

Crossing Generational Borders: The Holocaust Memories of the 1.5 Generation in Jurek Becker's *Jakob the Liar*

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As a child of German-Polish Jews, living in the Łódź Ghetto and being later deported to Nazi concentration camps, Jurek Becker had to endure many losses throughout his early life (those of his mother, his childhood and his memories). Strictly speaking, he was a first-generation survivor of the Holocaust, but he was too young to have had an adult understanding of what had happened to him during the Nazi persecution of Jews. Throughout his life, Becker insisted that his childhood years at the ghetto and camps had been buried by amnesia and that his father, also a camp survivor, was his only bond to his Jewishness and to his past.

Becker's *Jakob the Liar* (published in East Germany in 1969 and in West Germany in 1982) is a framed narrative, told by a double narrator who is both partaker and witness of the story. This multi-faceted narrative structure addresses some of the intricacies of Holocaust narratives: on one hand the writer's sense of belonging to a liminal generation—neither the first nor the second—and, on the other, a painful negotiation with the past and an interrogation of the means of writing about this past.

This paper will examine the ethical implications of Becker's narrative choice in a two-fold way. On one hand, I will critique the ways in which the concepts of "testimony" (Felman, 1992) and "postmemory" (Hirsch, 2012) have been over-used to examine Holocaust trauma and point at their limitations when it comes to addressing the complexities of forgetting and remembering the writer's past. On the other hand, I will contend that the use of two narrators provides a particular account of the past, one that grants access to the traumatic experience of the writer, without idealising, glorifying or romanticising it.

Keywords: testimony, post-memory, Generation 1.5, memory, Holocaust trauma

Primary Source:

Becker, Jurek. *Jacob the Liar*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975. Print.

Secondary Sources:

Felman, Shoshana and Dori Laub. *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*. New York: Routledge, 1992. Print.

Hirsch, Marianne. *The Generation of Postmemory: Visual Culture After the Holocaust*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2012. Print.