

# Translations and reception of Hanna Krall's literary reportages in German-speaking countries

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The question of translations and the reception of Hanna Krall's literary reportage in German-speaking countries relates to a specific cultural space, language, historical experience, and role in history. Most of the author's literary reportages focus on the stories of Holocaust survivors and the extermination of European Jews carried out on Polish soil by German occupiers. The Germans who appear in her work – Nazis employed at various administrative levels, SS members, Wehrmacht soldiers, reservists from the 101st Police Battalion in Hamburg – are depicted as perpetrators of crimes. The policies of persecution and extermination of Jews are attributed to Adolf Hitler and National Socialist strategists, Germans, and Austrians. The German language is therefore “die Sprache der Täter,” the language of the perpetrators<sup>1</sup>. How

<sup>1</sup> See Stephan Braese, „Einführung”, in: *In der Sprache der Täter. Neue Lektüren deutschsprachiger Nachkriegs- und Gegenwartsliteratur*, ed. by Stephan Braese (Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1998), 7–11. The German language is referred to as “the idiom of Shoah par excellence” for millions of Europeans “concentrated” in the East for the purposes of forced labour and extermination; it is a language still alive in the memories of survivors.

then were Hanna Krall's literary reportages received in Germany and Austria? How is her „non-fiction”<sup>2</sup>, largely portraying Jewish fates, received?

The Jewish experience as a particularly challenging area of translation in modern Polish and German literature was explored in a special issue of the Cracow magazine *Przekładaniec*, titled *Przekład żydowski. Żydowskość w przekładzie* [*A Jewish translation. Jewishness in Translation*] (29/2014). Writing about the revival of Jewish culture and the fascination with Jewish identity in Poland and Germany, Magdalena Waligórska asserts:

After all, the character of a German plays a major role in the Polish vision of Polish-Jewish relations during World War II, and Poland is an important point of reference in the German memory of Jews – as the cradle of Eastern European Jewry, whose portrait, as presented by Martin Buber, Joseph Roth, and Alfred Döblin, left a longlasting mark on the German-language literary tradition; it is also the space of the Holocaust. But are memory and literary narrative structures in this Polish-German-Jewish triad mutually translatable? How does the memory of the Other serve a self-cognitive function?<sup>3</sup>

Waligórska highlights the success of authors like Hanna Krall and Henryk Grynberg on the German book market, as well as the recognition of popular literature, like Maria Nurowska's *Listy miłości* [*Letters of Love*] (1991). The scholar is interested in the translatability of the Jewish experience in Poland for German readers and in the challenges that German or Austrian narratives pose to Polish audiences.<sup>4</sup>

In my paper, I will focus on selected academic works related to Hanna Krall's writing and on literary reviews of her works. It should be noted that the most popular of Krall's reportages were published in Germany in the 1990s, sometimes coinciding with their release in Poland<sup>5</sup>. They received praise from the critics and were widely discussed. The first publishing house to promote Krall's books in Germany was the Neue Kritik, which in

<sup>2</sup> Hanna Krall, *Literatura faktu* [Non-fiction literature]. (Vol. Tam już nie ma żadnej rzeki [There is No River There Anymore]), in her: *Fantom bólu. Reportaże wszystkie* [The Phantom of pain. All reportages] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2017), 667–674. The title features the author's characteristic irony: writing about a few Jews settling in a "northern town", she thus describes the mayor's openness: „The mayor was preparing communal flats. During the Nazi period the northern town distinguished itself by enthusiastic book burnings, so the mayor cared about the reputation of his people, who were tolerant and hospitable” (672). Nachum Klajner from Riga, a surgical oncologist, thus explained to Krall the make-up of her meet-the-author: here is a local fascist, there is also a woman who is a local anti-fascist, and an elderly couple („our Jews”): „And the rest of the audience who were listening to your reportage so politely, are our ordinary Germans. Cultured lovers of non-fiction” (674).

<sup>3</sup> Magdalena Waligórska, „Granice przekładu: polsko-niemiecko-żydowskie pogranicze literackie” [„Limits of translation: the Polish-German-Jewish literary frontier”], *Przekładaniec* 29 (2014), 259–264, here: 259–260.

<sup>4</sup> M. Waligórska's analyses and conversations concern Joanna Bator's *Piaskowa Góra* (Sandberg, transl. by Esther Kinsky), Robert Schindel's *Rodowody* [Genealogies], transl. by Jacek St. Buras), Bożena Keff's *Utwór o matce i Ojczyźnie* [A Piece on Mother and Fatherland] (transl. by Michael Zgodzay) and Erica Fischer's *Aimée & the Jaguar* (transl. by Katarzyna Weintraub). They all problematise Jewishness. Waligórska's interviews cover aspects of cultural translation, the role of public debates on Polish-Jewish or German-Jewish relations, and that which is lost or particularly controversial in translations.

<sup>5</sup> One of the signs of a growing interest is a collection of materials concerning the author and her books published in Germany (Dem Herrgott zuvorkommen, Legoland, Tanz auf fremder Hochzeit, Existenzbeweise): Hanna Krall, ed. by Eugeniusz Piliszek (Leipzig: Polnisches Institut Leipzig, 1996).

1986 released *Sublokatora/ Die Untermieterin* [*The Subtenant*].<sup>6</sup> Run by Dorothea Rhein in Frankfurt am Main, the small enterprise grew out of student protest movements of the 1960s and specialized in Eastern European literature, women's literature, topics related to the National Socialist dictatorship, Jewish persecution, and testimonial literature. Krall's later books, however, i.e., *Rosa Straußenfedern / Różowe Strusie Pióra* [*Pink Ostrich Feathers*], published in 2012, and *Weißes Maria / Biała Maria* [*White Maria*], published in 2014 (both translated by Bernhard Hartmann), did not resonate with critics. I have not been able to identify any German translations of Krall's most recent books published in Poland: *Pola i inne rzeczy teatralne* [*Pola and Other Theater Things*] (2018), *Synapsy Marii H.* [*Maria H.'s Synapses*] (2020), *Smutek ryb* [*The Sadness of the Fish*] (2020), and *Szczegóły znaczące* [*Significant Details*] (2022). This is surprising, in light of the author's earlier popularity. In contrast, more recent books by Krall have been published in France, alongside translations of her older works.<sup>7</sup>

When I asked Bernhard Hartmann about his experience working on Krall's books, he described the challenges of translating her distinctive style as follows:

I translated *Różowe strusia pióra* and *Biała Maria*, two most recent books by Hanna Krall, which are a kind of résumé of her work, and perhaps of her life. In formal terms, these books feature a concise and condensed narrative, which presupposes the reader's familiarity with the author's earlier works. Since I did not know everything, one of the challenges of the translation process was recognizing references to earlier texts and finding relevant passages in existing translations (by Hubert Schumann, Esther Kinsky, and Renate Schmidgall) to help the German-speaking readers follow these traces. Dorothea Rein, Hanna Krall's long-time German publisher, was very helpful in this endeavour. Another challenge was to achieve the aforementioned conciseness and brevity in the German text. Here, my experience in translating poetry came in handy.

Hartmann confirmed the loss of interest in Krall's reportage among German-speaking readers:

To put it mildly, the books I translated were not popular with readers. On the one hand, this can be attributed to the fact that the texts require a great deal from the reader. Secondly, the peak of Krall's popularity in Germany ended in the 2010s. The book about Mark Edelman was a revelation in the 1980s, and subsequent volumes also enjoyed great interest from literary critics right up till the 1990s. Then the interest waned. The issue of the Holocaust was no longer as important to many readers, and Krall's texts on other topics were perhaps less interesting to German-speaking audiences. It is also possible that the effect that Hanna Krall's style initially exerted on German audiences reading the first volumes of her works petered out over time<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> Later pocketbook editions (Taschenbuchausgabe) were based on the licence of the Neue Kritik publishing house, e.g. *Tanz auf fremder Hochzeit* (btb in Goldmann Verlag 1997) or *Hypnose* (btb 1998).

<sup>7</sup> Les fenêtres were published here in 2021, in 2022 – Les Synapses de Maria H. (both from Noir sur Blanc), largely thanks to Krall's translator, Margot Carlier.

<sup>8</sup> The author's private correspondence, in her translation.

Let us see how Hanna Krall's prose was received in Germany at the height of her popularity. Krall is a well-known and recognizable author there, having won several major awards, such as the prestigious Leipziger Buchpreis zur Europäischen Verständigung in 2000 (laudation by Dan Diner), the Samuel Bogumił Linde Award in 2001 (laudation by Ryszard Kapuściński), the Gottfried Herder Prize in 2005, the Würth-Preis für Europäische Literatur in 2012, and the Ricarda Huch Prize in 2008 for lifetime achievement. The latter is awarded for independence of thought and courage in action, for humanitarianism and fostering understanding between nations. The motivation for the award was that Krall "restored history to Polish Jews." At the time, the author responded that since the end of the war, many writers—Tadeusz Borowski, Zofia Nałkowska, Julian Strykowski, Henryk Grynberg, Adolf Rudnicki—had written on that subject. "I think that the Jewish fate exists in memory. And I am just another baton in this relay race of remembrance."<sup>9</sup> In his laudation, Marcel Reich-Ranicki emphasized that when he reads Hanna Krall's books, he is actually reading a reflection of his own life and experiences in the ghetto in the occupied Warsaw. "Most of what is written is unbelievable and unimaginable. Unfortunately, it is all true...."<sup>10</sup> Ranicki made Krall's acquaintance when she was working with his wife, Teofila Reich-Ranicki, whom he married in the Warsaw ghetto. In 2000, Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt in Stuttgart published an album edition of a book featuring Teofila Reich-Ranicki's watercolours and Roswitha Matwin-Buschmann's translations of Krall's texts, titled „Es war der letzte Augenblick. Leben im Warschauer Ghetto" [„It Was the Last Moment. Life in the Warsaw Ghetto"<sup>11</sup>]. This book has not been published in Polish, although Teofila Langnas (Reich-Ranicki's maiden name), was introduced to the Polish audiences in Piotr Rypson's article on her drawings („Album rysunków Teofili Langnas-Reich w Archiwum Ringelbluma" [„An Album of Drawings by Teofila Langnas-Reich in the Ringelblum Archive"<sup>12</sup>].

The book *Es war der letzte Augenblick*, edited by Krall, consists of five parts: *Die Gazeta Żydowska. Die Jüdische Zeitung im Warschauer Getto* [*Die Gazeta Żydowska, The Jewish Paper in the Warsaw Ghetto*], a collection of Teofila Reich-Ranicki's watercolours from the ghetto with Hanna Krall's captions (*Aquarelle aus dem Warschauer Getto*), Krall's literary reportage *Die Aquarelle der Teofila L.*, a series of opera heroines in stage costumes (*Heroinnen der Opernbühne*) by Teofila Reich-Ranicki, and notes about both authors (*Biographische Notiz*). Simultaneously with *Die Aquarelle von Teofila L.*, the Polish version was published

<sup>9</sup> Niemiecka nagroda dla Hanny Krall – DW – 03.10.2008 (accessed: 26.04.2024).

<sup>10</sup> Marcel Reich-Ranicki: „Das, was geschrieben ist, ist zum großen Teil nicht glaubwürdig, man kann es sich gar nicht vorstellen. Es stimmt leider alles". „Ricarda-Huch-Preis für Hanna Krall", *Taz*, 4.10.2008, unterm strich - taz.de, accessed: 26.04.2024. „Le vrai n'est pas toujours vraisemblable", „The truth is not always probable" - that is he motto of Annette von Droste-Hülshoff's 1842 short story *Die Judenbuche* (A Jewish beech tree).

<sup>11</sup> Teofila Reich-Ranicki / Hanna Krall, *Es war der letzte Augenblick. Leben im Warschauer Getto*, transl. by Roswitha Matwin-Buschmann (Stuttgart, München: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2000). This is what Hanna Krall said in *Tygodnik Powszechny* about the circumstances of the book's creation: „They say she illustrated my book. This is not true. I captioned her drawings, that's all. We talked every day for two weeks. It took a long time because she got tired easily". <https://www.tygodnikpowszechny.pl/teofila-168559>, accessed: 26.04.2024.

<sup>12</sup> Piotr Rypson, „Album rysunków Teofili Langnas-Reich w Archiwum Ringelbluma" [„The Album of Teofila Langnas-Reich's Drawings in the Ringelblum Archive"]. *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały* 18 (2022): 366–402. doi.org/10.32927/zssim.963, accessed: 26.04.2024.

in *Tygodnik Powszechny* as „Akwarele” („Watercolours”)<sup>13</sup>. The painter and her husband, a well-known literary critic, are also the subject of a short prose piece, *Teofila* in Krall's latest book - *Szczegóły znaczące* (2022).<sup>14</sup>

The first book by Hanna Krall published in Germany was *Zdążyć przed panem Bogiem* [Eng. title: *Shielding the Flame*], available in two translations. In 1979, Hubert Schumann's *Dem Herrgott zuvorkommen* was published in East Berlin, and a year later, Klaus Stemmler's *Schneller als der liebe Gott* was published in West Germany by Suhrkamp. The book was a great success, just like other collections of Krall's reportages, which became bestsellers in Germany in the 1990s. The first German edition of *Zdążyć przed Panem Biegiem* even featured an introduction by Willy Brandt, the chairman of the SPD party and former German chancellor.

An account of the struggle against extreme despair in the Warsaw ghetto, even in literary form, can really only be a documentation of a nightmare, an image of extreme cruelty, unspeakable suffering, and countless deaths. [...] And yet: I did not perceive Hanna Krall's account, with its focus on Marek Edelman, solely as a book about dying. Rather, I read it as a book about life, for life<sup>15</sup>.

*Zdążyć przez Panem Bogiem*, translated into 17 languages, remains Krall's best-known literary work abroad. However, it does not feature in German curricula (*Bildungskanon*) as a compulsory reading for secondary school students. Marita Meyer, comparing Polish and German readings on World War II and the Holocaust, writes about the lack of centralised exams and an official high school reading list in Germany.<sup>16</sup> She focuses on three Polish authors and their works: Tadeusz Borowski, Czesław Miłosz, and Hanna Krall, noting that in the case of the German educational system, one can only speak of a “secret canon” (*der heimliche Kanon*)<sup>17</sup>.

Describing the reception of *Zdążyć przed panem Bogiem*, Meyer emphasizes its innovative narrative style, which challenges the official policy of remembrance: “Following Aleida

<sup>13</sup>Hanna Krall, „Akwarele” [„Watercolours”]. *Tygodnik Powszechny* 26 (2000). To ty jesteś Daniel [And So You Are Daniel] contains a short story about Teofila Reich-Ranicki: Marzec 2000. Frankfurt nad Menem [March 2000. Frankfurt am Main (Krall, *Fantom bólu*. Reportaże wszystkie [The Phantom of pain. Collected reportages], 759–760). „I visit her daily. I sit in the same armchair, she sits opposite me. Germans will publish a book with her drawings and I will write a short story about her”. The protagonist of the text remains nameless; only her husband Marcel is called by his name. „Her husband Marcel was with her her whole life; he would narrate books to her or read poetry aloud”. She is only named in footnotes at the end of the book (Krall, *Fantom bólu*. Reportaże wszystkie, 805).

<sup>14</sup>Hanna Krall, *Teofila*, in her, *Szczegóły znaczące* [Significant details] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2022): 71–76.

<sup>15</sup>Willy Brandt, „Vorwort”, in Krall's: *Schneller als der liebe Gott*, transl. by Klaus Staemmler (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1980), 7–8, here: 7.

<sup>16</sup>Marita Mayer, „Deutsche und polnische Lektüren über den Zweiten Weltkrieg und den Holocaust. Eine vergleichende Untersuchung zur schulischen Kanonbildung und zum kulturellen Gedächtnis”, *Convivium. Germanistisches Jahrbuch Polen* (2009): 213–243. [https://cejsh.icm.edu.pl/cejsh/element/bwmeta1.element.ojs-doi-10\\_18778\\_2196-8403\\_2009\\_17](https://cejsh.icm.edu.pl/cejsh/element/bwmeta1.element.ojs-doi-10_18778_2196-8403_2009_17), accessed: 24.04.2024.

<sup>17</sup>Mayer, 216. Her research shows that the German youth read few books on the topic; the most popular ones are Anne Frank's *Diary* and *Damals war es Friedrich* by Hans Peter Richter, *Als Hitler das rosa Kaninchen stahl* by Judith Kerr and *Der Vorleser* [The Reader] by Bernhard Schlink. Meyer sees in those choices a preference for easy readings; good intentions combined with a desire for displacement and passing on to the third generation an idealised image of the past. Mayer wishes for school curricula to include Peter Weiss's documentary *Die Ermittlung* (1965) and Ruth Klüger's autobiographical prose *weiter leben* (1992).

Assmann, it can be said that Krall and Edelman attempt to transform frozen memory into fluid memory. This fluid or living memory permits uncertainty about the course of events.<sup>18</sup> Meyer silences controversies concerning the deconstruction of the story of a heroic uprising (and questioning witness authority<sup>19</sup>) by invoking the postmodern distrust of “grand and uninterrupted narratives” and presenting individual stories of people whose courageous or humanitarian behavior does feature in such a grand narrative.<sup>20</sup> Mayer, following Geoffrey Hartman, sees the role of the author-interviewer, recounting someone else’s story, as one of “intellectual testimony.”<sup>21</sup>

The website of the Deutsches Polen-Institut in Darmstadt features downloadable lesson modules, which can be used during German as a Foreign Language classes, but can also help acquaint German students with Polish-German relations and authors with Polish literary and biographical backgrounds.<sup>22</sup> One of such modules concerns survival strategies and mechanisms of coping with trauma (*Bewältigungsmechanismen*) in *Zdążyć przed panem Bogiem*.<sup>23</sup>

Probably the most comprehensive and accurate analysis of Hanna Krall’s literary reportages is Daniela Bode-Jarsumbeck’s dissertation *Die literarischen Reportagen Hanna Kralls. Gedächtnis an die ostjüdische Lebenswelt und die Shoah*<sup>24</sup>. The researcher focuses on *Zdążyć przed Panem Bogiem* and on what she terms “reportages about the *Shtetl*” (“*Schtetel-Reportagen*”). She is interested in the “textures of memory”: the reportage about Edelman and the ghetto uprising as a “medium of collective memories” is followed by an attempt at reconstructing the destroyed world of Jews in Eastern Europe (the architecture of the *shtetl*, everyday life, religiosity, mysticism), and concluded with a description of stylistic elements (interview and conversation, lexicon, narrativity and intellectual testimony, temporal planes, repetitions). The researcher uses Jan and Aleida Assmann’s categories of knowledge about memory to analyze Hanna Krall’s reportages – for the memory of witnesses to survive, it must be transferred from communicative memory to cultural memory.<sup>25</sup> Krall externalizes the experiences of survivors: “In the spirit of Assmann, literary reportages should be assigned both to storage and functional memory,<sup>26</sup>” which means that they both accumulate knowledge and, through the act of their publication, become part of the educational canon and social discourse.

<sup>18</sup>Mayer, 232–233.

<sup>19</sup>Barbara Breysach, *Schauplatz und Gedächtnisraum Polen. Die Vernichtung der Juden in der deutschen und polnischen Literatur* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2005), 375.

<sup>20</sup>Here Mayer quotes Tzvetan Todorov’s afterword on „ordinary virtues”, juxtaposed with „heroic virtues” – resisting acts of humiliation and taking care of others. Hanna Krall, *Dem Herrgott zuvorkommen*, transl. by Hubert Schumann (Frankfurt am Main: Neue Kritik, 1992). 163.

<sup>21</sup>Geoffrey Hartman, „Die Ethik des Zeugnisses. Ein Interview mit Geoffrey Hartman”, in: *Zeugenschaft des Holocaust. Zwischen Trauma, Tradierung und Ermittlung*, ed. by Michael Elm, Gottfried Kössler (Frankfurt am Main, New York: Campus Verlag, 2007), 52–76, here 73.

<sup>22</sup>Deutsch/Literatur – Polen in der Schule, accessed: 26.04.2024.

<sup>23</sup>Deutsch/Literatur – Polen in der Schule, accessed: 24.04.2024.

<sup>24</sup>Daniela Bode-Jarsumbeck, *Die literarischen Reportagen Hanna Kralls. Gedächtnis an die ostjüdische Lebenswelt und die Shoah* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2009).

<sup>25</sup>Bode-Jarsumbeck, 43.

<sup>26</sup>Bode-Jarsumbeck, 43.

Bode-Jarsumbeck aims to examine whether Krall refrains from a stylisation of suffering, how she presents authentic material, if she refrains from commentary, and what linguistic means she uses to find “the right form for the literature of memory”<sup>27</sup>. She classifies Krall’s reportage, along with Henryk Grynberg’s short stories (*Drohobycz, Drohobycz*, 2000), as “secondary testimonies,” and considers the hybrid narrative<sup>28</sup> format as characteristic of later Holocaust literature. It should be noted here that Hanna Krall belongs to the generation of survivors, but her use of a restrained form of expression in describing other people’s dramatic fates and her reliance on interviews and documents endow her prose with features of the post-memorial trend, characteristic of the literature of subsequent generations.

Dan Diner, professor of modern history in Jerusalem and former head of the Simon Dubnow Institute for Jewish History and Culture in Leipzig (1999-2014), delivered the laudatory speech in honor of Hanna Krall in 2000, when she was awarded the Leipzig Book Prize for European Understanding (Leipziger Buchpreis der Europäischen Verständigung). In his laudation, he emphasized the “radical poetics of understatement” and the “absence of monstrosities” in Krall’s texts. Diner interprets this not as a mere stylistic device, but as a consequence of the unimaginability, groundlessness, and abstractness of mass extermination: “The murder of European Jews is a statistic rather than a narrative.”<sup>29</sup> The absence of the actual process in the author’s texts therefore stems from the nature of the Holocaust, from the unimaginability of that event as it was taking place: industrial death prevents the creation of a narrative corresponding to the event.<sup>30</sup> Diner contextualises Krall’s prose within the problematic Polish-Jewish relationships, exacerbated by the crimes committed by the Germans. The Jews described in *Dowody na Istnienie* – Jewish children saved by the Poles – are modern-day Marranos, having become Poles without even knowing about it. The stories described by Krall are a biographical vestige of the Polish-Jewish drama: as Diner writes, “from her anthropologically oriented introspection of the fate of the individual, [Krall] enters the realm of complex and complicated collective histories that have taken hold of the individual without their participation.”<sup>31</sup> However, Krall does not spin collective epics; she shows individuals thrown into unusual situations and circumstances, examining universal humanity with the “eye of an incorruptible observer”:

<sup>27</sup>Bode-Jarsumbeck, 5. Bode-Jarsumbeck invokes Henryk Grynberg (*Prawda nieartystyczna* [The Non-artistic Truth], Czeladź 1990) and James E. Young (*Beschreiben des Holocaust. Darstellung und Formen der Interpretation*, Frankfurt am Main 1992). Grynberg emphasises the role of Polish writers as witnesses who were in the epicentre of the crime and now they are supposed to bear witness through a scant usage of literary techniques, refraining from commentary and depicting individual suffering of victims. Young believes that aiming for the greatest objectivity in the approach to the Holocaust is the task of historians. At the same time, in order to attract the interest of a wide range of readers, it is important to create an appropriate artistic form for the literature of memory. Bode-Jarsumbeck, 4–5.

<sup>28</sup>Bode-Jarsumbeck, 3. Thanks to temporal and spatial distance „objective truth beyond a personal horizon” may be conveyed in the literature of the Holocaust differently, and the artist’s style plays a much bigger role than in the case of witness texts from the time of persecution.

<sup>29</sup>Dan Diner, *Laudatio auf Hanna Krall*. Leipziger Buchpreis zur Europäischen Verständigung. Dan Diner: *Laudatio auf Hanna Krall* (leipzig.de), accessed: 24.04.2024.

<sup>30</sup>See Hanna Krall’s statements on „mass death”, e.g. in her *Reporterka* [She-reporter]: „Ryszard Kapuściński once wrote this wise sentence that there is no such thing as «mass death». The Holocaust is referred to as death of a nation, but it meant that many people were dying at the same time, or even in the same place, like in Auschwitz, in the ghetto or in Babi Yar near Kyiv. But each of those people was dying a singular death of their own, there is no such thing as collective death. Entire groups of people were dying, entire families, communities, but even within a family each person was dying their own death. And this is how one should tell their stories and remember about every individual person.” Jacek Antczak, *Reporterka* (Warszawa: Agora, 2015), 141.

<sup>31</sup>Diner.

She found her unique, masterful narrative in a retrospective account from the land of the dead, staged by people for people, with economical stenographic restraint and camouflaging as simple reportage. Edelman's way of speaking also permeates, as a primary narrative, subsequent stories from times of horror, traced by Hanna Krall with an almost archaeological obsession with detail. By using fragments and seemingly marginal miniatures of everyday life, she manages to create an even more realistic reflection of the nightmare. A gaze that bypasses what is truly terrifying allows for a depth of focus for which Hanna Krall is praised<sup>32</sup>.

Irmela von der Lühe highlights two aspects that fascinate German reviewers of Hanna Krall's works: the first is her ability to engage in socio-political criticism under censorship, revealing the discrepancy between the socialist ideal and everyday mediocrity; the second is her literary form: the use of hypotheses, stories told in the subjunctive mood (which is interpreted as a postmodernist feature), and a restrained, laconic, and discreet style. Using the interview format, Krall is able to reveal the dubious, ambiguous nature of what is supposedly authentic, indisputably personal, and experienced by her protagonists<sup>33</sup>. The third important reason for Krall's recognition in Germany is her role as an "archivist" and "archeologist" (terms used by the author herself in her reportages), searching for traces of the destroyed Jewish world in Poland. Lühe sees the Polish author's literary work of memory as a challenge to literary attempts and scientific research in Germany and beyond: the progressive radicalization of the scientific position on the possibility of literary representations of the Holocaust means that Krall's works, written in full awareness of the impossibility of conveying the Holocaust in words, are a modest but determined protest against the theorisation of this topos and a meticulous discussion of the inexpressible.<sup>34</sup> A characteristic feature of the reportages is their objection to verbosity and kitsch, reflection on carefully selected words, and the hidden meaning of episodic occurrences.<sup>35</sup>

Lühe also points to literary parallels in other literary works, e.g. by Maxim Biller, the Dutch author Carl Friedman, and the Austrian literary scholar Ruth Klüger. Klüger (1931–2020), who as a teenage girl survived the Theresienstadt ghetto and the Auschwitz and Gross-Rosen (Rogoźnica) camps, saw in "ghost stories" ("Gespenstergeschichten") a solution to the aporia of literary representation of mass murders. One such ghost story in *Dowody na Istnienie* is *Dybuk* [*The Dybbuk*] – the titular dybbuk is in the Jewish tradition a restless soul of the dead. The author renounces any attempts at an "interpretative neutralization of the improbable," "theoretical-psychological" or "philosophical-reflective" explanations, which is justified by the reporter's experience with the untruthfulness of logical stories.<sup>36</sup> The German researcher sees the uniqueness of Krall's texts in the combination of the fragmentariness of her characters' biographies, as she sketches their possible or desired life stories in her reportages, while the

<sup>32</sup>Diner.

<sup>33</sup>Irmela von der Lühe, "Interviews gegen das Verschweigen. Hanna Kralls Reportagen", in: "... wortlos der Sprache mächtig". Schweigen und Sprechen in Literatur und sprachlicher Kommunikation, ed. by Hartmut Eggert, Janusz Golec (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1999), 95–110, here: 97–101.

<sup>34</sup>Lühe, 101–102.

<sup>35</sup>Lühe, 104.

<sup>36</sup>Lühe, 105. She recalls Krall's comment from the reportage *Zbawienie* [Salvation] from her *Dowody na istnienie* [Evidence for existence]: "My job as a reporter has taught me that logical stories, which have no mysteries or gaps, the ones in which everything is understandable, tend to be untrue. And things which are inexplicable really do happen." Krall, *Fantom bólu*. Reportaże wszystkie, 583.



linguistic and literary means she uses allow her to preserve their individuality. Krall does not use a specific “Verfremdungstechnik” - alienation technique, which destroys the viewer’s illusion by creating an effect of strangeness and allowing them to maintain critical distance. She does without linguistic sophistication and elements that increase tension, incorporating comedy and absurdity<sup>37</sup>.

Reviews published in serious, influential German newspapers emphasize that Krall’s literary reportage is characterized by “the art of words” (*Sprachkunst*<sup>38</sup>) and focuses on the Holocaust. It should be noted that the vast majority of reviews mistakenly cite 1937 as Hanna Krall’s year of birth. The transformation of the reportage into literature (in Germany, the former is considered a journalistic genre) or the use of minimalist prose with its own poetics and rhythm are repeatedly praised. Heinz Ludwig Arnold notes that, unlike in German documentary literature, the characters remain the subjects or even “co-authors” of the stories: although the German edition of *Hipnoza* [*Hypnosis*] bears the subtitle *Opowiadania* [*Short Stories*], the stories are those of survivors and witnesses. But these are not “tearful stories” (*Betroffenheitsgeschichten*); the author does not psychologize to explain something or make it easier to understand. “Her seemingly detached narrative evokes a closeness that pierces through and through<sup>39</sup>.” As Arnold emphasizes, Krall’s books are worth more than monuments made of stone or bronze. For Cornelia Geissler, Krall’s texts are “an unprecedented library of the literature of memory.”<sup>40</sup> The writer does not invent stories or transport readers to foreign worlds, but instead leads them into the past. She does not stereotype Poles, Jews, and Germans, nor does she divide people into victims and perpetrators; she is always interested in individual cases. Geissler refers to Krall as a “documentarian of memory,” and in the structure of her narrative—the mixing of time frames and achronology—she sees the very manner in which the human brain functions<sup>41</sup>.

The theme of Hanna Krall’s prose is survival in terrible times, as noted by Kerstin Hensel, who emphasizes the intriguing originality of the texts: “No matter how gruesome the circumstances are, they also show their comical and grotesque side, and thus – a true abyss.”<sup>42</sup> Krall does not present a “cosmic view”, suggesting that the world has some absurd order, but uses detached language to filter out from her characters’ biographies “those moments when they become fate”. The difficult balance that Krall’s prose maintains between a documentary and literary style creates “true images of history” with an existential dimension<sup>43</sup>.

<sup>37</sup>Lühe, 107–108. As for the reportage, Lühe recalls the times of the Weimar Republic (Egon Erwin Kisch, Maria Leitner, Lili Körber, Alfred Polgar, Joseph Roth) and the postwar period (Alexander Kluge, Erika Runge, Max von der Grün, Günter Wallraff) with their ideals of matter-of-factness, truth, authenticity and social criticism.

<sup>38</sup>Jakob Hessing, „Eine Poetik der Erinnerung. Die Geschichten der Zeugen: Hanna Kralls erzählte Berichte über Opfer und Täter“, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* 10.07.1999, Rezension: Belletristik: Eine Poetik der Erinnerung (faz.net), accessed: 26.04.2024.

<sup>39</sup>Heinz Ludwig Arnold, „Im Schnee, da saß ein Mädchen. Mehr als ein Mahnmal: Hanna Krall berichtet von polnischen Juden“, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* 4.11.1997, Rezension: Belletristik: Im Schnee, da saß ein Mädchen (faz.net) (accessed: 27.04.2024).

<sup>40</sup>Cornelia Geissler, „Dokumentaristin der Erinnerung“, *Berliner Zeitung* 25.03.2000, Dokumentaristin der Erinnerung (berliner-zeitung.de), accessed: 27.04.2024.

<sup>41</sup>Geissler.

<sup>42</sup>Kerstin Hensel, „Vom Überleben in mörderischen Zeiten. Die Kunst des Weglassens und der Distanz: «Hypnose» von Hanna Krall“, *Tageszeitung* 31.05.1997, Vom Überleben in mörderischen Zeiten - taz.de, accessed: 27.04.2024.

<sup>43</sup>Hensel.

According to Katharina Doebler, the concept of literary reportage is not appropriate for stories about the dead, the survivors, and the empty spaces left behind by the deceased.<sup>44</sup> Treating Hanna Krall as a “narrator of the Shoah”, documenting the memories and biographies of survivors, fails to capture the essence of her prose: “With minimalist language and narrative conciseness that shifts the focus of the story to the empty spaces of the unwritten, [Krall] describes a state of loss, the ever-incomprehensible absence of the dead – not only those who died in the Holocaust.” In the dispute between two positions on the representation of the Holocaust: apologists of pure documentation, who reject any drama as trivializing the Holocaust, and those who seek a narrative that would reflect the fate of those murdered, Krall follows the path of meticulous work on details, imposing concrete form to biographies and episodes from the lives of characters. She writes about family holidays, dyed hair, maids in love, typewriters (the title of the review is *Duchy konkretności – The Ghosts of Concreteness*). Doebler wonders whether it is even possible to grade such writing. “The language and gaze are increasingly focused on the crystalline edges that have formed around empty spaces, on remnants such as stray abandoned objects, like ghosts on Nalewki Street or like the river in the titular story.”<sup>45</sup>

Reports about Germans as the subjects of stories are of particular interest in Germany. They remain the perpetrators (occupiers or terrorists), but there is a human side to them: opposition to mass extermination, membership in a conspiracy group, social ostracism because of a Polish father. Among Hanna Krall’s reportages, there are two stories whose main characters are Germans: the first is *Dno oka* [*The Back of the Eye*],<sup>46</sup> a story about Stefan Wisniewski, a terrorist of the Rote Armee Fraktion and co-perpetrator of the assassination of Hanns-Martin Schleyer; the second is *Fantom bólu* [*The Phantom of Pain*], the wartime story of Axel von dem Bussche, a Wehrmacht officer who was one of conspirators planning an assassination attempt on Hitler.<sup>47</sup> When asked by a German journalist, Julia Kospach, if she did not want to portray German perpetrators as monsters, Hanna Krall replied: “They were monsters. I am afraid of them. That is why I avoid getting close to them. In my story about the Hamburg police battalion, there is an episode about a group of artists from Berlin who want to take part in the shooting of Jews. I would be afraid of these people.”<sup>48</sup> She admits in her conversation with Kospach that when Axel von dem Bussche told her how his friend had died beside him on the first day of the war, she felt sympathy for a German soldier for the first time. “I was disturbed by this feeling myself,” the writer confesses.<sup>49</sup> Axel von dem Bussche was the first German of the war generation with whom she spoke.<sup>50</sup> The reason for writing these stories, as the author declares, was a desire to understand:

<sup>44</sup>Katharina Doebler, „Die Geister des Konkreten. Wie Hanna Krall aus Tatsachen Literatur macht”, *Die ZEIT* 23.09.1999, *Die Geister des Konkreten* | ZEIT ONLINE, accessed: 27.04.2024.

<sup>45</sup>Doebler.

<sup>46</sup>Hanna Krall, *Dno oka* [*The Back of the Eye*] (vol. *Taniec na cudzym weselu* [*Dancing at Someone Else’s Wedding*]), in her: *Fantom bólu. Reportaże wszystkie*, 418–433.

<sup>47</sup>Hanna Krall, *Fantom bólu* (vol. *Taniec na cudzym weselu*), in her: *Fantom bólu. Reportaże wszystkie*, 434–455.

<sup>48</sup>Julia Kospach, „Ich habe Angst. Der Holocaust, das Mitleid und die Literatur: Ein Gespräch mit der polnischen Autorin Hanna Krall über ihre schriftstellerische Arbeit”, *TAZ*, 24.04.1999, <https://taz.de/!1291696/>, accessed: 27.04.2024. See: Hanna Krall, *Pola* [*Fields*] (vol. *Tam już nie ma żadnej rzeki*), in her: *Fantom bólu. Reportaże wszystkie*, 654–663.

<sup>49</sup>Kospach.

<sup>50</sup>Gerhard Gnauck, „Ich will verstehen. Gespräch mit Hanna Krall, die in Leipzig den Preis für Europäische Verständigung erhält”, *Die Welt* 25.03.2000, *Ich will verstehen* – WELT, accessed: 28.04.2024.

In *Dno oka* (from the volume *Hipnoza*), I try to understand Stefan W. His father Stanisław, was a Polish forced laborer in Germany. He was in Dachau, and later stayed in Germany. Stefan joined the RAF and was sentenced to life imprisonment for the kidnapping of Schleyer. He had read my book *Zdążyć przed Panem Bogiem* and wrote to me from prison. I wanted to know what drove him to terrorism. I think it was revenge. Revenge for the humiliation he suffered at the hands of those around him, because his father was a Polish prisoner, while the fathers of his schoolmates were war heroes.<sup>51</sup>

The alienation from the German fate, the insurmountable distance from the German participant in the war remains, as in the case of the “Nordic baron” who, in *To ty jesteś Daniel* (*So You Are Daniel*), through the power of the author’s imagination, becomes an afterimage of the Jews shot by the SS-members in Dubno: “That the world will show them a beautiful autumn landscape with a young man on a horse as a farewell.”<sup>52</sup> The Germans’ ignorance concerning the Third Reich, the National Socialist terror, and the so-called Eastern Front in the occupied territories of Central and Eastern Europe is manifested, for example, in the reactions of mothers in Krall’s reportage *Dno oka*<sup>53</sup>. This ignorance, which also concerns subsequent generations, certainly hinders the reception of Hanna Krall’s reportage and, more generally, books about World War II and the Holocaust. Translator Bernhard Hartmann also points out the following: German readers do not know and do not understand the details of Polish history and the German occupation; they lack historical knowledge. A different cultural memory and culture of remembrance of the neighbors, therefore, stands in the way of a wider reception of Polish literature.<sup>54</sup> Nevertheless, the list of translations of Hanna Krall’s reportages into German is the longest<sup>55</sup>, featuring a total of fourteen of her books, including separate translations of *Hipnoza* by Wanja W. Ronge (*Legoland*, 1990) and Roswitha Matwin-Buschmann (*Hypnose*, 1997) respectively.<sup>56</sup>

The question of the reception of Hanna Krall’s “Holocaust reportages,” to borrow a term from Anna Dobiegała<sup>57</sup>, encompasses not only the issue of the translatability of literary texts and historical and cultural realities, but also the genre context – what is reportage or literary reportage? What position does it occupy in both linguistic areas? Also of interest are the broad issues of research and literary description of the Holocaust: memorial and post-memorial

<sup>51</sup>Gnauck.

<sup>52</sup>Hanna Krall, Styczeń 1991. Lehrensteinsfeld [January 1991. Lehrensteinsfeld] (vol. *To ty jesteś Daniel*), *Fantom bólu. Reportaże wszystkie*, 790–792, 792.

<sup>53</sup>„– Besides– other mothers said to other children – if his father was in a camp, he was there for a reason. Hitler or not, he would not have been imprisoned without a cause.” Krall, *Dno oka*, 423.

<sup>54</sup>See Mirosława Zielińska, „Auf dem Weg zum Monolog im Schatten des Zweiten Weltkriegs zum Polylog der global citizen. Kulturtransfer der polnischen Literatur im deutschsprachigen Raum (1989/1990-2010)”, *Erwachsene Nachbarschaft. Die deutsch-polnischen Beziehungen 1991 bis 2011*, ed. by Dieter Bingen et al. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2011), 377–372, <https://depot.ceon.pl/handle/123456789/2971?locale-attribute=pl>, accessed: 30.04.2024.

<sup>55</sup>See the list of Hanna Krall’s translations available at Polish Institute’s website. The Polish Book Institute ([instytutksiazki.pl](http://instytutksiazki.pl)), accessed: 30.04.2024.

<sup>56</sup>Both volumes differ in the selection of texts and go beyond the reportages from *Hipnoza* (Warszawa: Alfa, 1989). The titular *Legoland* is *Spotkanie w Dolinie Białego* [A Meeting in the Valley of Białe].

<sup>57</sup>Anna Dobiegała, „Rzeczy jako język dyskursu memorialnego w holokaustowych reportażach Hanny Krall”, [„Things as a language of memorial discourse in Hanna Krall’s Holocaust reportages”] *Teksty Drugie* 1-2 (2013), 224–238.

discourse (memory and post-memory), issues of representation and its limits, eyewitness and secondary literature, and cross-sectional studies. However, these issues require separate readings and comparative studies.

translated by Justyna Rogos-Hebda

Hanna Krall's translators (in alphabetical order):

**Bernhard Hartmann:** Różowe strusie pióra [Pink Ostrich Feathers] / Rosa Straußenfedern (Frankfurt am Main: Neue Kritik, 2012), Biała Maria [White Maria] / Weiße Maria (Frankfurt am Main: Neue Kritik, 2014).

**Esther Kinsky:** Dowody na istnienie [Evidence for Existence] / Existenzbeweise. Sieben Erzählungen (Frankfurt am Main: Neue Kritik, 1995).

**Anna Leszczyńska:** Sublokatorka [The Subtenant] / Die Untermieterin (Frankfurt am Main: Neue Kritik, 1986), Unschuldig für den Rest des Lebens. Frühe Reportagen (Frankfurt am Main: Neue Kritik, 2001) with Roswitha Matwin-Buschmann, Johanna Österreich and Hubert Schumann.

**Roswitha Matwin-Buschmann:** Hipnoza [Hypnosis] / Hypnose. Erzählungen (Frankfurt am Main: Neue Kritik, 1997), Tam już nie ma żadnej rzeki [There is No River There Anymore] / Da ist kein Fluß mehr (Frankfurt am Main: Neue Kritik, 1999), To ty jesteś Daniel [So You Are Daniel] / Ach du bist Daniel (Frankfurt am Main: Neue Kritik, 2002), Wyjątkowo długa linia / [An Exceptionally Long Line] Eine ausnehmend lange Linie (Frankfurt am Main: Neue Kritik, 2005).

**Hubert Schumann:** Zdążyć przed Panem Bogiem [Eng. Shielding the Flame] / Dem Herrgott zuvorkommen. Ein Tatsachenbericht (Berlin: Volk und Wissen, 1979, reprint Frankfurt am Main: Neue Kritik, 1992), Unschuldig für den Rest des Lebens: literarische Reportagen aus Polen (Frankfurt am Main: Neue Kritik, 1983), Tanz auf fremder Hochzeit (Frankfurt am Main: Neue Kritik, 1993).

**Renate Schmidgall:** Król kier na wylocie [Chasing the King of Hearts] / Herzkönig (Frankfurt am Main: Neue Kritik, 2007).

**Klaus Staemmler:** Zdążyć przed Panem Bogiem / Schneller als der liebe Gott (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1980)

**Wanja W. Ronge:** Hipnoza / Legoland (Frankfurt am Main: Neue Kritik, 1990).

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# KEYWORDS

Hanna Krall

*literary reportage*

**ABSTRACT:**

Since the publication of *Zdążyć przed Panem Bogiem* [Eng. *Shielding the Flame*] in East Germany (1979) and West Germany (1980), Hanna Krall's reportages have enjoyed popularity among readers and recognition among critics. However, no new translations have appeared in the last ten years. This article discusses the reception of Krall's literary reportages on the Holocaust in books, academic articles, and the German press, analyzing them to reveal the characteristic features of the author's narrative (the poetics of understatement, minimalist language, details) and the contexts of reading: the work of memory, testimonial literature, literary representations of the Holocaust, Polish-Jewish relations and fates, and the genre of the reportage. The paper concludes with a list of names of translators of Hanna Krall's reportages into German.

## German translation

### GERMAN-SPEAKING COUNTRIES

## the Holocaust

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