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HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE, RESILIENCE, AND RECONCILIATION IN ALICIA APPLEMAN-JURMAN'S AND ANITA EKSTEIN'S MEMOIRS: A COMPARATIVE LITERARY ANALYSIS OF NARRATIVE STRATEGIES*

Abstract. The present research explores the narrative strategies that foreground the themes of Holocaust remembrance, resilience, and reconciliation in Alicia Appleman-Jurman's *Alicia. My Story* (1988) and Anita Ekstein's *Always Remember Who You Are* (2019), two first-person accounts of Holocaust survivors in World War II who grew up in western Ukraine (then southeastern Poland). Through a comparative literary analysis, the study highlights how each author constructs their narrative to convey the trauma of the Holocaust, the lingering resentment toward perpetrators, and the diverse ways toward reconciliation, which result solely from the complete remembrance of past trauma. The article argues that while both self-narrations share common themes of memory and the creation of a Holocaust survivor's identity, the authors employ different narrative techniques reflecting their personal experiences and perspectives. The analysis of the core themes reveals that Appleman-Jurman's autobiographical narrative emphasizes resilience and survival, while Ekstein's memoir foregrounds intergenerational memory and the ethical imperative of remembrance.

Keywords: self-narration; Holocaust remembrance; identity; resilience; reconciliation; resentment; violence; narrative strategies

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* This article is based on the research project presented during my fellowship at the Imre Kertész Kolleg in 2024–2025 in cooperation with the Chair of Eastern European History at the Friedrich Schiller University of Jena, as well as the Virtual Ukraine Institute for Advanced Study (VUIAS). The project took shape as part of the Imre Kertész Kolleg's research area focusing on *The Holocaust and its Aftermath in Central and Eastern Europe*, led by Professor Dr. Joachim von Puttkamer, Director of the Kolleg, who fostered a collegial intellectual atmosphere within the Kolleg community. I would like to express my heartfelt appreciation and immeasurable debt of gratitude to Professor von Puttkamer for his inspirational depth of knowledge, professional integrity, encouragement, and generosity of spirit.

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PAMIĘĆ O HOLOKAUŚCIE, ODPORNOŚĆ I POJEDNANIE WE WSPOMNIENIACH
ALICJI APPLEMAN-JURMAN I ANITY EKSTEIN.
ANALIZA PORÓWNAWCZA STRATEGII NARRACYJNYCH

Artykuł analizuje strategie narracyjne, które w dwóch pierwszoosobowych świadectwach osób ocalałych z Holocaustu – *Alicia. My Story* (1988) Alicji Appleman-Jurman i *Always Remember Who You Are* (2019) Anity Ekstein – eksponują wątki pamięci, odporności i pojednania. Analiza porównawcza podkreśla sposób, w jaki każda z autorek konstruuje swoją opowieść w celu oddania traumy Zagłady, nieprzemijającej urazy względem oprawców, oraz odmiennych dróg do pojednania, które można osiągnąć wyłącznie poprzez odzyskanie pełnej pamięci traumy. Artykuł dowodzi, że chociaż obie autonarracje łączą wspólne wątki pamięci i budowania tożsamości ocalałego z Holocaustu, autorki stosują różne techniki narracyjne, odzwierciedlające ich osobiste doświadczenia i perspektywy. Analiza głównych wątków ujawnia, że autobiograficzna narracja Appleman-Jurman kładzie nacisk na odporność i przetrwanie, podczas gdy wspomnienia Eksteina wysuwają na pierwszy plan pamięć międzypokoleniową i etyczny imperatyw pamiętania.

Słowa kluczowe: autonarracja; pamięć o Holokauście; tożsamość; odporność; pojednanie; uraza; przemoc; strategie narracyjne

INTRODUCTION

In his book *How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves* (1999), Paul John Eakin defined autobiographical narrative “as an integral part of a lifelong process of identity formation in which acts of self-narration play a major part”.¹ It does not mean that narrative is merely about the self but rather that it is always a constituent part of the self in self-narrations whose purpose “to testify is thus not merely to narrate but to commit oneself, and to commit the narrative, to others: to take responsibility—in speech—for history or the truth of an occurrence, for something which, by definition, goes beyond the personal, in having general (nonpersonal) validity and consequences”,² and “as an ongoing process underpinned by selected memories”.³

This paper attempts to follow up on some of the theoretical and practical implications of Eakin’s definition. How does Holocaust memory that speaks about the past and the present, as well as autobiographical remembering as an essential way of giving meaning to Holocaust survivors assimilate in self-nar-

¹ Paul John Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 101, <https://doi.org/10.7591/9781501711831>.

² Shoshana Felman, “In an Era of Testimony: Claude Lanzmann’s Shoah,” *Yale French Studies* 97 (2000): 103–104.

³ Arnaud Schmitt, “Self-narration,” in *Handbook of Autobiography / Autofiction*, ed. Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), 658.

ration? What artistic strategies do the authors employ to address their traumatic experience and tell the truth about a past sequence of events? The two examples I will discuss—Alicia Appleman-Jurman’s *Alicia. My Story* (1988) and Anita Helfgott Ekstein’s *Always Remember Who You Are* (2019)—both refused to accept the fate determined for them by others and raised issues about Holocaust remembrance and its role in the construction of the survivor’s traumatic past and, more importantly, “reworking the past and working out a strategy that leads to the creation of the identity of a survivor”.⁴ The application of a historical-comparative method becomes essential to reveal how the collective memory of the Holocaust and the writers’ traumatic experiences are passed down through the narrative strategies of both autobiographical writings. A comparative literary analysis of the narrative strategies in both self-narrations aims to show the differences in uncovering the notion of Holocaust memory and the creation of a survivor’s identity through the prism of the core themes of resilience and reconciliation.

Alicia Appleman-Jurman (1930–2017) and Anita Helfgott Ekstein (b. 1934) were child survivors of the Holocaust who directly experienced and survived the Nazi persecution and for whom the mass genocide of Jewish people on Ukrainian territories during World War II was a personal traumatic experience. They both were born in the 1930s, in southeastern Poland (now in western Ukraine). Their experiences and connections to different regions of present-day Ukraine, specifically Ternopil (Tarnopol), Ivano-Frankivsk (Stanisławów), and Lviv (Lwów), have had a profound influence on their non-fictional writing (see table 1). As a result, Alicia Appleman-Jurman and Anita Helfgott Ekstein not only bore witnesses to the Holocaust’s unfathomable atrocities but also have contributed to Holocaust literature, each offering their unique narratives. Only very recently the extermination of Polish and Ukrainian Jews, which has been studied as part of the Nazi genocide in Europe, has become the subject of sustained historical analyses in Ukraine. It was Ukraine’s independence, gained in 1991, that facilitated research into Nazi crimes against Jews across Ukrainian lands.

⁴ Bożena Karwowska, “A Bystander or a (Passive) Witness? A Few Remarks on the Consequences of the Choice of Terminology in Research into the Shoah or the Holocaust,” *Roczniki Humanistyczne* 67, no. 1 (2019): 146, <http://doi.org/10.18290/rh.2019.67.1-9en>.

Table 1. A comparative table of Alicia Appleman-Jurman's and Anita Helfgott Ekstein's biographies referred to in the article

	Alicia Appleman-Jurman	Anita Helfgott Ekstein
date and place of birth	1930–2017, Rosulna (then Poland, now Ukraine, Ivano-Frankivsk region)	1934, Lwów (then Poland, now Ukraine, Lviv region)
national identity	Jewish, Holocaust survivor	Jewish, Holocaust survivor
literary identity	Polish-Israeli-American memoirist	Canadian Holocaust educator
mother tongue	Polish	Polish
language of their writings	English	English

The possibility of establishing narratives of the Holocaust as a traumatic experience has been widely discussed for the last several decades. Since the late 1980s, there has been a growing focus on Holocaust memory and testimonies of survivors and their representation in memorial literature which bore witness to the convergence and partial overlapping of the story-telling frameworks of memory, the family, and biography and this trinity gives rise to a new direction that is loaded with significance.⁵ Additionally, autobiographical writing involves the interplay of authentic memories with consciously fictional elements. Taking into consideration the fact that some remember traumatic experiences with absolute clarity and others may use less authentic memories, Kokkola emphasizes the following several different lines of discussion within Holocaust scholarship:⁶

- The nature of the experience makes remembering too traumatic, so some memories are repressed.
- The nature of the trauma heightens one's senses so that memories are sharpened.
- Some witnesses have given their accounts so many times that their memories have become trapped within a rigid set of expressions. Hence they are no longer living memories.

⁵ Philippe Mesnard, "Recent Literature Confronting the Past: France and Beyond", in *After Testimony: The Ethics and Aesthetics of Holocaust Narrative for the Future*, ed. Jakob Lothe, Susan Rubin Suleiman, and James Phelan (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 2012), 80–81.

⁶ Lydia Kokkola, *Representing the Holocaust in Children's Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 113.

Consequently, the research interest in memory and the limits within which memorial literature is developing have gradually shifted from how memories are depicted, and how Appleman-Jurman and Ekstein managed to convey vivid details in their memoirs over the years to how memory is constructed and, specifically, how their emotional response to the resilience of Jewish people and reconciliation with the past events have been woven into the verbal fabric of their autobiographical narratives. Addressing this lacuna in Holocaust literature, my paper is meant to suggest that Appleman-Jurman's and Ekstein's truthful and authentic representation of the Holocaust shapes the conceptions of Jewish collective memory by transmitting Holocaust remembrance to post-Holocaust generations and, more specifically, shows how this traumatic aftermath calls for the inquiry of resilience and reconciliation in first-generation writers' self-narrations.

The aim of this study is twofold. First, in a more general sense, it aims to highlight the essential role of Holocaust survivors' first-person accounts for historians and common people to comprehend the anti-Jewish violence, as well as show the necessity and relevance of this scholarship for further discussion. Second, in a narrower sense, this paper attempts to reveal the narrative strategies employed by two authors in shaping the themes of Holocaust remembrance, resilience, and reconciliation across two self-narrations.

1. THE ACT OF REMEMBRANCE IN HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS' SELF-NARRATIONS

In autobiographical writings, the events and emotional upsets tend to return as echoes and vivid relivings of the original experience, where the past is mediated through the narrator's perspective. Moreover, both the events and personal trauma described in the self-narrations need adequate assimilation in the form of the continuing impact of traumatic memories on the lives of further generations as a result of at least two important factors. On the one hand, they are "not a replaying of experience, but their interpretation",⁷ and on the other hand, their truth value is interpreted "not from the standpoint of some hypothetical objective human observer but from the author of the account".⁸

⁷ Peter G. Coleman, "Creating a Life Story: The Task of Reconciliation," *The Gerontologist* 39, no. 2 (1999): 134, <https://doi.org/10.1093/geront/39.2.133>.

⁸ Coleman, 134.

Both memoirs discussed emphasize the importance of a moral dimension of the authors' reminiscences and the truth value of their life stories. Appleman-Jurman's story is a testament to the strength of the human spirit. She writes, "Our people have always had faith. This is what sustained us for generations: our faith and our hope."⁹ This belief sustains her throughout her ordeal and inspires her to share her story with others. Ekstein's memoir also underlines the power of hope and the significance of educational efforts, passing on lessons to future generations. Ekstein states:

I feel that it is my responsibility to teach younger people about the Holocaust for as long as I can... I introduce students to lost members of my family, keeping their memories alive, as well as the life that existed before the Nazis entered our hometown. With great sensitivity but brutal honesty, I describe the immense hatred and antisemitism that led to the destruction of one thousand years of Jewish life in Poland and to the murder of six million European Jews, 1.5 million of them innocent children.¹⁰

This message underscores the didactic purpose of her autobiographical narrative and its relevance to contemporary issues.

For many survivors, it was easier to keep from narrating their experiences and feelings than assimilate the traumatic past into the present on account of "a guilty feeling about being alive" (AAJ 281). The act of remembrance is "undoubtedly a burden for every survivor, and how to tell, how to communicate, creates a further burden in terms of the responsibility entailed in such telling".¹¹ Appleman-Jurman belongs to those Holocaust survivors who were very much concerned with the fate of Jews. As the writer notes, it took her many years to allow herself to speak or write about her memories: "I realized that my family will always continue to live inside me and through me, and that I will always be part of the six million Jewish people who were so cruelly murdered by the Germans and their collaborators" (AAJ 433). Hence, in their desire to expose their memories and traumatic experiences, first-generation writers are willing to immerse the reader in their intimate world of struggles, worries, and all the hardships Holocaust survivors endured. They embed in

⁹ Alicia Appleman-Jurman, *Alicia: My Story* (New York: Bantam Books, 1988), 202. References to this book will indicate the author's initials and the relevant page number.

¹⁰ Anita Ekstein, *Always Remember Who You Are* (Toronto: Azrieli Foundation, 2019), 294–95. References to this book will indicate the author's initials and the relevant page number.

¹¹ Simon Angie, *The Question of the Human in Holocaust Writing* (London: University of London, 2009), 104, https://research.gold.ac.uk/id/eprint/28888/1/COM_thesis_simonA_2010.pdf.

their reader a determination to be alert and wakeful to the human obsession to dominate others and “evil forces will never again be permitted to set one people against another” (AAJ 433).

Many years later, only since the 1980s fictional and non-fictional accounts of atrocities committed by Germans in wartime Europe have become one of the central narratives of American culture. In 2005, the Azrieli Foundation Holocaust Survivor Memoirs Program began to share the memoirs written by those who survived the twentieth-century Nazi genocide of the Jews in Europe and later made their way to Canada. Thus, Appelman-Jurman’s and Ekstein’s memoirs, which are all products of an extremely lively American as well as Canadian interest in the catastrophic events during World War II, are told from the perspective of teenage girls who lived in ethnically and religiously diverse regions of Jews, Poles and Ukrainians, and then Russians and Germans.

Both Appelman-Jurman and Ekstein were child survivors and, as adults, their way of remembering is different from those who were older during the Holocaust. Appelman-Jurman’s statements reflect her determination to honor the memory of her family and community. She writes, “I had to survive, not just for myself, but for those who did not” (AAJ 12). “I had mixed reactions to leaving this city so full of my past. Buczacz held memories that were dear to me – of my parents, my brothers, of my entire family as we had lived before the war. But in Buczacz there were also too many reminders of the tragic war years. The city was drowned in the blood of my family and thousands of my people” (AAJ 290). Sometimes the thoughts of the past flooded back to Alicia: “All my bravery suddenly deserted me, and I burst out crying. I just couldn’t stop. For hours I just lay in my bed and cried for my parents and brothers, for my cousins, and for Alicia, who deep inside herself was afraid to love again” (AAJ 376).

Ekstein, on the other hand, emphasizes the importance of remembering one’s roots and values. She recalls her father’s words: “Always remember who you are” (AK 5), which became a guiding principle in her life. This phrase underscores the role of memory in maintaining a sense of identity amidst the chaos of war and displacement.

Like other Jewish survivors, Appelman-Jurman and Ekstein wanted to contribute to collective memory by communicating their experiences, and most importantly, it was not their involuntary attribution of identity as Jewish victims. On the contrary, they are both proud of being Jewish. For example, being a thirteen-year-old girl and while listening to the stories of the Jewish community, Anita Ekstein came to realize that she needed to be proud of her origins

and remain Jewish for her parents' sake (AK 169). After the war, struggling with her identity, Anita found her way through her grief and sadness over the absence of her parents to fulfill her father's request, "Always remember who you are." From her earliest memories, the Holocaust was not only a constant and real presence in her home, but over the years, Anita had a strong commitment to being Jewish and felt an irresistible desire and responsibility to educate her family and the next generations against antisemitism, intolerance, and racism. Many years later, Anita noted: "I have tried to instill in my family the meaning and pride of being Jewish" (AK 318). In her fragmented childhood recollections about Catholicism, Anita always emphasized her identity and noted: "But no matter what happened to me, I never forgot who I was" (AK 116).

Moreover, Alicia Appleman-Jurman's act of remembrance about the Holocaust sounds forceful at the very beginning of her story, namely in the "Foreword", when her husband Gabriel notes that those who "survived the war in Europe are driven. They cannot forget, and they cannot bear the thought that the world will not remember. As they grow older, it becomes more and more important to them that no one be permitted to forget. This is what survivors owe the dead. It is the means by which survivors hope to prevent history from repeating itself" (AAJ xii). It was the author's solution and her narrative strategy to introduce her husband, Gabriel. Her husband's voice at the beginning of the narrative reinforces the truthfulness of Appleman-Jurman's autobiography. Again, in the "Foreword", Gabriel continues that

to write this book she has had to relive experiences that had been buried, mercifully, in her subconscious memories. She has had to reopen all her old wounds.

Yet I feel that the finished book has justified her work and pain. It is an autobiography. It is factual. It has not been embellished. All that has been changed are some of the names of people she wanted to save the anguish of remembering. (AAJ 13)

Thus, Holocaust memory reflected in self-narrations is not something imposed on the survivors by their family or the prescribed role of an independent existence but rather—it is their collective resilience and brave response to brutality and violence. Even though we attribute Alicia and Anita as Jewish victims, "they had been Jews" (AAJ 214), their acts of remembrance of the

Holocaust are vividly revealed in their narrative strategies which focus on “accepting the obligation to commemorate as part of the Shoah community”.¹²

2. SURVIVAL SKILLS AND THE ACTS OF RESILIENCE FROM A NARRATOR’S PERSPECTIVE

From a psychological point of view, genocide survivors have a functional value of personal and interpersonal importance and their memories allow them to make sense of the past and live and cope with the present situation. Moreover, memorialization requires performance in the form of texts to give a representation and a language in which survivors’ embodied memories are represented. Consequently, resilience might be understood as a pervasive belief that one can rebound effectively from horrific events.¹³ In doing so, resilience is not a personality trait but is interrelated with individual development and societal processes.

In the two firsthand accounts of the atrocities of World War II, the credit is given not only to the essential role of collective resistance in survival but also to how individuals behaved and felt, how they responded to the events emotionally, and more importantly, how reminiscences serve resilience in the face of horrendous genocidal events.

Appleman-Jurman told us her story in which the Holocaust disaster has become the story of physical and psychological trauma and endurance. Thirteen-year-old Alicia escaped death several times. One cannot be indifferent after reading the opening lines of her memoir:

First they killed my brother Moshe...
Then they killed my father...
Then they killed my brother Bunio...
Then they killed my brother Zachary...
Then they killed my last brother, Herzl.
Only my mother and I were left. (AAJ 1)

¹² Beatrice Sandberg, “Challenges for the Successor Generations of German-Jewish Authors in Germany,” in *After Testimony: The Ethics and Aesthetics of Holocaust Narrative for the Future*, ed. Jakob Lothe, Susan Rubin Suleiman, and James Phelan (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 2012), 57.

¹³ Jutta Lindert, Haim Y. Knobler, and Moshe Z. Abramowitz, “Genocide and Its Long Term Mental Impact on Survivors – What We Know and What We Do Not Know,” in *Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Genocide and Memory*, ed. Jutta Lindert and Armen T. Marsoobian (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018), 93.

What gave her the power to persist and survive? In her storytelling, the answer is the only one: this is love for her mother. It marked a survivor's ability to become resilient and her mother's words sounded like an order. Over time, as the sole survivor of her family, Appleman-Jurman devoted her life to Holocaust education, fulfilling her mother's wish as recorded in her book: "Even if I never see you again, I know you will survive. You must survive. You are the only witness to what happened to our family, to our people. You owe it to us all to survive" (AAJ 219). Unfortunately, her mother, Frieda, was murdered by a German soldier when she stepped in front of Alicia, saving her life. Alicia was only allowed to live as the German soldier ran out of bullets.

Alicia's descriptions of hiding from Nazis and aiding others are vivid and detailed, creating a sense of immediacy and urgency. For example, Alicia recounts, "I held my head high and proud. 'Have you come to take us to the police, or will you just kill us outside? Why? Because we are Jews?' I suddenly felt the fear leave me and a cold anger surge through me" (AAJ 195). This passage illustrates Alicia's courage and the pride in being Jewish saving other people through the physical and moral challenges of survival. Her survival, as she believes, was not fueled by any special talents; after her four brothers and father were killed, she simply put every shred of her being into saving the last members of their family. As Appleman-Jurman repeatedly escaped death, she developed mental and physical survival skills, helped by her proficiency in Polish and Ukrainian as well as in Hebrew and her familiarity with rural areas and cultures. For example, with her ribs being cracked in Chortkiv prison, and being deprived of drinking for days before imbibing typhus-contaminated water, she failed to respond to the daily kicking intended to identify the dead, thus being hauled away to the burial. In the long run, Mr. Gold of the Judenrat, who came to collect the dead for burial, found her barely alive and smuggled her out of the prison cemetery.

Both memoirs employ a first-person narrative voice, which creates an intimate connection between the author and the reader. Appleman-Jurman's *Alicia: My Story* is characterized, however, by a direct unflinching tone that emphasizes her strong determination to survive by all means since out of her family of seven, Alicia was the only one to survive the Holocaust. To survive, Alicia and her mother had to hide in the wheat fields by day, in ravines by night, and in the home of a righteous Gentile Wujciu, a Polish noble man, who accepted three more people whom Alicia rescued in the field. Thus, her book is more openly angry than Ekstein's storytelling, more emotional, and concerned with the fate of Jews during wartime. Alicia's focus on relentless

determination aligns with traditional narratives of Holocaust survival, which often highlight the heroism of the individual.

In contrast, Ekstein's *Always Remember Who You Are* adopts a more reflective and introspective tone. This reflects her focus on reconciliation with the past, rather than solely on survival. The reason for that was obvious: the war found her aged eight. Her use of flashbacks and introspection suggests that resilience is not only about surviving but also about finding love and peace in the aftermath of trauma. It was Anita's aunt who was living close by during the Nazi occupation, who accompanied Anita throughout her life and with whom Anita emigrated to Canada. Later on, her aunt will receive the title Righteous Among the Nations. One day in early February 1943, when "the Germans and Ukrainian helpers rounded up all the Jews left in Rozdół" (AAJ 97), Anita found herself outdoors at the outhouse in slippers and "stayed in there in the freezing cold for five hours, afraid to come out. It was a miracle that the police did not look out the window. Had they done so, they would have seen small footsteps in the snow leading to the outhouse" (AAJ 97).

In a similar fashion, what gave Anita the power to survive and increase her resilience? Specifically, how did she learn to live with resilience after traumatic experiences? Ekstein's *Always Remember Who You Are* portrays resilience through the lens of her identity and memory. Anita, who was a child survivor of the Holocaust, focuses on the psychological strategies she employed to endure the trauma. She credits her survival to her father who asked a Polish man named Jozef Matusiewicz to save Anita. Risking his own life to save hers, Jozef carried Anita out of the ghetto at night in a sack. Frightened, living among strangers and missing the warmth her parents provided, Anita learned how to be a devout Catholic and spent most of her days in a lonely existence. Her father's last words before giving up his only child for the second time served her resilience on the lonely path of survival: "[B]e good, be independent and always remember who you are" (AE 105). Anita had to assume her new identity, her new name Anna Janowska and her false birth certificate. Then Anita did not know that she said goodbye to her father for the last time. With that fake passport, Anita could travel. Anita and that man took a train to where Jozef's nephew was living. His nephew was a priest who had agreed to hide Anita and taught her to be a Catholic. Paradoxically, she began to believe fervently in Jesus and her strong faith helped her survive by giving her hope for the future. Anita Ekstein stayed with Father Michal until the end of the war, always feeling fear and worry "that somebody would discover her true identity" (AE 114). After the war, orphaned and struggling with her iden-

tity, Anita finds her way through her confusion to fulfill her father's last request. For Anita, erasing the past and changing her identity has become a path of survival.

This emphasis on self-awareness and identity highlights a key difference in narrative focus in the autobiographic writings of these two authors: while Appleman-Jurman's resilience is outwardly directed, Ekstein's is more introspective. The narrative strategies employed by the two authors reflect their distinct storytelling approaches. Appleman-Jurman's memoir is characterized by a linear, action-driven narrative that emphasizes her physical survival and acts of bravery and even brute perseverance. In contrast, Ekstein's autobiographical narrative is more reflective and fragmented, mirroring the psychological impact of trauma. She often shifts between past and present, weaving together her childhood memories with reflections on their lasting effects. The nonlinear structure of her self-narration and introspective approach highlights the enduring nature of trauma and the resilience required to confront it.

3. (IM-)POSSIBILITIES OF RECONCILIATION WITH THE PAST IN THE CONTEXT OF VICTIM-OFFENDER WAR AND POSTWAR INTERACTIONS

One of the principal dilemmas the Holocaust survivors have faced is how to voice the traumatic experience that haunts them, and the way trauma as the experience of war and remembrance can (or cannot) be articulated in terms of self-narration as "an implicit element of the individual's ongoing cognitive experience".¹⁴

The number of fragments in Appleman-Jurman's memoir *Alicia. My Story* is meant to promote a discussion about resentment and reconciliation with the past that shapes memory and has the potential to transform the value of the present and the possibilities of the future.¹⁵ As Lang claims, "Memory also involves the capacity to reiterate or "re"-present what is recalled there, that is, by a purchase on the future. Without the capacity for this projection forward, memory would be in the past as well as of it."¹⁶ Appleman-Jurman places re-

¹⁴ Sharon Selby, *Memory and Identity in Canadian Fiction: Self-Inventive Storytelling in the Works of Five Authors* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2018), 9.

¹⁵ Idit Alphandary, *Forgiveness and Resentment in the Aftermath of Mass Atrocity: Jewish Voices in Literature and Film* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2024), 3, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111317694>.

¹⁶ Berel Lang, "Holocaust Memory and Revenge: The Presence of the Past," *Jewish Social Studies* 2, no. 2 (1996): 16, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4467468>.

sentment and reconciliation in a specific context: the years when half a million Jews in Eastern Europe fell victim to the Holocaust, the post-Holocaust period, and the years during which she wrote her memoir in the aftermath of that incomprehensible catastrophe. In her personal pain and moral disappointment, Alicia does not leave room for the hope that even in the future there will be recognition and collaboration between victim and offender.

As a young victim, she openly communicates with the offenders and perpetrators exposing her traumatic suffering and attaching moral responsibility to them: “Damned Nazis, I thought to myself. I’ll show you. I won’t die. You will not be able to kill me. I will live to see you pay for your crimes and to have your name erased from this world” (AAJ 109). In the next episodes, Alicia expresses her resentment again still more emotionally, through the use of vivid imagery and metaphors: “I don’t know how long I will live, but I will try to live long enough to see the Germans rot in hell. I will see them defeated, you’ll see!” (AAJ 196). “There will come a time when you will know my curse. I swear in the name of my God and yours, I will haunt you from my grave. You won’t know a day’s happiness, any of you!” (AAJ 272). In the next episode, resentment and forgiveness intertwine and merge, and in the long run, resentment of the narrator toward Nazi violence overcomes forgiveness: “Then let the murderers answer the God in some future existence. Perhaps He would forgive them. I couldn’t speak for anyone but myself, and I could never forgive” (AAJ 379).

Convinced that no one of the perpetrators can compensate for Nazi crimes, that “the Germans had murdered most of the Jewish people, [and] some Poles were trying to kill the rest” (AAJ 353), and that Europe had become “just one big Jewish cemetery” (AAJ 324), and all the horrors under the German occupation, as well as the awareness of the unremitting anti-Semitism and haunting terrible nightmares, Alicia resolved to “close this chapter of our family’s past” (AAJ 349) and get to Palestine with the hope to walk “into a new world” (AAJ 349). In 1945, she joined the Brecha, the organization that smuggled Jews out of Eastern Europe to ensure the protection of American and British armies. Finally, she made the promise to herself that “after I left Marseilles I would never set foot in Europe again. I wanted to leave that continent forever even if it meant taking a chance with the ship that looked to me like a floating mausoleum” (AAJ 422). Only at the end of the book, while reframing the past and shaping the future Appleman-Jurman point the way towards forgiveness, perhaps even hints at a sort of reconciliation between victims and offenders, and the possibilities of the future: “Through the story of ‘Alicia’ I wish to

reach out, not only to survivors like myself, but to all people" (AAJ 433). Ultimately, by focusing on painful experiences under the German occupation and the resentment of the narrator toward the Nazis, Appleman-Jurman emphasizes the impossibility of reconciliation between Holocaust survivors and perpetrators, thus suggesting the evident limits of forgiveness.

Is it possible to ease the perpetrators' guilt and their disgraceful behavior toward Jewish people? To Anita Ekstein, the reply is rather love than reconciliation. More specifically, love and revenge, in her view, are simultaneously subjective and public. As Gordon claims, "Memory clearly serves to intensify the desire for revenge. Moreover, memory is not only the means of feeding revenge, however, but has been described as the essential precondition of reconciliation."¹⁷

From this perspective, no less powerful and convincing Anita's daughter Ruth in the "Forward" remembers her mother with tears streaking down her face surrounded by teenagers carrying Israeli flags who said, "I was not supposed to be here; you were not supposed to be here. None of these kids should be here. This is the proof that Hitler did not win. This is our revenge" (AE 7). Accordingly, this kind of revenge affirms the value of forgiveness and reconciliation with the past and it is nothing more than the victory of love over hate. In terms of theology, reconciliation of the past horrific events, past grievances, and hatreds must be remembered, confessed, repented of, then cancelled, the world must move into a future where revenge dims into forgiveness.¹⁸

To Ekstein, the responsibility to remember, record and transmit Nazis crimes becomes even stronger. Her witnessing is becoming a collective act as "a vehicle of collective memory, a dialogue between present, past and future",¹⁹ and most importantly, a product of reconciliation with the past of both survivor and offender. Anita Ekstein's *Always Remember Who You Are* represents not only a process of reconciliation with the past but also extends the responsibility of the author to share collective memory with new generations. Among other narrative strategies that Ekstein employs in her autobiography is the interplay of memory, narrative, and authenticity. All the photographs in her self-narration (she adds 40 documentary family pictures to the narrative) are not fictional but authentic and accentuate the interaction of narrative tes-

¹⁷ Leah Gordon, "'The Remembering Self': Reflections on Reconciliation and Its Absence," *Theology*, 118, no. 3 (2015): 177, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0040571X14565597>.

¹⁸ Gordon, 177.

¹⁹ Valentina Adami, *Trauma Studies and Literature: Martin Amis's Time's Arrow as Trauma Fiction* (Lang, 2008).

timony with that of the photograph as testimony and “as an instrument of historical evidence, or even, simply, as a memory cue for the witness”.²⁰ These photographs range from the 1920s, 1930s, 1940s to 2019, taken before the war and in the aftermath of the Holocaust, all having their captions, for example: Anita’s father, Fisko (Fischel) with his scout group. Poland, 1920s; Anita’s mother, Edzia (Ettel). Sambor, Poland, 1920s; Edzia and Fisko. Synowódzko Wyżne, Poland, 1937; Anita at her childhood home in Synowódzko Wyżne. Ukraine, 1989; Anita in the Radłowice forest, where thousands of Jews from Sambor were murdered in 1942–1943. Poland, 1989; The barn behind her childhood home in Synowódzko Wyżne, where Anita and her parents hid during the pogrom in 1941. Ukraine, 1989. These photographs are placed after the main text, assuming the reader first reads the book. However, they create a *déjà vu* effect, as if the reader has already seen them and known about Ekstein’s family members who perished. The medium of photography and this intergenerational encounter create a bridge between past and present as well as connect memory and post-memory, first generation and post-generations.

CONCLUSION

Studies on Holocaust survivors and victims are extremely important and necessary due to their sadly dwindling number, making the survivors’ memoirs unique. The two books *Alicia. My Story* and *Always Remember Who You Are*, albeit in different ways, present bold and painful reminiscences of survival in Nazi-occupied Europe during World War II from the perspective of the child and young adult survivors.

The analysis reveals that both Appleman-Jurman and Ekstein use autobiographical memory and narrative strategies as important dimensions involved in constructing their identities and conveying their experiences during the Holocaust. While Appleman-Jurman’s memoir is characterized by a linear, action-oriented narrative, Ekstein’s work is more reflective and introspective. Despite these differences, both authors emphasize the common themes of resilience, memory, and moral responsibility.

As the findings suggest, autobiographical memory serves as a powerful tool for identity construction in both Holocaust memoirs. Appleman-Jurman and

²⁰ Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

Ekstein use their narratives to assert their identities as first-generation writers, simultaneously through the narrative voices of survivors and witnesses. They both emphasize the importance of remembrance, transmitting their stories to the post-Holocaust generation, as well as highlighting the link between memory and post-memory. In her memoir, Appleman-Jurman speaks for her perished family as she swore on her brother's grave, with her prayer and faith in human goodness. As a result, her self-narration celebrates resilience and the strengths of the human spirit: "I pray that all its readers, Jew and non-Jew alike, may unite in the resolve that evil forces will never again be permitted to set one people against another" (AAJ 433). Ekstein's memoir sounds like a tribute to the rescuers, specifically a righteous man who dared to save a little Jewish girl from imminent death, as well as a reminder to further generations of this miraculous survival: "Whenever I look at my beautiful great-grand-daughters Emily and Hallie, I am reminded of this miracle. How did we make it to four generations?" (AE 319).

A comparative literary analysis of narrative strategies demonstrates notable differences in how the two authors approach memory and identity. While Appleman-Jurman focuses on her individual experiences and actions as an active agent in her survival, Ekstein places greater emphasis on the collective nature of memory, highlighting the importance of intergenerational transmission. These differences reflect the diverse ways in which Holocaust survivors employ memory to make sense of their experiences and assert their Jewish identities.

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