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Poetic Voices of the Shoah

Traumatic Memories and the Attempt to Express the Inexpressible

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1. Introduction

The expulsion and extermination of Jewish life during World War II is one of the most tragic and inhuman events in recent European history, and almost 73 years after the liberation the Shoah is still very present in various fields of research. Even more these days, since the generation of survivors, the only people able to tell the truth about this horrifying period of brutal and systematic killing, is slowly passing away. An enormous quantity of research work has been done on Holocaust history and a great number of testimonies have been transmitted, oral as well as written ones. Literary responses have been very controversial and have generated various discourses regarding the presumed inexplicability of the tragic events during the Holocaust. (Lehmann, 3) Lyrical texts, however, appear to be an interesting medium to give expression to the individual, as well as to the collective painful experiences and memories. (Boyken/Immer, 24-25) Due to its frequent aesthetic character, poetry is often considered an inappropriate way to address such a terrible event as the Holocaust. (Bubser Wildner, 460)

Yet, writing poetry can be a way of testifying as will be seen in the poems that will be discussed later. The atrocity of the past was so enormous that it seemed impossible to write about it in a literary, yet alone in a poetic way. Surviving poets who decided to write about their memories of their traumatic experiences, not only had to relive their traumatic past, but rather did they have to face a completely new challenge as writers. (Laub/Felman, 67) The ineffability of the Shoah in its full intensity inevitably urged them into new directions. A different involvement with language and words was necessary in order to express their traumatic background, which also triggered innovation in those terms. (Boyken/Immer, 15, Lehmann 5-7) Thomas Boyken and Nikolas Immer point out in their research work *Texturen der Wunde* that literary texts including poetry are indeed “subjektive Kunstprodukte” but because of that seem to be predestined as a form of expression to work through traumatic experiences and memories of it. (Boyken/Immer, 19) Lyrical devices are interesting in that regard, since they are helpful tools in order to convey certain messages and images referring to the experienced. Characteristics such as structure, choice of words, repetition, symbols and motifs as well as figurative language potentiate the expression of certain ideas.

In this thesis I will explore on how the traumatic experienced and its memories of it are worked through in poetry and to what extent it is even possible to give expression to the individual and collective trauma of the Shoah based on selected poems written by four female survivors. Two of them well-known, Rose Ausländer and Ruth Klüger, two of them less or hardly familiar, Elly Gross and Magdalena Klein. All four women share similar traumatic experiences of persecution by the Nazis, violence, constant fear and the brutal life in a ghetto

or concentration camp. Their poems, written during and after the Holocaust, are their testimony to what they had to endure and witness. It is often argued that the trauma of the Holocaust, the individual trauma of the victims, is something unrepresentable. Not only because the horrors of that period morally cannot be grasped, but rather because trauma is a condition not to be fully understood neither by the victims themselves nor by any external person not directly related to it. (Laub/Felman, 78, Laub/Lee, 434, 437) How can something that is not comprehended be worked through in any kind of way, especially in poetry?

It is important to notice, however, that traumatic experience does not equal trauma per se. Trauma is the condition that sets in after or during an overwhelming event of traumatizing nature. The traumatic experience is a moment of severe danger and the traumatic memories are intruding memories evoked by something that reminds of the traumatic experienced. (Krystal, 115, Brison, 40) All three aspects are all strongly interwoven and non-existent without the other. While I might not be able to find out how trauma itself is reflected in the selected poems, I do believe that traces of it, such as certain individual responses, as well as traces of traumatic experiences and especially the memories of it do find expression through language. The poets' biographical background obviously is essential in that regard. Each of the women attempted to bring their personal memories down to paper and chose to do so in lyrical form. I say "attempted" because each of them tried to find words for what they had to live through, an extremely challenging task, since according to psychoanalyst and Holocaust survivor Dori Laub "there are never enough words or the right words" (Laub/Felman, 78). Sometimes though, it is not the words themselves that convey meaning but rather what is written in between the lines. While on one hand the selected poets tried to give expression to their personal traumatic experience in the poems, at the same time their intension by writing them went beyond.

In the course of my examination, I will also try to understand what the purpose behind writing poetry was for the survivors and who they meant to address. In order to do that, I will take a close look at the content of the texts and their stylistic features. Especially the perspectives from which the texts are written in appear interesting in that regard, as will be seen. Furthermore, will I take personal statements by the authors into consideration, as I believe they are important to understand what writing meant to the poets during and after the Holocaust. Breaking silence and raising voice definitely was a motivation. Elly Gross for instance points out that "By writing these poems, my goal was to leave something about our lives to present and future generations." (Gross, 47)

Literature of any kind can be a way to raise voice and to take responsibility to tell the truth about the terrifying method of the Nazis and the brutality they proceeded with. (Laub/Felman,

204) Lyrical poetry provides the writers with interesting possibilities to verbalize their thoughts. The link between trauma and poetry seems to have not drawn too much attention in literary studies so far. (Boyken/Immer, 24) My attempt to analyze the poems referring to the expression of traumatic experience and memories of it is only as much an attempt as it was for the selected poets to express the inexplicable through language.

1.1 State of Research

The representation of the Shoah in literature has been examined from numerous angles in the field of literary studies so far. Especially prose seems very popular in that regard. (Boyken/Immer, 22) Poetic responses of survivors to the horror of the Holocaust and particularly its examination of traumatic aspects is generally not overly represented in the literary research. (ibid., 14) With no doubt, there are poets that raised lots of attention with their poetic work, such as Paul Celan or Primo Levi, on whose texts plenty of analysis has been done. Yet, only a few names out of a great number of Jewish writers who wrote poetic testimonies during or after the Holocaust or both, sound familiar today. The lack of research on unknown poets comes along with the fact that many of them have been published in only a very limited number, if at all, just like Magdalena Klein's selection of poems *Pearls and Laces*. The reason for a lack of interest might also be the fact that many of those poems are not written in the same complex and highly literary language, in which for example Rose Ausländer's work is. The distinct difference in the use of language amongst the selected poems will become obvious later on. It appeared interesting to me to choose poems of unknown or less noted poets and compare some of their poetic responses to their Holocaust experience with those of well-known ones, precisely because of that significant differences in the use of language and style. My perception is that despite those distinctions, they all convey a similar message and traces of the traumatic experienced and memories of it with resembling intensity.

Magdalena Klein's selection of poems has only been published by her niece Susan Simpson Geroe, who believed in the importance of her work, after Klein had committed suicide. (Simpson Geroe, 78) Elly Gross on the other hand has been published more than once. Yet, her work hasn't reached a great deal of public attention and is barely mentioned in the literary research field. Only brief reviews of her memoir *Elly: My true Story of the Holocaust* can be found; her poem collection seems to have remained undiscussed so far. The names Ruth Klüger and Rose Ausländer on the other hand are well-known, not only in the German speaking area but also in the United States, partly because both of them lived there in exile. (Helfrich, 97, Klüger 2016) Despite the fact that Klüger also wrote poetry, her prose work *Still Alive* –

Weiterleben seems to have overshadowed her lyrical writing. Even though *Zerreiproben – Kommentierte Gedichte* includes many poems worth looking at. The additional information she gives on each of her poems are interesting and help to understand the texts from her personal point of view. However, her personal perspective on her work needs to be considered with caution. Even though she is a literary theorist, she is also a victim and therefore her comments are more subjective than objective. Amongst the four selected poets for this thesis, Rose Auslnder is doubtlessly the one who has received most attention and recognition for her poetic work. She wrote and published a vast number of poetic texts which made the choice of poems for my analysis challenging. (Runte, 71) I made my choice depending on if and how traces of traumatic experiences and the remembrance of it shines through the poems.

Even though the literary research on Holocaust literature is very extensive, little research has been done on the aspect of trauma in poetry, as mentioned before. (Boyken/Immer, 14) In her essay *Mourning as Remembrance*, Annette Runte raises the question of how trauma might be overpowered by writing, based on Rose Auslnder's poems but elaborates more on other aspects than that of trauma. In *Texturen der Wunde* Thomas Boyken and Nikolas Immer delve into the problematics of expressing trauma in poetry. They argue that the poem itself functions as a medium to express a wound, that couldn't be named in any linguistic way so far (Boyken/Immer, 8). They as well raise the inevitable question if and to what extent it is possible to express the inexpressible in a lyrical way. Their selection of essays on that matter will be essential for my thesis, since they provide interesting approaches on the aspect of trauma in poetry and conduct analysis of various poems, including some by Rose Auslnder. While the adduced research literature mainly deals with famous authors, Constanze Jaiser only concentrates on unknown poets in her research work *Poetische Zeugnisse*. Her examination of a great number of poems from the women's concentration camp Ravensbrck appears interesting, because she pays close attention to different symbols and motifs in the poems, which will also be of interest in my analysis. Furthermore, she emphasizes what it meant to write poetry in an extreme situation like the life in a ghetto or concentration camp.

In order to comprehend how traces of traumatic experiences and memories of the selected poets comes to surface, I believe that an understanding of the term trauma itself could be helpful. To analyze the poems on the aspect of trauma, more specifically with regard to traumatic experiences and memories, I can't get around of some groundbreaking theories on that matter. Since the perception of the term has developed distinctly over the years, especially after World War II, and the number of research literature seems endless, I focused on those studies that primarily analyze the traumatic impact concerning Holocaust victims.

The aftermath of the Shoah caused a new examination and perception of trauma. (Vordermark, 166-167) Holocaust survivor and psychoanalyst Dori Laub dedicated his research work to the close analysis of Holocaust victims and by that he tried to understand what trauma means and does. His perception and results, that he documented in various essays, appear interesting for my own examination of the poems. Especially Laub's co-work with Shoshana Felman *Testimony – Crisis of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History - 1992* turns out to be an essential source. I believe that the selected poems for my thesis function as sort of testimony, since they address individual as well as collective experiences endured during the Shoah. One brief example that supports my approach is a stanza taken out of Elly Gross' poem *The Echo and Chaos* written in the years between 1966 and 1999.

[...] That blasted day of June 2, 1944,

I waved goodbye

to my mother and brother.

The echo and chaos

I hear and see every day

as if it happened today. [...]

(Elly Gross, 15)

A picture that shows the poet's mother and brother is placed right next to the poem, which clearly emphasizes the testimonial character of the text. Laub's thoughts on testifying, their importance and their connection to trauma are auxiliary in supporting my arguments that the poems can be perceived as poetic testimonies and that they can show traces of traumatic experiences, especially those poems written while being held captive in the concentration camp or ghetto, as well as traumatic memories. Whereby the cognition of traumatic memories seems to be more likely than that of traumatic experience, as will be seen. Felman's expertise as a literary critic and her understanding of poetry as an act of testifying from a literary point of view is the perfect supplement to Laub's psychoanalytical perspective.

1.2 Methodology

Despite the fictional character of poetry in general, I do understand all the poems I chose for this thesis not only as aesthetic objects but also as poetic testimonies. Usually the lyrical I has to be distinguished distinctly from the author. (Müller, 59) However, in this case it should be kept in mind that the poems to a great extent convey the writers' personal Holocaust experiences and feelings relating to that, which invites the readers to perceive those poems as an act of bearing witness. Hence the lyrical texts have an autobiographic character and therefore the lyrical I stands in a close relation to the author.

I would like to emphasize, that the writing of poetry is a process that usually comes along with revision and several changes, and the final text can be perceived as a piece of art. The truth content of the lyrical texts, which are the horrifying experiences and memories that are tried to be communicated, isn't reduced because of its artistic character and vice versa as Shoshana Felman states [...] the truth does not kill the possibility of art. [...] (Laub/Felman, 206) The poems I chose can be read as an attempt to convey the memories of a terrible past and/or the perception of traumatic moments. What makes the "portrayal" of it so challenging is the fact that [...] there are never enough words or the right words [...] to articulate the story that cannot be fully captured in *thoughts, memory and speech*.¹ [...] (ibid., 78) With the use of lyrical devices there is a possibility to transmit meaning beyond words. All the poems that will be examined make use of such literary means. In the authors' attempts to transmit what they had to endure, their works sometimes do resemble in terms of figurative language, the specific use of expressions, the way of addressing the collective fate and particularly in the use of symbols and motifs. I purposely selected poems that, in my perception, manifest traits of traumatic experience as well as memories of it in linguistic form, since this will be one of the main aspects the texts will be analyzed on. The implementation of caesuras, short or long breaks induced by punctuation for instance, or the specific tone of a poem through the particular use of vocabulary are auxiliary in that regard, as will be elaborated later on in the thesis.

While some of the poems came into being during the immediate experience of persecution or captivity, the majority of the selected pieces are post-war poems. During my research, I thought there might be a significant difference, depending on the time of origin. As a matter of fact, they all convey the same intensity. The notion of traumatic experience though is rather transmitted in those texts which were written while the author was surrounded by severe danger, such as Ruth Klüger's *Auschwitz* or *Der Kamin*. Whereas the post-war poems narrate rather of a remembered than of an immediate perception of the experienced. Furthermore, the impact of having endured such an inhuman tragedy manifests in certain psychological responses, such as depression. (Laub/Lee, 433, Krystal, 116) Some of the poems convey a notable depressive mood, due to the interaction of the specific use of images and linguistic devices. My approach of analysis and interpretation is mainly based on a linguistic examination with regard to the historical as well as the autobiographical context. Linguistic/lyrical devices are the key aspect in order to look beyond the written words and make the connection to the traumatic experiences and memories of the poets. Punctuation, repetition, rhymes, figurative language, tone, etc. are all helpful means, which support the writers in their attempt to convey their perception, thoughts

¹ Italics in original

and memories of a traumatizing past. The historical context of the Shoah is inevitably steadily given in each poem, in some clearly comprehensible, in others less transparent. Although all the selected poems are resting upon personal experiences, which is why the individual trauma is mostly central, at the same time they may be seen to speak for all Holocaust victims and therefore include the collective trauma as well. This collective character becomes visible through the poets' use of certain phrasings and changing of personal pronouns. A semantic approach therefore seems most efficient in order to trace back the traumatic experiences and memories, individual or collective.

2. Trauma and Literature

The ability to portray trauma in literature is very controversial and often regarded as impossible. (Lehmann, 3-4) There are no words that could possibly describe the sheer brutality the Nazis proceeded with to exterminate Jewish life. (Laub/Felman, 87) Where there are no adequate words, there is no possibility to write about the Holocaust in an adequate way. So at least it seems. For some silence appears to be the only reasonable response as Annette Jael Lehman reflects in her work *Im Zeichen der Shoah*, "diese Stummheit repräsentiert das absolute Leiden" (Lehmann, 3). But to think of silence as the *only* adequate response would mean to deprive Holocaust survivors once again of their right – the right to raise voice, to share their stories, and to at least try to give expression to their personal and to the collective trauma. Once again, they would be reduced to silence. (Laub/Felman, 83, Brison, 49) The lyrical form allows the writers to express themselves in their personal poetic voice and on a linguistic level that differs from the everyday language. The various lyrical means not only help the poet to convey meaning but also to intensify the image that is meant to be transmitted. Writing poetry during and after a life in the ghetto or concentration camp provides the survivors with an alternative "zum hoffnungslosen Untergang und zur stummen Vernichtung" (Lehmann, 21). Poetry is a way to process the experienced as well as an attempt to control the individual trauma. (Boyken/Immer, 19)

2.1 The Controversy about Representing *Trauma* in Literature

Thomas Boyken and Nikolas Immer claim in *Texturen der Wunde* that a representation of trauma in literary texts is possible indeed, on a textual basis as well as on a formative level. (Boyken/Immer, 20) I would like to emphasize though that when I am speaking of trauma, I am not referring to trauma in its individual existence as a psychological condition that cannot be grasped to its full extent by neither the victims themselves nor the analysts. (Laub/Lee, 433) Rather am I referring to the term as the memory of a traumatizing event, the traumatic

experience or certain characteristics. An ongoing unpredictable mental process like a severe trauma is indeed inexplicable and unrepresentable. (Grotstein in Laub/Lee, 439-440, Laub/Lee, 444) I would like to emphasize that the full atrocity of the Shoah cannot be described by any words, but a narration of what the victims are able to remember can take place indeed. Without doubt, the problem of inexplicability, especially in literature, is a persistent one. Writers, who survived and intended to pass on their atrocious stories were faced with the difficulty and seeming impossibility [...] ein Verbrechen, ein Leiden, ein Sterben sinnlich, imaginative, in sprachlichen Zeichen ausdrücken zu sollen [...] (Emmerich, 367). In other words, to express something that goes beyond any human capability of imagination. Despite all, after everything they had to endure, some writers still took up the challenge to give expression to their horrible pasts full of sheer futility. (ibid., 367-368)

2.2 Understanding *Trauma*

In order to examine the selected poems on the aspect of trauma it is inevitable to look deeper into its theories and how it can be connected to poetry. Trauma is a process that takes place on a psychological level, which can show multiple different reactions as a consequence of traumatic experience, depending on the individual. (Cohen/Kinston in Laub/Lee, 439-440) What makes a clear definition of the state as well as the term trauma so difficult is the fact that the individual victim of a traumatic event responds in his or her very own way. Those individual responses may resemble each other but they can also vary significantly, since there is no firm structure that can be ascertained. (ibid., 440) This inevitably leads to the question how something can be worked through that is not understood to its full extent in any kind of way.

The initial meaning of the term trauma originates from the medical field and simply stands for a severe physical injury through an external force. (Boyken/Immer, 13) Taking this precise meaning into consideration only, trauma can be put into words as revealed in the following lines out of Magdalena Klein's poem *I'm telling the Story*: "In rags, soiled, infested with lice, \Stabbed by hunger and lined up in fives" (Klein, 119). These lines portray the physical harm carried out on innocent people by the Nazis functioning as the external force. The definition and representation of trauma as a psychological condition on the other hand is certainly more complex.

Psychoanalytical theories of trauma, emerged increasingly after World War I. Sigmund Freud developed essential and interesting approaches concerning trauma, to which nowadays is still drawn on in various fields of humanities. (Vordermark, 166, Caruth 2009, 7) He reviewed, developed and altered his approach again and again, which affirms the intricacy of the subject

matter. Ulrike Vordermark points out in *Das Gedächtnis des Todes* that the understanding of trauma is always strongly connected with a certain historical background. (Vordermark, 164-165) The aftermath of the Holocaust thus called for a new examination of trauma, its meaning and impact. The former understanding of and insight to it wasn't sufficient any more. The impact of the Shoah was so extreme and the psychological response of the victims so severe and of a different kind than so far, that no term seemed to be appropriate to describe that condition. (ibid. 167-168) Vordermark quotes in her work literary theorist Jan Philipp Reemtsma's perception of the psychological impact after the Holocaust, which he calls "Extremtraumatisierung". The victims are haunted by their traumatic experiences and incapable to overcome them. The recurrence of the traumatic memories and therefore the reliving of the moment does not function as a healing process, it is a constant torture for those affected and a life-time burden. (Reemtsma in Vordermark, 168) Author Jean Améry for instance describes the re-experiencing of his personal physical torture by the Nazis in *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne*:

Es ist *noch immer nicht* vorbei. Ich baumele *noch immer*², zweiundzwanzig Jahre danach, an ausgereckten Armen über dem Boden, keuche und bezichtige mich. Da gibt es kein »Verdrängen«. (Améry, 75)

As Reemtsma rightly suggested the events of the Shoah for the individuals are from such severe traumatizing nature that *overcoming* them seems impossible and as Améry put it, there is no repression per se, those traumatizing moments will always find a way back into mind and body. While Améry states that there is no possibility of repressing something so horrible as physical torture, Dori Laub claims that the majority of survivors he worked with had almost always trouble "to grasp or remember the trauma". (Laub/Lee, 437) It should be noted though that Améry merely refers to himself in the given passage and to his personal experience, for him there is no repression.

The inability to remember is a result of self-protection and to enable the victims to recall, the necessity of an "empathic other" is crucial, as Laub states. (ibid., 445) He understands trauma as a clear connection to Freud's concept of the death instinct. On one hand it operates on a level of destruction on the other hand with a tendency to "quiescence". (ibid. 437) Trauma, according to Laub, "becomes a force of annihilation – of memory, of reality, and of life." (ibid. 461) This brief outline on the aspect of trauma is therefore essential for my examination of the poems, because the traumatic experiences, the traumatic memories and specific responses to it are all interconnected.

² Italics added

2.3 The Force to Remember and the Effect of Repetition as Lyrical Device

Bearing the up to now explained theory in mind, I would like to take a closer look at Rose Ausländer's poem *Dennoch Rosen*. Laub perceives trauma as "a force of annihilation – of memory, of reality, and of life". Yet, this assertion can be interpreted quite the opposite way as well, encouraged by the hyphen. Trauma therefore can be understood as the force to remember, the force of dealing with reality and the force of managing life as it is. This compulsion is evident in the seeming incapability to forget in the following example:

Dennoch Rosen
sommerhoch
Schmetterlinge
Möwenschwingen
überm Fluß

Nein
ich vergesse nicht
die eingebrannten Jahre
ich vergesse nicht
daß Stiefel
den Regenbogen zertraten
daß sie sich rüsteten
uns zu verwandeln in
Feuerrosen Feuerfalter Feuerschwingen

dennoch sommerhoch
der Duft
die Doppelflügel überm Fluß
das Gold auf meiner Haut

und die toten Rosen
nach der Nacht

(Rose Ausländer in *Ich spiele noch*, 7)

Rose Ausländer's homeland, the Bukowina, and its pure nature had always been an inspiration to her, but many of her poems are marked by her experience in the Ghetto of Czernowitz, where 45000 Jewish people were herded together and diminished day by day. (Helfrich, 167) Rose Ausländer (1901), born as Rosalie Beatrice Scherzer, experienced persecution and inhuman conditions during the years in the Ghetto. She was forced to labor and heavily abused many times. Her life was shaped by fear and traumatic events and so are many of her lyrical poems. (Ausländer in Helfrich, 169) *Dennoch Rosen* starts off in a very gentle and bloomy language, a language of nature, which is often to be found in and which is a characteristic feature of her work. What makes it so interesting is that Rose Ausländer fuses that soft language with a sudden

harsh one. Memories of an unspoiled and unimpaired Bukowina change into memories of traumatizing nature, as to be seen by reference to the transition from the first to the second stanza. The lyrical I seems to have just been in a very peaceful environment and state of mind even though the word “dennoch” already indicates a slightly negative connotation. The change of tone in the second stanza appears very abrupt. This unexpected shift might be associated with the suddenness of the invasion of the Nazis in the Bukowina and the fateful changes that came along with it.

The following lines reveal the speaker’s inability to forget, rather than her inability to remember, “Nein\Ich vergesse nicht\die eingebrannten Jahre\Ich vergesse nicht”. The usage of repetition is a common rhetorical mean in the lyrical genre, and as a literary device it can be of different kinds, usually applied in order to emphasize a certain meaning. (Literary Devices) Repetition will turn out as an interesting opportunity to trace back the aspect of traumatic memories in the poems. For many Holocaust survivors the traumatic experienced is unbearable and the trauma shows in an uncontrollable resurgence of the traumatic event. A non-intentional repetition of traumatic memories takes place, thus the force to remember. (Boyken/Immer, 14) In the poem above the use of repetition clearly stands out. However, the implementation of it seems rather intentional and controlled than the opposite. The lyrical I’s inability to forget reveals unambiguously in “ich vergesse nicht”. In the last line of the third stanza on the other hand the repetition is ambiguous indeed. Repeating the word *fire* as part of the nouns three times consecutively without any punctuation in “Feuerrosen Feuerfalter Feuerschwingen” evokes a very intense image that can be interpreted in different ways.

On one hand it is possible that the speaker refers to a thriving and pure nature, on the other hand and more interesting for my analysis is a reading of it as a notion of traumatic memory, which does have an “intrusive” character. (Brison, 45) In an analysis of Rose Ausländer’s *Immer Atlantis* Burkhard Meyer-Sickendieck reads into the repetition of the word “immer” in the poem a compulsively repetitive appearing image. (Meyer-Sickendieck, 56) This compulsive repetition can also be interpreted into the line “Feuerrosen Feuerfalter Feuerschwingen”, as an image of destruction. The once lively roses, butterflies and gulls from the first stanza are turned into fire and ashes. What evokes this assumption is the idea conveyed in the verses before, especially the lines “daß sie sich rüsteten\uns zu verwandeln in”. Compared to the bloomy language used in the beginning, the stanza now embodies very harsh vocabulary. These lines can be read as reference to the Nazis “daß *sie*³ sich rüsteten”, preparing to exterminate Jewish life, “*uns* zu verwandeln”. This idea is supported by the use of third person plural “sie” possibly

³ Italics added

as reference to the Nazis and the use of first person plural “uns” as the lyrical I including herself in the collective of Jewish victims. The enunciation of “die eingebrannten Jahre” might imply that the years of persecution and violence may have ended but the memories and the pain are deeply anchored. The rough phonology of the words “Zertraten” and “rüsteten”, due to the combination of the consonants “r” and “t”, plus the words’ military character, convey a sense of brutality.

Another sudden change of tone, from a harsh back to a gentle one, emerges in the third stanza. The lyrical I is now back from the seeming flashback bringing up traumatic memories, in the initial environment of nature. The “dennoch” at this point implies that despite the past there are still moments worth living for, yet with a bitter overtone. Life goes on as it is; the force of life. Considering what I have read into the poem so far, the last two lines “und die toten Rosen\nach der Nacht” in that regard end on a hopeless and dismal notion.

3. Testifying and its Importance

In his co-work *Testimony* with Shoshana Felman Dori Laub puts his focus on the necessity of testifying and how important it is for Holocaust victims to be heard. His analysis is based on interviews with the survivors, their role as witnesses, and the interviewer’s role as active listener. The process of testifying means for the victim to re-live the traumatic event and to be set back into it. (Laub/Felman, 67, Laub 2009, 139) In order to set this process in motion, the listener needs to encourage the survivors and give them assurance that they are accompanied during the entire process of memorizing and testifying. What the victim will tell can often be unstructured and non-linear. (Laub 2009, 139) What emerges is unknown, as Laub states:

Testimony is not a ready-made text. It emerges from a process that is set in motion in a place that provides safety through the presence of the listener (interviewer) for the witness (interviewee). People who come to bear witness do not fully know what they know. (ibid., 140)

A feeling of security needs to be conveyed through the dialogue in order to reconstruct the memories of the survivors. How does this apply then to a written testimony, furthermore a poetic testimony? An active listener as in the case of the testimonial interview is not present during the process of writing. Yet, a dialogue is taking place. Writing poetry functions as an inner dialogue, as a conversation with the inner self. (Helfrich, 227) And even though a poem is “a ready-made text” in the end, the poet still goes through the process of testifying during the act of writing. The difference and also the risk is, the lack of an immediate listener. (Laub/Felman, 67) Oral testimony can be surprising, to both the narrator and the listener, but

so can be a poetic testimony. The meaning a poem conveys often clarifies only after the process of writing. As Shoshana Felman points out, poetry “speaks *beyond its means*”. (Laub/Felman, 21)

3.1 Poetic Testimony and its Risk

Each of the poems that will be examined constitute a form of testimony. As explained earlier, they all are responses to the Holocaust and for the most part process personal experiences. However, the poetic testimony differs in an essential way from that of an oral one. During the process of writing there is no active and immediate listener to comfort and encourage the person who is testifying, a fact which Laub considers to be serious: “If one talks about the trauma without being truly heard or listened to, the telling might itself be lived as a return of the trauma – a *re-experiencing of the event itself*” (ibid., 67) and that can be unbearable and might as well end fatal. Whether in written or oral form, in any case “testimony speaks to an inner truth of the survivor.” (Laub 2009, 142) A truth that many Holocaust victims could not endure any longer; for some suicide seemed to be the only way out.

The Romanian poet Magdalena Klein (1920) was amongst those who committed suicide after they had been overpowered by their trauma. Her niece Susan Simpson Geroe disclosed that [...] physically she was able to survive starvation and the other horrors of concentration camp, but not the emotional pain that haunted her [...] (Simpson Geroe, 79). Together with her family she was deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau, where she was separated from her parents and her sister’s children right after the arrival. The pain of her loss was too great, and also was the reason why she attempted to run into the electrical fence that surrounded the camp several times. Yet, her sisters convinced her to fight. Magdalena Klein survived, but the past haunted her day after day. Her selection of poems reveals how depressive she must have been. *Pearls and Laces* contains both poems written before her deportation to Auschwitz as well as poems written in the years after. Since she was only thirteen when National Socialism took over and the persecution by the Nazis began, her entire life had been shaped by horrid events. (ibid., 73-80) In one of her very last poems *This is no kind of life* the suffering becomes clearly visible:

This is no kind of life;
That’s why I want to die.
Death would be good,
I can no longer stay alive.

My mind is tired of working,
Please God, help me.
Take me to you, I want to go right away,

⁴ Italics in original

For I feel, I can no longer stay.

I will never long to return,
I never wanted to live.
If I die, that will be
My redemption, the spring.

Life has been brutal to me.
It never brought nay good.
Perhaps the day will arrive
When life will have me sacrificed.

I will then look back calmly,
For it has been my only wish,
To be dead already, and not suffer
This evil, cursed world of gibberish.

(Magdalena Klein, 127)

Compared to the language in Rose Ausländer's poems, Magdalena Klein makes use of a simpler and clearer idiom, through which meaning and message of her poems mostly appear less ambivalent, as to be seen in the first stanza of the above poem. Starting off with the lines "This is no kind of life;\That's why I want to die." immediately reveals the desperation and exhaustion of the lyrical I. The usage of punctuation supports the determination that lies in those words and provides a strong caesura⁵ at the end of the lines. For the reader this dramatic pause supports the idea of a mind already set.

The first line of the second stanza "My mind is tired of working" links back to the aspect of trauma and the idea of the intrusive repetition of traumatic memories. This represents the speaker's exhaustion. The emphasis on the phrase "I can no longer" by repeating it, points towards the difficulty for the lyrical I to cope with the past as well as the presence. The repetition functions to stress the unambiguous meaning of the words. A reason to go on with life seems to be non-existing. The continuous lines in the fourth stanza "Life has been brutal to me.\It never brought nay good." shows two interesting points. Firstly, the use of Present Perfect Tense⁶ in the first line implies the consistency of a merciless life. Because of her young age when the persecution of Jews started, almost her entire life was based on threat and fear, as already mentioned above. Secondly, again the punctuation after each line supports the firmness of the assertion. There is neither doubting nor hope implied in those lines.

⁵ As a lyrical mean a caesura is known as a break after a or during a line, often caused by an exclamation mark or other punctuation (Literary Devices)

⁶ I am referring to the English translation of the poem. The original version was written in Hungarian and may differ from its translation regarding the tense in that line.

The poem as a whole conveys a strong sense of longing; a deep longing for tranquility, which links back to Laub's understanding of trauma conjoined with Freud's concept of the death instinct. One characteristic of that concept is "the inclination to quiescence as the end of disturbance" while the other one is "the destructive tendency to do violence both to the self and to others". (Laub/Lee, 437) "If I die, that will be\My redemption, the spring." Thus, death would be the desired quiescence. The deep longing for death as pointed out clearly in the middle lines of the last stanza, "For it has been my only wish,\To be dead already, and not suffer" represents the idea of the destructive tendency of the self. Furthermore, it expresses the yearning to be reunited with her family. As mentioned earlier, Magdalena Klein could hardly deal with the loss of them, especially devastating was the loss of her mother to whom she had a very close relationship. As Laub suggests testifying "is the realization that the lost ones are not coming back; the realization that what life is all about is precisely living with an unfulfilled hope; (Laub/Felman, 91) Perceiving Magdalena Klein's poem as a testimony, it reveals precisely that realization. Something that also becomes apparent in her lyrical text is that, as her niece rightly stated, [...] the Nazis did not destroy them in the physical sense, but murdered their spirit [...] (Simpson Geroe, 79) The very first line of Magdalena Klein's poem articulates unvarnished that for her *This is no kind of life*.

3.2 Poetry as a Surviving Mechanism

While for some poets living with their trauma became unbearable, for others their poetry provided a creative space, in which they could work through their experiences and memories. To some extent, poetry can function as a healing process. (Helfrich 227) Writing poetry also enables the poets to distance themselves from the cruel reality. Not only after the Holocaust, when testifying was a coping mechanism, but also during the time of captivity in the ghetto or concentration camp some victims wrote down the experienced in poems in order to cope with the truth. Rose Ausländer stated:

Der unerträglichen Realität gegenüber gab es zwei Verhaltensweisen: entweder man gab sich der Verzweiflung preis, oder man übersiedelte in eine andere Wirklichkeit, die geistige. Wir zum Tode verurteilten Juden waren unsagbar trostbedürftig. Und während wir den Tod erwarteten, wohnten manche von uns in Traumworten – unser traumatisches Heim in der Heimatlosigkeit. Schreiben war Leben. Überleben.“
(Ausländer in Helfrich, 176)

Letting themselves enter a different reality, a spiritual or intellectual one, helped some of the victims to endure their actual reality. Poetry functioned as a refuge, a consolation and with

reference to the quote above, one could even say as a survival mechanism. On one hand poetry makes it possible to write against the fear and despair, on the other hand it means to distance oneself from traumatic events by putting oneself into the position of an external observer and not a victim. How this function is realized on a textual level will be seen in Ruth Klüger's poem *Auschwitz*, in which the lyrical I conducts the attempt to exclude herself from the traumatic circumstances. "The traumatic event, although real, took place outside the parameters of "normal" reality, such as causality, sequence, place and time", which means that trauma is "an event that could not and did not proceed through to its completion, has no ending, attained no closure, and therefore, as far as its survivors are concerned, continues into the present and is current in every respect" (Laub/Felman, 69). Magdalena Klein's poem already gave an example on how haunting this horrifying past can truly be.

3.2.1 The Observing Perspective

The following example demonstrates precisely that dissociation of the lyrical I from the dreadfulness the victims in the concentration camps were exposed to. So far it was more or less the memory of the traumatic experienced and the impact of it that was revealed in the poems already examined. In contrast, the following text deals with the traumatic circumstances themselves as well as with their observation. Ruth Klüger (1931) wrote her poem *Auschwitz* as a teenager while being held captive in that concentration camp. She was born and raised in Vienna, where she experienced the outrage of the Nazis. 1942, at the age of only eleven, she and her mother were deported to Theresienstadt. Later she was moved to Auschwitz, where she created the following poem under the constant threat to her life. (Klüger 2016, 43-47, Klüger 2008, 32-33)

Kalt und trüb ist noch der Morgen,
Männer gehn zur Arbeit hin,
schwer von Leid, gedrückt von Sorgen,
fern der Zeit, da sie geborgen,
langsam wandern sie dahin.

Aber jene Männer dort
bald nicht mehr die Sonne sehn.
Freiheit nahm man ihnen fort.
Welch ein grauenvoller Mord,
dem sie still entgegengohn.

Gott, du allein darfst's doch nur gebn,
das große, heilige Menschenleben,
du gibst das Dasein und du gibst den Tod.
Und du, du siehst dieses endlose Morden,

du siehst dies blutigen, grausamen Horden,
und Menschen verachten dein höchstes Gebot!

Wir haben die herrliche Heimat verlassen,
bleiben wir ewig in Elend und Not?
Willst du, dass alle Menschen uns hassen,
dass wir im Staube der schmutzigsten Gassen
leiden den elendsten, niedrigsten Tod?

Hinter den Baracken brennt
Feuer, Feuer Tag und Nacht.
Jeder Jude es hier kennt,
jeder weiß, für wen es brennt,
und kein Aug', das uns bewacht?

Sag, wofür muss ich hier büßen
nenn mir *eines* Unrechts Spur.
Darf ich nicht das Leben grüßen?
Darf mich nicht der Morgen küssen
und die Schönheit der Natur?

Fressen unsre Leichen Raben?
Müssen wir vernichtet sein?
Sag, wo werd' ich einst begraben?
Herr, ich will nur Freiheit haben
und der Heimat Sonnenschein.

Fern im Osten liegt ein Dunst,
und Natur zeigt ihre Kunst:
Sieh, die Sonne bricht hervor.
Zeigt mir diese Strahlensonne
eine neue Lebenswonne?
Zieht die Freiheit still empor?

(Ruth Klüger 2016, 45)

In May 1944, twelve-year old Ruth Klüger composed this poem in her mind, since there was no possibility for her to write it down on paper. The reason for the consistency of the rhyme scheme throughout the text as well as the clear verse structure is that this way she could memorize the stanzas easier. (ibid., 47) It is possible though that changes have been carried out when she actually wrote it down years later. Either way, the first three stanzas clearly put the speaker into the position of the observer, simply depicting the suffering of the people around and diverging herself from it. It says “Männer gehn zur Arbeit hin, schwer von Leid, gedrückt von Sorgen”, excluding the lyrical I from the rest of the hard working men and from a situation of pure affliction. In the second stanza the poet foreshadows all those men’s certain death still from a third person perspective, with an omniscient viewpoint. The lines “Freiheit nahm man

ihnen fort. \Welch ein grauenvoller Mord, \dem sie still entgegengehn.“ refer to the collective fate of all victims and the omnipresent sense of fear. The speaker still observes the situation and seems to keep a safe distance from the terrifying conditions.

About the emergence of that specific poem, Ruth Klüger discloses that it was “das erste, aber nicht das letzte Mal, dass ich mir einbildete, ich schriebe über etwas, das außerhalb von mir stattfand, etwas, das ich beobachtete, nicht etwas, das mich beutelte” (ibid., 44). While this personal statement regarding the poem appears interesting, it should also be kept in mind that it is Ruth Klüger’s subjective reflection as a Holocaust victim on her own work, rather than an objective analysis. Yet, the idea of her not perceiving herself as part of the traumatic events and the feeling of only describing a scene, is clearly evident in the text. By making use of a third person omniscient perspective as a stylistic device, she attempts to remove herself from the situation and by that to protect her sanity.

Up until the third stanza the lyrical I draws back from the happenings, which changes in the second part of the poem. Shortly after it comes to a juxtaposition between the speaker and an addressed “du”, that constitutes God. The use of second person singular whether it addresses God or an absent person, appears also in Rose Ausländer’s and Magdalena Klein’s poems. The intended meaning behind that could be that for the victims [...] there was no longer an other to which [sic] one could say “Thou” in the hope of being heard, of being recognized of a subject, of being answered. [...] The Holocaust created in this way a world in which one *could not bear witness to oneself*⁷[...] (Laub/Felman, 82). With that in mind the addressing of an abstract “du” appears as the speaker’s potential need to turn to someone who will listen. The lines “Und du, du siehst dieses endlose Morden, \du siehst diese blutigen grausamen Horden“ imply incomprehension and an uncertainty towards belief, while they also convey the image of death transmitted by the choice of words which was adapted rather because of the traumatic circumstances than because of artistic reasons. (Jaiser, 31) Furthermore, the number of lines in the third and last stanza differs from the rest and consists of six instead of five lines. Ruth Klüger explained this change in form as an attempt to represent the disorder of the everyday life in the concentration camp. (Klüger 2016, 47)

While the attempt of portraying that disorder by adding a line to the usual structure of the stanza is not entirely successful, another small alteration in the continuous stanza appears striking indeed – the use of the collective “we” in “Wir haben die herrliche Heimat verlassen”. The third person plural now replaces the anonymous community from the first part of the poem and includes the lyrical I as a victim. (ibid., 89) The outside point of view turns into an inside

⁷ Italics in original

point of view. The earlier juxtaposition between the speaker and God is continued and is still determined by a sense of incomprehension. The tone becomes more reproachful and the notion of religious doubt more distinct, when the lyrical I hints at the crematoria in the fifth stanza, revealed in “Jeder Jude es hier kennt,\jeder weiß, für wen es brennt,\und kein Aug’, das uns bewacht?”. This last clause especially reflects the speaker’s incomprehension regarding the conception that God seems to allow for this atrocity to happen. The image of fire, is one that will appear again in several other examples. The constant confrontation with that particular image and with the meaning of it, seems to have been deeply disturbing and therefore can be perceived as the reason for its repeated use in the poems.

While in the beginning of the poem the lyrical I excluded herself from the situation, towards the end her involvement becomes stronger and the attempt to distance herself weaker, supported by the fact that in the sixth stanza the collective “we” turns into an “I”, who tries to understand “Sag, wofür muss ich hier büßen\nenn mir *eines*⁸ Unrechts Spur.” In the following verses many questions are raised, which shows how afflicted the speaker is with the unknowing about her further fate and those of all the others, revealed in “Fressen unsre Leichen Raben?\Müssen wir vernichtet sein?\Sag, wo werd’ ich einst begraben?” The use of the collective “we” is taken up again and fear and despair resonate in those lines. The words “Leichen”, “vernichtet” and “begraben” are expressions based on personal experience in the camp, since extermination, piles of corpses and mass graves determined the surroundings. The confrontation with death seems to make the lyrical I wonder when their time comes and what will happen after they’ve been killed. Even though the sense of cruelty, fear and despair sets the tone of almost the entire poem, it ends with a gleam of hope “Zeigt mir diese Strahlensonne\eine neue Lebenswonne?\Zieht die Freiheit still empor?” As last verses of the poem they reveal that, despite everything, the lyrical I still has hope and holds on to a notion of freedom. (Klüger 2016, 47)

While in the beginning the perspective starts as a distanced one with an outside point of view, with every further stanza it steadily transitiones into a victim’s point of view. Central in this text seem to be the traumatizing conditions in the camp, the hard forced labor, the mass murder, the omnipresence of death, the burning of bodies and the constant physical as well as emotional affliction. The lyrical I observes those traumatic events and at the same time seems to experience them herself, while all she is longing for is freedom “Herr, ich will nur Freiheit haben”.

⁸ Italics added

3.2.2 Breaking the Silence

After the end of World War II, some survivors felt obligatory to pass on their stories and to tell the truth to the following generations. The notion of being able to testify about what they were being exposed to had encouraged them to hang on. (Laub/Felman, 78) Dori Laub suggests “the survivors did not only need to survive so that they could tell their story; they also needed to tell their story in order to survive” (ibid., 78). As already mentioned earlier, writing poetry meant entering a different reality; a sphere in which it appears to be easier for the victims to process their traumatic experiences and memories of it. Rose Ausländer endorses Dori Laub’s approach by explaining her personal reason for writing poetry:

Ich schreibe aus innerem Drang, ja ich darf sagen: aus innerem Zwang, quasi für mich selber. Aber publiziere für meine Mitmenschen. (...) Doch mein wesentliches Interesse gilt den Menschen, dem Menschlichen, dem Frieden und Gerechtigkeit unter den Menschen. (Ausländer in Helfich, 264-265)

According to Rose Ausländer’s statement on one hand writing poetry is the result of an inner urge, on the other hand it means reaching out and transmitting the story to the public. When she mentioned that “Schreiben war Leben. Überleben.”, she was not talking for herself only but included other writers as well. (ibid., 176) That it indeed applies to other poets as well is endorsed by Ruth Klüger’s perception of poems as a possibility “um sich Luft zu verschaffen” (Klüger 2016, 9), which can either mean breathing or more likely to get some distance.

Testifying, which to some extent the selected writers did with their poetry, can also be regarded as raising one’s voice and breaking the silence. A silence, which is considered an appropriate response to the events of the Shoah by some theorists (Lehmann, 3). For the victims though it would be essential to gain back their voice and break the silence to which they had been restricted during the Nazi regime. Being restricted and reduced to an object for such a long time, however, makes it extremely hard for the victims to reclaim their voice. (Brison, 49) The problem is, as Dori Laub points out, that “none find piece in silence, even when it is their choice to remain silent (Laub/Felman, 79). He elaborates that “the events become more and more distorted in their silent retention and pervasively invade and contaminate the survivor’s daily life. The longer the story remains untold, the more distorted it becomes in the survivor’s conception of it, so much so that the survivor doubts the reality of the actual event.” (ibid., 79) Which is why the telling of the stories is not only important to pass them on and save them from oblivion but also for the victim’s mental health. The selected poets Rose Ausländer, Magdalena Klein, Ruth Klüger and Elly Gross did find a way out of silence through writing. With every poetic text in response to the Holocaust, they regained and raised their voice and through the

publication of their poetry their “dichterische Stimme” became “Zeuge für die Toten.” (Lehmann, 9) In her poem *In Memory of Our Martyrs* Elly Gross writes:

[...] Some survivors were silent
For over fifty years.
Yet, some have the courage to talk,
and speak of the horror they lived through,
So that the next generation
Will remember our martyrs. [...]

(Elly Gross, 39)

Talking about one’s traumatic experiences needs “courage”, which not everybody could bring up. Those lines imply the hope that by speaking out the atrocity of the Holocaust will never be forgotten as well as that all the fatal victims will be saved from oblivion.

Her poem ends with a very clear message:

[...] In the memory of our families,
Who were brutally murdered,
We who are still alive,
Have an obligation.
It is our duty to share
Our memories with others.
If we remain silent,
It is as if we murder them again. [...]

(ibid., 30)

4. Traumatic Aspects and their expression in Poetry

Life after having experienced the Shoah “requires the courage to confront the past, reexamine it, retell it, and thereby remaster its traumatic aspects” (Brison, 49). What those traumatic aspects are exactly seems difficult to define. Every individual responds in a different way to a traumatic event; an event which is considered an overwhelming moment in which the affected victims perceive a serious threat to life, either to their own or to those of others, without any possibility of escape. Thus, the victim is exposed to fatal danger and terror. (ibid., 40, McNally, 78-79) The selected poets were amongst millions of others, who had to experience a series of such traumatic events. Persecution, forced labor, and violence were daily occurrences.

For Ruth Klüger, Elly Gross and Magdalena Klein, who didn’t escape the deportation to a concentration camp, the suffering took even a greater dimension. They were transported to the

camps like animals and once arrived there they were deprived of their identity and turned into a number; separation and loss followed, degradation and abuse became the norm. (Jaiser, 47, 73) The number of traumatic experiences seems endless. After having survived an atrocity like the Shoah, the victims are still tortured by the memories of it and respond in various psychological ways. Those psychological reactions are what I would like to refer to as traumatic aspects, which include “sleep disorders”, “responses of depression”, “inability to concentrate” and “lack of interest that used to give life meaning” (Brison, 40). Also, the loss of control, the feeling of disconnection from social life and of not belonging, homelessness, numbness, inability to recall former natural emotions as well as the loss of identity. (Seligman, 125, Krystal, 116) Some of those characteristics can be recognized in the poems written by the selected writers.

Traces of these traumatic aspects are reflected in the authors’ specific use of language and the implementation of lyrical devices. Poetry enables to express thoughts and memories beyond a verbal level. Felman argues that the poetic testimony also functions on a non-verbal level and that “language – through its breathless gasps – speak[s] ahead of knowledge and awareness and break[s] through the limits of its own conscious understanding.” (Laub/Felman, 21) Felman’s claim can be supported by Ruth Klüger’s reflection on her own poetry: “Manchmal verstand ich erst später, als das Gedicht fertig dastand, manches blieb undeutlich” (Klüger 2016, 9)

Linguistic devices can transmit traumatic memories or aspects beyond language to a certain extent. The poem *Dennoch Rosen*, which I have already discussed earlier, implements Felman’s approach. The absence of punctuation and the repetitive features create exactly that moment of “breathless gasps”, especially in the second verse. Despite the mostly deliberate application of literary tools, sometimes the emergence of seemingly unexpected images is possible. Another look at the example of “Feuerrosen Feuerfalter Feuerschwingen” evokes that idea. It obviously implies a duality. On one hand, it could very well be the image of pure nature, while at the same time, with regard to the verses before, which clearly revealed memories of persecution, the image of everything being turned into ashes comes up. In addition to that, the immediately consecutive words with the strong figurative character do evoke an unexpected almost flashing appearance of images for the reader. Interpreting this line with regard to the historical as well as the autobiographical background, and with the theory of traumatic memories in mind, it induces the idea of a flashback, the intrusive memory of a traumatic event. (Brison, 40) What this traumatic event is exactly, is unclear, but the image of fire and ashes reminds of the fact that during the persecution synagogues, Jewish shops and houses were set on fire and calls to mind the incineration of countless corpses. (Jaiser, 73) Clearly this verse out of Rose

Ausländer's poem can be interpreted into different directions, but it shows on one hand, as Felman suggested, that it speaks beyond and on the other hand that poetry can evoke something unexpected.

4.1 Traces of Depression

The earlier examined poem of Magdalena Klein *This is no kind of life* in relation to the risk of bearing witness to trauma without having an immediate listener, conveys a strong sense of depression, as a result of traumatic experiences during the Shoah and of the force to deal with its memories in everyday life. A similar depressive mood can be found in Elly Gross' poem *Where is G-d?* The idea that language speaks on a non-verbal level and that meaning doesn't depend on words alone, can be seen in the following example:

The sun shines bright,
But it is dark.
Smoke covers the sky,
So I can't see the sky.
Why is it so dark?

Ashes and fire arise
from the ground
but there is
no fire around.

Oh yes, there are
five chimneys which
pour smoke with ashes
and darken the sky.

Goes up, up high in the air.
What could be there?
Heavy smell everywhere.
Is a rubber factory there?

Oh no, no,
my soul, my heart
goes to heaven.
Oh G-d, are you there?

Please open
the gate to paradise;
let my soul, my heart
enter heaven.

My heart breaks
and I ask why?
Where is our G-d?

(Elly Gross, 17)

The general tone of this poem is a bleak and daunting one. It starts off with a harsh contradiction ending with a full stop, which creates a strong caesura, “The sun shines bright,\But it is dark.” The specific use of punctuation puts emphasis on the message that is transmitted by that assertion. A constant shadow seems to hover over life. Furthermore, when reading the poem, the pause that emerges at the end of the phrase suggests a moment of silence – a silence that conveys a feeling of despair and forlornness.

Elly Gross (1929) was deported from Romania to Auschwitz at the age of fifteen, together with her mother and her brother. Similar to Magdalena Klein’s fate, Elly Gross was separated from her family shortly after the arrival at the camp. (Weiss in Gross, i.) One horror follows another. While those two verses seem to refer to the dark atmosphere in the concentration camp, they could also be referring to a later perception of life after the Shoah – a life haunted by depression and overshadowed by the memories of traumatic experiences. The poem continues with “Smoke covers the sky,\So I can’t see the sky.” In those two lines the repetition of the phrase “the sky” stands out. However, in this case the repetitive effect does not represent re-emerging memories, as suggested in the examination of Rose Ausländer’s poem *Dennoch Rosen*. Images of nature are quite frequently used in camp poetry. They often refer to the homeland, but sometimes those representations of nature are also connected to the life in the concentration camp. The image of the sky, as it appears in the example of Elly Gross’s poem, links both the worlds, outside and inside the camp. (Jaiser, 88) By repeating it, the meaning of the sky image intensifies. The lyrical I is deprived of a view to the sky because of the smoke and through that it seems like the feeling of being held captive becomes more intense. The sky symbolizes the connection to a life outside the concentration camp and the fact that she can’t see it any longer, takes away the notion of freedom. Now that the sky is covered with smoke, preventing even the slightest glimpse of light, hope seems to turn into despair.

The stanza ends with the question “Why is it so dark?” and with another caesura, suggesting another moment of silence. Caesuras are used as lyrical devices in order to provide the written words with a deeper sense. They create moments of quiescence, which invite to reflect on the meaning beyond the words. In the following two stanzas the speaker continues to refer to the omnipresence of fire, ashes and smoke. However, especially striking is the fourth stanza because of its specific rhythm that is created by the interaction of structure and rhyme. It starts off with “Goes up, up high in the air.” The repetition of “up”, immediately consecutive, almost gives the line a musical sound when reading it out. That musical character continues due to the

following full rhymes in “What could be there?\Heavy smell everywhere.\Is a rubber factory there?” and by raising all those questions in addition to the rhythmical features, these verses manifest an almost naïve character. The seeming simplicity on one hand can be interpreted as the perception of the fifteen-year-old girl finding herself in the utmost horrifying circumstances, not yet realizing what is happening to and around her. On the other hand, it can also be read from a broader angle, as an implied criticism of the many bystanders, who were aware of the existence of the concentration camps but overlooked their actual purpose. (Laub/Felman, 208)

Compared to the first stanza, in this one the punctuation creates shorter breaks in order to support the rhythm that is created by the interplay of repetition, structure and rhyme. The depressive tone of the first five lines returns towards the end when the speaker starts addressing God⁹, begging him for redemption. “Oh G-d, are you there?\Please open\the gate to paradise;” The addressing of the “you” as God, reminds of Ruth Klüger’s poem *Auschwitz*, in which a similar dialogue takes place and in which the lyrical I’s desperate hope to be heard is conveyed. Unlike in Ruth Klüger’s text, there is no notion of reproach resonating in the speaker’s voice, only despair. Since the poem was written between 1966 and 1999 the author relates to the memories of that traumatic time and not to her immediate surroundings, unlike for instance in the case of the poem *Auschwitz*. The depressive tone hovering over the text may be regarded as the result of those traumatic memories. In the very last lines the lyrical I raises one last question that will remain unanswered “My heart breaks\and I ask why?\Where is our G-d?”

Ich bin schon lange verschollen by Rose Ausländer appears interesting on the note of depression as well. The idea of it is not as clearly transmitted as in Magdalena Klein’s or Elly Gross’s poems, still her words mirror loneliness and lostness.

Ich bin
schon lange verschollen
doch
ich lebe immer noch
in einem
verlorenen Zimmer

und spiele
mit Worten
wie ein
törichtes Kind

(Rose Ausländer in *Ich spiele noch*, 30)

⁹ The specific spelling of the word God, with a hyphen instead of the o, is often found in Jewish writing and a respectful way of writing out God’s name. (Jewish Community Center)

Despite its less transparent character, due to the figurative language Rose Ausländer uses, the first half of the text conveys a rather gloomy tone, which results from the combination of structure and lexical choices. The absence of punctuation, a feature in many of her poems, evokes the impression of a never-ending string of thoughts. This unbroken string of thoughts seems to be interrupted briefly by the transition from the first into the second stanza, despite the enjambment¹⁰, and causes a short but meaningful break. A break which is import, since it induces a slight change of tone. Unlike the first stanza, the second one reveals a sense of solace and comfort. The lyrical I's perception of herself as "schon lange verschollen" might be a reference to the years of persecution. During her life in the Czernowitz Ghetto she went into hiding in various basements, in order to escape the deportations to the concentration camps. (Helfrich, 193) That feeling of being "verschollen" and maybe the feeling of not finding a way back to one's former life, seems to accompany her even in her later years. In the years of exile, she never really feels comfortable, partly because her new home doesn't provide her with the intellectual world like the Bukowina did, which evoked a great sense of "Heimweh". (ibid., 217) The words "verschollen" and "verloren" support the idea of feeling lost and lonely. Interesting appears the duality in the lines of the first stanza. While the lines "schon lange verschollen" and "in einem\verlorenen Zimmer" convey a quite depressive mood, the verses "Ich bin" and "ich lebe immer noch", especially because of the fact that they constitute single verses and by that disengage from the rest, they reveal quite the opposite of the fatigue and despair reflected in the other lines. It almost evokes a notion of resistance to a seemingly depressive life. As indicated before, the transition from the first into the second stanza, initiates a slight change of tone. Continuing with "und spiele\mit Worten\wie ein\törichtes Kind". The word "spiele" in combination with the simile "wie ein\törichtes Kind" suggests a sense of ingenuousness and levity, which is in complete contradiction to what was conveyed in the earlier part of the poem. The image of the "Spiel" occurs quite frequently in Rose Ausländer's poetry and the assumption is that the words, the text itself, constitutes a sort of latitude, in which she can unfold. (Lehmann, 200-202) The play with words is essential in her life and clearly expressed in those last lines. It constitutes a possibility to back away from the dull reality and to dive into a world of words unconfined. (Helfrich, 9)

The discussed examples should display the sense of depression as an aspect of trauma. With certainty this cannot completely be defined by referring to structure, tone and use of language. Yet, the idea and traces of it can be conveyed by the interplay of the latter bearing the biographical and historical backgrounds in mind.

¹⁰ Passing over from one line to the next, without use of punctuation (Literary Devices)

4.2 Loss - of Home, Identity and Loved ones

A brief example of the dealing with homelessness was just mentioned in Rose Ausländer's *Ich bin schon lange verschollen*. Naturally, loss of identity, loss of home and loss in general often determine a central theme in Holocaust poetry. After the end of World War II and the liberation of the concentration camps, those victims who survived this atrocity, were literally left with nothing. They had been expelled from their homes and robbed of their assets. Their homes were no longer their homes and their former neighbors and fellowmen turned out to be either denounciators, bystanders or perpetrators. Everything that used to be familiar was gone. (Améry, 84) Along with that and worse was the deprivation of natural human rights and of one's former identity. By "transporting" them to the camps, by violently shaving their heads, by putting them all into the same rags, by vanishing their names and replacing them with numbers, they were reduced to objects, and nothing more than that. (Nader, 71) Those who ended up in a concentration camp went through a traumatic shock experience right at the outset. (Jaiser, 47-48) After being deprived of one's former identity and home, regaining it, after having survived, was everything but easy. What was left after a massive destruction were a few survivors who didn't know who they were or where they belonged. (Brison, 47, Améry 85-93)

An ambivalent feeling towards her "Heimat" appears in Ruth Klüger's poem *Heldenplatz*. Even after years in exile she keeps coming back to the city where she grew up. Despite all the traumatic memories related to this place, she feels an inner urge to return, in the hope to find answers. (Klüger 2008, 211)

Es heißt:
Im Hause des Henkers
sprich nicht
vom Strick.
Ich weiß –
und sprech auf Schritten und Tritten
vom Henken.
Gegen die guten Sitten
verstößt das Gedenken.

Ich bin im Hause des Henkers geboren.
Naturgemäß kehr ich wieder.
In krummen Verstecken
such ich den Strick.
Mir blieb eine Faser davon im Genick.
Meine Hartnäckigkeit war mein Glück.

Doch der Strick ging verloren
und der Henker ist gestorben.
Auf dem Galgenplatz blüht jetzt der Flieder.

(Ruth Klüger 2016, 40)

Striking in the above example appears the consistent use of metaphors. Ruth Klüger was born in what she calls “im Hause des Henkers”, Vienna, a city which became a venue of violence and inhumanity during the Nazi regime, the venue of Hitler’s successful and destructive propaganda. Yet, she seems to be tied to the place of her childhood that constitutes her “Heimat”. (Améry, 85-93, McGlothlin, 124-125) This is clearly reflected in “Naturgemäß kehr ich wieder.“

The lyrical I seems to be seeking for answers “In krummen Verstecken” – answers to the terrifying truth of the Shoah. She returns in the hope to understand “die mörderische und selbstmörderische Gewalt des letzten Jahrhunderts” (Klüger 2008, 211). However, “der Strick ging verloren” and left her with a “Faser davon im Genick”. The truth remained “in krummen Verstecken” and on the Heldenplatz, the “Galgenplatz” where once thousands of people gathered to worship a cruel and merciless dictator, “blüht jetzt der Flieder”. Ruth Klüger’s poem is remarkable because of its consistent use of one and the same metaphor throughout the verses. The search for missing pieces reveals a notion of restlessness and the return to her origins endorses Améry’s approach that there is only one “Heimat”. (Améry, 93)

Another poem that deals with loss of home, and loss in general, is a very short one, consisting of only six verses, by Rose Ausländer. Similar to Ruth Klüger’s *Heldenplatz*, it depends on figurative language. Rose Ausländer’s homeland the Bukowina appears frequently as a central theme in many of her poems. In the following example the loss of her Bukowina, a place which she remembered as a happy and lively one becomes present and her pain visible through the choice of words.

Ich sammle
meine Verluste
in einer Schale
sie blühen schwarz
wie Mohnduft
in mein Niemandsland

(Rose Ausländer in *Ich spiele noch*, 25)

Compared to the other poems, Rose Ausländer’s work always differentiates because of its specific structure. One verse flows into another, an ongoing enjambment, no breaks, depending on its figurative language, in order to convey the meaning beyond. The poem starts off with

“Ich sammle\meine Verluste”, which indicates two interesting points. Firstly, the use of Present Tense throughout the entire poem, which includes the past and the future as well, revealing “a tension between remembering and forgetting” as Eva B. Revesz suggested in an analysis of a different poem in her essay *Poetry after Auschwitz*. (Revesz, 210) The lyrical I remembers her losses but tries to replace the pain with thoughts of her beloved “Niemandland”, the Bukowina. (Helfrich, 14)

Secondly, the use of plural of the word loss. Rose Ausländer suffered many losses, that of family members, of her mother who became a motif in many of her poems, as will be seen later, of her home and in some way also that of her language. Jean Améry states “Muttersprache und Heimatwelt wachsen mit uns, wachsen in uns hinein und werden so zur Vertrautheit, die uns Sicherheit verbürgt.“ (Améry, 93) For Rose Ausländer as well as for Ruth Klüger, who were both raised with German, this language was not only related to a home but also to a traumatic past. German was the language of their perpetrators, “die Sprache der Feinde” (Klüger in McGlothlin, 126).

Rose Ausländer as well as Ruth Klüger tried to adapt the English language in their poetry but naturally returned to their first language. Rose Ausländer herself called that return “Geheimnis des Unbewußtseins” (Ausländer in Helfrich, 227), and in Rose Ausländer’s biography Cilly Helfrich perceives that return to the mother tongue as absolutely natural, since it is the only true way to express the deepest feelings and thoughts. (Helfrich, 227) Feelings and thoughts like those conveyed in her poem *Ich sammle Verluste*. The poem reveals pain and melancholy all in once. Her losses “blühen schwarz”, in the color of grief, hovering over her life and always leading her back into the “Niemandland”, her home.

Those who survived the Shoah were immediately confronted “mit dem Nichts”, from which they had to build a completely new life. Rose Ausländer writes in her poem *Wie schnell*:

[...] Tag und Nacht
weiß man nicht
wohin mit dem Nichts

aus dem man
schaffen muß
Wohnung Weg
Bewegung und Ruh [...]

(Rose Ausländer in *der Traum*, 106)

Starting from zero, left with nothing but the recent traumatic past, and the confrontation with a new country, a new language, and unfamiliar faces, very likely resulted in a feeling of extreme loneliness, visible in Rose Ausländer's poem *Einsamkeit II*.

Wahrgeworden
die Weissagung der Zigeunerin

Dein Land wird
dich verlassen
du wirst verlieren
Menschen und Schlaf

wirst reden
mit geschlossenen Lippen
zu fremden Lippen

Lieben wird dich
die Einsamkeit
wird dich umarmen

(Rose Ausländer in Helfrich, 204)

During her exile in America Rose Ausländer never felt comfortable nor secure. Her new life was determined by "Einsamkeit". (Helfrich, 204) In the poem the lyrical I addresses a "you", but seems to be displaying the personal experience. At the same time the speaker is clearly turning to an anonymous audience, which could be regarded as an attempt of hers to turn to someone who listens and maybe even understands. Her home, the Bukowina, identifies Rose Ausländer. In her new home America, the pieces that hold her together, which are her language, family, nature and the intellectual world of Csernowitz, seem to dismantle, revealed in "Dein Land wird dich verlassen". She loses "Menschen und Schlaf", and above all she seems to lose herself. The unfamiliarity with the new language and mentality in the country of exile is suggested in "wirst reden\mit geschlossenen Lippen\zu fremden Lippen". Interesting in this line is the implied notion of the believed transparency. The traumatic past seemingly comes to surface, despite "geschlossener Lippen". Hannah Arendt for instance wrote in one of her articles that they did their "Bestes, um anderen Leuten zu beweisen, daß wir ganz gewöhnliche Einwanderer seien" (Arendt in Helfrich, 218). However, the trauma seems to speak for itself.

Jean Améry states that a "neue Heimat" does not exist and [...] Wer sie verloren hat, bleibt ein Verlorener [...] (Améry, 93-94). Rose Ausländer's poem deals with that exact problem. After being forced into a new country, the only thing that seems to embrace her is "die Einsamkeit".

5. Motives and their relation to the individual and collective trauma

Comparing the poems of the four writers, who all differ in their style of writing, especially in their use of language, they reveal some significant similarities despite all variations. A close examination shows that the emerging motifs do resemble quite a lot. As literary device they are interesting because as resurfacing and continuous images in the poems, they define the central theme and by that transmit the message of the text. (Literary Devices)

Images, such as fire, ashes and smoke, which relate to the destruction of Jewish life as well as the motif of the mother as significant other and the unbearable life without her, occurred most frequently in the selected poems. Above all, the fire motif is strongly relating to the traumatic experiences the writers had during the Shoah and the images of it seem to be deeply anchored in each of them. While the motifs often relate to personal feelings and the individual trauma, sometimes they also include the collective perception of the experienced. The omnipresence of fire, smoke and ashes, for instance, is an image every victim of persecution and captivity in a concentration camp or ghetto was exposed to. Either way, motifs just like other lyrical means are auxiliary to convey a deeper message.

5.1 Loss of the Mother and Survivor's Guilt

Along with the violence, degradation, hunger, cold, exhaustion and everything else the victims had to endure, the loss of one's most important person of reference, can constitute a part of the trauma. With six Million systematically murdered Jews, it can be assumed that nearly every surviving victim had lost a great number of family members. For Magdalena Klein the separation from and loss of her mother turned out to be the most tragic and most unbearable one. The memories of her mother being taken and a life without her caused Magdalena Klein immense pain. A feeling that comes to surface very distinctly in many of her post-war poems, one of them is *My Mother*.

My mother taught me to feel, to love,
My mother taught me to cry, to laugh.
My mother taught me goodness and beauty,
But fate snatched her away suddenly.
Since she was taken, I have had no rest.
She was my life's vivifying breath.

(Magdalena Klein, 125)

Striking in the first three lines of this short poem is the repetition of the phrase "my mother taught me". Right at the outset this specific clause is repeated three times in a row exactly the

same way. By that the importance of the mother's role in the speaker's life is emphasized and through the repetitive effect it suggests a notion of a constantly reappearing memory. In the introduction of Magdalena Klein's selection of poems, her niece Susan Simpson Geroe mentions Magdalena Klein's close relationship to her mother, which stands out in every single line of the poem. (Simpson Geroe, 73) Even though the lyrical I is talking, this poem like all the others is very autobiographical, which means through the speaker's voice strongly resonates the poet's voice. The first three lines clearly suggest that her mother was the reason for her ability "to feel" until "fate snatched her away suddenly." This sudden and devastating separation and loss of the most important person seems to have been a moment of traumatizing nature. The assumption that "trauma can obliterate one's former emotional repertoire" and leave a victim feeling "numbed" (Brison, 44) can be interpreted into the lines "Since she was taken, I have had no rest.\She was my life's vivifying breath."

Furthermore, the poem reveals a very rhythmical character, provided by the repetition in the beginning, as well as the use of half rhyme at the end of each verse¹¹. The rhythm given in the text can be read as an attempt to represent the rhythm and balance the mother contributed to the lyrical I's life. A balance that no longer seems to be given after her mother's death. An idea, which is supported by the change of tone from the fourth line onwards. The first part of the poem consists of pleasant memories whereas the second part is determined by painful ones. The loss of the mother as a motif is very present in this text and through that the central theme is transmitted unambiguously. The death of the beloved mother and the unbearable life without her take focus and by that its traumatic character shines through.

In another poem by Magdalena Klein *I always knew* the mother manifests as motif as well, yet in a different way. Unlike the text before, this one addresses to the mother directly with the personal pronoun "you". Interesting in *I always knew* is that the central theme is not tied to the idea of the unconditional love for the mother and the inability to live without her as it was in the poem before. In this text the feeling of guilt resonates. The survivor's guilt is not an uncommon aftermath of the Shoah. For some victims the fact of their own survival while millions of others had to die, amongst them the closest family members, appeared as an unbearable burden. (Lehmann, 25-26) This feeling of guilt comes to surface in the fourth stanza of *I always knew*:

[...] But on a horrible night, as our train
Slowed down and stopped in the open plain,

¹¹ Half rhymes or imperfect rhymes are rhymes in which the consonant sounds resemble whereas the vowel sounds differ (Literary Devices)

They stole you from me, my only treasure.
And yet, I could continue on further. [...]

(Magdalena Klein, 121)

The metaphor “my only treasure” emphasizes the idea of the mother as the only true meaning to life, which already turned out to be the message of the poem *My Mother*. Obviously, these lines reflect the speaker’s memories of being separated from her mother at the arrival in the concentration camp. (Simpson Geroe, 74) Despite the tragedy she “could continue on further.” The tone in this very line reveals an almost contemptuous attitude towards herself, due to the fact that she survived but her mother didn’t. The very last two lines of the poem show how hard it actually is for her to keep on going. “And now, down here, lifelessly, I play a farce, I mime.\This world is no longer mine.” Furthermore, they are linking back to the earlier mentioned idea that survivors are often left feeling numb. Life after having survived the Holocaust seems to be an empty and depressive one. Behind her mask she feels “lifeless”, without joy, without hope. All she wishes for is to be reunited with her “only treasure”.

In Rose Ausländer’s poetry the mother motif also manifests as a quite common one. Her mother had an imprinting effect on her life as well, as visible in many of her poems. She died, unlike Magdalena Klein’s mother, not during the persecution by the Nazis, but as a result of an ongoing disease after the war. Rose Ausländer tried to enable her brother and her mother a permit of residence in the United States, where she herself lived at the time. The fact that she was unable to do so and that she left her diseased mother in Romania and therefore couldn’t say a last goodbye, provoked strong feelings of guilt and pain. (Helfrich, 204-206) Her four-line poem *Die Mutter* reflects those emotions and resembles in some ways Magdalena Klein’s text:

O daß die Toten sich in uns erheben
Und immer unbedingt in uns leben.

Wie trat sie ein, die Mutter, Schicht um Schicht?
Ich bin ihr Schatten und sie mein Licht.

(Rose Ausländer in Helfrich, 206)

The title strongly reminds of that of Magdalena Klein’s poem, *My Mother*. Yet, there is a slight but interesting difference. Unlike Magdalena Klein, Rose Ausländer uses the impersonal article “die” in front of the word “mother” instead of the possessive pronoun “my”. If the titles were looked at independently without contemplating the other, perhaps they wouldn’t appear as interesting. However, in a direct comparison the expression “die Mutter” seems rather reserved,

whereas “my mother” immediately implies warmth and closeness. Rose Ausländer’s perception of her mother as the most wonderful person in the world, as “eine Heilige” (ibid. 49), became firmly established in her mind. Yet, she always considered herself as “ihr Schatten”, which might be the reason for the reserved attitude that shows in the title. Then again, the choice to use the article “die” might as well also be a choice without specific reason. “Die Mutter” did function as a vital component though, revealed in the sensation of her mother as her “Licht”. Striking in this four-verse poem is also the punctuation, which only occurs rarely in Rose Ausländer’s poetry. As indicated earlier, the use of punctuation can create caesuras, short or long breaks, that might evoke moments of silence and therefore might imply a particular meaning. Such a caesura is induced at the end of the first stanza “O daß die Toten sich in uns erheben\und immer unbedingt in uns leben.“ The punctuation mark almost gives the assertion factuality. The fatal victims of the Holocaust as well as the departed loved ones seem to keep on living unrestrained in those who survived, who now live with the guilt of having survived and with the painful remembrance of those who didn’t. The “An- und Abwesenheit der Toten” as Lehmann calls it is clearly noticeable in those lines and almost appears threatening (Lehmann, 18).

Furthermore, the caesura evokes a shift in tone and perspective. While the first stanza appears quite intense and from a collective point of view, the second one reveals a more soft and melancholic tone, referring to the beloved mother, but now from a personal perspective only. “Ich bin ihr Schatten und sie mein Licht.” reminds of Magdalena Klein’s last verse “She was my life’s vivifying breath.” Both convey the message that life without their beloved mothers is bleak and pointless. The full stops at the end of both verses and the fact that the poems end on that note, add even more emphasis to it.

The notion of the mother and the pain induced by her loss, is present in every single line of Rose Ausländer’s four-line poem. As part of a collective in the first two lines, and more precisely, as vital part of the speaker’s personal life in the last two lines.

5.2 Presence of the Dead

The above mentioned “bedrohliche Nähe” of the dead is even more evident in Ruth Klüger’s *Netze der Toten*, a poem in which she explicitly addresses the perpetual presence of those who didn’t survive. (Lehmann, 18) Witnessing so many people die and being so close to one’s own death is an experience that can be assumed to have a traumatic impact. The terrifying memories seem to re-emerge and to be impossible to silence. Survivors of the Shoah feel to live in the shadow of all those who were murdered. The dead seem to accompany them in every aspect of

life. (Klüger, 54) Ruth Klüger writes “Sie sind immer dabei, und manchmal weiß man nicht, was sie vorhaben” (ibid., 54). Her poem transmits a notion of life after the Holocaust and of having to live with the fact that so many couldn’t survive, but oneself. It reveals the idea of an omnipresent shadow, which always dims the light every moment, every day, as written in the first verse “Morgens beim Augenöffnen\vergittert ihr Netz\ mir das Licht.” Rose Ausländer conveys a similar idea in the second line of *Die Mutter*. There seems to be no other way after the Holocaust than a life dominated by the painful and agonizing reminiscence of the past. “Wenn ich Stiegen steige\bringt mich ihr Netz\ins Stolpern. \ Als ich treppabwärts stürzte\hat mich ihr Netz\gerettet.“ (Klüger 2016, 53) These two stanzas indicate the contradiction of the dead’s presence, both the positive as well as the negative aspects of their seeming proximity. Either way they seem to keep on living deep inside of all those who survived.

5.3 Fire – Smoke – Ashes

No matter, if during the time of persecution or the period of captivity in a ghetto or concentration camp, the image of fire began to signify as a symbol of pure destruction. Jewish shops, houses and synagogues were set on fire and the many corpses of those who died because of torture, starvation, disease or exhaustion, were stuffed into the crematoria and incinerated like worthless pieces of wood. Shoshana Felman adduces the quote of a victim testifying that the Nazi’s wouldn’t even allow them [...] to use the words “corpse” or “victim”. The deads were blocks of wood, shit. [...] (Laub/Felman, 210) Survivor and author Elie Wiesel as well called the fact by its name in his *Plädoyer für die Toten* that Jews were reduced [...] auf einen brennbaren Gegenstand [...] (Wiesel, 164), and every single day they were confronted with this terrifying truth. The daily confrontation with the smoke coming out of the crematoria meant the daily confrontation with the knowledge of one’s own certain and soon to come death. Hence, it can be assumed that this experience was of traumatizing nature, since the victims were exposed to a constant life-threatening situation, without any chance of escape. (Caruth 2016, 12) As Ruth Klüger wrote in the earlier examined poem *Auschwitz* “Feuer, Feuer Tag und Nacht.\Jeder Jude es hier kennt,\jeder weiß für wen es brennt”.

Although the poetic style of the four writers usually differs quite distinctly, in regard to some aspects, like that of fire, their representations do resemble. A comparison of the starting lines of Ruth Klüger’s *Der Kamin* and Elly Gross’ *There is no Bird or Butterfly* supports that idea. (Klüger 2016, 48-49, Gross, 16) While the first mentioned starts off with “Täglich hinter den Baracken\Seh ich Rauch und Feuer stehn.“ the latter one begins with the following lines “Barbed wires with high voltage,\ and watch towers with soldiers.\ I can see only four tall

chimneys, which pour ashes and fire.” Both poems immediately put the focus on the notion of fire, smoke and ashes. As just mentioned, this was an image inmates of concentration camps were confronted with day after day, which is why it occurs as a motif in their poetry many times. In *Der Kamin* one particular verse is repeated at the end of each stanza saying “Auschwitz liegt in seiner Hand, alles, alles wird verbrannt.”, referring to the crematoria swallowing the many corpses it is fed with. The repetition of those lines functions as a refrain and can be read as the poet’s attempt to represent that perpetually repetitive process of burning corpses. The resemblance between Elly Gross’ and Ruth Klüger’s poems also shows in the evident sense of despair conveyed by both texts. While one writes “Jeder ist zermürbt von Leiden, keine Schönheit, keine Freuden, Leben, Sonne, sie sind hin, und es lodert der Kamin.“ the other writes “Our relatives were gassed, burned; their ashes thrown in the river. We who were selected to the right are only temporary survivors.” A notion of collective and persistent fear that each and every one will end up in one of those chimneys, is revealed in both examples. The use of Present Tense in “und es lodert der Kamin” indicates the concern that there is no foreseeable end to it while in Elly Gross’ poem that perception is underlined by her expressed thought that they were “only *temporary*¹² survivors”.

Despite the similarities those two poems have shown so far, they differentiate in one significant aspect. The genesis. *Der Kamin* was created by the twelve or thirteen-year-old Ruth Klüger, while being held captive in Auschwitz, whereas Elly Gross’ *There is no Bird or Butterfly* came into being only years after the war. (Klüger, 43, Weiss in Gross i.) Yet, her poem expresses similar experiences in the same authentic and intense way Ruth Klüger’s poem does. Arguing that the memories of that period of traumatic events remain terrifying and current and that it seems impossible to put that traumatizing past behind.

Rose Ausländer’s *Mit Giftblauem Feuer* (*Immer zurück zum Pruth*, 76) as well deals with the inhuman destruction of Jewish life. Amongst 5000 Jews out of 55000 she survived the Csernowitz Ghetto. (Braun in *Immer zurück zum Pruth*, 71-72) During her time of hiding, under the constant threat to life and being exposed to terror and fear, she created *Mit Giftblauem Feuer* and reflected on the horrible circumstances. The poem conveys a message similar to Elly Gross’ and Ruth Klüger’s poems. The speaker utters the dreadful truth, Jews were considered nothing more than “Scheiterhaufen”. The poem starts off with the two lines “Sie kamen mit giftblauem Feuer versengten unsere Kleider und Haut.” and ends in a full circle¹³ “Sie kamen mit giftblauem Feuer unser Blut zu verbrennen. Wir waren die Scheiterhaufen unserer Zeit.“

¹² Italics added

¹³ A poem ends in the same way it started off (Literary Devices)

Interesting about the use of the word „giftblau“ is not only its incisive phonology, but also the indication of the color. On one hand the color might imply the physical aspect, the enormous heat of the flames, on the other hand the acrimony of the word conveys the idea of the Nazis' derogatory attitude towards Jews and their despicable actions. The images of fire, ashes, smoke and chimneys seem to be haunting ones for Holocaust survivors. As indicated earlier they symbolize their extermination, the Nazis' intention of literally annihilating Jewish life and evidence of it. Addressing this dreadful atrocity in their poetry, appears to be of great concern, since it became motif in many of the poets' texts. The notion of death was omnipresent in those years of inhumanity and terror. As Rose Ausländer writes in her poem *Verbrannt* “Im vergänglichen Trug\der tägliche\Tod“ (Ausländer in *Der Traum*, 23)

All three examples can be perceived as poetic testimonies of not only the individual trauma but also the collective one. Being confronted with the idea of their own death, every single day and witnessing others suffer and die, can be assumed of being severely traumatizing. (Orth in Boyken/Immer, 81) Those poems include the fate of all fellow victims and therefore give voice even to those who couldn't survive. “*Wir*¹⁴ waren die Scheiterhaufen *unserer Zeit*”

6. An attempt to give expression to the collective fate

Reflecting on the initial question of how traumatic experiences, memories and aspects of trauma might come to surface in poetry, raises also the question how not alone the individual but also how the collective trauma might be expressed in those texts. The examined poems mostly have a very personal character and are strongly drawn from individual experience. However, in some passages references to the collective fate of all victims of the Shoah are made. This is important, since it gives voice to all the fatal victims, who never had the chance to tell their own stories. Annette Jael Lehmann beautifully writes in her book *Im Zeichen der Shoah* “Die Toten leben nicht in Erinnerung fort, sie führen ein fiktives Weiterleben im lebendigen Text. Sie überleben im Korpus der Sprache” (Lehmann, 16).

It is questionable to what extent aspects of collective trauma can be expressed, since every individuum experiences and perceives in a different way. But the fact that almost all victims of the Nazis had to endure similar forms of terror such as brutal violence, degradation, food deprivation, and the general constant threat to one's own life and to that of loved ones makes it possible for the poets to address those aspects from a collective point of view. How they attempt to do so, has already been brought up in earlier examples. Especially through the use of plural instead of singular first personal pronouns the speaker of the poem tries to give expression to

¹⁴ Italics added

the collective suffering. The lyrical I is still present but as part of the collective. (Orth in Boyken/Immer, 82) *I'm telling the Story* by Magdalena Klein reveals that portrayal of mass affliction in the following verses:

[...] Unclad frail feet were trudging in the snow
To dig deep trenches with enslaved hands.
It was easier in Auschwitz in the dusty land.
In our thoughts we often returned home,
But sometimes our hope would abate. [...]

(Magdalena Klein, 120)

Through the speaker's voice clearly resonates the misery of all. The lyrical I refers to all the frail and exhausted bodies, including herself. In order to display the collective suffering, the poet makes use of plural instead of singular in those lines. The clause "in *our*¹⁵ thoughts", implies that the desire to return home is not just an individual one. The idea that it concerns all victims is stressed again in "*our hope*¹⁶ would abate." The above lines therefore function as the expression of all victims' fate.

Roll Call in In Birkenau by Elly Gross also addresses the common misery and gives voice to everyone, who is no longer able to raise their own, as revealed in the following excerpt:

[...] On our bodies, we had only a dress,
And our shoes were wooden clogs.
Often it rained, so we got soaking wet,
Our bodies couldn't resist for too long. [...]

(Elly Gross, 19)

The lyrical I narrates from a personal perspective as an individuum while also being part of a collective. These lines address a situation which was experienced both by individuals and whole groups. Everyone who had been persecuted by the Nazis was forced to deal with the same misery and a similar fate. Experiencing severe violence not only oneself but as well witnessing others being subjected to similarly severe violence, is without doubt of traumatizing nature. (Orth in Boyken/Immer, 81) The above excerpts are examples of how the collective trauma can be given expression and how the deceased gain voice through the poets' voices. The use of the collective "we" in the texts breaks through "Grundmuster des Verdrängens und Vergessens auch

¹⁵ Italics added

¹⁶ Italics added

von seiten der Überlebenden” (Lehmann, 16). Therefore, the purpose of writing poetry, including the attempt of giving expression to the individual and collective traumatic experiences, traumatic memories and aspects of trauma, is to write against oblivion and repression of the Shoah.

7. Conclusion

Rose Ausländer, Ruth Klüger, Magdalena Klein and Elly Gross, four female poets with a different and yet similar background. All four of them survived the atrocities of the Shoah and ventured the attempt to give expression to their experiences and memories and by that raise their voice for themselves and for all those who aren't able to. Despite the poets' differences in their style of writing, the messages they try to convey resemble one another in many ways. The central themes are mostly determined by both their individual traumatic experiences and memories as well as collective ones. Clearly evident is the testimonial character of the poems, since the authors mainly react to their personal experiences and feelings and do so from a subjective point of view. They try to deal and come to terms with the horrors of the past in the language they seem to feel safest and most confident with, the poetic one. In each of the analyzed texts the poet's voice strongly resonates through the speaker's voice. As I have mentioned in the introduction, my attempt to find out how traumatic aspects, experiences and memories might come to surface in the selected poems, was as much an attempt as it was the writers' one to express their trauma in the first place. Certainly, it is difficult to define those aspects unambiguously in the poems. Yet, in regard to the biographical and historical background, the theoretical approaches, and with reference to the interplay of particular expressions and lyrical devices, it seemed possible to work out at least traces of traumatic experiences, memories and certain characteristics of trauma. The reason for me to focus not only on one of those aspects is that all of them are deeply interwoven with each other. As set out earlier, trauma and its characteristics are the result of traumatic experiences, and traumatic memories mostly involuntary maintain those tragic events. (Brison, 40-42)

Certain ideas become more intense and their meaning emphatic, due to the poets' intentional or unintentional use of literary devices such as repetition, caesura, figurative language and certain motifs. Those turned out to be essential for my examination on the subject matter. Without doubt, interpretations are always possible in more than just one way and some of the poems, especially those of Rose Ausländer, do not invariably refer to the Shoah. However, I decided to focus on indications that might be, could be or clearly are allusions to the Holocaust.

Just as relevant seemed the specific tone that resonated in some of the texts. Magdalena Klein's *This is no kind of life*, for instance, reveals a strong sense of depression as response to a traumatic past, conveyed through a quite forlorn tone, which evolves through the specific use of vocabulary and phrases. Unlike for Rose Ausländer, for Magdalena Klein writing didn't mean "leben. Überleben." (Ausländer in Helfrich, 176) For her it was unbearable to live on with the memories of that terrifying period of time and the painful loss of her family. All of her poems, without exception, utter her deepest thoughts and wishes and clearly convey her serious despair. For Rose Ausländer on the other hand, the play with words and the engagement with language constituted an escape into a different reality in which she seemingly could deal easier with her past. Her passion for playing with words and creating "Traumwelten" is clearly visible in her poetry.

Concerning traumatic experiences and how traces of them might show in the poems, Ruth Klüger's texts appeared particularly interesting since they came into being during her actual captivity in Auschwitz and therefore try to give expression to her immediate surroundings, while almost all the other examined poems are based on later memories of the tragic experiences.

Also, it can be assumed that the poems are an attempt to gain back voice and by that to regain a natural human right, of which all four women have been deprived during the years of persecution. Through their poetry they were able to develop a unique and very personal poetic voice, which they could raise without being silenced. In this way they could tell what they had to endure and what they had to deal with in the aftermath of the Holocaust. Poetry made it possible for the writers to give expression to their rooted thoughts and feelings outside the ordinary limitations of language, and to transmit a profound meaning beyond the written words. In some of the poems, the feeling of responsibility to pass on the story and to avoid falling into silence distinctly comes across. Elly Gross wrote with emphasis "It is our duty to share our memories with others. If we remain silent, it is as if we murder them again." (Gross, 30) Additionally to the personal aspects, therefore, emerges the urge to give voice to all the other victims as well, to keep them alive and to save them from being forgotten. Six million Jewish people were killed during the Shoah; their identity was annihilated, they were made nameless and they died nameless in the many concentration camps – either turned into ashes or thrown into anonymous mass graves. (Laub/Felman, 209-210)

But they were given voice by all those survivors who dared break the silence to which they had been reduced to for such a long time. Ruth Klüger, Magdalena Klein, Rose Ausländer and Elly Gross ventured the attempt to express the inexpressible, for themselves and for others.

They are the poetic voices of the Shoah.

Sprich die Namen der Orte:

Theresienstadt, Auschwitz, Groß-Rosen.

Sprich sie deutlich und ohne zu stammeln,
wie man ein Streichholz entzündet
(kräftig, dem Zitternden bricht es),
um den Toten die Kerze zu weihn.

Die Namen der Toten sind Dickicht,

Gestrüpp und wegloser Dschungel.

Du meinst, wer dabei war, soll Zeugnis ablegen.

Ich weiß noch von damals die Namen der Orte
und wie man sie sagt.

Sprich sie nach.

(Ruth Klüger 2016, 51)

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