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**Implications of silence: post-war German literature and the Holocaust.
About Ernestine Schlant's study on *The Language of Silence***

Review

Ernestine Schlant, *The Language of Silence. West German Literature and the Holocaust.*
New York and London, Routledge 1999.

Ernestine Schlant, *Die Sprache des Schweigens. Die deutsche Literatur und der Holocaust.*
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When dealing with literary texts, it is a self-evident fact that their potential for interpretation by far surpasses the intentions of the author; indeed, the quality of texts is often gauged in terms of their uncontrollable surplus of meaning.

That the German crimes committed against the Jews, however, confront authors with a special responsibility for unintentional effects which their texts may have is one of the difficulties which Schlant confronts in her study, *The Language of Silence*. This special responsibility may apply in particular to literature assigned as required reading in schools (Böll) or to works ranked as "poetic lessons in history" or "narratives of contemporary history" (Grass, Lenz, Koeppen). Ernestine Schlant, born 1935 in Passau and a resident of that town when its Jewish residents were deported, is now Professor for German and Comparative Literature at Montclair State University and has studied various aspects of post-war literature. She describes the history of post-war literature from Heinrich Böll to W.G. Sebald as a history of the lack of any self-evident truths, as a struggle with and against language, aimed at coming to terms with the unfinished business of the past. The title of Schlant's book is, however, by no means her verdict. By virtue of its privileged status, literature serves Schlant as a kind of seismograph of the moral position of a people. In her view, literature "lays bare a people's dreams and nightmares" and, in doing so, reveals forms of consciousness about which literary texts otherwise remain silent. Not to tell one's dreams in public because they divulge too much about the dreaming self was a verdict of European culture of speech and silence of the 17th century (Peter Burke). Although awareness of the extent of Nazi crimes has become part of German self-understanding, for the past four decades West-German literature has largely been, so Schlant's hypothesis, a literature of absence and of silence, a literature which alludes to itself through language. Schlant develops various insights with the help of this hypothesis, beginning with the presentation of her material. Each of the nine chapters and the introduction and conclusion of her book is prefaced with a motto which probes the various implications of silence, either establishing questionable connections to a tradition of silence or reproducing statements which contravene or recast the relationship between speech and silence discussed in a particular chapter.

Furthermore, Schlant perceives the Holocaust monument in Berlin-Grunewald as an analogy to literature – a monument as an iconographic presentation of what she uncovers in the medium of post-war literature. Jewish figures as such are not present as victims; only the surrounding stone renders them visible as the absent ones.

Language as a cloak of silence

The "language of silence" is more than a mere play on words. Schlant develops it by building on, but also marking the differences to, the work of George Steiner, who reflected on speech and speechlessness in the German speaking countries in his book, *Language and Silence* (1974), a volume devoted to the topos of the unspeakable, and, in a similar form, in the essay "Das lange Leben der Metaphorik" [The long life of metaphors, 1987]. For Steiner, Auschwitz lay beyond meaning and therefore beyond language, if one intends to safeguard language from assaults on its integrity. But language defined as a medium for transporting the truth without its frightening, inhuman, and unspeakable aspects is a censored language. Schlant's definition of silence qualifies her as an astute literary scholar. In order to avoid misunderstandings, she distinguishes between two kinds of silence – the first results from too much knowledge, the second from refusing to recognize knowledge. The second kind of silence is the escape route often taken by memory and guilt. In other words, Schlant distinguishes between the silence *of* the Holocaust and silence *about* the Holocaust. The overriding issue in Schlant's study focuses solely on the latter form: "What knowledge about the Holocaust is being repressed, denied, avoided, and how does this avoidance find expression?" (10) What strategies do authors develop to distort their accounts and what blind spots are effective to the present day? In her estimation, silence is not merely a "semantic void" (7); as with any language, the language of silence employs a variety of narrative strategies that carry ideologies and include unstated assumptions. Silence about the Holocaust can only be articulated as a paradox. Silence is constituted by the absence of words and is revealed by the presence of their absence. Language as the cloak of silence, "audible only through words." (7)

Schlant sees a psychic disposition – identified in the works of Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich as German society's "inability to mourn" – as the obstacle which keeps literature from fulfilling its mandate. One might describe literature's function in keeping with Adorno: post-war literature should give suffering a voice. Schlant's circumspect, if not to say politically correct argumentation shows that the mandate to literature is accompanied by an assignment for literary scholarship. She expressly examines the prose of (non-Jewish) authors published in the post-war era between 1949 to 1990 and criticizes the inadequate distinction between victims and perpetrators in comparative studies as an attempt to level or even equalize completely separate histories. (6)

Schlant has chosen to study the novel, because its poetological characteristics render it most rich in unconscious assumptions and its subject matter is more protean and malleable than is the case for the hermetic genres poetry and drama. (4) Her study begins with the literary exegesis of some works of Heinrich Böll and Wolfgang Koeppen, with analyses of Alexander Kluge, Günter Grass, Hanns-Josef Ortheil, Hermann Lenz, Gert Hofmann, Alfred Andersch, Peter Härtling, Bernhard Schlink, Peter Schneider, and W. G. Sebald following in chronological order, as representatives of the changing strategies of silence. Schlant's readings combine undogmatically hermeneutic and descriptive methods. In some places, her book resembles a better sort of literary history, only to surprise readers with an original approach to literature, by focusing on distortions, ambivalence, gaps, and omissions in the texts – in short, reading texts as if they were dreams. These symptomatic passages offer valuable insights into that which is meant to be kept hidden and reveal, in the play of imagination, literature's function as the symbolic fulfillment of unconscious desires – a highly charged function with respect to the annihilation of the Jews. The unconscious implications of the texts are analyzed as their blind spots. Schlant's prospecting in great depths with the help of close readings of certain passages yields new interpretations, in particular of the works of

Heinrich Böll, interpretations capable of awakening new interest in a readership who long ago grew tired of this moral authority.

What Schlant develops is, in a number of respects, an alternative to Ruth Klüger's *Katastrophen* (1994), as a model for reading this literature. Klüger's book is a corrosive analysis of a variety of representation techniques employed by post-war writers which end in kitsch and sentimentality, without a systematic investigating the texts. Schlant calls for a precise analysis of narrative strategies, in order to grasp the extent and complexity of this – by no means homogenous – silence. (166) This entails reading texts against the grain and recognizing where a text contradicts itself. While both authors agree in their diagnosis, they reach it by different paths. Schlant's analyses lead to the author via his/her works, scrutinize style, motives, and the fate and semantics of individual words, before they feed into two questions: how does the author remain silent about the Holocaust and how and with what interests are Jewish characters depicted?

Heinrich Böll's flights of/from memory

Schlant recognizes in Böll's books a remarkable misconception, characteristic of the so-called literature of the rubble; Böll draws an escapist false conclusion and declares both Jews and Germans to be victims of World War II. War veterans like Borchert and Böll poeticized their subject matter, as if the apparatus of annihilation had not taken possession of language and as if one could effortlessly restore credibility. Böll's compensatory philo-Semitism (25) lacks any radicalism of the kind which resonates in the terms *Stunde Null* (zero hour), *Kahlschlag* (clean sweep), and literature of the rubble. His simplistic conceptions feed various myths, such as the myth that only bad people collaborated with the Nazis. The question of the participation of the population is left out, as is any thought of the possibility of rebellion and resistance. According to Schlant, Böll soon reaches the limits set by the concept of the "other": here, the language of silence is based on an unconscious link of complicity, the protagonists know something they do not want to know. (34) With respect to its literary quality, Böll's novel *And where were you, Adam?* (1951) is exceptional, but she interprets this book as an excuse and an alibi at the same time. The question addressed to Adam is answered with the alibi of war. (35) Although this most underestimated novel reaches special heights in its representations and is the only novel clearly marked by a desire to find a language for the Holocaust, its strategies of silence, which are all too often scantily veiled flights of memory, are evident. Böll could only include Jews among Hitler's victims if they were converts, women, or unattached loners – that is Schlant's summary. As a seismograph of the moral consciousness of the Germans, Böll's work is indicative of the unconscious structure of prejudices and their continued mute effect since the end of the nineteen-forties.

Wolfgang Koeppen's language in a state of shock

Wolfgang Koeppen's work, in contrast, is seen as free of any attempt – otherwise quite typical of the literature of rubble – to reconstruct continuity or to equate Germans and Jews as victims of history. Instead, Koeppen strives to renew ties with the literary heritage of modernism, a heritage unaffected by National Socialism. His novel *Death in Rome* (1954) offers a critical panorama of German society in the first postwar decade. Koeppen's intricate narrative technique and his "playing" with literary traditions – Schlant reads *Death in Rome* as a parody of a satyr drama – literally insists on discontinuity (41), when the author declares ironically: the Germans are dead and live in hell. The first postwar decades, according to

Schlant, were characterized by philo-Semitic portrayals of Jews, intended as compensation for recent public hate, and the lack of a lively confrontation with the problems of Jewish reality. In Koeppen's works, in contrast, one finds a uniquely open and direct portrayal. He employs the language of the Nazis to remind philo-Semites of the anti-Semitic language of the recent past. His language captures the state of shock which, like mourning, was missed. For Schlant, this is the only acceptable reaction to the lack of despair and the political evasions of the fifties. In Koeppen's prose the Holocaust becomes absolute discontinuity, the break of civilization, since it has destroyed the very design of humanity. The novel is structured on continual inversions of the Western heritage, imprinting the elements of this heritage in the mythological images of a world gone to hell. (50) His work was written purposefully, so Schlant, directed toward silence and the author's silence after completing the trilogy was an act of self-refusal.

In her second chapter, one dedicated to documentary literature, Schlant investigates the changed nature of silence as a result of the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem and the Auschwitz trial in France. Whereas Böll and Walser did not directly refer to the Holocaust, the courtroom dramas published soon after these trials do, but begin losing their impact in the early seventies. These dramas are supplanted by documentary prose, a genre with a similar social and political orientation, but one which more effectively questioned the belief in authenticity. (55)

Alexander Kluge's deconstructionist approach

Alexander Kluge's books are part of the crisis of narrativity recharged after the Shoah, a crisis centered around the powerlessness of the individual in the face of unsurmountable forces. (57) Here, the Holocaust is viewed as the culmination of rapid technologization, its "logical development", as it were. Kluge thus imparts a precarious "meaning" to the Holocaust, so Schlant; when people had opportunities to assert their humanity, gaps and silence appear in the texts. (57) Demonstrating the socially mediated destruction of the individual affects the narrative point of view, which Kluge would prefer to eliminate. Kluge does not believe in the myth of the real and undermines the boundary between document and fiction wherever he reflects on his skepticism regarding the "narratability of events." (58) Together with Hayden White, Schlant refers to "anti-narrative non-stories" (59) as the only prospect for adequate representation. Despite his ambitious methods, Kluge avoids confrontation and circumvents the need for a special use of language when writing about the Holocaust – with one exception. "Ein Liebesversuch" ("An Experiment in Love" or "An Attempt in Love" 1962) is a fictive interview based on documentary material about medical experiments in concentration camps. Here, the prisoners are present by virtue of their absence and their silence. (60) The "implemented love" (*bewerkstelligte Liebe*) reveals the various interests behind the "experiment." The language of the perpetrators contrasts with the silence of the victims. (64) Although there are deficits in the depiction of Jews characters, in Schlant's assessment, Kluge comes closest to imagining the misery of the victims here. In *Description of a Battle*, in contrast, he perfects his "deconstructionist" approach. The flaw in the author's thinking lies, however, in his interpretation of the Holocaust as a outgrowth of imperialist exploitation, thus deflecting from its singularity. This Marxist-based hypothesis, defining fascism as a late development of capitalism, reduces the enormity of the crimes. (67) Kluge at no time leaves the safe territory of the problematics of language for the problematics of the Holocaust. The center, genocide committed against the Jews, remains untouched. (68)

Günter Grass' eloquence

In contrast to Kluge, Guenter Grass exhibits, in Schlant's assessment, great trust in language and its possibilities. However, in Grass' works, for example the *Diary of a Snail* (1972), there is an "obtuseness and insensitivity vis-a-vis those who suffered and died, evident in a language where silence is veiled in verbal dexterity" and is "rooted in pre-Holocaust aesthetics." (71) In keeping with the tradition of documentary prose, the author emphasizes the "constructed" aspect of the work (73) in the mixture of fact and fiction when he reports on the destruction of the Jewish community in Danzig and fictionalizes the fragility of memory. In the last chapter of the book, W.G. Sebald becomes the authority on a method designed to make events speak through silence, and, as a critic, supports Grass. Sebald calls Hermann Ott a retrospective figure of "wishful thinking", who is trying to prove that the "better German" really existed. (75) Here, Jews are not characters but inhabitants of the past or foreign visitors. Schlant points out a significant imbalance by recognizing a parallel to the physical destruction of the Jews in their narrative elimination. A blind spot in the author's ability to project imaginatively appears where Grass should have brought his emotions into play. In his hopeful message, he takes recourse to Christian images and concepts and recharges them. Grass speaks only through the filter of other's testimonies and gestures. (78) His text speaks of the inability to find a voice without the help of a mediator and thus gives a sense of the stony path to developing a narrative form which does justice to these events. (79)

With the so-called *Tendenzwende* (change of tides) which unfolded before the backdrop of the student movement of 1968, genocide became a political issue and a powerful instrument in the generation conflict. As Schlant notes critically, anger and desperation, rather than regret and shame, prevent a real confrontation with the past. What results is self-exploratory literature, or *Väterliteratur* (literature about fathers, from about 1975-1985), as it has been termed ever since in the history of postwar German literature. Autobiographical fiction here becomes a hybrid genre, operating – as does nearly every narrative form – with the dissolution of narrative boundaries and obligations. (84) Here, the literary search for the self becomes a search for the father. The psychopathologies of the family developed here, with their subjective approach to the Holocaust, fall into the same pattern of confusing veterans with victims. Jewish character play only marginal roles and are described in terms of euphemisms and clichés. Their links to the narrative are identificatory, since the first person narrator and the Jews share the same enemies – the generation of the fathers. According to Schlant, the *Väterliteratur* does not attain a level of critical insight and – with a few exceptions – she finds this literature unacceptable as a self-generated German model of mourning for the victims. (97)

Hanns-Josef Ortheil's apotheosis on father literature

Hanns-Josef Ortheil's novel *Abschied von den Kriegsteilnehmern* (*Farewell to the Veterans*, 1992) is, in Schlant's estimation, an apotheosis on *Väterliteratur* and a unique example of mourning. (116) Self-analysis and introspection, the question of continuity and rupture in the prewar and postwar periods are the elements of a genre which induces Ortheil to play with the concepts of order and *Geborgenheit* (the wellbeing that comes from feeling sheltered). Being protected and being hidden (*geborgen* and *verborgen*) are signals in the author's books and can be read as variations on the theme of the "nonpolitical German." (104) Ortheil's uniqueness lies in his exploration of the connection between forgetting and speaking/narration. He places new accents on the popular myth of a people seduced (by language) and leaves little doubt that no verbal exertion can annihilate annihilation. (111) In

spite of the novelist's unusual approach, the passages about Jewish characters lack a clear narrative perspective; Jews remain no more than abstract concepts, such that a recognition of them as individuals is impossible. (122) Where regret about crimes and mourning for the victims should have been voiced, silence reigns.

Hermann Lenz' silent language

Hermann Lenz is a representative of a radical new relationship between autobiography and autobiographical fiction. In *Neue Zeit* (*New Times*, 1975), for example, he reports not on events themselves, but rather on the influence of events. (129) Here, writing is a refuge, rather than a flight, focusing in equal measure on the function of memory and on what occurred. (124) Lenz' theme is the exploration of various patterns of behavior in Germany, and his narrative approach reveals both: the destruction of continuity and the desire to calm the nightmares. His text presents silence and this presentation lays bare the traumata which cannot breach the wall of silence. He shows which behaviors other than passive resistance were possible under the Nazis, without excusing them. His gaze focuses on painful details, describing with unending slowness how many individuals collaborated. Unique is the confession of Lenz' alter ego, in a language of silence, of his knowledge of Nazi crimes; he reveals that he knows, but not what he knows. When he refuses to record his thoughts, his senses speak. His representation of silence, of the gaps and the abysses, tells of the trauma which others steer away from. Here, "the language of silence preserves ... what it cannot speak about." (148)

Gert Hofmann's hopeless narratives

In his story of silence (*Die Denunziation*, 1979), Gert Hofmann recalls the practices of the Third Reich – denunciation and its consequences. All of his characters are traumatized, and Hofmann narrates from multiple perspectives to indicate profound disorientation and ruptures in the perception of reality. (152) The novella, characterized by an unheard-of event - locates this event outside of the field of vision; the narrative rhythm suggests shock and the narrative perspective splits up into dialogic or triologic discourse. (155) Specific words used by the characters also describe the narrative techniques used by the author. The lack of congruence between the narrated activities and the narrative time frame evokes the disorientation and the rupture caused by the Holocaust. This narrative movement opens the way to a crucial insight: although the perpetrators are no longer alive, their practices have survived. (160) Here, the Holocaust is the central point of the narrative, from which all subsequent events/catastrophes radiate. Narrative sequences read like mirrorings without an exit. Schlant's resume is that Hofmann does not want to investigate the past and identify the culprits but instead implicitly calls for an end to old practices, remaining, however, without the faintest glimmer of hope. With the Holocaust and its destructive practices, the human universe has ceased to exist. (165)

In her seventh chapter, Schlant reviews novels authored by Andersch (*Efraim*, 1967), Härtling (*Felix Guttman*, 1985), and Hofmann (*Veilchenfeld*, 1986) which bear the names of their Jewish protagonists in their respective titles and explores the possibility of a "restitution of personal identity" within a literary universe. (166) Contradicting Klüger, Schlant asserts that they represent different ways of relating to Holocaust victims; rather than a lack of Jewish characters, she ascertains deficits in their representation. Schlant extends Klaus Briegleb's call to make the Shoah present in literature through literary characters with the demand that authors elevate the victims to the status of subjects of their own suffering (169). Fiction, as

the field of imagined lives, offers room for "rescuing individual life stories." Is there literature which succeeds in restituting personal identity and is based on the "emotional identification with the victims as Jews?"

Alfred Andersch's searches and attempts and Peter Härtling's lack of interest

The literary critic Reich-Ranicki, as well as Klüger, referred to the anti-Semitic aura, the pure *Kitsch*, which surrounds those books authored by Andersch with Jewish protagonists. Schlant frees herself of prevailing critical assessment by analyzing what the author accomplished, rather than his intent. According to Schlant, the discontinuous episodes illuminate Andersch's struggle to endow his characters with a personal dynamic. In her reading, not Efraim but rather the absent and silent Esther is the key character. (173) Introducing Esther sentimentally as a child results in a superficial portrayal of the child's suffering, rather than banalizing the terrors of the situation. The time Efraim needs to articulate the fact that he has been unable to find out anything about Esther serves to illustrate the emotional strain of his search. (173) Andersch lets documents speak when the author's voice fails. He does not succeed in restoring the personal identity of his Jewish characters, but he does sometimes reach a level which undermines clichés, sentimentality, and philo-Semitism. Schlant's diagnosis of Härtling's *Felix Guttman*, in contrast, is devastating. Some of Härtling's sentences appear highly questionable when used without reflecting on their connotations and also reinforces the stereotype of the eternal wanderer (178). His narrator makes it too easy for himself and the author lacks a decisive prerequisite for developing fictional characters: his interest in them. "When Härtling commits Guttman's Palestine years to silence, he invalidates his own efforts to reconstruct a Jewish life and signals that his interest lies elsewhere." (180) Härtling's philo-Semitic portrayals, which stem from a lack of interest, can be seen as anti-Semitic. He insults Jewish suffering, so Schlant, by creating a counter-world of wish fulfillment, which only scantily veils his own interests in inventing a Jewish existence.

Gert Hofmann's restitution of Jewish identity

Gert Hofmann, in contrast, in his complex story *Veilchenfeld* (1986), provides an answer to the hitherto open question of whether it is acceptable, during and after annihilation, for a German to fantasize a Jewish existence. In this work, the silence of the victims reigns (187). *Veilchenfeld* not only tells a story, he also is perceived by others, who turn him into a non-person: When people act "as if he no longer existed" he will in fact cease to exist (183) is the implicit wish of the others. In Schlant's reading, the author raises questions - for example, by having *Veilchenfeld* commit suicide - which the book is not prepared to deal with. This is, of course, an assessment of quality, for a literary text must be equipped for all possible readings. Although the text implies in some passages that there was no alternative to fleeing or surviving the ghetto and concentration camp, Hofmann succeeds in restoring Jewish identity to a degree achieved by neither Andersch nor Härtling. Schlant refers to Hofmann's form of testimony as unique in West German literature.

Debates and controversies

In her eighth chapter "Speeches and Controversies" (188), Schlant reflects on political, academic, and literary debates, reviewing the long chancellorship of Kohl and his phrase about the "grace of late birth", a harbinger of the Historians' Controversy [*Historikerstreit*] of

1986, Bitburg, the Fassbinder scandal, the speech by the Bundestag president Philipp Jenninger, down to German unification, which prompted East Germany to make verbal restitution (203), and then comes to the general conclusion that all these debates instrumentalized the Holocaust and fit it into the course of German history. At least for German readers, Schlant's analysis is less convincing when she discusses the political controversies brought to light by derailments in the use of language, as in the case of Jenninger. Her cursory remarks on the social and political context fall short of her text interpretation. The student movement of the late sixties and seventies appears in her portrayal as a revolt of young people suffering from prolonged puberty, who attack the generation of their fathers with blind activism rather than arguments.

Schlant diagnoses a change in the dimensions of silence which is equally disheartening: Kohl's long administration can no longer be characterized by its repression but rather by its lack of respect for the victims.

When writers have no more and no less at their disposal than dubious literary tradition and their own imagination, then we can perceive a caesura after the *Wende*, with respect to what they allow to enter their imagination and what remains outside it. This is not so much the case because some things are impossible to portray, but rather because the authors shy away from a confrontation with the problem of representability.

Bernhard Schlink and Peter Schneider and the search for dialogue

Bernhard Schlink's novel *The Reader* (*Der Vorleser*, 1995) takes up the general themes of postwar literature - withheld information, a general condemnation of the parent generation, and moralizing platitudes. Schlant observes that the confusion attributed to the protagonist might just as well be his own, for in her estimation, he is incapable of dealing with the many issues he brings up. (215) His novel, a bestseller in America, contains not a word of reconciliation, but it does represent the beginning of a dialogue. (216)

In Peter Schneider's satirical novel *Couplings* (*Paarungen*, 1992), the interrupted and renewed love affairs can be viewed as symptoms, in a real as well as figurative sense, of a broader disintegration. (218) For Schneider, working through the Holocaust means clarifying one's personal relationships. The subtext consists of numerous references to the Nazi past, Nazi phrases, and allusions to debates about the Holocaust. Schneider orients his narrative elements with respect to a meta-text: Mitscherlich's *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern* (*Inability to Mourn*). In pointing to the opportunities for confrontational friendships between Jews and non-Jews in Germany, so Schlant's interpretation, the language of silence ceases to exist. (224)

W.G. Sebald's remarkable turn in the language of silence

In W.G. Sebald's prose volume *The Emigrants* (*Die Ausgewanderten*, 1992), the focus of Schlant's impressive finale, one finds the methods of modernity in their most radical form. His four "long stories" are hybrid constructions, succumbing to the tensions which reign between fact and fiction, through the interplay with photographs, drawings, and memoirs. (225) These stories "succeed in breaking the narrative patterns and perspectives in which the Nazi past has been discussed in postwar German literature." (226) Here, the interactions between Jewish and non-Jewish Germans encompass the experiences of everyday life, without a trace of anti- or philo-Semitism. Sebald succeeds because he revives a pre-Nazi era in which Germans and Jews did not confront each other as perpetrators and victims, without

portraying this period through rose-colored glasses. (228) Sebald lends a voice to suffering - this is especially the case in the story entitled *Max Aurach* (Max Ferber in English!) - not by usurping the voices of those who have perished, but by respecting the voices of the "others", by celebrating their culture and mourning its destruction. (230)

One could add that Sebald's narrative movement is questioning, speculative and differs from the many strained, narrow, and interpretive attempts to avoid releasing the Holocaust from German history. Sebald's last story is the most self-reflexive, since it considers the conditions under which art can be created after the Holocaust. Aurach's efforts to express erasure by painting over his pictures also apply to the author. In dense and labyrinthian narratives, Sebald radically denies the possibility of absolution (233) and effects a remarkable change in the language of silence. (234) Even when the text deals with other events, a language of melancholy and mourning shimmers through. Sebald succeeds in doing what others before him have failed at, he restores Jewish identity by introducing the silence of the victims as the other side of the language of silence. In Sebald's book, the victims speak and fall silent, the limits of articulation have been reached. This is the silence of those who have had to endure too much. Sebald's prose reveals the abyss between the different forms of silence. (234)

Philology as mourning?

It therefore took nearly half a century before Jewish characters in literary works were elevated to the level of individuals and subjects of their own actions and were seen as speakers of their own words. That is the summary formulated by Ernestine Schlant, who spent nearly ten years working on her book and whose astute gaze remained unclouded by acquaintances with Hermann Lenz and Peter Schneider. Her portrayal of the eloquence of textual processes and operations, which do not speak directly about silence, but rather demonstrate it involuntarily is brilliant. Her study would be more readable if she had quoted the texts in the original German. Schlant, who also translates from German to English, takes the texts and their poetic nature so seriously that presenting quotes from the original to American specialist readers would have been legitimate, even though their interest in philological aspects may be less keen. One minor irritation is the inconsistent introduction of the original titles, some of which are incorrect.

Schlant's study seems to be aimed at a correct approach to the Holocaust, both chronologically and teleologically. Seen on the backdrop of the Walser-Bubis debate, this ultimately untroubled relationship to the Enlightenment seems a bit too hopeful and makes Sebald's prose appear to be a now invalid seismograph of a people's moral integrity. At times, one has the impression that Schlant grasps her interpretations as a labor of mourning, beginning with the lament about the lack of mourning of post-war authors, who, since they know too little or want to know too little about the fate of persecuted Jews, are unable to produce more than "literary phantasies of restitution" (Klüger) and ending with the analysis of their maneuvers of evasion and silence. Mourning perhaps also about the enormous waste of language used to create artistic forms to express the rejection of memory or the rebirth of legends about memory, rather than to express memories of the German Jews. The process of working through the Holocaust has barely begun - public debates illustrate this fact, in particular since they fall far behind the narratives of great writers.

Translation from German: **Paula Bradish**

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