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Data przesłania tekstu do redakcji: 06.06.2016
Data przyjęcia tekstu do druku: 31.01.2017

“Abandoned Secrets”. The Question of the Holocaust Narratives in Ukrainian Literature

ABSTRACT: Golebiowski Anja, „*Abandoned Secrets*”. *The Question of the Holocaust Narratives in Ukrainian Literature*. “Poznańskie Studia Slawistyczne” 12. Poznań 2017. Publishing House of the Poznań Society for the Advancement of the Arts and Sciences, pp. 93–105. ISSN 2084-3011.

The reportage *Ukraine without Jews* (1943) by the Soviet writer Vasilij Grossman is one of the earliest public reports on the Holocaust. Although Ukraine had been in the centre of the Nazi mass murder and single voices like the ones of Grossman or Il’ja Ęrenburg even called betimes attention to the ongoing genocide of Ukrainian Jews, any tradition of Ukrainian Holocaust narratives has not been developed yet. Since its independency in 1991, there are attempts to participate in the Western memory discourse, but by now, they have rather no broader impact. The reception of the debate on the Holocaust serves more likely as a backdrop for its own discourse of victimization, the Holodomor, which is used for developing a national identification within the current Ukrainian nation-building process. Since the Orange Revolution, as the Ukraine has found itself in a critical phase of a socio-political upheaval, some texts of leading Ukrainian writers (Marija Matios, Oksana Zabużko, Jurij Vynnyćuk) have occurred that carefully raise the subject of the Holocaust, or rather the gap in the Ukrainian consciousness. This paper gives an overview about the texts and works out the narrative strategies, whereby only the coming years will show, if these texts constitute the beginning of a Ukrainian Holocaust literature.

KEYWORDS: Holocaust; Ukraine; Soviet Union; Jews; Vasilij Grossman; Babyn Jar; collective memory; Mykola Rjabćuk; Maria Matios; Jurij Vynnyćuk; Oksana Zabużko

Some of the earliest reports on the Holocaust¹ have been written by the Soviet author of Ukrainian descent, Vasilij Grossman². As a war

¹ The term “Holocaust” refers in this paper to the Nazi mass murders in general. When the word “Shoah” is used, the authoress focuses on the genocide of the Jewish population.

² At the end of the 1920s, Stalin began to reshape the Soviet Union and to sovietise the Ukrainian culture. In the course of this, the Ukrainian literary language was withdrawn from the public sphere and Ukrainian-born authors had to write their texts in Russian in order to be able to publish. Although, the *National Writers Union of Ukraine* was able to found itself

correspondent, Grossman had seen the testimonies of the violence against the civilian population and the mass murders that had been committed by the Nazis. However, while travelling through the war zones, he noticed that the course of action against the Jews was of a different type. Unlike other ethnic groups, the Jews were exposed to a policy of systematic extermination that aimed at their complete extinction. In order to raise awareness of this specific situation he pointed out the exceptional suffering of the Jewish population under the Nazi regime in his reportage *Ukraine without Jews* (1943):

There is no home in a single Ukrainian town or village where you will not hear bitter and evil words about the Germans, no home where tears have not flowed during these past two years; (...) There are also villages in Ukraine where one doesn't hear any crying or see tear-filled eyes, villages that are ruled by silence and peace. I visited a village like this on two occasions – the first time on 26 September, and again on 17 October in 1943. This village, Kozary, lies on the ancient Kievan highway between Nezhyne and Kozelets. I visited Kozary once during the day, and another time on a heavy autumn night. On both occasions silence and peace ruled over Kozary – the peace and silence of death. (...) And it occurred to me that just as Kozary is silent, so too are the Jews in Ukraine silent. In Ukraine, there are no Jews. Nowhere – not in Poltava, Kharkov, Kremenchug, Borispol, not in Iagotin. You will not see the black, tear-filled eyes of a little girl, you will not hear the sorrowful drawling voice of an old woman, you will not glimpse the swarthy face of a hungry child in a single city or a single one of hundreds of thousands of shtetls (Grossman 2011: 12).

Although Grossman judged the ongoing events correctly, he was not allowed to publish his text in a Russian journal. Therefore, he translated it into Yiddish, and in 1943 the reportage was printed in the official press medium of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee *Ejnikajt* whose co-editor he was. The reception of the text was thus very limited, since the Russian language version was printed for the first time in Israel in 1985 and in Russia in 1990.

Besides Grossman, there were only a few other authors in the Soviet Union who took up the issue of the Shoah. In most cases, these were authors with Jewish and / or Ukrainian roots, who themselves have become direct

in 1934, it was subordinated to the Union of Soviet Writers as there should be no Ukrainian literature. In the case, the term “Soviet literature” is mentioned in the paper, it shall indicate that this literature is written in Russian and addressed to a Soviet reader in general and not only intended for Ukrainian readers.

witnesses to the Holocaust. Especially Il’ja Ėrenburg, Anatolij Kuznecov, and Evgenij Evtušenko, who tried to raise awareness of the genocide of the Jewish people and to counterbalance the Soviet anti-Semitism, are worthy of mention. On the contrary to the official Soviet portrayal of history that excluded the fate of the Jews in favour of narratives about the victimhood and the heroism of Soviet citizens, these authors tried to give recognition to the suffering of the Jews. It was particularly important to them to emphasize that Jews were an equal part of the Soviet society. In the preface to the *Black Book*, a documentation about the genocide of the East Slavic Jews published by Il’ja Ėrenburg and Vasilij Grossman, the policy of anti-Semitism is therefore sentenced and the Jews are explicitly referred to as Soviet citizens:

The *Black Book* is presented as a memorial to be placed upon the countless mass graves of Soviet people who were tortured and murdered by the German fascists. (...) The book should stir an abhorrence and a loathing toward the savage ideology of fascism and should serve the great life-affirming idea of the equality of people and peace among them (Ehrenburg, Grossmann 2009: XXII).

For this generation of Soviet writers, the symbol of the Holocaust was the ravine of Babyn Jar, where more than 100,000 people and among them 30,000 Kievian Jews had been killed and buried. Despite or rather because of its significance, the state authorities tried to suppress the remembrance of Babyn Jar as there should be no separate Jewish commemorative culture. Thus, the Kiev administration decided to level the ravine in the 1950s. Furthermore, the nearby memorial, which was inaugurated in 1976, was not dedicated to the Jews, but to the civilian victims of the Nazis in general (Rapson 2015: 85–89). Nevertheless, thanks to the literary narratives Babyn Jar did not fall into oblivion. The writings of Ėrenburg, Grossman, Evtušenko, and Kuznecov activated the memory by lifting the ravine to the central symbol of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union³. Hence, it got a similar function in the collective memory of Soviet citizens as Auschwitz in the Western culture of memory. However, despite the expressive language and images used by the authors, the public reception was relatively limited. Babyn Jar became indeed a topos of the memorial culture, but a stable

³ The meaning of Babyn Jar as a central topic of the Eastern Slavic Holocaust writings is underlined by Jurij Kaplan’s anthology *Ėcho Bab’ego Jara. Poëtičeskaja antologija* (1991).

genre tradition of the East Slavic Holocaust literature did not emerge. The topic of the Holocaust and especially of the Shoah did not only turn out as a taboo that was imposed on the whole society from above, but it was also a social taboo since a lot of Ukrainians were afraid to be confronted with the problem of Ukrainian anti-Semitism and with the fact of war crimes committed by Ukrainian people against Jews. This fear of being faced with its own collective fault is one of the main reasons why the Holocaust experienced marginalization in Ukrainian society⁴.

After Ukraine gained independence in 1991, the subject of the Holocaust appeared in the public discussion, but it was not followed by a broader debate. In particular, the President Viktor Juščenko broached the issue of the Shoah within the framework of the nation-building process, as he tried to draw parallels to the Holodomor⁵. By activating the remembrance of collective suffering of Ukrainian people, he intended to awake a sense of unity within the population (Kappeler 2011: 417). However, this kind of exploitation as a support for national political interests turned out to be a blockade for the reappraisal of the Holocaust, since it tightened the problem of the competition of victims between Jews and Ukrainians. Nonetheless, some tendencies of an incipient culture of remembrance can be observed in the Ukrainian society since the political opening and especially since the Orange Revolution (2004). However, in terms of an overall social perspective they are a marginal phenomenon⁶. As long as the impression will persist that the suffering of the Ukrainians does not get proper recognition by the international community as a crime against the Ukrainian people, the awareness of the suffering of other social or ethnic group will hardly gain acceptance.

⁴The confrontation with the Holocaust continues to be a major problem in Ukrainian society. Interesting in this context is an Ukrainian commentary on Jonathan Safran Foer's novel *Everything Is Illuminated* (2002) which criticizes the portrayal of Ukraine in the novel. According to it, Foer does not describe a realistic picture of the country, but rather the common Western stereotype of an anti-Semitic Ukraine (Snihur 2005).

⁵V. Tomasz Stryjek (2014: 201–223) who breaks down the different levels of the difficult political and social memorial policy that has emerged in Ukraine after 1991.

⁶It is conspicuous that there is an increase of Holocaust memorials in Ukraine within the last 15 years. Nevertheless, there are only about two dozen memorials. Comparing to the number of Jews who have died in Ukraine it is a rather modest sign of remembrance. But only in 2015 five memorials have been inaugurated thanks to the efforts of Ukrainian and foreign organisations (Adler 2015).

The question of the Holocaust remembrance within the nation building process and the pro-western orientation of Ukraine is of considerable significance since it may serve as an indicator of the extent to which Ukraine approaches the Western values on its way to become an independent civil society. After all, the Holocaust – as Claus Leggewie and Anne Lang frame it – is the “negative founding myth of Europe” (“der Holocaust als negativer Gründungsmythos Europas”), which forms the value system of the European Community (Leggewie, Lang 2011: 15–21).

From this point of view, the contemporary Ukrainian literature provides interesting insights into the condition of Ukrainian society. Unlike many European literatures in which the Holocaust forms a leading theme, there are only very few Ukrainian literary writings that mention this topic at all⁷. One of the earliest exceptions is a short story *Eight Jews in search of their grandfather* (*Vos 'mero evreiv u pošukach didusja*, 1996/1997) by the writer, journalist, cultural analyst and leading public intellectual Mykola Rjabčuk. The story concerns an encounter between the Ukrainian first-person narrator and a Jewish family, who is visiting all the places where their grandparents had lived before the war. On their journey through Ukraine, the narrator works temporary for them as a tour guide. The exposition of the story makes clear that it is an unusual situation for the narrator what is not only caused by the matter of fact that he actually is not a professional guide. The exceptional thing about the situation concerns rather the fact that the encounter with the family and their history makes him tackle with his own national identity.

The first-person narrator sees it not only as his task to translate the language, but also to mediate the Ukrainian culture. But soon the question for the reader arises, who of them is actually the cultural mediator. The narrator himself has a negative attitude towards his home country and during the journey he finds all prejudices existing about Ukraine confirmed. Towards the cosmopolitan travel group consisting of Americans, French, Israelis and even a Jewish Thai woman he feels ashamed for the conditions in Ukraine, which he traces back to the Soviet past. In his opinion, Ukraine

⁷ In recent years, an increasing number of testimonies can be observed to be published in Ukraine what might be a sign for an opening towards the Holocaust issue. It will be interesting to observe, if this will also have an impact on the number of Holocaust fiction.

is a backward country of peasants at the periphery of the civilized world. The Jewish family on the other hand takes everything with humour and behaves with much more self-confidence. His personal reflections on the family's history illustrate that Jews have always been strangers to Ukrainians. Although Ukrainians and Jews have been neighbours for centuries, they share various destinies. The different social and historical experiences divide them. The discussion between the narrator and the family members makes it obvious, that despite their friendly relationship they interpret the history and the Jewish-Ukrainian relationship in different ways and they even talk at cross purposes (Rjabčuk 1998: 232–234).

The Holocaust marks the central turning point in the Ukrainian-Jewish relationship. In one of the conversations, the Jewish family reminds him of the complicity of Ukrainians in the Shoah. The narrator in turn draws the attention to the subject of the Holodomor calling it a “small Ukrainian Holocaust”⁸ (“malen’kyj ukrajyn’s’kyj holokost”, Rjabčuk 1998: 234). At the end of the journey, the narrator admits to himself that he feels something like jealousy since the family has the possibility to leave Ukraine whereas he has to remain in his home country with all its problems: “They returned from their past, a Jurassic Park, and went back to the future while I and my whole country were stocked in the past like in a nightmare, unable to do even one step into the future” (“Vony povertalysja zi svoho mynuloho, nače z Jurs’koho Parku, nazad u majbutne, tym časom jak ja buksuvav z usijeju kraïnoju v c’omu mynulomu, nače v chymernomu sni, nezdatnyj zrobyty u bik majbutn’oho ani kroku”; Rjabčuk 1998: 237).

But this is not the end of the story and not the end of the process the narrator is going through. One year later, he is on a flight to a conference in Jerusalem. It is a very symbolic situation that he finds himself above the sea right between Israel and Ukraine. In this intermediate position, he observes a Jewish family that uses the Galician language at ease for talking to each other: “For the first time in my life I had the impression that this were our Jews – not Russian and not Soviet Jews, and with them we will indeed lose something very important. We will soon – as I suppose – feel the meaning of this something, but we will not realize it” (“U perše v žytti

⁸ If not otherwise mentioned, the translations are made by the author of the paper.

ja vidčuv, ščo ce naši jevrei – ne rosijs’ki i ne sovet’s’ki, i ščo z nymy my spravdi vtračajemo ščos’ duže važlyve čoho my, bojusja, skoro vidčujemo, ale ne skoro zbahnemო”, Rjabčuk 1998: 238). The narrator realizes that these Jewish families have come to terms with their past and they are at peace with their culture. They do not repress their conflicts and therefore it is possible for them to build a liveable future. Rjabčuk’s text that dates back to the second half of the 1990s already takes up main thoughts about national identity and the significance of coming to terms with the past, which are important topics being currently discussed in Ukrainian literature as the paper is going to show.

In 2004, Maria Matios published her novel *Sweet Darusia (Solodka Darusja)* which is about the eventful past of the Bukovina people, who had been pawn in the game to the twentieth century history. The first part of the book that takes place in the 1980s is about the mentally retarded Darusja and the rural Bukovina. Darusja, who stopped talking in her childhood, lives the life of an outsider. Furthermore, the lonesome woman suffers of strong headaches. The second part of the book tells the story of her parents as well as the history of the region in the time of World War II, and the first years after the war. Matios describes a rural idyll where people live a simple and straight life. Despite the different ethnic groups, the people of the community live together in peace and they mainly identify themselves with their region. But their peaceful life is being disturbed by the events of the world politics. At short intervals, the ruling powers change. At one time the region belongs to Romania, then the Germans march in, and the next time the locals find themselves under the rule of the Soviets. It is very astonishing for the Western reader that the German invasion is described as a short and rather pleasant episode in the history of the region. The reader gets to know that there were also Jewish families in the village, but there is no information about their fate during the German occupation. The misfortune starts not until the march in of the Soviet soldiers. The reader learns that the Soviet reign of terror has been the reason for Darusjas’ behaviour and for her personal family tragedy. Next the reader finds out that Russian officer used a trick to make the ten-year-old girl betray her father without knowing it. This was the same officer who had tortured and raped her mother some years earlier. At the end of the book, Darusja stops speaking as she finds the body of her mother, who has committed suicide.

Matios latest novel *Slippers of Our Lady* (*Čerevyčky Božoi materi*) from 2013, continues to tell the history of the Bukovina during World War II. But in comparison to the former novel, the reader can remark a slightly more direct way to talk about the Holocaust. This time Matios tells the events from the perspective of the 12 years old Ivanka. Unlike her former novel, the focus of the narration lies rather on the fate of the Jewish people. Ivanka and the Jewish children in her village are friends. But although they play together, the girl realizes instinctively a cultural barrier between them, since the Jews differ by their customs and habits from other villagers. Even though, when the genocide begins in her village, she tries to help and to rescue the Jews. Ivanka who represents the people of Bukovinians, however, is helplessly exposed to the horrors of the Shoah. The novel ends with the despair of the child, who has been confronted too early with the evil and has become prematurely adult:

(...) and from above as from heaven spilled out the last prayer of the Jews, who had been chosen by this crazy time and were doomed by other merciless people (...) Ivanka did not hear the shots. (...) Ivanka was blind and deaf. She had died with them all. (...) Ivanka holds firmly in her hand the red boot with the brown bloodstains, she feels that she is old, old like those who wait for death.

(...) a zverchu, niby iz samoho neba, na dno toho pekla lylasja ostannja prižitteva molytva judeiv – prirečenyh inšymy neščadnymy ljud'my i vybranych boževil'nym časom (...) Ivanka ne čula postriliv. (...) Ivanka oslipla j ohluchla. Umerla razom z usima. (...) A Ivanka styskae v ruci červonyj čerevyčok iz pljamamy buroï krovï – i čue, ščo vona vže stara, jak ti chto čekae smerti (Matios 2013: 198–206).

The cohabitation of different ethnic groups is also the main subject of Jurij Vynnyčuk's novel *Tango of Death* (*Tango smerti*, 2012). The storyline unfolds on two different temporal levels. On the first level, the story of the young Ukrainian Orest Barbaryk and his close friends, the Pole Jas', the German Vol'f and the Jew Josyp, is told. The four live in the multicultural city of L'viv in the 1930s and 1940s, and together they go through the horrors of the German and Soviet occupation. Despite their different ethnic backgrounds, the four friends are Ukrainian patriots just like their deceased fathers, who had died for Ukrainian independence as the soldiers of the Ukrainian National Republic's Army. Corresponding to the heroic death of their fathers, who had been killed by the Bolsheviks in the executions of Bazar in 1921, three of them find also an early violent death as the

partisans in the struggle for Ukraine sovereignty. Only Josyp Mil’ker is to survive, but he cannot forget his friends and beloved ones, who suffered a violent death. Therefore, he stays all his adult life alone.

A second plotline is developed around Myrko Jaroš, a professor for classical languages, who lives in our days. During his research, he gets to know about an old sheet of music with the melody of the *Tango of Death*, which is said to possess magical powers. Whoever hears the melody right in the moment of his death is said to be reborn. And in fact, it turns out that Jaroš, who always seemed to be somehow restless and unable to enter into a deeper connection with other people, is the reincarnated Orest. His soul – as well as his friends’ souls – got the possibility to be reborn thanks to Mil’ker, who was playing the tango for them at the moment of their death. In the last scene of the novel, Orest hears the melody again and finally recognizes Mil’ker as his former friend.

By its title, Vynnyčuk’s novel obviously includes an intertextual allusion to Paul Celan’s famous Holocaust poem *Fugue of Death* (*Todesfuge*, written around 1944/1945) that was entitled *Tango of death* (*Tangoul morții*) in its Romanian version from 1947⁹. Furthermore, Vynnyčuk uses the poppy flower as symbol for reincarnation what is also a reference to Celan’s lyrical anthology *Poppy and Memory* (*Mohn und Gedächtnis*, 1952). But the link to the Holocaust subject is not only marked by intertextuality. There are several passages in the novel which thematise the Nazi crime against the Jews. However, the violent proceeding of the Soviet army against Ukrainian people dominates the plot and has a much stronger impact on the destiny of the main characters in the novel than the Holocaust. Nevertheless, it is striking that Mil’ker, a Jew, is the key to salvation and reunion for the circle of friends who are representing the Ukrainian nation.

Another novel that illustrates how close the present is connected with the past is Oksana Zabužko’s novel *The Museum of Abandoned Secrets* (*Muzej pokynutyh sekretiv*, 2010). This national and international award-winning bestseller that deals with the problem of repressed collective memory can be considered as a key novel to Ukrainian memory conflicts. The main character of the novel, that interlinks the events of two different

⁹The poem was first published in its Romanian translation.

time periods, is the journalist and television presenter Daryna Goščyns'ka, who is both, a victim of Soviet authorities and a victim of the new socio-political conditions in Ukraine. However, the emancipated woman takes up the fight against all barriers surrounding her.

Daryna is encircled by numerous secrets. For example, there are her former lover and her programme director, who want to misuse her popularity for their obscure affairs. But when she uncovers the intrigues, she prefers to relinquish her career instead of selling herself. Then, there is a mysterious case of her close friend Vlada, an internationally renowned artist, who died in a car crash. Also, some of her artworks, which were inspired by a traditional Ukrainian children's game, have disappeared in this accident. According to the artist, in former days, girls used to bury their little treasures and tried not to give away this secret. The roots of this game date from the time, when woman protected icon paintings from the Bolsheviks by burying them in the earth. Vlada's collages, who trace back to this forgotten Ukrainian folklore practice, are the central metaphor for the Ukrainian state of mind, as Ukrainian people have abandoned their past. They suppress the memory of their history whereby no Ukrainian identity is able to develop.

Another disastrous secret is connected with the fate of Hel'cja, a young partisan of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army. Hel'cja and Adrijan had fallen in love with each other, but in their short life time they never got the chance to be a couple. The tragedy of Hel'cja and her partisan comrade Adrijan Ortynskyj is narrated on a second time level in parallel to the story of Daryna. For her investigations about Hel'cja Daryna, receives support from Adrijan Dovhan, Hel'cja's grandnephew, who becomes Darynas great love. So, finally, the love affair of Hel'cja and Adrijan, which was denied by history, gets fulfilled.

In this multi-layered novel, the wounds of Ukrainian history that have been banished for a long time are brought back to the surface. Through a complex network of relationships, it is shown that the problems of the present are the results of the past:

"So many deaths." You're right, absolutely – there are too many. Perhaps, when there are so many deaths piled up in one place, and there is nothing to ward them (and what should be warding them, what kind of a bill?), their accumulated mass creates its own gravity – and draws in new ones, again and again? Like an avalanche? An avalanche

– of course! – but this is from an earlier history, of the neighbourhood of Kurenivka in Kyiv: in the fifties, the authorities had paved over Babyn Jar – they built a dam and for ten years pumped loam pulp from a nearby brick factory straight into the biggest mass grave in the world, to extinguish any trace of it. They even built a stadium and an outdoor dance floor on top of it – and in 1961 the dam broke and a forty-five-foot wall of mud wiped out an entire neighbourhood in thirty minutes, burying hundreds of people – no one had their backs, either. And the bodies that washed out of Babyn Jar rushed down Kurenivka to Podil together with the living who were swept up in the flood. (...) Babyn Jar rebelled, adults said, only back then one said such things in a whisper. In a whisper and with a pillow over even one's cradled phone: Soviet superstitions had it that you could be listened to through your phone even when you weren't talking on it. And then the stories of it slowly faded – survivors dissolved in the masses of newcomers, the city grew, and the newcomers never learned about the flood. They just went to play soccer in that same stadium, «Spartak», which was so quickly built up again. The dead were the ones, who took you, Vlada, weren't they? Other people's dead – exactly when your own life shifted and slid, losing its footing? They are strong, the dead; they can do things. Oh yes, they are strong. Lord, how strong they are. We couldn't dream of matching them.

“Duže bahato smertej”. Pravda tvoja – taky zabahato. Može, koly smertej skupčuet'sja tak bahato v odnomu misci, i vony ničym ne ochoroneni (a čym majut' buty, jakuju takuju “gramotoju”? ..), to sama ičhnja masa porodžuje vže vlasnu gravitacijnu sylu – i pritjahue do sebe novi j novi? Jak lavina? Lavina, avžež, – til'ky ce z davnjšoi istorii, z Kurenivs'koï: Babyn Jar u p'jatdesjati tež že nakryly asfal'tom – zvely dambu j desjat' rokov pospil' zalyvaly najbil'syj u sviti ljuds'kyj mohil'nik cementnoju pul'poju z pobliz'koho zavodu, ščob i slidu ne zostalosja. Šče j stadion iz tančmajdančikami zverchu povidkryvaly, - a v 1961-mu dambu prorvalo, i p'jatnadcjaty metrova hora selevoï lavyny za pivhodyny zmela z ličja zemli cilyj mikrorajon, pochovšy pid soboju sotni ljudej, jakich tež ne znajšlosja komu pidstrachuvaty. I trupy, vyneseni z Jaru, mčalo po Kurenivci vnyz na Podil uperemiž iz pidchoplenymy po dorozji žyvymy, (...) Babyn Jar povstav, hovoryly dorosli, til'ky todi pro taki reči hovoryly pošepky. Pošepky, i nakryvšy poduškoju telefona: čomus' radjans'ko ljudy viryly, ščo prosluchovujut' ič same čerez telefon. A potim rozmovy potrochu zижšli nanivec', – žyvi svidky rozčynyls' u masi novoprybulych, misto roslo, a novoprybuli vže ničoho ne znaly. I jšly hraty v futbol, na toj samyj stadion «Spartak»: joho duže švydko vidbuduvaly. Mertvi tebe zabraly, Vladoč'ko, – tak? Čuži mertvi - jakraz todi, koly tvoe vlasne žyttja poplyvlo, trarjačy grunt pid nogamy? Vony syl'ni, mertvi, vony možut'; och jaki vony syl'ni. O Bože, jaki ž vony syl'ni. Kudy nam do nych (Zabužko 2010: 685–686).

In this crucial text passage, Daryna mentions unexpectedly Babyn Jar. Until this moment, the fate of the Jews under the Nazis and later under the Soviets is hardly mentioned, but also not totally excluded. There is, for example, the outstanding character of Raxelja, a Jewish nurse and partisan with whom Adrijan Ortynskij has a love affair. Raxelja, who is

a Holocaust survivor and who gives birth to Adrijan's child, reminds of the interwoven relation between Jews and Ukrainians. In fact, the topic of the Holocaust is thematised by Zabužko in a very gentle manner. But by mentioning Babyn Jar as a symbol for Ukraine's failed memory culture, the Holocaust is moved into the centre of attention.

Even though some authors have written about the mass murders of Ukrainian Jews in the Soviet era, there is almost an absence of the Shoah in today's Ukrainian literature. As shown in this paper, there can be only recently noticed some timid attempts by the most prominent voices of Ukrainian literature to approach the narrative, although the Shoah is not the main theme of their writings. In comparison to Western Holocaust literature, there are indeed great differences, since, so far, Ukrainian Holocaust writings emphasize that the Soviet past left a much more burning issue for Ukrainian society than the Nazi regime did. Nevertheless, these critical voices try to initiate a discussion about the different traumata of the Ukrainian nation, which is an important contribution to the national identity finding process. Within this discourse, the image of a multicultural nation is illustrated and Ukraine is constructed as a place of European remembrance.

The problems of Ukrainian-Jewish relations are not concealed. Nevertheless, it could be noted that mentioned in the paper Holocaust writings do not deal with the Ukrainian-Jewish relations in a deeper way. It is significant that the trauma of the Holocaust has not been really discussed in Ukraine, although it marks the crossroads between Ukrainians and Jews. Nevertheless, these texts that show the risks of abandoned history have the potential to initiate a broader discourse. The Ukraine as a young nation has to find its own way to handle their numerous and difficult problems and it will be interesting to see how the Holocaust discourse will progress and what significance it will have for the development of the Ukrainian civil society.

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