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Baackmann, Susanne. *Writing the Child: Fictions of Memory in German Postwar Literature*

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Writing the Child: Fictions of Memory in German Postwar Literature, we learn in the preface, is inspired by author Susanne Baackmann's own German family history. In it, she sets out to combine the personal with the professional, as she confronts the silence she encountered growing up in Germany from her own parents, who did not talk about their war time childhood and youth. Thus, Baackmann ponders the cross-generational effects of war and asks how the silence about it shaped her, "a white woman born in the Ruhr Valley well after May 1945" (preface). At the same time, the author claims that the book also reckons with the discontinuities of her life in America for the past three decades and her marriage into a Jewish-American family: "How to traverse these intersections of different yet interrelated histories and cultures resting on legacies of systemic persecution, discrimination, and domination?" Baackmann asks. As a descendant of both a German mother and a Jewish-American father, Baackmann writes, her own daughter will have to follow the dictum of philosopher Hannah Arendt, after whom she is named and which also serves as one of the epigraphs to the book: "The best one can achieve is to know and make space for precisely what has been and then to wait and see what comes of knowing."

In following Arendt's invitation to know, make space, and learn from the past, Baackmann looks for information her parents were unable to provide. As a literary scholar, she hopes that fictional texts will shed light on personal and collective memory of the Second World War and "open new possibilities of thinking about the past beyond the certainties of historical facts" (202). While Part One discusses fiction written by and featuring German "Kriegskinder" (children of war), the shorter Part Two deals with texts by second and third generation authors, the "Kriegsenkel" (grandchildren of war).

"The child is never just a child," a recurring phrase in the book, is also its central premise. In six chapters, Baackmann discusses the child as an implicated witness to the Nazi Past, a memory icon, and an icon of knowing otherness. *Writing the Child* picks up in the 1990s and analyzes literary texts by Dieter Forte, Günter

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Grass, Gisela Elsner, Hans-Ulrich Treichel, and Rachel Seiffert against the backdrop of the politics of Germany's cultural memory of the Second World War. Baackmann locates the fictional child witness in the "fluid interspaces which expose gradations between victim and perpetrator, accomplice, and onlooker" (11). On the one hand, Baackmann argues that the voice of the child as a war victim symbolizes a world in shambles. On the other hand, she interprets it aesthetically as "an obfuscation of history" (17). In this context, Baackmann questions whose suffering has been validated after 1945, who has taken responsibility, and who has claimed innocence then and in modern day Germany, where the Nazi legacy rebounds in the present with the rise of the far-right *Alternative für Deutschland* party.

Baackmann successfully "achieved knowledge" and "made space" for what has been her parents' generations' secrets by filling that blank space with solid analyses of several fictional works. However, in this reviewer's opinion, the author did not convincingly show that the book also illuminated how three decades in the US have affected her. Perhaps this important perspective will be shared in another project, which could also include Jewish children voices and reflections on the Holocaust, which were purposefully left out in *Writing the Child.* Overall, the book could have also benefited from a clearer structure. The section titled "The Plan of the Book" does not aid in the reader's understanding and could have easily been incorporated into the introductory chapter. It is unclear why the summary of Chapter 1 precedes an explanation of Part 1, to which Chapter 1 belongs. Forte's novel *Der Junge mit den blutigen Schuhen* (1995), which is considered "exemplary" and is said to serve as a point of departure for the whole book, is only discussed in Chapter 2. While the book's structure, due to its many (somewhat repetitive) sections, is its weakest point, the content and literary analyses will nonetheless provide valuable insight to anyone interested in how contemporary writers have used the figure of the German child to write about the Second World War.