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Franklin Ruth. *Thousand Darknesses: Lies and Truth in Holocaust Fiction.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2013. 272 pp. $19.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-19-997600-3.

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Ruth Franklin, contributing editor at *The New Republic* and book critic, asserts in her first book *A Thousand Darknesses: Lies and Truth in Holocaust Fiction* that literature of the Holocaust has been looked upon with suspicion, if not relegated to a status below first-hand testimony and historical documents. She does "make the case for why we shouldn't not write literature about the Holocaust" (p. 12) by pointing out the problematics of testimony, such as there can be no "'pure testimony,' completely free from aestheticizing influences and narrative conventions" (p. 11). She also tells us why we should as an argument for literature and its importance: "We need literature about the Holocaust … because of what literature uniquely offers: an imaginative access to past events, together with new and different ways of understanding them that are unavailable to strictly factual forms of writing" (p. 13). Franklin argues against Theodor Adorno and Elie Wiesel, who have vehemently opposed the representation of the Holocaust in a literary form with the potential for misconstruing the facts. She does not, however, defend Holocaust fiction *carte blanche*; its content and artistry must be critically evaluated.

In her introduction, Franklin attempts to outline the landscape of opposing camps, and those intellectuals and authors who represent a particular stance, and to define the terms *testimony*, *memoir*, and *literature*, which are well known to those in this area of academia. She discusses some reasons why the novel has been pushed aside, and distinguishes between the prevailing types of Holocaust writing, "testimonial memoir," and "literary memoir," putting the latter in the category of imaginative literature. It may have been helpful for some readers if she had defined these categories less vaguely.

The book is divided into two parts: "The Witnesses," with six chapters, and "Those Who Came After," with five chapters. It ends with a conclusion: "The Third Generation." In part 1, "The Witnesses," Franklin looks at authors Tadeusz Borowski, Primo Levi, Elie Wiesel, Piotr Rawicz, Jerzy Kosinski, and Imre Kertész. Her particular

concern in this section is with the type of narrative each writer has produced. She states later, when discussing Kosinski, that "a book cannot simultaneously function as a novel and as a memoir, because the reader's investment in the two forms is significantly different" (p. 116). This is, in part, true. "In the case of Borowski, Levi, and Wiesel, the weight tips toward autobiography. For Rawicz, Kosinski, and later Imre Kertész, it tips—sometimes very strongly—toward fiction. Because of the fundamental instability of the form, it is up to the author to give the reader a clear signal as to how his book is to be read—either through clues in the text or by means of the book's physical apparatus. What such a book cannot do is simply say, 'My dear, I'm yours. You are free to do with me what you will'" (pp. 116-117). This statement encompasses the writers and the presentation of the material in this section. Franklin wrestles with issues surrounding not only how the authors themselves defined their works, but also how these works were categorized or perceived by publishers, critics, scholars, and readers. She first discusses Tadeusz Borowski, a Polish survivor of Auschwitz, and his stories ***We Were in Auschwitz,*** published in 1946 in Munich and jointly written with two other Polish survivors, and ***This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen,*** published in the 1970s. Borowski committed suicide in 1951, and his letters were published in 2001 in Poland and later in 2007 in America. Franklin contrasts Borowski's style in his stories with that of his translated letters. The voice of the narrator is different in tone, changing from distant and harsh in the stories to more engaged and softer in the letters. Which contains the true story, his fiction or his testimony in letters? Which voice is the real Borowski? Although Borowski is viewed by readers as primarily a victim, he thought of himself as a perpetrator of sorts. From his point of view, he seemed to suffer from not having suffered enough, of having been in a privileged position, and having survived if only in body.

Chapter 3 is perhaps the most intriguing in this section. Franklin has the chutzpah to critique, although not overtly, Elie Wiesel's prodigious stature, his fame as "perhaps ***the*** representative of the Holocaust" (p. 71), the chief proponent of the enduring predominant approach to the Holocaust that "'only those who lived it in their flesh and in their minds can possibly transform their experiences into knowledge'" (p. 5). Franklin states that in his article "Art and the Holocaust: Trivializing Memory" (the ***Times***, 1989), "Wiesel exhorted his readers to shun imaginative representations of the Holocaust and instead read testimonies and watch documentaries" (p. 5). Franklin, somewhat critical of Wiesel's stance, argues in this chapter that Wiesel's ***Night*** (1958) does not neatly fit into his own well-defined category of acceptable testimony, as ***Night*** is highly constructed and crafted, and "it has been treated very often as a novel--by journalists, by scholars, and even by its publisher" (p. 71). Despite Wiesel's assertions to the contrary, Franklin states, "But if ***Night*** may not be a novel, even an autobiographical novel, it is not exactly a memoir, either" (p. 72). I agree, to a certain extent; a memoir may strive for authenticity but it also contains the features inherent in fiction, and some may view this as meddling with the truth. Franklin takes the reader on a tour of the various incarnations of ***Night*** from 1958 to 2007. Franklin argues that Wiesel tinkered with ***Night*** in content and length, shaping the book as one shapes a novel (but, of course, one can also do this with memoir).

Some may ask while reading this chapter, does it matter in what predetermined category we place ***Night***? Is it essential for some reason that Wiesel concur rather than disagree with writers or critics who label his book "memoir" or "novel," or "autobiographical fiction"? ***Night*** has been a worldwide phenomenon; both author and text have lived a long life. Whether ***Night*** is tagged testimony, memoir, or autobiographical novel, Wiesel is canonical, as is ***Night,*** and it is not likely this will change any time soon, if ever. This chap-

ter on Wiesel sets up the issues Franklin discusses in the chapters following: the definitions of testimony, memoir, and novel and the requirements and expectations for each form.

While Franklin looks at the publishing fate of most of the authors in her book, in chapter 4 we see how countries' literary tastes and historical factors influence the publication or non-publication of books. Piotr Rawicz's book, ***Blood from the Sky*** (1961), was a classic in France and virtually unknown in America; Rawicz has been "consistently--even systematically--ignored" (p. 90). Franklin is full of praise for Rawicz's novel; it is "gorgeously written, funny, bitingly intelligent," and, as she admits, this is also the reason it may not have found a large audience. Rawicz's novel does not "conform to standard notions about what a Holocaust novel should be" (p. 91). Franklin views ***Blood from the Sky*** as a successful Holocaust novel that "brilliantly embodies the tension between the desire to commit imaginatively to the story and the fear of usurpation, of overstepping the bounds of propriety, of disturbing the rest of the dead" (p. 102).

In chapter 5, Franklin centers primarily on Jerzy Kosinski and ***The Painted Bird*** (1965). Kosinski's novel, marketed as such, was presumed to be autobiographical, as Kosinski told stories about his childhood at numerous gatherings over the years. Although he thought of ***The Painted Bird*** primarily as a novel, his vagueness about its "truth," and not stating outright what ***The Painted Bird*** was, misled readers. Franklin does not view Kosinski as deliberately deceptive; rather he "insist[ed] on the essential overlap of imagination and reality" (p. 107). Franklin states, "Now, more than forty years after the publication of ***The Painted Bird***, it is no longer controversial to argue that memory itself is always a variety of fiction.... Kosinski was hardly the first writer to assert the intermingling of fact and fiction in the human consciousness" (p. 115).

In part 2, "Those Who Came After," in an intriguing chapter 7 about Steven Spielberg's movie ***Schindler's List*** (1993) and Thomas Keneally's book ***Schindler's Ark*** (1982) on which the film was based, Franklin explores the liberties both Spielberg and Keneally took in their respective art forms. Schindler was dead, so Keneally produced a fictionalized biography, of sorts. The film ***Schindler's List*** was altered for effect and mediated, as one might expect in a Hollywood film. Franklin asks if these reconstructions stray too far from reality. In this case, she mostly sides with both writer and filmmaker, and more so the latter, as Spielberg's interweaving of fiction and fact ultimately created a heart-rending impact, and a worthwhile educational experience.

Chapter 8 centers on German novelist Wolfgang Koeppen, and the multiple incarnations of his writing. At the request of publisher Herbert Kluger to improve upon the abandoned manuscript of Jakob Littner's memoir, Koeppen basically wrote a new book that was published in 1948 as ***Notes from a Hole in the Ground***, attributed to Littner with no mention of Koeppen.[1] Around 1992, the book reappeared from another publisher that claimed it was the latest novel by Koeppen, although it was Littner's story. Kurt Grübler, Littner's relative in America, who had a copy of the original memoir, published a new version, ***Journey through the Night: Jacob Littner's Holocaust Memoir*** (2000), which was "presented as the final word on the Koeppen-Littner affair" (p. 170). It was clear that Koeppen had altered Littner's story more than he had claimed; critics vilified Koeppen posthumously for tinkering with a Holocaust memoir. Franklin defends Koeppen: he had admitted to writing fiction, although the story was based on Littner's, and created a cohesive and readable text. Grübler's efforts were hardly stellar. Franklin writes: "Sloppy mistakes ... together with the more systematic conceptual problems with this translation, confirm that ***Journey through the Night*** is no more reliable a representation of Jakob Littner's manuscript than Wolf-

gang Koeppen's novelization of it. If indeed it is a crime to tamper in any way with a Holocaust memoir, then Grübler is as guilty as Koeppen" (p. 178).

In chapter 9 Franklin discusses W. G. Sebald, a German. She has fewer problems with Sebald's work, which is ironic considering a reader does not know how much material is based on fact, and how much is fiction. Franklin does not interrogate Sebald's work as intensely in its synthesis of fact and fiction; perhaps this is because he does not write about the camps, but rather deals with post-Holocaust time. Does that, however, make it more permissible to take license with the material? In the next chapter she is far more critical of German novelist Bernhard Schlink and his novel ***The Reader*** (1995). She finds this author's prose, at times, distasteful, and the "intellectual and moral confusion" of this novel has only degenerated in Schlink's latest book, ***Homecoming*** (first published in German in 2006). In general, ***The Reader*** has incited controversy, perhaps because "the novel's investigation of Nazi guilt is problematic" (p. 201), and its moral and ethical ambiguity creates unease in the reader. She next deals with second-generation writers and their work, such as a collection compiled by Melvin Jules Bukiert, and Art Spiegelman's ***Maus*** (1991). While praising Spiegelman, Franklin is critical of co-opting survivor stories, kitsch, bad taste, poor writing, and even ignorance, in some second-generation work, proving there ***are*** limits to art of the Holocaust. For the third generation she displays more optimism, citing Jonathan Safran Foer and Michael Chabon, both of whom employ fantasy when the Holocaust is the focus of their work. Franklin concludes her book: "It is no accident that those who oppose the idea of literary representation of the Holocaust tend also to be those who argue most forcefully for the Holocaust's uniqueness. For literature, whatever its specific details, ultimately makes a case for universality" (p. 242).

I approached this book with some apprehension. As a literature professor, I have struggled with reading and, even more so, teaching Holocaust fiction. Bernhard Schlink's ***The Reader***, in particular, which Franklin discusses in chapter 10, creates conundrums in its fictional representation. Constructing an alternative reality, as in Holocaust fiction, is troublesome for some scholars, and, in my experience, primarily historians. So while I was resistant at first, Franklin's mostly engaging style with its variety of stylistic flourishes and passion for the topic draws in the reader, and I found myself pondering questions raised, and agreeing with many of her assertions. She rightfully argues that Holocaust fiction has been and is important and needed, but she also suggests through her examples that it must be prudently read and assessed with an informed mind. In that respect, including citations as well as a bibliography at the end would have benefited readers who want to explore specific texts or areas for further study. Nonetheless, Franklin's work of Holocaust literary criticism is excellent in its interpretations and a valuable read.

Note

[1]. Littner, a Polish Jew who had been living in Munich, was expelled to Poland in 1938, survived in hiding, returned to Munich in 1945 and wrote his memoir, ***Mein Weg durch die Nacht*** (My Way through the Night). Herbert Kluger received the manuscript in 1947 and agreed to publish it if Littner paid for the manuscript's changes, and any costs. Littner immigrated to America shortly thereafter ***sans*** a deal, and ***sans*** manuscript.

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