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REPRESENTATIONS OF THE ROMANIAN HOLOCAUST IN TESTIMONIAL LITERATURE AND FILMS: FROM TRIVIALIZATION, DENIAL TO WORKING THROUGH THE PAST (PART 2)[1]

Arleen IONESCU
West University of Timișoara, Romania

E-mail: arleen.ionescu@e-uvt.ro

Dumitru TUCAN
West University of Timișoara, Romania

E-mail: dumitru.tucan@e-uvt.ro

Abstract

Synthesizing the way in which the Romanian Holocaust has been represented in testimonial literature and films, this article deals with notions such as Holocaust trivialization and denial, as well as with "mastering the Romanian past" of the interwar period and WW2. The article is a cartography of the representations of the Romanian Holocaust; to that end, it follows the chronology of published literary works (documentary texts, memoirs and fiction) and documentary and artistic films which were produced about the Romanian Holocaust in Romania and outside Romania from 1945 to the present.

Keywords: Romanian Holocaust; memory; representations; literature; films.

(Continuation from Part 1)

Much more Holocaust research and "Holocaust literature" was created by Romanian-born writers or their second generation outside the borders of communist Romania. In 1969, Julius S. Fisher, a Rabbi who had escaped from Romania in 1942 published *Transnistria: The Forgotten Cemetery*, a comprehensive record of the deportations to Transnistria, relying on Carp's *Black Book*, but also on hearsay evidence.

Apart from the Holocaust survivor, president of ICSHR and Nobel prize winner Elie Wiesel, perhaps the best-known writers of Romanian-Jewish origin who witnessed the Holocaust in Romania are Paul Celan and Norman Manea, who left Romania in 1948 and 1986, respectively. Despite his claims that "[t]here is no such thing as a literature of the Holocaust," and that "Auschwitz negates any form of literature" (Wiesel, 1975, pp. 314–15), Wiesel decided to write his memoir *La Nuit*, a condensed version of the original *Un di Velt Hot Geshvign* [*And the world was silent*, 1954] after a meeting with François Mauriac.[2] After *Night* (1958/2006) earned international acclaim through its translation into more than thirty languages, Wiesel became aware of the urge to speak caused by the imperative to remember (1958/2006).

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[2] See more about this encounter in Wiesel, 1996. In this text, all translations from Romanian are ours, unless otherwise indicated.

Manea asserted "I am not what we call a 'writer of the Holocaust' […] Neither do I believe in this thematic 'specialty' which is practiced, quite successfully, by some writers" (Manea, 1999, p. 29).[3] Nevertheless, his famous *Întoarcerea Huliganului* [The hooligan's return] published first in English translation when he was already in the United States was to make history for its description of Manea's "initiation" as a 5-year-old prisoner in Transnistria (see Calinescu, 2008; Jerzak, 2008). In the name of *Never Again*, Paul Celan, the French-Jewish poet of Romanian descent, whose parents perished in Transnistria, published "Todesfuge," whose excess of lyricism Adorno had found inappropriate. The poem's ending puts in parallel the lives of an Aryan woman and a Jewish woman. Margarete is offered life because she belongs to the master race, while Shulamith is offered death:

> Black milk of daybreak we drink you at night
> we drink you at noon death is a master from Germany
> we drink you at sundown and in the morning we drink and we drink you
> death is a master from Germany his eyes are blue
> he strikes you with leaden bullets his aim is true
> a man lives in the house your golden hair Margarete
> he sets his pack on to us he grants us a grave in the air
> he plays with the serpents and daydreams death is a master from Germany
> your golden hair Margarete
> your ashen hair Shulamith. (Celan, 2018, p. 244)

In this context, Adorno put forward his famous dictum "to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric" (1955/1983, pp. 34; 70; 73), often wrenched out of context and, hence, erroneously interpreted. Huge debates followed (see Felman, 1992; Luckhurst, 2008; Ball, 2008; Huyssen, 2005; Weissberg, 2001, among others; see also Wolosky, 2001, p. 655, and n. 5, where Celan's response, "we know at last where to seek the barbarians," is quoted as evidence). Adorno softened his initial remark in *Aesthetic Theory*, where he credited Celan for wanting "to speak of the most extreme horror through silence" (2002, p. 143) and in "Commitment" (1962/1980, p. 188); later on he retracted his slightly reworded versions in *Negative Dialectics* (1973/2004, p. 362), admitting that "perennial suffering has as much right to expression as a tortured man has to scream; hence it may have been wrong to say that after Auschwitz you could no longer write poems."

The practicing psychoanalyst Dori Laub, a former victim of the Transnistrian camps, was born in Romania. His interview with Laurel Vlock became the first of a massive testimonial enterprise, The Holocaust Survivors Film Project, containing 14,000 videotaped interviews of Holocaust survivors and witnesses. The archive was moved to Yale University in 1981. Known as the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale, it practically marked the beginning of trauma studies. Reputed specialists worked on this archive. Lawrence Langer called for a post-Holocaust revision of ethics and coined the notion of "choiceless choices" (1982, p. 36; 1988, p. 120). Shoshana Felman co-wrote with Dori Laub *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (1992), an essential text for trauma specialists. Among the analyzed texts and the videotaped testimonies, they also interpreted Claude Lanzmann's film *Shoah* (1985), totalizing nine hours of interviews with survivors, witnesses, and perpetrators conducted over 11 years in the many visits to four sites across Poland. Marianne Hirsch, one of the founders of memory studies, whose work on postmemory is known worldwide (1997; 2001; 2012), is a second-generation Holocaust

[3] Manea was interviewed by Gerrit Bogaard and Jan Willem Bos for *Oost Europa Verkenningen*, Utrecht, The Netherlands, in June 1988; the interview was translated and published in *Familia*, no. 2/1999.

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survivor. Her parents who were from Czernowitz "evaded deportation to Transnistria, where they turned right instead of left" (Spargo & Enreich, 2009, p. 53; see Hirsch & Spitzer, 2010 and 2011 on the afterlife of Czernowitz, a major town where deportations started from). Hirsch and Leo Spitzer made public a small archive of Harry Jarvis, whose family survived Transnistria; this archive contained poems written by Jarvis's sister, Sonja Jaslowitz, which Hirsch and Spitzer compared to Selma Meerbaum-Eisinger's poetry[4] (2015).

Born in Bukovina, in 1930 and interned for several years in Auschwitz, Dan Pagis wrote in a "lucid, non-melodramatic tone" reflecting "his attempts to transcend horror through a clarity of imagery" (Ramras-Rauch, 2002, p. 145). Pagis moved to Israel in 1946 and earned his PhD from the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, where he ultimately became one of the most prominent professors of Hebrew medieval literature. Pagis's poetry is included in Holocaust literature, especially his third collection of poems titled *Gilgul* (1970). Victoria Aarons suggested that similarly to works written by Primo Levi, Elie Wiesel, Jerzy Kosinski and Ruth Klüger, Pagis's poetry is often framed withing the pre-existing cultural traditions of midrash and lamentation. In her analysis of Pagis's minimalistic prose poem "Written in Pencil in the Sealed Railway-Car," Aarons shows how the poet "dismantles the very language that constructs this moment of 'life'" (2014, p. 37). The fragmented poem reads:

> here in this carload
> i am eve
> with abel my son
> if you see my other son
> cain son of man
> tell him that i (Pagis, 1989, p. 29)

The poet has no time to capitalize, to punctuate. He does not even have the time to finish his sentence because the car becomes an "impenetrable tomb. The lack of conventional punctuation and capitalization and the intended deviation from ordinary word order create a tone of disruption and unease, the 'world' turned upside down. Here Pagis will draw upon understated techniques of disjunction, disturbance and interruption in order to disrupt the reader's expectations" (Aarons, 2014, p. 37). The poet becomes Abel, the victim of his brother Cain, "the archetypical sufferer" whose voice can be heard in another poem that is explicitly entitled "Autobiography," written in an elegiac tone that "is both midrash and lamentation, interpretation and grief" (Aarons, 2014, pp. 37–8).

Works Published and Films Produced in Postcommunist Romania or outside It after 1989

In the 1990's, several testimonies and diaries were published in Romania. From the first category, we can mention, for instance, J. Alexandru et al's edited collection (1991), and a collection of testimonies published by Institutul Român de Istorie Recentă (2004). The second is much larger. Moses Rosen (1991) documented his own life, including that after 1945, when he worked as a mediator between the communist power and the Jews who wanted to emigrate to Israel. Miriam Korber-Bercovici's *Jurnal de Ghetou: Djurin, Transnistria, 1941–1943* (1995), partially translated into English, mentioned the faith that kept her family together: "Still, we did not lose hope and, again, we started to give credence to the silly rumors of

[4] Meerbaum-Eisinger, Celan's cousin, perished in Transnistria. Her poetry notebook, composed between 1939 and 1942, *Ich bin in Sehnsucht eingehüllt*, was miraculously saved from the camp, published in 2005, translated as *Harvest of Blossoms: Poems from a Life Cut Short* (2008). On her life, see Paolino, 2013. In 1968, Celan allowed his "Todesfuge" to be anthologized by a German press on condition that her "Poem" be published alongside (see Ionescu A., 2017, pp. 235–6).

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repatriation. Poor and persecuted Jewish people! So tormented and so ingenious in giving itself courage through its own lies, born from desires unfulfilled by a God of revenge or of compassion" (Korber-Bercovici, 2004, p. 270). Alexandru Şafran's *Un Tăciune Smuls Flăcărilor* [A canker snatched from the fire] (1996) was published in Romania after its translation had appeared in Yad Vashem. Born in Bacău, Şafran became Romania's chief rabbi in 1940 (see Safran, 1987). Sonia Palty's *Evrei, Treceţi Nistrul!* [Jews, cross the Dniester!] (1992), written after the author's emigration to Israel, documents her deportation to Bogdanovka where she saw many horrors as a medical assistant, including rapes. Matei Gall's *Eclipsa* [The eclipse] (1997) details the author's incarceration in Vapniarka and Serge Moscovici's *Cronica Anilor Risipiţi* [The chronicle of the vanished years] (1999), the anti-Jewish laws and the 1941 Bucharest pogrom. Carol Buium Beniamini's *Un Sionist în Vremea lui Antonescu şi după aceea* [A Zionist in Antonescu's times and afterwards] (1999) describes the author's activity as a Zionist.

In 1996, two important diaries appeared: Mihail Sebastian's *Jurnal, 1935–1944*,[5] and Emil Dorian's *Jurnal din Vremuri de Prigoană, 1937–1944*, after its translation into English, *The Quality of Witness: A Diary, 1937–1944*, had already been published in the United States at the initiative of Dorian's daughter Marguerite Dorian. Both Sebastian, member of the Criterion Association, and Dorian, a Jewish-Romanian doctor, lived in the part of Romania where Jews were relatively spared from deportation, yet their diaries documented the persecution of Jews under the antisemitic governments that succeeded one another in the 1940's (on Dorian, see Manta-Cosma, 2013; on both, see Crăciun, 2019). Sebastian's diary recounts his experience as a Jewish writer struggling to become part of the Romanian literary life. Anybody interested in Sebastian's diary should place it alongside his semi-autobiographical novel *De Două Mii de Ani…* [For two thousand years] (1934), whose preface written by his former mentor, Nae Ionescu, included vitriolic antisemitic ideas (on the relationship between Sebastian and Nae Ionescu, Petreu, 2009 offers a contestable view; more balanced presentations appear in Babeș, 2015; Bejan, 2019; Grec, 2024; Iovănel, 2012; Neagoe, 2016; Ștefănescu, 1968; Volovici, 2011). According to David Patterson, Dorian "lived to see the atrocities of the Holocaust" (2002, p. 42), which is partially incorrect, since Dorian testified only indirectly to the atrocities from Transnistria. Dorian was a *literato* who had published, among others, two novels *Profeți și Paiațe* [Prophets and clowns] (1930), a critique of both the Jewish and Gentile bourgeoisie, and *Otrava* [The poison] (1939), focusing on a love story between a Jewish woman and a Romanian man at the time when antisemitism was rising.

Other works documenting the Romanian Holocaust appeared in the 1990's abroad. Hédi Fried's *The Road to Auschwitz: Fragments of a Life* (1990), written from the perspective of an Auschwitz survivor, tells the story of her family deported from Sighet to Auschwitz, where her parents were killed on arrival. Hédi and Livi survived, including the death marches to Hamburg and Bergen-Belsen. After the war they went to Sweden where people knew so little about the Holocaust that they could not believe that victims were imprisoned unfairly:

> "But why did they send you to the concentration camp? You must have done something?"
> What does one reply to that? That we have done nothing? That was why we were imprisoned? Had we done something, we would have been shot. And we hoped to avoid that by doing what we were told. […] Few can imagine a situation which they have not experienced. And those few are never believed. (Fried, 1990, pp. 179–80)

A sequel to her memoir, *Questions I Am Asked about the Holocaust*, published in 2017 and translated in 2019, answers people's questions, including difficult ones: how she managed

[5] An unknown part of Sebastian's journal was discovered and edited by Alexandra Oprescu and Teodora Dumitru (2024).

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to cope after liberation, whether she hated the Germans, etc. Fried proposed the solution of letting go "vengeful feelings:" "It is not a matter of forgiving. I cannot forgive on behalf of those who were murdered, as the famous Nazi hunter Simon Wiesenthal said. But you can learn to live with what has happened. You can live side by side with the former enemy, tolerating each other." (Fried, 2019, pp. 111–12)

Eta Fuchs Berk's *Chosen: A Holocaust Memoir* (1992), a story that she told to Gilbert Allardyce who transcribed it, is a personal attempt to defend the memory of her family who perished in Auschwitz. Berk always wondered why she survived, and the others did not: "I was twenty-one when I arrived with my family at the railway ramp at Auschwitz in May 1944. On that spot, since 1942, Jewish families by the hundreds of thousands had been lined up, 'selected,' and separated forever, some members going one way and some the other. My family went together to the crematoria; alone I was 'selected' to live" (Berk & Allardyce, 1992, p. 18). Ruth Glasberg Gold's *Ruth's Journey: A Survivor's Memoir* (1996) is the story of a survivor of Bershad concentration camp in Transnistria.[6] Sara Tuvel Bernstein's *Seamstress: A Memoir of Survival* (1997) documents the life of Sara (Seren) who left the Romanian gymnasium at thirteen after facing antisemitism and became an apprentice. In the Ravensbruck concentration camp where she, her younger sister Esther, and two friends were interned, they all supported one another.

Siegfried Jagendorf's first-person narrative *Jagendorf's Foundry: A Memoir of the Romanian Holocaust 1941–1944* tells the story of a resourceful engineer deported to Transnistria among other 150,000 Jews. Jagendorf convinced the authorities to let him convert an abandoned spare-parts factory into a Jewish labor colony, thus saving around 15,000 Jews from extermination. To give his memoir more objectivity, Jagendorf's narrative is intertwined with Hirt-Manheimer's commentaries; the latter, editor-in-chief of the Holocaust Library, interviewed survivors for two years and used primary sources to establish the truth, since critics had pointed out that Jagendorf was in the "gray zone," a collaborator who usurped power to preserve his own life. Hirt-Manheimer mentions Jagendorf's ghetto police's flagrant abuses of power but preserves the idea that he was a genuine hero who helped thousands survive.

Teréz Mózes's memoir describing the menacing anti-Jewish laws that changed her family's life was published in Hungarian as *Beverzett kotáblak* (*Shattered tablets*) in 1993, translated into Romanian in 1995 as *Decalog însângerat* and into English as *Staying Human through the Holocaust* in 2005. Mózes was born in Romania in 1919 in Oradea, where her family was put into a ghetto. They were deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau. The selection decided that only Teréz and her sister would have a chance to life. Their father went with an old man whom he was helping, her mother and older sister stayed with the latter's daughter, Anikó:

> Erzsi and I went to the right; mother, Magda and Anikó went to the left. Without a word of farewell, without putting up the least resistance, we were separated forever. I would never have thought such a thing possible, that with smiles on their lips and with faces that inspired trust and feigned good intentions, these men could send hundreds of thousands of unsuspecting people to their deaths. (Mózes, 2005, p. 105)

After "[i]n less than an hour [their] human appearance had been taken away," Teréz finally accepted the truth that "loved ones were no more" (Mózes, 2005, pp. 114; 117). After liberation in February 1945, the two sisters stayed in several Soviet camps before returning to their shattered hometown in August 1945.

Avigdor Shachan's *Burning Ice: The Ghettos of Transnistria* (1996) describes the

[6] In the post-1989 testimonies outside Romania, a tradition of ghost-writing was inaugurated: see Mihăilescu, 2021a; 2021b.

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Czernowitz Ghetto set up on October 11, 1941, as a station for deportation to Transnistria, then gives details about the death marches to Bessarabia and Ukraine. He explains the oxymoron in the title from the very beginning:

> There I saw the bitterly savage cold kill its victims with fiery-hot needles. That is why I named my book *Burning Ice*. When I was about eleven years old, the maniacal storm of annihilation subsided, and when I was about to return to the land of the living I was sworn to tell that to which I had been a witness there, in the land of death and destruction. (Shachan, 1996, p. 1)

The volume gathers figures from different sources, counting the number of victims as follows: "According to our estimate, 310,000 of the 330,000 Jews who had been in the area before the invasion were killed. The 20,000 Jews who had survived the terrible slaughter were scattered during October and November 1941 among the Jews of Bessarabia and Bukovina who had arrived in Transnistria after forced marches, and their fates thus remained intertwined until the Soviet army again conquered the area" (Shachan, 1996, p. 168).

Zimra Harsányi, pen name Ana Novac, was a fourteen-year-old Jewish girl from Transylvania who was deported to Auschwitz and Płaszów. She used any scraps of paper hidden by other inmates to write her diary which was a form of therapy:

> Today I am convinced that the journal was what allowed me to survive. For the rest of my life, it has also been a way to survive that survival, which is a less obvious problem. The fact that I had the toughness to live, to function, to keep my health and my sanity, after and despite the loss of my family, meant that — as illogical as it may seem — I carried, and still carry, the weight of a solitary crime: having lived. (Novac, 1997, p. 9)

Aharon Appelfeld was born in 1932 in Jadova Commune, Storojineț County, near Czernowitz. His mother was killed by the Nazis, and he was deported with his father in Transnistria. Appelfeld evaded, surviving in a Ukrainian gang who adopted him (see Ramras-Rauch, 1994; Budick, 2005). The book starts with a warning for his readers who are told that memory is fluid and hard to reconstruct:

> THE PAGES BEFORE YOU are segments of contemplation and memory. Memory is elusive and selective; it holds on to what it chooses to hold on to. I won't say that it retains only what is good and pleasant. Very like a dream, memory takes specific details out of the viscous flow of events — sometimes tiny, seemingly insignificant details — stores them deeply away, and at certain times brings them up to the surface. Like a dream, memory also tries to imbue events with some meaning. (Appelfeld, 2004, p. v, original emphasis)

As Emily Miller Budick remarked (2011, p. 157), when this autobiography appeared, "certain critics expressed disappointment that the text did not contain fuller and more concrete historical information about Appelfeld's rather remarkable life, especially his early childhood years before and during the Holocaust." When he was eight, he lost his childhood, having no home, no mother and no father; "[w]hat he has instead is a natural landscape, inhabited less by people than by water, pastures, trees, birds, animals, and everything else that defines a natural as opposed to a populated environment" (Budick, 2011, p. 159). Appelfeld's vagueness suggests his confusion. We hear that he spent his childhood in Czernowitz only in Chapter 23. The memoir "shows how unlike regular autobiographies by Holocaust adult survivors, child survivors' memoirs are less constructed around factual events of private and public relevance

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and that they concentrate on deeply entrenched sensations" (Mihăilescu, 2015b, p. 7). Nevertheless, Appelfeld's story makes us aware of the urgency of writing, of leaving a trace behind in the face of annihilation.

Martha Blum's *The Walnut Tree* (1999) is a fictional survival story of a well-to-do young Jewish woman, Sűssel, who had studied languages and pharmacy in several universities in Europe, her father and her childhood suitor, Max. The book is narrated by several first-person narrators. A male narrator explains the significance of the walnut tree. Similarly to the cherry trees in Daghani's memoir that we dealt with in Part 1, the walnut tree is the place where the Cernowitz victims were buried:

> And now my father is carrying Lev-Jossel Green's body. Father had to free him first from the entanglement of his youngest child, Lisa. We heaped them under the walnut tree, to let them rest. Our massive walnut tree, its branches broad and outreaching, sheltering, its top branches touching the clouds, a dreamworld lost in its foliage, now all these dreams lying under it. We did not see the blood until the sun rose, the blood on our hands, faces, clothes, and soles. We washed as well as we could and without a murmur descended into the garden to dig the mass grave under the walnut tree. It was not easy. The tree resisted, its roots rebelled, opposed our shovels and spades, did not want our bodies. The tree knew these people as children, climbing its mighty branches, almost to the top. Knew the sound of their playing, laughing, teasing voices, and now it resisted their muted forms. So we moved the bodies, carried them into the open of the garden. (Blum, 1999, pp. 69–70)

Those who were not killed were crowded in the ghetto before being sent in trucks to Transnistria:

> My mother can't cross the room, there are fifty people between us, sitting on suitcases and bundles. Instead we speak to each other in sign language, with hands, eyes, and bodies. The ghetto doors are locked. What we know comes through the air, windows, keyholes. Information flows, fed by rage, hope, caught by antennae on our skins. Through the windows we see the trucks leave. We can't believe our eyes. It can't be true. (Blum, 1999, p. 74)

They were told lies: "Resettlement — Palestine, Ukraine, somewhere" (Blum, 1999, p. 74). They ate their last provisions without knowing what awaits them:

> The ghetto room is dense with Jews, some I know and some strangers. Slowly, without realizing it, I gain more elbow-room, more breathing space, and suddenly I miss the pressure, the bodily closeness. Someone says, "You haven't eaten," and shares an open tin of sardines, while I look through my window, watching the trucks leave. Faintly recognize the woman I slept next to on the floor. There is no escaping the sardine smell. I hear the man say, "Drink the oil from the can, it will keep you for a while." (Blum, 1999, p. 85)

Salomon Isacovici's *Man of Ashes*, initially published in Mexico in 1990 as *Hombre de cenizas* and awarded the Fernando Jeno Prize, was published in English in a revised form in 1999. Isacovici was born to a farming family in Sighet which one day in 1940 was taken by Hungary. In 1944 the Germans arrived and all Jews from Sighet, including Isacovici and his family, were pushed into cattle cars and taken to Auschwitz. The memoir starts abruptly with the perspective of the witness:

> Killing is their daily work. They killed my mother, Basia, who clung to life hoping to see her children grow up. They took the lives of my younger sisters, Blima and Pesil, before

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> they had reached the prime of life. They destroyed my father, Hers, a skeletal somnambulist. They gunned down my adopted brother, Schmiel, whose life had been so painful. They poisoned my brother Saul, forcing him to be grateful for his hunger. They suffocated my grandfather Mordecai, a blacksmith whose beard was longer than his age. Cousins, friends, neighbors —all of us — faced death.
>
> I am Salomon Isacovici, a Jew from Sighet, Romania. I am a witness. I have endured it all. (Isacovici & Rodriguez, 1999, p. 1)

The memoir ends symmetrically, with the witness who has become a "man of ashes":

> I repeat, "Killing is their daily work." But I am a survivor, a man of ashes. Ashes of my mother, smeared across the palm of my hand … ashes of my people and their history beneath which the coals of hatred still glow hot … ashes, like those of the phoenix, from which I have been reborn on so many occasions and against all odds … ashes of the Sangay volcano venting nature's inexorable, incomprehensible fury… dust and ashes of which I was made and to which I must return. (Isacovici & Rodriguez, 1999, p. 236)

The new millennium saw many memoirs and novels published both in Romania and abroad. We no longer divide them geographically here but rather follow a chronological order which is abandoned only in the case of those writers who wrote more than one testimony.

Written from the perspective of an official member of the Jewish community, Arnold Schwefelberg's *Amintirile unui Intelectual Evreu din Romania* (2000) focuses on its initiatives and on the Jewish institutions' network during the Holocaust. Schwefelberg witnessed the 1941 Bucharest Pogrom directly, being arrested and beaten for one day and one night and robbed after his release. He witnessed the Iaşi pogrom indirectly, as a member of the Relief Commission which paid 5 million lei for saving the rest of the Jewish population from a massacre.[7]

By 2000, second-generation memoirs also appeared. Anca Vlasopolos's *No Return Address: A Memoir of Displacement* (2000) intersperses "(post)memories of the Holocaust with memories of Communism in view of configuring and understanding cultural spaces" (Mihăilescu, 2015a, p. 203) and documents her mother's ordeals in Auschwitz and three other Nazi labor camps.

Leopold Schobel and Marilena Lică-Maşala's *"Am fost la Auschwitz deţinutul A-13221:" Convorbire realizată cu Leopold Schobel* [I was inmate A-13221 in Auschwitz: A conversation with Leopold Schobel] (2002) is a dialogue with a former Auschwitz prisoner. B. Brănişteanu's three-volume diary (2003) starts in 1943 with an account about the Jewish community and leadership after the deportation to Transnistria of the former Jewish leader, Dr. Filderman. Brănişteanu met Dr. Filderman after he was released from Moghilev on August 6, 1943.

Ernő Lazarovits spent his childhood in Szilágysomlyó, and his school years in Kolozsvár (Cluj). His *Wanderer in Hell*, translated as *Călător prin Iad: Povestea Adevărată a unui Supraviețuitor* (2004), describes the protagonist's experiences after he was interned in Deutsch-Schützen, Austria, then drafted into the Budapest labor battalion in May 1944. The forced laborers were herded towards the western border of the country (Gánt, Bodajk, Mór, Fertörákos, Szombathely), and later transferred by the Hungarian gendarmes to the German Todt organization, which took them to Deutsch-Schützen. Subsequently, they had to go on foot to Mauthausen, and they were finally liberated in Gunskirchen, Austria, on May 4, 1945. After his liberation, he returned to Kolozsvár in August 1945.

[7] On the Iași Pogrom, see also Luca, 1989, and Cernea, 2002.

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Within the category of child survivors of various ages, a ghostwritten book, *Medwed, Sheina. Live! Remember! Tell the World! The Story of a Hidden Child Survivor of Transnistria* as told by Leah Kaufman, appeared in 2005.

Susan Geroe Simpson, a child of Holocaust survivors who was born in Oradea in 1946, and emigrated to the United States in 1965, wrote a novel, *The Silence of Parents* (2006), and a collection of short stories, *Treasures and Pleasures* (2009). Simpson Geroe's autobiographical narratives deal with second-generation lingering trauma brought on parents and larger family units, depicting the life paths of those who were born in after WW2 to parents who lost their relatives during the Holocaust. Both works include acts of return to places where the Shoah affected some members of the author's family.

Cu Trenul Expres spre Moarte [With the express train towards death] (2007) is a direct testimony of Leonard Zăicescu who survived the death-train to Podul-Iloaiei.[8] He was fourteen when he and his father were evacuated from their house on Vasile Stroescu Street, taken to the police headquarters for what he called "the spectacle of death" (2007, *passim*), and later forced into the death-train. The distance between Iaşi and Podul Iloaiei is thirty kilometers, but the trip was eight hours long, since the conductors returned to the previous destination several times to prolong the victims' agony. Zăicescu explained that those who could no longer stand were destined to death. Those who felt that they needed to sit could not survive, as those who could still breathe sat on them. Zăicescu's father, a WW1 veteran, was among those who perished (see also "Despre Holocaust," 2021).

Another second-generation memoir is Haya Leah Molnar's *Under a Red Sky: Memoir of a Childhood in Communist Romania* (2010), the story of Haya Leah, born Eva Zimmermann in Bucharest in 1951. The memoir offers her child's view on being brought up in communist Romania by a mother and maternal grandparents who were Bucharest Jews who had survived the Holocaust after doing forced labour and by a Hungarian Jewish father originally from Cluj, who survived several Nazi work camps and a Soviet labour camp but lost his parents in Auschwitz.

Rosita Fanto's *Rozalia Alone* (2010) is a fictional story narrated by a young girl born in Romania to a Christian mother and a Jewish father, who experiences the atrocities of the Romanian Holocaust. Relating the story in the Present Tense, thus transmitting to the reader the immediacy of the *here* and *now*, she tells us about the pogrom in Bucharest where her brother was killed. She initially sees "mutilated bodies" which are "hanging on butchers' hooks:"

> Some have their bellies slashed, their intestines tied around their necks with the inscription of "kosher meat" on their bodies. Human beings who have gone through all the stages of animal slaughter on a conveyor belt. I close my eyes as tight as I can and hope that when I open them, the nightmare in front of me will have disappeared. (Fanto, 2010, p. 35)

In this mass of corpses of Jewish people, she discovers her brother:

> Aunt Josephine squeezes my hand. Tears roll down our cheeks. I want to take Odo down. There is a wooden box. I bring it close to where Odo is hanging. I try to reach the hook that holds him by his neck. I can only just touch his stiff, frozen body. I can't reach the hook. With all my might, I try to push Odo up. His body slides through my hands. I find another box to place on top of the first one. Aunt Josephine helps me climb up. Now I have Odo's head against my chest. With both my hands I push and twist him on one side. I am almost there. Then the box moves and I fall down amidst the newspapers and dried blood.

[8] Leonard Zăicescu, born in 1927, remains the only survivor of this tragedy today.

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> When I raise my eyes toward Odo's neck, most of the lower part of the hook is showing. I want Odo down. I want Odo. I cry. I must have Odo's hook! Aunt Josephine steps on the wooden box, lowers Odo and, without a word, hands me the hook. I caress Odo's neck again and again and place the hook in the bun at the back of my neck. I'll keep it there with me, I'll never take it out. I am in terrible pain. A cold wind penetrates every part of me. (Fanto, 2010, p. 35)

In another scene, the family goes to Iași, to Rosita's aunt. Her mother who has never recovered from depression commits suicide. In an attempt to run away to Bucharest right away, as violence against the Jews has started, both daughter and father are caught in the crowd being pushed towards one of the death trains. They both survive, making a hole in a plank with the hook that had killed Odo; through that hole they can breathe. When the train finally stops at night, they are saved by Janos, the husband of their former Hungarian servant, who hides them in his cart under the treasures he stole from the deceased victims:

> "Shut up," he says. He lifts me up, lays me in the cart next to father, next to the shoes, next to the watches, the bracelets, the rings. He dips his dirty handkerchief in water, wipes my face with it, then makes me drink straight from the bucket. I am on all fours, like an animal, with my tongue out. I can drink and drink and drink. I hear soldiers approaching us. Janos covers me and father with the blanket and piles shoes and shirts on top of us. My head is swaying. Father is alive and so am I. (Fanto, 2010, pp. 43–4)

After returning to Bucharest, and losing her father too, Rozalia manages to escape from Romania. Fanto revealed that she began writing her book after seeing "photographs and documents on what had happened in Romania to Jews in the late nineteen thirties and early nineteen forties" (2010, p. 385). She saw *Rozalia Alone* as an act of justice and a protest against the lack of documentation about these events, since she was "outraged by the silence kept by those who knew about the barbarities of the Légionaires and the Iron Guard. […] This and other inhuman acts had been practiced by organized groups not known by the world." (Fanto, 2010, p. 385)

After featuring in the film *Forgiving Dr Mengele* (2005) that will be dealt with later, Eva Mozes Kor, decided to write her book *Surviving the Angel of Death: The True Story of a Mengele Twin in Auschwitz* (2011). Mozes Kor's family was from Portz, Transylvania, which had become part of Hungary. Eva and her sister Miriam were the only survivors. They were among the twins on whom Mengele performed his medical experiments. Mozes Kor had been injected with a chemical that almost killed her, yet she miraculously survived. Mengele himself was amazed by her resilience. Although she was liberated from Auschwitz and had a few years of happiness, setting up a family, her sister died young, after she gave birth to her children; her kidneys remained at the size they were when she was ten and injected with Mengele's poisons. Mozes Kor donated one kidney, but her sister's body still could not cope with the unknown effects of the criminal medical experiments from Auschwitz. After losing the only relative whom she still had, Mozes Kor thought that forgiving her tormentors was the only solution to live a normal life. This is by far the most controversial memoir of a Holocaust survivor, who declared that she forgave not only Dr Mengele, but also all the Nazis. Other controversial gestures of Mozes Kor include giving a declaration of amnesty in the presence of a former Nazi doctor during one of the commemorations from Auschwitz or making similar declarations in the presence of other former victims of Mengele. A lot has been written on forgiveness and on the impossibility of Holocaust victims to forgive their tormentors (see, among others, Jankélévitch, 1996 and Derrida's response [2005]). However, Mozes Kor's gesture is not forgiveness, but a form of self-healing presented as a form of restorative justice; "with the

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passing of time and the change of generations, forgiveness and reconciliation would be possible" (Ionescu A., 2020, p. 40) but they are highly unlikely for the generation of those who survived and lost their entire families in the Holocaust. For the first-generation, claiming to forgive the unforgivable is highly problematic in terms of ethics.[9]

Starting with 2012, Mihaela Gligor embarked on a pioneering project at several archives within the Hebrew University of Jerusalem which resulted in two edited (2018, 2020) and two co-edited with Miriam Caloianu (2012, 2013) volumes of correspondence of Jewish intellectuals covering the rising of antisemitism and the Holocaust in Romania.[10]

I.T. Morar's novel *Negru și Roșu* [Black and Red] (2013) focuses on the deportation of the Roma population. The main character, Georgian Nicolau, a gypsy from Tărtășești, who obtained a scholarship in a military high school, broke the ties with his family, claiming to be a "green" Romanian. He fights on the battlefield in the East, including in the attack against Odessa, and participates in the Odessa massacre, becoming an admirer of Antonescu. Morar borrows his comrades' antisemite, violent, nationalist discourse: "In whatever way they [the Jews] are guilty, because of them the world is subjugated. […] They are the cancer of our world" (2013, p. 111). When his mother and sisters are deported, he saves them, realizing his mistakes. He defects and joins the communists. By the end of the war, he commands the firing squad that carries out Antonescu's execution.

Cătălin Mihuleac's *America de peste Pogrom* [America beyond the pogrom] (2014) fictionalizes the Iași Pogrom, blending two narratives. The first, a historical one, focuses on those who lost their lives, the Oxemberg family: Jacques, a gynecologist, Roza, a poet, and their two children, Lev and Golda. The doctor and his son perished in the "death trains," Roza died after the pogrom. Golda who survived is the link to the second narrative in which Dora Bernstein and her son Ben appear. This second, more personal narrative focuses on Sânziana Stipiuc (Suzy), a thirty-three-year-old accountant who needs to be a guide for Dora Bernstein and Ben whom she later marries. She discovers that a pogrom took place in her town years ago, realizing how the tragedy of Jewishness was completely ignored and intentionally forgotten: "A Pogrom in Iași? At school and at university I had so much history that I used to have headaches. Yet no professor has ever mentioned one single word about it" (Mihuleac, 2014, p. 70). Mihuleac's *Ultima Țigară a lui Fondane: lstorii de Holocaust* [Fondane's last cigarette: Holocaust histories] (2016) contains thirteen short stories. The narrative technique is that of imagining microhistories that connect different events during the Holocaust in Romania and the difficulty the nation undergoes in recuperating its memory. One of these stories focuses on Beniamin (Beno) Wechsler (Benjamin Fondane) who perished in Auschwitz. Mihuleac mentions the Holocaust oblivion and denial towards the end of the second and the beginning of the third millennium when people assert vehemently: "Which Holocaust, my brother, where do you come from with these enormities? It is Jewish propaganda, in Romania there was no Holocaust!" (2016, p. 33). Mihuleac's third novel, *Deborah* (2019), deals with the deportations to Transnistria as well as the history of antisemitism. Deborah Mătăsaru, the central character, is a Jewish woman from Câmpulung Moldovenesc, a second-generation survivor, who is haunted by the image of her grandparents who perished in Moghilev. Other characters are perpetrators who tell their own stories. Aurel(ian) Leon's story deals with theft and betrayal: he is a thief, a spy, a denunciator. Emil Diaconescu is a history teacher who writes textbooks to justify Romania's imperialist desires. Some of the events were real, as documented by historians (see, for instance, Livezeanu, 1995). Mihuleac's latest novel, *Strania Valiză a*

[9] See Peter Banki's reading through Derrida's texts of "[t]he feeling of self-empowerment to which Mozes Kor testifies after having made her declaration of amnesty-forgiveness" foregrounding "the restoration of a feeling of narcissistic self-sufficiency" (2018, p. 86) which Mozes Kor named forgiveness.

[10] See also her considerations on the importance of such testimonies (Gligor, 2020 and 2023).

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Domnului Silberstein [Mr. Silberstein's strange suitcase] (2024), keeps an interest in the ordeals of the Jews from Iaşi, while also going beyond the Holocaust (many pages deal with interlopers from Romania, Romanian beggars and thieves from Paris). An insignificant part focuses on two Jews from Iaşi, Wilhelm (Guillaume) Silberstein, a sort of competitor of the famous Louis Vuitton, and Bernard Nathan (Natan Tannenzaft), an actor and film director, at some point the owner of Pathé Cinema. They were both arrested in the infamous Rafle des notables, in December 1941. Wilhelm was supposedly saved by the queen of Belgium, while Nathan died in Auschwitz. All in all, Mihuleac's fiction insists on the writer's duty to document the traumatic memory of the Holocaust, trying to make the public aware of this shameful page of Romanian history.

Avital Baruch's *Frozen Mud and Red Ribbons* (2017) is a literary memoir focusing on the writer's aunt, her grandfather and her great-grandparents who perished in Transnistria. Mirel Taloș's *Undeva în Transilvania* [Somewhere in Transylvania] (2019) documents what happened in North Transylvania. Although clumsily written, this docufiction is relevant for the effort to emphasize the role of memory in reconstructing the links between Romanians and Jews in two villages from Sălaj County, Jac and Șimleul-Silvaniei during 1938 and 1944. The narrative follows the friendship between two girls, Măriuca, a Romanian, and Gittel, a Jewish girl, who witness different events (the Vienna Dictate and the occupation of North Transylvania), which affect the interethnic relations and their lives. The Jews from Sălaj are deported to Auschwitz in the spring of 1944, and this is regarded by the narrator as a brutal dislocation from the community's roots.

Elana K. Arnold's *The Blood Years* (2023) is based on the harrowing experiences of the author's grandmother, Frederieke (Rieke) Teitler and her older sister, Astra who lived in Czernowitz. Another postmemory novel, Lilia Calancea's *Sunt oare un călău* (2023) deals with the Holocaust in the east. The narrator discovers a family photo that reveals that her father, Kostenko, was a Ukrainian soldier in the auxiliary Nazi troops, the infamous Trawniki:

> In the green notebook I have discovered a photo. It made me vomit. I ran away to the bathroom. I did everything I could not to return home. I married the first man who took my hand. This photo, in its grey nuances had scorched me to the core. After it I could not stand my father at a distance shorter than two meters. […] This piece of white-black paper is the proof that my father was a monster. My father did not have the smell of a bear, he smelled of blood. How does a man who smells of blood look like? I know. Handsome, young, tall, in a uniform, shouldering a weapon. Near other monsters like him, in front of them, a hole. In it, naked bodies. Women… An immense pile of drunken, drugged, crazy women... whichever… but still alive! My father chose death. Why did he keep this picture? Why didn't Mother throw it away? Wasn't she sick? Wasn't she afraid of my father? How could she let him touch her? Carress her? Married to him. Why did she love him so much? (Calancea, 2023, p. 15)

In the first part the father's point of view is privileged – his daughter reads his diary. Fragments that document what happened interrupt the narrative. The second part is written from the perspective of the narrator's mother, Elena. She was a fifteen-year-old orphan, possibly with German Polish origins, when she arrived in the Treblinka area near a mass grave. Kostenko saved her from rape. The last part is relatively fragmented and presents the family's history as well as the tragic history of the region, including that of Bessarabia. The Epilogue focuses on the third generation, the daughter's son whose name is Kostenko, like his grandfather's. As a nationalist Romanian he knows nothing about the Holocaust. His mother invites him to visit Treblinka in order to reconstruct the forgotten past of his family. The son's position is difficult, since he is an heir of both perpetrators and victims, incapable of

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distinguishing between good and evil. The investigation of the perpetrators' psychology puts forward a microhistory of what humanity means when moral rules are abolished.

Radu Vancu's *Kaddish* (2023a) is a witness poem that lets victims speak.[11] As the poet himself revealed (2023b), "*Kaddish* does not claim to be anything but a document about the destroyed humanity, yet it shows that we remain the species that constructs beauty rather horror."[12] Vancu wrote *Kaddish* after seeing the crimes committed by the Russian Army in Bucha and Mariupol, Ukraine, in 2022. He overlapped his own biography with the biography of poet Miklós Radnóti who perished in the Holocaust and that of his wife, Fanni Gyarmati. When Radnóti's corpse was exhumed from a mass grave, Fanni found in Radnóti's pocket his notebook containing the last poems he wrote before being killed. She published these poems which came back from the realm of death to assert life.

Finally, in 2024, Marta Caraion published *Géographie des Ténèbres: Bucarest–Transnistrie–Odessa 1941–1981* [Geography of darkness: Bucharest–Transnistria–Odessa 1941–1981], a *récit* following the destiny of her mother Valentina Caraion (born in 1927 in Galaţi, maid name Berman), and her grandparents, Sprinţa Berman (born in Chișinău, maid name Ciobricer) and Isidor Berman (born in Odessa at the end of the 19th century). As Russian Jews, her grandparents were discriminated in the Great Romania. When the Soviets took over Bessarabia in 1940 (after the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact), the family fled to Chișinău and after the war started in the East, to Odessa, which was conquered by Romanians in the fall of 1941. They were all deported to Transnistria. Isidor was shot in the spring of 1942. Valentina and Sprința were saved by two Romanian officers. They survived hiding under a false identity in the town of Berezovka and returned to Bucharest in the fall of 1944. After forty years, Valentina told her story to Ion Solacolu, a journalist of Romanian origin, exiled in Germany. Her daughter wrote the book, including her parents' documents and personal letters.

Based on the daily notes he kept as a physician during his two-year imprisonment in Vapniarka and Olgopol ghetto, Arthur Kessler's account *A Doctor's Memoir of the Romanian Holocaust: Survival in Lager Vapniarka and the Ghettos of Transnistria* (2024) details how the Romanian authorities fed the inmates with a soup made of toxic chickling peas (*Lathyrus sativus*) that induced paralysis, kidney failure, and sometimes death. He and an inmate fellow managed to save hundreds of lives by a daring gesture which could have killed them: they organized a hunger strike which resulted in the camp's dissolution and the prisoners' relocation to other ghettos in Transnistria.

Several films that refer to WW2 were produced in postcommunist Romania. Among these, two denied the Holocaust and minimized the Romanian army's role,[13] presenting Ion Antonescu as a "great patriot" (Degeratu, 2016; Solomon, 2016), continuing the tenets of Ceaușescu's alternative history. Making use of archival images and documents, Sergiu Nicolaescu's controversial film *Oglinda. Începutul adevărului* (1994) claimed to respect the historical truth. Yet, what Nicolaescu calls "historical truth" is rather post-truth: Romania is presented as the victim of both the Nazis and the Bolsheviks; no deportations are mentioned, and Antonescu is transformed into a martyr, whose purpose was to save his country. The motto „Istoria e prima carte a unei națiuni în care vedem trecutul, prezentul și viitorul" [History is the

[11] Kaddish is an ancient Jewish prayer sequence for the dead, regularly recited in the synagogue service, that concludes with a prayer for universal peace. The phrase "poetry of witness" was coined by poet Carolyn Forché in 1993 to describe a type of writing that combines the urgency of the "political" with bearing witness to personal experiences (Forché, 2014).

[12] See also Milesi and Vancu for a discussion on post-confessional poets (2022, p. 7).

[13] For an unbiased perspective on the Romanian army's participation in the Holocaust, see Harward, 2021. The American historian provides a detailed analysis of Romanian soldiers' motivations during the anti-Soviet war, emphasizing that nationalism ("the purification of Romania"), religious vision ("the defense of Christian civilization"), antisemitism, and anti-communism were the primary public, as well as personal justifications that sustained Romanian soldiers' morale and made them participate actively in atrocities.

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first book of a nation in which we see the past, present and future], as well as the assertion at the end of the film „Cine nu are memoria istoriei riscă să o repete" [Those who do not keep the memory of history risk repeating it] remain simply ornamental. Another hoax is Felicia Cernăianu's documentary film *Destinul Mareșalului* [The Marshal's fate] (1996) which starts from Antonescu's childhood and presents him as an exceptional soldier and a Romanian patriot.

Radu Mihăileanu's Franco-Belgian-Dutch film *Train de Vie* [Train of life] (1998, winner of the Audience Award at the 1999 Sundance Film Festival and of the debut award at the Venice Festival) unfolds the story of an east European Jewish village, whose residents plan to escape the Holocaust by organizing an imitation deportation train (see Berardinelli, 1999). Schlomo, the fool of the village, narrates as if his Eastern European *shtetl* in 1941 were real. This is also helped by The Klezmer-inspired score by Goran Bregović which "succeeds in capturing the prewar vitality of *shtetl* life" (Insdorf, 2003, 286; see also Baron, 2005, 149–54 for more on how Yiddish traditions are presented in the film and the similarities between *Train de vie* and *Fiddler on the Roof*). Schlomo brings the news that all Jewish citizens are in danger and suggests a utopian plan of escape: the villagers build up their own train, make costumes for the villager whose German was the best, Mordechai the Woodworker, who would disguise himself as the 'Nazi' general, and 'deport' the villagers before the real Nazis arrived. The plan works, despite being menaced not only by the Germans but also by Resistance members and another fake Nazi who is actually a Gypsy in disguise helping his community to escape the Nazis. The film's ending suggests that all the story was a fairy-tale made up by Schlomo who seems to be a prisoner in a concentration camp. We realize that he presented to us, the audience, his dream from behind the barbed wire, a method which, as Anette Insdorf showed, "might indeed have been more effective had it begun with a greater acknowledgment of its 'fairy-tale' premise" (2003, p. 285). The director claimed that Roberto Benigni was influenced by his film when he created La Vita è Bella, although this might look improbable, since both films were launched in the same year. One detail that nevertheless has to be considered is that "[t]he script for Train of Life was allegedly sent to Roberto Benigni, who was offered the role of Shlomo" (Insdorf, 2003, p. 286). Not surprisingly, although the film was well received, it brought about criticism on the same issues as Benigni's film, mainly ethical issues having to do with creating a Holocaust comedy.

A special film is *Forgiving Dr Mengele* (2005), whose protagonist, Moses Kor, was presented in the previous pages. The film which preceded her book uses empowering as the leitmotif, yet although seemingly impressive, her declaration of amnesty does not convince the viewers. Moses Kor admitted that her experience "has nothing to do with the perpetrator, has nothing to do with any religion, it has only everything to do with the way the victim is empowering himself or herself and taking back their life" (*Forgiving Dr Mengele*, 48.44–49.03). Moses Kor, also co-founder with her sister of the museum CANDLES (Children of Auschwitz Nazi Deadly Lab Experiments Survivors) in 1984 after managing to locate 122 survivors living in different parts of the world, remained committed to witnessing to the very last day of her life. She passed away at the venerable age of eighty-five in Krakow on 4 July 2019, while accompanying a CANDLES delegation on the annual educational trip to Auschwitz, hence "literally testifying" (Ionescu A., 2020, p. 41).

In the second decade of our millennium, several Romanian film directors understood that to deal with fault, shame, pride, anguish, an interminable "working-through" is needed; only in this way can we avoid the temptation of succumbing to the desire to close the narrative (we paraphrase here Lyotard, 1991, pp. 29–30). As film director Florin Iepan declared, "[w]ithout cinematography, the Holocaust would be a hard theme to process, to analyze" (2014).

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Radu Gabrea's documentary film *Struma* [The goiter] (2001) tells the tragic story of a ship used to transport Romanian Jews to safety during the Holocaust that was ultimately torpedoed by the Soviets in 1942, killing all but one of its passengers. Another film by the same director, *Gruber's Journey* (2009), a drama, was inspired by Malaparte's *Kapput.* It tackles the horrors of the Iași pogrom where over 13,000 Jews perished in the first days when Romania joined its Ally in the war. Florin Iepan's *Odessa* (2013) which launched a whole historical debate describes "the massacres of tens of thousands of Jews in Odessa by the Romanian army while simultaneously revealing the indifference and obstinate refusal of Romania's contemporary society to integrate this page into its collective memory" (Dumitru, 2020, p. 414). *Odessa* reveals the filmmaker's difficulties to raise awareness of the massacre and, from this perspective, is a film about "the making of the film" (Solomon, 2016, 153). It captures the disbelief of ordinary Romanians that Romania killed the largest number of Jews after the Germans, including that of Sergiu Nicolaescu, who is confronted by Iepan with this truth and asked why he did not include the word "Jew" but once in his film about Antonescu. The indifference of Romanians may be explainable since their former leaders refused to speak about the topic, including Emil Constantinescu, then Romania's president, and Romania's former King Mihai. Featuring in the film is also the antisemite Corneliu Vadim Tudor, president of the party Great Romania, who was presented in Part 1. He considered himself a "lamb" in comparison with the British conservatives who practiced antisemitism on a larger scale in his opinion.

Radu Jude, whose "systematic exploration of historical anti-Semitism in Romania began in 2016 with *Inimi Cicatrizate* [Scarred hearts], his adaptation of Max Blecher's writings from the 1930s" (Gorzo & Lazăr, 2023, p. 137),[14] started his series of films confronting the Romanian public with its real past with *Țara moartă* (2017), which describes events that took place between 1936 and 1946, by juxtaposing photographs taken by a Romanian photographer in his private studio in Slobozia in between the 1930's and early 1940's; the photos are shown while the filmmaker reads excerpts from Emil Dorian's diary, which "painstakingly details his anxieties and reflections as progressively worse elements of anti-Jewish policies begin being rolled out with crushing force" (Dumitru, 2020, p. 415). Audio material from Romania's National Archive of Films (nationalist Romanian songs, cinematographic news, discourses of politicians) is also used. Mareș (2017) described the film as an example of a "new radical and political cinema" showcasing an "experimental style, and an acute political consciousness," and "the most radical and anti-spectacular documentary post-2000," "an ambitious cinematographic oeuvre because of its formal attributes and its polemic subject matter." Proca (2017) deemed it as "one of the most intelligent and provocative film essays" (see also Dragomir, 2017).

Boris Maftsir's *Beyond the Nistru* (2016), depicting events from 1941 when Romania got back its territories occupied by the Soviet Union, is the story of hundreds of thousands of Jews. The three main episodes document the fate of the Jews deported to Transnistria: "Revenge of the Romanians" is about the pogroms and assassination of Jews in Moldova (Bessarabia) from the onset of Operation Barbarossa on June 22, 1941 until the beginning of the deportation of Bessarabia and Bukovina Jews to Transnistria; "Purification," the second episode, gives details about the deportation of Jews from Cernăuți and other towns in Bukovina and their suffering and death until they reached Transnistria; "Typhoid Outbreak" focuses on the winter of 1941/42 in Transnistria and in the Bershad and Sargorod ghettos – tens of thousands of Jews died during the outbreak, getting sick in the freezing cold and starving.

[14] In this film Jude used Blecher's surrealist narrating: "random episodes, seemingly free association of words," and an "oneiric manner" (Mironescu, 2022, pp. 98–9).

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Romulus Balazs's *Souvenirs de Iasi* (2023) deals with the director's trip to Romania after he discovered a book about the Iași Pogrom containing a series of photographs. Balazs returned to Romania to find the locations where the photos had been taken, identifying almost all of them in two years.

Following his less known *Cele două execuții ale mareșalului* [The Marshal's two executions], in 2018, Radu Jude's *"Îmi este indiferent dacă în istorie vom intra ca barbari"* ["I don't care if we go down in history as barbarians."] whose "footnote" was *Cele Două Execuții* (Gorzo & Lazăr, 2023, p. 152), is a masterpiece. It became the recipient of the Karlovy Vary Film Festival prize. It tells the story of Mariana Marin, an artist who is producing a pageant about her country's celebrated defeat of Soviet forces in the 1941 battle of Odessa. The Town Hall supports the project, expecting "a display of nationalist glory," yet Mariana's desire is "to reenact another aspect of the Odessa victory: the murder of some 20,000 of Odessa's Jews, which was in fact only two days out of a year-long, Romanian-led campaign of mass murder" (Horn, 2019**).** This is the first film that successfully works on mastering Romania's past, although it tells it in the form of a "mockumentary" (Horn, 2019). It is also the first film in which some of the characters face the traumatic past of their nation, which implies a "numbing and distancing effect of intellectual work on the Shoah" and has a "strong emotional impact" on those who pursue this difficult task (Friedlander, 1992, p. 51). Through Mariana**,** Romanians are asked to assume their past, hence there is no surprise that she is supported by a part of the team, but she also faces resistance at all levels, from that of the cultural workers who try to change the content of the artistic creation into a soft censored version, to part of the amateur actors and the figureheads who are intrigued and revolted by the nonconformist variant of history that they are advised to present (Romașcanu, 2019). Jude has been regarded as the director who reveals "repressed histories," who explores "the possibilities of cinematic, photographic, and radio archives, those of montage […], as well as those of 'Brechtian' aesthetics" (Gorzo & Lazăr, 2023, p. 28). There are many events that we cannot discuss here at large, yet two details are significant for the way in which Mariana works on Romanians' mastering their past. First, "[p]articularly well-articulated by Jude" is a polemics targeting "a certain understanding of 'realism,' associated with Romanian director Sergiu Nicolaescu's conception of the historical film" (Gorzo & Lazăr, 2023, p. 122). Mariana, who is aware of the great respect artists have for Nicolaescu's work (for her pageant she uses some costumes from his films), watches Nicolaescu's *Oglinda*, whose hagiographical rhetorics she questions. Second, she unmasks the way he negates the Holocaust in *Oglinda*: "at a certain point he gives Field Marshal Antonescu (played by actor Ion Siminie) a noble low-angle profile shot, with an icon of the crucified Christ in the background and cloying piano music on the soundtrack, as the Field Marshal, brought to trial in 1946 for his crimes, solemnly castigates the ungrateful Romanian people" (Gorzo & Lazăr, 2023, p. 122).

Radu Jude worked with historian Adrian Cioflâncă to create his next film, *Ieșirea Trenurilor din Gară* [The exit of the trains] (2020), a documentary essay that constructs historicity on the basis of a montage composed entirely of archive photographs and documents of the first big massacre of the Jews in Romania (Iași, June 29, p. 1941), where more than 10,000 Jews were killed – first by bullets, then by asphyxiation in freight trains. The montage film with photographs and texts related to the Iași pogrom confronts the viewer because, as Georges Didi-Huberman (2003, p. 3) claims, images confront us "in spite of all […] in spite of our own inability to look at them as they deserve; in spite of our own world, full, almost choked, with imaginary commodities." Gorzo and Lazăr commented on the way the photographs Jude displayed (more numerous than the only four existent photos taken by the Sonderkommando at Auschwitz that Didi-Huberman used for his book) work for Jude: they propose to the viewer a gaze that "can be a form of patience, an attempt at reparation" (2023, p. 219). Another film

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created by Jude in collaboration with Cioflâncă, *Amintiri de pe Frontul de Est* [Memories from the Eastern Front] (2022), features a photo album that traces the path of the 6th Regiment of the Romanian army in the war years of 1941 and 1942, putting the images of everyday military life in a larger context. Both Jude and his codirector Cioflâncă believe that archival photos are a medium that challenges us in the tradition of Susan Sontag (2004) with the "pain of the other."

Several documentary films were produced in the second decade of the new millennium outside postcommunist Romania: Natalia Ghilașcu's *Prigoana din Basarabia* [The exile from Bessarabia] (2012), *Persecuțiile din Basarabia* [The persecutions in Bessarabia] (2012), and *Cursed Years in Transnistria* (2016), Oleg Brega's *Masacrul de acasă* [The massacre from home] (2019) and Olga Ștefan's four documentaries and one short film. Ștefan set up the platform *The Future of Memory* which aims to raise public awareness through art and media. The mission of the initiative is manifold: "reactivating memory through contemporary art and media, connecting the past to the present, documenting the last witnesses, personalizing history through oral narratives, creating connections between people and opening up public spaces for debate and mutual understanding" (The Future of Memory, 2018). Her films, *Fragments of a Life* (2016), *My Illusions* (2017), *Daniel Spoerri: The Wild Child of Yassy* (2017), *Gesturi de rezistență* [Gestures of resistance] (2019), *Vapniarka: The Camp of Death* (2022), are a few examples that prove that we have moved towards a period in which mastering Romania's past is a must.

Afterthoughts

In this article we have attempted to synthetize a major part of the representations of the Romanian Holocaust in the eighty years that have passed since the end of WW2. As authors of such a vast synthesis, we have been inevitably the possessors of an overabundance of data. The numerous items in our bibliography have been selected from hundreds that have been published so far and with such a wealth of material it was difficult to footnote everything. Our article is offered as a compendium of factual knowledge; it includes succinct presentations of a corpus of memoirs, fictional works and films. We can notice that in the last two decades, the cultural production and memorial initiatives to master Romania's past and to represent the Romanian Holocaust have intensified and it is only now that we can echo Ștefan Ionescu's optimistic note that these testimonies are promising for future research, allowing a more nuanced understanding of the persecution of the Jews and Roma population in Romania (2005, pp. 369–70). The historical truth prevails since both Romanian and foreign historians have made efforts to correct the alternative histories of the Romanian Holocaust produced in communist times. Starting with the academic year 2023–2024, the discipline "History of the Jews. The Holocaust" became mandatory for highschoolers (see Țiu, 2024). The need to memorialize the victims, to make people empathize with them has also resulted in an increase in literary and filmic productions. However, as part of the European Union, Romanians live in an age when the messages of the extreme right have become more widespread in the context of a growing global populism. Romania's Constitutional Court annulled the December 2024 presidential elections after finding out that one candidate was unlawfully promoted through a campaign of fake news on TikTok, in which he combined fragments from discourses from Horia Sima and Antonescu with Ceaușist nostalgia. These are signs that scholars, writers and film makers have the duty to preserve Holocaust memory and continue to promote diversity, equity and inclusion which are part of the fundamental mission of a democratic society.

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