*The self and the world: aspects of the aesthetics and politics of contemporary North American literary memoir by women* constitutes an attempt at a selective, but far-ranging analysis of the aesthetics and politics of memoirs written by Canadian and US women of different racial and ethnic backgrounds since 1990. The study focuses on memoirs by experienced writers, consciously deploying in their texts a number of literary, visual and paratextual devices. The aim is to illuminate the ways in which they make sense of their experience and how they endow it with a particular narrative shape, with special focus on the implicit and explicit ideological baggage of the memoirs. An important aspect of the project is the critical reflection on the nature of memory that emerges from the selected texts in connection with both individual and collective history. Special focus falls on configurations of gender and race/ethnicity in the contexts of the two multicultural North American societies, and their influence on the process of self-fashioning.

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WYDAWNICTWO NAUKOWE UAM

# The self and the world

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KEY WORDS: memoir, life-writing, memoir by women writers, female memoir in Canada and the USA.

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# Contents

# Introduction

## In brief: focus, aim and scope

The focus of this study is memoir as practiced by North American female authors in – roughly – the last three decades. Within that period, the flexibility – in terms of both theme and form – of this particular genre of life-writing, which historically predates autobiography, has made it a very popular vehicle for expressing the self emerging at the intersection of the private and the public. The popularity of the genre among writers is matched by its avid readership, and rising volume of critical literature – the processes which seem particularly prominent in Canada and the United States.

The study constitutes an attempt at a selective, but far-ranging analysis of aspects of the aesthetics and politics of memoirs written since 1990 by Canadian and US women of different backgrounds in terms of race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation and other parameters of the self. While the so-called "nobody" and celebrity memoirs taken together constitute probably the bulk of all the memoirs published in North America, this study focuses on what might be called "literary memoir", whose authors are writers and academics knowing the craft of writing, and shaping their texts with – we assume – much knowledge of writing techniques and much self-awareness. The aim is to illuminate the ways in which such women memoirists make sense of their experience and how they endow it with a particular narrative shape, with special focus on the implicit and explicit ideological baggage of the memoirs.

The year 1990 has been selected as the temporal caesura for the choice of source texts because the 1990s mark changes crucial for our methodological choices, and – arguably – for the nature of memoirs published by North American women. The decade was characterised by the rapid development of memory studies and auto/biography (or life writing) studies, aspects of which form our core methodology. Memory studies in particular seem to have influenced not only literary and cultural theory, but also ways in which authors of life-writing texts approach and conceptualise the past. Additionally, the decade brought also the rise in memoir publication by minority writers, the beginning of the "academic memoir" as a

distinct sub-genre both in Canada and the United States; and the general rise in both the publication and popularity of broadly conceived memoir in North America, which has since been described as the "memoir boom." Since 1990 we can observe further diversification of every aspect of the genre, with, for example, the rise of the graphic memoir or new prominence of memoirs tackling transgender experience.

Memoirs selected for discussion in the present study have been published in Canada and the United States, though the countries do not necessarily provide essential settings for the texts. We work on the assumption, however, that as all the authors have had a substantial North American experience, it has influenced their perceptions and perhaps also the perspective from which the texts are written.

The comparative perspective applied in the study aims at breaking the polarization and separateness of literary inquiry present in the studies on literature in the USA and English-speaking Canada. We assume that the development of memoir as a literary genre in the selected period has progressed largely along similar lines in Canada and the United States. In our analyses, we take into account where relevant the – partly similar and partly different – national contexts of the analysed texts as well as the influence of the national literary tradition(s) in Canada and the USA on the final form of the memoirs.

While we do not wish to claim that the form and content of memoir depends in a systematic way on the gender of the author, we assume that gender is an important interpretative parameter, which needs to be taken into account cautiously and in connection with other parameters of the self, such as race, ethnicity, class, education, sexual preference, etc. We are particularly interested in the configurations of gender and race/ethnicity in the contexts of the two multicultural North American societies and their influence on the process of self-fashioning.

Female memoirists whose texts have been selected for analysis stem from varied majority and minority cultural, ethnic, and racial backgrounds – those of the multiple diasporas (the majority white Anglo-Saxon group; broadly defined "invisible minorities" hailing from Central/Eastern Europe; the black diaspora represented by writers with roots in the Caribbean; the Chinese diaspora; and more), but also those of Indigenous North America. They are all writers knowing their craft, conscious of the processes involved in writing and thus able (at least to a certain extent) to control and create these processes, and to shape and fashion the self that emerges from

the texts. Our memoirists are simultaneously authors of novels, poetry, essays, or scientific papers and books, as well as popular science publications. Hence, they are self-reflective writers, consciously deploying in their texts a number of literary, visual and paratextual devices.

The focal point of the study as a whole is the examination of different ways in which the aesthetics of contemporary female memoirs in North America is related to the "politics", or the ideological burden, of the texts. We examine how ideological choices determine aesthetic choices, and how aesthetic choices facilitate and support the articulation of ideological stances of the authors, including the concepts of self and memory that emerge from the texts, but also immediate issues related to complex individual and group histories and contemporary realities of life in North America. The three chapters of the study focus on intertwining fields of inquiry related to the aesthetics of the memoir that have been selected to illuminate this reciprocal relationship: (1) generic choices, specifically genre blending (Chapter One: "Out of many …: generic hybridity in memoir"); (2) formal choices, i.e. formally and thematically significant incorporation of visual material in different forms into written text, and visual manipulation of the text itself (Chapter Two: "The beholding eye: visual aspects of memoir"); and (3) the use of the trope of haunting as a text-structuring device and a vehicle of the ideological baggage of the text (Chapter Three: "Hauntings: fashioning the (female) self at the intersection of the private, the public, the national and the global").

The increasingly narrower focus allows us to examine the reciprocal relationship between the aesthetics and politics of memoir at different levels of the texts, but also to underscore the features of the contemporary North American female memoirs under discussion that seem to have become more pronounced in the period that we are discussing. While it seems that generic flexibility or the use of visuals have always been important for the genre, in recent decades both seem to be used increasingly often, and in new, richer configurations. This is, at least partly, because memoir more and more frequently seeks to deal with difficult, suppressed, silenced or forgotten aspects of individual, communal and social experience arising from complex and nuanced postmodern and (post)colonial contexts, with the intention of not only making sense of individual experience, but also making an impact on the extratextual world. Hence, also, the importance of the critically neglected trope of haunting, which structures many of the memoirs under discussion.

## At some length: memoir, women life writers, national contexts

The rise in volume and the popular appeal of memoir is part of a broader trend of rising interest in life writing, which – inevitably – has resulted in a certain confusion, or laxity, in generic labelling. The term "memoir", in its popular usage, has almost lost its discriminating potential. As Julie Rak noted in her 2004 article "Are Memoirs Autobiography? A Consideration of Genre and Public Identity": "in the North American publishing industrty (sic), 'memoir' is in the process of becoming a byword for autobiography, particularly as this form of non-fiction grows in popularity" (305-306). Currently it seems that journalists and publishers use the label even more liberally, to indicate almost any kind of personal narrative that exceeds the length of an essay. Additionally, the phenomenal popularity of memoir in this generalised sense has already produced a "boom|lash", to use Leigh Gilmore's term, which "describes the simultaneous embrace of memoir by authors, literary agents, publishers, and readers, and its routine calumnification as a genre," and which she links to the "promotion of a new equivalence of facts, truth, and genre" ("Boom|lash" 212). In other words, even though life-writing criticism has convincingly and repeatedly put forward the assertion that texts about self are never fully "factual", but rather, and inevitably, rely on fictionalising techniques, in the wake of a few widely publicised memoir hoaxes there has appeared a new demand – put forward as a moral imperative – for an absolute separation between fact and fiction, and for sheer facticity in memoir and other "non-fiction" genres (Gilmore "Boom|lash" 214-215).

The usage of the term "memoir" adopted in this study is a more rigorous one that has been worked out by life-writing scholars and is somewhat distanced from the popular understanding of the term. In spite of the fact that contemporarily it is often characterised by generic hybridity, memoir retains a number of features that make it different from other life-writing genres, and is therefore treated here as a distinct genre. In particular, it is essential to note the differences between memoir and autobiography (some of whose features it nevertheless shares), especially in terms of the most general theme and scope. Autobiography typically focuses on a chronologically broad scope of the individual life – starting from the birth and finishing in the present of writing – and often on the inner development of the narrating self. Memoir – while retaining the autobiographical focus on the self that "filters" and interprets narrated events – focuses on selected as-

pects of personal life and experience, often employing a narrower time frame. The memoiristic self is the self in the world, the self in its rich familial, social, cultural contexts, aspects of which become major thematic focal points. The self is always within a social environment, either actively participating in it or observing it. As Lee Quinby puts it: "The 'I' or subjectivity produced in memoirs is externalized and ... dialogical" (299). The inquiry of the writing subject in contemporary memoir most often follows not chronology but rather thematic or associative logic.

As Rak notes, many critics still tend to treat memoir "as a secondary development" (317), even though the term itself precedes that of autobiography by well over one hundred years or more (Rak 316; Buss *Repossessing* 2; Smith and Watson *Reading Autobiography* 2). In early generic conceptualisations, by Georg Misch (1950) and George Gusdorf (1980), the memoir was a lesser genre and a poor sister of autobiography, treating largely about external events rather than internal development, and practiced primarily by marginal or somehow "lacking" individuals: lacking in social standing, but also in writing skills, and catering for substandard tastes. As Rak demonstrates, the critics started the still lingering attitude to the memoir by linking "the humbleness of memoir practice with assumptions about the character of those who write it. … a passive form for passive writers" (309-310); and for less sophisticated readers. Even today, in spite of the collapse of the rigid distinction between high and low literature, and rapid developments both in the field of life-writing studies and in life-writing practice, memoir still tends to be relegated to the murky zone of the popular, and therefore treated with some ambivalence.

Memoir as a genre, however, is not only extremely rich and varied, but also flexible. It responds to changing literary and cultural trends, and social realities, catering to different tastes and proclivities, easily dismantling the binary of high and low literature. In this respect, it might be assumed that memoir benefits from the changes brought by broadly conceived postmodernism, which in its rage against boundaries and binaries, has allowed for the acknowledgment and normalisation of hybrid forms that straddle or ignore them, and of marginalised subjects. Likewise, revamped aesthetics of literary memoir, influenced largely by the achievements of life writing in general, can be linked to the widespread tendencies that postmodernism of the 1970s and the 1980s brought, and it might be positioned alongside and against them. Memoir has always relied, though to varying degrees, on the fragment and on tentative connection, and has been by definition a marginal

genre written by marginal writers – all features brought to the fore and championed by broadly conceived literary postmodernism. At the same time, thought, it seems to respond to the growing nostalgia for the first person narrative that would promise to refer to the tangible, provable, and palpable world denied or questioned by some of the dominant strands of postmodern literature. This is, inevitably, what feeds both the "memoir boom" and "boom|lash". As Nancy Miller writers: "When you go to the bookstore and pick out a book that says 'memoir' on it, you expect to be reading the truth, even if, being a sophisticated modern reader, you also realize that some of the details might not stand up to Googling. That's still the deal, what Lejeune called in 1975 'the autobiographical pact'" ("Entangled Self" 528). Of course, many (perhaps even the majority of) contemporary literary memoirs neither fulfil the promise nor satisfy the "craving we developed for the literal" (Yagoda 239), proving time and again that there is no clear border between fact and fiction, that any truth is always inevitably plural and changeable, any (hi)story full of gaps, silences and open to multiple interpretations, any self ultimately an unknowable conglomerate of differences. At the same time, the questioning self-reflexive voice that dominates memoir does not necessarily explicitly deny presence and meaning, rather often yearns for them. Striving for affinity and attachment, the memoirist creates a narrative space of possibility for the encounter with both the self and the other. The already almost habitual meta-perspective makes the memoirist sensitive and conspicuously attuned to her own conduct as well as to her own products (narratives/texts). The fact, however, that these are seen and proffered as constructs – as inventions of a particular time and a particular place – is frequently not lamented but applauded as relevant, if provisional. This tendency coexists with another one, which might also be linked to the discourses of the postmodern, which it nevertheless also undermines: that of the recovery of silenced and marginalised voices, which are often demonstrated to speak undeniable, though inconvenient, truths. This aspect of the memoir is very strongly linked to its relationality – placing the narrative of the self within communal and social contexts.

The memoir as a relational genre (Larson calls it "a relational form" [22]), which places at its centre "the self [that] is dynamic, changing, and plural" (Eakin 98), shaped thorough interactions with multiple others, focuses on narratives of connection and belonging – sometimes restoring, and other times questioning and destabilising both. Memoirists emphasize their relationships with others, their rootedness in places they call home,

but also their physical and cultural uprootedness as a result of colonisation or migrations, their diasporic existence, and the way they try to stay attuned to their multifaceted surroundings, all of which influence their sense of self. It is the connections with other people, the tight links with others and the indelible marks left by them that constitute the points of reference as the authors track their lives in time. While tracing the development of the self in terms of the points of crossing paths and parting with others, the authors narrate the obvious and the more obscure mutual influence, which is by the same token a mutual authoring, of life and stories of themselves and others. As such then, the memoir enables research on the reciprocal formation of individual and collective identities.

The early conceptualisation of memoir as a genre focusing on memory, as opposed to autobiography, whose focus is a person (Misch 6); and the etymology of the word "memoir", which links it to memory, have resulted in many contemporary critics treating memoir as a quintessential memory genre, i.e. as being based on memory and recollection and therefore subjective rather than "authoritatively fact based," as Couser (19) puts it. This centrality of memory, however, initially treated as a weakness, and a clear indication of the subservient position of memoir vis-à-vis autobiography, has more recently – with the rise of memory studies in the 1990s – become memoir's strength; only to be once again vilified as widespread popularity of the genre, in its extended definition, has given rise to the "boom|lash". What we choose to call here "literary memoir," however, has in recent decades definitely been shaped into a genre that not only rests on memory and recollection, but also tends to thematise individual and cultural memory: its strange workings, gappiness, unreliability, as well as miracles and failures of remembering and attempts at commemoration. What is more, the genre often links the workings and conceptualisations of memory with processes related to the constitution of the self. As such, literary memoir falls within the broader autobiographical mode of remembrance that, according to Susannah Radstone, has replaced the mode of confession which dominated the 1960s and 1970s in North American literature. "In remembrance, it is memory's relation to subjective coherence that comes under scrutiny. Instead of suturing the division between the writing 'I' and the 'I' that is written about, texts of remembrance tend rather to undermine the resilience of that suture, by emphasising memory's tenuous relation to the 'past'" (Radstone 205).

Presumably the popularity of the memoir is part of a larger fascination with memory itself, which in the 1990s produced the memory turn, con-

tinuing in various forms till today. The interest in how, what, and why we remember has become a leading area of research in many disciplines, from medicine to psychology to literature to sociology to studies on culture. Memory studies in general, just like memoir in particular, have emerged, at least partly, as a reaction to the postmodern crisis of identity; as both a promise to leave universal truths (including those of history, whether collective and personal) and the universal unitary subject behind; and as a promise of an antidote to the threatening dispersal and deferral of both. The interdependent triad of memory, narrative, and identity has become the fundamental pillar of the current literary theory and criticism; it is certainly crucial for life-writing studies.

Contemporarily memory is theorised as somewhat capricious and unreliable, even though it constitutes a pillar of identity formation. The past is not stored intact, always on call; one cannot regurgitate the past unprocessed.

> An active memory reconstructs the past and history from the standpoint of the present and in light of certain future expectations. Every memory-based representation employs the available cultural means of the specific present time. This present time encompasses the social situation, against the backdrop of which one speaks with others and communicates with them … A particularly important modus of this communication is storytelling. (Straub Jürgen 222)

It is, therefore, futile to expect that memoir, or any other memory-based narrative, can recreate the past as it was, unchanged: "from one point of view all memory partakes of falsification, to the extent that it is necessarily a transformation of the remembered event or experience" (Saunders 323). Memoir repeats the sins of memory itself. The literary memoirist, however, is very much conscious of all the processes involved in constructing a self-narrative, and often openly muses on the construction, reconstruction and elusiveness of memory and recollection, sieving through the past as documented and remembered not only by herself, but also others, aware that her memoir is but one, though often collectively agreed upon, version of events; allowing doubt and uncertainty to enter the narrative. The memoirist's imperatives are to question and critique. At the same time she partakes of the impulse behind any kind of self-writing: to recover or revise the past, and often to both confess and bear witness to personal and collective experiences and traumas. Memoirs both rely on

and contribute to collective memories, i.e. "representations of the past in the minds of members of a community that contribute to the community's sense of identity" (Manier and Hirst 253). Halbwachs's original concept of so defined collective memory has been fine-tuned by Jan Assmann, who differentiated it into communicative and cultural memory. While the historical reach of memoirs is sometimes very broad and based on meticulous research, they essentially rely on what Assmann (117) calls noninstitutional "communicative memory," i.e. "history in the frame of autobiographical memory, [that refers to the] recent past; [its forms are] informal traditions and genres of everyday communication," it is a "living, embodied memory" that covers "80-100 years", roughly three to four generations. Published, the stories memoirs tell can persist in the public domain. Therefore, under certain circumstances, memoirs might be perceived as vehicles contributing to the process of turning communicative memory into durable, institutionalised cultural memory, the site of cultural identity, that is "exteriorized, objectified, and stored away in symbolic forms that … are stable and situation-transcendent" (110-111).

The "moral imperative" in literary memoir, which often emphasises the inextricability of ethics from aesthetics, does not consist in the impossible commitment to truth defined as the opposite of fiction(alisation). Instead, the memoirist attempts to do justice to the complex, intertwining discourses past events have given rise to in their individualised meanings, and is committed to demonstrating the difficult knowledge that any "truth" about the past is always partial, already modified, contaminated, fictionalised at the moment of recollection, as it becomes a narrative. Just as the search to a certain extent determines what is found, the intention with which the memoirist sits down to represent the past and her past self/selves, leaves marks all over the story she eventually produces. While the literary memoir avoids promising to arrive at the truth, it still does promise to present the author's truth and/or her community's truth, and to confront the voice of introspection with the, broadly understood, voices of culture and society.

Contemporary memoir, not only literary and not only by women, often focuses on traumatic experience, attesting to "trauma's centrality to self-representation" (Gilmore *Limits* 3): it accommodates, confronts, narrativises what haunts and hurts the self. Recent memoirs, often written by "youngish" writers "whose private lives are emblematic of a cultural moment" (Gilmore *Limits* 1), might constitute, as Gilmore claims, a re-

sponse to both a "culture of confession" and a "culture of testimony" (as defined by Spivak) – a fulfillment of a broad need to demonstrate private, and not so private, ecstasies and agonies and privately experienced oppression suffered by the subaltern (*Limits* 2). Indeed, while some of the traumas addressed by memoirists are very private, though most often shown nevertheless to be representative of the trauma of many, some are broader family traumas and historical traumas of communities and nations. Memoir quite often attempts to attest to crimes and injustices, becoming for both writers and readers a vehicle of testimony and of individual and collective exorcism.

It was only in the second half of 20th c., and not before the 1970s, as many critics point out (cf. e.g. Saunders 327; and Smith and Watson "Introduction" 5), that life writing, often in the form of memoir, started to be recognized as a study-worthy form of giving witness and validation to silenced minority subjects, their past and present experience and views, but also as a form of empowerment. Diverse movements of the last three decades of 20th c. that advocated rights of minority groups can be linked to the intensification of writing and publishing self-narratives by members of marginalised communities – Leigh Gilmore suggests, in fact, that this is what the current "memoir boom" benefits from (*Limits* 16). Women, members of ethnic and sexual minorities, colonised subjects, indigenous people, working class people, the disabled have engaged in writing about their lives, though initially often in forms neglected by the dominant critical discourse which elevated autobiography and its white male Western subject – in forms which, like memoir, have since gained much broader recognition and legitimacy.

Early critical attempts at finding systematic differences between life writing by men and women, and majority and minority subjects in general, were soon dismissed as simplistic: based on group definitions that ignored significant intra-group differences, and on the unsustainable concept of pre-existing gendered self as well as of experience as readable and readily expressible in self-narrative. Such was the fate of attempts at contrasting male and female life writing as made, for example, by Estelle Jelinek in her introduction to *Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism* (1980) – the first anthology of critical essays devoted specifically to female life-writing. Jelinek attempted to demonstrate differences in content and style of male and female texts, and link the differences to divergent patterns of life, in particular to the confinement of women to the sphere of domestic life, sup-

posedly reflected in textual irregularity, "diffusion and diversity" (17), which lead to the exclusion of the texts from the realm of autobiography proper, and confined them to the realm of the popular.

Soon critics were posing other models of women's life writing based on problematised definitions of "woman", newly destabilised categories of gender, race, ethnicity, subjecthood, and discursively constructed subjectivity given rise to by new philosophical, psychoanalytic and sociological approaches affecting literary theory and interpretative practice, and taken up also by life writing studies. While memoir as a genre has for centuries been strongly connected with female authorship – one can point, for example, to the genre of "scandalous memoir" of British courtesans, which emerged in mid-18$^{th}$ c. – it is definitely no longer so. Still, for some critics memoir clearly retains this "gendered" orientation, which allows them, for example, to posit it as a somewhat utopian site of possibility for female solidarity across difference, a therapeutic site where women can "discover a similarity in reliable and repeatable processes of revision of received history and memory which can help them to perform effective and satisfying selves in their time and place. Through those acts they can begin to repossess the public world for themselves and for other women" (Buss *Repossessing* xxiii).

While conceptualisations of life writing in general and memoir in particular have followed broader trends within literary theory, the practice of memoir writing has itself been changing alongside major trends of literary development. Contemporary North American literary memoir is to a certain extent shaped by and continues literary traditions in both Canada and the United States that, from the very outset, have favoured fact-based, but self-focused, often idiosyncratic accounts of external events, whether in the context of society, community or family (in the form of histories and chronicles, travel accounts, letters, journals, diaries, and others); and noticeably depended on the modes of confession and conversion as ways of representing the self. While literary critics have attempted to conceptualise the two literatures as essentially divergent, even antithetical – in particular pointing out the fixation on the individual in canonised US literature and the importance of community in the much more flexible Canadian literary canon – in much contemporary literature, and in particular life writing, these differences are not obvious, to say the least. Instead, we see both literatures, and literary memoir in both countries, responding to quite similar pressing needs related to the agonies of the self facing the in-

tricacies of memory and trauma that reach far beyond personal. While memoirists examine issues related to family relations, death, illness, disability, private suffering and joy, they also inevitably demonstrate how these are related to community or group experience as well as social and political realities. The history and the present of the two settler states, the enduring legacy of colonialism and struggles for decolonisation, the dispossession of the aboriginal peoples, societies composed of multiple diasporas – in which "the subject of diaspora does not map easily onto the subject of citizenship" (Cho 94) – silenced histories, misogyny, racism: all these, and many more, surface time and again as themes or contexts of the story the memoirist attempts to tell. While recognising the themes and contexts, in the analyses that follow we also pay attention to idiosyncrasies of individual memoirs, to individual multiply conditioned and modulated female voices: to what they convey to the reader, but also to how they do it.

# Chapter One

# Out of many …: generic hybridity in memoir

Memoir starts as a question in the chaos of multitude – of conflicts, emotions, values and beliefs; in plurality – of people involved, languages and discourses used; in heterogeneity – of memories and the variety of traces: photographs, charts, maps, birth certificates, miscellaneous documents, and others; and in ambiguity regarding the accuracy of recollections, the connective points between the given data and the particular memories. Flexible and responsive to nuances of changing aesthetic trends, but also social and political currents, the memoir easily merges with or incorporates aspects of other genres. We may, therefore, talk of the memoir as a hybrid construct and, subsequently, as a hybrid genre. The organising principle behind the diverse material is, as Birkerts (3) points out, the incipient "intuition of meaning" towards which the narrative is developed. This chapter focuses on selected examples of the multitude of types of generic blending that contemporary female memoir accomplishes.

Hybridity, a 19th century concept used to denote a biological and physiological phenomenon (an organism that results from cross-breeding; Young 5), originally carried "negative implications and connotations of inferiority, contamination, miscegenation and perversion" (Raab and Butler 1). In time, however, the term has acquired more and more neutral ramifications and started to be used in the context of cultural transfer (Young 5). Championed by postcolonial theory in the late 1980s and 1990s (coinciding also with the memory turn and "an age of memoir" [Couser 142; cf. also Stamant 1]), hybridity today is understood as "everything that owes its existence to a mixture of traditions or chains of significance, everything that links different kinds of discourse and technologies, everything that came into being through techniques of *collage, sampling*, or *bricolage*" (Elisabeth Bronfen and Benjamin Marius qtd. in Raab and Butler 2; emphasis in the original). Overall, while a hybrid is always already plural, evolving out of two or more sources and thus having multiple roots, it is an entity that is both the same and distinct from

that which gave it its existence: the features of the origins are repeated in it with a difference.

In the research on memoir, the concept of hybridity proves to be expedient in analyzing contact and exchange not only among cultures and languages, but also among literary genres. An amalgam of different literary practices, memoir as a hybrid genre is a work of art that as such "transgress[es] genre boundaries by combining characteristic traits and elements of diverse literary and non-literary genres" (Galster 227). Following Couser (26), it might be claimed that the memoir is an inclusive genre. It evidently shares a number of generic characteristics with autobiography and displays crucial affinities with the novel. Its essence, however, does not come down to a combination of these; nor is it eventually the one or the other. Memoir is a distinct entity, a genre of its own. It has been disparaged as a low, minor, shallow genre (Couser 18), and most recently as belonging to a – definitely more neutral and capacious – category of the fourth genre or creative non-fiction (Root and Steinberg xv). Gradually, the hybridity of memoir instead of being lamented over has become lauded as an invaluable asset. Memoir provides a unique generic platform of potentialities where the author demarcates and subsequently furnishes her own textual territory relying on the practices and findings of both fiction and non-fiction as well as poetry in order to most accurately represent personal experience. Rather than anchoring memoir in other genres into which it dissipates, the memoirist culls these (means of representation) into her writing territory and filters them through the subjective lens of the self. As such, memoir is indispensable for the research on identity formation and identity analysis of our times.

As Stockheimer (2) writes, hybridity is linked to creativity, stemming from "individual experiences and identities, which in turn explain the heterogeneity of hybridization processes." These acts of invention involve ingenious and idiosyncratic ways and means of selecting and combining the available material. The processes of generic invention may be elucidated with reference to Mikhail Bakhtin's understanding of hybridity as "an encounter, within the arena of an utterance, between two different linguistic consciousnesses, separated from one another by an epoch, by social differentiation or by some other factor" (Bakhtin 358); and his distinction between organic hybridity and intentional hybridity. According to Bakhtin, organic hybridity, which involves "not only two languages but also two sociolinguistic (thus organic) world views" (360), remains outside of human conscious regulation, is unintended, occurs on a daily basis

and thus goes on fairly unnoticed, and "will tend toward fusion" (Young 22). Intentional hybridity, on the other hand, is artistically oriented, purposeful, initiated by humans in and by means of language, it gravitates towards maintaining divisions, and as such may be at odds with the organic hybridity. In fact, Young comments, "intentional hybridity … enables a contestatory activity, a politicized setting of cultural differences against each other" (20).

Hybridity as an operating concept is exclusively neither the one nor the other, it is neither completely organic nor downright intentional. Hence, the concept itself is hybrid (Young 19), characterized simultaneously by two distinct dispositions. Both kinds of hybridity are significant for the research on memoir and may further be understood in terms of the acts of intertextuality and intratextuality,[1] both intentional and unintentional (dialogic and dialectic, or conscious and unconscious), which are generative of new forms in memoir. As a crucial consequence, in each particular case memoir's final formal and stylistic characteristics are influenced by both the idiosyncratic writing styles and generic features of other genres that are practiced by individual authors in their other fictional, non-fictional, and academic texts.

In the end, all these ways and methods lead to make the self present, visible, and knowable to itself and others, even though this may not be achieved once and for all, and is rather a matter of approximation than of completion. Nonetheless, in a somewhat paradoxical gesture, by capturing the elusive and fluid process of the self's identity construction in the form of a text, the memoir proffers a steady (and permanent) record of the self's movements in time for its subsequent (re)consideration, while it also provides a glimpse or a detailed picture of the social environment of the memoirist.

### 1.1. Memoir and autobiography

The most intimate inter-generic links can perhaps be detected between memoir and autobiography. In both the author turns her life into text and experience into literature (cf. Olney 10) as she narrates her own history (cf.

[1] Intratextuality, originally denoting the relations within a single text, in this study is expanded to include the relations among the entirety of a particular author's texts (the entirety of her oeuvre).

Gusdorf 35). Both genres require the author to assume the simultaneous roles of the narrator and the (main) character. Further still, both autobiography and memoir provide indispensable orientation points as well as a rich source of "a peculiarly direct and faithful way" of regarding people's behaviour, thoughts, actions, and reactions in a given time and place, which are, in turn, also "informing all the literature of that people" (Olney 13). Nonetheless, in the introductory chapter to *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical* (1980), Olney mentions the dubious status of autobiography in literature. A similar hesitation and incredulity is present in relation to memoir. It is due to the autobiographical mode they both share, which makes them paradoxically "often something considerably less than literature and … always something rather more than literature" (Olney 24). Olney distinguishes between two extreme reactions to autobiography. On the one hand, he claims, in autobiography the subject disappears altogether "leaving behind the perception that there is no such creature as autobiography and that there never has been" (4). On the other hand, the autobiographical subject looms as ubiquitous, which leads some to "argue not only that autobiography exists but that it alone exists – that all writing that aspires to be literature is autobiography and nothing else" (Olney 4).

The literary memoirist tries to find a way out of this predicament by embracing the autobiographical mode as that which centres on the self yet only with the view to representing its life story in narrative and in sync with the terms dictated by the demands of literary aesthetics. While she sets out to distill and crystalize her experience into words, she clearly demarcates a period of her life, determines its thematic territory, and her focus/filter on both with an intentional circumference, within which she makes herself as present and visible as possible, i.e. to the extent made available by the narrative medium. The focus on the self and on the private aspects of its existence merge in the memoir with the focus on lives of others and on the public or the social spheres. In fact, as Nancy K. Miller maintains, memoir "hesitates to define the boundaries between private and public, subject and object" (*Bequest* 2).

Moreover, in many cases, at the very outset, the memoir attempts to achieve both the record and the emergence of the self, which is made explicit by the memoirist herself. Meena Alexander points out in *Fault Lines* (73): "Sometimes I think I have to write myself into being. Write in order not to be erased." The memoirist's texts are written in order for the self to behold itself, to become available for introspection and inspection. Thus, the memoir

is a medium for attentive and analytic observation, which as such is hardly possible in life as lived in the thick of things. In *Among the White Moon Faces: An Asian-American Memoir of Homelands* (1996) Shirley Geok-lin Lim comments on her act of writing: "I wrote to know I was still there, somewhere among the accumulating details of numbing reality" (214). Writing a memoir becomes thus also a way of making sure one possesses a self, of navigating the changes in the self, of looking not only on what is around oneself, but also looking into oneself and at oneself in a given context.

It seems the self-reflexive dimension of memoir is impossible to overemphasize. Writing a memoir is writing oneself into a particular landscape and into a presence augmented by the dimension of self-awareness. The memoirist recognizes herself in the recollected events which are marked in a reciprocal way: they are what belongs to the memoirist and the memoirist belongs to them in terms of mutual signification. The writer knows and is in possession of herself through her past, whereas the past is made known as it is owned up to by the memoirist in her narrative. As Alexander (*Fault Lines* 237) writes: "After all, as a writer, what do I have but the raw materials of my own life?" Contrary to autobiography, which is associated with texts relating life-achievement by way of a long backward glance that embraces the scope of life, the memoir may be written at any moment in life. Also, memoirs are written to either closely focus on and exhaustively render a given period in the author's life or are dedicated to an in-depth exploration of a given subject (Larson 17), or both, if these overlap. As Birkerts (51-54) writes in *The Art and Time in Memoir: Then, Again*, since memoir zooms in on a part of a life, it is shorter, it does not aim to have the scope and breadth of autobiography, and it is far more selective.

Meena Alexander, who composed her memoir when she was 42 and expanded it at the age of 53, shows that memoir's structure is centred on the fragment. The fragment seems to be the fundamental narrative unit that sets the beat – as in the heartbeat – in memoir. The fragments shift, unfold, link with one another in new constellations – the fragment as such is relied on as what both reveals and conceals. In a way, it defies the notions of totality and finality; it cannot be viewed or interpreted and set down once and for all. Alexander (*Fault Lines* 237; emphasis in the original) quotes from a poem the words that become her guideline: "*Write in fragments, the fragments will save you.*" In modern memoir, the fragmentariness of experience, memory, and self is often not decried, but intensely explored in terms of what is given and what remains. Such a state of af-

fairs is understood as the order of things, the way of the world: "I was convinced by the evidence of my touch and of my beating heart, that there was a crack in the earth nothing could heal, a fault in the very nature of things," Alexander writes (*Fault Lines* 103). The crack in the earth (cf. Alexander *Fault Lines* 15), experienced as an outside condition, rhymes with Alexander's (2) innerly perceived fissure: "What could I ever be but a mass of faults, a fault mass?" Participating in the world means encountering herself as a rubble of things, a daunting task that involves subjecting herself to the "bursts of rhythm and sense" (235), the ebbs and flows of memory that "knits us together then tears us apart … the first blessing and the last curse" (232). The elusive fragments as well as the titular fault lines are the vestiges of the bygone where Alexander finds herself while she acknowledges and defines them in return.

Embraced together to form a portrait of the self, made of memory translated into language and experiences turned into a story, the narrative emerges as a form of a discernible collage in *Fault Lines*. Alexander's memoir may be approached as a text in which the author longs to "see" herself from different angles, to be able to contemplate her own image in the process in which the subject and object of inquiry meet, and as such to confront, come to terms with, and claim the past on her own behalf. As Alexander's numerous and insightful meta-narrative passages suggest, while the memoirist gathers herself up on the page, she observes herself in the creative act(s). Her detailed, poignantly sharp and highly self-reflexive (and at times meta-narrative) account written in English, although thought "through the rhythms of many other languages: Malayalam, Hindi, Arabic, French. So that the strut and play of words, the chiselled order of lines permits a sense crystallized through the seizures of dislocation" (*Fault Lines* 260), opens up onto a precarious territory of speaking about domestic violence and abuse.

Shirley Geok-lin Lim's description of the way she approached essay composition is true of the way she and other memoirists go about revisiting their past: "The memorialization of information was never mere data collection, as many of my classmates believed. The selection of 'facts' to memorise was itself a painstaking, necessary, and formative preparation for the final task of analysis and presentation" (85). In an analogous way, the memoirist's task is not to re/collect and re/assemble as many memories as possible. It is rather to stay focused on what refuses to subside and build the narrative around these persistent and returning, yet to some degree elusive,

events. A pattern is sought to be unveiled (cf. Birkerts 46), while the faculty of memory in the memoir demonstrates how "psychologically alive the body of memory is: it is both an elder, offering the wisdom of experience, and a child, wanting our attention *now*" (Larson 41; emphasis in the original). This kind of a promise of meaning as the recollections are narrated in each other's context underlies the composition of the memoir. The memoirist's meta-perspective – evident in the meta-narrative comments on the act of writing itself, the acts and processes of remembering, etc. – explicates memoir's fundamental principle, namely, that this genre makes work on the text invariably tantamount to work on the self and the other way around, whereas the final product is established on and unfolds in sync with the premises from which the memoirist sets out. How recollections are connected is guided by the writer's intention and sentiment. In memoir, in the words of Birkerts (17): "The purpose decides the process."

By default, the memoirist is a theorist: she observes paying attention to details, she explains and questions her own acts of doing justice to the past and its representations while she keeps within the boundaries she promises not to overstep. Hence, literary memoir upholds the inextricability of ethics from aesthetics. More than that, the intention of the author is as important as the accuracy with which she proceeds. Memoir's premises overlap with the territories of phenomena that cannot be exactly measured, controlled, or verified: i.e. intention, affect, emotion. These are the crucial, if volatile and elusive, components of both narrative production and reception. In the words of Mary Karr in her theory oriented volume *The Art of Memoir* (51): "How you approach the truth depends on your passions." Alexander, in her memoir, as has been mentioned above, also theorises on the subject of memory. The more or less linear progression of her life story is interspersed with reflections on its nature. Such a structure is apt for memoir as the quintessential memory genre. In the words of Patricia Hampl (4), the genre instigates theoretical investigation into memory because "looking repeatedly into the past, you do not necessarily become fascinated with your own life, but rather with the phenomenon of memory." In literary memoir, both fascinations are equally strong, the one perpetuating the other.

The memoirist exposes herself both as a recipient and a contributor of reality, while she acknowledges herself as connected with others, most profoundly by language. In *French Lessons, A Memoir* (1993) Alice Kap-

lan,[2] a native speaker of English, looks back on her life through the lens of acquiring French. Learning the foreign language, she recognizes, sent her on a particular life path and thus was a determining factor in terms of her general life choices (e.g., the choice of schools, the people she meets, etc.). French is represented as the foreign language with which and in which she grows up. As such it contains her recollections and contributes to the expanding reality and developing identity of Kaplan in her college years. It remains a major structuring factor at the time of writing the memoir, since after her stay in France Kaplan returned to the USA and became a professor in French. Today she works at Yale University.

Her memoir contains passages where the reader follows Kaplan as she describes in careful detail the process of immersing herself in a foreign language – she recollects her growing fluency (learning to pronounce the 'r' sound, the vowels, discriminating the sounds and sequences of French), her joy at the patterns and control she is able to exercise in mastering a foreign language, as well as the ins and outs of inhabiting a different culture: "Learning French and learning to think, learning to desire, is all mixed up in my head, until I can't tell the difference … French got me away from my family and taught me how to talk. Made me an adult. And the whole drama of it is in that 'r' …" (Kaplan 140-141). Kaplan concludes that the foreign tongue gave her a sort of a safe haven, a refuge where she was allowed a fresh start. It also connected her to her father, who died when she was eight years old: "French made me absent the way he was absent, and it made me an expert the way he was an expert" (203). Her father was a lawyer who worked on the Nuremberg trials. Kaplan to a certain extent follows in his intellectual footsteps. Her PhD she turned into the book *Reproductions of Banality: Fascism, Literature, and French intellectual Life*, for which she interviewed, among others, the French denier of Holocaust Maurice Bardèche (of which she also writes in *French Lessons*). In the memoir, she frequently mentions how the voice of her father guided her in the crucial moments. The ways she as a girl was responded to (Larson 36-37) by the parent in the past – particularly in terms of the now remembered values and the tone of her father's voice – guide her imagination now regarding his advice and the answers to the questions she pursues.

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[2] The subject of education, whether high school or university education, is often discussed in memoirs. Another example might be *Black Ice* (1991) by Lorene Cary.

Along with the linguistic explorations, Kaplan recollects her teachers: Ann Smock and her class on poetry, Paul DeMan and his class on literary theory, Linda Orr, and others. She also discusses the writers: Louis-Ferdinand Celine (*Journey to the End of the Night*), F. Scott Fitzgerald (*The Great Gatsby*), Gertrude Stein, Raymond Queneau, Victor Hugo, and others. Her memoir, thus, is a composition that, among others, relies on a broad intertextual web of references and meanings. Kaplan recollects herself and makes sense of her experience referring to the texts of others, which she either actively searches for or stumbles upon by way of serendipity.

Later, when she is a teacher of French, the preoccupation with language acquires for her a new dimension: she is conscious of "generating words – other people's words" (Kaplan 134). She proffers words about others as well, e.g. in the article she wrote about DeMan after his Nazi affiliations surfaced. By remembering the people (teachers, friends, students) and summoning their words, Kaplan retraces her preoccupations and thoughts, she recollects her own analyses of the texts and her conclusions. She suspends the pace of her life-story in order to zoom in on particular words that prove crucial as she verifies their meanings for herself with the benefit of hindsight. Moreover, she traces, translates, and analyses the links between her words and the words of others as forming connections of stories (together with their readings, and interpretations she pursues) that intersect with and/or run parallel to her own. She examines them for their value of explicating the processes of mutual authoring that take place among people. These processes occur within and across generations, in and beyond languages. The authors become characters, the characters become authors, just like the students become teachers and the teachers become students. One time, Kaplan assigned Patrick Modiano's *Remise de peine* to her class; the close reading was prepared by her student Catherine L. The student made Kaplan notice something about the text she had not seen before: "'Children grow up and they write about what they saw and heard.' … She had explained to me his sense of a past that can't be erased but which is always incomplete … There are truths about the past but there is no authority, no policeman, ready to be able to pin them down" (Kaplan 213). One may risk a statement that Kaplan allows these words coming from the other to unfold in her memoir. One might go even further, and state that memoir as a genre is a medium where these realizations between self and other, the mutual enlightenments, are acknowledged and as such incorporated into its very constitution.

Life periods particularly intensively mined and explored in memoir as a genre include childhood and adolescence/young adulthood. The former leaves much space for imaginative restoration and reflection on the past that is not really available most of the time. Typical childhood memoirs are quite short, written in a rather simple manner and language, which does not mean that they are trivial. The purpose is to summon the child's perception, logic, and sense of valuation (as we recollect, observe, and imagine it to be); as well as to look into what remains and/or continues in the present. The narrative is written also to provide links of continuity between the adult writer and the child she used to be. As in *Chinese Cinderella* (1999) by Adeline Yen Mah, which spans her life till she is 14, or Joyce Carol Oates's *The Lost Landscape: A Writer's Coming of Age* (2015), the narrative passages that zoom in on childhood events are the narratives of education – of learning in terms of acquiring knowledge, motivation and, subsequently, a certain perspective on both. The adult is supplying now the necessary language and wording of the then perceived phenomena which teamed with the benefit of hindsight (and thus the subsequent understanding of the events in terms of their consequences) make it possible to represent the past adequately.

However, the present state of mind is there only to illuminate and place in a broader perspective something entirely more precious, i.e. how it felt to be a child in relation to certain people and going through certain events and experiences. These experiences are frequently related to an animal, often a pet: a focus which Couser calls "a curious trend in contemporary memoir" (164). Yen Mah recalls a baby duckling she was given (73): "By the time my turn arrived, I was left with the tiniest, scrawniest baby bird. I picked her up, cupped her in my hand and carried her gingerly into my room." She called her pet Precious Little Treasure. Mah treated PLT as a true friend, right after her devoted aunt Baba, both of whom she saw as the only living begins who understood and took care of her. The little animal she treated with such exquisite and loving care was to be soon taken away from her: snatched by the family dog, but first by her family. Her father wanted to see whether the dog, Jackie, learned proper behaviour and her older brother picked PLT out of the seven ducklings, belonging to the seven children, as a bait. She reconstructs the event, which was for her filled with terror at the time, in such a way that the reader knows the animal is sent to sure death and feels with Yen Mah what she felt as a girl, and perhaps still feels as a grown-up woman. PLT

is more than an animal to her. For the child, who can spot her own duckling among the brood of seven that all look identical to the adults, the beloved animal is an extension of her own self, a living being who feels, knows, and reciprocates feelings, even trying to communicate. For the adult writer, the treatment of PLT by others stands for the cruel ways of the world, the harm, the loss of innocence (the brothers knew little Adeline would be the last one to retaliate or give them trouble), the disrespect. The calculation with which the violence is inflicted mixes with the hopelessness and helplessness that make little Adeline freeze in her tracks unable to prevent what is about to happen as she literally sees it coming, and make her forever live with the consequences. The loss of PLT signalises to her now a certain alienation from the adult world, which she seems to still carry inside her. With this world, she associates a blunt erasure of imagination and empathy, a fading of affection and feelings. In her current self, Yen Mah feels a continuity of the girl who treasured PLT, the duckling brings back her memories of herself. The animal is among the strongholds of the core of her past identity as a girl: a sensitive and harmless child, the youngest and the weakest, surrounded by family that is foreign and brute to her while she remains exposed to their whims and wishes unable to defend herself, with only her aunt taking care of her (which was to end soon and abruptly as well).

In Joyce Carol Oates's narrative a pet chicken functions as the narrator of the second chapter of her memoir. *The Lost Landscape: A Writer's Coming of Age* features the Happy Chicken that tells Oates' story roughly from ages 1 to 4 and later continues in a sort of a dialogue with the older Oates. Oates adopts the (impossible) perspective of the animal in order to look at herself from the outside: to turn back and look at herself from the present into the past and see herself through the prism of the, in many ways fundamental, relationship with the Happy Chicken. Thus, the chicken in a way imaginatively and rationally recollects the time of Oates' life beyond the possibilities of her memory. Happy Chicken, the stand-in voice of the past, is more than a chicken: recognized and favoured by her, it visibly responds to her, and in the narrative they are meant to be each other's guardians. The affection Oates endowed the animal with, the way it both links with and contrasts with the presence of her grandparents in her life, especially the grandmother, who chopped the farm chickens for food and most probably did the same to Happy Chicken (who abruptly

vanishes never to return again), tells a lot about the child's need for complete affection and uncompromised reciprocity of feeling.

Also, it shows the necessity for make-believe, as Oates grows up still attached to the past through the relationship to the bird: "The little girl grew up, and grew away, but never forgot her Happy Chicken. The little girl forgot much else, but not Happy Chicken. The little girl became an adult woman, and at the sight of even just pictures of chickens she felt an overwhelming sense of nostalgia, sharp as pain" (Oates 30). Oates reasons with herself, juxtaposing and juggling the known and the unknown of her past. The most profound instance is her way of making Happy Chicken's voice insist she turned a blind eye to the harm inflicted on the animals on the farm, against which she defends herself claiming unawareness. The abruptness with which the animal disappears from her life (unlike Yen Mah she is not a witness of it in any way), exemplifies that events that would pass unnoticed in the life of an adult do leave a lasting mark on the life and imagination of a child and may as such continue to extend their signification for and in the grown-up person. The adult in whom the child still resonates needs to return to the memories of both affection, belonging, and harm in order to right the wrongs and overcome her own powerlessness and fear. Moreover, both memoirs show their authors as yearning not only for presence and meaning, but also striving for affinity and attachment, despite the odds.

As such, memoir as a genre, and childhood memoir in particular, foregrounds events and moments that autobiography may dismiss as insignificant. The yardsticks and breakthroughs in autobiography are of a different character than the yardsticks in the memoir. In the case of the former, the importance of the events is as if imposed on one from the outside, while in the latter focuses on the revelatory, frequently solitary moments, of arriving at a meaning, of often sudden realizations, of putting together various instances that would not let go of a person, who at once finds them falling neatly into a suggestive arrangement. As such "The pervasive desire to relate to one's life, inhibited by the severe restrictions on what could be included *in* the narrative, pressured autobiography close to the breaking point" (Yagoda 134; emphasis in the original). Contrary to the ways of autobiography, the events in the life of the memoirist dictate the form and scope of memoir – it is from the event that its shape emerges, and not the other way around. Memoir more readily accommodates than dismisses (or censors) the given.

In memoir, not only what seems minor in life might be turned into something major in this narrative map of the self, acquiring an overwhelming and symbolic significance, but also a single event might stand in for numerous similar ones and contain all the emotion accumulated (in them). In her earlier memoir, *Falling Leaves: The True Story of an Unwanted Chinese Daughter* (1997) that embraces a longer timeline than *Chinese Cinderella* (and features her memoires of PLT for the first time), Adeline Yen Mah gives a testimony to her life as an unwelcomed child. The strictness of almost all family members and humiliation she suffers seem to fill her account to its brim. They culminate in the episode relating the ritual of boiled eggs distribution at her Chinese boarding school:

> Those eggs became symbols of rare privilege. They were cheap and readily available in the markets, but having your number called by Mother Mary meant that someone from home loved you enough to bring you eggs so that you would eat a nourishing breakfast. Just because your family was rich did not mean that you automatically received an egg … [it] divided us into two distinct and transparent groups: the loved ones and the unloved ones. Needless to say, I remained eggless throughout my tenure at Sacred Heart. (Yen Mah *Falling Leaves* 101)

Both of Yen Mah's memoirs are written as a reply to pervading loneliness, in order to resist fear, desolation, and to find ways out of them.

The memoirs that focus on adolescence/young adulthood, i.e. the more tractable formative years (Birkets 17), trace these for their threshold events and moments,[3] the milestones that contain both the literal and symbolic meanings of the self. Depending on the proximity to the times the memoirists embrace, their events like beads on a string are either more or less detailed, more or less consolidated, and more or less distanced from one another. Some persistently demand attention, both on their own

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[3] Bakhtin (248) defines the chronotope in a detailed way: "it can be combined with the motif of encounter, but its most fundamental instance is as the chronotope of crisis and break in a life. The word 'threshold' itself already has a metaphorical meaning in everyday usage (together with its literal meaning), and is connected with the breaking point of a life, the moment of crisis, the decision that changes a life (or the indecisiveness that fails to change a life, the fear to step over the threshold). In literature the chronotope of the threshold is always metaphorical and symbolic, sometimes openly but more often implicitly." Threshold places are "places where crisis events occur, the falls, resurrections, renewals, epiphanies, decisions that determine the whole life of a man" (Bakhtin 248).

and as contextualised within a larger frame of reference of the mutually illuminating links that are formed among the memories in time.

Memoir in general is written in an aura of a quest; it relies on the concept of the quest due to the fact that the past is not merely put on record, but also discovered as it is narrated. Some memoirs explicitly rely on the motif of the quest and develop it in a variety of ways and on a number of levels. Sometimes, as in the case of Alexander, it takes a long journey with intermittent breaks, that is both literal and metaphorical, towards discovering what one did not realise one knew. Sometimes, as in the case of Yen Mah, the journey is triggered by the feeling of a termination of a certain period in one's life and the numerous realizations and conclusions that are inextricable from it. Without exception, these narrative quests involve an experiment on, as well as a treatment of, the self. In Cheryl Strayed's memoir *Wild: From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail* (2012), the quest is as physical as can be and takes form of the somewhat picaresque experiment in the form of a solitary hiking adventure.

Cheryl Strayed's walking journey is supposed to last a certain amount of time, the track is already charted with the map in her hand. As such then, Strayed's self-assigned task is to move from the starting point to the ending point in a given amount of time. However, as her experience and her memoir prove, "the map is not the territory" (Korzybski 205). The physical journey for her is just a pretext, a way of cutting herself out of her daily life. The trip is a way of swerving from the life path she was on since the death of her mother in order to get to a place she could continue from. Paradoxical as it may seem, as she goes forward, out into the wilderness, she tries to reach a destination of personal growth as well as a point in herself that is buried in her memory: "A world I thought would both make me into the woman I knew I could become and turn me back into the girl I'd once been" (Strayed 4). Her narrative is a story of emotional growth which goes both ways: back to the past – "I had to change. *I had to change* was the thought that drove me in those months of planning. Not into a different person, but back to the person I used to be – strong and responsible, clear-eyed and driven, ethical and good" (Strayed 57; emphasis in the original) – and thus changed, forward into the future. The whole endeavor makes her current present of unbearable disruption and suspension appear as a mere walk-through phase that she needs to push herself through in order to come out alive at the other end. Her journey to regain her self – the self she feels herself to be at the core, free from the

harmful influence of her life events and experiences, is a journey of self-creation. Strayed's quest is propelled by a sense of metamorphosis and a need for catharsis while she works on turning herself into a woman.

While she hopes to become a self-nourishing individual, by the physical act of moving through the PCT (Pacific Crest Trail) wilderness and by the psychological working through the wilderness of the past, present, and their interminglings, just as some of her toenails come off, she peels off the painful memories and fears, one by one, as if they were fossilised layers arresting her freedom and growth. Moreover, hers is a journey that is supposed to make her both internalise her mother as a person and actualise the mother's (as well as her absent father's) roles. In a way she had to both learn to live without her mother's (and earlier on without her father's as well) physical presence and subsequently becomes her own mother (and father) in their stead. She fills the empty, voiceless, place: "My mother was in me already. Not just the parts of her that I knew, but the parts of her that had come before me too" (Strayed 19). To be her own mother is to become her own guide, her own point of reference, her own advisor. The things of her mother she did not know, including her solutions to the ways of the world, are the things Strayed needs to figure out for herself, so that they do not cast a shadow on or perpetually repeat themselves in her life.

Strayed (10) claims the genesis of her physical journey reaches back to "precisely four years, seven months, and three days before, when I'd stood in a little room at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, and learned that my mother was going to die." Only now, after the dissipation of her family and a self-destructive period that culminated in her divorce at 26, after the severance of the ties that connected her with the people closest to her, she embarks on the PCT in order to regain balance, beginning with the temporary new identity of hers as a solitary woman in the wilderness. Every step on her way throughout the first and then also the subsequent chapters, the loss of the mother is more than she can handle, more than she can carry, more than she can live with. Exposing herself so fully to the unknown is Strayed's way of grieving, the process she embarks on by going away alone, thus completely displacing herself. The new and harsh surroundings make her concentrate on what is just in front of her. Hence, her attention is almost undividedly focused on the current moment. The aim is to forget herself, forget the others, but keep on finding herself anew, in just the present moment. The reader knows Strayed's grief is much deeper than she is able to put into words: "*the woman with the hole in her heart*. That

was me. / … Nothing did. Nothing would. Nothing could ever bring my mother back or make it okay that she was gone. Nothing would put me beside her the moment she died. It broke me up. It cut me off. It tumbled me end over end" (Strayed 38, 27; emphasis in the original). Chapter by chapter, the reader recognizes that throughout the journey as the memoirist traverses the land, she is pushing the frontiers not only in terms of physical limits, but also in terms of the boundaries of and in herself.

Even though Strayed's memoir is written from the edge of grief, it is brimming with life. Mostly, it is due to the pulsating rhythm of her steps that – even when she writes about something else than the physical movement itself – remains almost audible in the background. Step by step, memory by memory, she covers the chosen track reaching the stops on the way that she crowns with meals and baths. Akin to the steps, the vibration of the words ring in the reader's mind throughout the narrative and reverberate as a rhythmic echo much longer.

In Strayed's memoir, the immediacy of the events and the palpability of the feelings go hand in hand with emotional and intellectual growth. As Strayed progresses along the PCT, she reads books. Apart from the volumes of the guide *Staying Found: The Pacific Crest Trail, Volume 1: California* and *Staying Found: The Pacific Crest Trail,Volume 2: Oregon and Washington*, these are, among others, the quintessential texts of a rightful English major student that she was: *The Awakening* by Kate Chopin, *The Optimist's Daughter* by Eudora Welty, William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*, J. M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*, and Adrienne Rich's *The Dream of a Common Language* (which is the only book she did not abandon on the journey but kept till the end). The texts are the triggers behind some of her epiphanies. Incorporating them into her story of survival, Strayed both gives credit to the words of the other (becomes authored by them and acknowledges it) and enriches her personal story with an intertextual dimension and thus with a plurality of meaning.

As she traverses the different realms: the physical track of PCT, the personal recollections, and the literary worlds, the underlying principle in Strayed's memoir is to bring out the so-called "undiscovered self" (Larson 116, after Carl Gustav Jung) – the inner, true self, a self that is authentic, honest, sincere; a self that is in accord with herself as she feels herself to be, the fulfilled and the unfulfilled potential included. Her journey is, therefore, not only a track of mourning the poignant events in her life: her mother's life and death, the dissolution of her closest family in its wake, and her

own broken marriage. It is not only about finding the words to say goodbye to the past in terms of letting it sink in and become an integrated part of herself. Strayed sets out on a solitary quest for authenticity. She puts herself over the edge in this experiment on the self to test the idea of the true self surrounded and restrained by nothing but open space. Thus, her journey is both an act of internalization (of people and the past) and an act of externalization (peeling off layers of the self that both constrain and are sensed as artificial) at the same time. As she writes: "There was the woman I was before my mom died and the one I was now, my old life sitting on the surface of me like a bruise. The real me was beneath that, pulsing under all the things I used to think I knew" (33). Putting the self on trial, stripping it of habit and ordinary daily coordinates, the memoirist throws herself out into the world while she challenges rather than complies with what she has received and internalised as story patterns and truths of culture and society before she accepts any as her own (cf. Larson 116-120).

The orientation on the inner life, the innerly experienced time, a peculiar literary introversion, refurbishment, and reconnection of the (parts of the) self, conjoined with seeking out of the authentic in the self, all differentiate memoir from autobiography. According to Larson (129), using a Jungian framework, the latter "is written by the public person who tells the birth-to-death story of her persona [… whereas] the memoir allows the authentic self to lift the mask and tell the story of how mask and self have been intertwined." While the concept of "the authentic self" as such is highly controversial, what Larson certainly draws our attention to is the link the memoirist explores: between interiority, the "felt" self, or the story of the self the memoirist believes, and the social role of the self, the way it is perceived and the way it coalesces in social contact. Contemporary memoir, contrary to autobiography,[4] is written not to satisfy an assumed opinion or to ingrain or stabilise an image of an already established person/authority, but rather it puts the search and creation of the self out there in the open, for the public to see. Such an exposure means struggle with oneself, the feelings of shame, guilt, inadequacy. As Buss (*Repossessing* 12) writes: "the memoir form as practiced by women, plays off the confessional form in that it has at its core a desire to reveal the

[4] "For generations, the autobiography has told its author that his life should glow with the author's profession, ideas, accomplishments; it should follow a life path that's eminent and consequential; it should rely on summary and be publicly tactful" (Larson 76).

hidden thing, the forbidden knowledge, the shameful and guilty secret, and to make what was formerly a private matter into public knowledge." Not only, therefore, is there a certain nakedness involved, but also the entire (idiosyncratic and complex) process of stripping one self of protective layers is laid bare. Gradually, the self and its image are realised as constraining since they are revealed as composed of strata of inculcated cultural and family values, spoon-fed interpretations, imposed paths of development. In memoir, overall, the way one has acted as well as the trajectories of one's thought, and the interaction between them on the broad horizon of culture, are considered and revealed in tandem.

Starting with what appear to be simple meanings of events, the memoirists draw broader circles of signification around them, the structure of which is negotiated not only in terms of reasonable explanations but also in relation to the affective aftertaste these leave in the self. One of the fundamental resolutions of Strayed was to revamp and refurbish the underlying principle of her personal story according to which she had lived her life so far:

> I knew that if I allowed fear to overtake me, my journey was doomed. Fear, to a great extent, is born of a story we tell ourselves, and so I chose to tell myself a different story from the one women are told. I decided I was safe. I was strong. I was brave. Nothing could vanquish me. Insisting on this story was a form of mind control, but for the most part, it worked. Every time I heard a sound of unknown origin or felt something horrible cohering in my imagination, I pushed it away. I simply did not let myself become afraid. Fear begets fear. Power begets power. I willed myself to beget power. And it wasn't long before I actually *wasn't* afraid. I was working too hard to be afraid. / … nothing bad could happen to me, I thought. The worst thing already had. (Strayed 51, 59; emphasis in the original)

Overall, Strayed makes the frayed pieces of her self match and rhyme with one another into a wholeness of her own making that, the reader feels, reaches the point of indefatigability at the end. The narrative that started with the words:

> "It took me years to take my place among the ten thousand things again. To be the woman my mother raised … I would suffer. I would want things to be different than they were. The wanting was a wilderness and I had to find my own way out of the woods ... I didn't know where I was going until I got there. It was a place called the Bridge of the Gods" (Strayed 27).

Ends with things she had not known then and which subsequently happened She settled down, found a family (she is married with two children) and considers herself now a fulfilled person. At the end of the memoir, she writes, she would never have predicted that 15 years after she first set foot at the Bridge of Gods, she would not only recount her trip to her family, but also (re)visit the ending spot. Only in this return does she recognize the quest's full development. It seems that just like all the roads once led Strayed to the PCT, the PCT led her to the bridge, a literal bridge that she now perceives also as a symbolic, figurative bridge that became both a border separating her "previous" life, and a connection to the further life of hers that has been unfolding right from there. In both – Cheryl Strayed's memoir in particular and in memoir as a genre in general – while the unknown is illuminated into the known, the finality of the process is deferred. Thus, the conclusions are turned into (new) beginnings, while what is emphasised is what cannot be measured or put into lines of words but is carried on and retained in between them.

Furthermore, this act of reaching to the deep core has a lot to do with finding the right balance between the self and the other: it is not done by denying, fighting, avoiding, or negating the other. Rather, the goal is to find a place, to reach a point, from where one can safely both receive from and give to the other: "This balancing act of the self in relation to the outer and the inner worlds, against the memoir's thematic and temporal restrictions" (Larson 23). While the trigger behind memoir writing seems to be deeply personal (coming from an unquenchable need in the self), without exception literary memoir opens towards the other. It is always because of the other, for the other, or – eventually – about the other that the memoir is written, even though the experience belongs to the self and the author makes herself into an experiential subject. Literary memoir's structure may thus be likened to that of concentric circles where the personal, with each added layer of signification, engages also the collective realms, and where a given subject under consideration is expanded in a variety of significant contexts.

Contrary to the writer of an autobiography, the memoirist instead of centering on herself may focus almost entirely on the other. The researched others are frequently family members and the incentive to start writing about their life is a fundamental lack – a dearth of information, a lacuna in family history, some crucial missing data from the (very often) parent's life that means incompleteness in the story-chain that connects the generations, and as such is experienced as a hole in the self. As the time passes, instead

of diminishing, the emptiness may in fact start expanding in a foreboding manner. The journey into the past of the other is studded with variations on the question of finding – will one find (out about) the past?, will one know whether one has found (things about) the past at all?, will one know, in fact, what one has found?, will one be able to live with what one has found? – all of which are spanned with the queries: where does one begin; as well as when does one end the search? As Nancy K. Miller writes in *What They Saved* (129; emphasis in the original): "*The truth about the past comes in pieces, but not all of the pieces fit together*." The tokens of the past are scattered and to find at least scraps of it, one often needs to move, to travel, and frequently to far-away places.

In the case of Erin Einhorn the search entailed trips within the US, an unplanned stay in the Netherlands, a year-long stay in Poland, as well as a trip to Sweden to enable her to find and fit together at least some of the pieces of the bygone. Einhorn's memoir *The Pages in Between – A Holocaust Legacy of Two Families, One Home* (2008)[5] was written to recount and document her research into her family's history. She relies on memoir as a genre that is conducive to reassembling and reassessing family history and family relations while she reimagines and redefines herself in light of the newly discovered information.

Just like in the case of Cheryl Strayed, for Einhorn the decisive factor behind her research was the bond, strong but complex, with her mother. Einhorn's mother, Irena Frydrych, died shortly after she started her investigation in Poland. Einhorn, who thought she had all the time in the world to spend on looking for the traces of her mother's life, wanted to share her findings with the parent. She thought that whatever she found might also help her explain and interpret her mother's life and behaviour to herself and thus make her understand the parent better. She hoped that the knowledge of where she was coming from – both literally and metaphorically – would bring her closer to her mother, with whom she had a fairly close, yet a troubled relationship. In the meantime, the search she thought they could participate in together, becomes quite a solitary, and at times lonely, endeavour she proceeds with not only for, but also instead of and in the name of the mother. As she looks for her mother's roots, Einhorn goes through unfamiliar places and proceeds with her fieldwork. She starts with the historical archives and ends with the house in Będzin which her

[5] For a detailed analysis see (Macedulska "Root Seekers").

great-grandfather owned before the war and her grandfather promised to the Polish woman, Honorata Skowrońska, in exchange for taking care of his daughter (i.e. Einhorn's mother) if anything should happen to him (he was captured by the Nazis but survived the war). Simultaneously, she goes through the motions that Nancy K. Miller describes in her own memoir by referring to the Freudian "Fort-Da" game:

> … returning to the scene where something was lost can seem comforting. For us, the child's game with the spool means fooling ourselves with time travel; if we cannot retrieve the past, we can go back to its places in the present. Playing with loss becomes a way to confront, often not fully consciously, what we are missing, to admit that we are missing something. … in the end, by returning to the place of loss, we acknowledge our true sadness, which is that we miss what's missing. (*What They* 207)

Not all is missing for Einhorn, though. There are some crucial findings she comes across. Already in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington D.C., among the volumes of documents, she stumbled upon the surviving image of her grandmother: "small and dark, a two-inch photocopy of a photograph" (Einhorn *Pages In Between* 45). This picture was a true gem, since Irena Frydrych had never before seen what her mother, who perished in WWII, looked like. In her memoir, Einhorn revises the life-story of her mother the parent believed in and fills in some of the blanks with information never even mentioned by her mother. As time passes, she also reassesses her own life in light of the changing coordinates. The most profound is the passing of her mother and the tumultuous grief she needs to come to terms with as she continues with her history research plan. Besides, there is also the wish of the Polish family that hopes Einhorn finally makes them lawful owners of the Będzin house, so that their legal status and the taxation responsibilities are solved; a request she never succeeds in fulfilling.

As a reporter and a writer, Einhorn is very scrupulous and attentive to detail while she revises, confirms, or dismisses facts, and she admits to and leaves empty spaces whenever it is not possible to provide any answers. While researching her family history, she finds, just like Miller under similar circumstances (*What They* 229), that she is "forever suspended between lost and found." While Einhorn's account contains stories of survival (of her grandfather and her mother), it is first of all a post-memorial testimony of a journey back to the bygone with its foreign places as well as its unfa-

miliar linguistic and cultural spaces. Erin Einhorn is part of what Marianne Hirsch defined in terms of the "generation of postmemory"[6]:

> "Postmemory" describes the relationship that the "generation after" bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before – to experiences they "remember" only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up / Postmemory is a powerful form of *memory* precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through *repetition* or *reenactment* but through previous *representations* that themselves become the objects of projection and recreation. (Hirsch *Generation* 5, Hirsch "Marked" 76; emphasis in the original).

The past for Einhorn is contained in the available and understandable, in the tangible yet inexplicable, and – finally – in the unavailable as well as in the ephemeral that is beyond recognition. The latter (two pairs) open her memoir to the future: her own and that of her children. The inexplicable is what is elusive and defies setting down once and for all; what has not been found yet might someday resurface or may stay forever out of reach.

In her memoir, Einhorn tunes in to the peculiarities she recalls were so characteristic for her mother's behaviour in relation to herself and others. In her personal story, Einhorn is guided by what her mother repeatedly told her about the past (the recorded interview with Frydrych that Einhorn conducted for her high school newspaper included) and which she needs to recollect with especial sensitivity to the slight variations of the narrative of the parent (one such inconsistency actually spurred her on the journey in search of the past); as well as with sharp attention in order to succeed in grasping what might be found between the lines. Eventually, Einhorn's heritage comes in the shape of the story – the stories told by the mother and other family members, the stories told by the Skowronski family, the story she tells herself about the stories she has heard – while she tries to place in it the tangible evidence from which meaning emanates, sometimes confirming, but often almost spilling on and blotting out what she had already learned. Her story, thus, has multiple authors, but it is herself who could patch all their voices together and further constitute it in the acts of writing, opening, and releasing the story/stories into the future.

Since the form of memoir emerges from the memoirist's life's essences, rhythms, frequencies, and energies, memoir, as Mary Karr (xvii)

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[6] see also: http://www.postmemory.net

writes, "purports to grow more organically from lived experience." Sometimes what was supposed to be a single act of narrative representation of one's life becomes a prolonged, if not habitual, engagement. Mary Karr's triptych *The Liar's Club* (1995), *Cherry* (2000), and *Lit* (2009), cover the time of her childhood, adolescence, and adulthood, respectively. Earlier, it was Kate Simon, the Polish-born American author, who transformed her life experience into a triptych dedicated to the subsequent stages in her life. She narrates her childhood, adolescence, and adulthood in *Bronx Primitive: Portraits in a Childhood* (1982), *A Wider World, Portraits in an Adolescence* (1986), and *Etchings in an Hourglass* (1990), respectively. The triptychs were the only memoirs written by these authors, each later one a sequel to the previous ones.[7] Another triptych was penned by Esmeralda Santiago, who wrote *When I Was Puerto Rican: A Memoir* (1993), *Almost a Woman* (1999, edition from 2012 has the subtitle: *a Memoir*), and *The Turkish Lover* (2004). The scope of her memoirs roughly corresponds to the life stages pattern established by Simon and Karr.

Nicole Stamant recognizes the "serial memoir," which "challenges the larger narrative of the one-book publication championed by autobiography" (18). Memoir provides a generic space where the making and unmaking of the self is possible, where the narrative effect is that of a dialogical accumulation (which might include stripping off as well) of the layered self. The serial memoir in particular works by addition, juxtaposition, and reorganization on the local (within a single memoir) and the global (within the memoiristic output of a given author) levels at the same time. Recording and testifying to the author's development, the volumes thus possess the potential for tracing a certain continuity of the self. As such the memoir as a genre challenges, revises, and redefines what is taken (for granted) as ways and limits of self-construction and self-representation.

### 1.2. Other generic blendings

What Helen M. Buss recognizes in her own discussion on memoir, i.e. its being "a complex blending of genres that borrows from the whole past of writing practice" with the view to constructing new ways of living and communicating (Buss *Repossessing* 25), embraces also appropriations from both fic-

[7] Simon's second and third memoirs are even subtitled: *A Sequel to Bronx Primitive* and a *Sequel to Bronx Primitive and A Wider World*, respectively.

tion and poetry. Larson (151) thinks of contemporary memoir as a "cousin to the novel," while Couser (8) sees "the two genres [novel and memoir] … as siblings who grew up together, often borrowing each other's clothes." Among the narrative techniques memoir shares with the novel are their common use of the narrative, the chief stylistic device of both and their common reliance on dialogue. The similarities between the novel and memoir continue with regard to the subgenres, e.g. graphic novel has its generic counterpart in graphic memoir, both of which rely on the tandem of narrative and graphic expression (e.g. Alison Bechdel *Fun Home* [2006], *Are You My Mother?* [2012], Liz Prince *Tomboy* [2014]). As Couser concludes, it is often difficult to distinguish between the novel and memoir "on the basis of internal evidence alone." It might be because in both we enter a world: in the novel it is a world (or a parallel world) of probabilities, in memoir a world of claimed actualities, while both are experiments performed on experience. With its conspicuousness on the literary scene, contemporary memoir challenges our relatively comfortable distinction between fact and fiction, as it questions this dichotomy, whereas at the same time explicating that, in the words of Larson (108), "fiction's falsification is entirely different from that of a memoirist", even if the memoirist consciously overcomes the impulse to fake and embellish, she is aware that the act of the narrative itself, as it requires selection and composition, inherently disfigures the event and the self. Still, as Larson (104) continues, "memoir is getting more comfortable with its niche beside fiction and within the sphere of narrative."

The affiliation of memoir with poetry is not obvious at face value, yet needs to be explicated. For instance, to refer to Mary Karr again, she claims her memoirs realize her childhood resolution scribbled in her 10-year-old self's handwriting: "When I grow up I will write ½ poetry and ½ autobiography" (xvi). Moreover, the impressionistically memoiristic effort of Lyn Hejinian in *My Life in the Nineties* (2003) (a continuation of *My Life* from 1987), where she both relies on and discards the medium of the narrative, is published as poetry. On the other hand, Patricia Hampl, claims memoir as a genre is non-poetry, as opposed to being non-fiction. In this way, Hampl situates the memoir not on the opposite side of the fiction/non-fiction spectrum in general and novel in particular, but as the reverse of poetry: simultaneously a separate and a complementary genre, both of which (poetry and memoir) mutually define and influence one another. Numerous memoirists are poets and they rely on both in their ways of representation (of the self in the world and the world in the self):

Mary Karr, Shirley Geok-lin Lim, Joyce Carol Oates, Joy Harjo, June Jordan (author of memoir *Soldier, a Poet's Childhood* [2001]), Dionne Brand, Meena Alexander, to name only some poets/memoirists. In their memoirs, the influences of poetry are highly visible in terms of addressing and exploring the question and awareness of language, the poetic sensibility, the interplay between the word and the image, the reliance on fragments and their symbolic interrelations, as well as the (general) crisis of representation and ways of overcoming it or moving around it.

Moreover, as Thomas Larson (15) notices: "It may be that the memoir has risen in the last two decades because the personal essay expanded its singular theme and fleshed out its emotional immediacy". The affiliation between the memoir and the personal essay cannot be overlooked. It seems both genres exist in a certain symbiosis, where the border between the two is quite difficult to determine. What is, for instance, the exact name for the generic territory occupied by texts such as Sandra Cisneros' *A House of My Own* (2016), *Teaching a Stone to Talk* by Annie Dillard (2013), or Amy Tan's *The Opposites of Fate* (2004)? We may address them as no longer strictly personal essays, but also not yet quite memoirs. These forms of expression themselves are not entirely new: one can mention here the nineteenth century texts, e.g. Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*, or Margaret Fuller's *Summer on the Lakes*. Though not exactly alike, these texts share an in-between generic zone, a threshold zone of transition, i.e. a zone of purposeful growth but also of coincidental development. As such the contemporary texts harbour the potential of a new, as yet not fully structured or inhabited, way of representing the self and its experience in the ever changing cultural, sociological, political, and personal circumstances.

In a way, memoir is relied on to respond to and to deal with the crisis of representation that has been lingering on since postmodernism. What fuels the development of the genre are the fundamental questions that pertain not only to the (possible) way(s) that the self can be represented in, but also to the idea regarding the parts of the self that can and/or should be represented in a literary and aesthetic way that remains closest to the living experience. In other words, the question is about what kind of experience(s) possess(es) literary value. Beside the ones already mentioned above, memoir provides a literary space for an aesthetic representation of the most recent events, still filled with tactile sensation and emotion. The suddenness, the immediacy and a peculiar vividness of the narrated experience is what characterises memoir and, again, what also sets it apart from autobiography. Thomas

Larson distinguishes the sudden memoir, written in the thralls of certain most recent event(s) as the author, still in the throes of its/their aftermath, grapples with what has just occurred. Therefore, these memoirs may get hold of "something before memory can edit it," whereas the sheer act of writing "helps the writer cope, get through, get past" (Larson 79). In *The Year of Magical Thinking* (2005) and *Blue Nights* (2011), Joan Didion[8] tries to make sense of what happened, registers, and looks at her own work of mourning after the loss of her husband and her daughter, respectively. It is herself as a mother and a wife who in her texts responds to the extraordinary traumatic circumstances that come too abruptly and too soon.

In *The Year of Magical Thinking* Didion zooms in on details, as if they contained the reality of her husband's death and by surveying them she might finally believe it happened and – somewhat paradoxically – at the same time undo or prevent it from happening. Didion's voice is strained between the reasonable agreement with the facts and the wishful prolongation of the state in which she considers her husband as absent but still alive, still coming back, a state in which she lives on as if he just went on a trip. As she explores the most recent events, she summons and immerses herself in the life she lived with Gregory Dunne. Didion was caught unawares and she clings to what memory provides to her, desperately holding on to the past in terms of both – the most recent and the more distanced recollections. She opens *The Year of Magical Thinking* with these words:

> *Life changes fast.*
> *Life changes in an instant.*
> *You sit down to dinner and life as you know it ends.*
> *The question of self-pity*. (3; emphasis in the original)

The instant, as Didion explains further, is an ordinary one. The suddenness rips apart the well-known routine, the life as one knows it becomes divided into the time "before" and the time "after" (cf. Dhingra and Cheung 106), with an unbearable pain in between spreading in both (chronological) directions. The sheer event of loss becomes incomprehensible. It is first dismissed as unreal and impossible. Withdrawal and a sort of an extended state of shock that makes the self close on itself are how Didion represents her reaction. It is her wounded self that she observes and pours out in writing. It is not that she aims at a constructive rationalization of grief, although

[8] For further analysis see Kuczma.

she does that too: "Grief comes in waves, paroxysms, sudden apprehensions that weaken the knees and blind the eyes …" (*Year* 27). It is not that she tries to engage her mind in the cerebral work of analysis, association, and ordering, also in a self-reflexive way to observe herself mourn, although she does that: "In time of trouble, I had been trained since childhood, read, learn, work it up, go to the literature. Information was control. / I realized that for the time being I could not trust myself to present a coherent face to the world" (44, 168). It is not that she tries to record and hold on to the memories she has of her husband, Gregory Dunne, although she does that: "During the past months I have spent a great deal of time trying first to keep track of, and, when that failed, to reconstruct, the exact sequence of events that preceded and followed what happened that night" (63). All these are merely variations on her need to find a way out for her mind arrested by the loss of her husband. The memoir is her immediate lifeline against despair and against falling into the engulfing pit of self-pity. In a similar vein, Kay Redfield Jamison wrote *Nothing Was the Same, A Memoir* (2009), which is an account of life, death, and grief after the loss of her husband Richard Wyatt. Also, in *A Widow's Story* (2011), Joyce Carol Oates mourns the death of her husband Raymond Smith.

In *Blue Nights* Didion's barely healed scar is slashed open. Her daughter, Quintana Roo dies at the age of 39. The suddenness of this second death as if removes Didion from her position of control, or what still remains of it, and which she nevertheless has so far both lived by and kept faith in. This text as if moves in circles, while Didion charges herself with lack of insight. She delivers blows to herself, accuses herself, feels guilty of her inability to read what was happening in front of her when her work depends on the skill of observation and as such she depends on it for her writing and manages the literary task so well. Didion's narrative is acutely and explicitly fragmentary in this memoir, which is the effect of her searingly doubtful self-reflexive voice. In the documentary vein so familiar to her, she attempts to track down the beginnings of things, she goes forward by repetition, relentlessly coming back to the same events that will not let go of her: "Had I been saying it without hearing what I say?" (Didion *Blue Nights* 17); "In theory these mementos serve to bring back the moment. In fact they serve only to make clear how inadequately I appreciated the moment when it was here. How inadequately I appreciated the moment when it was here is something else I could never afford to see" (46). These repetitions are not tokens of any magical thinking in this me-

moir. Rather, Didion starts writing in the stupor of the conviction that nothing can be done to prevent what has just yet already happened. Nonetheless, the weight of it is too much to carry for her, both psychologically and physically. The writing reflects the disintegration of the memoirist, who nonetheless writes in order not to collapse completely.

Larson's observation: "Sudden memoir is about being insecure, remaining insecure for the extra innings of insight" (98), helps make sense of Didion's memoirs. Also, in the case of loss, writing, as Birkerts (187) maintains, is propelled by the need to find closure in the self. Similarly, in the case of trauma what is most important is to bridge the divide between event and understanding (cf. Caruth 8), which – as Didion's memoirs, and especially the later one, exemplify – cannot really be achieved. As such, the writer seems to have relied on memoir as a genre that provides the necessary literary space for accommodating extreme conditions, where she could both tackle them and dispose of them figuratively and aesthetically. These have occurred in the plural for her, which leaves the reader trying to imagine the excruciating pain, fear, exclusion, abandonment, and many more coinciding conditions. Such extreme situations make people turn inside, both in the physical sense – into rooms, houses and closed and intimate spaces – and in the mental sense – into themselves. In both memoirs, Didion turns inside herself and turns herself inside-out. She follows the most visible pulsating veins as well as the cracks, the breaks, the fissures. As such, memoir enables her to represent the intensity of inner confusion and conflict, which would not have been that obvious or clear in autobiography.

Moreover, as Buss observes, the self-vigilance/self-questioning that memoir demands of the author is a characteristic feature of memoir by women: "It is the attention to reflexivity and the resulting revisions of self and world that mark the contemporary memoir form as practiced by women as a life-writing practice, as a generic expression" (*Repossessing* 17). For Didion, as for Alexander, writing is thus not only a way of repeating the opening of wounds, but also a way of writing them out, of receiving and delivering severe blows (to herself), a way of almost obliterating themselves as they are trying to reach the greatest pain with their eyes wide open and start bringing themselves back to life from there: "What I have learned to remember is the wound I could not carry in memory. I must write it out if I am to go on living" (Alexander *Fault Lines* 237). The writing is done after the initial complete stupor dissipates,

yet while it still has an overpowering impact on the memoirist. Hence also the strength for the firm resolution to expel it.

Stamant (10), summarizing Roy Pascal's claims in *Design and Truth in Autobiography* (1960), writes: "The strict focus on the individual self and its interiority, often at the expense of the larger cultural context, becomes central to his theorization of autobiography and its distinction from memoir; memoirs often focus on the historical moment, occasionally at the expense of the narrator." Clearly, those claims are not, or only partially valid with regard to the most recent memoirs, i.e. those published after 1990. While contemporary memoirs include relevant details regarding the geographical as well as cultural and linguistic coordinates, it is the inner life of the memoirist that often determines which of the former are foregrounded and which remain in the background, backstage, or are not included at all. In other words, it is only those outer facts that help elucidate the self that are emplotted. As the memoirist narrates her recollections and in so doing turns herself into a text, of general import is the idea of "what it was like to be *me*, to face what I faced, to lose what I lost" that is conveyed to the reader (Larson 22; emphasis in the original). It is most often conveyed in an explicit way, e.g. in Shirley Geok-Lin Lim's memoir, in which she writes about her childhood and growing up in Malacca Malaysia, and subsequently leaving the country for the USA:

> It was convenient for me that Malacca was at the center of that crooked hunchback peninsula that filled an entire page, just as Australia and North America each filled a page. Malaya was in the middle of the earth and everybody else fell out over the edges – China, cramped like a squeezed orange half, India, an inverted pyramid, leaking Ceylon as a teardrop. This geography, placing me at the hub of the universe, was more than childish egocentrism. I felt the depth of my existence, and accepted that it was full of meaning. Meaning radiated from me, the subject on whom experience fell and the potential author on whom experience was dependent for sense. (73)

Often, the feeling of "what it felt like" is more indirect and of a general nature, a metaphorically constructed representation distilled from many similar experiences into a description that stands in for all related instances.

In the case of Kay Redfield Jamison's memoir *An Unquiet Mind. A Memoir of Moods and Madness* (1996), written from both perspectives available to her – that of a scholar and that of an affected patient as she

sheds light on mental illness – next to passages describing a daily but not extreme life (akin to those penned by Lim), there are others, published in italics and functioning as a crucial characteristic or a common denominator of the manic-depressive condition she discusses. Whether experience is emplotted in a direct way as belonging to the memoirist, or in more universal, or neutral, terms – not really as separated from the memoirist herself but also descriptive of others in similar position/condition – we can most clearly notice Jamison's dependence on what Buss (*Repossessing* 16) distinguishes as a regular performance of three functions in the process of writing the self: that of participant (doer), witness (recipient) and reflective/reflexive voice. A balance among these three positions, or perhaps rather the point(s) where these overlap, is indispensable for the emergence of the narrative and the coherence of memoir.

Lim shows the symbolic and imaginative importance of such centres, representing herself as the one who occupies some of them. She beholds herself as occupying a literal and metaphorical centre of the world. She looks at the map and sees herself in terms of Malacca Malaysia's place on it. Moreover, while she understands meaning to come forth in writing, she sees both as extensions of the self. Also, Lim self-reflexively secures a narrative continuity of her identity by drawing a link between her experience of being at the centre as a child and her present work of writing, where she acts as a (central) filter between her experience and meaning, mediating between the former and the latter.

While Jamison mediates between the function of a witness and a participant her position is more troubled: she is both a patient and a doctor (she experiences the illness and knows a lot about it as a scientific researcher). As such, she satisfies her need for the meta-perspective of self-reflexivity by references to empirical research and scientific data she has access to as a scholar. The peculiarity of Jamison's position, however, lies in the fact that the illness affects the core of the self, splitting it into two somewhat unequal and not really symmetrical aspects (manic and depressive). Thus, it is more difficult to establish and point to the core, the centre that her self occupies:

> Moods are such an essential part of the substance of life, of one's notion of oneself, that even psychotic extremes in mood and behavior somehow can be seen as temporary, even understandable, reactions to what life has dealt. In my case I had a horrible sense of loss for who I had been and where I had been. It was difficult to give up the high

> flights of mind and mood, even though the depressions that inevitably followed nearly cost me my life. (*Unquiet Mind* 91)

Jamison's words point to the necessity of continuity of the self in time, however fractured or split it might be experienced as. Even though her mood alterations cause her harm and she does alleviate them thanks to the prescribed medications, she nonetheless finds it difficult to put a decisive end to them. She is wary of medicine becoming the regulatory force in her life by eliminating the irregularities in her behaviour. The loss of her constitutional abnormalities is tantamount for her to the loss of her self. Jamison's memoir shows that extreme conditions need to be narrated and thus tamed and disenchanted for the general public and therefore reframed (in reference to the most recent scientific findings) on the cultural horizon, in consequence of which they may be diagnosed earlier and adequately treated.

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Each memoir is different, marked by fingerprints of the particular author, but in what is repeated from memoir to memoir may be found what constitutes the characteristics of the genre. Readily visible now is that the incentive that revived the interest in autobiographical discourse as a literary discourse was the overall emphasis on "*autos*" (cf. Olney 19-21) also promoted by autobiography. This sharp focus on the self – and its complexities, mysteries, fears and anxieties, milestones, moments of revelation and (self)understanding – memoir continues to explore. Just as "the act of autobiography is at once a discovery, a creation, and an imitation of the self" (Olney 19), memoir again engages itself in tracing, recording, and reinventing the growth of consciousness and self-knowledge. It is the peregrinations of identity formation that memoir is interested in. The limelight is directed on the subject, the "who" (cf. Olney 19) of the narrative. Contrary, however, to what is predominant in autobiography, the "who" is not only a doer who makes things happen and shows herself as arbiter of events, but also someone to whom things happen, whose creativity lies first and foremost in positioning herself as a recipient of reality to which she responds, in face of which she takes a stand and writes her story.

Nonetheless, the transition from the withheld to the published, as Leigh Gilmore (*Limits* 4) points out, makes the former ambivalent. In what she sees as today's "'culture of confession' and a culture of testi-

mony" (2), the memoirist uses herself as both the subject and the object, and thus splits herself of her own accord into the observer and the observed. This is how there appears an indeterminate space, which carries the potential of imaginative invention and hence links the memoir further with fiction in general and the novel in particular. On the other hand, however, memoir opens the self and incidents from her life to scientific investigation – which often results not only in demonstrating that the private described in a memoir exemplifies broader social tendencies, but also in texts that straddle the academic, the scientific and the personal.

### 1.3. Memoir and academic writing

The clear link between the seeming opposites of the subjective memoir and the "objective" academic text has been forged relatively recently. It is only since the second half of 20th c. that life writing in general has quite consistently started to encroach on the territory of the academic text and its conventions. As a result, both academic texts, especially in different areas of the humanities, and life-writing texts have changed. Multiple changes in theories of subjectivity, but also the rise of movements advocating minority rights, including the women's movement, Civil Rights Movement, American Indian Movement and others, have by the mid-1980s produced what Laura Marcus has called the "autobiographical turn" in such fields as literary theory and social studies, motivated by the desire to "reclaim agency and subjectivity" (Marcus 11), but also to go against the universalisation of individual experience, claims of representativity, and purported objectivity of theoretical discourse (11-12). While the term has been used particularly often to refer to academic texts by feminist scholars who have carefully examined their own social and ideological positioning as a ground and starting point for their analyses, a similar trend has been present in texts by other, usually minority, writers, including postcolonial scholars or Indigenous scholars in North America. However, as Huddard argues (6), "not every theoretical writer can get away with an autobiographical moment" – it is those coming from marginalised backgrounds who, in this case, speak with more authority.

While the intention is always to "ground" the text, avoid falling into the trap of universalising individual experience and accepting the mirage of scholarly objectivity, scholars representing many non-white groups, for example Black and Indigenous scholars, have additionally claimed that

the Western model of academic and theoretical writing stands in contradiction to traditionally employed in their communities forms of theorizing; and that theory has become in the Western world in general, and in the North American academia in particular, a means to obscure meaning and put non-majority scholars down (cf., for example, Christian). For example, the source of the personal in academic texts by Indigenous scholars can be found in traditional protocols of storytelling and traditional ways of conveying knowledge, which defy Western paradigms. A variety of academic and life-writing forms have been shaped by consciously implemented Indigenous anti-oppressive teaching, learning and research paradigms related to various Indigenous ontologies and storytelling traditions. In the North American context, this development can be attributed to the incessant work of Indigenous activists and elders, but also to the slow, but consistently rising and increasingly more visible involvement of the Indigenous peoples in the academic world as both students and teachers, attempting not just to fit in, but to shape and transform the educational environment.

The extensive introduction of personal, subjective information and storytelling into academic articles and books, especially in many areas of the broadly conceived humanities and social sciences, has resulted in generically hybrid texts, in particular academic articles that strongly resemble personal essays, but also monographs that employ auto/biographic information for a variety of purposes. In the realm of Indigenous writing, one of the purposes is, in the words of Emma LaRocque, to produce "a counter-discourse to emphasize a point made by the earliest Native writers; namely, that we are not savages, we have cultures" (164). Likewise, Indigenous scholars have more and more often included traditional stories and storytelling as the method and the tool of investigation shaping their academic texts. As LaRocque maintains, using one's voice in academic writing, "through references to first-person commentaries, or to community, family, experiences, perceptions, anecdotes, or facts of biography for instructional purposes" means, in fact, "assuming a contrapuntal space concerning Western conventions" rather than "abandoning the canon of scholarly circumspections" (31).

At the other end of the spectrum, one finds different, more or less conventional, forms of life writing texts by scholars, and – though perhaps not as often – life writing texts that take up strategies and conventions of academic writing and documentation – often going far beyond the list of

sources or "selective bibliography" or occasional footnotes quite commonly found, for example, in contemporary memoirs. While conventions of academic writing can be taken up by almost any memoirist, the majority of those using them are academics; though many scholarly memoirs steer clear of those conventions. Since the turn of the 20th and 21st century critics have attempted to come up with labels to describe memoirs written by scholars. As there is a huge variety of approaches, styles and forms within this group, some not necessarily related to academic writing conventions or approaches, none of the terms is all-inclusive, and – which is only to be expected – none manages to draw non-porous boundaries around the genre. The majority of definitions focus almost exclusively on the contents of the memoirs, in particular their focus on academic, professional life, the life of the academia, or autobiographical and institutional circumstances that led the author to the profession. The generic designation that is perhaps most inclusive is that of the "academic memoir". Here, the principle of categorization seems to be not so much the form or contents of the text, but authorship. Cynthia Franklin, the author of the only monograph on the topic, classifies as an "academic memoir" a memoir written by an academic prominent within his or her field, though not necessarily of national or international prominence. One of her contentions is that academic memoir constitutes a ploy of sorts: an oblique way to address an unease with the elimination of the personal by poststructuralist theory, to escape the rigors of academic writing and evaluation, but at the same time to use one's institutional position to bolster claims made on the basis of autobiographical material (Franklin 2). Thus, the memoirs – which represent a variety of approaches, not necessarily including open engagements with theoretical concepts – provide a valuable glimpse into "academics' contemporary struggles with the purpose and definition of subjectivity" (12), but also into the workings of a variety of institutions, including academia. She reads the personal in those memoirs as always ideologically and socially inflected, which allows her to treat the memoirs as "cultural touchstones for the present-day academy" (15).

Another generic label is that of "autocritography" – the designation first used by Henry Louis Gates Jr., and then taken up by another African-American scholar, Michael Awkward, to describe his own *Scenes of Instruction: A Memoir* (1999). Awkward's definition focuses on the dominant theme and narrative teleology of the memoir: he defines "autocritography" as a self-reflexive "account of the individual, social, and institutional conditions that help to produce a scholar" (7).

Margaret K. Willard-Traub, on the other hand, introduces into her conceptualisation of "scholarly memoir" a focus on its impact. She calls scholarly memoir "reflective" in that the authors are conscious of their own positionality and its implications, and of the contingency of such categories as gender, race and class; and focuses on the link the memoirs establish between the writer and the reader. In fact, she posits "the inscription and establishing of relationships between writers and readers" (511) to be the unique feature that allows for the conceptualisation of such texts as belonging to a separate genre. By mobilising such parameters of identity as gender, race and class the genre, on the one hand, refuses to locate the "subject as a solitary individual pursuing 'objective' knowledge"; and on the other, it helps establish a mutually supportive connection between writers and readers. The connection is based on the "materiality" of language in the realm of "social relations that encourage particular understandings of identity within (and across) particular communities, and that bring with them particular (material) consequences for writers and readers" (512). Her analyses of such memoirs by Ruth Behar, Patricia Williamson, Alice Kaplan and Shirley Geok-lin Lim underscore the focus of the texts on the complicity of academic languages with discriminatory behaviours within and without academia (513).

While none of the three definitions focuses on the form and style per se, within any of those groups one can find generically hybrid texts. It is particularly interesting to examine life writing and academic writing hybrids in the realm of North American Indigenous writing. Of course, generic hybridity – for example, texts straddling the oral and the written, and incorporating both Indigenous storytelling traditions and (often radically reworked) Western genres – is one of the hallmarks of contemporary North American Indigenous literatures. At the core of the experimentation one finds not simply unavoidable intercultural influences, but most importantly the belief in the responsibility of the writer as a contemporary storyteller to reach dispersed and varied Indigenous communities, build coalitions with non-Indigenous communities, touch the reader with the transformative power of the story and initiate internal change, which can ideally lead to transformations within the reader's immediate community, within the society or even globally. The pedagogical intent of Indigenous fiction writers, life writers and educators – to raise awareness, to heal, to validate community experiences, to transmit traditional knowledge, etc. – has resulted in more and more pronounced critiques of Western paradigms of research and knowl-

edge transmission. For example, the Canadian writer and activist Lee Maracle defines the inadequacy of Western paradigms by contrasting prescriptive Western *theory* and indigenous *story*, be it mythological, autobiographical, or any other; describing the latter as a much more effective pedagogical tool. The major difference is in the affect and relational power of the story, which the listener/reader can relate to her own experience. In contrast, *theory* couched in hermetic language which impedes communication functions in fact as a tool to gain power over others (Maracle *Oratory* 11-13). While some Indigenous writers, for example Maracle herself in her *I Am Woman* (1988), have simply ignored academic conventions in their educational texts, using instead a mix of mostly autobiographical stories straddling a number of Western genres (an essay, a poem) and relying on oratory to convey knowledge, others have utilised conventions of academic writing at the same time modifying or even deconstructing them.

An interesting example of the latter approach is Fyre Jean Graveline's work. Graveline, a Métis (Cree) writer/educator specialising in social work and education, has created her own generically hybrid model of writing. She uses similar techniques and writing style, and autobiographical material, in all her texts: her articles, the monograph *Circle Works: Transforming Eurocentric Consciousness*, based on her doctoral thesis; and in the memoir *Healing Wounded Hearts* (2004), which in fact incorporates revised versions of some of her academic articles. The memoir, which – as she admits (*Healing* 19) – includes fictionalisations and composited characters and events, focuses on lifelong experiences of abuse of different nature, and the process of healing. The healing comes through the retelling of incidents from Graveline's childhood, growing-up and early career, her difficult experiences of teaching at a number of higher education institutions in Canada, during which – against many odds – she develops her pedagogical method ("circle works"); up to the moment she receives her Ph.D., and then, overcoming many institutional obstacles, continues teaching. At the same time, using the autobiographical and partly fictionalised material, reworked traditional story, family story, graphic work (her own drawings), and outside scholarly sources, she discusses power structures and anti-indigenous bias of the Canadian society written into its (educational) institutions and the media. Employing the autobiographical material which structures her work, she explores patriarchy, sexism, racism; but also indigenous protocols of research, teaching, healing. Her experiences are

treated as both individual and representative: she writes to give witness, but also to resist, to heal herself and her reader, and to change.

The overall structure of the memoir seems to follow the conventional structure of an academic text, but in fact it constitutes not only a creative reworking of the structure, but its deconstruction with elements of pastiche. The author demonstrates her familiarity with the conventions, her skill at using them, but at the same time shows them to be an unnecessary, often harmful burden – some are discarded, others adapted for purposes congruent with adopted procedure and goals, many discussed and found wanting in the course of the memoir.

Graveline starts with clarifying her nomenclature in the section titled "Words to Know to Read Me" (8-10). In the section she familiarises the reader with Mitchif/Cree terms used throughout the text, locates the text generically ("indigenous creative non-fiction"; 9), and names "Warrior-Women. WordSmiths. Sisters." (9) – but also mentions male writers and scholars – who have influenced her thought; as well as anthologies of texts that have been important for her. After that, she defines her aims, procedure, methodology and writing technique ("Getting Started. on dis Healing. Journey"; 11-18). Each chapter finishes with "Notes" – which include standard bibliographic pointers and references, but are often of personal and idiosyncratic character. The whole text closes with an extensive, conventionally structured, though unconventionally titled, bibliography ("If. You Want to Know. Who I Read. Read This"; 226-237) and "Acknowledgments". At the same time, Graveline discards both the scientific distance with its purported "objectivity", and the unemotional language that goes with it, supporting her claims equally with personal experience, story, drawing, and writings of authorities in the field. Graveline explains that the protocols that structure the text come from traditional teachings (202): this is what motivates the content of her text, which – according to the protocol – she opens by introducing herself, her ancestors, and locating herself culturally. Her aim is, among others, to oppose different facets of oppression, including academic diseases of "Chronic Neutral.itis. Research-itis. Rational.itis." (202), from which she also wants the reader to recover. In her research, teaching and writing, she reveals, she uses the "Medicine Wheel as Paradigm" (203), relying on the indigenous concept of the sacred circle as a symbol of wholeness, balance and interconnectedness. Using storytelling as medicine, she invites the reader to join her on her own "Healing.Teaching. Journey." (13).

Grappling with the transfer of her life story and the oral story to writing in English, Graveline devices a number of ways of "Re-inventing. Enemy-Language." (15) to suit her needs, to avoid the dangers of setting the story in only one "authoritative", sterile form, and also, it seems, to enrich it with ways and structures of oral storytelling. "Reinventing enemy language" is originally Joy Harjo's phrase and the title of an anthology she has edited with Gloria Bird (cf. Harjo and Bird). Episkenew calls it a "subversive practice" (12), but it has also become an area of concern much addressed by Indigenous scholars and writers. It is widely accepted that one cannot speak Indigenous truths and express Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies in the language of the coloniser as it is. While the language can hardly be discarded – for various reasons – in order to serve the colonised it needs to be reworked, reinvented. As Episkenew comments: "contemporary Indigenous writers manipulate the English language and its literary traditions to narrate Indigenous experiences under colonialism in an effort to heal themselves and their audiences from the colonial trauma" (12). For some writers and scholars – those who know their tribal languages, which structure the world for them – this "manipulation" involves endowing English with the overtones of the language of their nation in terms of both meaning and structure, engaging in "autotranslation", which results in carrying over Native worldviews through the language of the coloniser (cf. Armstrong 22-27). For many, the "manipulation" involves what is perceived as formal and textual experimentation, which brings orality into written texts in English and disrupts their linear structure and logic.

While the overall structure of Graveline's memoir is circular, which seems – at least for the non-indigenous reader – to go against the structural metaphor of healing as a journey, the reader is warned early on that it will not be a smooth journey. It is not only circular, but fragmented, full of blind alleys and lost tracks (11); the circuitous road might lead to healing, but it is not final. There is no resolution, but rather "ongoing Struggle." (18). The structural concepts question from the very beginning the validity of commonly accepted procedures of Western academic writing, which relies on linearity, coherence, explainability, and clear conclusions and resolutions; and which produces a sense of infallibility of research procedures used, with no place for false starts, errors or backtracking.

Choosing the style of writing, Graveline goes against the uniformity, transparence and sterility of the language of the academia. Much of the memoir is written in short fragments of sentences, with unusual punctua-

tion and capitalisation, unevenly organised on the page, visually resembling a poem. Graveline explains that her purpose behind formal experimentation is to jolt the reader out of the rut, into new ways of thinking:

> Spacing. Punctuation. Capitalization. Grammatical Incorrectness.
> Become Tools to foreground questions.
> Of Authority. Power. Privilege.
>
> Carefully crafted Words. Lines. To Create different perspectives.
> To Transform. To Surprise. Your consciousness.
> Into new ways of seeing. Believing. (15)

These techniques are followed throughout, though the unusual versification is usually reserved for fragments in which the autobiographical narrator generalises, explains her aims and procedures, announces the theme of the story to follow, imparts information. The stories, whether straightforwardly autobiographical, or reworked into the shape of Trickster stories in which people (including the narrator) are represented as animals, are recounted in a different font, in regular-looking paragraphs. Throughout the text, the author uses varied registers of vocabulary and discourse, ranging from formal, concise, precise to colloquial and sprawling. The writing style is one of the techniques that allow her to question the four "Hegemonic Rules" she says academia requires her to follow: anonymity/objectivity, categorisation, brevity, and readability (204-207). The prescriptive rules of academic writing she denounces are treated as representative of colonial oppression, racism, misogyny. Formal non-compliance, the unconventional text is also intended to wake up the reader's appetite for change, to initiate the healing journey (196).

The reader is invited to follow both the autobiographical journey and its pattern, which leads from the realisation of being imprisoned by hostile discourses and practices – related not only to racism, but also misogyny – through a number of "doorways" (fears, tears, love, scars, honesty) to getting out of the "cage" thanks to the return to tradition which "Heals. WoundedHearts" (217). The structure of the text reflects a holistic vision of the world, and the concept of individual life as a process that is most fully actualised in the context of community. It is also congruent with the therapeutic and pedagogical intention of the text, and the final transformative vision of "a revolutionized world [that] will come in a Circular way" (225) and to the creation of which everyone should contribute.

The psychological depth of the autobiographical narrator is achieved to a large extent not through self-analysis, but through her immersion in the realm of myth and traditional ways of experiencing the world, which stresses relationships: among individuals, with Mother Earth, nature and the elements. In result, the text, even though it is anchored in individual autobiography, evokes community as a collective protagonist. The community, however, is not just the immediate Métis or broader Indigenous community. Instead, the writer stresses connectedness of all life and all people and discursively constructs a new community of those in need of healing, those discriminated against, those willing to help bring about a changed world. It is this flexible community-in-the-making that is written into the text as both its addressee and – to a certain extent – protagonist.

The autobiographical focus of Graveline's memoir is at the same time its most important teaching tool. Focused on provoking an emotional reaction and empathy, instead of fostering distance and "objectivity", and flaunting both familiarity with and ambivalence about conventions of academic writing, the text still succeeds in conveying knowledge of broader social practices and processes, and respecting those whose "stories", often in the form of academic texts, are used as inspiration or evidence. Graveline's memoir is an example of an engaged hybrid writing practice in which memoiristic reflection functions not only as the most important tool of critical reflection and pedagogy, but also as a way to spread Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies, and a tool of resistance and community building. While it partly stems from and engages academic life and conventions of academic writing, it can hardly be contained within the categories of "academic memoir", "autocritography", or "scholarly memoir".

## 1.4. Memoir and travelogue

In her book on Ukrainian-Canadian literature, Lisa Grekul (xx) asks questions about the "attempts to (re)define [the writers'] ethnic and national identity by 'returning' to Ukraine." She interrogates writers of Ukrainian origins as well as herself: "how does going 'back' – and, importantly, writing about the experience – change the way they see themselves, as Ukrainians and as Canadians?" (xx). These questions can also be addressed to other ethnic and diasporic writers undertaking the journey back. Grekul emphasises the fact

that those writers belong to the generations of "children of multiculturalism and grandchildren of assimilation" (xxii), and pass as Canadian as a result of belonging to the so called invisible minorities and not being pressed to perform their racial otherness. They, however, frequently experience this otherness and, in order to prevent their ethnicity from fading away, undertake a journey back. For artists, the outcome of such travels often appears to be the publication of a memoir, or a hybrid text, combining a memoir with (an)other genre(s). The reflections on such journeys can be found in many memoirs, among others, in Lisa Appignanesi's *Losing the Dead. A Family Memoir* (1999), Janice Kulyk Keefer's *Honey and Ashes. Story of a Family* (1998)[9], Elaine Kalman Naves's *Journey to Vaja. Reconstructing the World of a Hungarian-Jewish Family* (1996) and Anne Porter's *The Storyteller Memory, Secrets, Magic and Lies. A Memoir of Hungary* (2001). In all of these texts, as well as in many others, the narrator reflects not only on the contemporary reality of the countries of origin that is found and confronted with the memories, but also on what it means to be a hyphenated Canadian or American, and how to save the legacy of ancestral roots from oblivion.

A unique way of dealing with the experience of a Canadian of Central and Eastern European roots travelling to the ethnic homeland is writing a text that can be defined as a travelogue. This is another example of a cross-generic approach to memoir writing as it contaminates the genre with geographical descriptions of places, sociological studies of nations and countries, and travel anecdotes, juxtaposing them with impressions and thoughts particular places invoke as well as historical studies frequently accompanying the memories. Parallel to discussions of the personal dimension of travelling to the country (countries, regions) of one's origins there develops a dialog with a range of people met during these trips: guides, hosts, people met in various situations, whose perspective on these locations is invited. Thus, from an intimate discovery of *les lieux de mémoire* that no longer exist in the shapes that are remembered by the generations of parents and grandparents (cf. Nora), these hybrid genres also offer polyphonic mediations on both tangible and intangible aspects of these locations.

The travelogue *per se* is not a new genre as it dates back to the 18th century: the era of peregrinations both in the real and fantastic worlds. Wilson points out that back in the times of the Classicists, the travel genre

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[9] For the discussion of Kulyk Keefer's and Appignanesi's texts, see (Drewniak *Forgetful Recollections*).

was mainly an "instrument for transmitting, by means of a diary-style narrative, information about distant, often exotic people and places" (x) and as such was adopted by writers such as Lawrence Sterne and, in its fantastic mode, by Jonathan Swift. Despite certain limitations imposed on the genre from the very beginning (first person narration, account of a journey, no plot), it clearly manifests itself through its hybrid form even as early as in the 18th century; it is then that it "becomes a hybrid genre comprising elements of poetry, prose, and the drama" and permitting "the mixture of literary genres" (Wilson x). In the study of travelogues written on the basis of peregrinations around Scandinavia, Steinvall claims that travelogue "is expected to present facts, but at the same time it has artistic aspirations and values" (220). In the context of multicultural perspectives discussed in the present volume, it is not the discovery of the new places, previously unknown and absent in the traveler's familial accounts and memories, but rather the rediscovery of ethnic homelands to be confronted with one's roots, identity and the legacy of the former generations which become the main issues of diasporic memoirs.

In Canadian non-fictional literature, Michael Ondaatje's *Running in the Family* (1983) has become a classic example of the need to revisit the homeland and the urge to juxtapose one's memories and imagination of the place with the perspectives of the other people living there in a literary text. As a highly hybridised and intertextual text, Ondaatje's book escapes one dimensional classifications and, thus, has come to appear as a perfect example of generic hybridity. Called a memoir and an episodic novel (Davies 267, Verhoeven 104, Russell 23ff.), it is simultaneously referred to as a "novel-cum-autobiography-cum-biography-cum-travelogue" (Verhoeven 104), and has also been defined as a biotext (Saul 4). Ondaatje's text, naturally, does not fit the paradigm of the female memoir, but it aptly delineates the tendencies within diasporic writing of the late 1990s and the beginning of the 21st century. The immigrants themselves or their children often feel the imperative to rediscover their roots through hybrid literary practices as the writing which fuses many forms of artistic expression seems to be the only way of dealing with either traumatic or simply convoluted family stories.

Irena F. Karafilly's *Ashes and Miracles. A Polish Journey* (1998) is an interesting example of such a travelogue. In her memoir/travelogue, she depicts her voyage to and across Poland, meeting many people, seeing a number of places, trying to position herself towards the Poland of the end

of the 20th century against a backdrop of blurred memories from her first five, formative years spent in the city of Łódź. Besides these roamings and ramblings, Karafilly is also capable of asking questions about what it means to be Polish-Jewish in Poland and in Canada and how her tangled roots (she is of mixed Russian, Polish and Jewish descent and has lived in Poland, Israel, Greece and Canada so far) have defined her as a woman and a writer.

The problems with the unambiguous classification of her book are also reflected in the commentaries and reviews included on her official webpage. The text is defined as a "portrait" (Philip Marsden), "part memoir, part history, part social commentary" (Robert Weaver), "travelogue and autobiography" and "*belles lettres* and documentary" (Elaine Kalman Naves) ("Ashes").The text cannot be classified within the boundaries of only one genre as it crisscrosses the definitions of many genres, even so seemingly opposite as life writing and *belles lettres*. Furthermore, it clearly moves towards history and an account of the past as Karafilly consulted libraries, historical books, and authorities in the field. Simultaneously, it departs from the historical type of narration into a more artistic direction of a portrait created or, perhaps, painted on the basis of subjective impressions and fleeting moments. At the beginning of her book, Karafilly admits, quoting Martin Buber that "All journeys have secret destinations of which the traveler is unaware" (*Ashes* v), which sums up the nature of her travelogue: apart from showing places, she revisits the sites of memory, Polish and Jewish history of the lands, the linguistic dimension of this Babel tower of Central Europe, which is no longer available, studies literature and film, and last but not least positions herself as a Canadian of Russian-Jewish origins born in the Urals, who learned to walk and speak in the post-WWII, Communist Poland.

Additionally, the book also explores the problem of the language of a migrant as the author's mother was a Russian woman from the Urals and the father was a Polish Jew. Having inherited such a mixture of roots, blood, and languages (we must bear in mind that Karafilly knows French, Hebrew, English and basic Polish), she claims none of these as her mother tongue. In her 1990s travel to the biggest Polish cities, as well as small towns and villages hidden among lakes, mountains and forests, she is not driven by nostalgia and "not *á la recherché du temps perdu*" (*Ashes* v). Instead, she methodically travels from one place to another referring to the Polish history and discovering layer by layer the multicultural Poland

from before the Second World War. She touches upon painful, frequently unhealed wounds. The book, being a record of her journey, becomes an Odyssey, and a quest to discover what has been lost. Karafilly visits museums, concentration camps as well as the remnants of endangered cultures: the town of Kazimierz Dolny – the former *shtetl* of her father, communities of Gypsies in the hills and mountains of southern Poland, Tartar villages with small wooden mosques in Bohoniki and Kruszyniany in the east of Poland, the Teutonic Order castles, Orthodox churches converted into Roman Catholic ones. She parenthetically mentions her Canadian identity, when, during the travel through the Mazurian Lake District and the area of Suwałki, she recalls the Polish stereotype according to which this part of Poland is as empty and wild as Canada or Siberia (129-130). When she stays for a few days in Kazimierz Dolny, her travelogue becomes more intimate, "underwritten by the melancholy sense of loss and wonder that comes with an awareness of change sweeping away communities and ways of life before it" (Ravvin 16). This wave of intimacy and melancholia is caused by her attempts to find her father's house in Kazimierz Dolny as well as people who might remember him. Additionally, during her stay, the traditional market day held in the main square triggers images from the pre-WWII *shtetl* of Kazimierz Dolny:

> There is the honking of geese and squawking of chicks, children's squeals, merchants' cajoling voices … I have read that these market days have been taking place here since the sixteenth century but have trouble imagining Hassidic fur hats and wigs in the Polish crowd. And yet, having read books by Sholem Aleichem and I. B. Singer, I know that Poles and Jews attended the same country markets, milling together amid horses and cows, bargaining in Polish and Yiddish [but] the Jews' last hours in Kazimierz haunt me as I cross the ancient square. (Karafilly *Ashes* 273-274, 283)

Although, Karafilly obviously does not remember the pre-WWII market fairs held in Kazimierz Dolny, she fuses the stories she heard from her father and other immigrants with her imagination fed on literature and history. Therefore, as it turns out, her book resurrects the multicultural Poland and Karafilly is capable of doing so as a result of her knowledge of the history of Poland and also thanks to the people she meets on her way, whose voices and gaze are quoted by the memoirist. The people, met on trains, in hotels, restaurants, houses or simply "on the road" offer recol-

lections not necessarily of their ancestors but of their neighbors: Germans, Gypsies, Jews, Poles, Lemkos, or Tartars, thus offering a plethora of voices and multivocality of perspectives.

Despite many accounts of painful history of the sites of memory Karafilly visits, and critical views of the post-Cold War changes in Poland expressed by some of her interlocutors, her text is not filled with despair or sadness. Apart from a detailed analysis of the tragic history of Poland and the whole of Eastern Europe, one can find funny fragments and parts which allow her to delineate great differences between this part of the world and Canada. The author admits frequently that she has not been prepared to see many things – ranging from the beauty of the blue sky to a surprising view of nuns in the streets:

> Having spent much of my life in Montreal, I am not unaccustomed to seeing nuns in public places, but not such jolly, attractive ones, laughing together as they cross the street, looking flushed and wholesome and a little improbable–like actresses who have just stepped off a Hollywood movie set. This observation amuses Olga Podlaski, a native Krakowian who spent two years in Canada, studying and working as an au pair. When I remark that there seems to be a church on just about every corner, Olga laughs and says, 'In Canada, you have a bank on every corner; in Kraków, we have a church. What else would you expect from a city that gave the world its first Polish Pope?' (17)

In spite of the fact that Karafilly left Poland as a five year old child, she goes back in her adult journey to Łódź in order to look for her house. In contrast to Kulyk Keefer's search described in *Honey and Ashes*, she finds the place, visits the people living in the apartment formerly inhabited by her parents. It is in this apartment that she suddenly feels at home, especially when she enters the bathroom, where nothing has been changed since the war and she recalls or imagines herself in childhood. Similar feelings come to her in Kazimierz Dolny, where next to the crowd of tourists in summer, she can find some time to sit in tranquility and cope with the history of this place. Karafilly's journey, being a physical peregrination around Poland, becomes a quest for knowledge about the country, which cannot even be called the country of her parents. She absorbs the historical as well as the contemporary Poland. It is definitely an incredible advantage of this travel memoir/travelogue, which becomes a good showcase of Poland in which Karafilly, in spite of her original fear

to travel alone in that stereotypically dangerous country, meets great people and receives a lot of help.

*Ashes and Miracles: A Polish Journey* is a narrative which may be listed together with such texts as Eva Hoffman's seminal a *Exit into History: A Journey through the New Eastern Europe* (1993), Myrna Kostash's *Bloodlines A Journey into Eastern Europe* (1993),[10] and Anna Porter's *The Ghosts of Europe: Journeys through Central Europe's Troubled Past and Uncertain Future* (2010), but the main differences between Karafilly's text and those of the other authors lie in the fact that Karafilly's voyage is only to one country rather than a peregrination across major part of Eastern and Central Europe.[11] Moreover, Karafilly foregrounds her personal gaze, fusing this personal memoir with distant memories of the past, current observations, a recollection of stories and voices of others, rather than offering a historical and political account of Eastern Europe. The power of her travelogue lies not only within the subject matter and landscapes she refers to, but also in the engaging storytelling. Karafilly's text is a manifestation of the tendency recognized by George Fetherling (vi-viii), who claims that the end of the 20th century in Canada witnessed not only the memoir boom, but also an elevation of travel memoirs. Furthermore, Fetherling sees a parallel between travel memoirs and literary memoirs as people read literary memoirs "to travel inside the luggage of somebody else's life" (vii), and, as such, *Ashes and Miracles* responds to this tendency fusing the two subgenres of the memoir. As a result, the travelogue opens up to more creative, fictive dimensions than a plain recounting of one's travel across a country and its history. Such texts, according to Fetherling, "[a]re not morally bound to remember details exactly as they were or to recount events in

[10] It is extremely interesting to see the techniques Kostash uses to make her text a historical account rather than only a personal memoir. Each of the chapters devoted to various countries (Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Poland, Ukraine) is preceded by a short historical account summarizing the 20th century (usually post-WWII) history of the lands in question. Her text, through frequent debates over the truth of the lands crushed by Communism, and detailed notes at the end, moves more into history writing, a historylogue, than a personal travelogue. Thus, Kostash in her *Bloodlines*, can be seen as a unique witness of the late 1980s and early 1990s disintegration of Central, Eastern and Southern Europe who interrogates both the inhabitants of these parts of the world and her own ethnic self.

[11] Other texts mentioned here offer accounts of the journeys to the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, and Ukraine, among others.

precisely their order. They answer to a higher, more impressionistic, more fictive type of truth" (viii).[12]

The self-portraiture of a Canadian of Slavic and Jewish roots that Karafilly creates, does not result from what she discovers or says about herself. It is rather a reflection of herself in others, in her curiosity and meditation on their lives. Karafilly is most frequently silent about her emotions but appears to be a great listener, and from what she wants to talk about and what questions she asks, the reader gets to know who she is, especially through the themes that she is interested in. They include primarily multicultural Poland from the 16th century to the pre-Second World War period, tangled fates of emigrants as well as the changes brought about by the fall of Communism. Karafilly is deeply aware of her unambiguous evaluation of the changes in the post-1989 Poland and even during the final conversation with a friend before leaving Poland, when asked about the impressions from the journey, Karafilly says: "I promise to write and tell you, … but it will take me about a year and roughly three hundred pages" (293). For there is no one answer to the question about the sense of travelling and discovering oneself, sense of her parents' uprooting and that is why the answer is a multivocal cross-generic intimate travelogue that offers a presentation of many places, yet never constitutes a mere mirror reflection but embraces the self-discovery quest of a wanderer revisiting one of her ethnic homelands.

### 1.5. Memoir and cookbook

Generic hybridity of the memoir can take many different forms including the fusion of a personal memoir and a cookbook. The contemporary popularity of life writing, its manufacturing for and availability on the popular market have transformed it into a popular genre attracting wide audiences and utilizing the so-called popular or low literary modes of writing. The recent popularity of (literary) food blogs and vlogs as well as rising sales of celebrities' printed cookbooks have contributed to the growing interest in life-writing texts which utilise culinary recipes to a different extent. Julie Rak examines a similar phenomenon in her *Boom!* (2013) in which she also mentions, though in different contexts, the appearance of such texts

[12] Karafilly indeed makes some mistakes in names and historical facts (cf. *Ashes* 104, 121).

as Julie Powell's *Julie and Julia: 365 Days, 524 Recipes, 1 Tiny Apartment Kitchen* (2005), *Eat, Pray, Love: One's Woman Search for Everything Across Italy, India and Indonesia* (2006) by Elizabeth Gilbert as well as *Three Cups of Tea: One Man's Mission to Fight Terrorism and Build Nations... One School at a Time* (2007) by Greg Mortenson and David Olive Relin. One can add Laura Elise Taylor's *A Taste of Paprika. A Memoir* (2004) and *Dream Homes* by Joyce Zonana (2008) to this list. All of these texts, classified as memoirs, refer to food as a means of either gaining self-awareness and happiness, or purpose in life. The demand for and popularity of such texts stem on the one hand from the general 'boom' within the memoir and auto/biography market, and rehabilitation of the value of home and healthy cooking on the other. The return to cooking as one of the comforts of home and a physical embodiment of "family values" has been championed not only from socially conservative standpoints, but also as part of the feminist effort to restore female tradition lines and to stress the importance of intimate links within communities of women, sometimes both established and strengthened through domestic rituals, such as cooking. In the diasporic life-writing, food and cooking can also be seen as ways of revisiting one's traditions and excavating the long forgotten or suppressed aspects of family identity.

*Comfort Food for Breakups. The Memoir of a Hungry Girl* (2007) by Marusya Bociurkiw is an interesting example of a book which fuses at least two genres: that of memoir and cookbook. In the introductory part of the text, the author – a fiction writer and filmmaker – declares that the book is dedicated to her mother, Vera, but she is also indebted to her grandmother, Evhenia, both of Ukrainian origin, who provided not only delicious and abundant meals, but also stories from the past and recipes attached to the chapters. In the "Preface" to the memoir, Bociurkiw states: "Food and stories, stories and food: it's a marathon, and you have to be prepared. It is painful, and deeply satisfying" (*Comfort Food* 14). The food cooked by different members of the family has always comforted them, both physically, for example when "hearty breakfast" (15) is served before a day at school; and psychologically, when something important and troublesome happens to anybody in the family. In these cases the family, following the traditions accepted in Ukraine, have turned to food, which "punctuated those moments, gave structure to chaos, something to hold onto for the length of a meal" (72). The significance of cooking and eating, the comforting zone both of these activities offer, becomes evident

when Bociurkiw learns about her brother's unexpected death, which only emphasises the position to which the food is elevated in the family.

Composed as a series of vignettes, the majority of the chapters are accompanied by recipes of Ukrainian dishes which are referred to in particular sections. Frequently, apart from brief remarks about the importance of a particular meal, sauce or starter, Bociurkiw describes situations from the past in which these dishes were served. There are also chapters devoted to the importance and preparation of coffee, potatoes, eggs, and fish, among others, which are not followed by any recipes, but which provide explanations to the reasons for which they are important for Bociurkiw and her family members. As a result of such generic hybridity, the text frequently offers unusual typography, more typical of a cookbook than a memoir. The book is divided into four parts: "Mama's Kitchen and Beyond", "Food for the Soul", "Food Voyages", and "Food for the Body," and each of these parts, as well as the "Contents" page, is supplemented with a pictogram of a dish or a kitchen utensil: a saucepan ("Contents"), a pot ("Mama's Kitchen and Beyond"), a cup and a glass ("Food for the Soul"), a wok ("Food Voyages") and a cauldron ("Food for the Body"). Parallel to these neatly organised sections with detailed recipes, Bociurkiw quite early in the text explains what the book is and how it departs from a plain cookbook format: "The pages of my cookbook are a palimpsest, layered with notes and food stains, and the complex flavours of love and loss" (*Comfort Food* 17). The recipes are organised typographically according to the standards of typical cookbooks; the ingredients are listed first, preparation instructions follow. *Comfort Food for Breakups* includes recipes for such dishes as: Kasha Varnishkes, No-Fail Minestrone Soup, Pasta Sauce Passionata, Tsimmes, and Terri's Transcarpathian Varennyky among others. The guidelines for cooking and baking complement vignettes on life, memory, loss, and the power of the familial life as for Bociurkiw, the "rituals of cooking and eating are a kind of memory machine, unleashing smells and tastes that evoke spectral presences" (*Comfort* 59).

Written in 2007 after the death of Bociurkiw's father and brother, the text meditates on family memory and through private recollections of her own self, it furthermore constitutes a narrative which is not confined within cookbook and memoir genres, no matter how much they are intertwined. *Comfort Food for Breakups* is also a personal narrative on memory and rewriting and repositioning of Bociurkiw's queer self. In

this context, it continues the traditions of hybridizing autobiographical, lesbian writing with cookbook, accentuated by such memoirists as Alice Babette Toklas in her 1954 *The Alice B. Toklas Cookbook* and Bode Noonan's *Red Beans and Rice: Recipes for Lesbian Health and Wisdom* (1986). Although, in contrast to Bociurkiw's memoir, in Noonan's text there are no lists of ingredients and no cooking instructions, it also discusses the value of "comfort food," which "is familiar childhood food that in a Proustian manner brings back with its flavors the distant memory of unconditional love and acceptance" (Vester 172). Bociurkiw, nevertheless, admits that she understands food more metaphorically: "Food doesn't always appear in the form of a meal on the table. Sometimes, it's a smell that shows up; at other times, it's not the meal I'm consuming, but an idea, or a recipe, or a gesture towards it, which feeds my hunger just the same" (*Comfort Food* 14). As a result, all of the mentioned food-based memoirs reexamine the notion of memory, as mediated through food, as a foundation for one's identity. And Bociurkiw's *Comfort Food for Breakups* highlights the idea of memory understood as "cyclical, not linear" (*Comfort Food* 22); a phenomenon in which "[c]ertain sections of life activate particular mental images and ways of remembering" (22).

Bociurkiw is very explicit about the value of memory in her memoir/cookbook. She calls herself the

> family's self-appointed bearer of memory, recalling the absent spaces, recording recipes, searching for the glimmer of devotion, the aroma of happiness, the back beat of bitterness. Between recipes and stories, I will ask myself a thousand times: who owns these memories? How is it that each of us remembers it a different way? If my way of remembering makes it to print, what does it do to theirs? (*Comfort Food* 16)

That is why, although food and eating are the centre of her attention, the text violates the plain understanding of food as mere nourishment. Despite the fact that all the visits at her grandmother's and then mother's places concentrate around food preparation and eating together, these activities stretch far beyond their physical dimension. Bociurkiw's dilemmas highlighted above resonate throughout the entire text. Her memoir and her memories do not usurp the monopoly for a 'truthful' version just as the recipes included are subject to individual modifications and variations. The main ingredients of some of the recipes hint at the

part of the world the dish comes from, but there is "the absent space," which can be filled with a dose of improvisation as each of the cooks can add a distinctive, personal touch to the meal, by adding different spices for instance.

Since Bociurkiw's relationships with her grandmother and mother as well as other members of the family are shadowed by their resistance to her lesbian identity ("Let's just say my Baba, the love of my life, disowned me," says Bociurkiw in an essay on her life-writing ("Bringing Back" 74), cooking and eating were the only neutral activities they could engage in while visiting each other. However, in the Ukrainian tradition food preparation is closely linked with storytelling, and, as a result of this, Bociurkiw started to tell her mother stories from her books, and became a devoted listener to her mother's stories about the family's past. Therefore, food initiates a mutual understanding and acceptance, and through suffering it gives rise to healing. This phenomenon reflects mainly the mother-daughter relationship Bociurkiw analyses, but it also helps her reconcile with the memories of her father: "Memory does its slow, necessary work. It is only very recently that I have been able to recall the pleasant memories from childhood, most of them connected to food" (*Comfort Food* 29). Paradoxically, the healing process takes place in the moments of distress, the eponymous "breakups" or confrontations with distant relatives and friends.

The implementation of a cookbook format is not only a graphically organising device in Bociurkiw's project. Though it arranges the memoir aesthetically according to the cookbook standards, through an inclusion of poignant vignettes in between the recipes, the text itself becomes like a palimpsest, a cooking journal, a notebook which consists not only of lists of ingredients and instructions, but also of stories, memories, people, and impressions. It is always open to new additions, loose pages can be included into it, and it is never totalised and, as such, it becomes a memoir. Bociurkiw seems to see her narrative in a similar way: "memoir, like memory, is an incomplete document. It records, but it also invents. And it reimagines. What happened. What was said. Perhaps most importantly what wasn't said, or could have been said. Memoir is highly interactive. Its subjects will argue, add to your story long after it's been published" ("Bringing Back" 79). In this way, this memoir, seen as a cookbook-cum-memoir, becomes the treasurer of always fallible and incomplete memories. The interactive mode of the text points out to two aspects of its dialogic form. On the one

hand, through her attempts at reconciliation with her mother through storytelling, Bociurkiw through cooking and discussing recipes, creates a space for their mutual presence and comprehension as "Food creates a kind of dialogue between us, an implicit assent missing in other aspects of each other's lives" (*Comfort Food* 77). It seems that nourishment and the community created over dish preparation prove restorative at least for the brief moment of a discussion over a recipe. On the other hand, the kitchen and culinary debates conjure up the ghosts of the dead to assist the family members, and this liminal space stretches far beyond the physical walls of the flat: "In my family, it's not necessary to lay a place setting for the dead. They're always with us, encouraging us to eat, and love, and live better" (*Comfort Food* 60). This generic hybridization does not only invite the dialogic communication among the family. It transgresses the family bonds and exceeds a traditionally seen mutual understanding. In her 2016 essay, Bociurkiw, while meditating the nature of her food memoir, states that apart from the community of family members gathering for a festive meal, she has also formed another, more distant community, consisting of her readers: "My sauce. Based on my mother's recipe. A language of generosity. The tentative mingling of cultures. The folkloric, the traditional, the orthodox. It hadn't been enough in the end. But something grew out of it, or despite it. Or in its place. That something is my writing. That something is you, the reader. Or us. Bringing each other back, into rewritten memory" ("Bringing Back" 82). Such moments, though remaining more on a personal note, trigger considerations of various nature. The space of dialog situates Bociurkiw not only within her family as the one who has become an artist, but also as an artist responding to her Ukrainian roots and involving her readers in the process of self-discovery.

One of the most important themes explored by Bociurkiw in her memoir is also that of belonging and the idea of home. She meditates on her roots, the status of her parents as immigrants who came to Canada with nothing tangible at hand and full of traumatic memories of the Second World War and the camps experience. Silenced as much as these memories were in their home, Bociurkiw was burdened with the unspeakable postmemory of a child infected with the Holocaust experience. There is "no family archive, oral or written" ("Bringing Back" 77) and therefore, she feels an urge to reclaim what is missing. The process of regaining her Ukrainian-Canadian identity is not always an easy one. Even though she prepares some dishes alone and in a community of friends, visits her

family, eats with her loved ones, "[s]ome days you eat and eat and it just doesn't feel like home. Roots can nourish, but they can also develop a bitter taste. Sometimes, they can make you ill. That day, at the Plaza of Nations, I ached for something to feel familiar, but none of it did, not even the food" (*Comfort Food* 55). In this fragment Bociurkiw mentions her visit at a Vancouver food festival, where she tastes delicious Ukrainian food and merges with people searching for the same familiar aftertaste of communal history. It turns out, however, that it is not only the food itself that has the restorative powers. This experience proves important as it demonstrates that there is no one response to suffering. Furthermore, reflections on vagaries of identity-formation process she includes in her text, demonstrate that her memoir is not a one-dimensional collection of recipes. Bociurkiw concludes that "home is also in relation to what is not home; we define ourselves by what we aren't, identity forming itself along that slippery, uncomfortable edge … The clipped cadences of a skinhead's German epithets pulls (sic!) me back to my father's imprisonment. The taste of *apfelkuchen* takes me home, to my mother's kitchen … And home is also this: the thin, barely visible underpainting of grief and loss" (*Comfort Food* 167, emphasis in the original).

Responding to the recent tendencies in life-writing, Bociurkiw's memoir as well as her follow-up essay included in *Unbound: Ukrainian Canadians Writing Home* (2016), fuse the genre of memoir with more experimental, dialogic forms of life-writing. Through the hybrid form of her memoir combined with recipes, dialogically organised memories and multiplicity of intertextual allusions, as well as the innovative form of her essay in which she presents the reasons for writing and the aftermath of the publication of *Comfort Food for Breakups*, Bociurkiw's life-writing becomes a hybridised palimpsest and (re)meditation on her identity as a lesbian and Ukrainian-Canadian feminist artist, rooted in the inherited legacy of postmemory.

### 1.6. Memoir as a bricolage of graphic novel and comic strip

In the context of Raab and Butler's (2008) discussion on hybridity manifesting itself in the postmodern fascination with collage and bricolage, various life writing genres, memoir in particular, can be viewed as the ones which through intertextuality have moved towards a more experimental literary bricolage and display many characteristic features of genre

blending. This fusion of multiplicity of literary and non-literary genres has proven viable for the memoir as it opens it to new dimensions both in a metaphorical and literal sense. If, as Fetherling claims, "memoir is more tightly focused, more daring in construction, and … more penetrating" (vii), then hybrid memoir multiplies these features. The hybridity of North American memoirs, especially the ones selected for discussion here, offer an understanding of hybridity which stems from the multifarious cultures the memoirists come from, different languages that are referred to in the texts, and finally discourses and genres they utilise. This transgression of genre boundaries is a reflection of the memoirists' hybrid identities as well as their urge to express a hybrid self through a genre that would adequately respond to this hybridity. It is also a response to the demise of the "logocentric attitude" (El Refaie 35) which prevailed in literature for centuries. Memoir, seen as a combination of genres, clearly exhibits the amalgamating actions undertaken by the authors of memoirs, who also become the protagonists and the objects of the bricolaging themselves. Thus, the texts in question very often become not only textual memoirs but artistic endeavors that bring together disparate forms of writing, painting, drawing and typography, among others.

In her graphic memoir *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* (2006), Bernice Eisenstein addresses the problem of traumatic past and its postmemory. Eisenstein, a child of immigrants herself, was born in Toronto after World War II and has been working as an artist and editor for many years. In her text, Eisenstein deals in a textual as well as graphic form with her parents' memory and her own postmemory – that is the legacy, being both a privilege and a curse, her relatives have bestowed upon her. Her graphic memoir utilises the form of a comic strip and departs from it into the direction of a more autobiographical writing as well. Harris (2008) defines the text as a graphic novel, although there are evident proofs the text is written on the basis of the author's mediations on her identity. Moreover, as Hescher claims, there is a tendency in the 21st century graphic novels (or what we used to call graphic novels) to move towards more autobiographical modes of writing understood as texts that "differ from the rest of comics production by an increased concern about their authentic subject matter and author-narrator protagonists" (339). As a result, the book cannot be easily classified. Also, in terms of the way Eisenstein treats the serious topic of Shoah, it is not a one-dimensional work in any respect, as she moves from a serious "collective Kaddish" narration to a humorous perception of herself

and her legacy in the family. Genre blending that can be traced within Eisenstein's text operates within the textual and visual practices. The text itself merges the graphic and life writing genres with the typically Jewish ones such as Mourners' Kaddish, a prayer for the dead, and a Haggadah, understood as a story that is indispensable for the understanding of history. Since sometimes the panels and drawings densely cover the pages and otherwise refuse to leave the space for the words – fusing in ebb and flow movements – the text is not an even one. Thus, the way Eisenstein uses pictures contaminates the genre of a comic strip, understood as a sequential system of panels, with the inclusion of pages covered entirely with drawings and pages including only text. The topic of the Holocaust was obviously introduced into the adult comics genre much earlier by the critically acclaimed *Maus* by Art Spiegelman, but it is the hybridity of Eisenstein's endeavour which merits an inquiry. Through its variation on the comic strip genre, the text becomes an illustration of typically postmodern tendencies. According to El Refaie: "while sections of the population may of course still have strong reservations about hybridity [in autobiographical comics], it is certainly no longer anything exceptional, and postmodernism has even embraced it as a basic principle" (35).

Eisenstein's text does not only express the multidimensionality of textual and visual space through bricolage. Jean-Philippe Marcoux points out that Eisenstein's meditation across generations (on her grandparents, parents and her own place in the family) can be understood as "intervocality," a variant of and "narratological companion to" intertextuality, which is supposed to be developed "by reestablishing and renegotiating the dialogic potential between the first and the second generations of the Holocaust experience" (209). That is why Eisenstein recollects the confrontations of the young Bernice with the legacy of Holocaust writing. In her childhood and youth, Bernice almost devours books and films on Holocaust, gets fascinated by it, and subjects herself to the multiplicity of voices coming from previous generations, as well as the postgenerations, in order to establish her own voice and be able to "'speak' to her parents, to their experience, and to their role in the trauma Bernice now feels by proxy" (Marcoux 209). This is even more important if we realise that many Holocaust survivors, including Eisenstein's parents, did not speak of their past openly and, by silencing it, they have bestowed the muted burden of trauma onto their children. Eisenstein's nakedness on page 88, according to Marcoux (209) aptly suggests the lack of the narrative voice of her own generation. If Eisenstein

is born as naked as a blank page, and in the process of upbringing she did not receive the most crucial part of her parents' identity, she feels compelled to look for one for herself. A tabula rasa, as she is, she must confront her Bildung with the legacy she, nevertheless, discovers.

The aim of such a hybridised text is to express the fluid memory and the "grip of the ghostly" (Harris 129). The haunting the child of Holocaust survivors experiences and the identity of a Holocaust addict, which ensues in the process of identity formation, are responsible for the aesthetic choices Eisenstein makes in her memoir. The fragmentation and insecurity lead her to the discovery of her "true" self, which turns out to be the one of an artist/addict. Throughout the text, she perceives herself primarily as a child of Holocaust survivors who suffers from Holocaust addiction: "The Holocaust is a drug and I have entered an opium den, having been given my first taste for free, innocently, by everyone here. I have only glimpsed its power, scanning the trail of needle marks on the left forearms of each person in the room"; and as such she all the time craves "one more entry into a hallucinatory world of ghosts. … My parents don't even realize that they are drug dealers. They could never imagine the kind of high H gives" (Eisenstein 20).

These fragments are juxtaposed with a drawing of a little girl standing on a rock and calling towards the Biblical Moses, who throws down a stone letter H onto the ground, instead of offering the stone tables. Eisenstein's autobiographical protagonist says: "Hey, wait! Which is it? Thou shalt not take its name in vain or not take it into a vein? Help me out" (Eisenstein 21, emphasis in the original) referring, of course, to the drug the Holocaust has become for her. It can be treated as a satirical way of seeing the figure of Moses and Holocaust as such, however, humour and irony are not used in a blasphemous way here, but they help to liberate the Holocaust addict from the burden of her parents' history, which she carries all the time, as well as add a personal dimension to the interpretation of the Biblical text (cf. Drewniak "Addicted" 48).

There are quite a few other renditions of the humorous scenes in which the genre blending becomes acutely visible. Apart from the Biblical references, which become both the intertextual allusions and realisations of genre contamination, Eisenstein projects the picture of her father, a Holocaust survivor, as a character from a western he used to like watching on TV. Many years after the death of Eisenstein's father, she imagines him as a John Wayne figure bringing freedom to Auschwitz and crushing evil

with his almost extra-terrestrial powers, emerging from the camp as a victor, carrying a gun, wearing a Stetson and a Jewish star instead of a sheriff's star on his vest. In her imagination, the father, as a Holocaust survivor, does not leave the camp as a broken person marked for life by the experience, but as a free and invincible leader, leaving behind the iconic Auschwitz gate with the 'Arbeit macht frei' inscription (Eisenstein 51). This reference to the good-versus-evil fight in western movies shows the power of artistic imagination but also points to a plethora of genres Eisenstein utilises, fuses, and alludes to in her memoir in order to present ways through which she tries to deal with her postmemory. This dialogically oriented account never abandons the task challenging the reader's intertextual knowledge as well as their capability to decipher and de/construct the elements of the bricolage. Apart from offering a simple account of her parents' exile from Miechów in Poland, through the ghetto and concentration camps, to Canada, through fusing such genres as a comic strip, autobiography, memoir and, graphic novel, the text becomes an artistic response to the urge of addressing the concept of postmemory in a new language.

The book begins with a drawing in which we can see a table with an arrow and a few important figures variously related to the Holocaust studies, such as Primo Levi, Bruno Schulz, Hannah Arendt, Elie Wiesel, and Charlotte Salomon – "by far the least well-known" (Freedman 38) – each of whom offers a piece of advice.These utterances can be read as messages for the artist composing the text. The picture brings to mind a session to conjure up ghosts in order to ask them important questions about the past and the future.[13] They are supposed to offer commentary and advice. The ghosts all refer to the task of writing a Holocaust narrative and their comments can be interpreted as mottoes to Eisenstein's inquiry. What Eisenstein tries to retrieve is "absent memory" to use Fresco's words (qtd. in Hirsch "Marked" 243), and she situates herself at the crossroads of experiencing a whole gamut of absences ranging from the dead members of her family to the absence of memories (cf. Drewniak "Addicted" 42). In order to fill in this lack, she tries to read every possible book on the Holocaust and watch every possible movie available to a person infected with the "Holocaust addiction." Among the pieces of advice, there is Primo

[13] It is interesting to note that Harris compares the arrangements of the picture to a roulette table (134).

Levi's statement "I fear that my language has become inadequate, that you need to speak a different language today," calling for a new form of artistic expression; Charlotte Salomon's "You must first go into yourself – Into your childhood – to be able to get out of yourself"; and Elie Wiesel's "The space between two words is vaster than the distance between heaven and earth. To bridge it you must close your eyes and leap" (Eisenstein epigraph page). Not only do they situate Eisenstein as a person whose task is to dig for stories and to grapple with her postmemory in order to embrace her own identity, but also as an artist who has to go beyond the traditional forms of artistry in life writing.

Eisenstein's project describes the process of establishing her own identity as a child of Holocaust survivors. That is why it is the aforementioned advice from both Salomon and Levi which seems to be crucial for the whole book. Salomon's hint to write an autobiography-cum-memoir and Levi's advice to use a new language and new form suggest what kind of task lies in front of the author. She is unable to trace the first instance of remembering, the first memory of the truth about the Holocaust, but is certain she has inherited the trauma non-verbally and it would not be possible for her to live and create without constant references to it. Following the metaphor of the Holocaust as an opium den sucking a drug addict in with utmost power, she calls for a Holocaust Anonymous Program, where a person can get rid of the addiction which controls and leads one through life. Nevertheless, she sees the vanity of such a project as she claims:

> Yet to rid myself of this habit [obsession with reading, writing, thinking about the Holocaust all the time], this calling, I would have to blind my eyes, cover my ears, seal my lips, and erase the truth that without the Holocaust I would not be who I am. It has seared and branded me with its stippled mark on my forearm and pulled me into its world, irrevocably, as its offspring. The collective memory of a generation speaks and I am bound to listen, see its horrors, and feel its outrage. (Eisenstein 25)

Despite the fact that Eisenstein reconstructs her parents' history in a more or less chronological way, the narrative is by no means chronological. She tries to grasp more than facts, tries to move beyond the veil of brute events and reconsider herself and her own identity in the face of who she really is as a child of Holocaust survivors. This is exactly the moment of

intersection of life stories with postmemory. What Eisenstein attempts to do is to investigate what she remembers and how the memories are stored and organised. At the same time, she sees this task as futile because traumatic postmemory cannot be fixed and arranged systematically. She says: "Yet here I am, some Jewish Sisyphus, pushing history and memory uphill, wondering what I'm supposed to be … all I have to do is to look up ahead and catch glimpse of Primo Levi and Elie Wiesel, Found Fathers of Memory, fixed at the very top, in order to realize my folly" (Eisenstein 53-54). There is no forgetting, no way to hide in a safe place devoid of memories. The story of a gold ring which her mother found in the "canada" section of the camp, when sorting out the clothes of the dead, is also an illustration of this trap. The ring with the inscription of somebody's wedding date, is treated in the family as a token of communal trauma and identity, and as a proof of survival. While the ring is handed down to Eisenstein as a gift, it also becomes a certain burden as she is compelled to retell the story and immerse herself in the legacy it symbolises. Although the ring is "only" an object drawn on the pages of the book, it nevertheless becomes another, symbolic element of a bricolage, almost multidimensionally stemming from the page of the book and pertaining to the intergenerational dialog and the inheritance of certain legacy.

Furthermore, in the chapter devoted to the status of Yiddish, Eisenstein claims: "Yiddish was a soul and substance of the life in our home. A veltele, a world within a world" (61); and although she inhaled the language quite naturally, she quickly stopped using it as at one point she left her home and went off into the Anglophone education system. She, however, remembered not only the distant musicality of the language she, later on, did not use, but – as even her mother was perplexed to discover – the language itself and the stories told in whispering tones some fifty years before. The stories, fragmented and torn into pieces, were not really offered to children, yet the kids overheard them and somehow incorporated them into the glimpses of memories from childhood, to effuse them in adolescence and adult life into various forms of commemoration. Following the idea of dialogism proposed by Bakhtin and his conviction about a hybrid that is created intentionally (361), *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* can be read as a double or multivoiced text, not because of the author offering many narratological perspectives but mainly due to the memoirist's decision to fuse the culture of a prewar Yiddish shtetl, the stories of the concentration camps, the tendency to silence the past prevalent among the survivors, and, finally, the culture of a

child of survivors who grapples with her own postmemorial identity, i.e. the self she has become in relation to all of the above.

Since Eisenstein fuses the two different semantic systems: words and pictures, it is noteworthy to see how her postmemory is represented through both and how they complement each other. Hirsch claims that "[f]or postmemorial artists, the challenge is to define an aesthetic based on a form of identification and projection that can include the transmission of bodily memory of trauma without leading to the self-wounding and retraumatization that is rememory" (*Generation* 86). Eisenstein's artistic idiom offers a way of dealing with various aspects of the "obsession with the Holocaust." Some of the gouache pictures are grim and dark due to their black-grey-and-white aesthetics, and frequently blurred, which definitely suggests the darkness that lies at their root. Some of them, through the obscurity of shapes and dim shadows evoke the ghostly presence of the dead, whom Eisenstein calls up to help her write the family story and fill in the blanks of the past. Others are humorous renditions of her own distance to the legacy, which is both the gift and burden for her. Yet, all groups of drawings offer dialogical commentaries on the nature of postmemory.

Eisenstein's intentionally hybrid form of the graphic memoir is an artistic response to her need to express what Levi called "a different language" (Levi as qtd. in Eisenstein 7). Through the techniques of a hybrid bricolage and intervocality, she merges various forms of artistry in order to establish her own identity vis-à-vis her parents' silenced trauma. She says:

> while I knew I did not possess that particular magnetism that would draw my parents to me, the pull of their history was irresistible. I think in some way I have always been able to step into the presence of absence. It is something I have needed to do … Without my family's knowledge or even their understanding, their past has shaped my loneliness and anger, and *sculpted* the meaning of loss and love. I have inherited the unbearable lightness of being a child of Holocaust survivors. Cursed and blessed. Black, white, and shadowed. (Eisenstein 167; emphasis added)

The word "sculpted", as well as the reference to colours and shadows, all show the memoirist's perception of her own identity as having been shaped dialogically across generations and through different forms of interaction she undertook in order to create her graphic text. Bernice Eisenstein's work, seen as a postmemorial graphic memoir, can be situated among many other

postmemorial works, which attempt "to reactivate and re-embody more distant political and cultural memorial structures by reinvesting them with resonant individual and familial forms of mediation and aesthetic expression" (Hirsch *Generation* 33). Despite the fact that Hirsch addresses the usage of photographs in postmemorial texts (cf. *Family Frames*, *Generation*), certain findings can also be applied to drawings as the main form of artistic expression employed by Eisenstein. In her shadowy pictures of dead relatives (for instance on pages 18 and 166), she presents her inability to pin down the whole story of her family and to draw the clear boundaries of influences, silences, and knowledge about them. As a result, she finds "the balance that allows the spectator to enter the image and to *imagine* the disaster" (Hirsch *Generation* 161; emphasis added) rather than to grasp the full understanding of it. Eisenstein's dialogic form, therefore, invites the reader to a self-discovery journey in which it is not only Eisenstein who tries to find her own identity, but the generations of postmemory, not necessarily sharing the same legacy, can also intervocally react to this cross-generic transmission of silenced trauma.

# Chapter Two

# The beholding eye: visual aspects of memoir

Memoir, like many other forms of life-writing, tends to rely not simply on the written text, the story, but also on a variety of visual "aids", be it photographs, maps, documents, typographic devices or others. While in many memoirs the type and use of such visuals is often motivated by the desire to document and prove the essential truthfulness of the text, contemporary memoirists have often been differently motivated, and have made visual devices an integral part of the meaning of the text essential for its interpretation. Whatever the writer's intention, the visuals used are always capable of telling their own story, or entering into a dialogic interaction with the text, often destabilising its meaning instead of bolstering it. Therefore, one of the crucial questions that need to be addressed is the way visuals and typography function in relation to the factual and the "imagined" aspects of the text, both supporting the mimetic illusion and undercutting it, working with or against the text, and opening often unexpected interpretative spaces for the authors and the readers simultaneously.

## 2.1. Photography in life-writing

A prime example of the complicated relationships between the text and the visual material it includes is photography in memoirs. Photographs, which belong among the most often used types of visuals in life-writing, have been until relatively recently treated as transparent and purely referential text supplements, and typically used in order to help the reader believe the author's claims, and imagine people, places and events described in the texts. More recently, however, the purported referentiality of both life writing and photography has been re-examined and problematised. Critics have drawn our attention to the similarity in the processes of photograph-taking and writing a life, both of which might result in a constructed and even a potentially "lying" image (Rugg 35). As Timothy Dow Adams concludes, "photography and autobiography operate in a pa-

rallel fashion, both deliberately blurring the boundaries between fact and fiction, between representation and creation" (20), both constitute "an attempt at reconciling authors' sense of self with their lives through an art that simultaneously reveals and conceals" (21). The result of using photographs in life-writing might then not solidify referential claims, but rather "intensify … the complexity and ambiguity of each [medium] taken separately" (Adams xxi) – a feature often explored by contemporary memoirists and critics. The inclusion of photographs in auto/biographical texts often results then in a complex interaction between the media, including intended or unintended tension, and the critic needs to consider "both the photograph as a subject *in* autobiography, and the subject as he or she comes to be defined *by* a photograph reproduced (or alluded to) in an autobiography"[1] (Ashley et al. 191; emphasis in the original). As Gudmundsdóttir writes, we need to question the desire to cling to the "seeming transparency" (223) of photography, and treat it as a dialogic, "challenging medium" which has to be "constantly re-examined and re-evaluated" (223).

The fusion of "representation and creation" characteristic of the two media mentioned by Adams is a multifaceted one; and is related to the position of the author/autobiographical narrator in the text. In the case of memoir, self-portraiture, both textual and photographic, is often accompanied by or even achieved through textual and photographic portraits of others, thus producing a specific relationship between the author and her subjects. The focus on others – often close family members, but sometimes relatives whose stories are (re)constructed after several generations from pieces of family memory, documents and photographs – forces the memoirist into the position of the one who might be simultaneously the author, "reader", and – often only obliquely – the subject of the verbal image; and the Operator (photographer); Spectator, and Spectrum (the person photographed) of the visual image, to use Barthesian nomenclature. The fusion of the Operator, Spectator and Spectrum is literal only in the case of selfies. However, as the meaning of photographs is strongly contextual, and depends on contexts "in which the image is reproduced, circulated and received" (Meehan 2008 53), when reproduced in a memoir, a photograph necessarily means and is

[1] Since the methodological study of memoir as a separate life-writing genre, is still very limited, theoretical texts devoted to autobiographies will be used throughout the chapter as well.

read differently than in the original context of a private family album or photograph collection. The fusion, therefore, comes about metaphorically as the author, in her capacity of the Spectator, changes the context in which photographs appear: she chooses and arranges photographs of herself and others, and combines them with the written text in such a way that they become "new". In result, she portrays in a novel manner both her subjects and herself as the author – and becomes not just the Spectator, but also the Operator and Spectrum at the same time. It might be argued, even though the author/narrator might not be present in the included photographs at all, that in many cases – also in relation to the verbal component of the text – she experiences at least some aspects of the spectralisation which Roland Barthes describes in his seminal *Camera Lucida* in relation to traditional photography, i.e. the effect of the dichotomy between herself as the creator of the portrait and herself as the theme and the "spectator" of the portrait:

> In front of the lens, I am at the same time: the one I think I am, the one I want others to think I am, the one the photographer thinks I am, and the one he makes use of to exhibit his art. … I invariably suffer from a sensation of inauthenticity, sometimes of imposture… the Photograph represents the very subtle moment when, to tell the truth, I am neither subject nor object but a subject who feels he is becoming an object: I then experience a micro-version of death… I am truly becoming a specter. (13-14)

The position of the spectral subject/object that the narrating self takes up in the memoir is underlined by the combination of the sense of immediacy/presence and pastness/absence that both photographs and life writing texts give rise to.

Stressing the importance of the placement of a photograph in relation to the text, Silke Horstkotte contends that "the semantics and rhetoric of photo-text interactions" depend not simply on what the photograph shows or seems to show, but also on "a photo-text topography" (50). While she bases her argument on the analysis of fiction, it is clear that the complicated interaction of this type between text and a photographic image can be observed in life writing, even in texts which seem to rely primarily on the purported referential and documentary value of photography. In this case snapshots are typically grouped either chronologically or thematically and placed in inserts in a few places within or at the end of the book, with the list of captions often closing the text instead of accompanying

the pictures; or photographs function as a visual counterpart of chapter titles or as chapter "prefaces". In the former case, the result is both a certain dissociation of the text and image, and a disrupted reading process, sometimes even a disquieting confusion on the part of the reader. At the same time, when carefully chosen and arranged the pictures might add poignant accents to the text. In the latter case, the snapshot gives rise to expectations and pre-formed judgments on the part of the reader, which the text that follows might either confirm or, often deliberately, thwart; and which influence interpretations of the text. The photo-text topography is much more complicated in texts which so strongly integrate the written word and the photographic image that they demand to be "read" together, which substantially affects the reading and interpretative practice: "the reader becomes," as Horstkotte puts it, "to a large extent responsible for their integrative interpretation so that the role of the recipient is self-consciously foregrounded" (62).

While the subjects of photographs employed in memoir might differ quite widely, the majority seem to make use of rather typical family photographs. As critics have noticed, photographs of this type, even though they tend to pretend to chronicle the everyday and the normal of the family life, in fact focus on rare, but memorable, and most often pleasurable or festive events in family life: births, weddings, birthdays, family reunions, the first day of school, a new house, new car, etc., though the focus is determined historically and culturally. Such photographs construct a conventionalised, idealised and ideologically infused narrative of the family life determined by "the familial gaze" as Hirsch puts it, the instruments of which are "the camera and the family album" (*Family Frames* 11). It is the familial gaze that "situates human subjects in the ideology, the mythology, of the family as institution and projects a screen of familial myths between camera and subject. Through this screen the subject both recognizes and can attempt to context her or his embeddedness in familiarity" (11). While often perceived as "normalised and normalising" (Pasternak 236), the family photographs, which since the 20$^{th}$ century have most often exuded happiness and joy not necessarily experienced by the family, might also be interpreted as "images of pleasure and gratification that sitters visually claim for themselves" not in order to lie, but to challenge "the more familiar social dynamics of life within the system" (Pasternak 236).

## 2.2. Photography as illustration: Apolonja Maria Kojder's *Marynia, Don't Cry. A Mother's Legacy* & Barbara Głogowska's *Three Generations*

Apolonja Maria Kojder's memoir *Marynia, Don't Cry. A Mother's Legacy* published in Canada in 1995 is a text written by a granddaughter of immigrants from Poland, who was born in Canada after the Second World War. Having graduated from Canadian universities with a true gift to write, she decided to gather the story of her forefathers into a memoir of her family who, though the first one to come to Canada was her grandfather in 1925, had to endure many war atrocities, including the banishment into Siberia, a voyage out of war-stricken Europe through Persia, India and Great Britain, to arrive in Canada. The memoir is rather traditional in style, chronologically-organised and illustrated by ten family photographs placed in the middle of the text in an insert. The photos are arranged in a chronologically linear way starting from the photos of Kojder's grandmother, Marja Steć, and her sister-in-law taken in a manor in Galicia around 1914, and the selection includes group pictures of various members of her close family. She includes also a wedding photo of her parents, which can be precisely dated (20 Jan. 1936); and a snapshot of her grandfather, Jan Beznowski, in front of his house in Saskatchewan taken in the "pre-World War II" period, as the caption explains (Kojder and Głogowska 64). There is a picture of her mother as a nurse in Balachadi, India, taken on March 8th 1945 and of her father as a soldier in the army uniform taken on November 2nd 1945 in Italy. There is a photo taken after the family's arrival in Canada, in North Battleford, where they built their first house. The final photo in the insert is a group wedding photo of Apolonja Maria Kojder's aunt, Genia Beznowska, taken on July 31st 1951, with the author of the memoir in the front row as a three-year-old flower girl looking bravely into the camera lens. The pictures are organised in a linear way from the oldest ancestors to the youngest.

The presence of the author of the memoir in the last photo might be interpreted symbolically. She belongs to the first generation of the family born in Canada and as such she is the one to give testimony to her ancestors' past. She is the family member who best represents the tangled fates of the Kojders. During her parents' forced stay in a labor camp in Siberia, their firstborn daughter, Apolonja, died. The second Apolonja Maria, the author of the memoir, was conceived in Europe and born in Canada only a few weeks after their arrival. She is thus the link between the old conti-

nent and the new world, a symbolic connection between the past and the present, and the hardships and deaths of the old life linking up with the promise of a new life. She is both the coda to their quest for a better life initiated in 1925 and the epitome of the new beginning in the land which her grandfather saw as "the promised land, the land flowing with milk and honey and gold here on the streets" (Kojder and Głogowska 136)[2]. Conventional as they may seem, these preconceptions about Canada were frequently frustrated and many years had to pass before the Kojders achieved the "Canadian" standards of living.

The organization of the photographs in the insert has another symbolic dimension, embedded in the stories Apolonja Maria Kojder gathers for her memoir. The idea of a symbolic familial continuum represented in the photos is revealed in the text. Apolonja Maria Kojder represents another generation of women carrying the family stories, thus the cycle of photos from Marja Steć to Apolonja Maria Kojder is important as an illustration of the mutual support of family members always treasured by women in the family. It was Apolonja's great-grandmother, Rozalia Steć, who consoled her daughter, Marja (Apolonja's grandmother) with the words: "Marynia, don't cry. As long as I'm alive, I'll help you. And maybe you will survive longer because nobody will bother you. And later your children will help you" (Kojder and Głogowska 130). It was a very happy moment for Apolonja's mother when she gave birth to another baby girl after the death of the first Apolonja. The family decided to give her the names "Apolonja Maria" after the older sister and after her grandmother ("so that I would live" as she states in the book [Kojder and Głogowska 132]), who received the words of support as the first one from her mother. The legacy is thus passed down from generation to generation. As Kojder writes herself: "All these stories about my infancy made a place for me in the family scheme of things: I was now a part of the saga. In a sense, my story began with their coming to Canada. I was a symbol of their new beginnings, a new chapter in their lives" (132).

Symbolically, the pictures, and especially the way they are organised, refer to the message of the memoir Kojder wants to retain as a family treasure and give testimony to. From the first photo of her grandmother, the receiver of the comforting promise, to the youngest women in the family continuum who were offered the consoling phrase, which becomes

[2] For a more detailed study of the memoir in question, see (Drewniak "It Was Empty...").

a sort of magical spell in the family, Kojder wants to underline the power of familial consolation. In between the two framing pictures there are, of course, photos documenting the story of the family, their emigration, bonds and successes, but they all strongly indicate the "female support system" which was the family's "method of survival" (Kojder and Głogowska 132).

Through such a selection and arrangement of photos, starting with women and finishing with women, Kojder gives voice to the matriarchal narrative in her family. According to Eva C. Karpinski, however, this message stands in contrast to the coda Kojder offers in her written text. The story as a whole, while it abounds in male and female characters, seems to highlight the female perspective on the war years, immigration and the process of gaining stability in Canada. Kojder emphasises her own university background and the power of women from all generations of the family who, when left alone, dealt with poverty, war atrocities, wandering into the unknown; managed to cope with starvation and immigration and always emerged stronger from all the ordeals. In the end, however, the author gives voice to her father and thus makes him the central and sustainable gaze/voice of the book. In the final paragraphs she recounts again the story of her father's life, his vision of Canada, and gives a short account of the fate of her father's brother and cousin, who were both murdered, one probably in Khatyn, the other immediately after WWII in Poland, their murderers never brought to justice. At the conclusion of her memoir, Kojder further solidifies the male voice in the story by quoting her father's favourite verses from "Ode to Youth" by the most famous Polish Romantic poet, Adam Mickiewicz: "*Without a heart, without a soul – man is but a skeleton*" (Kojder and Głogowska 138; emphasis in the original). Therefore, the photos might be interpreted as, in fact, offering an alternative, woman-centred, family story. Karpinski states: "Although photographs are always 'framed' from a particular angle of vision and mediated through different conventions of seeing, still they can be isolated from the text in which they are embedded and treated as a relatively separate discourse of images, perhaps a site of possible counter-discourse" (*Borrowed Tongues* 127). If not for the conclusion of the text, highlighting Kojder's father's dreams, ideas, achievements and complaints about Canada, the photos would "ideally" fit the text with its focus on female mutual support and strength and the memoir would frame them without any dissonance. The photos would then remain purely illustrative in relation to the text and would offer a conven-

tional reinforcement of the life-writing. That is why Karpinski stresses the dialogue which emerges between the text and the photo sequence, and the counter-discourse the photos offer.

Another text, published in the same volume as Kojder's memoir, is Barbara Głogowska's account of the Deputat family titled *Three Generations*. Since it takes up about one third of *Marynia, Don't Cry. Memoirs of Two Polish-Canadian Families,* it may be mistakenly considered as yet another memoir included in the same book.[3] It is, however, a distinct form of life writing which should rather fall into the category of the biography rather than the eponymous memoir. The memories and life stories of the Deputat family are written down in the third person singular by a friend of the family, Barbara Głogowska, and translated from Polish into English by Irma Zaleski.

Since the text is published alongside Kojder's, both stories can obviously be compared and contrasted. In an essay devoted to the volume, Eva C. Karpinski remarks, "Głogowska's conventional and clichéd account seems like an appendix to Kojder's warm and emphatic, epic-like tribute to four generations of women in her family" ("*Marynia Don't"* 155). Such is also the selection of photos in the text. The readers receive a few pictures which show the Deputats in front of their house, which they built on the island at Six Mile Lake in the province of Ontario, as well as the Deputats with their children or during their pastimes in the natural environments in the whereabouts of their home province. Despite the fact that their lives (especially Mike Deputat's and his wife's) were not entirely successful and easy, the storyline that is created is a truly North-American success story and the pictures are selected to prove the point. Therefore, they serve as virtually referential supplementation of the text and do not open for either symbolic or counter discourse. The photographs of the Deputats included in *Three Generations* pertain to the Barthesian vision of immobility. In *Camera Lucida,* Barthes claims that

> by attesting that the object has been real, the photograph surreptitiously induces belief that it is alive, because of that delusion which makes us attribute to Reality an absolutely superior, somehow eternal value; but by shifting this reality to the past ("this-has-been"), the photograph

[3] Eva C. Karpinski characterises *Three Generations* as a memoir, yet claims it to be a "different genre of oral history, transcribed by Barbara Głogowska" (*Borrowed Tongues* 237).

> suggests that it is already dead. Hence it would be better to say that Photography's inimitable feature (its *noeme*) is that someone has seen the referent (even if it is a matter of objects) *in flesh and blood*, or again *in person*. (79; emphasis in the original)

Therefore, Głogowska's third person omniscient narration is aimed at providing the readers with verity, "this-has-been" type of reality without entering the more convoluted play with the visual representation of the Deputats.

### 2.3. Photography, typography and violations of textual space: Janice Williamson's *Crybaby!*

Janice Williamson's text *Crybaby!* (1998) belongs to a relatively new line of incest survivor memoirs which are not "the predictable teleological fables of recovery" (Doane and Hodges 110) propagated by mainstream North American media. Instead, they focus on the halting, incomplete process of recovering the story of the physical violation, often resorting, among others, to "violations of conventions of space" (Doane and Hodges 109).

The focus of Williamson's memoir is the difficult and protracted process of attempting to piece together vague shards of memories, flashbacks and acute bodily symptoms to recover the story of incest. The non-narrative nature of memories, explained not only by the trauma itself, but also by the young age of the survivor (Buss *Repossessing* 152), necessitates reliance on non-linguistic aspects of memory (mental images and bodily symptoms), and "external" memory aids such as photographs and verbal evidence of family members and friends. The father is dead (he committed suicide by drowning) and cannot be confronted, and no external evidence is conclusive. As a result, the story of incest never fully shapes up. The process of attempting to stitch up pieces of evidence and counter-evidence, the sense of fragmentation the author experiences, her doubts and self-questioning are represented by Williamson through a number of formal devices, which shape the textual space. The memoir is not only fragmented and non-linear, it also relies on typography and layout – the arrangement of text fragments and words and images on the page – to convey meaning. Additionally, it makes use of a number of "family album" photographs of the author as a child, captioned by the father's hand on the back, to confront the surface narrative of middle-class happiness and meditate on the power of the photograph to conceal rather

than reveal the past. The multi-generic text – combining memoir with testimony, literary and cultural criticism, prose and poetry – relies on the combination of different semantic systems to produce meaning: the visual element (photographs, typography, layout) and the verbal element cannot be separated without impoverishing the text. It is a product of a number of impossibilities (Williamson 105) as the author declares: the impossibility of telling the father's story because of his suicide, the impossibility of telling the daughter's story because there is not enough evidence for the story to shape up. "This book was impossible to write," she says, and yet here it is, though "This is not quite what [the author] had in mind" (105). Williamson's text is, in Nancy Pedri's terminology, a "forbidden narrative", a testimonial narrative that uses "somewhat unfamiliar, always jarring narrative techniques to represent something … beyond that which can be transmitted discursively" and "draws attention to its own narrative impossibility, despite an underlying desire to tell and to show" (261).

The complicated relation between the pictorial and verbal elements of the text is signalled by the cover, which shows a photograph of the author as a child on a swing. The photograph of the smiling girl is fragmented, however, with its lower part – showing the bottom of the home-made swing – placed on the top; the upper part, the one with the smiling girl's face – on the bottom of the cover. It is the fragment which shows the bottom of the swing – normally a rather inconspicuous element of the photo – that is foregrounded because of its placement and colour, especially that it constitutes the background against which the title of the text appears in white letters. The title *Crybaby!* – clearly a taunt, as the word is repeated many times in a ribbon-like sequence below – contrasts with the smiling face of the girl beneath[4]. The cover signals then, through this specific combination of the word and the image – the focus of the text on what is fragmented rather than whole; on the invisible, on what is hidden in plain sight and on the nature of photography, or, for that matter, perhaps any representation of the past. The blurriness of the photograph, edged with imitated creases, indicates additionally the temporal distance between the time of reading/writing and the events that are to be recovered, and the indistinct nature of past memories. At the same time, the meaning of the contrast between the image of the smiling girl and the title of the text remains ambiguous – the readers are plunged into a story that might turn

[4] For a somewhat different reading and interpretation of the cover see (Robson 152).

out to be a bitter and unjustified complaint of a "crybaby" about what really was a rather happy childhood; or a story of deep and real unhappiness and abuse, ignored in spite of complaints, and hidden behind a happy smile. This ambiguity is never fully dispelled. As the autobiographical narrator declares,

> These photographs are not about finding "the truth" of my childhood. They are a childhood. A possible account. Whether my father molested me will not be established. My memory has proven resilient in its ability to find an equilibrium somewhere between vision and articulation, a zone of possible plots, likely scenarios, blurred images. Gaps and fissures, arguments and echoes make up what I know about this child who stands before me. (Williamson 26)

The difficulty and pain of writing about the self half-glimpsed in blurred images, gaps and fissures are underlined by the three mottos – quotes from Hélène Cixous, Virginia Woolf and Marguerite Duras – that open the text. Set in fonts of different shape, size and shade of black the quotes, each one in its turn, are foregrounded, demanding reader's attention, taking up the textual space in a manner more expansive than is usually expected of mottoes. "The effect of the visible difference," as Helen Buss comments, "[is] to draw attention to the difference of each woman's observation on the same subject, the difficulty of writing about what is most important in their lives" (*Repossessing* 154). The lines of the quotes are not fully justified, but rather centred, the ragged edges underlining the contents of the quotes: Cixous's contention that "the true book" has to be torn from oneself; Woolf's musings on the shapelessness of "I"; Duras's belief that a story can be told only "through its absence", that writing means "telling everything at once" (Williamson 1998 n. pag.).

The cover photograph, or – to be precise – the movement of the swing, signals the importance of spatiality throughout the text, and, in fact, structures it. While the initial brief part of the book titled "Crybaby!" that follows the mottos is prefaced with a different photograph of the little girl that Williamson was, it alludes to the cover photo in the narrator's conclusion that "if I am going to continue writing, I will need to gain altitude." "Altitude" indicates here a distance to the story itself, and – more importantly – to the reactions of others to the story – which she reads initially as "indifference or disdain" (Williamson 10). In this respect, Williamson's complaint that the story of the "crybaby" is simply disregarded,

demonstrates a broader issue, which Doane and Hodges identify in *Telling Incest* as "conditions of uncertainty not only about 'what happened' but also who will listen" under which incest narratives are retrieved and written (1-2). Williamson's bitterness about the unwillingness of others to listen to the story is reflected in her musings about discussions around the false memory syndrome.

The picture of the girl on a swing is used as a preface to the part of the book titled "Swing Memory (a lesson in altitude)" (54), which reproduces the up and down movement of the swing in the textual movement between evidence and denial: "One day I remembers; the next, I regrets-*shame shame go away*. Swing the back and forth record of memory's denial: blame, no blame" (57; emphasis in the original). The protracted, fragmentary process of attempting to recover the memory and at the same time doubting any recollection and outside evidence that appears, can therefore be linked to the movement of the swing, the movement in space. "The altitude" she is attempting to gain between the abused, half-remembering self and the analytical, writing self is additionally stressed by the use of "I" as a third person singular pronoun, which indicates also "the difficulty of speaking about sexual abuse" (Roy 190). As Kathryn Robson puts it, in the text "sexual abuse links physical/psychic ruptures with disjointed movement: the narrator never 'recovers' her childhood memories as such, but grasps them fleetingly as they swing past" (152). This part of the book finishes with an almost empty page inhabited only by the final, brief note of a scrap of evidence:

***The waking dream: evidence***

> The notes falter for a moment, but remain almost flawless in memory. The piano continues to play. (81)

The spatial arrangement of the text clearly imitates the now motionless swing, though the stasis is apparently only temporary as the evidence is hardly conclusive: the narrator alludes here to her friend's confession that she was molested by Williamson's father on the piano bench, when – the narrator speculates – she herself must have been in the house or even in the same room, distracted by something else. Nobody notices the notes faltering for a moment, and if they do, they disregard them: once again nobody listens, "the piano continues to play", the victim remains silent for years. Similar stories are retold in the text in many configurations, dem-

onstrating that the author's ordeal is just one example of a much broader phenomenon. "This book," she says earlier, "is also about a collective history longer than my own – one that begins with Freud's Dora" (11).

This partly explains the rich intertextual nature of Williamson's memoir, which interweaves her own words with quotes from scholars, critics, philosophers, incest victims: some appear as mottos to each part of the book, and are then attributed, while others are woven into the texture of the book and usually attributed only in the "Works Cited" section at the end. The quotes, usually set off from the authorial narrator's words only by the use of italics, function in effect like a prism through which the individual experience is viewed, a sort of a diffuse, split up, contradictory but densely structured interpretative framework. The quotes are integral parts of the text, sometimes difficult to recognize as quotes because Williamson uses italics also for some of her poems, for letters, to quote herself, to indicate a switch from speech to thought, to add asides, parenthetical information or emphasis. The resulting mélange of the private, intimate and public – both academic and popular – discourse underlines the constructedness of the self being formed at the intersection: the self that falls apart as a result of the sudden flashbacks of the memories of possible incest and has to be constructed anew. Indeed, as Wendy Roy contends, Williamson's "book is not only, or not primarily, about sexual abuse, but instead about its influence on a woman's sense of self and ability to write about that self" (189).

The process, as signalled by the cover, starts with a revision of the images of childhood encoded in photographs which document the "official" version of family life. The photographs reproduced in the book are typical "family album" photographs of the 1950s, recording the happiness of the family and its upward mobility: the little girl on the swing, the little girl with her smiling father or peeking out of a new car (156), the little girl in the foreground looking straight at the photographer and the reader (8). Many parts of the book are prefaced with photos bordered with a white frame and placed against a black background, so that they look like part of a page from the family album. While in Williamson's text photographs play some of the roles in which they are typically employed in life writing (for example to help the reader visualise major characters of the story and sympathise with the autobiographical narrator), they are not supplementary but rather essential for reader's reception and understanding of the text. Likewise, for the autobiographical narrator, they constitute the means through

which she attempts both to get some insight into and to question the past that they falsely promise to record. As Marianne Hirsch suggests, and Williamson's memoir demonstrates, family photographs "locate themselves precisely in the space of contradiction between the myth of the ideal family and the lived reality of family life" (*Family Frames* 8). Unlike Kojder and Głogowska, Williamson explicitly focuses on this "space of contradiction." The past she is exploring is the past as "the scene of a crime," to use Annette Kuhn's well-known phrase: "if the deed itself is irrecoverable, its traces may still remain" (4); "the photograph is a prop, a prompt, a pre-text: it sets the scene of recollection" (13).

The role of the photograph in remembering and forgetting the trauma is most extensively explored in the part of Williamson's memoir called "Snapshots", which is also rich in "violations of textual space" of the kind similar to those used in other parts of the book. The part of the book is prefaced with a photograph of the little girl with her smiling father, both looking straight at the camera and – on the neighbouring page – three quotes related respectively to the link between photography and memory (John Berger), the photographic likeness and identity (Theresa Hak Kyung Cha) and the role of family photography as the reinforcer of "the integration of the family group" (Pierre Bourdieu; qtd. in Williamson 14). As we turn the page, we can see the reproduction of the back of the photo with the caption made by the father's hand, which reads: "She's waiting / for the birdie / to come out of / the camera," and is dated "May 23/54" as are all other photos reproduced in the text: a few days after the author's third birthday. The reproduced captions play multiple roles in this and other parts of the text. First of all, they are a graphic sign of the person, a visible sign of the absent father, offering a semblance of presence and a deceptive sense of familiarity with the person behind the handwriting. Besides, the captions impose an interpretation on the photographs, thus silencing the daughter. Some put words in her mouth ("Push me some more, Daddy" 56), while others – like the one quoted above, provide "an outside" (though not a disinterested) view of her given from the position of the one who knows her thoughts and intentions. The captions, which at first glance seem innocent enough, are pondered upon, manipulated and recontextualised; the same is true of photographs. The intention is clearly to impress on the reader the essential untruthfulness of both the private words and the seemingly objective photographic image: "the *real* narrative … lies in what is *not* said and … in what the photograph does *not* show" (Pedri 264; emphasis in the original).

The first caption in "Snapshots" ("She is waiting …") is juxtaposed in the neighbouring page with a fragment of the caption ("Out / of / the / cam / era"; Williamson 15) in oversized, pale grey letters against the whiteness of the page. The size of the letters and the fact that there is no spacing between the lines make the excerpt look, at first glance, like a picture: a graphic design. The letters have to be unscrambled, the reader has to make an effort to get meaningful words out of the faded image. This is another stumbling block that halts the reading process: while the photo that opens the section is conventional enough not to merit, initially, a longer look, and the mottos are arranged in a way well-suited to common reading habits, the reproduction of the back of the photograph with the handwritten caption placed sideways on the page, and the word-image side by side with it require an additional effort at deciphering and interpreting the text-image compound. The emphasised words "out of the camera" might indicate a switch from the conventional family album photograph to lived reality, to what was and is happening to the subject of the picture out in the world.

Indeed, what follows is the verbal description of the first and then the second "telling": intense experiences of flashbacks and mental pictures provoked by a night-time violation of the private space of the author/narrator, now an adult: a car crashing the fence surrounding her house, which she believes she dreamed, but which proves true enough: "These remnants of my fence are not a nightmare, but a morning awakened to my body's power to forget nocturnal violations. My mental/physical paralysis/erasure leads me to query what it means to remember and how it is we become this forgetting" (16). What follows identifies the meaning of the "snapshots" of the title: not reproduced photos, but rather snatches of prose that are not necessarily explanatory; and flashbacks in the form of images (reproduced as verbal images) projected by the mind of the narrator (18), which provoke immediately acute bodily symptoms. The description of the second "telling", which leads to the discovery that the narrator was as an infant left in the care of a miner whom the family thought particularly trustworthy, finishes with the motto-like statement in a grey oval that announces: "Always watch your back- / grounds. They can make / or break your pictures" (20): a call for alertness directed to the narrator herself and the reader, and a reminder of the importance of the immediate milieu, especially – but not only – the family, and of the sometimes murky past.

The central section of "Snapshots" is announced by another oversized part of the snapshot caption forming an image, which on scrutiny says "She's wait- / ing / for / the / birdie / to / come" (24) – the excerpt, given its changed context, gains here clearly sexualised connotations. It half-reveals what the caption itself perhaps intends to hide. What follows are the promised "snapshots": the organisation of the text and graphic elements imitate the organisation a photo album, but again the focus is on what the photographs do not show – the flip side, the "negative" image as visualised by the negative of a photograph overwritten with an excerpt in white letters on a photographic "story-telling sequence", some portions of which are rendered in bold font. The emphasised fragments of the neutral text render it private and expose the sinister underbelly of the "off-to-bed" sequence, clearly connecting it to the story that is struggling to emerge: "the star is a child", "off-to-bed series is a good example of the technique", "hide-and-seek, donning of pajamas, and crib scene", "dramatic plot", "priceless as time passes" (25). The image overwritten with text is marked as "Figure 1" and captioned with a general comment on the "aim of the family photo" (i.e. creating an appearance of naturalness, a slice of life being captured), exposing the photograph again as a lie. What follows consistently links and contrasts meta-comments on photography in general, which function as the "neutral" or "objective" picture, with comments on its personal dimension, which play the role of the private caption. The meta-comments and remarks on common photographic practices replace photographic images and are placed in black frames to form, as Pedri says, "a provocative series of empty, visually lacking photographs" (264), which are captioned most often with comments related to narrator's experience. For example, the framed text explaining that "a low angle makes viewer participant" is followed by a caption speculating on the role of the mother as a "participant" in the incest drama: "Peering through the car window, does she catch a glimpse of 'something funny'?" (Williamson 26). This "album" is also intended as a series of poems: "the captioned photograph is a poem" (29), the narrator declares, as both run "*a sort of controversy between what can be identified and what remains nameless, what has been said and what is yet unsayable*" (Williamson 29; emphasis in the original).

Demonstrating the distance and estrangement of her childhood and adult selves the narrator expresses a desire to voice – and be – a "coherent" story, not a series of snapshots, and to be a story separate from her father's. The futility of both attempts is demonstrated verbally and

graphically. Describing her attempts at manipulating the photograph of herself with her father by excising from it first the figure of the little girl and then that of the father, Williamson says:

> When the girl/I disappears, the remainder of the photograph tells a story of retribution. She/I takes part of father with her. The girl's arm, now absent, cuts into her father's leg like a sword. [When the father is gone] The little girl stands near the frame of the photograph. Is she puzzled by the absent centre? Or relieved? This photograph is not documentary evidence, but a sign of the unsayable. *The impact of incest may be hidden from him*. (33; emphasis in the original)

Just as the father remains present even in his absence in the photograph, so any other attempt at escaping him, "removing him from the picture," proves futile. The narrator informs the reader, for example, that "at sixteen, [she ran] away from home, from the proximity of the paternal, the distinguished entranceway pillars", only to follow the announcement with a poem in the form of a pillar, still there, slicing the page in half from top to bottom (35). The poem announces once again the impossibility of the story she is attempting to tell and the crisis of the self. She writes:

looped
circuit
of
looking/being
looked
at
makes
this
*i*
nomadic
(35-36; emphasis in the original)

The pillar-like shape of the poem, while affirming the constant presence of the "paternal … pillars", confirms also the fragmentation of the self. In the geography of the self she is tracing the father remains central for the daughter's story.

The whole text abounds in blank gaps between paragraphs that are sometimes only tenuously connected thematically, and with partly blank pages. These violations of textual space, and common reading habits, show the nature of the halting and incomplete process the narrator is de-

scribing, but also mimic or visualise bodily symptoms of trauma and bodily violations that are part and perhaps a result of it. For example, the reader is exhorted in the part of the text titled "Tattoo" to "mistake tattoos for photographs! Expose silvered flesh!" (Williamson 47). The surface of the body becomes here the visual record of experience ("experience must show"; 49), a letter and a map. It is the surface of the body that is written upon first by the hands of the violator, and later by tattoos and through self-mutilation, as the narrator cuts shapes into her skin. The reader is presented not with pictures, but with typographic "tattoos" and scars: with a sequence of quasi-definitions of "tattoo" and "incest tattoo" that run through four pages separated by blank spaces and might remind one of parallel scars. The "definitions" play with the words "tattoo" and "taboo" and translate the meaning of a tattoo, as an indelible marking and as a signal or sound, to the context of the violation of the incest taboo, which also leaves indelible psychological marks that are then translated into the physical/visual and auditory signals and markings: the markings on the body and the words on paper, the sound of typing.

Similarly, the part called "Ektomy: A Chance Betrayal", strengthens the meaning and impact of the text by manipulating the space of the page. In terms of content the part focuses on the story of Williamson's failed and violent marriage and (briefly) a more successful relationship many years later; but also – more importantly – on what she conceptualises as "a chance betrayal" of her body. She plays here on one of the definitions of ektomy: to cut out; and early meanings of the word "cut" – as in "draw cuts" or lots in a game of chance (126). This "chance betrayal" consists in the acute and medically inexplicable bodily symptoms that might result from the incest trauma, and consequent infertility, "cutting out" of parts of her reproductive system; and the return of the symptoms many years later when she is planning an adoption. The majority of the sections take up only a part of the page and finish with the capitalised word "[CUT]" in square brackets – in effect the blank portion of the page indicates this missing, cut out part of the body, of life, of psyche, of memory; but might also be interpreted as the open space of possibility, the game of chance she is engaged in. The word, through its association with the visual media, i.e. the film editing process, suggests also a point of transition between visual fragments, and the process of composing them into a narrative that might be fragmented, but nevertheless coheres: in this case, into a verbal/visual family album as a trauma story.

While the final section of the memoir, "Where Does the Misery Come From?", promises a reconciliation or resolution of sorts, the final quote from Sharon Zukin indicates the impossibility of closure. The author/narrator returns to her father's summer cottage to work on the galleys of her text and to "remake the cottage in her own image" (193). As Helen M. Buss concludes, these two acts, the one "linguistic", the other "geographical" indicate "repossession of the body and the mind that have been crippled by the incest", which is strengthened by the decision, about to come to fruition, to adopt a child, which demonstrates the repossession of "the private world as a habitable space for the future" (*Repossessing* 160). The quote from Zukin, on the other hand, points to this happy moment of multiple repossessions as temporary:

> The only way we can find our way is through the
> bush. Dense. Impossible.
> Until the moment we reach the meadow when we have
> arrived.
> Until the moment the meadow, crossed is now remembered as we enter the bush again.
> (Williamson 195; emphasis in the original)

The metaphor of the dense bush, impossible to navigate, refers in the context of Williamson's memoir to the entanglements of memory, psychological and physical agony, but also to the intricacies of the memoir itself intended, at least partly, to testify to and illustrate the terrible aftermath of incest. The intricate interfaces of photography, image, typography and text produce a maze-like bush through which both the narrator and the reader wade towards the meadow – a clearing indicated by the expanse of the page surrounding the quote; a partial understanding of the story that, in many ways, is still in progress.

The violations of textual space in Williamson's memoir play then multiple roles. They reflect the process of recovering the vague memories of incest; the difficulty of piecing them together to form a story, the "gaps" and "fissures" around which it is constructed; its "untellable", impossible nature. They provide visual analogues to the contents of fragments of the text and organise other fragments by providing guiding metaphors. They expose the discrepancy between "the surface of middle-class life and concomitant culturally-dominant discourse and the horror of the experience of violence" (Doane and Hodges 105), and the resulting collapse of the self, which is

constructed as "composite and invented" (111). By violating established reading habits, they also affect the process of reading and make for what Nancy Petri calls "an anxious reading practice. The taboo subject matter and the … unusual manner of presentation instill an anxiety, a discomfort … in readers that closely reflects that which the author … felt …" (262).

## 2.4. Photography and ekphrasis

Memoir often plays with reader's expectation of and desire for truthfulness and its visual verification that the genre gives rise to by offering ekphrastic descriptions instead of or alongside reproductions of relevant visual material, in particular photographs. Ekphrasis itself is a complex phenomenon; in fact, W.J.T. Mitchell sees ekphrasis as a complex paradox since its can never reproduce in words the exact image. "The verbal representation of visual representation" (W.J.T. Mitchell) may barely conjure the image up in the imagination of the reader and rather reenact the scene, situation and person. This phenomenon includes description, retelling or rewriting the image. Mitchell comments that "a verbal representation cannot represent – that is, make present – its object in the same way a visual representation can. It may refer to an object, describe it, invoke it, but it can never bring its visual presence before us in the way pictures do. Words can "cite," but never "sight" their objects."

"Citing" the images, the descriptions at the same time impose interpretations. One of the most famous examples of a memoir which offers such ekphrastic descriptions is *Lost in Translation* (1989) by Eva Hoffman, which displays only one picture on the cover of the majority of editions[5] and two other pictures are then described, but not reproduced, in the text of the memoir. The cover picture shows Eva, confident and happy, and her younger sister Alina, still in Poland, before emigration to North America. Ekphrastic descriptions are provided for photographic images that Eva-the memoirist cannot quite associate herself with: Eva as an early teenager in Vancouver, "transformed" into a Canadian girl; and Eva as a child in Poland with a friend in a moment that might be nostalgically tinted, but which she cannot quite emotionally recover af-

[5] It is interesting to note that while the photograph of Eva Hoffman and her sister, Alina, appears on the covers of the majority of editions of the book, the Polish 1995 edition gives a collage photograph of Cracow and New York instead.

ter all the years. The two descriptions contextualise the photographs in such a way that they demonstrate Hoffman's resistance to identify with her new self – and this is how they have been interpreted (Hirsch *Family Frames* 222-225). Hirsch suggests, in fact, that the three visual and verbal images trace the trajectory of the text reflected in the titles of the three parts of Hoffman's book: "Paradise," "Exile" and "The New World" (222-225).

A similar approach is presented by Irena F. Karafilly in her memoir entitled *The Stranger in the Plumed Hat* (2000), in which the sole photo of Irena and her mother is reproduced on the cover, and is frequently referred to in the book. Apart from that, there are numerous ekphrastic descriptions of other photos which offer some insight into the characters' past as well as their memories of the past. Since some of the alluded to photos have irretrievably vanished, their descriptions become allusive references to the loss of memory and a certain dose of estrangement the daughter constructing the memoir feels in relation to her parents. It is worth mentioning that *The Stranger in the Plumed Hat* is a memoir predominantly devoted to the study of Karafilly's mother's descent into Alzheimer's disease, and, as such, focuses on the questions of identity, self-representation, and memory loss. Throughout the book, the reader gradually comes to understand that the identity of the victim of Alzheimer's is equally unreachable as the lost photos, or even the memories of them. The personality of the mother as well as the snapshots from the past which the family fails to retrieve suggest the air of mystery surrounding the mother, the father and the daughter, and their troubled relationships.

Karafilly's mother frequently goes back to her childhood and youth spent in the Russian Urals and the memories of such distant past are always linked to a photo taken in 1926. The fact that certain photos surface in the familial memory despite their disappearance may suggest a "premonition as to the losses that would await them in the future during and after the Second World War. The world from the 1920s is irretrievably lost and the dreamy gazes in the picture can now only symbolize the strange foreboding" (Drewniak "Changing Traditions" 139). At the same time, some pictures burn in the fire caused by Karafilly's mother that destroys the family house. Constant references to the lost but remembered photos suggest that the loss of photographs frames her amnesia.

## 2.5. Maps, graphs, genealogical trees as visual devices legitimising the "truthfulness" of memoir: Mary A. Drzewiecki's *Born and Raised Under a Straw Roof*

An interesting example of a memoir employing a variety of illustrative techniques is Mary A. Drzewiecki's *Born and Raised Under a Straw Roof: A True Legacy of the Human Spirit* (2001). The title announcing a "true legacy" of the Drzewieckis collected and written by their daughter seems to be the organising motif for the whole narrative. Mary A. Drzewiecki's aim is to be as truthful as it is only possible, and, in order to underscore the verifiable truth-value of her account, she includes many photos, captions, maps, and numerous documents to support her "true legacy", which becomes a "documented legacy" as Drzewiecki states in the "Overview" (viii). The book is divided into six parts developing the history of the family in a chronological way. Starting from the first years of the Second World War 1939-1941, Drzewiecki goes on to present her father's stay in German Forced Labour Camps until 1945, and to present, in the third part, the postwar years. In part four, the shift back to 1943-1945 is made in order to depict the history of Janina Horoszkiewicz – Drzewiecki's mother; whereas part five shows their reunion and stay in a DPs camp in Germany between 1945 and 1947, and finally, part six offers a story of their transfer to Canada in 1949 and a short synopsis of their hard but successful life there.

Drzewiecki includes several maps in her memoir (nine instances, some are however, repeated in different chapters), the sources of which are mentioned in the Bibliography section at the end of the book. Most of these maps are annotated with the statement: "This map is not to scale", and as a result of this, they give a very general image of the lands in question. Sometimes, for instance on pages xi and 56, the maps inform about particular places that are of interest for Drzewiecki because of the story she tells, rather than give a broader, geographical awareness. For example, on the map of Germany, Drzewiecki puts the names of places and camps her father, Sylwester, was sent to, instead of names of big cities which would make orientation easier. She also repeats the same maps of Wołyn (original spelling in her text) in order to place the villages of Rudnia and Omelanka that play a vital part in the lives of her family.

The organization of Drzewiecki's memoir and its layout are also to support the verity of the story she writes. There are numerous photos of her father, Sylwester, but the majority of them are just replications of the

very same image. His serious, black and white face looks at the reader a few times as if to testify to the truthfulness of his story. Other members of the family are also presented in the form of photographs and descriptions that follow. Additionally, to each person, Drzewiecki attaches a short synopsis of their lives, for instance the one on page 19 (others are organised in the same way and followed by a photo if such is available):

Konstancja – Kostka

| | |
|---|---|
| Birth date: | April 6, 1921 |
| Birth place: | Wioska Rudnia – Village of Rudnia<br>Wschodnia Polska – Eastern Poland |
| Died: | March 6, 1986 |

Such introductions of each person depicted in the memoir leave no doubts as to who the person was and in the case of all family connections offer clear explanations like "*Dziadziuś Ludwig Hulkiewicz*: Michalina's Father, Sylwester's Grandfather" (17; emphasis in the original), but at the same time they disrupt the flow of narration as these intrusions are numerous.

Another element which influences the aesthetic aspect of the memoir is Drzewiecki's usage of foreign languages. Firstly, there is a two-page-long section devoted to the explanations of Polish pronunciation, in which she lists particular sounds with corresponding English sounds as well as examples e.g. Wujek – Voo-yek Uncle (ix). Apart from the Polish, and occasionally German, names there are dialogues which Drzewiecki quotes directly in Polish or Russian, then offering a translation into English. The idea of mixing languages reveals the background of the family as they came from the region where the influences of both languages can easily be traced. This linguistic hotchpotch is very well represented on pages 64-67 where the mixture of misspelt Polish and Russian sentences in the Cyrillic alphabet is juxtaposed with German words, all of these nested in the English narrative. Repeatedly, Drzewiecki uses that technique to achieve the "true" picture of the linguistic Babel tower of Eastern Europe and its reflection in the work camps scattered across Germany. She is probably not aware of the mistaken and misspelt words (especially in Polish, such as "Dla czego nie kopneliś cie dziecko w dupe zie by nie wydzial co wy robicie? Dziecko jest dzieckiem i nic nie muwiliście zie by był cicho!" [65; original spelling ]), which make the intended effect of "truthfulness" work only for an anglophone reader who does not know Polish.

Furthermore, alongside the photos in the "Canadian" section of the book, showing the successful and relatively affluent lifestyle of the family

(children in front of the car The Oldsmobile (319), Polski Piknik – Polish Picnic 1957 [333]), there are also photographs of people and documents testifying to the more difficult and traumatic period in the family's past. Pages 188 and 189 serve as good examples: here the camp photos with prison numbers of Adam and Filipina Horoszkiewicz are presented as well as a cover and the first three pages of the German Work Book (Arbeitsbuch für Ausländer). In general, what is to be concluded after a close study of Drzewiecki's *Born and Raised Under Straw Roof: A True Legacy of the Human Spirit* is the author's decision (suggested in the title) to offer a "true" picture and a narrative which would not play with the idea of the fallibility of memory. Drzewiecki's goal is to write a true story of her family and in order to support the idea of this legacy handed down from one generation to another she offers two photos of herself and her two daughters at the end of the text and the caption that reads that the memoir "*Born and Raised Under Straw Roof* is Mary Drzewiecki's first book and the fulfillment of a dream to preserve her parents' legacy, and her roots, for generations to come" (347). All the visual elements in her text are therefore selected and used to serve this goal.

Drzewiecki's memoir is not the only one including maps and other graphic aids to support the story with some factual information. Maps appear in many texts depicting the troubled history of Central and Eastern Europe especially when the stories touch upon the first half of the 20th century. Two memoirs by Hungarian-Canadian authors, Elaine Kalman Naves's *Journey to Vaja. Reconstructing the World of a Hungarian-Jewish Family* ([1996] 1998) and Anna Porter's *The Storyteller. Memory, Secrets, Magic and Lies* (2000) include maps of Central and Eastern Europe with a special emphasis on the region of Vaja in the former one. The same pertains to Janice Kulyk Keefer's *Honey and Ashes. A Story of Family* (1998) and a travel memoir by Irena F. Karafilly *Ashes and Miracles. A Polish Journey* (1998). While some of these texts include very basic and relief type of maps (Karafilly iv), all the other aforementioned memoirs contain maps displaying changing national borders in different periods (Kojder 2, Porter no page given, Kalman Naves *Journey* xv-xvi, Kulyk Keefer x-xi, Drzewiecki xi, xvi, 52, 56, 138, 156, 192, 232, 267) and main transportation routes (Kalman Naves *Journey* xvi).

While maps are most often included with the intention of giving visual support to stories of historical upheavals and group as well as personal dislocations, sometimes the sense of geographical accuracy or "placed-

ness" they promise to provide for the reader is misleading. For example, Sharon Butala's memoir *Wild Stone Heart* (2000) opens with a historical annotated map of the Cypress Hills area of Saskatchewan the tiny part of which – one particular field – she is focusing on in the memoir. At the same time, as Butala admits in "Author's Note", in spite of meticulous descriptions of landscape features, and even stones, flowers and artifacts found in the field, there might be noticed "the occasional annoying vagueness about detail" as to, among others, "the location of the field" (201), which seems to go against the "promise" of geographical accuracy suggested by the map.

Some of the memoirs mentioned above include genealogical trees (Kulyk Keefer xii), while Elaine Kalman Naves (*Journey* xvii) and Mary A. Drzewiecki offer very detailed descriptions of all the members of the family, instead of visualising the genealogy. These presentations do not only include the most important dates and facts from a person's life but also nicknames the people used in different countries in particular phases of their lives, depictions of physical features and various pronunciations of their surnames (for example in Drzewiecki's memoir: page 2 featuring Sylvester Drzewiecki, page 160 featuring his wife Janina Horoszkiewicz, and many others).

While all the memoirs include visual material documenting the lives of the storytellers and members of their families, and as such attempt to offer the "authenticity" which is the basis for life-writing narratives, some of them present a certain distance to the quandary of truthfulness and question the limits of documentation. Right at the very beginning of her memoir, Janice Kulyk Keefer announces:

> *Honey and Ashes* is, more than anything, a story of family. I do not claim to know or tell The Truth about my family; what I am doing is sieving memory and retelling the stories that make memory material, and public. The difference between what I was told and what I heard; what memory hides and what imagination discloses – all this is a part of the book I have written. (5; original spelling).

A similar distance is signaled by Porter in her *The Storyteller*, in which even the subtitle *Memory, Secrets, Magic, and Lies* suggests a certain discrepancy between life-as-it-is and its textual representation. Porter's memoir is constructed from the stories she heard from her grandfather, Vili Racz, whose "stories had many tellings" (55). But Anna Porter, herself

aware of the pitfalls of memory and fictitious air of storytelling, introduces the story with the following remark: "My childhood was filled with my grandfather's stories. Some I remember so clearly that I still hear his voice in their telling and still see the pictures I saw when I first heard them. My whole family told stories – many true, a few imagined, others invented so long ago they had become true – but none were as full of life as my grandfather's" (4).

Kojder's and Drzewiecki's memoirs are certainly devoid of such a distancing awareness. While Apolonja Maria Kojder plays with privileging the female voices over the male gaze, Mary A. Drzewiecki's text, although written by a woman, does not highlight this fact and avoids any feminist discussions. Mary A. Drzewiecki definitely tries to offer the reader the proof of Lejeune's autobiographical pact which is at no place broken (Lejeune [1989] 1995). The whole range of photographs, documents, lists of names, factual information, dates and places serve as the legitimization of the pact. While Barbara Głogowska's text appears to be more of a biography of the Deputat family, Kojder's text is similar to Drzewiecki's in the desire to represent "life-as-it-is".

Kojder and Drzewiecki (also Głogowska but hers is not a memoir *per se*) do not want to acknowledge the impossibility of relating life-as-it-was and do not see the rift between the life and its textual and visual representation. It is strongly emphasised by Drzewiecki in her text by the inclusion of a great variety of illustrations and photographs. In contrast, Kulyk Keefer, Porter, Kalman Naves are the narrators of memoirs which are also called stories, and as such suggest the inclusion of certain fictionalisation. These texts shift from dates and verifiable truths to a more story-like discourse and according to Yagoda, in such memoirs "attention is resolutely focused on the self, and a certain leeway or looseness with the facts is expected" (2). Therefore, it may be inferred that the inclusion of photographs, maps, genealogical trees and other illustrative devices that prove the truthfulness of the narrative, does not necessarily exclude a distance between the author of the memoir and the story she tells. The distance is created in the text due to the approach a particular narrator applies. For the three authors mentioned above, the photograph, the document, the map as traces of the past do not provide the truth of it, but rather serve as inspiration and a starting point of intimately felt stories that are openly presented as based on (presumed, often only narrated) fact and confabulation. A similar strategy is used by Deborah A. Miranda, whose experi-

ments with the inclusion of visual, often factographic, material into her memoir are a way to counteract gaps and lies in recorded history not only of her family, but also of her tribe.

### 2.6. Reconstructing genealogies, visualising (up)rootedness: the tribal and the private in Deborah A. Miranda's *Bad Indians. A Tribal Memoir*

The construction and reconstruction of genealogies constitute the framework of Deborah A. Miranda's 2013 multi-generic memoir *Bad Indians. A Tribal Memoir*. Miranda, a poet and prose writer, a member of the Ohlone-Costanoan Esselen Nation of California, constructs her text as a counter-narrative to the colonial story of "Mission Indians" which is still disseminated in the US, notably through the school system: the story of happy converts, now sadly extinct, gladly offering their time and labour to Spanish missions along the Pacific Coast. Conceptually and graphically she devises the memoir as her "Mission Project", which grade four children in California are required to complete as part of their curriculum on the history of the state; but which she never did as a child, because she moved out of the state with her mother. The project, as schools require it to be submitted, Miranda writes (xvii), is not aimed at recovering the real history of the region – which includes exploitations, imperialism and racism – or fostering critical thinking, but rather at recycling and strengthening "Mission Mythology." Her own "very late" counter-project focuses instead on the recovery of violently silenced Native voices (xx), (re)constructing the story of her ancestors, and herself. It is an attempt at taking control of historical and cultural discourse (xvi), conceptualised as a powerful story, which is knowledge (xx), but also at placing a family and personal story firmly within and in relation to it. The multifaceted story of intertwining personal and tribal genealogy is composed of reproduced documents, drawings, photographs, newspaper clippings, charts; simulated "project sheets"; narrative fragments on the history of Miranda's Nation and her family, poems, creative prose, and journal fragments. Visual material is a central, meaningful part of the memoir, providing and deepening its argument; not simply an illustration, but a structuring device, an integral element of the text, whose written part often coalesces around it and in response to it.

Cover art, both the cover photograph and "blood quantum charts" art on the back sides of both covers, effectively visualise the problematic nature of genealogy and origin as they function in culture. The cover photo-

graph shows a smiling child in a fancy cowboy or cowgirl outfit sitting astride a blind-looking black-and-white pony. Above, the title *Bad Indians* hovers in white letters, the word "bad" underlined. The figure of the child reiterates here the pop-culture version of the cultural myth of the conquest of the "Wild West" by "good" Whites winning over "bad Indians". It is only after the reader at least leafs through the book that she might recognize the child as young Miranda herself, readjust the reading of both the gender and race of the child on the photograph, and fully appreciate the ironic nature of the image-title complex. The phrase "bad Indians" refers to the cultural vilification and infantilisation of Indigenous peoples: Miranda herself in an interview (Palacio) says that the phrase "bad Indians" turned up time and again in documents and articles she read as part of her research. This cultural attitude is epitomised by the dictum of Gen. Philip Sheridan that filtered to American culture as "The only good Indian is a dead Indian" – suggesting, as Miranda recalls her father quipping, that living Native people are, by definition, "bad". This has made her realise that being "bad", in this context, means not simply defiance, but survival. As Miranda's story focuses on the tribe that, as a result of "federal neglect" and "anthropological erasure" (Laverty 224) was deemed extinct and in 1927 removed from the list of federally recognized tribes, but is very much in existence (cf. Laverty), hers is indeed a story of "bad Indians". "Badness" has also very literal and personal connotations: Miranda approaches the cruel streak running through the Native male line of her ancestors, including her father. Gender, but also sexual orientation, become other important focal points of the text, with Miranda's reflection on the treatment and position of the Costanoan/Esselen women, but also transgender people, from the mission period on – the strength and resistance they have managed to demonstrate in spite of abuse, both racial and sexual, and their role as culture-keepers, in particular holders of stories.

The whole text focuses on the construction of the intertwined tribal and personal genealogies, and in effect constitutes an attempt at counteracting through storytelling some of the persistent damage done by colonisation, in particular by constructing the genealogical story of survival. The work of questioning and poking fun at standard stories of genealogy and myth circulated in American culture and officially sanctioned, which starts with the cover picture, is continued on the backs of both the front and back cover, which contain reproduced images of Bureau of Indian Affairs Blood Quantum charts. Miranda treats them like pictures from a co-

louring book, encouraging the reader to decorate the charts with colourful patterns, such as her own "Wannabe Creations", "Hand of God", "Patriotism Percentages" and "Blood Quantum: The Four Sacred Directions"[6]. Taken together the colourful images playfully and ironically question and trivialise genealogies and definitions imposed on Native peoples by governmental agendas and the authorities, as well as the concept of racial purity in general. They also draw the reader's attention to persistent legal attempts at quantifying and defining "Nativeness" and belonging – attempts that still have the power to define everyday reality for many Indigenous people, both in the US and in Canada.

Blood quantum charts, still in use in the USA, are designed to help individuals asses the quantum of Native blood they possess, though the use of the charts is not obligatory or required. They were created in response to administrative attempts at determining "Nativeness" through "blood", which in North America can be traced to the beginning of 18th c. In a different part of the memoir, Miranda reproduces one of the documents used over the years to confirm "Indian blood": that one, for one of her relatives, is dated 1930 and contains a "thumbprint" signature of the witness (in this case, Isabel Meadows) (28). In modified forms similar procedures, resting on the same principles, are still present both in the US and in Canada. The blood quantum which can be established using the charts is used by some Native nations in the US to define membership: each tribe establishes its own enrolment requirements, on the basis of which the BIA issues a Certificate of Degree of Indian Blood (CDIB) that shows blood quantum and tribal affiliation. Schmidt (6) summarises current research on the issue by saying that this approach, which started with the 1934 Indian Reorganization Act, and defines Nativeness on the basis of biology rather than culture, has been perceived by many authors as genocidal: if rigidly adhered to, it will lead to extinction through intermarriage. At the same time, since the 1960s there can be noticed a discrepancy between official enrollment data from federally recognized tribes and self-identification as Native, especially among people of complicated, mixed ancestry (Schmidt 6).

Miranda's visual "fun with charts" immediately draws reader's attention to questions of ancestry, genealogy, belonging and the administrative, political framework within which they are couched – issues critical to her text.

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[6] These are also reproduced in Miranda's blog "Bad NDNs" at: http://whenturtlesfly.blogspot.com/2009/10/four-things-you-can-do-with-your-chart.html

The author herself is of Native, but also Jewish and French origin, self-identifying as Native. She visualises ancestry, among others, by a photograph, reproduced in light grey, of herself as a child between her parents holding her hands at a beach, the figures of the parents overwritten with columns of text describing their heritage: traumatised, starving French Hugenot, English, Irish, Sephardic Jew people attempting to find refuge in North America for her mother; persecuted, enslaved, decultured Native people for her father (Miranda xv). Conscious that she is "the result of the love of thousands" (a quote from Linda Hogan which functions as the motto of the memoir), and bitterly aware that hiding Native identity was for many years a passport to survival for her ancestors, she makes a case for replacing the imagined identitarian tribal unity, "authenticity" and official recognition with a concept of mosaic identity, which still allows for Native self-identification. "We can be whole – just differently," she writes (Miranda 136). The design of the multi-generic, fragmented memoir, which is at the same time "whole" in that its fragments coalesce to give a rich multi-faceted story, supports and mirrors this concept of identity. Additionally, the rich visual material, which forms integral part and often focal point of the text; which is reworked, retold, commented upon, engaged with in an emotional, deeply personal way, strengthens the sense of the firm connection between the public and the private, between the historical and the contemporary, between tribal community and its individual members.

The text is organised chronologically, into four parts: "The End of the World: Missionization 1776-1836," "Bridges: Post-Secularization 1836-1900," "The Light from the Carissa Plains: Reinvention 1900-1960," and "Teheyapami Achiska: Home 1961-present." The chronology, however, is often disrupted to show links and interdependencies between the past and the present in their tribal, social, and personal dimensions. While the text relies heavily not only on personal and family memory, but also meticulous research, on documents and records, the history it records and reconstructs is at the same time emotionally charged, often very personal. This is indeed history as a multi-voiced story. As Miranda declares in an interview: "*Bad Indians* is such a collaborative work – the Ancestors, Isabel [Meadows; one of Harrington's Native informants], my mother's genealogy, my father and grandfather's stories, my sister's Esselen language work, Harrington [a Smithsonian ethnologist], the help of librarians, researchers, other scholars – I want their voices heard" (Miscolta). Weaving stories is declared to be equal to human existence – "Story is everything

we are: human beings are made of words and the patterns we construct out of words" (193). The story is the only thing that will survive (122). The story, however, has to be told in its fullness and it cannot lie: hence Mirada's alternative "Mission Project," devised as a corrective to the official history and a place for long-silenced voices to speak – "voices telling the antidote to lies" (Miranda xx).

The genealogical context and the intertwining of tribal and personal histories are graphically reflected through two genealogical charts. One opens the first part of the memoir and visualises the "Genealogy of Violence", Part I of which is a chart (2), which traces all the social and mental plagues of contemporary "Mission Indians" ("Incarceration/Prison", "Child Abuse", "Low Life Expectancy", "Racism/Internalised Racism", "Poverty" and more) back to the twin sources of Spanish colonisation and the Catholic Church/Christianisation. "Genealogy of Violence, Part II," which closes the first part of the memoir, is a brief narrative fragment (33-35), which demonstrates on the example of Miranda's family the links represented graphically earlier. Here, Miranda's recollections of the physical and psychological cruelty with which her father treated her half-brother are interrupted with historical quotes in which Padres or Spanish soldiers describe parental "love so excessive that it is a vice" (34) and leniency with which Native parents treated their children, as well as their own conviction that harsher discipline was much needed. The quotes are inserted into Miranda's recollections, but separated graphically by thin black lines and a larger font. She brings the family narrative and historical quotes together in her final comments, focusing on the reflection that "we carry the violence we were given along with baptism, confession, last rites" (34).

The other genealogical chart, which closes the book, is Miranda's own detailed family tree focusing firmly on her Native, paternal ancestry. In between the two charts, the story of the enfolding of the two genealogies develops, as Miranda – through her family story – gives a powerful account of how the cruelty her ancestors suffered and the teachings in social and family relations forced on them by Spanish missionaries, and then American authorities, have been internalised and persist in contemporary Native families and communities, destroying them. Her findings are consistent with what Eduardo Duran and Bonnie Duran call the "soulwound" (24) that Native communities throughout the Americas and beyond suffer as a result of colonialism. The forced acculturation and violence, overwhelming sense of powerlessness, internalised and externalised self-

hatred, internalised pathological patterns of behaviour are handed down from generation to generation in the form the "interrgenerational post-traumatic stress disorder" similar to that suffered by the victims of the Holocaust (Duran and Duran 30-35).

The first part of Miranda's text encapsulates all the dimensions of the intertwining genealogies and the losses that colonisation has brought: the abuse and dissolution of the community, the degradation of women, the dissolution of more fluid gender structure of traditional tribal groups, the destruction of traditional family relations – in particular of the bond between parents and children based not on discipline, but on affection. After delineating the "Genealogy of Violence, Part I", Miranda introduces "My Mission Glossary", the first page of which follows graphically the "Mission Project" format; a thin black frame, which suggests page borders, embracing a title heading, brief introduction, a drawing of "Deby's mission" and Miranda's "fourth grade picture", which partly escapes the frame. The glossary itself takes up such terms as "Adobe Bricks", "Flogging", "Cudgel" or "Padre", each section illustrated with reproduced drawings from the period and historical photographs incorporated into the text. Some of the texts resemble encyclopedic entries, some are presented from the point of view of a contemporary researcher; others, however, take the point of view of the Padres, or the Natives working in the missions. Together they illustrate the everyday life in missions, full of hard work and harsh discipline, omnipresent death and abuse, and paternalising, often degrading, attitudes of the Spanish, including the Padres, to the Native people. The closing entry on the term "Padre" demonstrates ironically the unequal exchange in which abused colonised Indigenous people bring economic profits to the colonisers and get in return conversion to Christianity and more abuse. Their story remains silenced and buried as Americans take over and cultural discourses change; while the story of the Spanish missions, of the Padres and the soldiers is highlighted, even glorified, and remains in circulation. Miranda demonstrates this, also visually, through the one-page section titled "A Few Corrections to My Daughter's Coloring Book" (21), which consists of a reproduction of a page of a contemporary colouring book with wry comments and questions, much like teacher's corrections, added to portions of the text on San Carlos Borromeo de Carmelo mission and accompanying drawings. The remarks all demonstrate the omissions which result in the erasure of the realities of the life of the Native people in missions and after the missions collapsed, and contribute to the contemporary mission mythology.

Miranda comments, for example, on the use of the passive voice and other impersonal grammatical structures in the text aimed at children, which obscures the fact that the mission was built and existed due to the labour of the Native people. She focuses on the omission in the text of the colouring book of any information on the fate of the Natives after the missions collapsed, even though the state of mission buildings, and their restoration, are commented upon.

The "corrections" page is followed by two visually reproduced fragments of recollections and handed-down stories of a "Native informant" and Miranda's remote relative Isabel Meadows, written down by Smithsonian ethnologist John Peabody Harrington in the 1930s. Each reproduced handwritten page is captioned with Miranda's printed transcript of the text, and followed with her imaginative response to it. The transcript translates also original Spanish phrases Meadows used into English. Examining the material gathered by Harrington from Meadows – primarily traditional stories and linguistic material, with some historical stories handed down to her – Miranda, in her biographical note on Meadows, draws the conclusion that Meadows actively sought to give to Harrington the stories she wanted to survive for the benefit of her future community. The two stories – of the girl Vincenta who is not afraid to tell her family she was raped by a Padre, who – as a result – then escapes the mission; and of *joteras*, transgender men living freely the life of women in Native communities and often marrying men – reverberate throughout Miranda's memoir in the double capacity of a witness to violence and injustice and an inspiration to resistance. Instead of functioning as a passive informant spewing out required information, Meadows used the white researcher harvesting Native stories for her own purposes (28-29).

Harrington himself, driven by the desire to record disappearing Native languages and cultures at all (human) cost, hardly cuts a sympathetic figure, but his photographs, records and notes, ironically, do serve as a major historical source in Miranda's search for Chumash and Esselen voices from the past. In a collage-like section of framed quotes (104) titled "J. P. Harrington: Collage" and a note on and a brief text addressed to Harrington on the opposite page Miranda suggests that, Coyote-like, Harrington tricked others and brought harm, but was outsmarted at the end, the butt of his own joke: outlived by those he thought were destined to "disappear" (105), used by his objectified "Native informants", scrutinised by their descendants as he scrutinised them (105), serving posterity much differently than he thought he would.

In part II of the memoir, Miranda demonstrates that while Meadows managed to make her voice heard and her stories survive, others, in order to survive, attempted to blend in and denied their Native heritage, cultivating it only in secret, pretending to be Mexican. Lying, trying to fit in, saying what was expected became widely, though not always effectively, practiced modes of survival. As public discourse, which rests on written records, was for a long time dominated by the white voice and white, most often prejudiced and culturally ignorant, interpretations of Native lives, Native experiences reach us most often either through ethnographic, missionary and traveller records and accounts; or newspaper articles and official documents. This is the material Miranda has to work with. The Native experiences can only be seen palimpsestically, guessed at, read obliquely, or deduced from images and texts heavily burdened with white interpretations. The accounts themselves – in the memoir Miranda offers poems based on newspaper articles from the second half of 19th c. – describe different violent encounters between whites and Indigenous people, demonstrating that both cultural and physical survival was for the latter an everyday concern.

Miranda offers a reinterpretation of two images of Native women, all called "belles" in original captions, which – as the author demonstrates – was at the time in itself a widespread strategy in California to degrade Native women, who were thought about as an opposite of what the term suggested: uncouth rather than civilised, "wild" and sturdy rather that "domesticated" and delicate (Miranda 47). By juxtaposing her reading of the images to their original interpretations she shows that no image can be read neutrally and innocently as each reading is determined by the context of reading, by the cultural knowledge and cultural positioning, sensitivity and established attitudes of the viewer. The first image is a drawing, based on a photograph, of "A Digger Bell" that Miranda found in the travel account by David Rohrer Leeper titled *The Argonauts of 'Forty-nine* (originally published in 1894), recounting his journey from Indiana to California in 1849 (Miranda 44). The drawing functioned as a "neutral" illustration in the original book; in Miranda's memoir it becomes an indictment of the US policies of the time. Looking at the drawing of a young bare-breasted woman with a surprisingly modern hairstyle, she realises that the woman is probably in mourning, her hair recently burnt or cut to indicate her grief. Described as a "Digger", the term used usually to describe "California Indians … who had not been missionized by the Franciscans but

instead endured the gold rush" (45), the woman – Miranda hypothesises – might have been through tragic experiences "of one of the bloodiest genocides ever documented, one approved and funded by the Unites States government" (45), which resulted in death or enslavement of many Native people of California in the second half of 19th century. She describes the bounty hunting for Indian scalps, supported financially by Congress in 1851 and 1852, which continued till the close of the century, and resulted in death and enslavement of many Native people in California.

The other picture she focuses on was circulated as a postcard in early 20th c. (Miranda 48). It shows three very old Native women in the ruins of Mission San Luis Rey and was originally captioned "The Belles of San Luis Rey." In its attempt at witticism – the women are all over 100 years old and clearly poor, certainly not conventionally beautiful; neither are they "Mission bells" – the caption demonstrates callousness and disrespect, but also the commodification of both women and Native people.

The "bridge" between the mission period and post-secularization is Miranda's great-grandfather Tomás Miranda (73), whom she did not know, but whose story survived, whose image on an old group photograph is recognizable and familiar. With him, she enters the realm of recorded and remembered family history: first the period of "Reinvention 1900-1961", to which the third part of the text is devoted; and then, in part four, the contemporary period, up to the time of the writing of the memoir. Part three focuses on the life and transcripts of taped recollections of Miranda's paternal grandfather, Tom Miranda, punctuated primarily with typical family album photographs, which are also used, though sparingly, in part four, which includes author's own recollections. While the photographs are used as illustration, the happy images of the father, children, siblings clash with the narrative of cruelty and bitterness running through the family and Miranda's personal story. Her father, loved and hated, at times an affectionate parent, skilled at cooking, carpentry and gardening, but also violent to his family; a criminal jailed in San Quentin State Prison for beating up and raping a woman; becomes a symbol of the tragic heritage of colonisation; his "body … the source of the most precious part of our identity, and the most damning legacies of our history" (172).

Miranda's text deconstructs the idealised vision of California's early history, at the same time demonstrating the ongoing efforts at perpetuating it. She strengthens her point by closing her own "mission project" with a "Post-Colonial Thought Experiment". She reproduces first a typi-

cal "Mission Project" assignment: a letter to students and parents with guidelines, and a worksheet with question about the Carmel mission. These are followed by almost identical guidelines and questions on a "Birmingham Plantation Project" and a "Dachau Concentration Camp Project" devised by the author. Placing the projects side by side, towards the ending of the poignant memoir, strikingly demonstrates the inappropriateness of the project the intention of which is for kids to "have fun" when not simply learning about, but creatively reproducing places of misery and mass extermination. What Miranda offers instead in her project-memoir is not simply the bitter genealogy, but a vision of the indomitable spirit of survival, revival and return. Learning the Esselen language, finding and revisiting the land of her ancestors, participating in the efforts to register the tribe, help her to ground the "mosaic" identity she proposes for her tribe and Native people in general.

As noted before, her mosaic-like memoir inextricably intertwined with the memoir of her tribe provides a visual-textual equivalent to this concept of identity. At the same time, the reproduced photographs, drawings, and documents and the general visual design of the memoir strengthen the sense of the materiality of the silenced (hi)stories she is attempting to recover, the link between her and her family's story and that of the tribe, providing also – in conjunction with different types of texts – often ironic or damning comments on the colonising policies of, first, the Spanish, and then white Americans.

## 2.7. The remains of the past: memoir as a space of (re)mediation between images and stories in *What They Saved. Pieces of a Jewish Past* by Nancy K. Miller

> "… the inescapable fact that the experience of catastrophe in the past century can only be articulated from its remains, our history sifted from among these storied deposits."
>
> (Neville and Villeneuve 2)

Nancy K. Miller's memoir *What They Saved. Pieces of a Jewish Past* (2011) commences, as she herself remarks, in a drawer. "The unsorted memorabilia" she has come into the possession of, are stored away in several drawers and "compartments of the Danish modern credenza" (Miller *What They* 3). After years of being placed and displaced, depend-

ing on the current location of her family, the manila folders, with which Miller's narrative begins and from which it unfolds, contain documents, pictures, photo albums, letters, and objects. They constitute her father's, Louis Kipnis's, private archive that becomes the eldest daughter's heirloom (also by consent of her sister, Ronna). As Miller concludes, among the keepsakes collected by her father are pieces that have been resaved by him, passed down from generation to generation as the subsequent heirs made space in their homes for the remains of the past: "my father often resaved what his mother had saved, deliberately or not. Some of what I have assumed to be *his* might originally have been hers … a palimpsest of joined ownership" (Miller *What They* 26; emphasis in the original). A hoarder herself, she did not let go of any bequeathed possessions. What remains, she realises, does not always carry a clear nametag of its particular owner. Individual names may be difficult to decipher or determine, yet the legacy is undeniably stamped with the family name, which itself becomes a symbol of superimposition, a palimpsest of the lives and stories of its respective bearers.

What Miller inherits, thus, are tokens of the more immediate and the less proximate past that was deliberately stored and the past that was restored without much heed or questioning on the part of the heir. In other words, what she tries to make sense of are traces of the bygone the significance of which is spread and dispersed both in time and space. Like the lines of her family tree of six generations she was able to map, she perceives them as culminating in her, who now beholds them. As such, the tangible legacy imposes on Miller the burden to re/consider, commemorate, and re-appropriate the lives of her ancestors into her own sense of self, i.e. in terms of her self-image and her personal story, as well as in light of the history of the Kipnis clan. As such, her memory book seems to be the fulfilment of an obligation both to the past and to the future, even though or rather especially because there is no immediate heir, no child of her (nor of her sister), into whose hands she could hand over the family bequest:

> This family, over generations, had no doubt left discernible traces – in objects, documents, and finally in me. I could feel that mute history like a deposit in my body, without being able to say how, a feeling more intense, paradoxically perhaps, by the fact that I had no child who would in turn inherit the objects from me. (4-5).

Overall, Miller's memoir emerges out of the dynamics in the triad: the artefacts (the inherited objects), the body, and the story (that is made of fragments, pieces, strains of singular stories). It is in the body, Miller suggests, where the tangible and the intangible meet, where living and writing are joined by an obligation to the other. The memoir in the form of the book is to her, by the same token, a product and an extension of the body; it is both a substitute and a supplement of the body. The memoir is eventually itself an artefact that connects people across time and space. Within its bounds, with the benefit of hindsight, connections are established in the shape of a story between the memoirist and her close as well as distant family and ancestors.

Miller's memoir is composed of 17 chapters and is divided into three parts: "How I Found My Family in a Drawer" (chapters 1-8), "Saving the Name" (chapters 9-11), and "Memoirs of a Wondering Jew" (chapters 12-17). At the outset, Miller includes her family tree that zooms in on and expands the Kipnis branches. The original drawing of the family tree where framed numbers stand in for the names which are given below in the accompanying legend, Miller found in one of the Manila envelopes. The family tree is not only included as a scanned image in the memoir (*What They* 65), but also serves as the cover picture. The family tree that looks like a sketch is found among her father's papers, and Miller concludes it was drawn by her uncle Samuel (her father's older brother) and then readjusted by his son (her cousin) Julian, who is 20 years older than Miller. Whereas the cover bears the original family tree, the first two pages feature Miller's reworking of the sketch that identifies further family members she was able to trace down with the help of a friend. The family tree, that gets enhanced and corrected, thus ushers the reader into the narrative itself: a history of a family of immigrants, a tale that finds its rhythm in displacement and renewal.

The recovered artefacts are the tangible legacy that serves as portals to her family history. The chapters zoom in on particular item/s and currently pressing and relevant aspects of the past. All the while, Miller hopes to eventually link them together into a meaningful constellation of what would yield a chronicle of the Kipnis family. Her way of being "the custodian of this repository" (Miller *What They* 5) is to connect the dots between what seems to be discrepant pieces of the past – among others – the formal family portrait(s), copies of handwritten letters (in Hebrew), a blue tallis bag (with tefillin inside), a land deed for a property in Israel, and curled

locks of dark-blonde hair in a soap box. These are the most prominent and surprising contents found in the drawers. Some of them are displayed as essential visual components embedded into the narrative as photographs (they look like scanned versions of the originals). To fill in the semantic emptiness between the recovered items as they lie in front of her, raised now to the status of symbols, Miller relies on the metaphor of the spline, which she understands as that which fills "the blanks between isolated points, construct[s] a complete object from limited information" as well as "a way to navigate unknown spaces and as a way to frame the fragmentary map of my discoveries" (5). Connecting the dots and filling in the spaces between them in order to draw a circumference around the family history, she initially roots for a recognizable pattern that would also explain her own past. Miller, who is her own first reader, makes her position – vis-à-vis what has been saved – evident in the meta-narrative passages, e.g.:

> You have to – I have to – resist the fascination of collecting information for its own sake … you must develop a regimen of self-control … otherwise you run the risk – I did – of losing the plot, forgetting what you were trying to discover and why. If you are also a writer, you must ask yourself why anyone else should care about what you find, and admit that they might not. (104) / *The rootseeker's blindness: I wasn't looking for her, so I didn't see her* (75; emphasis in the original). / *How many times have I missed what was right before my eyes?* (30; emphasis in the original). / *The hardest thing to find is what you are looking for. … You don't necessarily know what it is you'll want to know* (22; emphasis in the original).

Such conclusions of a general nature as the ones above come from a person who delves into the past and observes both what she recovers and herself in the process of discovery. These passages are more often than not italicised and they stand out from the text on the first and next readings as findings about the findings. Moreover, through these meta-narrative comments Miller addresses the reader. The reader both witnesses Miller's excavation of her past sanctuaries and she is guided to the archive(s) of her own, while the meta-narrative passages serve as clues and advice as to how one may go about inspecting the past and what to expect in the acts of engaging with what remains. If the reader finds such a personal archive to be missing, the dearth itself is conspicuously significant and worth looking into (and perhaps, after all, there will transpire some traces that have been waiting to be uncovered).

Therefore, one might infer that Miller conducts her search as a sort of an experiment in recuperating the past both for herself and on behalf of others. As such the memoir both represents and performs the work of cultural memory inasmuch as, in the words of Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney (1; emphasis in the original), "the very concept of *cultural* memory is itself premised on the idea that memory can only become collective as part of a continuous process whereby memories are shared with the help of symbolic artefacts that mediate between individuals and, in the process, create communality across both space and time." In the acts of devoting her attention to the items (which are otherwise neutral for the reader) and in so doing imbuing them with importance and investing them with her own feelings and emotions, Miller narrates the story of her family in reference to, yet – first and foremost – through them. This is done both literally and metaphorically, since the items are featured as icons and images throughout the text constituting points of condensation of value and meaning.

For Miller, delving into the past has the thrills of an adventure that is of both individual and collective character. It is a riddle with high stakes, where she can exercise her detective skills in tandem with the – theoretical in general and hermeneutic in particular – skills of a literary scholar: "My love affair is with the quest" (Miller *What They* 130). Moreover, the memoir provides a space for connecting with the world at large. The immediate family history tightly bounds her to the world history: the Kishinev pogroms, the waves of migrations, World War II and the Holocaust, which she thought not to be directly connected to. "In a way," Miller comments, "the Holocaust finally caught up with me" (173). Therefore, as a quest for her own sake and for the sake of the other and the culture at large, her memoir is directed by the effort to share the story that is acquiring its final shape as Miller follows the traces that yield the familiar, strange, as well as exotic and surprising aspects of her ancestors' lives.

Erll and Rigney (2) underscore the dynamics of engagement with the past as always already mediated:

> ongoing process of remembrance and forgetting in which individuals and groups continue to reconfigure their relationship to the past and hence reposition themselves … As the word itself suggests, "remembering" is better seen as an active engagement with the past, as performative rather than as reproductive. It is as much a matter of acting out a relationship to the past from a particular point in the present as it is a matter of preserving and retrieving earlier stories.

Miller's memoir project is proffered as such an actively performative and recuperative endeavor. She makes it clear that memoir writing is at once both a record of a keen engagement with the past and itself one of its instances, perhaps even a meta-instance, since it requires all the homework (the convoluted process of recollection as well as getting hold of one's own memories in writing), housework (perusing and ordering the memorabilia and things that come from others), and fieldwork (visiting the places and spaces inhabited by the ancestors) at once.

Miller travels to Memphis, Tennessee, where she meets Julian and has one and, as it later transpires, the only talk with her cousin before he dies. Among others, while there she also befriends his daughter Sarah and her daughter Shannon. Further, the search for her roots takes her across the ocean to Kishinev, where she hopes to recover the traces of her paternal grandparents and learn what their daily life was like. She travels to Moldova twice. The first trip was not sufficient as it left her with the sensation of missing something crucial. Besides, the novel *The Lazarus Project* (2008) by Alexandar Hemon challenged her memory: she did not remember seeing certain Purim puppets in Kishinev that he describes, and started doubting her own memory with regard to other facts; though it later turned out that she did not see the puppets because they were not on display. A piece of fiction revealed a nagging void in her reality. Miller considers her second trip in terms of a not altogether comprehensible gesture, which she subsequently interprets as follows:

> [For us,] the child's game with the spool means fooling ourselves with time travel; if we cannot retrieve the past, we can go back to its places in the present. Playing with loss becomes a way to confront, often not fully consciously, what we are missing, to admit that we are missing something … in the end, by returning to the place of loss, we acknowledge our true sadness, which is that we miss what's missing. (Miller *What They* 207)

When it comes to her journeys, Miller also visits Jerusalem to see the property acquired by her paternal grandparents when they already lived in New York and which had already been sold at the moment she arrived. Finally, she flies to Tuscon to retrieve an original version of a document that came to light only as she was drawing her memoir to a close. She sees this event as a sort of a symbolic coda to her quest, a result of setting the machinery of the search in motion, of putting herself out into the open

with questions and queries the answers to which, albeit partial, finally catch up with her – they find her in the reciprocal bind of world's lost and found. So much is missed and missing that the remaining and the recovered objects acquire a value little short of a miracle. And what is missing can never be completely retrieved. Whereas she starts her journey under the sign of the spline, she closes it subdued by the symbol of the asymptote which stands for "not meeting, not falling together," forever approaching what will not be reached (Miller *What They* 208).

However, whereas the finality and completeness are out of bounds (she is unable to uncover any facts about her grandparents' life in Kishinev), in fact a lot of discoveries and accomplishments do occur. For instance, a careful study of her father's diploma makes Miller realise that her father wanted to accomplish his studies so much not for the sake of a better payment (he finished the 4-year program 20 years after taking it up), but for the sake of prestige. The motivation was the difference in family status – the discrepancy in social class – of her parents. By completing the studies, Louis Kipnis wanted to gain a better position in society and also situate himself on a par with his wife. Next, the numerous undated pics from a Summer Camp showed a different image of her father than she has created. The photos represented the side of her introvert parent totally unknown to her: active, ebullient, and talkative.

Miller makes explicit the fact that her father maintained just tenuous relations with his brother, whom she never got acquainted with. The infrequent letters are saved, but there is no evidence that the two men met on any regular basis as adults, and since Sam Kipnis left for Arizona (due to Julian's medical condition that made New York too polluted a place for him to live), they appear not to have met at all. Miller wants to find out the reasons for the severance of the ties with the Kipnis family after the grandmother's death (Sam and Louis's mother). She now sees the termination of the relations somewhat unwittingly repeated in her renaming herself Miller: taking on her mother's maiden name, after she divorced her husband (during the marriage she used the hyphenated "father's name-husband's name" alternative[7]).

The processes of recovering the family history and reclaiming the roots run parallel to Miller's engagement in bringing the unfinished family business(es) to a close. The incentives to follow the traces she is left

[7] Today, the letter K. between her name (Nancy) and surname (Miller) stands for Kipnis.

with, which themselves quintessentially, in the words of Beata Frydryczak (234), mean because they conceal, and conceal because they mean, is spurred by the following major preoccupations: the desire to learn some facts from her father's life, the wish to find out what the cause of the absence of the father's family (brother Julian, his wife and daughter) in her life was, as well as to visit the place her family hails from and see the plot of land bought by her grandparents. Miller includes the map of the dunams, two of which belonged to the paternal grandparents. The map is a sketch of white lines delineating the individual plots with numbers, on a black background (Miller *What They* 183). The property was sold before she was able to see it herself in Israel.

The work on the memoir in fact starts with the half-acre property when Miller is approached as an heir with the question about selling it. Before she does so, she needs to contact the other family members on her father's side and, as it turns out, also on the mother's side. Even though the grandfather paid for the land, the document features the name of the grandmother. Such a dynamic proves to be symbolic for Miller's search altogether, since as she goes to explore the male side of the Kipnis family tree, she keeps finding the women, both on the side of her grandfather (Kipnis) and on the side of her grandmother (Scholnick). These women help her fill in the blanks in the family history (most prominently and surprisingly the 93-year-old Brownie Ebner, daughter of Sam's wife's sister). As Miller comments on her discoveries: "Such was the force of my obsession with the Kipnis name and its genealogy. I kept not seeing – deferring, postponing – the women, and yet, it was the women who were the guardians of the story I was looking so hard to find. I wasted a lot of time that way, as I doubled back over missed opportunities" (133).

Due to the belatedness regarding her own search objectives and the initial suppositions as well as the sheer nature of research into the past, Miller's narrative oscillates between revelation and concealment not merely in terms of its contents, but also when it comes to its form and structure. As she delves into the family history, one by one beholding and describing its remains in words, she includes also the (scans of the) photographs she evokes and analyses; yet not all of them. Often it happens that Miller describes pictures that are nowhere to be found in the memoir, e.g. the picture of Sam and Julian posing as the father and son team serving in the US army together that was published in *Sacramento Bee* together with an article about them. Hence, the reader is left without the

corresponding image she could compare with the written word and, in so doing, mediate between the two as a space of interaction would thus open by way of juxtaposition of text and image.

Sometimes a picture is included without a contextualising description or a dedicated passage. Placed in the text in the same way as all the other images, it seemingly announces the ensuing corresponding delineation or reference, yet the reader finds none such is present: neither on the immediately following pages, nor any other subsequent or preceding ones (as one hastily returns to the previous pages questioning their short-term memory). Such an image without its ekphrastic counterpart comes across as a fissure, an unanchored finding that is surrounded by silence. As such, it disrupts the reading process, often also leading to a re-reading of the neighbouring paragraphs in search of pertinent information only to discover that Miller simply does not elaborate on the photo or mentions it only in passing. This is true of the picture of her father on page 31, as well as of one of the four pictures included in the middle part of the memoir that features – most presumably – her cousin Julian, her father, uncle Sam, and her grandfather Raphael (124), which the reader has to figure out on her own. Nonetheless, these are exceptions, Miller usually follows the more conventional way of organising what Silke Horstkotte (50) calls "photo-text topography … indicating a spatial dimension which the photos introduce into the linearity of verbal narrative." However the reader already acknowledges that the author is in control of her text and shows herself to exercise her mastery precisely in the way she chooses her material and the way she converts it (or not) into the text (cf. Rugg 7). As such, the photographs in Miller's memoir, "… or even the references to photographs, cue the reader into a complex play of signifiers that indicates the presence of a player, a person, upon whom text and image rebound" (Rugg 21).

In memoir as a genre in general, and in Miller's memoir in particular, pictures are often used as devices validating and emphasising the written word. As Susan Sontag pointed out: "Photographs really are experience captured … now provide most of the knowledge people have about the look of the past" (3-4). They function as palpable and documentary testimonies: "Photographs furnish evidence … A photograph passes for incontrovertible proof that a given thing happened. The picture may distort, but there is always a presumption that something exists, or did exist, which is like what's in the picture" (Sontag 5). As such they orient and regulate the imaginative faculty of the reader who is provided with referents – the ac-

tual faces, places, objects, etc. Moreover, the pictures serve as mediators not only between the past and the present for the author herself, but also between Miller and her reader. The latter has to perform two movements at once. First, she follows the author's way of approaching, looking at, and interpreting the heirloom – Miller's ways of making sense of both what lies before her and her own memoires she narrates, as well as the dialogic relationship between the two. Second, the reader occupies the perspective of an outsider – a foreigner to the family history, which she is thus not emotionally invested in. Such a distance enables a rather unbiased critical mediation among the descriptive fragments, the interpretative passages, and the images themselves. In other words, as the reader beholds the author's observations and the featured artefacts (in 2-D), she is in the position to both follow Miller's ways of making assumptions and drawing conclusions from her findings, and to draw her own conclusions from Miller's resolutions.

For the reader, such a selective inclusion of pictures, and sometimes the non-inclusion of the matching photographs, requires reliance on what Miller herself sees and understands, on how she marks and arranges her investigative territory, and on the ways she translates images into words and back again as she instigates the remediation of history through the artefacts. Yet, on the other hand, embracing the memoir as a whole, just enough photographs are included to ground the reader in the Kipnis family reality as well as to illustrate the author's ways of accessing and assessing the past. Moreover, the reader as an outsider, suddenly facing a lack or a lacuna, also gets immersed in the atmosphere of Miller's search. She steps into the aura of both findings and failings, of certainty and hesitation. While some facts are handed out almost, or as if, intact, others remain elusive, out of reach, inaccessible at the given instance.

Furthermore, the pictures that are available in a sense stand for and stand in for the missing ones. They signify for themselves and for the others, somewhat testifying to the others' presence and existence. Hence, the included pictures not only direct the reader beyond the two covers of the memoir to the world that once was and now is gone – towards particular places and actual people, but also they refer the reader to Miller's archive that is still there and can be reached, is authentic and verifiable. Miller engages the reader in and with her text but also leads her towards the contemporary world outside of it. The memoir is proffered as an honest and invested commitment to the reader and it achieves the status of a mediator

between the past and the present, between image and language, between process (recollection / verification) and result (narrative / conclusions). As such, altogether it functions as a remediator between the revealed and the concealed.

What escapes one's attention at first, but with the progress of the narrative becomes conspicuously apparent, is that Miller never includes her own pictures in the narrative. The only picture of hers is the one on the dust cover (in the back), where she is – as custom would have it – featured as the author of the memoir. That there are no pictures of her in the memoir itself is somewhat understandable, since the narrative is devoted to others – the "they" of the title – who saved items she now beholds. She looks at the past in which she does not figure as a main character. However, the pictures she herself took on her (memoir research) trips and of which she speaks in the book are not included either. One of the reasons behind such a resolution might be that they feature people who were (most probably) still alive at the time of the memoir's publication and the non-inclusion is a form of privacy protection. On the contrary, the family members, whose pictures can be found in the memoir, i.e. Rafael, Samuel, Louis, and Julian Kipnis, were dead when the memoir was published in 2011. Another reason for not including the snapshots might be that – since the book is dedicated to and contains what they saved – Miller does not add to it any subsequent artefacts or data that she herself authored and that belong to her moment in the timeline. Moreover, sometimes the pictures that are discussed but are not reproduced in the memoir are those already published elsewhere (like the Sam and Julian pic from the *Sacramento Bee*). These pictures already belong to other books or magazines – between other sets of two covers and refer the reader directly to them.

Furthermore, the principles of choice in accordance with which she selects her images for display are not entirely clear for the reader. What Miller writes about viewing and re-viewing the family photographs and about constructing her memoir suggests that she most probably included the highly informative ones and at the same time those that were, in her eyes, pregnant with symbolic and metaphorical meaning. The pictures are incorporated into the text of her memoir, none of them occupies a page on its own, and they are not surrounded (cut-off) by frames. Instead of relegating the pictures to a specific part of the memoir, she embeds them in the text. The image and the text are placed alternately and printed text does not surround the photographs on the sides. Altogether, there is no

separation between the visual and the verbal aspects of the memoir, but rather – a relatively smooth in reception – alteration verging on continuity between the two. Overall, the pictures are not supposed to interrupt the reading process and are arranged in a way that suggests their indispensability for and integrity with the text.

She reproduces/scans the whole set the way she finds it: the already framed photographs and photographs with marking/drawing on their surface or on the surface of the material they adhere to – ripped out of its previous context, a different photo-album perhaps. Among these is a framed family picture which, Miller learns, hangs in the houses of distant cousins she never knew, and thus symbolically links them all in time; as well as a photo of the Kipnis men (great-grandfather Chaim, grandfather Rafael, uncle Sam, and cousin Julian; her own father is conspicuously missing). Next, the oval picture of young Samuel Kipnis is reproduced in the book with a part of the page it is attached to and on which there is a dark line almost encircling it, which seems to have been made by a child. As such this picture is a trace that bears further traces. The same is true of the father's school report of which she publishes both the front and the reverse sides for the sake of illustrating the later added scribblings. On the back of the report, names in longhand are legible. Miller checks the facts and discovers that contrary to her first assumption it is the handwriting of Sam or Julian Kipnis and not her father's.

The photographs are not captioned or numbered in any way. They are all black and white imprints and as such do not stand out in terms of hue from the black words on the white pages. Most of the pictures are single images aligned either to the top or the bottom margin of the page, or they are printed right in its middle with the text arranged above and below it. Twice multiple pictures are placed next to one another, for instance, on page 28 there are 3 pictures of a series vertically placed one under another. In the top picture Miller's father, Louis Kipnis, holds his nephew Julian; the middle picture features Miller's grandparents, Raphael and Sheyndel/Sadie Kipnis; and the bottom picture depicts Raphael, Samuel, and Louis Kipnis – the father with two sons. Miller (*What They* 28) reveals she made a selection out of a dozen similar photographs, all taken "against the background of the same chain-link fence, probably on the same June day." The ekphrastic reading of the photos, as she zooms in on details in posture and clothes, and compares and contrasts the three snapshots, makes Miller gain aesthetic distance, at once novelistic and poetic in tone, that enables her an

imaginative movement from detail to concept, from repetition to regularity. Miller invests the characteristic fence in the background with a metaphorical dimension that provides the framework for the pictures she beholds as well as for the entire memoiristic endeavour on her part: "The story of the inheritance, we might say, starts here, next to the chain-link fence" (29). Subsequently, she makes the chain-link fence rhyme with the generational link of chain-smokers while she sees herself as the next in line. Moreover, the metaphoric significance of the chain further reverberates in what can be seen as – a more or less tightly linked – chain of family ties no one wants to break or give up on: "We are always somewhat the second savers, the keepers of the memories of others" (Miller *What They* 216).

What is saved and carried along is most often portable and relatively small. Among the things her immigrant grandparents carried from Moldova to the USA is a cigarette case and cutlery. The former, artistically engraved with the initials "RK" (it belonged to Raphael Kipnis), is first mentioned on page 49, at the beginning of Chapter 5. The picture of it appears, centre-adjusted, on the top of page 60, only as the chapter draws to the end and Miller is turning to her own position in the family chain of smokers. Thus, the word and the icon together secure a literal and a symbolic framework for the chapter titled "The *Nudnik* and the Boss" as the text is provided with its counterpart in a life-like image, and the image is secured with a hermeneutically circular interpretation that is, still further, semantically linked with the (already mentioned) chain smokers and the chain-link fence. The cigarette case is embedded on the page in such a way that one almost falls for the illusion that one can literally touch the real thing, as if the case has just been dropped there, ready to be picked up from the page. The life-like 3-D effect is achieved by way of dexterous shading.

In a similar way, Miller represents another heirloom, the silverware. In the thirteenth chapter "The Silverware from Russia", Miller approaches the story that breaks "the rule of silence in family matters" (177) in that it was actually laid out in the open and briefly talked about, and which pertains to the three forks and the three spoons her father gave her with just a remark that they belonged to the family. All six pieces are etched with dates and some bear monograms, which Miller tries to decipher. She describes the pieces in detail and recounts the story of how she found out the meaning of the embossed letters. The riddle "from the kitchen drawer" is the enigma in the shape of the initials "N and SH" (178). She figures

out that the "S" stands for Scholnick, her grandmother's maiden name: "The Cyrillic letter sounding 'SH' would be Scholnick" (180). The "N", which she could not match with any name in the family, Miller eventually learns to read in the proper way, i.e. pronounced as "JU", a tip she got from a guide on the trip in Eastern Europe. Hence, she links the "N" with "maternal great-grandfather's name, Judah" and this is what Miller eventually settles on as the initial's meaning (182). The silverware is reproduced in the memoir at the bottom of the first page of the chapter. The single spoon and the single fork placed horizontally, one over the other – first the spoon with the handle to the left, and then the fork with the handle to the right – stand for all the silverware she received. Again, using the same technique of photography that creates the 3-D effect through the introduction of a shadow cast by the object makes them acquire a life-like form (albeit the shadowing is a bit unnatural in the case of the fork). The reader finds herself almost reaching for the cutlery.

Both the cigarette case and the cutlery appear to have been downsized for the sake of inclusion in the memoir, so they are not represented in a 1:1 scale. Miller uses the cutlery everyday "as a kind of practice in memory" (*What They* 182). She no longer smokes compulsively, thus the cigarette case carries more of a symbolic and metaphoric value for her: she wrote about it in her academic works, where it served as a token of connectivity of past and present, a role it fulfils now as well. Not only a memento but also a *memento mori*, as Miller herself writes (61), the case, and by extension the cutlery as well, emphasise the role of artefacts as enigmas, riddles to be solved, which acquire the status of, as Miller (61) writes,

> a figure of speech that expresses the connection between things, and that helps me gather up and mend the fragile ties to the vanished side of the family, a story to stand in, even make up, for all the stories that were never told. I know so much more now than when I started that I had to return for another round.

The hermeneutic interpretation knows no end, and whether Miller employs her investigative faculties in her academic work or the more personal writings, the objects serve as ties to the past that the beholder makes into powerfully meaningful carriers of the bygone. With them starts the quest into the time passed, and with them it eventually ends before one embarks on it anew, each time propelled by different incentives, starting from a different angle and arriving at novel findings while confirming or

altering the previous ones. Beside their tangibility and indisputability as a proof of the past time and people, they carry a story-making potential that is difficult to let go of and through which one recollects what is no longer. The remains are, in Miller's words, "reminders of what she does not remember" (224). This is why Miller claims that – precisely because one has no memories, and for the sake of historical continuity while faced with absence – everyone saves and feels particularly obliged to resave the items cherished by previous generations down the ancestor lines. Even if what is passed on is as bizarre as one among Miller's items.

She finds a box with locks of hair inside, a peculiar if not creepy bequest. There is no answer as to whom it could belong, it is not even possible to determine the gender as the hair was saved without the follicles. In lieu of the image of the object, Miller includes a picture of the lid of the scented French soap box that it was stored in (192). In so doing, she leaves a trace of the hair's presence by extending the signification of the box that now both harbors and stands in for the troublesome inheritance leaving its contents to the reader's imagination. Stopping short at the (closed) lid Miller hides from view the proof (and simultaneously part) of an unknown person's presence (the body) for a variety of reasons. Speaking in terms of collective memory, such a picture could immediately evoke Holocaust pictures (especially the pictures now available in Holocaust museums), which Miller might not want to directly link it with, as she possesses no historical validation to make this particular hair symbolic of the Shoah. The sheer mention of the artefact and the context of the family story of Jewish immigrants itself might trigger such associations, and probably do, but in a more subtle way, incomparable with the force of a picture, and somewhat as if outside of the author's intentions. Hence, a token of an unknown life(story) is, alongside Miller's narrative descriptive passages, also metaphorically endowed with a meaning larger than it denotes. The web of connotations makes it signify the horrid collective experience that Holocaust victims in general, and the Jewish people in particular, suffered at the hands of the Nazis. Whether by intention or by (historical at that) coincidence, the form and function of Miller's narrative make it clear that in absence of the individual story accompanying (the image of) the artefact, the collective history rushes to fill in the blanks, both in terms of the most proximate as well as the rather distant associations.

Beside the pictures, the letters, the matching envelopes, and the artefacts, Miller incorporates into her text also a selection of family documents. These files commemorate milestones in the lives of their previous owners and can be digged into in search of clues both regarding the past and the present family relations. They are: the father's graduation record, the book of autographs he received at the graduation, Sam Kipnis's scrapbook that eventually materialises at the end of her research, and her grandma's photobook. Among them is also the novel written by Julian Kipnis. Thus, a large portion of the documents Miller stumbles upon come in the form of idiosyncratic variations on the book format. In fact, they are self-enclosed entities, with beginnings, middles and ends between the covers. Miller sees these books as both containing family history and being part of it. Including pictures of (only) some of them, the memoirist makes space in her book for the various family books she inherited. Especially the scrapbook and the photobook are visible and crucial books within the book in which Miller recognizes her own literary impulses and textual techniques she herself employs.

The grandmother's family photo-album that Miller's sister finds at her own house and the scrapbook of Samuel Kipnis that one day, just as she was giving up on ever finding it, arrives in mail at her doorstep, are the two book-like objects the covers of which Miller reproduces in her memoir. The first book belonged to Sheindel (Sadie) Kipnis. Miller has difficulty classifying it since even though around thirty pictures were enclosed in it, it is not really a photo album. For a lack of a better generic term, she calls it a memory book and includes a scan of its front cover, which bears the name of "The Graphic Arts Center of New York". The grandmother converted a promotional brochure into a makeshift family portfolio: "Attached to the pages with paper clips were snapshots, as well as thick cabinet cards from Russia, Argentina, and the Lower East Side" (Miller *What They* 203). Miller reproduces two pages of the open memory book which feature eight family photographs, all of women or children. None of the pictures bears any description or date and Miller was not able to determine who the people in the photos were. Instead of discussing the included photographs, she briefly mentions a picture that is not offered to the reader, and describes and quotes from the postcards she also finds in the memory book, but does not include images of. Hence, there is a sort of a divide and tension between the image and the text at this point. The scans do not really illustrate her descriptions, but rather are offered as a random sample for the reader to

imagine and wonder about the rest. Miller describes her second trip to Kishinev as also triggered by this album and the aura of daily life of the people which she wanted to learn about. Miller never exactly found the answer to all her questions, which finds its representation in her narrative gesture of not laying entirely bare the content of the grandmother's memory book. Most probably what she could not comment upon or verify she decided to remain silent about.

While the grandmother's family album links Miller with the distant family, throughout her memoir it is the ties with the closest family members that were cut which fascinate Miller. It does not escape the reader's attention that the clear character difference of Louis Kipnis and Samuel Kipnis troubles the author, while the underlying question that spurs her search pertains to the (seemingly willed) separation of the (already adult) brothers. The former was a reticent and withdrawn man, whose introvert impulses were irritating for his wife and daughters, while the latter was a flamboyant, adventure-driven extrovert, for whom there hardly existed any limits. Both, however, seem to have been outsiders, if for different reasons. Her father, Miller (221) points out, "never composed an album for himself", and her work of excavating the past consists also in providing him with one: a scrapbook where he is the centre, the main character.

By embedding a selection of the inherited photographs and documents and in so doing reduplicating them, Miller constructs and authorises a family album opening it to the public. Hence, she performs a simultaneously individual and collective need which, according to Susan Sontag (8), is the sign of the times: "Through photographs, each family constructs a portrait-chronicle of itself – a portable kit of images that bears witness to its connectedness". As she secures the family's continuity in time through the narrative, she also activates the function of the pictures, which is to "link to the past …/... indicate through their presence what is no longer here" (Rugg 21, 26). As they point towards the past and thus enable the acts of mediation and remediation between the present and the bygone, the pictures Miller includes inspire "some illusion of continuity over time and space" (Hirsch *Family Frames* xi). It is the potential for creating continuity that Miller acts on in her text, which she accentuates as a medium of time and memory. In the narrative Miller engages the personal images into the project of meaning- and sense-making, the processes and products of which link members of families and societies. As Hirsch (xii) continues: "Family pictures depend on such a narrative act of

adoption that transforms rectangular pieces of cardboard into telling details connecting lives and stories across continents and generations".

Contrary to her father, her uncle did compose a book of his life, probably driven by a belief that one needs to pay debts to the past: both his own and others'. The result of his commemorative activity he donated to the library at the University of Arizona and Miller is able to lay her hands on it eventually. The only picture of her uncle's endeavour she includes in the memoir is a scanned image of the scrapbook's cover where the words "ORDER BOOK" in capital letters are prominent against the monochrome background. The reproduction of the ordinary cover performs the function of both a proof of its existence referring one to the object itself, and a symbol of the crude collision of imagination with reality. The book, so much talked about, turns out to be nothing else but an ordinary ledger. The tangible object did not correspond to Miller's imagination of it, since it technically was never meant to be what it became. Just as her "grandmother had converted the pages of a publicity brochure into a photograph album, my uncle had repurposed the ledger as a scrapbook, a holder of memorabilia" (Miller *What They* 226). Still, even if it was a regular order book (her uncle is said to have worked for New York mafia as an accountant), the contents did surprise her more than once and clarified certain doubts. Yet, the most fundamental question that still lingers on as the narrative of her own memoir draws to a close is left unanswered. Ultimately, Miller is left without a decisive conclusion as to the reason(s) behind the severance of ties between the brothers.

In Miller's family history and in her memoir, the rule seems to be that books grow out of books and are further turned into books down the chain of transformation, while to live history is to contribute to and perpetuate its continuity. In terms of structure and content, while books get embedded in books, they are reproduced, converted, and constructed for the purposes of the present. More still, as she notices in one of the self-reflexive passages, "the process of finding the story continues to change the story" (26), while "a well-known Hasidic story" she inserts towards the end of her memoir (in italics and printed in a different font than the rest of the memoir), makes it clear that the story one tells oneself about the past is all one is left with and it functions as a carrier of past values. According to the parable (quoted from Gershom Scholem's writings), with every generation the ritual is depleted: the place in the woods is forgotten, the way to light the fire is known no longer, the words to the

prayer are sunk in oblivion. In other words, the details of a given ritual get condensed and displaced into the story itself, that ultimately still has "the same effect as the actions of the other three" (Miller *What They* 196).

Miller (207) finds herself in the position of the storyteller who constructs the family story "to put in place of her ignorance" and ends up producing her own book of memory. She relies not only on the texts that circulate in her family, but also on literary texts by others. The intertextual dimension of her memoir opens her narrative to the other's experience as the process of making sense of the past is shown to go both ways: from the tangible traces to generalizations about the nature of seeking roots; and the other way around: by way of generalizations she sometimes manages to arrive at particular details that are elusive, usually omitted. A single chapter (4th) in part 1 as well as all the chapters (12-17) in the 3rd (and last) part of the book are headed by quotes from other writers: Hayim Nahman Bialik, Amy Bloom, Rebecca Solnit, James Joyce, Alice Munro, Marilynne Robinson. These borrowed passages introduce and illustrate the character and/or the dilemma of a particular subject addressed by Miller. Within the text itself, there are also mentions of other texts (e.g., Jonathan Safran Foer's novel *Everything Is Illuminated*), Miller adopts significant passages from other writers (e.g., Annie Ernaux's family memoir *A Woman's Story*), or uses them for the purposes of scholarly interpretation of personal experience (e.g., Freud's "Beyond the Pleasure Principle"). She enters her story into the literary realm by letting the literary texts help frame the representation of her experience.

Throughout the memoir, Miller reminds the reader she is in the process of the active construction of the story and searching for "roots by the very gesture of looking for them, [she is] creating the outline of a family narrative that [she's] had to invent" (63). Invention she comes to see as a natural order of memoir writing, which to her is "a matter of putting these tiny shoots of information, these bits of archival DNA, into the history from which they were excised through silence, and imagining what might have happened if they had been put into words" (Miller *What They* 63). The proclivity to add and embellish makes the narrative, devoted to the reconstruction of the past, verge on the fictional. She notices the inclination at its strongest while researching the life of her uncle: "Here's the difference between Sarah and me: For Sarah, Sam was a real person who on many occasions disappointed her. For me, Sam is a character in the story I am creating, a character for whom I have an almost novelistic attachment. The truth

I need about him could come in the form of lies" (121). The distance in time and the fact that the family members are in fact strangers to Miller, make her fall on imaginative invention to fill the gap of the unknown.

Also, she concludes that the artefacts themselves inspire fiction-making in the midst of reconstructing family history. In the memoir, which inadvertently relies on devices developed in fiction (and may purposefully employ them), the onus is on the author to draw a line between what is real and what is imagined: "with a story whose pieces were like the silverware – stamped with history but largely mute – I had to realize that I could go only so far and no farther – without my own embellishments" (182). The tangible artefacts – the pictures, books, documents, letters, and others – that Miller includes scans of in her memoir, serve her as a starting point for her story as well as the tangible reference, always at hand, as she continues with her endeavour. While their muteness inspires words and their mystery instigates the imagination, these very features of them also remind her of the dangers of fabrication. The artefacts, thus, also function as necessary check points, directing and restraining her creative reconstruction. In a way, they are – and by the same token the visuals in her memoir are – both the openings onto the unknown past and the containers that give shape to the time passed. They are pieces of the world that is no longer and as such they are magnetizing.

Hence, on the one hand, Miller is fascinated by and ready to study family pictures in detail, attracted especially to the Barthesian punctum in some of them and its effect on her while she draws conclusions, e.g. as to the relationship between the individual family members. On the other hand, however, she is aware that the selection of the photos lifts them to the status of symbols, that they are only "a neat slice of time", carved out of it and preserved with barely any hints as to what happened just before and almost none as to what happened after (Sontag 17). It is obvious then that drawing conclusions from these in one way brings her closer to her ancestors. She can finally recognize them, herself as belonging to them, and them belonging to her. While she gives the family members her attention and devotion, uncovering some facts from their history/ies thanks to the preserved documents, Miller makes their lives present and real to herself. Yet, as she weaves the story, her narrative itself may take her away from the ancestors altogether – the aesthetic distance as a natural result of the passage of time as well as the narrative demands for events she may no longer be able to solidify with facts – may lead her to turn to invention: "photographs give

people an imaginary possession of a past that is unreal" (Sontag 9). She does turn to invention to a certain extent anyway, but notifies the reader of any embellishments. For instance, she says she basically named her no-name ancestress Sarah, so that everyone in the family tree does have a name. Also, she includes a picture of her aunt she so much resembles and imagines her relation with her, the resemblance is a starting point for creating possible stories for herself. Overall then, Miller's task, of which she is well aware, is to approximate, to be enough: enough of a collector, enough of a beholder and enough of an interpreter. The need is to balance out her engagement in the processes of reattachment and the momentum of her own life. The narrative, thus, comes out as an outcome of an equilibrium between the desire to uncover the past and the imperative to understand where and why its stories stop and need to stop.

As she is progressing in her (re)search and the work on her text, Miller notices that the final product is largely dependent on a peculiar mix of intention and fluke: "the knowledge I hungered for often came by chance; but without one's taking a first step, the accident could not happen. I had to set something in motion, set down the path, pick up the phone" (*What They*181). In other words, once one starts the search, it gains momentum, it is a self-perpetuating process that acquires a life of its own and crosses paths with its initiator every once in a while, regardless of whether the author ceases or continues to be interested in the quest. Hence, one is always under-prepared for seeking the roots. Moving as if in a fog, one stumbles upon items while trying to connect the edges of a frayed world that is gone, at the same time wilfully resurrecting it in order to make and maintain connections between the bygone and the present. While the collection of the found traces and artefacts accumulates, there is still something that is (forever) missing, yet as Miller decides, "close would have to be enough" (208).

# Chapter Three

# Hauntings: fashioning the (female) self at the intersection of the private, the public, the national and the global

> "Our ghosts did not do anything except call our attention to their presence; they did not actually do any evil that we were aware of. It was as if they were trying to rouse us to something – some kind of action, an awareness of something, some new knowledge – but had no way of telling us what it was they wanted."
> (Butala *Wild* 12)

The realization of the autobiographical narrator of Sharon Butala's *Wild Stone Heart* (2000) that some ghostly demands have been placed on her seems to resonate through many memoirs by contemporary women writers in North America. While the politics of their memoirs is multi-faceted it seems to be quite often expressed through the trope of haunting in the sense in which Avery F. Gordon has used the term: haunting as an integral, crucial element of contemporary social life (*Ghostly Matters* 7-8) through which the repressed knowledge of past or present oppressive power systems and "a repressed or unresolved social violence" is revealed, and the repression is not only recognized but reckoned with (183). "Haunting raises specters, and it alters the experience of being in linear time, alters the way we normally separate and sequence the past, the present and the future" (Gordon "Some Thoughts" 2).

Since the publication of Jacques Derrida's *Spectres de Marx* (1993; published in English translation as *Spectres of Marx* in 1994), which is often perceived as the symbolic beginning of a new critical interest in spectrality; and Gordon's *Ghostly Matters* (1997) the thematics of haunting has been quite thoroughly explored by social, cultural and literary scholars (cf. for example, Brogan, Wolfreys, Davis "Hauntology" and *Haunted Sub-*

*jects*). While ghosts and the phenomenon of haunting were culturally important and critically recognized in North America and Europe before the 1990s, the more recent "spectral turn", sometimes linked to the more or less concomitant rise of memory and trauma studies, adds a new quality to the multidisciplinary study of variously conceived spectres, which are now read as "figurations of the quandaries of history, memory, (inter)mediality, and (national) identity" (Peeren 305).

However, while the subject has been quite widely discussed in reference to North American fiction (cf., for example, Brogan or Goldman *Dispossession*), the focus of critical inquiry has not often fallen on life writing, even though it also registers resonances of various kinds of social "unfinished business" in individual experience (rare examples include Rippl et al. and Chambers). "The story of cultural haunting," which Kathleen Brogan recognizes as a "transethnic genre" of contemporary US fiction (16), finds its very broad equivalent in numerous life-writing texts throughout the USA and Canada, whose authors likewise address the specific (post)colonial North American context and explore questions of memory and forgetting, ruptures in cultural continuity, and focus on cultural mourning and commemoration in their texts. While Brogan links the genre quite specifically to texts by ethnic minority writers, she also recognizes like Gordon that, in more general terms, haunting repressed narratives constitute a core around which social groups coalesce or "organize" (18). Likewise, as we hope to demonstrate, such hauntings can organise individual experience, and conceptualisations of individual identity, also in memoirs.

The female authors of memoirs discussed in this chapter show clearly a heightened awareness of the complex, multiple links of individual lives with one another and with broader social and historical phenomena, and in consequence an awareness of the relationality of subjectivity: an exemplification of what Helen M. Buss in her *Repossessing the World: Reading Memoirs by Contemporary Women* (2002) calls "the pervasive desire of our times for less binarized versions of human subjectivity" (185-186). The "hauntings" they focus upon are of diverse nature, and while silencings and repressions specific to the North American context feature prominently, other "ghosts" rise quite often from contexts related to varied immigrant or diasporic heritage of the authors, and their individual experiences. The "hauntings" are most often a result of, a reason for, and a medium of their engagement with others within and without the family, and with the social and historical contexts they live. The new awareness, new knowledge, new

course of action they are incited to are strongly related to the construction of individual subjectivity at the intersection of gender, race, sexual identity and a myriad other conditionings and influences, some for a long time only intuited or experienced as hauntings.

### 3.1. Mapping diasporic and national identity and belonging in Dionne Brand's *A Map to the Door of No Return. Notes to Belonging*

*A Map to the Door of No Return. Notes to Belonging* (2001), a memoir by the poet, prose writer, essayist and political activist Dionne Brand, while rooted in personal experience, constitutes an extended meditation on the questions of belonging and roots in relation to the black diaspora of the contemporary world, and the space of the nation. While her meditations and conclusions reach far beyond individual experience, it is clear that the experience and, more broadly, the autobiographical process of mapping the self lie at the core of her attempts to map or otherwise render in words the experience of the black diaspora. The nature of the process is underlined and supported by the language and structure of the text – as Brand says in an interview, what matters to her the most as a writer and reader is "the way of the telling" (Olbey 88).

The paradoxical node of the memoir is the Door of No Return. The root of Brand's extended metaphor is a physical place: the door through which African slaves were leaving various "slave castles" scattered along the coast of west Africa to be loaded on ships and sent to their cruel fates in Europe, the Americas or the Caribbean, never to return. In her memoir, the Door becomes not a point of departure, but a place where one dwells, is trapped in, travels to: "a spiritual location," "a psychic destination" (Brand 1), the representation of "the fissure between the past and the present." Even though she contends that the Door is "the creation place of Blacks in the New World Diaspora" (5), it is still "a place emptied of beginnings… a site of belonging and unbelonging" (6). It is the "inexplicable space" where members of the diaspora still dwell (20), a state of consciousness and experience, which Brand describes explicitly as a haunting (25), an always present absence. As Kathy Mezei points out, Brand's deployment of the meaning of the Door stands in contradiction to the "everyday language of home and the effect of this language on the formation of identity and belonging" (93), and in opposition to the elaborations of the meaning of the door as connecting the inside and the outside, "as connection between the

world and a separate existence" (94) developed by such European scholars as Georg Simmel and Gaston Bachelard. In the case of the black diaspora there is no return, no going back through the Door. Stuck in the Door the diasporic self is also presented as being stuck in an empty room with History, which functions as the revenant, the haunting entity (Brand 93).

The black autobiographical narrator of Brand's text, in a familiar postcolonial gesture, places herself in the position of an explorer of "this creation place" (6) and as an aspiring map-maker. The map is, accordingly, represented not as a neutral representation of land forms – or in this case mental or spiritual formations – but as a product of imagination: an embodiment of desire, believes, and a result of interpretation. In keeping with contemporary approaches to cartography, which stress that maps are shaped by ideological structures and embody values of societies and individuals that produce them (cf. Harley), Brand refuses to suggest that results of her "mapping" effort are objectively true and universal. Instead, by introducing extensive autobiographical interludes, the author – a Trinidadian currently holding Canadian citizenship – stresses her situatedness. While explicitly stating that she writes from the ancestry of "the black water and the Door of No Return [that] signify space and not land" (61) and is common to the black diaspora of the New World, she claims both autobiographical and social/historical insider-knowledge. Through references to the processes of map-making coming mostly from the pre-Enlightenment era, Brand both stresses that cartography is indeed, as Harley claims, a discourse; and places herself within the tradition of postmodern mappings in literary texts. Her ambition is not to give to the reader "a complete map", as some Enlightenment and Modernist writers were attempting to do (P. Mitchell 2); rather "the map becomes a key metaphor for" the process of making sense of the world (3) and more specifically, of the space of the experience of the black diaspora.

As Peter Turchi says in his book that demonstrates similarities between map-making and creative writing, "to ask for a map is to say, 'Tell me a story'" (11). The story Brand tells is, from the very beginning, and consciously, a story in process, with only a spectral beginning and, it seems, without an end. Even though she posits the Door of No Return as "the creation place" for the diaspora, it is not the place of origin. The introductory anecdote, which has young Brand pestering her grandfather about "the people we came from" (3) and never getting an answer – his forgetfulness later described as an intergenerational gift (223) – demonstrates "a rupture in

history, a rupture in the quality of being … a rupture of geography" (5) that is the legacy of the diaspora. Africa is clearly pictured as the unknown within the self that has been taken over by imperial consciousness and colonial imagery (17). Therefore, there is no point of origin and the comfort of belonging needs to be rejected (85). The map and the journey are presented as ways of structuring the world of the diaspora, based – as Brand says – not on the notion of belonging, but rather on the "sense of … drift" (119) without a starting point other than the mythical Door, and with no destination (150). Both the map and the journey are paradoxes – to quote Brand's conclusions: "[The] misdirection became the way. After the Door of No Return, a map was only a set of impossibilities, a set of changing locations. … A map, then, is only a life of conversations about a forgotten list of irretrievable selves" (224).

Diasporic identity in Brand's text is structured by these impossibilities and conversations, not by longing for the lost homeland. While she, like Stuart Hall among others, perceives cultural identities of the diaspora in terms of "becoming" and not only "being" (Hall 394), "not an essence but a *positioning*" (395, Hall's emphasis; in the same text he defines diaspora in a similar way: 401-2), she is nevertheless fixated on the power the common point of departure, the Door, exerts over the fluctuations of those identities. Like bell hooks many years earlier, she recognizes and underscores the difference between the false assumption that there exists "a black 'essence'" and the contention that black identity has been shaped by very specific experience, "the experience of exile and struggle" (hooks 426).

History is what haunts "personal and collective consciousness in the Diaspora" (25), according to Brand, therefore it is not surprising that when early on in her text she adopts "a cognitive schema" to support her mapping effort, it is the schema of captivity (29). In keeping with the guiding metaphor of the map Brand locates the body as central to the topography of the diaspora: she contends that within the diaspora it is the black body that is "the place of captivity". In her map it functions as an extensive expanse of space, seemingly physical, but in fact spectral, phantasmatic, because "emptied of self-interpretation, into which new interpretations might be placed" (93); the body haunted and haunting. The black body is both domesticated (made familiar) and wild ("a sign of transgression, opposition, resistance, and desire" 36). It is "physically and psychically open space" (38) written over by cultural meanings. Even though it might be one's own,

it is also a cultural commodity, functions as a mask, a symbol, can be "performed" by the black and non-black alike, taken over, inhabited (38, 39). Brand addresses then the partially internalised otherness through which the black body is constructed in Western culture (Hall 394), demonstrating how the diasporic body functions "as a sign of particular cultural and political meanings" (Brand 35).

The body is then not home, it is in fact – because members of the diaspora are perennial travellers – a body in transit, "emptied of being" (93), necessarily homeless. It is always – as the part of the memoir titled *Ruttier for the Marooned in the Diaspora* suggests – a fugitive body, a body spectralised, dwelling in negations, marooned and unmoored at the same time. And yet, even though in the spirit of Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* Brand reaches "beyond … national and nationalistic perspectives" (Gilroy 7), the questions of home, of the nation and national identity have to be addressed. These are fraught questions everywhere in the contemporary world, very much so also in Canada, to which Brand, having declared her rejection of the mythology of origins and belonging, refers to, nevertheless, as "here at home, in Canada" (64).

While because of the mental hovering at the Door and the experience of the Middle Passage diasporic identities are identities in "drift", Brand at the same time acknowledges that "landing" is essential part of the experience of the diaspora (cf. Goldman "Mapping"; and Joseph). "Landing", however, is not connected with developing a sense of belonging. As Maia Joseph notes, "Brand favours the gerund form 'landing,' which suggests an ongoing process and indicates that Brand is not interested in mapping a static, universalized landscape" (77). Critics such as James Clifford and Paul Gilroy claim that conjoining routes and roots results for the diaspora in the formation of communities that exceed the space of the nation: these are communities that dwell within a particular nation-state, but maintain transnational links and take an anti-assimilationist stance (Clifford 308). Brand's text, however, seems to resist the notion of community, especially a diasporic community "landed" in a particular national context, focusing instead on tenuous transnational filiations, which are often of spectral nature, i.e. rooted in the ghostly experience of being bedfellows with history, hovering at the Door of No Return. Within Canada, she focuses rather on what she calls at one point "the thin camaraderie of the Diaspora" (102), and a shared, rather skeptical, approach of diaspora members to the host

country. Her understanding of the term *diaspora* is congruent with its relatively new conceptualisations, which recognize it as the term which "forces us to consider discourses of cultural and political linkage only through and across difference" (Edwards 31).

Diaspora and citizenship, as Lily Cho notes, inevitably exist in dissonance that results in tension (108). Brand's text registers the tension, which is clear in her distrust of origins, which – she notes – in Canada and nation-states in general function as "exclusionary power structures which have legitimacy based solely on conquest and acquisition" (65). She is critical of the desire for origins and belonging common to many in the diaspora and among other immigrant groups in Canada, which – she maintains – counter Canadian nationalism with their own claims to particular roots. "National identity" in Canada, she writes, "is a dance of artificiality" (73), ritualised and unchanging. She identifies the contemporary official Canadian discourse of multiculturalism and a fluid, open, kaleidoscopic concept of national identity, the concept of the mosaic, as false. Canadian national identity still takes, she claims, predominantly "the European shape" (72).

Describing her own experience of living in the Canadian countryside, Brand makes use, somewhat paradoxically, of the paradigm of the Canadian wilderness story. Her sense of her identity hinges on difference and an acute feeling of isolation and fear of the land, the elements and the people (Brand 143). Like the first settlers, though without the intention of settling, she finds the country and the weather forbidding, the local (in this case, white majority) population threatening. This is exemplified by the story of her car stalling at mid-day on a wintry country road. Scared to leave the car, she contemplates for a long time her choices: she can make a long trek back to her house, walk an unknown road, walk to the post office or "into the bush of deep snow … or … into the open field where I can lie down and be swallowed up by tonight's snowfall and wind" (149-150). Instead of allowing herself to be devoured by "nature the monster", a motif common in Canadian literature, she decides to go back to the social and the danger of the post office.

The motive of fighting for survival in the wilderness, identified by Margaret Atwood in her well-known book of thematic criticism *Survival* (1976) as a key motive of Canadian literature, is employed, as Myriam J.A. Chancy contends, by the majority of writers of the African diaspora living in Canada. Chancy believes that in their texts the motive is developed differently than in texts by white Canadian writers: "alienation from the land" in their case is "a psychic and spiritual disconnection" (101), not merely a

physical one. The landscape, defined culturally and linguistically by the dominant, colonising British and French cultures is additionally made even more "inaccessible" by the marginal position of the exploited black immigrant, "forever looking in" (101). While neither in Atwood's' text nor in many literary texts by white Canadians (especially in the colonial era) is "survival" defined as merely physical, Brand's memoir bears out Chancy's contention. The author repeatedly registers both her alienation from uninviting Canadian landscapes and a yawning gap, a difference of consciousness and sensibility, between herself and the other inhabitants of the Canadian countryside. The social functions here as the wilderness:

> There are ways of constructing the world – that is, of putting it together each morning, what it should look like piece by piece – and I don't feel that I share this with the people in my small town. Each morning … we wake up and open our eyes and set the particles of forms together … What I am afraid of is that waking up in another room, minutes away by car, the mechanic walks up and takes my face for a target, my arm for something to bite, my car for a bear. (Brand 141)

She perceives her own presence in an all-white town as an intrusion, which can be detected any minute, and then suddenly she will not even be recognized as human. The sense of unbelonging and danger is on the one hand identified as common to the black diaspora, forever haunted by history; on the other, it is explicitly linked both to the dominant Canadian national discourse and social make up; and to Brand's direct experience in Grenada, which structures at least parts of many of her texts (for example, the novel *In Another Place Not Here*, or the collection of autobiographical essays *Bread Out of Stone*). Brand worked for the People's Revolutionary Government of Grenada during the revolution and lived through the 1983 American invasion. Even though she survived and was lifted out of Grenada, she witnessed not only death of others, many of them collaborators and friends; but also death of her attempt "to be human … to live without historical pain" (Brand 157).

When approaching the life in Canadian cities, Brand registers a different sensibility, one more similar to her own. As in much of her prose, cities as pictured in *A Map* are places of ambivalence. They signify conspicuous consumption, which replaces self-examination, and instead of hope stand for "the end of imagination" (Brand 110). There is, however, serenity in the "anonymous desire" (124) of the city, which replaces unfulfilled longings

and unrealised fears (124). Most importantly, even though cities might be dangerous, they are also vibrant places of movement and change, where origins are forgotten, where "the old migrants transmogrify into citizens with disappeared origins" (63) (which is not necessarily good), places of intercultural encounters. Critics, such as Heather Smyth, have suggested that altogether in her works Brand seems to be constructing the city as "a model of heterogeneity that is an alternative to multiculturalism" (Smyth 274). The model is based not on the existence of communities clinging to their "calcified hyphenated narratives" (Brand 70), but rather on chance, brief encounters and acts of solidarity of individuals within the space of the city, individuals at times coming together to form "political affinity groups" (Smyth 275), which later on disperse. Her social vision is not based on coherent homogeneous communities, but rather on heterogeneous links among minority communities and individuals. The same kind of fluctuating, temporary community seems to be emerging from her descriptions of her travels and encounters with members of the diaspora around the world, which stress both difference and some points of commonality without idealising the diaspora, forging links reaching beyond the nation-state. In keeping with the concepts of drift and landing, Brand concludes that all diasporic people exist always in a tenuous relationship of "diplomatic relations" (83) to any state, be it the place they come from or the place they land in.

Brand's project of mapping the diasporic self and mapping the diaspora hinges also on the conjoined processes of reading, writing, imagining and projecting. Brand defines reading and writing in terms of desire. Reading is for her a formative experience, which registers not only on one's mind but also on the body. Not the contents, but broader ideas, the style, the moment when a seductive book is read have the power to shape the reader. For Brand's autobiographical narrator this formative role is fulfilled by two books forbidden by adults and read secretly: the text about the Haitian revolution of 1791 titled *The Black Napoleon*, which she reads when she is eight, and D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, which she reads as a young teenager. The process of furtive reading is described as sensual and savoury, as a bodily and emotional experience. In both cases the books function as the forbidden fruit. The former, found in one of the secret places where Brand's grandmother hides sweets, is the one that "makes" the narrator, it is the agent of her fall from innocence and into knowledge (Brand 187). The latter, shared with female friends, makes them realise their marginalised position as both "primitive" colonials and females (190-191).

"The canonical locations of light and dark, male, female, master, slave were broken or interrupted in both books" (Map 192). Both give Brand's narrator a sense of the complexity and fluidity of desire, and desire itself: a lifelong "refractory hunger", which she both evinces and attempts to satisfy through intertwined acts of reading and writing, defined as translation of "another body's idiom" (193). The twinned sensual processes of reading/writing are also ambivalent, almost predatory: "to desire …, to read and translate, may also be to envy, to want to become" (194).

Positioning herself as an artist, she underscores the artistry and imagination of others: writers, painters, mapmakers. She makes it clear that the world coalesces in individual experience only after it has been imagined, only after mental routes have been traced (Map 117). Creativity, also the kind of everyday creativity she observes during the festival of Caribana in Toronto, creativity always linked to the (dancing) body, is indicated to be the only way to somehow – perhaps only temporarily, perhaps only partially – get out of the Door. The body as the instrument of creativity is then not only a prison, but also a way out of it: "this dreary door …, though its effects are unremitting, does not claim the human being unremittingly" (42). All artists are involved in their times, never free of ideological baggage, she insists. Therefore her own verbal "map" supports her ideological project. It is written not as a continuous narrative, but rather as a series of fragments and sections, with no "legend" in the form of a list of contents. The sections and fragments are connected through association, and demonstrate the tentative and imaginative nature of any map, but also the concept of the map as based on misdirection and impossibility. While it has no "overarching teleological structure" (Goldman "Mapping" 23), the mapping project is coherent and revolves around the guiding tropes of The Door of No Return, the map, travel and water. Even though some "routes" are only briefly explored and then abandoned, major thoroughfares running throughout text, certain recurrent, clearly linked strands are clearly recognizable. The interweaving of the strands corresponds to the rich and tangled web of associations and disassociations among diasporic and national identities, the diaspora and the autobiographical self.

Claiming the impossible map, Brand at the same time demonstrates a deep consciousness of the fact that the map is only one of many, just as in her reflection on the brutalisation of the black body she says explicitly that it is not exclusive, but rather particular, that other bodies have suffered and been bru-

talised. She repeatedly, though briefly, reflects on the erased bodies and conceptual maps, and on the victimisation of aboriginal populations be it in the Americas, Australia or New Zealand. She comments on the fact that obscured histories of first peoples seem to reside "on the first floor of all our consciousness, all our imaginations in the Americas" (Brand 197) and builds a parallel and a link between the black diaspora and the Native peoples – both groups in a drift, directionless in the world of erased paths. This is best demonstrated by the anecdote recounted in the memoir in which a Salish woman enters a Vancouver bus driven by a black man and asks him for directions – an everyday situation demonstrating the paradox of the encounter of "the driver of lost paths", the ghostly inheritor of the legacy of the Door, and "the woman of a lost country" (Brand 220), the moment when "a ragged mirage of histories comes into a momentary realization" (221), as Brand puts it.

The spectrality of history in Brand's memoir has its source in intertwined disasters of colonisation and slavery, whose ghosts inevitably structure contemporary experience. The figurative presentation of the Americas as a haunted house, or – even worse – a haunted museum is echoed, among others, in the brief description of an autobiographical episode reminiscent of that described by Butala in the quote that opens this chapter. Brand starts with a comment on the name of the Canadian town she lives in – Burnt River – which she understands as an oblique indication of a historical disaster resulting from colonisation, an erasure of the original inhabitants of the area. The erasure is revealed as a haunting absence-presence when one of her guests dreams of a winged being passing over the house. "Whoever's [the land] was, they had passed over the house," Brand comments. "Sometimes at night I felt it pass and linger at the tops of the scrub pines. It was not a peaceful thing, though it meant no harm to me, I think" (150-151).

### 3.2. Hidden in plain sight: Sharon Butala's triple discovery of Nature, the self and the (Native) other

The context of the haunted landscape, the spectral cultural trace that lingers in the colonised and violated land itself is essential to Sharon Butala's memoirs, which are otherwise very much different from Brand's text. *The Perfection of the Morning: An Apprenticeship in Nature* (1994) dedicated "To Those Who Knew This Land in Ancient Times" and its sequel, titled *Wild Stone Heart: An Apprentice in the Fields* (2000) and dedicated "To The Spirits of the Field", are permeated by dreams, visions, signs and hauntings. The two

dedications point to what Butala's autobiographical narrator perceives as their dual source: Nature (capitalised), linked with femininity, and the obscured history and spiritual emanations of Native populations of the area where she lives, which seem to persist in the land, in nature, in the form of force fields, feelings that linger in particular places, and occasionally presences that become visions, as well as physical remnants of Native cultures: tepee rings, cairns, stone tools, a petroglyph. While Brand's autobiographical narrator's self is structured by (un)belonging, the tenuous processes of drifting and landing, favouring routes rather than roots – an identity structure necessitated by the haunting history of the black diaspora – Butala focuses her narrative of the process of becoming "the Self [she's] been in search of for so many years" (*Perfection* xvi) on the (re)discovery of place, belonging, a spiritual home in nature; and on the (re)discovery of aboriginal cultures, now lost or displaced. While Brand claims the world and the journey, Butala claims a field in southern Saskatchewan, which becomes the catalyst of her spiritual journey and the "spiritual location" metonymic of nature, which she also believes others should discover. The contemplation of nature, hauntings, dreams, visions she encounters gradually bring her – over the period of almost thirty years – to the brink of the physical world where, she believes, she can "glimpse through the veil into another one" (*Wild* 200); and to the brink of the deep knowledge of the nature of human existence and the universe.

The two memoirs are rooted in what Butala calls "a new story" she started writing for herself (*Wild* 49) when she began a new life at thirty six by leaving behind a budding university career, divorcing her first husband, marrying a rancher and moving from the city of Saskatoon to a remote rural area of extreme south-west Saskatchewan. Even though Butala's autobiographical narrator declares to have been happy to delve into her new life, she also reports going through a prolonged spiritual crisis and inexplicable tiredness precipitated primarily by the abrupt change of her social and physical environment and a suppressed longing for her previous life. The resolution of the crisis comes only after many years of meditating while wandering through and examining the field and the surrounding prairie. Additionally, Butala declares also that the process of the development of the new self comes to completion through the mediation of writing.

Smaro Kamboureli in her article on *The Perfection of the Morning* (2001) defines the pattern of the text as that of a *Künstlerroman* and that of "a *Bildung* with a difference" (42; emphasis in the original). Butala's text, Kamboureli writes, traces the process of maturation not through rational subject's

mastery of the chaos of nature and alliance with the social, but through "its resistance to culture" (43), remaining nevertheless "within the binarist thinking of the Enlightenment tradition" (45) and constituting a rejection of modernity. While the *Bildung* pattern is clear to see, both multi-generic memoirs, especially *The Perfection of the Morning*, while combining life-writing with nature writing and popular historiography, might also be described as (secular) conversion narratives, presenting the pivotal change in "convert's" life: describing the life before the conversion, a crisis precipitating the process of conversion, and the life after the conversion. The conversion narrative pattern, which dominates the texts, is combined with elements of *Bildung*.

In spite of Butala's often openly anti-scientific and anti-rationalist approach (cf. for example *Perfection* 64-66), and her reliance on feelings, signs, and numinous phenomena for prompt and guidance, her "conversion" is not spontaneous, emotional and beyond the control of the autobiographical subject. It might, instead, be defined in keeping with what Ulrike Popp-Baier calls "the contemporary research paradigm": as a "rational rather than emotional" process in which the convert engages actively and which results in a change of foundational elements of the convert's vision of the world and herself (45). Butala's autobiographical narrator, propelled by spiritual *angst*, observations and numerous prompts, often verging on the supernatural, actively researches every minute detail that draws her attention, whether it is an unknown plant, an artefact or a dream, attempting to integrate them into a holistic pattern. She looks for written sources, consults specialists and local people, walks the field for hours, ruminates, writes diaries. In result, slowly and painstakingly, she completely reorganises her perception of self. If, after Zinnbauer and Pargament, we define "self" as "a person's inner world that includes the person's beliefs about the world and about himself or herself" (Popp-Baier 45), then, in keeping with Popp-Baier's definition of conversion, the process indeed results for Butala in "a change in the core elements of this belief" (45; cf. also Butala *Perfection* 66).

The conversion process is prompted by the crisis and intense self-examination, which result first in the narrator's conclusion that she "had no Self, or the self [she] was using, not being the true one, was thoroughly unstable, easily shaken, and even destroyed" (*Perfection* 82). The process is conceptualised by the narrator as a spiritual death, "the death of the old Self" (*Perfection* 175), and simultaneous "monumental work of self-creation" (*Perfection* 82), emerging into a new life. It is symbolically represented through dreams in which the narrator travels into a foreign country

guided by a female figure of formidable authority, whom she interprets as the Jungian Wise Woman or a Goddess (*Perfection* 174-174). When, in a dream, the narrator unwittingly bites into an unwashed, unpeeled orange, the woman announces that she is going to die: "I had not known what I was doing when I reached for the fruit of this [new] life, and … it had indeed killed me," writes Butala (*Perfection* 175). She refers later to the difficult process of growing into her new life as her re-creation of herself (*Wild* 29).

Butala's new life involves also becoming a professional writer – which she never expected – of numerous works of autobiographically inspired fiction and non-fiction. Writing plays a pivotal role in the process of conversion and is presented as a necessity that could not be escaped and is laden with purpose (*Perfection* 109). When, after much vacillating, Butala's autobiographical narrator sits down to write *The Perfection of the Morning*, the text essentially writes itself, and she has a sense of the field as "aura or presence": she feels as if she is there. It is, she comments, "as if I have entered the sway of another consciousness, as if I am not alone but watched over by a presence much bigger than I am. It was as though that presence or landscape had incarnated and come to me as I sat in my office far from it" (*Perfection* 108). The process of writing has several important functions. It is described by the author in the Preface to *The Perfection of the Morning* as the factor that creates "that Self I've at last found" (xvi) and that functions as "the instrument of integration between myself and my environment" (xvi; see also *Perfection* 86). Writing functions then as a method of achieving conversion conceptualised as self-transformation – an aspect of "conversion … as a change of the universe of discourse" underlined by Staples and Mause (Popp Baier 49) in their approach to conversion experiences; the authors also find, by the way, that "biographical reconstruction is the specific rhetorical indicator for a conversion story" (Popp-Baier 50).

Besides, writing is for Butala a form of both witnessing and discursive community-building, which are also important aspects of the conversion process (Shumsky 40-42). The aim of both texts is to encourage and support others who might be going through similar experiences by validating the experiences, and to prove to "those who saw without seeing, who knew and denied what they knew" (Butala *Wild* 200) that non-standard, non-scientific ways of experiencing the world are legitimate and should be explored, that the earth is in fact permeated by spirit. The witnessing is not just a self-imposed duty; it is, Butala believes, a task she is meant to fulfil (*Wild* 200).

The process of conversion, in Butala's case, is a particularly lonely one. Beyond the text and the textual community she attempts to build, she has, for a long time, no community to fall back upon or witness to. When in 1976 she makes the momentous decision to leave the city and move to rural Saskatchewan, she leaves behind also a vibrant group of female friends, and quickly discovers that she can find a rapport with the rural community of women only slowly, incompletely, and with much difficulty (*Perfection* 30-37). She does realise, in spite of what Cheryl Lousley argues in her article (76-77), her privileged position vis-à-vis the rural women. However, in spite of the passages describing her respect for their hard work and devotion to their families (*Perfection* 33-36), it is clear that they fall short of her expectations. In particular, they seem to have no understanding of ideals informing the feminist movement of the second wave that was part of Butala's "city" background. She feels acutely the loss of an informal community of well-informed, independent urban women with whom she was sharing her struggles and joys, with whom she was "inventing a new world", "exploring womanhood … searching for and finding our power …" (*Perfection* 31).

Her early involvement in the feminist community, nevertheless, significantly shapes the process of her coming to terms with the prolonged spiritual crisis. Many of the ideas she explores and adopts – those of spirituality that links the self with the Universal Oneness, of nature as essentially feminine and permeated by spirit, of the existence of the feminine principle, the Goddess – were, at the time (in the 1960s and 1970s), current and actively explored by some feminist and non-feminist thinkers alike. While Butala consults and partly incorporates into her belief system the thought of Sir James Fraser, Carl Jung, Joseph Campbell, Robert Graves and Erich Neumann; she likewise reads Esther Harding, Marija Gimbutas, Adrienne Rich, Evelyn Underhill, Marion Woodman and Clarissa Pinkola Estés.

While nature, perceived as an essentially feminine entity, functions as the catalyst of the conversion and recreation of self, it is the rediscovery of aboriginal peoples as nature-dwellers that aids the narrator in the process. While the field becomes her "church", the dwelling place of the "holy", which once again demonstrates her numerous debts to romantic writings on nature (with echoes of both Emerson and Thoreau), she more and more often links her sense of the sacredness of nature with the spiritual systems and ways of perceiving nature by the aboriginal population of North America. The artifacts she finds, and ruminates about, as she roams the field are

accompanied by half glimpsed visions of former inhabitants of the prairie (a shaman, a cluster of Amerindian women), and the haunting, which affects the landscape, but also Butala's new house.

Enabled by the heightened sense of the importance of the natural world, she realises in time that the visions and experiences she has had might arise not only from nature itself, but from the suppressed, unspoken histories of the area (*Wild* 158). She attempts to reach beyond her personal, culture-bound experience – the attempt becomes the pivot of her conversion. The experience of haunting, ghosts, apparitions, magical presences draw her "affectively … into the structure of feeling of a reality we come to experience, not as cold knowledge, but as a transformative recognition" (Gordon *Ghostly Matters* 8), to use Avery Gordon's words.

In effect Butala, as both Susan Maher and Alison Calder contend, "deep maps" the prairie, politicising and historicising the landscape; and manages to avoid, at least partly, the pitfalls of the classic "wilderness plot" as defined by Krista Comer: the typically North American discourse in which wilderness is presented as "a nonhuman, extraindustrial, spiritual topography of humbling otherness, where biodiversity and the sacred coexist" (76). Calder argues convincingly that the constitution of nature/wilderness is different in the two memoirs, and that while in *The Perfection of the Morning* Butala's vision relies on "dualities – city/country, nature/culture" (167) and a static and idealised image of nature as primarily a source of mystic experience, in *Wild Stone Heart* the dualities unravel, and a more complex, historically and socially informed understanding of place is developed, even though nature remains a major source of individual spiritual experience (167-168). In both texts, though not to the same degree, while reporting on the settler history of the area and reflecting on the effect of contemporary economic policies on the fate of the ranchers, Butala focuses also on many other varied, criss-crossing stories that write the prairie, including its prehistory, and tries to come to terms with "the attempted or inadvertent erasure of rich natural and Indigenous histories" (Maher 55). In time, Butala declares, "I began to see … the invisible [landscape], a landscape in which history, unrecorded and unremembered as it is, had transmuted into an always present spiritual dimension" (*Perfection* 129).

The description of the process of getting attuned to the spiritual dimension of the field, and in particular the emanation of the social it projects, related to its former indigenous inhabitants, is complicated by the imagery

and metaphors used to depict it. Butala's autobiographical narrator's journey is marked by an attempt at reaching beyond, or perhaps even healing some of the scars of colonisation – one of the epiphanies she has is the realisation of the loss brought about by colonisation and the importance of the land as a source and power-horse of culture. She is careful not to offend, and seeks legitimation of her actions by consulting members and elders of different Native Nations at several occasions. Her spiritual self-discovery cannot be separated from her re-discovery of the spiritual and actual traces of the other, in particular the Native other. In time, she manages to discover that the field was the place of many skirmishes, during which numerous Native people died and were buried without appropriate ceremonies, which partly explains the hauntings and visions. She then acts on this knowledge, by inviting the Nekaneet people of the local reserve to the inauguration ceremony before converting the field to a nature preserve called "The Old Man on His Back Prairie and Heritage Conservation Area" (*Wild* 115).

At the same time Butala often relies on tropes familiar in American and Canadian cultures and literatures, and related both to the process of colonisation and the construction of the nation. She compares herself to Columbus and her quest is conceptualised as a journey of exploration and the discovery of a new land, as a physical and spiritual journey through an unknown territory, her own sojourn into the wilderness, a return to her paradisal "home" in feminised nature (cf. Lousley 71-80). She talks about Euro-North American culture and aboriginal cultures in terms of "two solitudes" (*Wild* 183) – a metaphor originally used by Hugh McLennan to indicate the cultural disjunction between Anglo- and Franco-Canadians, the two "founding nations": a misnomer in opposition to which the term "First Nations" has been forged in Canada. She even weaves into her story the image of a Peaceable Kingdom – a social and national ideal which recurs in Canadian literature and culture – through her depiction of her husband Peter sleeping out in the open, surrounded by domestic and wild animals (*Perfection* 27; 42-43): an image she is profoundly moved by. While the image has a personal significance to her, in the broader context of her memoirs it is difficult not to be attentive to its broader resonances: it visualises the "pastoral ideal" identified by Northrop Fry (848) as pivotal for the literary and cultural quest for Canada as a Peaceable Kingdom, and expressed among others through the idealisation of the Prairie West as a paradisal region where simple, happy people live close to nature. The quest and the idealisation were linked to the construction of the colonisation of Canada as a peaceful process of settlement.

Butala is very much conscious of the history of colonisation, the tragic history of the First Nations, her own positioning as "a daughter of the oppressors" (*Wild* 196). She is well-aware of the dangers of cultural appropriation and stresses her inadvertent, but necessary complicity with the project of colonisation; she tries to record the complicated comings and goings of different Native nations through the area. At the same time, she is comfortable with generalising about Native cultures (Lousley 79), and proclaims that "this land makes Crees of us all" (*Perfection* 100). The statement, as critics have noted, "collapses indigenous cultures into nature and instinct … denying indigenous people voice and agency" (Lousley 80) and "at once annuls the Crees' cultural specificity and discloses the complicity of [Butala's] project with modernity, and colonialism as its civilizing mission" (Kamboureli 41-42). She describes how, not even knowing that the act is part of "Plains people's tradition of worship" (*Perfection* 127), she is at one point compelled by a force to "pay homage to each of the four directions" (*Perfection* 127). This leads her to reflect that these and other coincidences between her thought and behaviour and Native approaches and ceremonies are not culture-bound, but rather "come out of Nature itself; come with the land and are taught by it" (*Perfection* 128). She even, for a while, in her imagination becomes an Amerindian woman of a distant past, which allows her to find new tepee rings (*Wild* 25). In the end, Butala declares herself "a hybrid": brought up in and still clinging to European culture, but admiring and partly embracing a generalised indigenous perception of the world, which has its source in the land. She ends on a note of hope and reconciliation, and with a resolution to witness. She writes: "our 'two solitudes' have come to some kind of an accord, some kind of liveable recognition of each other's rights and wisdom" (*Wild* 183); and adds, with the zeal of a true convert: "I would try to transform the gift given to me by the field into a payment and a tribute to ease the wild stone heart of the earth" (*Wild* 200). In the end, then, while she deep-maps the prairie, she still takes for granted the existence of purely "natural" nature unmediated by culture, and land free of social signification and culturally imposed meanings, and holding answers to most profound existential questions, which can be glimpsed by, though not fully communicated to, the lone sojourner

Butala's texts, though widely read, have been justly criticised for their failures to completely escape the exigencies of cultural conditioning and cultural tropology in the way they construct the autobiographical narrator and her journey (cf. Lousley, Kamboureli, Calder). In their recording of the intertwining discoveries of the self, nature and the (Native) other, the texts

register, nevertheless, the logic of haunting understood as "this socio-political-psychological state when something else, or something different from before, feels like it must be done, and prompts a something-to-be-done" [; as what] refers us to what's living and breathing in the place hidden from view: people, places, histories, knowledge, memories, ways of life, ideas" (Gordon "Some Thoughts" 3). Butala's aim is exactly to illuminate what has been hidden in plain sight; and the private conversion journey of her narrator closes with a constructive response to the prompt: on a private level "something" is done – the spirits of the dead are put to rest through appropriate ceremonies of aboriginal people; and a nature reserve is created. The private, delineated within the limited area of the Saskatchewan field and relatively uneventful country living, and not against a broad context of national or international social upheavals, is in those journals intimately – if sometimes controversially – linked to the social and the political.

### 3.3. Spectral shadowing: history and politics in three Hungarian-Canadian memoirs

Similarly to Brand's and Butala's texts, the memoirs by Elaine Kalman Naves and Anne Porter, Hungarian-Canadian authors, address the issues of how history and global politics inform personal identity.[1] The history of Hungary, as part of the history of Central Europe, is very frequently the history in which its "greatest moments tend to be defeats and losses" as Anne Porter in her *The Ghosts of Europe* (231) claims. As emigrants from Hungary, Anne Porter and Elaine Kalman Naves try to relate their personal perceptions of who they are to where they come from through autobiographical accounts of their relatives' and their own life stories. This stance is typically taken by authors of memoirs. Marlene Kadar, in her encyclopedic definition of various genres and conventions within the broad concept of the memoir, suggests that memoirs "take their lead from the historical circumstances and personages that have influenced the memoirist's recollections" (663). Thus, as Smith argues "the moment of self-narrating" (108) is a crucial one in the construction of the self in such historically and politically based life-writing discourses. According to Manuela Constantino and Susanna Egan, who compare the life-writing narrative practices of Dionne Brand, Janice Kulyk Keefer and Anna Porter, "the very activity of passing

[1] This is an extended version of Drewniak "'It's Our Shared".

stories down through the generations creates a family history as well as the history of communities that no longer exist and that can be brought back to life through such combinations of memory and imagination" (99). Thus, the fusion of the global politics filtered through the private experience of events and the memories of events handed down in the form of stories, results in a unique blend of a private memoir and a political reflection related to the author's self-positioning as a member of a certain community. This blending of the personal and socio-historical dimensions is also matter-of-factly highlighted in the subtitles of the memoirs by Kalman Naves and Porter. In the case of Anna Porter's *The Storyteller. Memory, Secrets, Magic and Lies* (2000), the subtitle reads *A Memoir of Hungary*, which suggests the permeation of personal storytelling, family secrets and lies with a wider background of Hungarian history. Elaine Kalman Naves is the author of two memoirs addressing the history and family legacy of her family as Hungarian Jews. One, *Journey to Vaja* (1996), is subtitled *Reconstructing the World of a Hungarian-Jewish Family*, which overtly suggests a broad referential frame resulting from the urge to "[place] her family's triumphs and tribulations against a backdrop of Hungarian history" (note from the editor; 1996 edition page i). The other, *Shoshanna's Story* (2003), in turn, is subtitled *A Mother, a Daughter, and the Shadows of History*, which again emphasises the interconnection of these two aspects. The personal story in the selected memoirs is narrated against the historical and socio-political background, which can be associated with the overshadowing of one's identity by the "big" history. The identity formation processes in the case of Porter and Kalman Naves are always related to their identity as Hungarians and additionally for Kalman Naves as Jewish Hungarian.

Born in Budapest in 1944, Anna Porter (formerly Anna Szighety) emigrated to New Zealand at the age of twelve. She graduated from a university there and in 1969 she moved to Canada, where she started a career as an editor, owner of a publishing house and a writer. She has established Key Porter Books and has written a few books, life-writing texts and non-fiction, among which are *The Storyteller: A Memoir of Secrets, Magic and Lies; Kasztner's Train: The True Story of Rezső Kasztner, Unknown Hero of the Holocaust*, which won the 2007 Writers' Trust Non-Fiction Award and the Jewish Book Award for Non-Fiction; and *The Ghosts of Europe: Journeys through Central Europe's Troubled Past and Uncertain Future* published in 2010, which received the 2011 Shaughnessy Cohen Prize for political writing. Porter's choice of the title of her political and historical text, *The*

*Ghosts of Europe*, further implies the existence of the ghosts of history influencing and haunting the immigrants from the troubled corners of Europe, which are also confronted in the memoirs.

In *The Storyteller*, the awareness of history and identity are firmly located in the political history of Hungary and especially the two pivotal events: the Treaty of Trianon of 1920 and the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, but Vili Rácz, Porter's grandfather, is a born storyteller and he sketches all the epochs in his storytelling. In fact, as a born storyteller, he becomes the most important person for the young Porter: the one who reveals history and identity to his beloved granddaughter and also the one who invites her to the vast world of eponymous secrets and lies which then haunt her throughout her adult life. Thus the leitmotif of haunting running through the selected texts acquires a specific meaning here. Porter does not find herself in the spectral void of repressed knowledge, of the "not knowing" who she is or where she comes from. Rather, she is granted access to who she is through the past stories "many true, a few imagined, others invented so long ago that they had become true" (*Storyteller* 4).

Vili Rácz's stories become the most important part of the historical legacy Porter inherits. His storytelling sometimes collides with other accounts which are obtained from reliable sources. What she learns very early from her relatives, Vili in particular, is the fact that "Victors write history" (*Storyteller* 28) and as a result of that if one desires to learn it, one has to seek other sources, hidden springs and rivulets of stories passed down from generation to generation by word of mouth. This conviction haunts Porter all the time during her adult life in Canada. As she decides to keep her promise to her grandfather to go back to Hungary and the parts of Hungary claimed by other countries, she does this exactly with the aim of confronting the ghosts of the past. During one of the meetings with members of her family, an elderly cousin Edy, she receives a book on the Treaty of Trianon which "purports to tell you everything about Trianon …" (*Storyteller* 27). She talks about the way Hungary was stripped of the land, its people and resources in order to "pay for the war" (26). Porter admits that she "bring[s] the book home to Toronto, where it sits, somewhat incongruously next to Paul Johnson's *History of Europe*, a book that mentions Hungary only once in its discussion of the Treaty of Versailles. Trianon, so important in Vili's story, barely deserved a paragraph" (28). Since early childhood, Porter has learned to accept the voids and gaps in official history and has known that certain things are not spelt out loud. These spectres lurk from the past and compel Porter to excavate them in her memoir. In her

discussion of Patricia Williams's *The Alchemy of Race and Rights* (1991), Gordon sees Williams's book as "a project where *finding the shape described by her absence* [her grandmother] captures perfectly the paradox of tracking through time and across all those forces that which makes its mark by being there and not there at the same time" (*Ghostly Matters* 6, emphasis in the original). Porter's task is a similar one, except that in her memoir she is cajoled – because this is what ghosts do (*Ghostly Matters* 6) – into her grandfather's stories, through which she can have access to the family history as well as to the history of Hungary.

According to the legacy Porter received from Vili Rácz, the entrance to one's identity is through memory and language. The two form the basis for constituting who the person is. Owing to the memories he preserved in his stories and the language he cherished till the end of his life, Vili himself never stopped being a Hungarian despite the persecutions he suffered from the Communist regime. He treated this task seriously and pleaded with his granddaughter to do the same. Porter recounts that "he explained that, being who we were, we had a number of obligations he took seriously, and he expected me to do the same. 'The old families,' he said, 'are responsible for keeping the memories … The stories we tell and our language. Stuck between the Slavs and the Germans, and a thorn in both their sides, we have endured" (*Storyteller* 55). As a result of such an understanding of her legacy, Porter decided to write first a biography of her unusual grandfather, a multi-skilled Olympic athlete and champion, a Hungarian entrepreneur who in the very short period of freedom in the interwar period published magazines, invested in the movie business and became a true family hero, who had always been passionately involved in the construction of Hungary's well-being as a state.

Vili Rácz and his family were obviously severely punished after 1945 for their political involvement and their bourgeois roots. They were deprived of their comfortable flat, all Vili's business was banned, and he himself was imprisoned. His daughters were also affected by the new regime's hatred for the kulaks and entrepreneurs. One of them, Leah

> [i]n the summer of 1950 … was raped and beaten in the cab of her four-ton, diesel-engined distance hauler and left by the roadside. The three men climbed back into their trucks, still laughing at her bourgeois ways. It seemed, they said later, that Comrade Leah Rácz hadn't understood the new spirit of sharing. They had shared their apricot brandy as sweetener for her coffee, and that was all they had. Afterwards, it was her turn to share what she had. (*Storyteller* 34)

The second daughter, Sari, emigrated from Hungary together with her husband and daughter to Austria, which was not only a reason for distress but also a source of mysterious silence as "we were told not to talk about them in public" (*Storyteller* 35). These voids of trauma and exile were the shadows of the past, the "ghostly matters" the family had to cope with though never in public, never officially.

It was also Sari, apart from Vili, who later on was able to tell Porter the story of her mother, Pucci, the favourite daughter of Vili's. As the smartest of all the daughters Vili decided to send her to a convent school, in which she learned mathematics, Latin and French as well as manners of a high-class lady. Pucci, however, hated the school so much that, when still a teenager, she married the thirty-two year old István and as Porter explains "[a] year later I was born, and a few months after that István was gone" (46). The mystery of this marriage as well as an apparent lack of love between her parents was yet another spectre Porter had to confront in her life. Pucci's second marriage was likewise not dictated by love. After Vili ended up in prison for his capitalist and bourgeois attitude, thanks to her marriage of convenience to a Communist Party comrade, Pucci managed to pull him out of it. He never fully recovered physically and mentally from the experience and that was the final straw which precipitated their decision of emigration.

Constant persecutions of Vili as a capitalist and member of nobility form a focal part of the story. He was, however, not a one dimensional person and should not be perceived only as a noble estate and business owner. Porter also discusses his devotion to sports and his dislike for the old fashioned "court life" (58). According to her, for Vili there was "too much bowing and scraping, too much talk of fashion" as he "didn't care at all for silk puffed pants" (58). He was fond of education, getting to know the world, history and languages. His motto for life and another component of his legacy for his granddaughter would be his belief that "A man is as many men as the languages he speaks … Each gives him its secrets. In each, he can be a different person. Language, you see, is what makes us who we are. Each language declares its own history" (*Storyteller* 58). Such a perception of language is pivotal for Vili. Language is a tool through which one can understand and contact the world; it was thanks to his vast knowledge of languages that he managed to correspond with numbers of "friends, writers, historians, former parliamentarians, poets" (341) when in exile, to read books on Hungarian history, newspapers published in the USA, New Zealand and Canada, South America. It is also a mysterious key to the haunting world of the past, a key to his own but

also Porter's 'Hungarian' identity as "[i]n the evenings he still told me stories, but most of them were now [in exile] about his magical childhood" (341). The absence that he felt was not only the nostalgic affectation for the times gone by. His refusal to abandon Hungary spiritually was visible in jail and in exile in New Zealand as "he never thought of [New Zealand] as home. It never changed who he had been. He didn't apply for citizenship. He didn't even see himself as an immigrant. When he talked of the great Rákóczi in exile to the end of his life, never able to return home, I know he was thinking of himself" (342). He was haunted by the past and he was conjuring up the ghosts himself through self-identification with Hungarian heroes, Hungarian history and Hungarian spirit. He deeply experienced the absence of his Hungary. This experience was almost sensory (Vili changed physically as well as mentally after coming back from jail) and it was closely bound to historical events such as the already mentioned Treaty of Trianon, and then rooted in politics of post-1956 Hungary. The country looted so many times in history, deprived of freedom and its best people, was for Vili the greatest treasure which almost disappeared and he believed that it had to be preserved in memories and language because as a result of politics and history he believed that "[i]t is our shared memories that make us a country" (*Storyteller* 55).

For Porter, the task of collecting the stories in a book and simultaneously rediscovering her own identity is synonymous with mapping the unknown territories both in Europe, while undertaking a trip to Hungary and Transylvania, and in her heart, when she tries to map her identity and emotions towards herself (and her daughters) as Hungarian-Canadians (and Canadians of Hungarian origin)[2]. As Renger suggests, "[m]apping works within and serves a particular social, cultural and political context" (61). Therefore, although Porter performs mapping in locations outside Canada and refers to the post-WWI and Post-1956 periods in particular, the metaphor of mapping can be applied to her rediscovery of her grandfather Vili, as well as her redefinition of herself as a Hungarian-Canadian. The latter could only be done through facing the ghosts of the past and trying to embrace the Hungarian part of her identity through writing a memoir. This task of mapping a territory of one's heart while treading the once abandoned landscapes excavating ghosts and stories of the past, which Porter

[2] Though Porter describes her daughters as Canadian, she also acknowledges that "[s]till, the old stories that filled my childhood have made their way into theirs" (*Storyteller* 343).

undertakes, responds to Vili's legacy resonating in Porter's mind. The metaphor of traveling in order to know oneself and learn as much about the past as possible is both a conclusion to Porter's memoir and a memento Vili left for her: "Life is … a succession of loose ends, roads leading nowhere in particular, tales unfinished, so many left unexplored, endless possibilities lighting the way you travel. Often we don't even know what happened until the train we should have taken has already passed by. Whatever you do, grab the rail, jump on. Don't live a half-lived life" (*Storyteller* 370).

Another prominent Hungarian-Canadian memoirist addressing the issues of politics and identity is Elaine Kalman Naves. Born in Hungary in 1947, Kalman Naves grew up in Budapest, from which her family emigrated to London in 1957, and then in 1959 to Montreal. Kalman Naves pursues a career of a freelance columnist, editor and writer. She has written several books including two memoirs: *Journey to Vaja: Reconstructing the World of a Hungarian-Jewish Family* (1996) and *Shoshanna's Story: A Mother, A Daughter, and the Shadows of History* (2003).

In his *Spectres of Marx*, Derrida claims that "haunting is historical" especially in Europe "suffer[ing] from a certain evil" and as a result of that "[h]aunting would mark the very existence of Europe" (4). Drawing upon Derrida's conceptualization of spectrality, Lorek-Jezińska in her book on hauntology in female drama, adds that "[t]he ghost comes to signify the processes of being haunted by the past, by other texts, and by those who have been marginalized or silenced. The spectral figure operates as a site of … transference of memory, trauma, melancholia or loss …" (7). It is exactly the history of the family which Kalman Naves excavates in her memoirs that becomes the source of haunting she experienced and which pushed her to collect the memories and stories of her family into two volumes of life-writing. Since her paternal ancestors had come from northeastern Hungary, from the village of Vaja, it is this particular site as well as the fact that they were farmers, orthodox Jews and "Hungariophile[s]" (*Journey* 7) which appear to be the central aspects of identity Kalman Naves addresses in her texts. It is the history of this place, her father's stories about the past, the Holocaust and the politics of post-1956 Hungary that contribute to the processes of identity formation and rediscovery of Hungary, her own Jewishness and predominantly the confrontation with the ghosts of the past she feels compelled to face in her adult life.

In *Journey to Vaja*, Kalman Naves clearly defines the reasons for and also results of being haunted by the ghosts of the past. Among the chief

motives is the way she was brought up by her parents, and especially her father, who was a born storyteller who devoted his free time to telling his little daughter stories of the past. Kalman Naves, who left Hungary at the age of 9, recalls that her father worked during the week away from home "inspecting the state network of collective farms" and devoted Sundays to his daughter. She would refer to these moments as "story-days when he told of places and people I didn't know: places we didn't visit, people I couldn't know" (*Journey* 3). Apart from the stories about his place of origin, he also included stories from the Bible, which, in a fused form, became important components for the development of Kalman Naves's sense of self. She claims that in her "child's mind these stories jelled into a complex amalgam of the biblical and the apocryphal. Fables of Hungarian-Jewish farmers fused with accounts of the Garden of Eden and the sacrifice of Isaac. My confusion reflected a central truth in my father's thinking. For him Vaja represented both the beginning of the world and a lost Garden of Eden" (*Journey* 3). Along with the stories, there were photographs[3] gathered in "albums of the dead" (4), which Elaine and her sister had easy access to. The pastoral stories of the past are thus blended in Kalman Naves's mind with the knowledge of the ancestors' deaths during the Holocaust. This constitutes one aspect of haunting she experiences. She claims: "I don't remember ever asking what had happened to the people in the photographs. I always *knew* that they had died during the war, that they had died because they were Jewish. Sometime in the course of my childhood I must have also found out how they had died, but I don't remember that either" (*Journey* 5, emphasis in the original). The storytelling and digging into distant history was for her father the only escape from the harsh reality of Communist Hungary. Kalman Naves compares his relishing these stories to drinking fresh, cool water from a crystal-clean well. She claims that her mother did not really like this idea of constantly revisiting the past, her sister "swallowed small gulps" and she herself "took to the tastings naturally, as if by osmosis" (*Journey* 4).

Even before the family left Hungary in 1957, the bond with her father resulting from his storytelling produces in Kalman Naves a sense of being haunted by the stories and her ancestors. She states that her mother all the time protested as she was strongly against "peopling my head with ghosts.

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[3] For a specific use of paratexts in *Journey to Vaja* cf. (Drewniak "Changing Traditions").

It was hard enough to be married to a man whose emotional life was so deeply rooted in the soil of Vaja without having one's child haunted as well" (*Journey* 5). It was, however, too late to object to what had already happened. The symptoms of haunting are later on both physical and psychological. When she is grown up, Kalman Naves decides to tape her father's remembrances and stories from the past, the calling which is intensified when her own daughter is born. Responding to "the siren call of the family's past" (6), she starts translating the tape scripts and finally writes her memoirs. This fascination produces, however, severe somatic symptoms resulting from conjuring up and engaging the spectral past. At one point, she confesses she "conjured up" (6) her two uncles to learn more about their lives as small children together with her father. It triggered the unavoidable associations, which made her visualise her father in different places and situations. Alarmingly, she started to see him "flit[ing] from pastoral scenes on the estate to Auschwitz, from a wedding feat in Vaja to the clearing of Buchenwald" (6). Equipped with the recordings, letters her father disclosed, an article about the history of the Jews in Hungary, and accompanied by the spectral presence of the ghosts of her uncles, she fell prey to an obsession about writing the story down. It took a toll on her physically and she "fell ill and spent six months on the floor, immobilized by back pain and a kind of psychic paralysis" (9).

The spectral presence of the past produces visible, physical symptoms and pushes Kalman Naves to write her memoir. In her *Journey to Vaja* she goes back to the 19th century to explore the roots of her family but she also includes wider historical panoramas of certain regions of Central Europe, once populated by Hungarian Jews, troubled in the course of history by their neighbors. Reaching far into the Middle Ages, she builds a family mythology studying the ancestors' genealogical trees, names of estates and villages, traditions as well as the global history of Central Europe and Hungarian Jewry. In doing so, Kalman Naves insists on finding the living, the ancestors who would inform her own existence with the potential of life rather than death. Undeniably it is the Holocaust which serves as the most traumatic catastrophe for the family, but *Journey to Vaja* aims at transcending this disaster in order to privilege life over death and find the source of identity also in the stories which go back to *life* and not to death. On the cover of the book, Helen Epstein, the author of *Children of the Holocaust* herself, claims that Kalman Naves wants "to build a bridge over the Holocaust between the world of pre-war European Jewry and contemporary

Jewish life" (book cover of the 1996 McGill's-Queen's University Press edition). Following this statement, the memoir needs to be seen as a materialisation of the desire to ascribe one's identity to a viable basis. It is by no means a plea to forget or diminish the Holocaust. The majority of Kalman Naves's relatives who entered WWII died in it as well. Since the two uncles, Paul and Feri, desperately conjured up in her reveries, were dead (Paul died in 1945 in Buchenwald, where he was transferred from Auschwitz; Feri in 1944 in Concentration Camp Flossenburg), her father Gusti was the only one to visit his homeland. However, even though he went to Hungary a few times after his emigration to Canada, he never went back to Vaja. Therefore, Kalman Naves decided to confront the ghosts of the past also by traveling to Vaja and the region, and writing the memoir.

Upon her announcement in 1983 that she intends to go to Hungary, her father strongly opposed her idea: "I forbid you to go! … They will kill you if you set foot there. … They'll call you a member of the land-owning classes … They'll tear the clothes off your back. You'll be thrown into prison … Mark my words, you'll never see your family again" (*Journey* 206). Kalman Naves admits to have been shocked by this reaction as if he took the "role of crazed oracle" who "sucked [her] into the vortex of his paranoia. Uncannily, he had pushed all the right buttons" (*Journey* 206). When she finally goes to Hungary nothing like that happens, of course, but Kalman Naves's account of her travel is not a story of a "success", as she frequently feels nothing (214), which is a source of a certain disappointment, as if instead of ghosts she finds a vacuum, a spectral vortex that can be equally disturbing. Secondly, she admits to two important discoveries. Since she travels across Hungary with some members of the family and friends, she actually confesses her experiences are filtered also through their memory and their stories. Moreover, as a historian, she planned to remain objective and to collect hard data to write her memoir. This aim is abandoned; she declares: "I cannot find it in me to be detached or objective" (247). She bases some of the ideas, memories, and stories on the memories of the dead that are passed onto her in various ways. Kalman Naves also stumbles over the painful legacy of the Holocaust, especially when she confronts the story of her stepsister, Évike. In 1944 she was taken to a gas chamber at Auschwitz with her mother, who strictly followed the advice of their father not to ever leave the child behind. This nightmare, which haunted the family during the years to come, is juxtaposed with historical records in an attempt to explain the reasons for such massive deportations.

Kalman Naves also refers to Churchill's declaration that "the annihilation of Hungarian Jewry was 'probably the greatest and the most horrible crime ever committed in the whole history of the world'" (*Journey* 251).

Nonetheless, Kalman Naves's memoir is a text in which she rediscovers her identity as a Jewish-Hungarian Canadian. The only way to deal with haunting memories and stories was to visit the sites of memory, Nora's *les lieux de mémoire*, which do not exist in its pre-WWII shape any longer (Nora 7), as well as to write the family history down both for herself and future generations; thus privileging life over death and proving her ancestry and legacy. These notions are voiced by her in the introductory chapter of the memoir, in which she declares: "I needed my birthright, a right not merely to living parents, but to parents who exist in a continuous chain of generations with a past that reaches beyond a single cataclysmic event" (*Journey* 9). These words confirm Eaglestone's contention that "the way in which we remember plays a large role in constructing our identity (personal, social, communal), and in turn our identity shapes in no small way how we remember the past, cope in the present, and hope or expect the future … *identity without memory is empty, memory without identity is meaningless*" (74-75, emphasis in the original). Memory narratives, these referring to the Holocaust in particular, can then be perceived as examples of how identity is constructed through storytelling, which can be seen as analogous to remembering (75).

In *Journey to Vaja*, Kalman Naves also employs a variety of texts to support her inquiry into family's past. Apart from photographs, maps, genealogical trees and other visuals (cf. Drewniak "Changing Traditions"**)** she includes a whole range of texts in the form of mottoes, quotations and references gathered in the final sections of Notes and Selected Bibliography (265-269). This definitely enriches the historical background the author as a historian wants to give credit to. One of the quotations, included in the epigraph page and serving as a motto for Kalman Naves´s memoir, reveals the nature of the spectral haunting experienced by the author. It also draws upon the interplay of hauntology and intertextuality (Lorek-Jezińska 7-10). The motto is a fragment from Toni Morrison's *Beloved:* "Where I was before I came here, that place is real. It's never going away. Even if the whole farm – every tree and grass blade of it dies. The picture is still there – if you go and stand in the place where it was, it will happen again; it will be there waiting for you" (*Journey,* epigraph page; Morrison 43-44). While the novel is a classical text embracing the way the past haunts the present gen-

erations, the specific passage chosen by Kalman Naves informs her confrontation with the ghostly past. She admits that in confrontation with the past of her own family, she cannot remain simply a historian: "the historian has become no longer a memory-individual but, in himself, a *lieu de mémoire*" (Nora 18, emphasis in the original).

While *Journey to Vaja* predominantly explores the legacy of the more distant past and former generations, in *Shoshanna's Story: A Mother, a Daughter, and the Shadows of History* (2003) Kalman Naves confronts the theme of mother-daughter relationships, her own earliest memories of immigration to Canada and rediscovery of her own Jewish legacy and identity. In this memoir, Kalman Naves concentrates on the story of her parents as well as on the rendition of who she was as a child and an adult person both in reference to her country of origin, which she left at the age of 9 in 1956, and Canada. Forever marked by the Holocaust, Kalman Naves's mother, Shoshanna, who was released from Auschwitz in 1945 physically devastated almost to the point of death, tried to live her life as if the past did not exist. After many troubled months afterwards, when she worked in an orphanage, and learned that she would not bear any children, losing hope for her husband's miraculous recovery from Russia where he had perished years before, Shoshanna gets involved in a love relationship with Gusti, whose wife had also been believed dead. Shoshanna and Gusti start their relationship in 1946 and contrary to the previous diagnosis Ilushka (Elaine Kalman Naves) is born in November 1947. Márton (her official husband) reappears in Hungary and contacts Shoshanna in June 1948. During a meeting with her husband Shoshanna declares her love for Gusti, and Márton decides to desist from the marriage. In due course they receive a formal Jewish *get*, a divorce, which, however, still does not allow Shoshanna and Gusti to marry as Gusti has to wait five years for the official statement of his widowerhood. As Shoshanna's personal life falls into place, the political situation in Hungary starts to pose another threat.

Shoshanna and Gusti's marriage in December 1949 almost coincides with the beginning of show trials and purges of the Communist party from Jews. The year of 1950 marks the tightening of the terror in Hungary, its culmination still to come in 1956 (*Shoshanna* 35-36). In 1953, after an abortion, Shoshanna is pregnant again. At the time "producing children was a comradely obligation in the Soviet Union. Hungary fell into line, too" (*Shoshanna* 49). As a result, Shoshanna's pregnancy is a guarantee of a

modicum of safety for the family, in spite of their Jewishness, as it is perceived as a political act of dedication to the Communist homeland.

Although Gusti works in a state-owned company, which is seen as a sign of hope for the family, he is also burdened with the memories of the past. Recollected in *Journey to Vaja* and mentioned above, the story of his former wife and daughter who perished in gas chambers haunts him throughout all these years of the tightening grip of the Soviet terror. As Kalman Naves claims, he "felt as much guilt on their [his wife and daughter's] account as if he had devised the crematoria himself" (102) because of the fatal advice he gave his wife to "never let go of the children's hands" (102). He thus becomes trapped in the survivor guilt trauma (Krystal 1995 78f.). Burdened with this catastrophic event, he tries to live a normal life although when the Revolution of 1956 starts Kalman Naves sees her father as the one for whom "the war never ended ... Twelve years later, when the Revolution broke out, the wounds were … fresh" (*Journey* 101). Gusti, and his family feel trapped. On the one hand, the Revolution brings about the promise of freedom, on the other, Gusti is very well aware of the atrocities committed during revolutions and wars. The Hungarian secret police ÁVO, "who penetrated every corner of Hungarian life, spying, reporting, kidnapping, torturing, killing" (104) consisted predominantly of Jews in high ranks and they were to be executed first by the revolutionaries. This could be expanded to other citizens of Jewish origins. On top of that, Gusti had a cousin in the police, who one day begged them to hide his daughter, which they did.

The 1956 Revolution was also about purging Hungary from Soviets and Jews, which became quite quickly apparent to the family when they stayed in hiding in the cellar of their tenement. Kalman Naves recalls one event which marks the beginning of fear and for her father a mere continuation of the Second World War experiences. It was when they heard one of the neighbours declaring that "[w]e'll keep the lampposts for the run-of-the-mill type of Jew, the type that didn't get finished off in '44" (116). Seeing 1956 as a "coda to 1944" (118), the Jewish families in Hungary felt endangered despite the fact that the Russians took control over the country bringing back the ÁVO into power. It was a sign of the perpetual solitude and terror for the family and their relatives. Some of them decided to baptise the newly-born children and some headed for the West.

Shoshana, who had some relatives abroad, was soon involved in preparations for the journey West. They were aware of how many people died and that the fights continued in the country so the decision was made although,

to Shoshanna, Gusti seemed reluctant as he opposed leaving the country illegally and advocated official application for passports. This led to a conflict between the parents. Shoshanna accused Gusti of fear and screamed into his face: "You love this accursed country despite everything. You have no intention of leaving" (121). Gusti admitted to being afraid: "You're right, I *am* scared. I'm scared to take children over minefields and through barbed wire" (121, emphasis in the original). Owing to Shoshanna's brother, Duved, based in London, who sponsored the train tickets, and her sister Vera in Montreal, they knew someone was awaiting them on the other side. Hungarian authorities also agreed to let them out of the country via Vienna. Gusti, being much older than Shoshanna, was definitely also fearful about starting a new life far from his own country at 51, without the language and with the conviction that this meant leaving Hungary forever. Shoshanna, who was 38, still hoped for new prospects, a new life and new possibilities. Despite her resilience, she had to bear the political and personal repercussions of their decision. Kalman Naves notes that the act of leave-taking influenced the family relations as well: "once we surrendered our Hungarian identity papers at Hegyeshalom and were left with only the *laissez-passer* stamped with the dreary letters that spelled out 'stateless,' he turned to my mother with an expression of mournful gravity. 'Thus far, I have brought you myself. To the edges of my world. From here on, you're our captain'" (122-123).

With such a political decision and the atmosphere of fear and panic in some, especially Jewish, circles of Hungarians, Shoshanna and Gusti knew there was no going back to Hungary. The second part of the book (starting roughly in the middle of the narrative) is mainly the account of Kalman Naves's temporary stay in London (where they remained for a short period of time) and her life in Canada. The project of identity construction, or to use Buss's term "*re-e-merging* process" (17, emphasis in the original) consists of reclaiming her Jewishness suppressed as a result of the silences of her parents due to political tensions in Eastern Europe and the trauma they went through; as well as emerging as a strong and independent woman.

Her femininity and independence must be formed simultaneously in reference and in opposition to her mother – a very strong woman, whose power is dominant in the family as a result of her position of the "captain." In her essay on mother-daughter relations and language, Brodzki deems the mother "the pre-text for the daughter's autobiographical project" (157). Buss goes on to claim that "[a]s a child's first significant Other, the mother engenders subjectivity through language; she is the primary source of

speech and love. And part of the maternal legacy is the conflation of the two" (17). With the above statements in mind, Kalman Naves's recollection of her own conversation with her mother about her first husband, Márton, whose picture she saw in an album, serves as a comment on the process of gaining identity, on the mother-daughter relationship and predominantly on the ways in which "the daughter's text, variously, seeks to reject, reconstruct, and reclaim – to locate and recontextualize – the mother's message" (Brodzki 157). When they were already in Canada and Shoshanna demanded that her daughter should discuss her boyfriends with her, her mother offered her the whole story, the "unwanted information" (*Shoshanna* 211) about her first husband and the circumstances of her decision to stay with Gusti, Elaine's father: "You decided for me. The fact that I got pregnant with you! That's why I didn't go back to Márton, though he still wanted me. Because you were Gusti's child, not his" (212). Shoshanna's legacy for her daughter included these bitter outcries of blame imposed on her daughter as well as her rather negative attitude to men, despite her otherwise happy marriage to Gusti. Kalman Naves admits that the guilt stayed with her forever, the "zygotic, embryonic me was responsible, because I had somehow managed to get her pregnant with myself" (212). She decided to listen to Shoshanna's stories about other relatives, beautiful girls who were never to blame for such decisions, but she refrained from sharing all her views with her mother.

As a result she had to listen to a multiplicity of stories, nearly all of them referring to the Holocaust and traumatic memories from the past. At some point, Kalman Naves, whose growing-up daughters also had to listen to the stories, loudly protested against this constant talk of the dead. She acknowledges the fact that at least when her own daughters were small, Shoshanna "censored herself in a way she didn't when I was a child" (261). She goes on and comments on this in the following way:

> I resent that now, resent that she didn't hold back for the sake of my innocence and unclouded youth. I chafe under the burden of the stories I've been listening to all my life with a petulance that I know ill befits a mature adult. As if, were she [Shoshanna] able to keep quiet, it would all go away somehow. The truth is that I have to recognize that the bony outline of Shoshanna's stories is my bedrock. It is what I am built on. Willing to disappear would be to risk disappearing myself. In the end, is what Shoshanna has asked of me so terrible? She has made me into her audience, subjected me to a chain of words linked one to another. What

> I heard were anecdotes, attenuated memories – many I would rather have shut out – but still only stories. Yet the stories weren't stories when she lived them. They were real life, her life, demanding to be remembered. (261)

It turns out that their relationship was mostly based on her listening to Shoshanna's stories of the past. The dark aspect of the past, the Holocaust stories of many members of the family, has overshadowed Kalman Naves's life. It has also enabled her to construct herself in accord with and against her mother. She is an heiress of her legacy but she also rejects and creatively reclaims this heritage. If "the autobiographical project symbolizes the search for origins, for women a search for maternal origins" (Brodzki 157), then Kalman Naves digs for origins through stories.

Besides her womanhood and feminine independence, Kalman Naves also explores the Jewish origins in her memoir. The first phase of the family's exile is England. From the very beginning of their stay there, Gusti together with his family are advised to try to fit in as "[b]eing a Jew is a social disadvantage in this country" (142), which makes Gusti reply in an uncompromising tone: "It was more than a social disadvantage in the country that I left. That's why I left it" (142). Soon, due to the fact that both Gusti and Shoshanna are unemployed, they decide to join Shoshanna's sister Vera in Canada. They became even more convinced that they should leave Europe in 1958, when they learned about the death of Imre Nagy back in Hungary as well as the intensification of the Cold War. Moreover, Elaine attended a Christian school in England and the fact they she quickly assimilated in it, acquiring English fast and having new friends, made her parents uncomfortable about her identity. Although they were not a religious family, they were troubled by Elaine's refusal to accept her Jewish origins. At 11, Kalman Naves's attitude to her Jewishness in an English school is best summarised by her statement: "My Jewishness, my troublesome Jewishness, that conveniently no one knew about here …" (162). Her identity is still to be questioned, analyzed and challenged as she is torn between her grandfather's stories of analysed a proud Hungarian on the one hand (as described in *Journey to Vaja*), and the silenced, yet tangible Jewishness of the family, on the other.

The Canadian chapter of their lives starts in winter 1959 when they arrive at Shoshanna's sister's house. There, Shoshanna's family is welcome very warmly, however, from the very beginning they are informed that Vera and her husband, Pierre, "have had enough of dying" (169) and as a result

they bring up their children as Christians, because Vera "want[s] [her] children to have a normal life. [She doesn't] want *anything* in their background to brand them as different. To brand them as *inférieurs*" (169, emphasis in the original). Consequently, Shoshanna and Gusti are offered jobs and lodgings on the condition that "they [are] not to parade their Jewishness publicly" (169). Since Kalman Naves hears all these conversations, it is clear that her identity is troubled even more. Not only are they to enter the alien world of Canada and start their lives from scratch, but they are also asked to deny their identity. Their Jewishness, which was despised during the war, was not questioned even then. Difficult as it seems, they are pressed to adopt "the Protestant alias", which Gusti finds unacceptable: "I was born a Jew and a Jew I will die" (169), he announces.

They stay with Vera and Pierre for some time but they do not accept the adoption of the disguise of Protestantism, on which Vera insists. It seems that the only person who craves it is Elaine. When Shoshanna goes to the school headmaster to talk about Kalman Naves's education, she declares that Elaine desires to be a Protestant like other children, but the astute principal says: "This is not Nazi Germany, Mrs. Kalman. You've come to a free country. … [t]here are Jewish teachers on the staff of this school. No one will ever persecute your child here" (177). Although Shoshanna's daughter protests and declares a desire to take up a double identity – "I could be a Jewish child at home! … I could be a Jewish child in private" (176) – they finally make peace with their Jewish identity.

The most important moment which turns out to be formative for Elaine and eventually nails down her self-awareness as a Jewish person of Hungarian origins living in Canada is the Six Day War in Israel in 1967. The joy which she observed on her father's face was a confirmation of her identity and choices. She acknowledges the fact that the choices were not easy and she admits to bargaining with God and Jesus many times in her childhood in Canada over her faith and identity. The family tried to merge the Hanukkah celebrations with the celebration of Christmas: they had "a Christmas tree and Christmas presents to celebrate the birth of a great Jew" and "the Hanukkah menorah at the same time" (205). She also confesses to "skirt[ing] the territory between the Star of David and the Cross" (206). In spite of these ambivalent emotions, she manages to emerge from this crisis. Fueled by the memories of the war, the constant talk of the camps and Hitler, the exile and their various experiences of intolerance, she finally accepts her Jewishness. Despite the political and historical backdrop against

which Kalman Naves defines herself, ultimately "all became clear for [her] and [her] Jewish identity fell firmly into place" (205). In adult life, although she marries a non-Jew, she drags her husband into her faith, and realises that throughout her life she has been heading towards the following self-assertion: "Not matter what I did, no matter how much I wanted to, I couldn't divest myself of the albatross of our Jewishness. I could choose to regard the Jewish star as a tattoo of shame or a badge of courage. Either way, it was mine" (206).

In her two memoirs, Kalman Naves depicts her identity through the political and historical tensions connected with the history of Central European Jewry and Hungary. Her search and inquiry into her identity is therefore highly informed by the grand history and the personal, familial thread woven into this fabric. In the article "Mapping the Diasporic Self," Maria Noëlle Ng claims: "If the postmodern subject is multiple and decentenred, then the diasporic subject is even more so. To articulate its existence and reality, the diasporic writer needs to contend not only with the disconnect between meaning and words, but also with the many historical and social trajectories that constitute a diasporic identity" (35). She goes on to suggest that this task is "enabling and empowering" (43). Ng's experience and origins are completely different but her statements match Kalman Naves's self-discovery. Through writing the memoirs, *Journey to Vaja* and *Shoshanna's Story*, she does not only get to know her parents and revisits their traumatic past, but predominantly comes to terms with the haunting ghosts of the past which overshadow her own identity.

Complicated as the history of Hungary is, the country has been perceived by both Porter and Kalman Naves as a cradle for their identity as Jewish-Hungarians, the identity which in exile had to be reclaimed. Due to fear, resentments and political resentiments, Hungary has been neglected by the West, and Transylvania – the multicultural region divided among Romania, Hungary, and the Ukraine – has become a taboo topic in Hungary and has not been widely discussed in the West. Eva Hoffman in her travel book *Exit into History* mentions this phenomenon quoting one of her Romanian interlocutors: "this was the place where many Jewish people lived. Now there are none left. I think about them a lot. Sometimes I go to look at their houses, their cemeteries … Sometimes I think I can feel their presence" (276). Hoffman comments:

> I didn't expect, in this tucked away corner of Transylvania, to hear about a once thriving Jewish community that disappeared with the war. But the Jews, it seems, are the specter haunting Eastern Europe these days, the inescapable absence, an absence that is itself felt as a presence, a wrongness … Perhaps, if we don't always have a conscious conscience, we have a subliminal one… (276)

The conscious choices of the two writers, who have taken up memoir writing in order to reclaim their roots, and making them thus the pillars of their own identities, are realised through writing. Memoirs become, however, narratives which dismiss autobiography's "absolutist view" (Larson 20) and as such are stories of self-narration which expose "a conception of personhood, *identity* … which, because it cannot be 'remembered,' must be narrated" (Anderson 204, emphasis in the original). Both Porter and Kalman Naves, as journalists and historians, are well aware of the fragmentary and rugged nature of the memoir, as well as the power of storytelling, which these three memoirs emphasise.

### 3.4. Fragments and ghosts, fear and release in Meena Alexander's *Fault Lines* and Joy Harjo's *Crazy Brave*

In the words of Thomas Larson (190): "Memoir is judging the paradoxes of public and private truth-telling in our time" and it might be that it is both a vehicle and a form of record and register of a rather substantial cultural shift towards "a truth telling mode … which questions traditions of myth-based literature, in the same way that our society may be moving toward science, which counters traditions of myth based belief" (Larson 191). Not everyone is a memoirist and not everyone is equally involved in the initiation of changes and revisions. As Peter Burke (67) writes, "When cultures meet, some individuals and groups participate in the process more than others." Currently, with an increasing regularity, as some of our preceding discussions demonstrate, the memoirs have been authored by women who are migrants, who stand between and among cultures, languages, and discourses, or between what is considered the centre and the margin, be it ethnic and/or academic minority. They focus on the points (and themselves as mediators) of cultural contact and its repercussions. A majority of them have come to the United States or Canada from other countries, they are bearers of unprocessed legacies, and/or they are the marginalised Native

inhabitants who have been colonised on their own lands. Thus, these memoirists' cultural identity is said to be, in the words of Kaup and Rosenthal (xiii), "not so much defined by their unique place of origin as it is by multiculturalism," by being exposed to (and sometimes forced to yield to) different values and ways of living in, perceiving, and making sense of the world around them.

It is in the – whether chosen or forced – contact with the other culture that self-reflexivity is augmented while one cultural and linguistic reality is shed light on by the other. The juxtapositions and conflicts that emerge from such cultural contacts generate the overall tendency towards a synthesis of the incongruent elements on the part of the memoirist. The memoir serves the author as a platform for the unique construction of a coherent and cohesive, narrated/narrative self who sets out and – in a more or less linear way – manages to weave the disparate parts together. Most often, a certain wholeness, an idiosyncratic pattern, or a dialogic balance, is worked out in the memoir. When it comes to the memoirs by Native North Americans, however, their stories, although expressed and communicated in the English language, are more often than not an expression of a particular tribe's reality and worldview rather than an attempt at a synthesis of the (broadly understood) white majority with Indigenous values and acts of meaning-making. While the authors do not cut themselves off from North American reality, itself plural and propelled by opposites and paradoxes, their focus tends to fall on the reclamation and validation of silenced histories, values and experiences; on demonstrating the injustices they have suffered; and on regaining visibility as rightful and indispensable original constituents and makers of North America, rooted in and in communion with its soil as its irreplaceable heirs, especially through their strong affiliation with the past and their way of inhabiting and cultivating the land.

Memoir, considered by some a non-elitist genre[4] has been adapted and revived by the women writers to explore the possibilities of both contestation and confluence, since it seems best suited to accommodate the reciprocal dialectic and the dialogical forces at work at the crossroads of culture(s). Also, memoir as a marginal genre has become a platform for voicing the coming-of-age story of the girl becoming a woman. Since the texts also exist "to propel a sense of belonging to a formerly suppressed group,

[4] In comparison to the novel, "memoir is still treated with relative neglect, leaving an impression that it needs no explanation" (Couser 8).

or to dismantle the ideological suppression of marginalized identities" (Schinko 181), the memoirs participate in the collective challenging and responding to ideological restraints.

As such the memoirs enter the politics of culture, they become the means of reasserting individual identities through their life-stories that are accounts of active contestation of ingrained yet inaccurate expectations. Also, they are literary platforms of expression for the disagreement with imposed and controlling master narratives as well as testimonies to inequality, exclusion, violence, and abuse the authors have witnessed or been subjected to. The women memoirists rely especially on the disruptive potential of intentional hybridity that welcomes human initiative and prepares the ground for resistance in the process of the favourable dialogical construction of identity. This is done with a view to juxtaposing and instigating an interaction between seemingly, especially at first, equally valid and upheld views and beliefs to witness and analyse their confrontation: "With intentional hybridity two points of view are not mixed, but set against each other dialogically. This can be used, for example in the aesthetic domain, 'to shock, change, challenge, revitalize or disrupt through deliberate, intended fusions of unlike social languages and images' (Werbner 5), thus creating … a collision between differing points of view on the world" (Ackermann 12).

This, in turn, gives a sense of participation, empowerment, and self-guidance that the memoirists feed back to and elicit from the reading public. Just as for Bakhtin "hybridity delineates the way in which language, even within a single utterance can be double-voiced," the contemporary memoirist relies on this ambiguity at the heart of language, culture, and literature in order to explore the affiliations, disavowals, rhymes and reciprocal glances among and between the dominant discourses and their own experiences (Young 18). What is more, the women memoirists modulate their voices not so much in terms of a counter-culture or counter-narratives. Rather, they position themselves as rightful members and equal participants who actively contribute to the make-up of today's culture and literature, especially in terms of what it means to grow and live in today's world, and what it means to grow and live in today's world as a woman.

Thus, the fact that "national cultures in the global condition are co-produced increasingly from the perspective of minorities" (Ackermann 12) finds its extension in the way the contemporary memoir is increasingly written by and from the perspective of individuals with multiple ethnic roots. Meena Alexander's *Fault Lines* (1993/2003) and Joy Harjo's *Crazy*

*Brave* (2012) are two distinct yet also conspicuously representative personal narratives focusing on the current revisitations of the past, recovering its traces, coming to terms with their meanings in the (pro)long(ed) aftermaths. Also, or perhaps simultaneously, both authors explicitly approach the ghostly matters, whether these assume the proportions of an *unfinished business* or a phantom existence/persistence in the presence. If we agree with Young (3) that "fixity of identity is only sought in situations of instability and disruption, of conflict and change," the endeavour of the memoir to seize the (past) self with the view to releasing it (from the haunting past) into the future, makes it a vehicle of working through the critical and decisive moments of contact and conflict, relevant for particular memoirists as (hybrid) individuals, as members of specific cultures, and as heirs to specific legacies.

Meena Alexander was born in 1951 in Allahabad in India. Currently, she is Professor at CUNY and at Hunter College. Alexander was a prodigious child; at 15 she already published her poems in Sudanese newspapers. She gained her PhD from the University of Nottingham; her dissertation on the construction of self-identity in English Romantic poetry was published as *The Poetic Self, Towards a Phenomenology of Romanticism* in 1980. She returned to India, where she taught at various universities. Finally, she moved to the United States where she resides with her husband and their two children. Alexander's memoir is a testimony of her multiple uprootings – both geographical and psychological displacements. These have created the titular fault lines in her experience and identity and, by the same token, in her narrative.

The concept of the fault line is an extended metaphor in her memoir. We notice its (paradoxical) function as a centre from and around which her story develops. Then, the fault line functions also as the underlying motif and interpretive tool in reference to which Alexander forms and formulates her past. She defines it at the very outset of the memoir with reference to Oxford English Dictionary – as a deficiency, a defect, a break – and as such the fault line serves her as a formal and stylistic point of reference in the memoir. First and foremost, however – in a literal and metaphorical way – it is a concept that adequately defines her identity: "That's it, I thought. That's all I am, a woman cracked by multiple migrations. Uprooted so many times that she connects nothing with nothing" (*Fault* 2). Fault lines, fragments, shards of recollections, always incomplete, forever displaced as

well as scattered in the myriad of places – "Allahabad, Tiruvella, Kozencheri, Pune, Delhi, Hyderabad, all within the boundaries of India; Khartoum in the Sudan; Nottingham in Britain; and now this island of Manhattan" – are what she feels constitute her identity while they leave her wondering about the challenge of how to "spell out these fragments of a broken geography?" (Alexander 1). Searching herself out and mapping herself in these places, Alexander re/collects the pieces of her life.

Her memoir, composed of thirty-eight chapters, progresses in sync with a loosely understood chronological order, which means that her narrative is composed according to a timeline yet with a certain latitude. Overall, in *Fault Lines* the reader is placed in and sets out from the past and moves into the present, while being simultaneously engaged in a variety of proleptic and analeptic narrative movements. Crucial is the fact that Alexander's memoir is an idiosyncratic diptych. The first part was published as a complete memoir of 13 chapters (about 230 pages) titled *Fault Lines* in 1993. The 2003 edition of the text includes an entirely new section titled *The Book of Childhood*, which is about one hundred pages long and is composed of 25 chapters that revisit – time-wise, place-wise, and concept-wise- – the territory she has charted in the first part. As such, the first and the second parts of the memoir explore roughly the same memory terrain. With the benefit of hindsight, however, the reader understands that the first version, as detailed and vibrant as it was, came to constitute a preparatory narrative work for Alexander, a first venture into the past in order to draw its circumference and verify its contours, as well as to order the narrative of her life and set certain verifiable facts straight. The result was a valuable, fully fledged literary narrative of her life, which nonetheless turned out to be a preliminary, or an interim, outcome of her memory work.

Meena Alexander in fact wrote her memoir *Fault Lines* twice. As such her memoir, with regard to structure, corresponds also to the idea of a palimpsest that she came to regard as the other, equally strong and decisive, organising principle in her life: "in all my work place is layered on place to make a palimpsest of sense" (*Fault Lines* 284). The way she (re)considers her life and her text in the second part of the memoir echoes a realization she emplots in the first part: "As the bus passed Harlem Meer an image came to me: and with it, as with all images now, in the dislocated life, landscapes superimposed each on the other, a veritable palimpsest, time's turmoil" (*Fault* 125). The layered structure of her narrative implies almost a hieroglyphic manuscript not only the reader but, first and foremost, she

herself needed to interpret by piercing through the signs, symbols, and metaphors with reliance on which she configured and narrated her experience. In other words, she needed first to do the memory and narrative work to continue with a (psychoanalytic) self-interpretation.

The second part of the memoir is a result of such an archeological work of immersing herself in the recollections: the ones she already represented in the first part and which further lead to and open up onto the memory spaces/layers she has not yet ventured into. Her own text (the first memoir) becomes a trigger for her further excavations. In quite a circular and indirect way, the buried secret – in light of which she needs to rewrite or rather write over her first attempt at her life-story – is unveiled to her. What prods the surface (of her awareness) are sharp inklings in unexpected circumstances. As the mechanics of memory would have it, it is the seemingly accidental present occurrences that summon the bygone and urge for its reconsideration. The first pang of premonition that makes a significantly deep cut in the smoothness of her finished narrative and in the regularity of Alexander's thoughts occurs while she happens to behold a set of questions prepared within a study group by people who read and discuss her memoir:

> the unease stayed with me. I had the gnawing feeling that under the story of multiple places, of a life lived between languages and cultures, there was something more. That actual dislocation and exile, though true as it was, had served me as an emotional counter for a darker truth, bitter exfoliation of self, something that as yet I had no words for. (*Fault* 238)

Later, it is another text, a paper she prepares on the novel *Mathilda* by Mary Shelley, which features the theme of incest, that activates this earlier discomfort anew. The seemingly unrelated academic text about a work of another writer instigates in her poignant bodily sensations of agitation and disquiet, which eventually make Alexander realise and clearly recognize beyond doubt the past violent abuse by her grandfather.

If the personal is political,[5] the memoir brings what is concealed out into the open. More often than not it entails, either exposed from the very beginning or quite buried, individual traumas of abuse, violence, harmful neglect, repressed information, loneliness and abandonment. The memoir

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[5] The phrase was made popular with the publication of the paper by Carol Hanisch "The Personal is Political" in *Notes from the Second Year: Women's Liberation* (1970) (http://www.carolhanisch.org/CHwritings/PIP.html).

as the medium of transformation of private experience into a public display seems best suited to accommodate and confront what haunts and hurts the self. Each memoirist faces certain ghostly spectres of what has been left unprocessed, misrepresented, and misjudged. These fill her personal stories and as such want to be acknowledged for what they are and in so doing released. Moreover, not only the personal is revealed, but through the personal, the collective might be shed light on. According to Helen Buss, the genre "tells much about what remains silent and unexamined in our public culture" (*Repossessing* xxv).

In *Fault Lines* Alexander represents the vicissitudes of memory in general and traumatic memory in particular. It seems she first needed to map the territory of her fissured past, to find herself in the places she inhabited. The work of memory required the connection of the dots between the numerous places on the world map as well as the trajectories among them. While she retraces her steps (in literal and figurative way), she pins down the events, gets her facts straight, and gauges her emotions and inner development. In the self-reflexive passages that suspend her inquiries into charting her own physical presence(s) on the world map, Alexander's attention is consumed by self-interpretative activity. One of her conclusions is that the innumerous changes of location, i.e. her multiple migrations, were the source of disruption(s) in her identity forming process. What she experiences now as ruptures and flagrant discontinuities in her memory and self-perception are tokens of being uprooted, torn away from contexts she was just making herself familiar with. For example, the (already seemingly final) move from India to New York seems to have taken a heavy toll on her: "My two worlds, present and past, were torn apart, and I was the fault line, the crack that marked the dislocation" *(Fault* 15). The relocation to New York in general and Manhattan in particular, just as any of her previous changes of abode, she claims, required a lot of physical effort and mental strength:

> In Manhattan it is hard to make the bits and pieces hold together. Things are constantly falling apart. The city is dispersing itself, jolting, juggling its parts. There is no ideal of poise in its construction, just the basting together of bits. Sometimes the bits burst open, split apart, and one does not quite know how to go on. How to construct a provisional self to live by (*Fault* 177).

It seems that the description of the place defines the state Alexander finds herself in to a greater extent than it describes the borough of New York itself. Unavoidably, the accumulated yet unarticulated material of her past and her present condition overfloods her senses and determines her perception of the new place. Manhattan, previously uninhabited by her and thus unmarked by individual memories, reflects to Alexander what she carries within. She reads herself onto the city and since there is too much of assembled material in her self to welcome the new; the old bursts at the seams demanding to be sorted out and integrated. Moreover, we notice that Alexander seems internally pressured into holding on to a centre that would hold her, a focal guiding point to which she could attach the fragments of herself, or rather towards which they would gravitate of their own accord, so that she could smooth them out or they would seamlessly arrange themselves yielding a familiar pattern in which she could see her reflection the way she wishes to behold her face in the mirror and see a certain wholeness. In a harmoniously constructed outside she hopes to find help with collecting and composing her inside. In fact, it seems this most recent displacement activates certain ghosts in her she was not even aware of being haunted by. Not finding the firm core in the spaces and places of the city, she turns to poetry; in the constructed patterns she attempts to reach a reliable stronghold. Yet, eventually, it is Alexander's reliance on the narrative medium and the memoir as a hybrid genre that allows her to unfold her life-story in an adequate manner, whereas her poetry as a (representation of) experience is accommodated into the order of the story as well.

In the process, particularly in the writing of the second part of the memoir, Alexander sees the fault lines (that already fossilised into a defining metaphor delineating her experience) as a dominant marker that sets a rhythm for both her narrative and her identity construction. Looking into their potential for signification she acknowledges also their concealing property. In a paradoxical way, they have distracted her attention and awareness from the buried trauma while at the same time incessantly pointing in its direction, towards the "something more," a hidden knowledge, a secret that needed to be uncovered. The fault line is both where ghosts hide and through which they can be exposed. Like a scar, the fault line both reveals and conceals the once present wound. As such, Alexander traces and points to the shared mechanics of excavating what is painful and screened from the conscious self. Concealed, the ghosts threaten the integ-

rity of the self, and thus, as Derrida puts it in *Spectres of Marx,* one "welcomes them only in order to chase them … One is only occupied with ghosts by being occupied with exorcising them, kicking them out the door" (141). The pursuit of the haunting material from the past has this one goal – to exorcise it. And exorcism, as Alexander perceives it, is a performative act that demands articulation and enactment and is fulfilled while it is effective on both: the individual as well as – and perhaps most importantly – the collective level. At the end of the day, these movements are what memoir accommodates. Memoir is about exposure in terms of turning the private and intimate into the public and thus collective display. Writing a memoir involves feelings of revelation and relevance as well as embarrassment and shame, since it relies on and foregrounds the expansion of the self that necessarily proceeds from the private to the public and back again in endless loops. It is from the intimate self that the essential themes, concerns, and design of a particular memoir emerge (cf. Gusdorf 37).

The nature of trauma, as Alexander's memoir shows, is that it is a layered phenomenon. First of all, past traumas are not only buried, but also to a certain extent replaced or covered by the more recent traumas. Thus, not all is available to Alexander at once while the presence burdens her with the demand for a meticulous excavation in a timeline fashion; she needs to "work back from the pressure of the present into the past" (*Fault* 284). The process of working-through for Alexander proved to be as manifold as the layers of painful memories, in all of which the reader can notice greater or smaller hints of violence, betrayal, and rupture. The other part of her memoir, consists not so much in rewriting as in writing over what she wrote previously. As such, Alexander's narrative evolves by ways of addition and accumulation, not erasure or correction. The earlier version she does not consider wrong but rather incomplete because unfinished: her narrative came to an end with the last page, but in terms of failing to arrive at the buried trauma and thus at a more precise meaning, it did not close. As such, it required the supplement, a dialogical extension which Alexander proffers in the hundred-page long coda of *The Book of Childhood*.

Taken together, we can read *Fault Lines* as itself broken into two. The ten-year long fissure between the two narratives might be seen as standing in for the great divide that separates as well as aligns with one another the regular (and regulatory) functioning of memory and the extreme work of memory, i.e. the traumatic reworking of the past material. As Alexander's memoir exemplifies, the work of trauma is more veiled, convoluted in the

fissures of memory, from and through which it slowly succeeds in affecting the regular work of memory. In the Freudian way, in Alexander's memoir what is recollected bears the traces of what is forgotten by being repressed and veiled beyond recognition. The traumatic memory relies on the regular work of memory for both concealment and ways of signalling its presence before the psychic defence mechanisms completely give way under the growing pressure as it accumulates in time. In the words of Cathy Caruth (*Trauma* 7): "this understanding of trauma in terms of its indirect relation to reference, does not deny or eliminate the possibility of reference but insists, precisely, on the inescapability of its belated impact." Accompanied by or synchronised with a trigger or a set of triggers in the present that pierce through the protective psychological veil, the traumatic memories eventually emerge from the (figurative and literal) depths.

In light of the surfacing history, Alexander writes over her first life narrative as she traverses her lifetime anew. As such the memoir becomes a veritable example of both the provisionality of the genre and simultaneously its indispensability in representing the development of growing awareness and understanding in time. There is no revision to her text in the conventional sense of the word: "My aim is not to cross out what I first wrote but to deepen that writing, dig under it, even to the point of overturning one of the most cherished figures I created" (*Fault* 229). Rather, by adding the other narrative, *The Book of Childhood*, she creates a veritable palimpsest of her experience while her memoir testifies to the fluidity of memory, its elusive mechanisms of revision and complementation, and to its phantom-like nature.

In the gesture of narrative enhancement, Alexander perceives the palimpsest as a regulatory mechanism of her perception; it has become a habitual way of approaching and representing reality: "So much of my life has been motion and flight, the tactics of self-evasion. When I think of one face, one figure I layer it over with what it is not" (*Fault* 271). What is first an undeliberate reliance on the palimpsest, she turns into an intentional narrative device that helps her explore the structural and symbolical proclivities of her earlier narrative in order to arrive at a solution to a question she puts at the very outset of her memoir: "How would I map all this in a book of days? After all, my life did not fall into the narratives I had been taught to honor, tales that closed back on themselves, as a snake might, swallowing its own ending" (*Fault* 1). Also, in the intentional use of the palimpsest as the guiding trope in her memoir, Alexander endeavours to take control over the repetition-

compulsion bind she feels herself caught in: both when it comes to her mechanical reliance on substitution in the acts of mapping herself as well as her proclivity toward avoidance.

There are three chapters in both sections of her memoir that bear the same titles and, those especially, Alexander makes into mirror reflections of one another. "Dark Mirror" is the first chapter in each part. "Stone-Eating Girl" is the 6th chapter in *Fault Lines* and the 9th (22nd altogether) chapter in *The Book of Childhood*. "Khartoum Journal" is the 7th chapter in *Fault Lines* and the 4th (17th altogether) in *The Book of Childhood*. These chapters are built around the events that require the most acute attention and analytical composure of Alexander. They deal with the self-image, the breakthrough events in her life as a woman and a poet, the death of her grandfather Ilya, who hurt her beyond measure, which she now tries to re/process and express, and the symbolic images of the stone-eating girl, the fire-eating girl and the drowned girls in the wells (who die so as not to bring shame on their families). These images, which Alexander metamorphosed into symbols of her narrative, are superimposed one upon the other (as the mechanism of palimpsest would have it) and as such are the veritable orientation points for her complex self-perception and growing self-understanding. At the end of the "Khartoum Journal" in *The Book of Childhood*, after having drawn many a circumference around the mentioned events, some of which are repetitions from the precious chapters and some are new recollections, Alexander pins herself down in the narrative. Extending the image of the stone-eating girl, also by the double mirror effect resulting in a mutual reinforcement by reduplication of the self-image in a *mise-en-abyme* way, she writes:

> that gets me to a part of my story that is so very hard. A tale with no head to it, no feet, only a stump of a thing. So I have to keep beginning, again and again, as if I were facing a mirror in a white painted room, and in that mirror a girl cut in red granite, lifted out of the floodwaters of the Nile,[6] her hands and feet cut off, and where her head should be the lonely voice of an Indian woman as a small sedan grates on a metal bridge, over a dark river. (*Fault* 250)

[6] This image refers to the first paragraphs of "Khartoum Journal" in the first part of the memoir. Here, Alexander sees herself identified in the image of a dead and bleeding body of a man (during a genocide war in Sudan, *Fault Lines* 91). It also somewhat corresponds to the image of the drowned girls/young women who jump into wells.

The image of the mutilated body, of the body in parts, of severed limbs, and a misplaced head is that of a body torn by trauma. It is the trauma of sexual abuse by her closest family member as well as the fact that it "is almost more traumatic to her that something so significant and relevant had not only been left out of her writing, but also of her own memory" (Ali 51). In the end, what Alexander intended to write about, i.e. "About being born into a female body," circles on her tangible body (*Fault* 3). The body, as "a recorder of physical experience, particularly of pain once felt, it inscribes itself indelibly into memory," in her text is located somewhere between and behind the fine lines of prose and poetry, which represent ways in which the body both experiences life and "produces memories which will remain permanent and mostly reliable" (Straub Julia 93). As such, and Alexander knows about it, the body cannot be dismissed, in fact it is most reliable, "a fixed point of reassurance" (Straub Julia 93).

Alexander sees herself as belonging to a generation chain of female bodies "born out of my mother, and out of her mother before her … Womb blood and womb tissue flowing, gleaming, no stopping" (*Fault* 21). Since her writing is also a conscious gesture of search for homelands, in the poem "Pitfire" she asks herself: "How much shall a body be home?" (286). Moreover, she recognizes the danger of forgetting the body: "forgetfulness of the body can also be a death" (200). Together with the suddenly awakened terror of having no history in terms of her own, personal history, a history written from the perspective of living in her own body and through her body in the world. It is in the body that this dire need to create this history that would accommodate her experience instead of streamlining it into ready-made and available narrative patterns, originates.

The lack of psychological and mental centre exacerbated by Alexander's failure to feel in concordance with her body reactivated earlier states of similar experiences. For instance, once her self-negligence coupled with intense work and stress related to her thesis writing made her feel "as if my body were taking vengeance on me" (141). The physical and mental breakdowns reverberate in her Manhattan experience, however, this new home of hers becomes a seclusion safe enough for her to start reappraising her past. In New York she sees herself for the first time as a survivor, "a fissured thing, a body crossed by fault lines. Where is my past? What is my past to me, here, now at the edge of Broadway? Is America a place without memory?" (182). America is for her a place not without memory as such, but a place without a memory of her – she is not yet mapped on its spaces

and in its places. The body does not have familiar incentives to react to and thus she turns inward, to the story buried within her.

The body in Alexander's texts is a site of memory, a veritable palimpsest of fault lines that fragment her into pieces. It is further a body filled with stones: "The stones made words for things she could not say" (295), which rhymes with and explains the event of her swallowing a stone. At the time, it made her feel strong and capable of achievements. Subsequently, the stone which is closed off, hard, and silent stands in for the buried secret that is difficult to access. As a site of trauma, the container of stones, the territory of abuse and suffering, and the place where the images of abuse are buried, the body is what Alexander makes into the centre of meaning she starts listening to. Once she regained strength in New York, Alexander returns to India to make the past available to herself, so that the inner and outer spaces where the memories are stored may meet again for memory to come full circle. The body must revisit the spaces it dwelled in; the body thus returns also to the places of molestation.

Alexander's memoir performs the function of both the individual and collective exorcisms. It is a cry for help the shape of which Alexander borrows from the Biblical story of Isaac and the persistent questions which reverberate in her own life-story: why no one did anything, why no one intervened, where the mother of the child was, and why she was not able to save the child. Also, her memoir performs the function of a collective exorcism in that Alexander's journey is a journey both for herself and other women in similar situations of violence and betrayal, when the need to remember is overpowered by the need to not remember: "memory knows, but knowing cannot remember" (*Fault* 301).

In the penultimate chapter of the bi-partite memoir, which has the same title as the second part, i.e. "The Book of Childhood," Alexander writes of herself in the third person singular: "A child in a white dress walked in the door, a while later a child walked out … I do not like to say I …" (301). Making herself into an/the other, she watches herself turned into a character in her narrative that she makes bear her trauma. In this way, she both acknowledges the events and distances herself from them, or perhaps is already distanced from them, since she is able to write about them at all. Emplotted in her memoir, the memories of abuse are part of her story, but belong to a fragment of herself, a broken-off fragment of her past self that wreaks havoc on the totality of self she endeavoured to work out. Alexander herself is the only

one who can save her now and to save herself means to write herself in "indigo ink," the ink that transforms memories into identities, dreams into stories, translates trauma into poetry, and herself into the other (301) while she retraces and maps the fault lines. These compose her and are multiple.

One may begin with the huge rift resulting from the incompatibility of demands Alexander experiences on a daily basis and which she understands in terms of the conflict between cultural narratives and expectations and her own experience and desires. This is the clear rift between "the claims of my intelligence – what my father taught me to honor, what allowed me to live my life – and the requirements of femininity my mother had been born and bred to" (*Fault* 102). One may end the chain of (inter)connected rifts with the fault lines that make creases in her memory, where painful, traumatic recollections are buried beyond (easy) recognition, beyond languages, beyond places, beyond available patterns. Alexander's fault lines are haunted spaces; they are zones of impossibility, aporetic spaces where the conflicts are charged to their extremes, where one not simply recollects but relives experiences that impose themselves on one demanding attention and recognition. The fault lines are zones of heightened awareness, intense emotions, sensations; they are zones where one feels defenceless, confused, lost, split in half. Fault lines are zones of no words, places within places arranged according to the principle of "uncertain accretion" (229), which is guided by the mechanics of the palimpsest. As such they invite the Benjaminian manner of digging deeper, reconsidering the same material over and over again, facing the same images that reappear in the rhythm of Nietzschean eternal return. Alexander's memoir emerges out of the fault lines, it is weaved among them, between them, joining as well as separating them with the body of the fragmented narrative, into which her living body is translated: "Sometimes I have felt that I was translating from a place of no words – translate in the early sense of transporting across a border ... There is a zone of radical illiteracy out of which we translate our selves in order to appear, to be in place. A zone to which words do not attach, a realm syntax flees" (259).

The fault lines as such can only be put into writing in indigo ink, the ink that reaches the rifts and cleavages; the ink that sinks into them and is visible in its entirety to Alexander herself and might be deciphered by people with similar experiences. It is the ink in which the migrations of meaning between the images, symbols, events, memories of these events, words, and gestures are dotted, and shown as interconnected and superimposed, falling into and expanding one another, so that to reach to their incipient core, or rather try to

approximate their source of origin, is a long process of unravelling: "Migrations of sense that take a lifetime to decipher" (258). The indigo ink is the ink of transitions, used to write in a language of symbols, a language of poetic resonance and aesthetic relevance. As such it enables Alexander to construct a web out of the available material that she endows with an idiosyncratic pattern and which she makes into a safety net, or perhaps rather into a lifeline that both lets her immerse herself into the past and makes it possible to find a way out of it into the present where she is both the witness and the survivor.

The indigo ink is also used in order to embroider on one's clothes the words of protection, words that will become etched on the flesh, spelling out the self's identity. Alexander draws her narrative to a close by a reference to the warrior and poet Rani Kodamangalam's clothes:

> On the sari were inscribed the names of the seventy saints and seventy-seven holy women and men who could protect her and her just cause. When Rani passed through fire, the sari melted into her skin … The letters inscribed in indigo ink on the sari she had worn for protection were burnt indelibly into her skin. What allowed her to live her life, made her what she was, was graphed in curving syllables over her woman's body. But no one could read that script. (316)

The indigo ink is used for writing on the skin, making words become one with the flesh, and as such make the body bear the inscription(s) of past atrocities. Body, text, and texture are inseparable in Alexander's memoir. They form a metonymic chain of significance as one falls into and/or metamorphoses, almost imperceptibly, into the other. One is read through the other in an endless chain of mutual signification. In the end, as she puts it in her final words in the memoir: "I have written what I could through the rips and tears in the dress I once wore, a shield for a small child's soul, silk stitched with shadow work in delicate rose, violet, and green" (*Fault* 317). Clothes, like skin, have this double status as buffers: they both absorb the impact of the blows as they are dealt to the self, and transform their force into phantoms that haunt the self. The indigo ink is absorbed through the fault lines in body, texture, and text; as such it becomes the solution in which the fires of the past come alive as specters of what they once were. The indigo ink, thus, is the ink of ghosts.

With the sequel, "The Book of Childhood," the titular "fault line" acquires a further meaning that can be delineated with reference to Colin Da-

vis's (4) remark in his work *Haunted Subjects*, where he addresses hauntology and surveys texts by Derrida, Abraham and Torok, Sarte, and others: "The belief in ghosts is (like the ghost itself) something that survives or returns long after it should have been relegated to the past; it is a kind of excess or fault line within belief." Alexander's fault line's status is further expanded into that of a spectral gap, a fissure where the past still persists. Just like the ghost, the fault line indicates both presence (a remaining trace that demands attention) and absence (it stands in for what is no longer) while it provokes the question: "How does it signify?" (Davis *Haunted Subjects* 111). In the first chapter, the 3-page-long lyrically self-reflexive "The Dark Mirror," Alexander (*Fault Lines* 2) says: "Everything I think of is filled with ghosts …". In structural and symbolic terms her personal narrative comes full circle with the statement in the penultimate paragraph of the last chapter "Indigo Ink": "To be haunted by the illegible is the fate of those who have passed through fire and children who have been hurt beyond visible measure" (317). If together with Julia Straub (226) we consider the "act of writing about traumatic experiences as ultimately more harmful and challenging than living through the horrors which produced the trauma," Alexander's act of writing the memoir may be approached as a figurative passing through the fire of the past still burning and scalding, though not tangible. Alexander, therefore, clothes herself in the words of others. The quotations from texts by writers, theorists, and poets are the armour she wears for protection as she goes to battle her own past. Just as bodies become texts, texts are considered in terms of bodies: "Other arms and legs and mouths reach out to succor me, help me through the portals of memory" (*Fault* 250). In all these figures she recognizes herself, often belatedly. Where there was an indecipherable attraction at first, she now perceives identification. All the writers not only protect her, but first of all enable her to begin, go through, and end the process of working through her trauma.

As Davis asserts: "Ghosts still roam amongst us because the past is not settled; the dead are not quite dead and the living are not fully alive" (*Haunted Subjects* 100). Alexander's memoir-writing is done to remedy the situation: so that the dead are relegated to the realm of death, and the living may go on with their lives. Delineating the trauma as resulting from actions undertaken by the grandfather, and thus assigning to him the role of the perpetrator, Alexander confronts the harm inflicted on the self by the other clearly demarcating the victim from the abuser, so that the hurt can be weaved into "the narrative fabric of the self" (Freeman).

According to Slavoj Žižek one needs to attend to the ghosts, since they stand in for what has not been properly buried (Davis *Haunted Subjects* 80).[7] As Davis (*Haunted Subjects* 152) continues: "In each case, whether the presence of the dead or the undead is desired or dreaded, they return because our business with them is unfinished." In the first part of *Fault Lines*, in the chapter "Stone-Eating Girl," Alexander recounts how she refused to pass water to her grandfather Ilya as he was lying on his deathbed and, subsequently, how she refused to attend his funeral. At the time, she thinks, she "felt I must refuse life, become a stone, a hard unmoving thing, no motion in it … In dreams my whole body seemed to me, then, buried under a pile of rubble" (Alexander *Poetics* 89). The image might stand in for Alexander's self-denial, self-annihilation, self-entombment and simultaneous protest against these, as if with the death and burial of the grandfather, the part of her that bears the secret was put away as well yet without her presence and without her consent.

When ghosts of the dead return and enter the realms of life, their arrival annihilates the border between life and death for the living: "The living and the dead have their separate domains and there should be no commerce between them" (Davis *Haunted Subjects* 152). The work of mourning "entails killing the dead again" (155), and in Alexander's memoir this process involves obliterating the image of her grandfather. Alongside her representation of him as a great influence on her, she demystifies him as a sexual abuser. A figure she was supposed to revere, she discovers him to be a completely different person than everyone thought.

More problematic is the relation of Alexander to her own abused self. Identifying Ilya, summoning him and dismissing him in the memoir, she unburies a secret. Bringing it to light, which she symbolically wished to accomplish much earlier, as a girl, turning her face to the sun to pierce her irises, does not right the wrongs. The uncovering of trauma does not make the phantoms of past violence and betrayal disappear. Hence, they are summoned in the narrative not as much to be eradicated as to be faced and dealt with. Bringing the atrocities out into the open, Alexander names and acknowledges them for what they are, which weakens their power over her and relegates them to where they belong, into the past. As such, she learns to live with what

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[7] Cf. Davis (*Haunted Subjects* 80) on Žižek: "The ghost appears, as Žižek suggests, because of an unpaid symbolic debt: a rite of burial or mourning which has not been completed, a duty still to be fulfilled, a crime to be uncovered, or an injustice to be rectified.".

she has left behind, which is, however, not tantamount to accepting it. Especially, since defencelessness and helplessness remain attached to the recollected traumatic events forever. Hence, she is aware, some similar psychological states of weakness or loss of control may activate the traumatic memories of past violence anew.

The palimpsestic nature of trauma in Alexander's memoir means that only when she has charted her numerous dislocations and displacements was she prepared to trace the fault lines back to the most veiled and hidden one. However, none of her excavations does she deem as merely ancillary in her memory search. She has drawn on and expanded her personal experience of migration in other works, both in her poetry and academic writing, all of which taken together create a palimpsest as well. In *Poetics of Dislocation*, Alexander discusses the work of Joy Harjo, in particular the poems "A Map to the Next World," "Grace," "Returning from the Enemy," the prose poem "Secrets from the Center of the World." As a woman writer who belongs to an ethnic minority and – because of which and despite of which – she sees herself as sharing particular life milestones with Harjo, Alexander connects her own experience with the experience of the Native American poet and performer and is able to feel with her the pangs of dispossession, loss, destruction. Moreover, she points out the alienation of Harjo's native culture from the broadly understood American values and beliefs, as well as the writer's simultaneous fierce and unrelenting will to persevere in accordance with her Mvskoke ideas, ideals, meanings, and customs. Alexander's reading of Harjo's poetry is personal and one notices that the passages she pays especial attention to are these in which her own experience reverberates. Among these is the reference to Harjo's notions of map-making: "Her job it to make a map tough enough and delicate enough for the wandering soul … What human beings need is a passage through multiple worlds, and myths must be brought in to help" (Alexander, *Poetics* 22). In this interpretation, migration as such is not a negative experience. On the contrary, it is an enriching journey, yet only when it is a guided, guarded, and a mapped endeavour that caters to the needs of the inner life.

Mapping for both the authors takes place in poetry and in the narrative. Alexander's (*Poetics* 23) description of Harjo's "fierce rhythm that seeks to etch itself through words" is how her own writing may be referred to as well. Other most relevant conclusions drawn from reading Harjo's poems – i.e. about poetry that emerges "from the depths of what was destroyed" while the earth is forever "beyond what words might reach," the lines she

quotes about people as materializing "through dense unspeakable material" while the "survival of those never meant to survive" is still a possibility – form together an interesting composite through which one may approach the oeuvres of both writers (23-25). Conspicuously also, the two authors from altogether different backgrounds, both invoke and try to reach back to ancestral powers in their writings.

The wish for a familial spirit, a guiding figure that would listen, help, and save her is present in Alexander's *Fault Lines*: "I was filled with longing for an ancestral figure who would allow my mouth to open, permit me to speak. I skipped a whole ring of life and made up a grandmother figure, part ghost, part flesh" (15). Towards the end of her memoir, already in its other part, *The Book of Childhood*, she confesses her own surprising realization that while writing she keeps searching for her (maternal) grandmother who died before she herself was born. Alexander scrutinises her own motives and suspects that in the figure of the grandmother, whom she knows through the stories passed to her by the mother, she finds a figure she identifies with and thus locates in her the possibility of help in terms of making "sense of what happened in my buried childhood" (268). Also, when it comes to personal inspirations and aims of self-realization, Alexander sees herself as an extension of her grandmother Kuruvilla, the wife of Ilya: "Sometimes I feel as if my life is flowing into hers" (268). The figure of her grandmother, a blood relative in the generational line of women in her family, she considers strong enough to both rescue her from harm at home and navigate her ways and (morally) guide her in the world outside. In a way, Alexander constructs her grandmother's self as the strong, capable, and wise version, the ideal version of her own self. At the time of writing *The Book of Childhood* she is almost exactly her age, when she passed away – a month short of fifty. The cause of the grandmother's death is not revealed in the memoir.

In Alexander's writing the figure of the Grandmother acquires a mythical status. No longer alive, and to a significant extent enveloped in the aura of secrecy, she is situated in the realm beyond "an impossible border" (*Fault* 269). In the way the figure of the grandmother functions in Alexander's text one may recognize aspects of the Derridean spectre, which as Davis (*Haunted Subjects* 76) points out: "is also a figure of the other, of the strange and the stranger, of that which in me is other than myself and that which outside me is more than I can know." The grandmother is perceived in terms of the "non-present present" (Derrida 5). She is no longer physically there to express her views, no longer able to tell her stories, yet Alexander is ready to

listen and imagines her grandmother's response(s) as she is writing her own words, which are the connecting bridges between what she has heard about her grandmother and the pieces of her own (life) story. Some of the events rhyme or, in other words, reflect one another, e.g. the passages that feature the stained white handkerchief (*Fault Lines* 270, 313), which functions both on the literal and on the symbolic level in her memoir. The reader is left wondering about the deeper import of such parallels.

In Harjo's *Crazy Brave* (2012), the presence of ancestral spirits is conspicuous, yet of a different nature. They accompany the self in and through life starting with the moment of birth, which for the Mvskoke is a sacred act (*Crazy Brave* 123). It is a critical moment when (a potential of) memory comes alive as an unaccomplished story. Simultaneously, the event of physical birth is the moment of entering and becoming enmeshed in the story-web of connected and connecting life paths. First, Harjo sees her life path determined by the people closest to her. It is her parents who initially define her. In her personal narrative, which Harjo imaginatively extends to the time before her birth, she (as a not yet-born person yet still in her own distinctive voice) addresses them as her mother and father "to-be", later referring to her father as "the man who was now my father" (30). The parents she characterises as belonging to the elements of fire and water, respectively, and she thus self-identifies as an inherently conflicted nature. "Born to earth, of water and fire" she is subject to the interaction of their opposed natures, which could either destroy or nourish her (25).

Next, Harjo relates how, since her birth, she has been accompanied by a Mvskoke ancestor (somewhat akin to a godmother), in whom she finds a kindred soul and who seems to have previously been an embodiment of the memory Harjo is now a continuation of. In her life narrative, the parents are the inherited affinities, while the further ancestor(s) she feels close to are the elective affinities, whom she approaches by and recognizes in art: narrative, painting, music, etc. As she grows up, there is an especial bond Harjo feels developing between herself and her grandmother, Naomi, a painter: "As I moved pencil across paper and brush across canvas, my grandmother existed again. She was as present as these words" (149). For Harjo, art is a visible and tangible expression and representation of the connectivity with others that is innerly experienced by the self. As such, in a cyclical way – from the self to the other to the self – it depends on, provides access to, nourishes, and begets memory. Thus, engaging in art means stepping into the flow of time, or rather into a sort of simultaneity: one becomes

both the opening onto the past and onto the future, and as such a mediator between them. Harjo equals artistic activity with forging a connection between what was and what is. Art itself is a gateway to her ancestors and their stories, since it provides a space for encounter, remembrance, and feeling with the other. Art is for her, therefore, a regular human activity that our bodies and minds are prepared for. Harjo writes:

> I began to know her within the memory of my hands as they sketched. Bones have consciousness. Within marrow is memory, I heard her soft voice and saw where my father got his sensitive, dreaming eyes ... / She exists in me now, just as I will and already do within my grandchildren … / voices of so many people, and so many stories that want to come forth … These people, our ancestors, want to be recognized; they want to be remembered … / No one ever truly dies. The desires of our hearts make a path. We create legacy with our thoughts and dreams. This legacy will give those who follow us joy on their road or will give them sorrow. (Harjo *Crazy Brave* 148, 149, 21, 149)

According to Harjo, an act of expressive invention activates the individuals' access to the memory that is beyond them yet the traces of which live in them. This memory Harjo understands as "not just associated with past history, past events, past stories, but nonlinear, as in future and ongoing history, events, and stories" (Coltelli *Winged Words* 57). In Harjo's representation of self, the individual is a bearer of past stories that circulate through them while she "travels through story realms" (46). The onus is on the self to listen to the dead, to acknowledge their stories, which as Davis writes, "entails attending to signs which irrupt as a surprise, and which signify without any ascertainable signifying intention. They cannot be anticipated or foreseen, and they cannot be attributed to a conscious subject. They may be anywhere that we do not expect them. Perhaps they are all around us" (Davis *Haunted Subjects* 127). In Harjo's memoir that is immersed in her Mvskoke history and heritage, the ubiquitousness yet also a certain obscurity of the signs that reveal, but themselves are quite concealed, leads her to unfold them into fully-fledged stories in light of her cultural heritage of reading and meaning-making.

Harjo's voice is the voice of a Native American who is a poet, a performer, a writer, an academic, a memoirist. In *Crazy Brave* she inscribes herself into the history of her tribe and reads herself and her life-story in terms of its mythology. Her storytelling is deeply rooted in the tribe's oral

tradition, whereas the structure of her narrative is heavily influenced by the Mvskoke understanding of space/time organization. *Crazy Brave* is divided into four parts (or four sets of stories): East, North, West, and South. Each part is accompanied by a tiny diagram – a variation on a circular emblem, the sacred circle – and a short poetic introduction to the symbolic meaning of the particular direction: East is the direction of beginnings, North symbolises difficulty, West stands for endings and the past, and South signifies release and growth. Accordingly, considering the linear progress in her life narrative: from the early years through adolescence to early adulthood, Harjo focuses on her birth, particular childhood and selected adolescent recollections, the historical and cultural conditions of her tribe, and the self-performed exorcism of fear and anxiety and thus a rebirth, or a conscious birth of an adult personality, respectively.

The four parts of the memoir, their correspondence to the cardinal points, as well as a circular narrative framework opening and closing with a birth/release (both natural and symbolic, physical and spiritual) are not incidental. In Mvskoke culture number four carries a symbolic significance, it is a "means of division for both time and space … represent[s] the totality of creation … All things consist[ing] of four parts were considered to be especially stable and harmonious."[8] Moreover, through the spatial representation of number four, the memoir acquires a certain wholeness. The cardinal directions Harjo further symbolically associates with Sun/Light (beginning, hope, her home), Wind/Air, Earth (or Water), and Fire. In the interrelation and interaction within and between the different groups of four(s) – the cardinal directions, the basic elements, the seasons of the year – she looks for harmony and balance. Overall, Harjo maps her life into the narrative structure the contours of which have been formed and validated by the Mvskoke's understanding of "balance and harmony in diversity" with regard to the stages of a singular life and (the repeated) life cycles in general (Walker and Balk 636). All things considered, Harjo's narrative is guided by *Ibofanga*, a concept of totality: "Ibofanga is above us all, and is the unifying principle in the entire energy field which is existence. The field includes links between various entities … ultimately *Ibofanga* is circular in character" (Chaudhuri and Chaudhuri 24). To the

[8] The Muscogee/ Creek Nation webpage, http://www.muscogeenation-nsn.gov/Pages/CultPres/pdf/mvskokecustomsandtraditions.pdf (Accessed September 14 2015, no longer available).

Creek/Mvskoke essential is the spiritual energy inherent in all things, whereas "Circle and cycles are central to the world and that all things are related in the universe" (Chaudhuri and Chaudhuri 24). *Ibofanga* and the number four as well as the way in which they "interact and complement one another, [so that] a supreme natural balance is reached" (Walker and Balk 636) – provide the structural pattern for the development of Harjo's life narrative. In her memoir, the Mvskoke belief in general equilibrium and permanence goes hand in hand with the emphasis on transition and change. Harjo attends to the two by trying to assume a certain distance or, perhaps rather, transcendence in relation to her individual recollections. She transcends the immediate and the particular without dismissing them. In this way, she is able to notice the harmony and balance – matters, she shows, of temporal and spatial imagination. In so doing, her life-narrative pattern is invented by mediating between the eternal (harmony and balance) and the immediate (change and transition).

The memoir opens with birth and advances by figurative moments of birth, i.e. moments of crisis, threshold/decisive moments that induce self-reflexivity and self-understanding. Harjo first recollects her symbolic birth – her rite of passage into the world of humanity – the awakening to music when she was a little girl. Ever since, music, jazz in particular, have possessed for her the eternal quality, a certain rhythm that tunes her in to the temporal imagination:

> this moment, a loop of time … I became acutely aware of the line the jazz trumpeter was playing … I followed that sound to the beginning, to the birth of sound … I grieved my parents' life failings, my own life, which I saw stretching the length of that rhapsody … music is the language that lives in the spiritual realms … Every soul has a distinct song. (*Crazy Brave* 17-19)

Music, for Harjo, is the container and transmitter of memory, while particular songs have the capacity for triggering and guiding the recollection process that reaches further in time than the lifespan of an individual. This symbolic prelude is followed by and tightly knit to Harjo's memory of the actual birth:

> Though I was reluctant to be born, I was attracted by the music. I had plans. I was entrusted with carrying voices, songs, and stories to grow and release into the world, to be of assistance and inspiration. These were

> my responsibility. I am not special. It is this way for everyone. We enter into a family story, and then other stories based on tribal clans, on tribal towns and nations, lands, countries, planetary systems, and universes. Yet we each have our own individual soul story to tend. (20)

Harjo's voice from before birth, the recollection of her own coming into the world are elements of a process of self-understanding that rests on the myth. Such an imaginative self-invention rests on the presupposition that the self is a "psychic process" that can be understood "only in the light of inner happenings," i.e. only in terms of a personal myth that issues from the inside (Jung *Memories* 5). As Jung explains it: "[w]hat we are to our inward vision and what man appears to be *sub specie aeternitatis*,[9] can only be experienced by way of myth" (3). The personal myth is about "telling stories. Whether or not these stories are 'true' is not the problem. The only question is whether what I tell is *my* fable, *my* truth" (3; emphasis in the original). Harjo lets her personal story be told partly through the tribal myths, and maps her life in accordance with her understanding of memory, exploring the latter's imaginative quality that refers to both: the art of the recollection of images as such and the art of imaginative invention. To understand the personal myth, one needs to get acquainted with her understanding of memory.

Harjo presents us with a notion of memory that encompasses all time and where nothing ever dies (somewhat echoing Freud's notion of the unconscious which stores everything); it is a living and active memory, where nothing is accidental. Yet this memory is not readily available in its entirety: "some things I remember and some things continue to be kept from me" (Harjo *Crazy Brave* 22). Such a two-fold understanding of memory: partly available and partly hidden, makes her both a carrier of memory (to the point of being overburdened with recollections) and a memory's potential (free to uncover/invent the veiled). Freedom from recollection does not equal forgetting, however. Forgetting for Harjo is an utterly negative concept. It means relenting on the effort to grow, it equals giving up on oneself; therefore it makes one vulnerable (*Crazy Brave* 107). To forget means to lose oneself both as an individual and as a member of the tribe. Remembering, thus, is both a predisposition to be nurtured and a duty to be fulfilled. As Harjo writes in the introduction to the poetry collection *She Had Some Horses* (7): "I come from people who are taught to forget nothing."

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[9] "under the aspect of eternity".

Harjo suggests that while memory in its entirety exists outside time,[10] it may be realised only in time (particular life), only in part(s), and while it is enacted, its meaning may be divined only by way of representation and interpretation. Which parts are realised and in which form they enter the present appears to be conditioned by the questions that are currently asked of the individual. Referring to the words of Jung (*Memories* 233), who himself felt strongly connected to his predecessors both in terms of what he knew about them and in terms of questions that remained unanswered, Harjo experiences a very similar sensation of being "under the influence of things and questions which were left incomplete and unanswered by [her] parents and grandparents and more distant ancestors". Harjo's concept of identity rests then on the idea of continuity and connectivity of individuals, as a dialogical continuity of questions and answers throughout generations. Eventually then, since an individual is a unique heir and an indispensable contributor to the collective story/memory of questions/answers, she is born out of the collective memory. As such she stands before an ethical imperative to cultivate and develop her individual potential on her own in order to later return it to the collectivity of the tribe. Harjo's words: "I feel strongly that I have a responsibility to all the sources that I am: to all past and future ancestors, …, all people, all earth, and beyond that to all beginnings and endings" (Harjo in Hussain 29), resonate with the words of Jung (*Memories* 320): "I try to see the line which leads through my life into the world, and out of the world again." Harjo comprehends her story as a given sketch ("I'd seen the map of my life" [*Crazy Brave* 25], "a memory curled in my DNA" [26]) that she unfolds and actualises as her identity. Memory for Harjo, thus, is paradoxically an obligation (marked by previous questions) that makes her free – to look for her own answers and create her own legacy, in short – to create joy or sorrow for future generations.

Memoir as a genre is a survival story – a story of having lived through events in time, a story of having remained. *Crazy Brave* is a survival story in many ways as Harjo selects and not only retells but seems to relive the critical events and ways of having been saved (both as an individual and as a member of the Mvskoke tribe). Harjo's story, however, confirms that no

[10] "For us, there is not just *this* world, there's also a layering of others. Time is not divided by minutes and hours, and everything has presence in this landscape of timelessness" (Coltelli and Harjo 39) – in this passage one notices the palimpsestic layering of worlds on one another (which is akin to Alexander's way of understanding experience and memory).

one is saved unscathed. Whether directly a witness to traumatic events or removed from them by a generation or by (multiple) generations, one feels the past pain, which is transmitted and continues in the present. In the words of Caruth (who discusses Freud's *Moses and Monotheism*), survival of collective trauma means "being shot into a future that is not entirely one's own …" (*Trauma* 71).

On the collective level, Harjo considers herself a survivor in the historic sense: "I feel the legacy and personhood of my warrior grandfathers and grandmothers who refused to surrender to injustice against our peoples" (Harjo *Crazy Brave* 158). The wounds inflicted on the tribe in time manifested themselves on the individual level as ghosts haunting entire families. Harjo's memoir is filled with ghosts. In a way, all narratives, and therefore also all memoirs are. Davis (*Haunted Subjects* 13) quotes Julian Wolfrey's words from *Victorian Hauntings*: "all forms of narrative are spectral to some extent," and "the spectral is at the heart of any narrative of the modern;" "to tell a story is always to invoke ghosts, to open a space through which something other returns" so that "all stories are, more or less, ghost stories."

Harjo's narrative, especially the parts that are written in the mode of a self-mythology, is permeated with ghostly presences in terms of what Derrida describes as "this being-with specters would also be, not only but also, a politics of memory, of inheritance, and of generations" (xviii). The ghosts in Harjo's memoir are not relegated to the past; they fill the present almost to its brim. In her memoir time is considered in terms of infinity and eternity, and the stories from all over the world fill and fuel her imagination. Harjo is haunted by past violence and pain inflicted on people distanced in time and space from her, with whom, however, she feels a connection beyond geographical or historical constraints:

> One of the oldest stories took place in lower Nubia and involved a very cruel imprisonment. People were literally buried alive, standing up. I can still see the rows of eyes looking out. They haunted me for many nights. I can still see them in the dark, unrelenting sunlight, suffering without water. They were there because they did not agree with the prevailing government. (Harjo *Crazy Brave* 46)

In their experience, she hears echoed and recognizes the experience of her tribe, the countless dispossessions and deprivations, brutal murders, and the barbarous decimation: "As peoples we had been broken. We were still in the bloody aftermath of a violent takeover of our lands. Within a few generations

we had gone from being nearly one hundred percent of the population of this continent to less than one-half of one percent. We were all haunted" (158).

The trauma of the Mvskoke tribe in particular, and the trauma of Native North Americans in general transforms the survivors into the carriers of their memory, which creates a troubled legacy: on the one hand, there are the overwhelming feelings of reverence, awe, and gratitude; and on the other hand, the traumatic past becomes a heavy load to carry by the exiguous survivors, the next generations who by no means can rescue the departed, right or amend the wrongs already done. The current generations are bearers and/or witnesses to the still living memory and may themselves run the risk of being turned into what Abraham and Torok call "the crypt and the phantom," which for the two scholars stand for the "modes of the survival of the dead in the unconscious of the living" (Davis *Haunted Subjects* 77). For instance, one may become "a *cryptophore*, the repository of a crypt constructed to preserve loved ones from being radically lost in death" (77). Whether the memory is a positive and encouraging or a destructive remnant from the past, it exerts influence on its carrier.

Harjo relates an experience of a college classmate whom she saw literally haunted by phantoms of the past coming from a variety of sources, all of which taken together seemed to have defeated his personality and made him a slave to a spell, to a force beyond his comprehension: "He leapt onto the hoods of every car … Around him a whirlwind halo glowed … Within the whirlwind were racial slurs, his abandoned baby self, the running-away ghost of his father" (Harjo *Crazy Brave* 90). The boy seems to have suffered from extreme ghost sickness, a malady Harjo herself does not feel free from, either. As Walker and Balk explain: "Like Ibofanga, the perception of health involves unity of mind, body, and spirit, whereas any obstruction of the flow causes sickness" (635). Since, among others, "The progression through these natural states of 'four,' tends to be action-oriented, to be seasonal, and to promote transition," Harjo's memoir may be seen as an act of (self)healing and (self)recuperation, which she performs and goes through for herself, for the sake of the Mvskoke people, and for the Native American tribes in general (Walker and Balk 636). She passes on the stories, but she does it in order to weaken their hold on the current generations: spelled out and pointed to, they loosen their hold on the present.

The collective trauma (the trauma of the other that the self participates in, is witness to, and/or an heir to) and the individual trauma permeate one another. Harjo recounts being neglected and abandoned by her father and

step-father, the lucky admission to the art school in Santa Fe, the meeting of her first and her second husbands, the birth of her son and daughter, the repetitive cycles of alcohol, abuse, divorce. These she contrasts with the moments of painstaking awareness attributed to the guidance of what she calls "the knowing": "a powerful warning system that stepped forth when I was in danger. Still, I often disregarded it … The knowing was always right. It could never be disarmed. It stood watch over me" (Harjo *Crazy Brave* 74). The knowing as the undeciphered foundation of the self is what Jung (*Collected Vol. 8* 132) called intuition that works by an "unconscious, purposive apprehension of a highly complicated situation." The rescue mechanism, Harjo claims, helped her break the circle of damaging repetitions.[11] In an instant, as she saw herself continue on the path she was on – dumped again and again into the future of sorrow just as she saw the life of sorrow of her parents as a child – she decided to break free from this circle of familial recurrence. She succeeds by way of a symbolic collapsing of time in space in an act of imaginative/prophetic grasping of her own, and human in general, tendencies and possibilities, which Jung would call the "patterns of emotional and mental behavior in man" (*Man* 383).

Harjo's survival story is thus eventually a story of healing, the process of recuperation Harjo conducts in English. Her narrative is enabled and begins with the moment of the awakening of linguistic consciousness: when the acquisition of language, she declares, "changed my relationship to the spin of the world" (*Crazy Brave* 17). In her memoir, thus, the Mvskoke reality – its history, customs, beliefs, rituals, cultural concepts – are all translated into the "other" language, the language of the oppressors and neighbours in one, in fact. Whereas her cultural situatedness remains clear – the firm ties to the Mvskoke culture strongly dominate over the American influence – the English language, the language of the other is the language in which she exorcises the ghost of the Mvskoke past on the collective level as the trauma is released to wider audiences in an approachable and understandable form and as such demands recognition, acknowledgment, and retribution.

For Harjo the boundary, if any, between the individual and collective realms is delicate, transparent. To her nothing induces clearer and stronger

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[11] Cf. Cathy Caruth (*Trauma* 63): "In modern trauma theory … there is an emphatic tendency to focus on the destructive repetition of the trauma that governs a person's life … the reality of the destructive force that the violence of history imposes on the human psyche, the formation of history as the endless repetition of previous violence."

resonance on both sides, connecting them, than a story of emerging a survivor from a struggle in both. Towards the end of her memoir, we learn that the trauma accumulated in the form of collective history of the tribe and the plurality of abuse and violence present in Harjo's personal experience induced her panic attacks. Overcoming the sudden paralyzing fear meant going through the layers of memory, some of which were fossilised trauma(s):

> I continued to struggle with panic. I considered all the possible reasons: the mother-in-law witching, tribal history, the strangle of jealousy from others, the banishment from home, faltering into territory and offending spirits there … I recalled how the dream of the chase began around the time our father left home. It would begin with the sound, just like the panic … And I would begin running. (*Crazy Brave* 160-161)

Running away as an everyday reality continued into her dreams till once she dreamt of being cornered in a white room with no place to turn. Exhausted by the chase, she chose to confront the fear. She took a leap into the air and started flying. The courage to face the horrifying unknown in the dream continued into her waking hours. Putting herself into the position of a bearer of both the collective and individual phantoms from the past, the haunting ghosts of violence and abuse, Harjo was faced with, as Davis (*Haunted Subjects* 137) puts it (in a different context), "The question of how to address the dead [which] is … an extension of the question of how to address the living, how to address the future-dead whilst they are still alive." Her narrative opens towards the future the way Derridean spectres "gesture towards a still unformulated future" (Davis *Haunted Subjects* 14). She ends her personal narrative of exorcism with a gesture of release. Harjo closes her memoir with the song-like poem called "Fear poem, or I Give You Back" that she wrote after having the dream/nightmare. Like a chorus, a mantra, it comes from the past and opens onto and reverberates into the future. *Crazy Brave* closes with poetry and ultimately Harjo's process of self-creation and self-representation is a story of finding and being found in words: it is poetry that saves her, and it is the narrative where she can explicitly acknowledge it. Harjo closes a circle of experience by performing an act of poetic exorcism. She releases the self into the future accompanied with the words that saved her, i.e. the patterns, both given (inherited and culture/tribe specific) and self-made (poetry, life-story), which are not among what is tangible but nevertheless belong to the palpable, the liveable. These patterns where the self finds seclusion and is endowed with shape and meaning

are, Harjo emphasises, made from language and memory by way of "imagining the shape and size of the knowing" (*Crazy Brave* 164).

Just as the outside leaves an imprint on the self, the self leaves a mark on the world. As Patricia Hampl (8), an American writer of Czech origin, maintains: "private memory is not just private and not just memory." This recognition echoes in memoir as a genre. In the words of Helen M. Buss (*Repossessing* 115): "The memoir consciously performs the connections between private lives (ones lived by ordinary people who are not direct actors in large events) and the public ideologies that they are both shaped by and resistant to." What memoir – as a genre that accommodates the story of an individual that always already is a story of a community as well – exemplifies is that there are phantoms we have not exorcised as nations, as cultures, as communities, as members of families, and as individuals, which makes the painful past very much alive. What surprised Erin Einhorn (see Chapter One) on her journey to verify and find out about her mother's past is what reverberates through the memoirs of the Canadian and American women writers, i.e. the fact that "there are all these unresolved consequences and all these unresolved issues that are affecting people today. Just as it was affecting me, it was affecting all these other people, in Europe and in the United States, there is all of these consequences that we are still dealing with" (Moss-Coane 8:08 – 8:32). What happens in the memoir where the author revisits the haunted places of the past and the present as well as maps the trauma and encounters the ghosts left behind, reflects what the memoirist goes through on her physical and narrative journeys in general: she finds herself connected to others by the past events the repercussions of which still hold a firm grip on her sense of reality and imagination. As such, the woman memoirist feels as much constituted by and connected with others by what is spoken as by that which (so far) remains silent. The memoir enables her to probe the untapped ground in terms of voicing her findings in tandem with the dilemmas and confusion these stir in her daily life. She sets out to chart a territory where people often fear to tread – the territory where the past survives into the present.

# Coda

"I am saying that writerly writing is personal writing."
(Torgovnick 26)

"[Memory] is, in turn, intimately bound to narrative;
to remember is to be able to relate one incident or episode to another,
and thereby to produce a version of the self."
(Whitehead 63)

The literary memoirs by women selected for analysis in this study constitute just a fraction of the truly overwhelming number of memoirs published in Anglophone North America since 1990. Like all memoirs, they might be divided into overlapping groups, for example thematic subgenres (such as trauma memoirs, incest memoirs, childhood memoirs, family memoirs, and many others), or grouped according to the nationality, ethnicity, class, sexual preference or other selected identity markers of the writer. Our aim in this study was, however, to move beyond those, after all artificial and porous, boundaries. The objective was—on one hand—to give a selective, but still far-ranging panorama of the life-writing practice by North American women writers, and—on the other—to shift the analytic focus to the systematic intertwining of aesthetic strategies and ideological ends of the texts. The sophisticated, conscious use of the blend is what we find at the core of otherwise highly diversified contemporary literary memoir by North American women.

Generic hybridity, reliance on a wide range of visual and paratextual devices and the significant trope of haunting have been selected for discussion as techniques used particularly widely in literary memoirs by North American women published since 1990. One of the prominent uses of all those devices in the analysed texts is to destabilise both history and memory as reliable records of the personal and communal past, and simultaneously to demonstrate that the hold of the past on the present is manifold and relentless. The techniques also aid the authors in shifting focus from self to its familial, communal, national, global contexts—often revealing the intimate, personal impact of the erasure, suppression or ma-

nipulation of memory and historical record as well as the limits of memory and recollection. This helps build a textual community—which many authors consciously attempt to achieve—by demonstrating the self at the centre of memoir to be both unique and, at least to a certain extent, representative of the experience of many.

The striking generic hybridity of the memoirs and the prominent and often highly experimental use of visual and paratextual devices (including photographs, drawings and typography) in the majority of the memoirs analysed in the study suggest not only the malleability and versatility of memoir as a genre, but also the fact that the nuanced sense of self and the self's various entanglements with the world that the authors attempt to communicate most often cannot be adequately captured in established narrative forms. In memoir, as in any other literary genre, formal and aesthetic devices have implications and carry meanings that reach far beyond the realm of literature—the memoirists use them as highly politicised, ideological tools to more effectively address not only matters of personal importance, but broad philosophical and social concepts and issues, which include concepts of multiply inflected identity and experience, and issues such as the historical and contemporary dimensions of diasporic experience, of individual and group trauma, social privilege and injustice, racism, gender discrimination, misogyny, homophobia, and many others. Literary memoir—in contrast to popular memoir addressed to a very broad, diversified readership—appeals primarily to the sophisticated, often well-educated reader for whom it offers not only deepened reflection, but often also additional space for personal thought through interpretative freedom facilitated among others by unconventional formal and visual or typographic devices. As used by North American women writers, the genre responds to needs of authors and audiences that stem from complex gender-inflected histories, including those of colonisation and multiple diasporas.

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# Ja i świat: wybrane aspekty estetyki i ideologii współczesnego pamiętnika literackiego pisarek północnoamerykańskich

STRESZCZENIE

„The self and the world: aspects of the aesthetics and politics of contemporary North American literary memoir by women" prezentuje wybiórczy, ale szeroko zakrojony przegląd rozwiązań estetycznych i przekazu ideologicznego wydanych po 1990 roku pamiętników anglojęzycznych pisarek północnoamerykańskich o różnym pochodzeniu etnicznym i rasowym. Analizowane teksty wyszły spod pióra doświadczonych pisarek świadomie stosujących różnorodne techniki literackie, związane tak z konstrukcją tekstu pisanego, jak z użyciem różnorodnych zabiegów wizualnych oraz paratekstów. Analizy mają na celu ukazanie sposobów w jakie autorki porządkują swoje doświadczenia, jak nadają im konkretny kształt narracyjny oraz wskazanie na to jak rozwiązania estetyczne powiązane są w omawianych pamiętnikach z ich bagażem ideologicznym. Znaczącym aspektem książki jest także krytyczna refleksja nad koncepcją pamięci, jaka wyłania się z omawianych pamiętników, w szczególności w odniesieniu do historii tak indywidualnej jak zbiorowej. Szczególnie ważne są konfiguracje płci i rasy/etniczności w kontekście wielokulturowych społeczeństw Kanady i USA oraz ich wpływ na proces autokreacji autobiograficznych narratorek.