

Narrating Wartime Rapes and Trauma in a Woman in Berlin

Agatha Schwartz
University of Ottawa

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"Narrating Wartime Rapes and Trauma in a *Woman in Berlin*"

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Contents of **CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture 17.3 (2015)**

Thematic Issue ***Life Writing and the Trauma of War***. Ed. Louise O. Vasvári and I-Chun Wang

<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol17/iss3/>>

Abstract: In her article "Narrating Wartime Rapes and Trauma in *A Woman in Berlin*" Agatha Schwartz examines the reception of the controversial wartime diary published anonymously first in 1954 in English translation. The book is a narrative representation of the mass rapes committed by Red Army soldiers during the siege of Berlin in 1945. Schwartz argues that *A Woman in Berlin's* portrayal of the rapes and the rapists, although not unbiased, leaves room for the initiation of the healing of trauma and forgiveness. Schwartz reflects on how life writing, particularly by women about a difficult chapter of German history can contribute to memorialization of collective trauma outside the frame of national victimhood and defeated masculinity.

Agatha SCHWARTZ

Narrating Wartime Rapes and Trauma in *A Woman in Berlin*

The wartime diary *Eine Frau in Berlin: Tagebuchaufzeichnungen vom 20. April bis 22. Juni 1945*, first published not in the original German, but in English as *A Woman in Berlin* in 1954, is likely the first published text by a woman to address wartime rapes, although similar claims have (wrongly) been made in relation to the Hungarian narrative by Alaine Polcz, *Asszony a fronton* (*A Woman on the Front*) as well (see Vasvári). The first German edition of *A Woman in Berlin* followed only in 1959 by which time it had already been translated into several languages (see Dahlke 203). The second German edition was published in 2003, followed by a new English translation in 2005, and a cinematographic adaptation was directed in 2008 by Max Färberböck. This now internationally known example of wartime life writing narrates the story of the siege of Berlin between 20 April and 22 June 1945 and the rapes by soldiers of the Red Army from the perspective of a woman who was herself subjected to multiple rapes. Following the diary's first publication in German in Switzerland and its mostly negative reception in Germany, the author chose not to have it republished during her lifetime.

Despite the book's popularity with readers and the praise by World War II historian Antony Beevor who wrote the "Introduction" to the 2005 edition, some German scholars and critics still contested its authenticity. Färberböck's film was met with an even more mixed reception in its home country. Júlia Guarraio attributes this mixed reception to the film's failure to successfully navigate the fine line between a discourse of German victimhood and wartime guilt something at which, she contends, the diary succeeds much better. These debates notwithstanding, Kate Connolly considers that both the book and the film had a "cathartic effect in Germany" in that many women and their families started to discuss more openly what happened to them in the winter of 1945. The diary and the film also helped to initiate in Germany some long-overdue trauma counseling for the survivors and their families. Some survivors, now in their 80s, came forward with their own stories and broke their decade-long silence (see, e.g., Lösel). Numerous narratives about wartime rape have been published since in Germany, written both by the survivors themselves and others who have worked with them (see, e.g., Eichhorn and Kuwert; Hesse-Werner; Jacobs; Köpp; Kuwert; Meinhof; Münch). It is important to point out that unlike *A Woman in Berlin*, these more recent authors chose to reveal their name, a fact that may signal a change in the attitude to wartime rape (or to rape in general) and a readiness to discuss this controversial chapter of German history more openly.

Suzette Henke suggests that life writing, an umbrella term by which she expands "the traditional limits of autobiography through the use of a category that encompasses memoirs, diaries, letters, and journals, as well as the bildungsroman and other personally inflected fictional texts" (xiii) can function as "scriptotherapy," a "writing out and writing through traumatic experience" (xii). I argue that *A Woman in Berlin* represents a form of scriptotherapeutic life writing. While reflecting on interpretations of rape in wartime and this particular case and following a brief discussion of the diary's reception, I focus on the following points: a) how does the diary represent the rapes and the rapists; b) how are the trauma and women's strategies of coping with it framed in the book; and c) how does the diary challenge images of gender and national identity.

Since second-wave feminism, rape in war has been interpreted as an act of violence aimed at destroying the "honor" of the enemy nation, thus as a symbolic battlefield carried out on women's bodies, and interpreted in some cases as a strategy of "ethnic cleansing" (see Brownmiller; Copelon; Seifert). By the same token, wartime rape was, for the longest time, downplayed and represented as an inevitable by-product of war (Kosta 223). The physical and psychological effects of wartime rapes on the women themselves have often been overlooked and only in the past decades following the systematic rapes in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the 1990s war in Yugoslavia has the focus shifted somewhat to emphasize women's experience and the damage done to their physical, psychological, and social well-being while also implementing important changes in international law. The Bosnian war also helped, retrospectively, to bring renewed attention to the mass wartime rapes in Central and East Europe in the last months of World War II.

While the rapes of German women and girls had not been an entirely unknown topic in Germany, political discourses of the Cold War shaped how it was discussed or silenced in public. East Germany put a veil of public silence over it (see Dahlke). In West Germany there were publications, most importantly the government-sponsored 1954 *Dokumentation der Vertreibung der Deutschen aus Ost-Mitteleuropa* (Schieder and Conze) which included testimonies of rape survivors (see also Garraio). Despite some life writing published after the 1960s, the rape of German women remained a touchy topic treated with scant attention given Germany's role as the main perpetrator of the war and the Holocaust and the atrocities committed by the German army in Europe and Russia. The latter has received some in-depth scholarly attention more recently demonstrating that rape of Soviet women was very much part of those atrocities (see Beck; Gertjeanssen; Mühlhäuser). Holger Pötzsch argues that for the above reasons post-World War II public discourse had no place for German women's memories of trauma caused by the rapes they suffered. German women thus had to wait decades before their individual experiences of rape at the end of World War II and its consequences could be told and discussed publicly.

Today, scholars generally agree that up to two million women and girls were raped mainly by Red Army soldiers, in the last months of the war and its aftermath, of which between 95,000 and 130,000 were raped in Berlin alone (see Beevor, "Introduction" xx, *The Fall 29*; Messerschmidt 706). It is estimated that about 10% of the women raped in Berlin died of the consequences, whereas in East Prussia, Pomerania, and Silesia the death rate is considered much higher (see Beevor, *The Fall* 410).

Those who survived had to cope with post-traumatic stress disorder, sexually transmitted diseases, and unwanted pregnancies. Although most pregnancies are estimated to have resulted in abortions, the number of children born of the rapes is estimated at about 300,000 (see Brzoska; Eichhorn and Kuwert). Atina Grossman quotes Norman Naimark regarding the higher prevalence of rape in the Soviet occupation zone in relation to the West, although Miriam Gebhardt recently demonstrated that rape also occurred in the Western zones at a much higher rate than previously assumed. *A Woman in Berlin* offers an account of this atmosphere of lawlessness in which, according to Pötzsch, women became reduced as per Giorgio Agamben's term to "bare life" meaning that "their bodies become disposable objects that can be mistreated or killed without legal consequences for the perpetrator" (20). However, the anonymous narrator and other women characters maintain a sense of agency and develop ways to survive. We can speculate that the women's refusal to be reduced to "bare life" was what made the initial reception of the diary controversial in the years of the German economic miracle marked by a desire to move on and to forget. Urvashi Butalia reminds us of the difficulty to memorialize such episodes of national histories that are marked by collective trauma and shame, episodes the collective memory would rather suppress.

A Woman in Berlin was first published in James Stern's translation in 1954. The editor, C.W. Ceram (pen-name for Kurt W. Marek), was a writer, fellow journalist, and a friend of the author who wished to remain anonymous. Both Marek and the author of the diary had a career in Nazi Germany. Marek/Ceram lived in the U.S. after 1954 returning later to Hamburg where he died in 1972. It was only following the author's death in 2001 that Marek's widow Hannelore consented to a new edition by Hans Magnus Enzensberger. The author of *A Woman in Berlin* wrote or rather scribbled down her notes using shorthand and various abbreviations, later turning these notes into a typescript, which is what Ceram used for his first edition of the book (see Raphael). In his introduction, Ceram praises the diary and explains its detached style — something critics will attack — with the horrors experienced by the author, whom he introduces as a young middle-class, educated woman in her early thirties who had travelled throughout Europe and moved to Berlin for work. I would like to add that the author was, based on Ceram's description and on the diary itself, a typical representative of the Weimar Republic "new woman": emancipated, self-assured, independent, widely travelled, who spoke several languages, including Russian, and thus challenged long-held patriarchal assumptions about women's place and role in German society, assumptions that became even stronger in Nazi Germany. The fact that in her early thirties she was not married and was childless, could be used as evidence of a sceptical attitude toward Nazi ideology, at least regarding its gender aspects. Although according to Ceram, the author of *A Woman in Berlin* was not involved in any Nazi organizations, in my analysis I demonstrate that she had embraced elements of Nazi racial ideology.

Ceram's introduction to the 1954 English translation resonates with a Cold War anti-Russian rhetoric when he talks about the "Red apocalypse" (6) that fell over Berlin, a rhetoric also present in some critiques of the diary from the 1950s. While several of these critiques were positive toward the author praising her courage (e.g., "A Woman in Berlin. Anonymous"), her book's importance for addressing a painful topic and for reaching beyond the personal level (e.g., "A Woman in Berlin"), others attacked her for what they saw as her insufficiently critical attitude toward Germany and its role in the war (e.g., Keene). Some even went as far as calling the diary repellent and defending the rapists (e.g., Trevor-Roper) displaying an attitude of what contemporary feminists have termed "rape mythology" (e.g., DuMont and Parnis; Krahé), namely blaming the raped woman for what happens to her. As Enzensberger writes in his "Foreword" to the book, most German critiques in reaction to the 1959 German edition were scathing, attacking its author's account of the rapes and her survival strategies as immoral (xi). Other commentators discuss the view that the author's behavior was shameful for a German woman (e.g., Beavor, "Introduction" xv). A 1960 article in *Der Spiegel* was more balanced and positive offering information on the publishing house (Helmut Kassodo in Genève), mentioning several translations and dismissing negative reactions from German critics as unjustified (see "Eine Frau in Berlin"). Despite this one positive review, the author became so disheartened by the attacks — which show that the topic of mass rape was not about the women's experiences, but about national identity and defeat — that she did not wish to see the book republished during her lifetime. Nevertheless, *A Woman in Berlin* did not fall into complete oblivion between its first and second edition. Enzensberger reports that photocopies of the book circulated in the 1970s in Berlin and that he attempted to republish it in the 1980s (xi). Feminist film director Helke Sander in her 1992 documentary *Be-Freier und Befreite* quotes the diary among her sources. Sander interviewed rape survivors and some children born to women who had been raped, but was attacked by some scholars for her approach (see, e.g., Grossman). When the author of the diary died in 2001, Hannelore Marek, now the copyright owner, authorized the publication of a new edition by Enzensberger (see Raphael). While it would go beyond the scope of this study to discuss issues with possible interventions by the editor(s), it should be noted that some fairly minor modifications in the text between the two editions are present. Given also the fact that Hannelore Marek has refused to make the original manuscript available to the public "the question of the documentary value of the Anonyma's report remains an issue of debate" (Pötzsch 27).

Following the new edition in 2003, the book became a bestseller in Germany for several weeks. Overall, critiques were positive, but following Jens Bisky's alleged discovery of the author's identity in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, the diary's authenticity was questioned by some (e.g., Raphael). What was most disturbing about Bisky's article was his obsession with identifying the author who wished to remain anonymous. Unlike Bisky, I respect the author's wish. Iris Radisch, whose response to Bisky was important in shedding light on the continuation of rape mythology regarding the reception of the diary, countered Bisky's attack calling his approach "journalistic machismo" for his disrespect of the author's wish to keep her anonymity, his focus on her physical description and for referring to her by her first

name. What is ironic in this debate is that had the author published under her real name and taken upon herself the public shame, this controversy would have probably never arisen. Other voices, however, defended the diary's authenticity arguing not only with the realistic details about life in the besieged city that have historically been proven to be accurate, but also with the description of the rapes which other survivors recognized as reflecting their own experiences (see e.g., Beevor, *The Fall*; Beyer; Jaiser; Kempowski; Lösel). One of these experiences commonly identified by rape survivors is described by Anonymous as a split between body and mind for the sake of self-preservation: "It was as if I were flat on my bed and seeing myself lying there when a luminous white being rose from my body, a kind of angel, but without wings, that floated high into the air. Of course, it's just a fantasy, a pipe dream, a means of escape — my true self simply leaving my body behind, my poor, besmirched, abused body ... It can't be me that this is happening to, so I'm expelling it all from me. Could I be raving? But my head feels cool at the moment, my hands heavy and calm" (2005 edition 61) ("Es war mir, als läge ich flach auf meinem Bett und sähe mich gleichzeitig selber daliegen, während sich aus meinem Leib ein leuchtendweißes Wesen erhob; eine Art Engel, doch ohne Flügel, der steil aufwärts schwebte ... Natürlich ein Wunschtraum und Fluchttraum. Mein Ich läßt den Leib, den armen, verdreckten, mißbrauchten, einfach liegen ... Es soll nicht mein 'Ich' sein, dem dies geschieht. Ich schiebe all das aus mir hinaus. Ob ich wohl spinne? Aber mein Kopf faßt sich in diesem Augenblick kühl an, die Hände sind bleiern und ruhig" [2003 edition 70-71]).

In the diary, the author tends to avoid the word *Vergewaltigung* (rape) and uses *Schändung* (violation or shaming) instead, an important nuance the English translation, unfortunately, does not reflect. Ingo von Münch observes this euphemistic avoidance of the word *Vergewaltigung* in rape narratives by German women explaining it with the social stigma rape carries (80). However, despite various euphemisms for "rape" in the text, the author offers graphic descriptions which focus on the women's, in particular her own, experience of the rapes. Whereas after the first night following the arrival of the soldiers in her neighbourhood, during which she is raped several times, she has the strength to cheer on the other women, as the rapes continue, she experiences increasing physical pain and mental anguish. The worst episode in this series of abuse is when she is not only raped but also humiliated by an older soldier who forces her clenched teeth open and spits into her mouth, an act that demonstrates what feminist critics have said about rape, namely that such attacks "have their origins not in sexual passion, but in hate and the wish to exercise power" (Seifert 56). The author describes her reaction as a feeling of annihilation and numbness and as if she were sinking into the ground. From this bottom she gathers her strength and decides to find a high-ranking protector to keep away the random attacks from the soldiers. With Anatol, her first "chosen" officer, she still drinks a lot of alcohol to numb herself and feels like a wooden doll without sensation that is being thrown around. Despite a certain level of agency this "choice" implies, the author emphasizes that her relationship with Anatol is based on forced intercourse.

Parallel to the description of the rapes, the author reflects on possible causes behind the violence toward German women by the Soviets, suggesting that there was no collective strategy behind the rapes and that they were, on the one hand a consequence of revenge for the German atrocities and on the other a fact of war against which nobody was able or willing to intervene. According to Beevor, it was not until 20 April 1945 that Stalin issued an order to his troops whereby the bad treatment of German civilians had to stop because it was harmful to Soviet propaganda (*The Fall* 413). *A Woman in Berlin* begins on the same date pointing out the futility of Stalin's order and the lack of willingness on the part of Soviet officers to protect the women and to intervene to stop the rapes. She reports how one officer dismisses her complaint with the words, "Come on, I'm sure they didn't really hurt you. Our men are all healthy" (2005 edition 54), thus expressing an attitude rooted in rape mythology and downplaying the violence and consequences of the rape on women's health. Andrew Roberts elaborates on reasons behind the Soviet rapes and contends that they were very much systematic and carried out against mostly innocent and defenceless girls and women of all ages out of hatred, brutalization, and a desire to instil fear. Roberts quotes as evidence mass rape in other countries such as Austria and Hungary, but also in others which were not allies of Nazi Germany such as Poland and Yugoslavia (see Djilas; Petó; Polcz; *Elhallgatott gyalázat* [Silenced Shame]). He further points out that rapes did not only happen in the Soviet occupation zone but also in the West, although these, unlike the Soviet rapes, were punished to a certain degree, a fact documented in detail by J. Robert Lilly. Beevor also lists factors other than revenge that contributed to the rapes carried out by the Red Army not only on German, but even Jewish and Soviet women (*The Fall* 31-32). He considers alcohol to have played a major role, in addition to a general lack of discipline, and an impact of Stalinist sexual policies resulting in sexual ignorance and a primitive and violent manifestation of sexuality.

Beevor's analysis corroborates what *A Woman in Berlin* describes as numerous examples both for the Soviet soldiers' excessive interest in alcohol and their subsequent sexual misconduct. Most of the rapists burst into the apartment building either drunk or in the search for alcohol and treat the women they can get their hands on badly. The narrator adds one additional reflection concerning their behavior, namely the fact that the soldiers were not given any holidays to visit their families, which, along with the long years of fighting would have contributed to their brutalization. Not all Soviet soldiers, however, fit the image of "the drunken, armed and dangerous foreigner, the Other, the enemy" (Petó 138-39). In *A Woman in Berlin* there are distinctions between the many soldiers the narrator encounters by name, but also by their physical appearance, age, background, rank, and behavior. Her knowledge of the Russian language, which she continues to associate with Pushkin and Tolstoy rather than demonize it, helps her to avoid turning all Soviet men into a despicable anonymous mass. Being able to communicate with Russians in their own language makes her see them as human beings who tell their stories and this helps her control her fear and makes her realize the atrocities carried out by German men in the Soviet Union. Yet at the same time she does express some biases which reverber-

ate with Nazi racial ideology about the Slavs when she refers to the Russians as more primitive, less developed as a people, and younger as a nation. She soon finds a powerful protector in the major with whom she develops a somewhat amicable relationship. The major is the Soviet soldier represented in the most positive terms owing to his higher class, status, education, and manners and she respects him as a human being irrespective of the fact that she is with him out of need for survival in the besieged and starving city. She wonders whether she should call herself a "prostitute" for using her body to survive, but makes no moral judgment and states that she feels miserable, hoping to be able to earn her living soon again in a better way. As the major expresses appreciation for her education, she establishes a comparison with German men and their traditional gender expectations. Ultimately, however, he remains a distant stranger to her and she feels superior as a German.

She describes a variety of strategies the women find to cope with the situation in which they are reduced to "bare life." Many, like the narrator, get themselves a "protector" while older women and parents attempt to hide the younger women. A 24-year-old lesbian girl escapes the rapes by cross-dressing, a strategy also described by the star of German post-World War II cinema Hildegard Knef in her 1971 autobiography *The Gift Horse: Report on a Life*. Some women perish as a consequence of the rapes or when trying to escape rape like the woman who jumps through the window. Some women have to cope with STDs and unwanted pregnancies and seek abortions. The rapes thus do not affect all women in the same way. As with the soldiers, the author offers a differentiated picture of the rapes' consequences, women's coping mechanisms, and the levels of trauma.

In *Unclaimed Experience* Cathy Caruth reminds us of the original meaning of trauma as "wound," a bodily injury (3-17). It is only in nineteenth-century medical and psychiatric literature and particularly with Freud that trauma begins to signify a wound inflicted on the affected person's mind, one that becomes latent and acts itself out through the unconscious, in nightmares or repetitive actions. Regarding the experience of rape told in *A Woman in Berlin* one can say that most affected women carry both a physical and mental trauma. Several are severely traumatized, and especially young girls who had no sexual contact prior to being raped. The narrator comments that these girls will carry the consequences all their lives (2005 edition 147), such as the refugee girl from Königsberg, who after being repeatedly gang-raped wants to commit suicide. The adult women manage to deal with the situation better as they talk to and nurse each other and sometimes even tell jokes about the rape as a way of working through their trauma, which the narrator refers to as gallows humor. When the narrator visits her friend Ilse, they exchange notes on their rapes in a matter-of-factly way making fun of the low erotic skills of their rapists. The gallows humor opens the way to the process of healing the trauma. According to Dominick LaCapra (*Writing History* 144), the compulsive "acting out" of traumatic memory ideally has to yield to "working through" in an attempt to gain critical distance to an event and to distinguish between past, present and future, something, as Susan J. Brison reminds us, trauma victims often lose (68): "working through" enables a trauma survivor to gain agency. In *A Woman in Berlin*, the gallows humor of the more mature women is an expression of this agency and thus becomes an important first step in their "working through" the trauma of the rapes.

In *A Woman in Berlin* mass rapes are narrated as a collective experience that the women will also have to overcome collectively demonstrating what Veena Das suggests with respect to healing mass rape through communal rituals and re-telling. As the war comes to an end and the surviving German men return home, the women's attempts to heal through their gallows humor and various small rituals of support is suddenly interrupted and they are stripped of this manifestation of agency. The narrator comments that unlike the men who can share their war stories, the women will henceforth have to be silent or no man will want them. When during her visit to a woman doctor she attempts to discuss how many women may need abortions, the doctor reassures her that she is not pregnant, but does not discuss the issue any further preferring to put a veil of silence over it. When the narrator's boyfriend Gerd shows up at her door, he is not interested in listening to her or her neighbors' stories. Instead, he judges them negatively, blaming them for what happened, which makes the narrator feel silenced and further exacerbates her traumatized body's and mind's inability for any physical closeness. She cites other examples of women whose men also cannot bear listening to their rape stories. For her, writing then becomes the only form for her "working through" the trauma and it gives her the strength to move on in spite of her feelings of loneliness. Despite her busy days in the starving city where she has to work for the Russians doing menial jobs such as clearing rubble, dismantling equipment in factories, and washing clothes so as to be given food rations, at times her trauma resurfaces. In one instance, she feels nausea when washing a soldier's handkerchief covered in snot. Yet, her desire to survive makes her determined to move on. Unlike her neighbor, the widow who has dreams about the rapes, the narrator does not, which she attributes to her writing illustrating Henke's contention that life writing brings about a healing process for the wounded self by offering it a temporary position of agency (xvi), an agency the narrator and other German women are denied by society. It is ultimately the diary that helps its author move through a daunting chapter of her life confirming Susanne zur Nieden's analysis of German women's wartime diaries as an expression of a search for orientation and relief (28).

When trying to grasp the complex reasons behind the silencing of German women's rape experiences, *A Woman in Berlin* is a reflection on the crisis of German masculinity, a disappearance of the myth of the strong man glorified by Nazi ideology. The narrative is an unheroic tale about the war, at least as far as the traditional image of the "hero" is concerned. The author demonstrates how the deflating of heroic German masculinity opens up new opportunities for women and how women cope much better with life in the besieged city after the defeat despite the omnipresence of sexual violence and the destruction of infrastructure. In opposition to the women, the few German men remaining in Berlin are largely represented as weak and unable or unwilling to protect their women. The narrator comments that the men are afraid and that they feel conquered unlike the women who are ready to

move on and start a new life. It is this aspect of the narrative that was likely particularly troubling for its early critics to the point of accusing the author of "disgracing" the German woman.

Several scholars define "woman" as a symbol of the nation and of its respectability that has to be defended through women's bodies, whereby the function of rape in wartime becomes a violation of the enemy and is therefore both a gendered and a political strategy (see, e.g., Iveković and Mostov; Mosse; Zarkov). We can deduce from these arguments that the rapes in Berlin were an implicit strategy to degrade German men, labelling them impotent for their inability to protect German women, with women as targets of sexual violence because they were viewed as possessions of German men. James W. Messerschmidt argues that by intimidating and humiliating women through mass rape, the Soviets simultaneously challenged the masculinity of German men who were essentially emasculated while Soviet men became hyper-masculinized (709). Further, Messerschmidt interprets the rapes in Berlin as a strategy of intimidation of the civilian population to make them submit to the victorious Red Army. When comparing Nazi and Stalinist gender ideologies, we can see that they were similar: they both tied gender to the national cause, although that national cause was defined along different political lines. The place to which women are relegated in both these ultra-patriarchal ideologies is one that denies their sexual agency reducing them to their body and treating them as silent objectified instruments for the sake of the national cause (see Iveković and Mostov 17). We can understand from here the discomfort and silence surrounding women's stories of mass rape and the negative reception of *A Woman in Berlin* in the 1950s and early 1960s. The author of *A Woman in Berlin* and other women who attempted to protect themselves by picking a "protector" display an agency motivated by sheer survival instinct rather than any national considerations, something their defeated men and nation were not able to accept. It was therefore not their trauma that mattered, but what Barbara Kosta calls the "trauma of male disempowerment" (222). The silence around women's experience of the rapes, which were aimed at destroying female agency, served to reconstruct the traumatized masculinity of German men (Heide Fehrenbach qtd. in Byg 179). However, Kosta contends that this silence also prevented the work of memory and mourning. During the Cold War period, traditional masculinity was reestablished, which makes us understand why the stories of the raped women began to elicit more public interest only following second-wave feminism in Germany.

A point of criticism often raised against *A Woman in Berlin* was the author's style, her reporting events in a matter-of-factly way, and her refusal to act as a victim of sexual assault is expected to act, all of which fueled the authenticity debate. Joanna Bourke's explorations in the history of trauma help us cast a light on the doubt about the authenticity of *A Woman in Berlin*. Bourke explains that raped women who act upset and emotional are given more credibility than women who display a more rational demeanor and whose rape stories as a consequence are often doubted (45). Had the author of *A Woman in Berlin* acted as a passive, helpless, and complaining victim, she would have likely been given a more sympathetic ear with critics. Keeping a reflexive distance and her strength despite the trauma of the rapes simply did not fit in with the national and gender agenda of post-war West Germany. Perhaps most importantly, the author thematizes the healing of trauma caused by mass rape both in the interest of the survivors and of their community. Jacques Derrida addresses the importance of the survivors' right to talk about their trauma because if they are silenced, no forgiveness can happen and this deprives survivors of the right to move beyond the position of the victim (58-59). In *A Woman in Berlin* there are signs of a desire to forgive and reconcile when several women sit together with a few Soviet soldiers who, while playing with a child sitting on her mother's lap, tell them about the German army's atrocities in their country. This scene shines a light of hope for the young generation represented in the little girl to create a new society beyond the trauma and the agendas of national and ideological separation and hatred the war had created.

In conclusion, the question of how to memorialize the trauma of mass rape committed by the Red Army remains a complex one. As Andrea Pető cautions regarding mass rapes by soldiers of the Soviet Army in Hungary, the survivors' stories can be instrumentalized for the sake of a new post-Cold War right-wing nationalist political agenda. Such ideological challenges notwithstanding, studying mass rape in World War II and their representation in life writing by women in particular can be an important step in the understanding and memorialization of a difficult chapter in twentieth-century European history.

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Author's profile: Agatha Schwartz teaches German literature, culture, and language and world literatures and cultures at the University of Ottawa. Her interests in scholarship include nineteenth to twenty-first century Central European literature and culture, women's writing and trauma narratives. In addition to numerous articles, Schwartz's book publications include *Shaking the Empire, Shaking Patriarchy: The Growth of a Feminist Consciousness Across the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy* (with Helga Thorson, 2014) and *Shifting Voices: Feminist Thought and Women's Writing in Fin-de-Siècle Austria and Hungary* (2008). She is also co-editor, with Judith Szapor of *Gender and Nation in Hungary Since 1919* (special issue *Hungarian Studies Review*, 2014). E-mail: <agathas@uottawa.ca>