Editors’ Introduction

This issue of the *Journal of Literature and Trauma Studies* gathers together perspectives on the literatures of memory and trauma related to the specific complexities of the “experience” of the Nazi rise to power and the attendant horrors and political and personal catastrophes the establishment of Nazi political power entailed. The defeat and collapse of Nazi power eventually established the subsequent division into Eastern and Western Europe that reoriented older geographical, political, national, and cultural perspectives. Crucially, then, the articles presented here deal with what may be termed “the literatures of the aftermath” and therefore the interlocking problems of both personal remembrance and cultural memory that always occur in the “after” impact of the events. All the articles present here recognize the irreducible nature of traumatic events with the subsequent strivings of troubled memory and the demands of a damaged language.

This interlacing pattern of traumatic events, the strivings of remembrance, and the demands of literary form is forever extending itself and requires an ever-expanding and self-critical series of literary categories and concepts in order to keep pace with the demands of both the memory of those events and the literary and cultural forms that emerge to deal with this demand. The national literary identities presented here are testimony to the range and depth of the responses to the Nazi “system” and also to the ways this “system” affected the life of postwar Europe and the aesthetic sensibilities and lives of those who survived and the generations that came immediately after.

The articles take in writers from Hungary, Germany, and France. However, in line with the continuing and pressing concerns of post- and trans-
generational memory, there are articles that examine the complex patterns of how the crucible of the literature and memory of these events and experiences has inevitably moved beyond the geographical boundaries of postwar Europe only to remain firmly attached to it, as is the case with the work of Anne Michaels. There are attendant theoretical problems involved in these questions and this issue on post-war European literature also opens a debate on how some of the literary, psychoanalytic and historiographical categories may be adapted and finessed in order to prepare the ground for further work.

The book review in this issue extends these concerns and issues, dealing with Jenni Adams and Sue Vice’s recent work on how we might attempt to understand versions of perpetrator testimony as even the very notion of “postwar” Europe begins to fade from sight.

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