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**Review of Maja Figge, Konstanze Hanitzsch, Nadine Teuber (eds.), *Scham und Schuld. Geschlechter(sub)texte der Shoah*. Bielefeld: transcript Verlag 2010, 324 pages, ISBN 978-3-8376-1245-5.**

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Holocaust studies thrive on approaches from a wide range of disciplines. Frequently new high-profile historical research is published; sociological and psychological work is done on perpetrators and victims, their interrelations and their offspring; literary and film scholars explore the possibilities and boundaries of representation of the *Shoah* (Holocaust) in poetry, fiction and on screen; theologians consider the tenability of the traditional concepts of God 'after Auschwitz'. And each of these themes can be viewed in a gender perspective.

It is precisely this what *Scham und Schuld. Geschlechter(sub)texte der Shoah* [Shame and guilt. Gender (sub)texts of the *Shoah*] sets out to do. This collection of German essays is the fruit of a conference at the Humboldt University in Berlin. Its central issue is, firstly, the transmission of shame and guilt through the generations, and, secondly, the role of these emotions in the cultural and political debates on the remembrance of National Socialism in the country of the perpetrators. In all cases the gender perspective is taken into consideration, a mostly unarticulated and unquestioned perspective. Together the essays aim to build an interdisciplinary bridge between a psychoanalytic conceptualizing of the

transfer of shame and guilt within family dynamics on the one hand, and cultural and literary analysis and sociological, historical and theological research on the other. The connections between shame, guilt and gender on the side of the perpetrators and their offspring are explored from these different perspectives. However, as is often the case in similar projects, the interdisciplinary ideal applies to the collection rather than to the separate contributions, each of which principally shows its own scientific method and discourse.

The book is divided into five sections. The first is on the transmission of shame and guilt through the generations. These articles are all from the social sciences. The second section is on the end of the Second World War in the private and the public domains. The third section is on female National Socialist perpetrators. The fourth section is titled: Guilt and reconciliation: gender codes of the religions. These essays all show a literary angle, using analyses of novels, poetry or perpetrator's testimonies. And the last section is on sexuality and National Socialism in general. The first and the fourth sections are the most extensive, with four contributions each, while the other sections contain only two papers each. It does not come as a surprise that today, nearly seventy years after the war, the transgenerational dimension has an ever more prominent position. It struck me that the extensive references of these papers (often taking up almost one fifth of the entire article) hardly contain any English literature. Clearly the issue of transmission of shame and guilt is more pressing in the 'country of the perpetrators', so presumably the research is more advanced than in the Anglophone world. Or perhaps the outlook of the authors suffers from a certain one-sidedness?

Unfortunately, a purely theological approach is absent, although both on the Christian and on the Jewish side efforts have been made to find a new language and different images to replace the male, almighty images of God, which, in view of the *Shoah*, are so difficult to reconcile with his/her love and justice. Yet theology is not absent altogether, but it presents itself in a roundabout way through literature. In view of the field of interest of this journal, I will only discuss the articles with a religious dimension. These articles are assigned to the section 'Guilt and reconciliation: Gender codes of the religions' and focus on literary works that are not all well-known: the confession-like *Credo* by Oswald Pohl, the Italian novel *Con le peggiori intenzioni* (translated as *The worst intentions*) by Alessandro Piperno and Ulla Berkéwicz's novel *Engel sind schwarz und weiss* (Angels are black and white). Better known is Paul Celan, although his

poem 'Nah, im Aortenbogen' does not appear very frequently in anthologies of Holocaust poetry.

Mirjam Bitter's discussion of Piperno's novel is a bit out of place in this section on religion (and perhaps even in the book as a whole), because the religious component is only present in the metaphoric language in respect of one of the female characters, Gaia. Referring to disappointment in love as 'hell' can hardly count as an insightful probing into the meaning or content of religion. Female characters in this novel are subject to the dichotomy between whore and saint. The *Shoah* as a theme seems to be visible only in the background, more like a 'subtext' of the gender dimension than the other way round.

It may have been easier for Tim Lörke to go into the religious and gender aspects of *Engel sind schwarz und weiss*, if only for its plotline, which is much simpler to recount than the unclear and tangled one of Piperno's novel. For a reader unfamiliar with the novels in question his evaluation is therefore easier to follow and appreciate. With reference to an earlier article by Tilman Moser, Lörke starts with showing how unjust the negative critical reception of Ulla Berkéwicz's novel was, and how false the arguments that were used. The critics doubted that a woman would be able to put herself in the position of a Hitler Youth member, but on the other hand condemned her for using the pathetic, pompous language current in those circles. The reproach that she tries to make the *Blut und Boden* myth acceptable shows the same unjust reasoning, as if the author were identical with the narrator in the novel. Lörke (or Tilman Moser) considers the empathy and the evocative ability of the novel as feminine literary qualities (something I would not contend in view of the work of all the great male novelists). He is of the opinion that the novel is not meant as an absolving defence of the German people, but as a warning against fascism with its seductive ideas (and language) of manhood and nationalism.

To me this seems plausible enough. In the end, however, Lörke does not maintain his favourable judgment. He objects to the rather easy and cheap way in which 'black' is identified with men, with atheism and rationalism, with perpetrators, whereas 'white' converges with women, emotions, empathy, religion and victims. Moreover, in the novel the latter is presented as the only fertile ground for art and literature. Not having read the novel, I cannot check Lörke's analysis, but he draws a convincing picture, and the novel would in its intention indeed be a sample of poor and one-sided feminism obviously overdoing it. Lörke reproaches the author for having a schematic doctrine of grace, which conceives of

victimhood as a necessary precondition for storytelling, and storytelling or literature as the only way to grace where the *Shoah* is concerned. Therefore, the real difficulty with the novel is, in Lörke's view, that the unimaginable sorrow of the *Shoah* is made into a history of redemption, and thus is ultimately justified. I quite agree with Lörke's protest against the idea of art as ultimately exceeding the worth of human lives. If this is what the novel wants to convey, it is truly scandalous.

The poem by Paul Celan that Naomi Shulman explores, 'Nah, im Aortenbogen', touches upon the same theme. Shulman contends that the poem puts into question the divine power of creation as well as Judaism as a religious tradition of remembrance, because it presents writing after the *Shoah* as a potentially guilty form of creativity. In the poem the character of Rachel is presented, the mother weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted, 'because they are not' (Jeremiah 31:15). Rachel has become an icon that links the experience of loss and the act of remembrance to femininity, specifically motherhood. Yet, in Celan's poem, Rachel 'doesn't weep anymore'. Shulman interprets Rachel as associated with the *Shechina*, according to Jewish mystic tradition the female manifestation of divine presence. In the last sentence of the poem, the *Shechina* appears as 'Ziw, that light'. Shulman makes a plausible case that for Celan that light also refers to the remembrance of the horror of history and the pain of the survivors, as well as to the threatened and vulnerable possibility of communication. Shulman's paper is not easy to follow, but it gives a clever analysis and rich insights in the spiritual backgrounds of Celan's poem.

Björn Krondorfer's article is the only one in *Scham und Schuld's* section on religion that does not draw from fiction or poetry. Even so, his essay on 'Manliness and Self-Pity' uses literary analysis to uncover the reality behind Oswald Pohl's written 'confession', *Credo. Mein Weg zu Gott* (1950). Pohl was the head of the SS main bureau of economic administration and was in charge of the organization of the concentration and slave labour camps. After the war he was captured and sentenced to death, but the verdict was not immediately executed. While in prison, Pohl converted to Catholicism. In the early fifties the Cold War was taking shape, and many former Nazi perpetrators were pardoned. This background becomes apparent in Pohl's pious text. Pohl wants to show himself penitent, but not too much so. He does not go into the particulars of his crimes, nor into his feelings of guilt. In fact he cleverly evades the issue by putting it into the light of human sin and divine grace. Denying his guilt would not have won him the sympathy of his readers, but scrutinizing his individual guilt would have harmed his appeal for clemency. The

religious rhetoric also provides him with a way out of the dilemma between a highly appreciated manliness on the one hand and self-pity about his predicament and the public humility that his situation requires on the other. In all this he shows a blatant disregard for the victims. Björn Krondorfer makes a convincing case of the help Pohl got from his pastor in writing this 'confession', as well as of his insincerity. The reader cannot but feel some satisfaction that the Court did not fall for it: Pohl was hanged in June 1951. At the same time a Christian reader will feel deeply ashamed that the pastor was fooled so easily, and worse, that he contributed to the (attempted) delusion by offering Pohl the religious tools to cover his personal guilt.

One must conclude that even in the four papers that supposedly confront religious themes, religion is not a very prominent element. For those interested in gender aspects of the *Shoah*, this collection offers many more interesting articles, in particular on the transgenerational transmission of trauma and guilt. Further, there are two articles on female perpetrators: Ljiljana Heise writes about the Ravensbrück trial, and Simone Erpel about the portrayal of a supposed *aufseherin* (female guard) in the TV film *Gegen der Ende der Nacht*. The final paper is on the effect of the pornographic in Jonathan Littell's controversial novel *The kindly ones*. The suggested effect is not so much in the sexual escapades of the main character as in the picturing of the violence and the detached way of looking at and telling about it.

All in all this book is more relevant for scholars of the *Shoah*, especially from the social and literary sciences, than it is for theologians. With the exception of Björn Krondorfer's contribution, it also shows how difficult a truly interdisciplinary approach is. For this collection of essays the term multidisciplinary would have been more adequate.