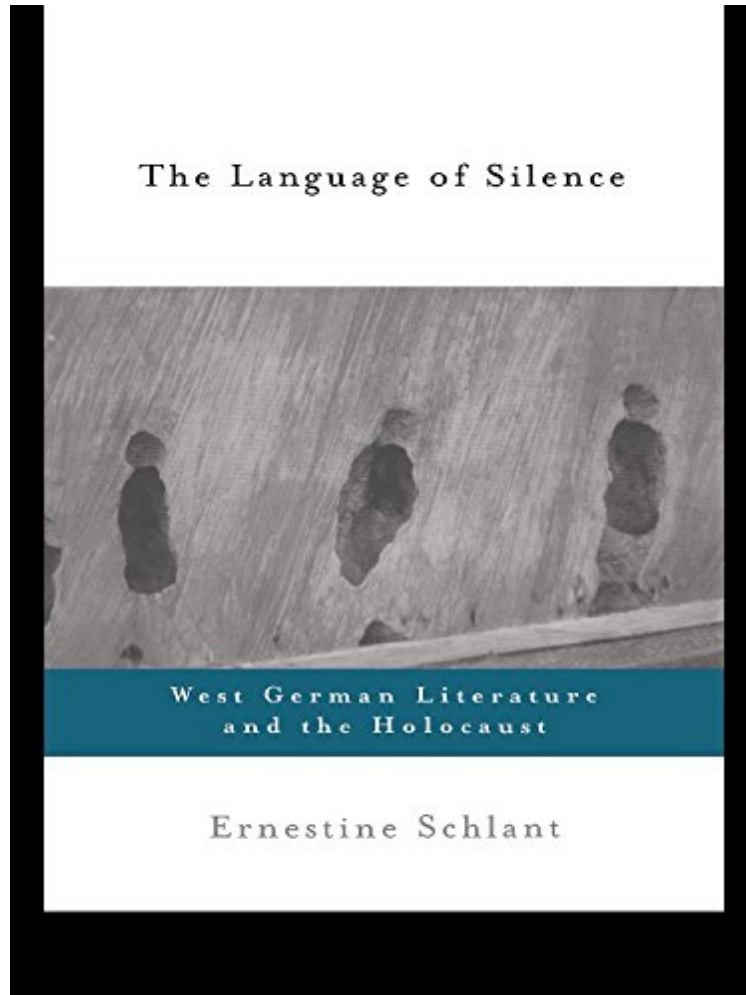


(Library ebook) The Language of Silence: West German Literature and the Holocaust

The Language of Silence: West German Literature and the Holocaust

Ernestine Schlant

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Ernestine Schlant : The Language of Silence: West German Literature and the Holocaust before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Language of Silence: West German Literature and the Holocaust:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Changes in the telling of the Shoah in literature over time
CustomerThe cover of THE LANGUAGE OF SILENCE tells the story. It is a memorial wall at a Grunewald, Germany, train station. The solid wall surrounds cut out forms of people looking as if they are the ones at the front of the line ready to board the trains. But there are no actual people there, just their remembered shapes. In an erudite exploration of West German literature, Ernestine Schlant details how the Holocaust has been covered or ignored by authors representing various generations from the ones who were adults during that time to their grandchildren. The differences are stark. Immediately following the Holocaust, authors tended to either ignore what happened to the

victims, mostly Jewish for the purposes of this book, and, at times, focused on the suffering of the Germans: Their leader died, their cities were bombed, they lacked the food and other goods. Many Germans continued to be anti-Semitic. The few Jews who were mentioned had often converted and were unattached to the Jewish community. This matched the reality of the society. Many of the perpetrators, especially civil servants, judges, and military personnel, retained their jobs, received pensions while the survivors of the concentration camps received little compensation, if any. It was only when the younger generations, especially those who were born long after the Holocaust, began their writings, did they begin to examine what happened to the Jews and why. Distance determined how close they got to the subject as well as how they portrayed both the Germans and the Jews: Who were the victims? What did the others do? Why? A video of Schlant discussing the book is available at [...]

8 of 8 people found the following review helpful. If you are serious...By A CustomerI've read most of the novels in Dr. Schlant's book. Yet when I turned the last page of LANGUAGE, I knew that one of my next projects will have to include re-reading them. She rightly isolates the lone voices who dared speak up from 1945 - 1960 or so, especially Karl Jaspers. Perhaps if we ask, she will write a sequel on the individuals she does identify as positive role models in an era when they were few. [Note: I think I disagree with her assessment of Werner Bergengruen's works, as he was widely read by the small numbers involved in German resistance, and was a special friend of the White Rose. In fact, he manually duplicated some of their leaflets not knowing he knew the authors, an action that could have met with death. But I will not quibble.] Even if she never gets around to a follow-up work, this one will have accomplished something few others have dared to speak aloud, namely boldly proclaiming that the world has not expected too much of Germany, that there have not been too many books about the Holocaust, that in fact those who chant "there's no business like Shoah business" are the worst informed of the lot. For what she says is true -- Germany must figure out how to mourn the dead. Once the nation is willing to collectively grieve (and not sate its conscience by buying Magen David necklaces and swelling the numbers at klezmer concerts), then perhaps the writing of books about the Holocaust can end. But not before then. Thank you, Dr. Schlant.

49 of 51 people found the following review helpful. literature as the seismograph of a people's unconsciousBy ursula duba (duba@rcn.com) At a recent book party for Ernestine Schlant (a.k.a. Mrs. Bill Bradley), I was particularly struck with Ms. Schlant's statement that "literature is the seismograph of a people's unconscious". Ms. Schlant and I both grew up in Germany. She was nine years old at the end of WWII, I was six. We both live in the US and have a foot in both worlds. I attended schools where "former" Nazi teachers made sure that I didn't know about the atrocities committed by my people, was surrounded by a thick wall of impenetrable silence and like many young Germans of my generation, including Schlant, didn't find out about the Holocaust until I ventured abroad as a young adult and was confronted with its horror. It can safely be said that the official silence of the first twenty postwar years has long since given way to debates, discussions, the publication of many non-fiction books, documentaries, and so forth. While German authors like Heinrich Böll (who received the Nobel prize in 1972), Günter Grass (one of last year's nobelists), Wolfgang Borchert, Siegfried Lenz, and others have written eloquently about the horrors and the madness of war and our misery because of it, literature by non-Jewish Germans depicting and addressing the suffering of fellow German-Jewish citizens continues to be virtually nonexistent. We saw our world as shattered by WWII and its aftermath, Jews disappeared - while the language with which we describe our own suffering is rich in nuance and texture, the language we use to describe the fate of Jews is abstract and devoid of emotional resonance. In my own research, I have found that many of my countrymen believe that there is in fact an abundance of literature written by German gentiles which deals with the plight of European Jews in general and German Jews in particular. In reality, there is a distinct absence of Holocaust victims as protagonists in literature written by German gentiles. Many if not most Germans seem to consider literature about their own suffering during WWII and the chaos of the postwar years, and condemnation of the Hitler regime as synonymous with writing about Holocaust victims. It doesn't strike them as extraordinary that there are almost no books written by them about our former Jewish fellow citizens, who had lived in Germany for hundreds of years, had contributed to our culture and society, had been our neighbors, our class-mates, our colleagues, our acquaintances, our friends and our relatives. As Ms. Schlant brilliantly demonstrates in her book, even after WWII, when it was perfectly safe to do so, almost no books were written by Germans, which explored their feelings about the forced emigration or deportation to a sure death of their Jewish fellow citizens. Not even by the roughly half a million German gentiles who had acquired Jewish relatives through marriage. One could expect that at least a handful of those might have felt compelled to write about the emotional fallout of the tragedies of their Jewish in-laws, aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews, or cousins. In my first collection of narrative poetry TALES FROM A CHILD OF THE ENEMY (so far only published in the US) the stories of Holocaust victims and survivors whom I met in Brooklyn during the sixties, figure prominently. I have returned to Germany regularly to share my work with students and others. Several Germans involved in creating Holocaust teaching curricula, have criticized my inclusion of Holocaust victims in my writing and have suggested that 'I should write about my experience, and Holocaust survivors should write about theirs'. To this day, German Jews are referred to as Jews, hardly ever as German citizens, thereby continuing their marginalization in German consciousness. Not surprisingly, young Germans are generally unaware that German Jews had been fully integrated and assimilated into German society prior to the Holocaust. Yes, German gentiles visit Israel; some young Germans pick weeds on kibbutzim during their holidays; others join Action

Reconciliation and perform lowly tasks in Jewish nursing homes. But to this day we Germans have failed by and large to incorporate the fates, the sorrow and the suffering of our fellow German-Jewish citizens into our literature. What then does the seismograph of the unconscious as reflected in German literature, say about The New Germany?

Focusing on individual authors from Heinrich Boll to Gunther Grass, Hermann Lenz to Peter Schneider, *The Language of Silence* offers an analysis of West German literature as it tries to come to terms with the Holocaust and its impact on postwar West German society. Exploring postwar literature as the barometer of Germany's unconsciously held values as well as of its professed conscience, Ernestine Schlant demonstrates that the confrontation with the Holocaust has shifted over the decades from repression, circumvention, and omission to an open acknowledgement of the crimes. Yet even today a 'language of silence' remains since the victims and their suffering are still overlooked and ignored. Learned and exacting, Schlant's study makes an important contribution to our understanding of postwar German culture.

From *Library Journal* Schlant, a specialist in German literature, has written a study of West German literature and its relation to the Holocaust, focusing on non-Jewish German authors writing between 1949 and 1990. She discusses the Holocaust as a total war against the Jews and the writings of the period as a literature of silence, evasion, and blindness. Bll, Grass, Koeppen, Kluge, Schlink, and Sebald are some of the authors discussed. Schlant gives novels about fathers (vaterliteratur) written between 1975 and 1981 a separate chapter, and Ortheils *A Farewell to the War Veterans* receives a close and sustained reading. Lenz's autobiographical novel *New Times*, about the fighting on the Eastern Front, is examined as a narrative, especially as regards what is left out, disfigured, or silenced. A chapter on speeches and controversy is especially good in discussing not only the written word but also the causes, development, understanding, and psychological repression of the reality of the Holocaust. An excellent study; highly recommended for German and Jewish studies collections. [Schlant is the wife of presidential hopeful Bill Bradley. Ed.] Gene Shaw, NYP.-Gene Shaw, NYPL Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. From *Booklist* Schlant, a professor of German and comparative literature at Montclair State University, has studied the writings of West German novelists from 1949 to 1990, concluding that in their approach to the Holocaust, the majority of the works are essentially a "language of silence." The author is a non-Jew, as are the novelists she studied, which include Nobel Prize[^]-winner Heinrich Boll and Gunter Grass. The sequence of the authors' chapters follows roughly a chronological order, showing how the nature of the silence has changed over the decades. Schlant begins with a chapter examining the generation that tried, in the first postwar decade, to find its literary voice in what she calls the "literature of the rubble," and ends with a chapter that discusses the efforts of some novelists to introduce a dialogue between Jews and non-Jews. The author envisions some hope for the future, writing that this literature "has begun to express sorrow and mourning, and has started to acknowledge and include the Jewish presence in Germany." Schlant quotes such notable historians, writers, and scholars as Theodor Adorno, Jean Amery, Hannah Arendt, Paul Celan, Saul Friedlander, Raul Hilberg, Rolf Hochhuth, Thomas Mann, and George Steiner in supporting her thesis. The book is thoughtful and innovative, riveting in its narrative, analysis, and details. George Cohen "Ernestine Schlant has written a book of profound moral and historical importance...a landmark of moral courage and historical integrity." -- Arthur Hertzberg, past President, the American Jewish Congress, Bronfman Professor of the Humanities, New York University "Schlant's book is thorough; its insightful analyses reveal a talent for delicate, close reading...useful as a reference on the cultural history of West Germany." -- *Choice* - Sept. 1999 "This eminently readable and engaging book is an important contribution to the literature of the Holocaust." -- Walter Hinderer, Professor of German, Princeton University