

LEONARD ORR
Dept. of English
Washington State University
2710 University Dr.
Richland WA 99354-1671
USA
orr@tricity.wsu.edu
(509) 372-7253

**Post-Memory and Postmodern:
The Value of Teaching Experimental Holocaust Fiction**

[for workshop at the conference on
TEACHING THE HOLOCAUST TO FUTURE GENERATIONS]

Holocaust scholars have often had a difficult relationship with fiction in the classroom, tending to fear drifting from the nonfictional genres of documents, history, memoirs, diaries, and documentary film. Many historians are worried that if any fiction set in the Holocaust is introduced to students, they will regard all of the documentary material as fictional, as well. These fears have been fed whenever there is a scandal of the Benjamin Wilkomirski and Jerzy Kosinski varieties in which fiction is claimed to be memoir or where the author allows for such generic elisions. There is perhaps confusion as well where canonical Holocaust survival memoirists, such as Elie Wiesel and Primo Levi, have shifted from nonfiction to fiction and back again, often covering the same ground in both arenas. Because of these issues and understandable anxieties, the fiction that has become most canonical, has been that which is most conservative in techniques, most overt and straightforward, closest to documentary forms.

I would argue that after the more traditional texts, it is valuable to use some of the experimental or oblique works of fiction that have been published recently, especially since 1980. The versions of concentration camp or ghetto life in the traditional survivor narratives corroborate each other in their repeated elements even while telling individual stories. But other things are accomplished and new directions open up for discussion and analysis in exposing students to works that are oblique, written by people who were not themselves survivors (an inevitable fact with the passage of time), or set either just prior to the beginning of the Holocaust or in the devastated landscape of Europe in the Fifties. These may be experimental or mixed in form and technique, including embedded photographs, nonlinear structures, alternative histories, and other such devices that foreground the fictionality of these works. For the most part, these unconventional works are not included in even the largest and most recent books on teaching representations of the Holocaust, such as the 500-page guide published by the Modern Language Association in 2004.

The works for this discussion include Walter Abish's *How German Is It*, W. G. Sebald's *The Emigrants* and *Austerlitz*, Georges Perec's *W, or The Memory of Childhood*, Piotr Szewc's *Annihilation*, Aharon Appelfeld's *Badenheim, 1939* and *The Iron Tracks*, Harry Mulisch's *The Assault*, Melvin Jules Bukiet's *Stories from an Imaginary Childhood*, Michael Chabon's *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay*, Philip Roth's *The Plot Against America*, and Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything Is Illuminated*.

The verge: Schulz, *The Street of Crocodiles* and *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass*
 Appelfeld, *Badenheim, 1939*, *To the Land of the Cattails*, and *The Healer*
 Szewc, *Annihilation*
 Bukiet, *Stories from an Imaginary Childhood*

Art analogue: Christian Boltanski

The gap: Abish, *How German Is It*
 Perec, *W, or the Memory of Childhood*
 Sebald, *Austerlitz* and *The Emigrants*
 Mulisch, *The Assault*
 Appelfeld, *The Age of Wonders* and *The Iron Tracks*

Transgressive transformations:

Delbo, *Auschwitz and After*
 Spiegelman, *Maus*
 Gary, *The Dancer of Genghis Cohn*
 Borowski, *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen*
 Roth, *The Ghost Writer* and *The Plot Against America*
 Chabon, *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay*
 Foer, *Everything is Illuminated*
 Dorfman, *Konfidenz*

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