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Aleksandra Z. Stojanović[1]
University of Kragujevac
Faculty of Philology and Arts

THE TESTIMONY OF SILENCE: EXPLORING TRAUMA IN ALEKSANDAR TIŠMA'S *THE USE OF MAN*

Abstract: *This paper explores the intricate web of testimony, storytelling, and the haunting (in)ability to speak in Aleksandar Tišma's novel* The Use of Man*. With a thematic framework encompassing critical perspectives on Holocaust representation, unspoken narratives, and the healing of trauma, the paper presents the multifaceted experiences of survivors and their enduring narratives. Tišma's unique approach to Holocaust representation serves as the backdrop for our exploration, emphasising the significance of testimony as a means of bearing witness to the indescribable Holocaust atrocities. Distinguishing between silence and muteness, the paper focuses on the silences that permeate the characters' lives, recognising that some stories are too painful to tell, even within the intimate confines of diary writing. Tišma's protagonists, like many real-life survivors, undergo a complex process of reintegration into their former lives, allowing in-depth exploration of the resilience of the human spirit in the face of unimaginable suffering. By weaving these themes together, an analysis of intricate narratives that emerge from the ashes of history provides evidence that silence can sometimes serve as the most poignant form of testimony.*

Keywords: *Holocaust representation, testimony, silence, diary, trauma,* The Use of Man*, Aleksandar Tišma.*

1. Aleksandar Tišma's Holocaust Representation

Crafting literary works that represent the Holocaust frequently confronts authors with a profound dilemma, leading to, as Joseph Hillis Miller writes, an impasse in writing. Miller (2011) recognises two aporias[2] in attempting to write fiction after

[1] aleksandra.stojanovic@filum.kg.ac.rs

[2] J. Hillis Miller (2011:p.182) defines an aporia as "an impasse in an argument in which two conclusions follow from the premises, but contradict one another, though neither can be chosen over the other."

the Holocaust. Namely, the first aporia centers on the 'inherently unthinkable and unspeakable' (Hillis Miller, 2011:p.182) nature of the concentration camps, which defies representation, while the second aporia explores 'turning the Nazi genocide into a fiction of any kind, "aestheticising" it' (Hillis Miller, 2011:p.187). Many literary critics maintain that while '[t]he Holocaust resists comprehension in its entirety, in the detail, the scope, the intricate cruelty, and the relentless brutality,' works depicting the evil of humankind and the suffering of millions should be created and "should not lead to resignation or disbelief" (Kraft, 2002:p.5). The Holocaust has taken on 'a mythic hue' (Hartman, 2010:p.28), becoming shrouded in an aura of mystery, sacredness, and incomprehensibility. Two problems arise concerning Holocaust fiction – representation and reception. *How should the Holocaust be represented in literature to provide 'a picture complete enough so that the real might become the intelligible?' (Hartman, 2010:p.28)*

Aleksandar Tišma's novel *The Use of Man,* though unintentionally, brings readers closer to the questions of representation and reception in Holocaust literature by incorporating documentary material in illuminating the post-traumatic experience of the Holocaust, the (im)possibility of sharing one's experience and the healing power of *storytelling* in overcoming trauma. 'Aleksandar Tišma's greatest achievement as a writer is not, or not only, that he 'represented' the lives of Jews in the space of former Yugoslavia in a manner unprecedented and unsurpassed, which he did, but that he integrated in the most intimate fibers of his narrative and then allowed to unravel [...] the crisis left in literature after the Holocaust of European Jewry' (Kujundžić, 2013:p.59).

Michael Rothberg (2000:p.3) identifies two approaches to Holocaust representation – the Realist and the Antirealist. The Realist approach is 'both an epistemological claim that the Holocaust is knowable and a representational claim that this knowledge can be translated into a familiar mimetic universe' (Rothberg, 2000:p.3-4). The Antirealist is 'both a claim that the Holocaust is not knowable or would be knowable only under radically new regimes of knowledge that it cannot be captured in traditional representational schemata' (Rothberg, 2000:p.4). The Antirealist approach 'removes the Holocaust from standard historical, cultural, or autobiographical narratives and situates it as a sublime, unapproachable object beyond discourse or knowledge' (Rothberg, 2000:p.4). This is Tišma's method of portraying his protagonist, Vera Kroner's, Holocaust experience. In general, Tišma's tone aligns more closely with the realist inclination, which Rothberg links to Hannah Arendt's concept of the 'banality of evil,' 'which sought to capture the essence of Nazi genocide in the ordinary figure of the bureaucrat' (Rothberg, 2000:p.4), suggesting

to the inherent quality of evil in man, in political systems, suggesting that evil is not an extraordinary thing. However, the novel effectively encapsulates the fundamental challenge of Holocaust representation. It does so through Vera Kroner's narrative as a survivor and her struggle to provide testimony, or rather, her incapacity to bear witness. Additionally, it explores the fictional depiction of the Holocaust by a documentary novelist, creating a narrative that resides in a state of ambiguity, somewhere in between the two realms – 'between "normal" and "extraordinary" understandings of methodology and representation; and between emphasising the extreme and everyday elements of the events' (Rothberg, 2000:p.6).

The Use of Man lacks a structured chronological sequence of events, devoid of any unifying spatial or temporal elements, thus exhibiting a conspicuous absence of narrative consistency. The result is a disorienting narrative, frequently causing confusion due to the inclusion of multiple narrative voices and interspersed recollections of memories, seamlessly blending the past with the present. The sentences within the narrative exude a dynamic quality, often left incomplete, resembling more of a listing style. This amalgamation of storytelling encompasses accounts of pre-war life, the traumatic experiences during the war, and the subsequent psychological states in the post-war period. The novel features several chapters, strategically placed within the narrative of the protagonists' lives, that show the progressive encroachment of inhumanity upon the city of Novi Sad and its residents, ultimately leaving a haunting legacy of emptiness and trauma, both physical and psychological. Although the chapters are not explicitly named, the first word of the text succinctly displays its contents – *Habitations*, *Evening separation*, *Bodies*, *Street scenes*, *Natural deaths and violent deaths*, *Other departures from home*. 'The very chapter titles, in the plural, anticipate the multiplication and massification of death in the shadow or embers of the Holocaust' (Kujundžić, 2013:p.69). While focusing on broader themes in these chapters, Tišma's novel presents the testimony of an ordinary man; a man whose inner world is shattered by incomprehensible tragedy. The novel itself resembles the testimony of a witness as 'the images are conveyed in raw form, unstructured, and the testimony can seem incoherent to the listener' (Kraft, 2002:p.21). Additionally, the 'testimony becomes elliptical, impressionistic, and not in a narrative form' (Kraft, 2002:p.22), which also mirrors Tišma's writing style.

In the novels of Aleksandar Tišma 'a great tale of unrelenting suffering, violence, and injustice is narrated, along with a love that simmers in unfulfillment or in the gap of everyday life, about the camps and the extinguishing of a humanistic concept of history' (Božović, 2005:p.168). Various manifestations of evil, stemming from diverse sources, take on a central role within Tišma's literary works. He represents

both evil that emerges unexpectedly and evil deeply rooted in mankind; the evil that were the concentration camps and 'evil that corrodes the small, ordinary individual' (Božović, 2005:p.169). Not only is Tišma concerned with presenting evil, but with the ways his protagonists react to such circumstances and how they navigate their past trauma in a new world. The words Holocaust survivors typically use when describing their experience are: '"a double existence," "another world," "a schizophrenic division," "two worlds," "two different planets," "double lives"' (Kraft, 2002:p.2), which points to a Balkanisation of memory, where Holocaust memories and normal memories are assigned to two different territories. In most cases, Holocaust memories are not incorporated into a survivor's sense of identity. Instead, they exist separately, representing a different version of themselves in a distinct time and place. (Kraft, 2002:p.2) When Vera Kroner returns from the concentration camp she feels out of place and describes her arrival as 'a shipwrecked sailor arriving on dry land' (Tišma, 1989:p.20), as 'the world she came from was another, far different'. (Tišma, 1989:p.20)

The research paper's uniqueness and significance are found in the psychoanalytic examination of Vera Kroner's Holocaust experience. Emphasis is placed on the apparent absence in her testimony, her silence, and the notable lack of a diary, diverging from the conventional focus on existing diaries and testimonies, such as that of Anna Drentvenšek. The examination delves into the distinction between muteness and silence, investigating the implications of traumatic events on language. The challenges of articulating one's narrative within the constraints of Lacan's symbolic order are discussed, illustrating the inherent difficulty in being heard or understood by others. Vera's incapacity to document her experience is initially considered, followed by her struggle with verbal expression, ultimately culminating in the therapeutic act of burning Anna Drentvenšek's diary as an attempt to overcome trauma and heal her fragmented identity. Throughout the exploration, broader implications of Holocaust representation are examined, including the imperative need for testimony, the societal pressure on survivors to provide it, and the internal processes involved in the act of testifying.

2. Words Left Unwritten

'Tišma is an impartial *witness*, an analyser of human tragedy, the misuse and abuse of man, whose tragic fate is shaped not only by change, i.e., "Gods", but by people themselves' (Popović, 1980:p.330). Although he was not a victim of the Holocaust and had no first-had experience with the trauma he conveys in his work, Tišma's

works provide a literary testimony of the events and its psychological consequences. *The Use of Man* is thus 'a textual testimony which can *penetrate us like an actual life'* (Felman, 1995:p.14), presenting a vivid image of pain and suffering to bring better understanding of the over-reaching and engulfing trauma that was the Holocaust. The Holocaust goes 'beyond powers of both imagination and conceptualisation' as it 'posed problems of "representation" at the time of its occurrence, and it continues to pose problems today' (LaCapra, 1994:p.220). Tišma's Holocaust novels most prominently emphasise a rift in understanding and representation as they are 'undoubtedly part of the new aesthetics and ethics of representation that arose around Auschwitz as the ultimate reference point that simultaneously establishes the limits of humanity and threatens its destruction' (Gvozden, 2005:p.90). He portrays the capacity of humanity to inflict pain not only upon others but also upon itself. Simultaneously, while delving deep into human inner turmoil amidst challenging circumstances and malevolence, Tišma becomes the voice of the Yugoslavian experience during the Holocaust, encapsulating an entire epoch.

The novel centers on the experiences of three protagonists, Vera Kroner, Miloje Božić, and Sredoje Lazukić, both before and after the war. They shared a common childhood, having attended a German language class taught by Anna Drentvenšek, also known as Fräulein. Each of them endured their own distinct traumas during the war: Vera suffered in a concentration camp and a brothel, Miloje was left maimed and without limbs from his time in the trenches, and Sredoje tragically lost his entire family due to the war. The thread that connects these characters is a diary that Anna Drentvenšek leaves behind on her deathbed, instructing Vera to burn it. This diary changes hands among the protagonists, eventually ending up with Vera and Sredoje, who, in the novel's conclusion, decide to burn it. This paper does not primarily center on Anna Drentvenšek's diary itself but rather explores the concept of diary writing and how it serves as a means to address and work through the trauma experienced by the protagonists, namely, Vera Kroner whose connection to the diary is most explicitly stated in the novel.

> 'If to witness events is to participate in them, even to become a walking trace of them, then to testify would seem to affirm for the writer just this intimate link with experience [...] For the diarists and memoirists intuit that in asking literature to establish the facts of the Holocaust–or evidence of events–they are demanding not just that words signify experiences, but that they become–like the writers themselves–*traces* of their experiences.' (Young, 1988:p.23)

Vera does not attempt to write her own diary, because she wishes to distance herself from the experience, rather than create a more intimate link with it by

creating physical traces of it. 'Vera volunteered her story' (Tišma, 1989:p.182) to Mr. Bernister, an old family friend, and some pieces of it to Sredoje, but she found it impossible to write down her biography. When bearing witness in front of Mr. Bernister, there was no sense of finality about it, as the words Vera spoke remained free, unfixed, and, most importantly, uninterpreted. 'The words came easily; the man did not frighten her. His eyes were dull, his lined face like bark on a dead tree. It was as if he were not there' (Tišma, 1989:p.182). Vera told Sredoje about her brother Gerhard's suffering in prison and how her family was taken to the camp (Tišma, 1989:p.334), yet she omitted the events from the "House of Joy," the brothel she was held in.

The position of the witness represents 'a radically unique, noninterchangeable, and solitary burden' (Felman, 1995:p.15). Although Sredoje had his share of trauma, as did all of those who returned from the concentration camps, Vera's precise experience is hers alone and she carries that burden without the possibility for relief. Even if she had shared her experience, told somebody, written it down, it still would not have mattered. It would not have made a difference in overcoming her trauma because 'what the testimony does not offer is, however, a completed statement, a totalisable account of those events' (Felman, 1995:p.17). Vera cannot face her experiences even to relay them to herself, in the confines of her own thoughts. To testify to the horrors she endured would mean to define herself, to determine her position in the post-war world, while she is still navigating her present life in light of her past trauma.

Vera's trauma and muteness first become evident when she is filling out a questionnaire about herself and writing an adjoining biography:

> 'She tried to put the unutterable on paper. The crucial events, it seemed to her, ought to be described in the minutest detail, but they were in disorder, unconnected, and connecting them in memory would cause immeasurable distress. She tried to generalise, but that didn't work, for her generalisations quickly degenerated into half-truths and falsehoods. She threw the sheet of paper away, took another, and in a fury of decision hurled herself on that past which was suddenly demanded of her. But the words wouldn't come. She lay down, but her heart went on hammering, would have liked to run out into the street, but hadn't enough breath left to move. She was a prisoner of those blank sheets of paper, as she had been a prisoner in the camp. This was a camp too, she realised, a continuation of the camp in which she had been walled for a year and a half. The war had ended, but she had not escaped; her former captors, drowned in blood, even in death, stretched out their arms to her, to her captivity.' (Tišma, 1989:p.161)

Gasché (2018:p.4) emphasises the distinction between *muteness* and *silence* in which muteness 'arises when language has been crippled and when the human being has been violently deprived of what, so far, has been the property that distinguishes it from animals' and 'implies the impossibility of speech.' Silence, on the other hand, 'presupposes the possibility of utterance since it consists only in refraining from speech' (Gasché, 2018:p.4). Therefore, silence may only occur in situations where one is able to speak, but muteness presupposes violence, trauma, and the inability to *speak, tell, testify*. 'Holocaust memories deviate so radically from shared experience that language cannot adequately convey them, and Holocaust witnesses frequently refer to the insufficiency of language' (Kraft, 2002:p.32). Vera lacked the words necessary to describe the atrocities that befell her, which is why she left the paper *blank*. Just as Hillis Miller grappled with an impasse when attempting to write about fiction after the Holocaust, Vera confronted a similar impasse in crafting her own testimony.

A traumatic event creates a disruption, or void, in the Lacanian order of the Symbolic. As the Symbolic controls all linguistic communication and adherence to societal and ideological conventions (Žižek, 2006:p.11–13), such disruptions lead to muteness. Vera's imprisonment, rape, and the murder of her family emerges as 'an impasse of [her] symbolic universe' (Žižek, 2006:p.73–74), rendering her unable to properly incorporate the events into her language. In attempting to write her biography, Vera attempts to recall traumatic events, but since they remain unsymbolised, in a void created by the traumatic disruption, they cannot be perceived in linguistic terms, resulting in a blank paper. Lacan observes that 'at the very heart of the primary processes, we see preserved the insistence of the trauma in making us aware of its existence. The trauma reappears, in effect, frequently unveiled' (Lacan, 1987:p.55). Whenever Vera attempted to verbalise, or in this instance, write down her experiences, she was confronted with trauma's 'resistance to signification' (Lacan, 1987:p.129) and '*unassimilable*' (Lacan, 1987:p.55) nature.

Muteness is connected to anonymity and the complete eradication of self that leaves out the possibility of having a story and/or later relating that story to others. When destroying the questionnaire she had filled out, Vera deletes not just her biography, but her name as well. She has no name, no identity, no sense of selfhood. 'Prolonged atrocity splits the extended self, with one self-functioning in the normal world, guided by expectations from other people, and the other existing in the consuming memories of horror' (Kraft, 2002:p.133). The Vera Kroner that grew up in the province, took German lessons, was courted by Milinko Božić and danced with Sredoje Lazukić, does not exist anymore. She has returned from the

camps a shell of what was once there, defining herself through the torture, rape and inhumanity she endured. Vera's vision of herself and her understanding of her identity as a Jew, a woman was swayed by the events, and she does not have a clear understanding of who she is anymore. 'That suffering, once over, was a part of her life, a part of herself, and now, she could not imagine that it had never happened' (Tišma, 1989:p.143) and by returning to her previous life, Vera found she 'had moved further away from it than she could ever have imagined' (Tišma, 1989:p.143). The split in her identity was emphasised even further.

> 'Hence, she crossed out her name and in its place left a black line, a symbol of nothingness and emptiness: 'Then she sat down with the questionnaire and carefully crossed out, in thick ink, every word she had written. Now, following the questions was a row of black dashes, long and short. First name, last name: nothing. Father's name: nothing. Mother's name, maiden name: nothing. Day, month, year of birth: nothing. She was nothing.' (Tišma, 1989:p.162)

'The imperative to tell the story of the Holocaust is inhabited by the impossibility of telling, and therefore, silence about the truth commonly prevails' (Laub, 1995:p.64). To testify is to tell a story of one's experience. But, a story implies there is an understanding of events and that the "storyteller" has made sense of them before attempting to pass the story on to others (Gasché, 2018:p.18). Vera has nothing to write down because she has not made sense of her experience. She can retell it and give generalised facts on what happened, but she cannot fully internalise it and create a story that would be meaningful. Kraft (2002:p.83) discusses "learned silence" as a frequent phenomenon in concentration camps, whereby victims had to remain silent to survive and thus 'could not use language to interpret and assimilate events.' At the time of her captivity, Vera did not verbalise her pain and was passive, obedient and resigned. Thus, when presented with the opportunity to take on an active role in her traumatic experience through testimony, she remained mute. When they meet again after the war, Sredoje asks Vera if she is resigned with her life, her fate, her past. Vera answers that she survived but 'she suddenly burst into tears. She cried her heart out, lips twisted, face streaming; her body racked with such sobs that the couch on which she was sitting creaked' (Tišma, 1989:p.337). The question arises of how to overcome a traumatic experience and resign oneself to one's destiny when there is a complete sense of inability and unwillingness to accept the reality of such horrific events. The challenge lies in resigning oneself to the unacceptable (Van der Kolk & Van der Hart, 1995:p.178).

3. Silent Testimony and the Struggle to Speak

Before she was taken to the concentration camp, Vera had dreams of escaping her home and becoming "nameless", which she then associated with freedom: 'She saw herself on a busy street crowded with people, streetcars, glittering window displays, where she would pass unnoticed, no longer Vera Kroner, daughter of merchant Robert Kroner, but a nameless creature, reduced to her own healthy, supple body, in which she had full confidence' (Tišma, 1989:p.131). There is a profound contrast between the anonymity Vera yearned for before the war and what she encountered in its aftermath. Her initial longing for namelessness represented a concept of strength and liberation, but it underwent a profound transformation into one of vulnerability and confinement. She discovered herself trapped within the grip of her trauma, struggling to discern her own sense of self. Vera's desire to be reduced to her body shifted drastically when she found herself in the grim "House of Joy," where she was tattooed, branded, and subjected to the desires of soldiers. 'The role she was forced to inhabit in the brothel determined her own universe as well, subordinated her own personality, and narrowed the range of choices she was capable of conceiving to such a powerful extent that the continuation of her participation in the Nazi-brothel-like social and erotic relationships in postwar Novi Sad was almost inevitable' (Antić, 2009:p.60).

Vera's entire Jewish family, including her brother, father, and grandmother, were taken and killed by the Nazis. Vera was forced into the harrowing confines of a concentration camp, serving as part of a Nazi brothel. Sredoje Lazukić suffered the loss of his family. Milinko Božić, on the other hand, endured a different fate, perishing in a Polish hospital without a recognisable name or identity, mutilated beyond recognition. Vera and Sredoje emerged from the war with minimal visible physical injuries, their wounds primarily psychological. Caruth establishes that 'trauma seems to be much more than a pathology, or the simple illness of a wounded psyche: it is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available' (Caruth, 1996:p.4). Thus, the trauma must be told. However, for trauma to heal one must investigate the past and aim 'at resituating it in our understanding, that is, at precisely permitting history to arise where immediate understanding may not' (Caruth, 1996:p.11). For Vera, it was not only her experience in the "House of Joy" that left a wound that cries out, but also her feelings of isolation and difference growing up in a family of mixed religion. Vera's trauma, thus, pre-dates the war.

According to Jacques Lacan (2014:p.327), the initial trauma is the trauma of birth in which one experiences 'the inhalation, into oneself, of a fundamentally Other environment.' For Vera Kroner, there is an additional layer in the trauma of birth that encompasses her Jewish identity, an identity inherently defined as Other, in an environment of division and persecution. Vera's initial trauma thus stems from her Jewish identity and sense of being an outsider in her surroundings. Her childhood was marked by an inherent feeling that something is amiss with this part of her identity. She had an aversion to her family's traditional customs, superstitions, and religious practices and she actively avoided using these expressions or engaging in rituals, even feeling repulsed by them. Vera saw these traditions as outdated, senseless, and potentially divisive, as they categorised people based on their religion and adherence to customs (Tišma, 1989:p.68–69). She chose to keep her personality and mixed heritage private, which resulted in her maintaining a certain distance from others (Tišma, 1989:p.70). Vera found herself utterly alone, with no confidante, not even a diary, to bear witness to her life experiences. There is an inherent loneliness and division between Tišma's protagonist that stems from conflicting nationalities, faiths, doctrines, as well as their belonging to different social categories, age groups or genders. Such separations, gaps and "wounds" are prominent throughout the entire novel. Perhaps the most crucial factor in Vera's attachment to the diary, evidenced by her unwillingness to burn it per Anna's instructions, is that she established a deep connection and identification with the narrative; not with the events and the "facts" of Anna's life, but her suffering, pain, and loneliness. 'Fräulein was truly alone. She listened to every noise in the darkness [...] All the words she had to utter seemed to loom insurmountably high, like a soft, crumbling mountain that would collapse and bury her' (Tišma, 1989:p.35). After experiencing her own trauma, she adopted the language of loss and hopelessness that she had discovered in the diary, which she could not then fully grasp.

'There is, in each survivor, an imperative need to *tell* and thus to come to *know* one's story [...] one has to know one's buried truth in order to be able to live one's life' (Laub, 1995:p.63). The imperative to tell one's story is seen in Vera's behaviour directly upon returning to Novi Sad when she feels the urge to let everybody in her surroundings know the horrors she lived through in the camp: "She felt a need to tell everyone of her terrible suffering, but the words that had not yet been said weighed her down with their truthfulness, and with their non-truthfulness, too, for some things remained stuck inside her, silent, like resin"' (Tišma, 1989:p.146). Despite her need to testify, she could not do so because 'regardless of how well-meaning or how knowledgeable or how sincere the listener, unless a person has directly

experienced the Holocaust, it cannot be comprehended' (Kraft, 2002:p.4). Even when in the company of other survivors, she felt her story would not be understood as each person's experience is unique and traumatic in its own right. While Sredoje's entire family was also killed, he could not comprehend the rape and humiliation Vera endured in the "House of Joy,"[3] so some experiences remained unspoken trauma. Vera also stayed away from other surviving Jews, for fear that their questions 'would probe too deep' (Tišma, 1989:p.156). Vera distanced herself from others and fell into a 'malicious silence' (Tišma, 1989:p.119) because 'no amount of telling seems ever to do justice to this inner compulsion. There are never enough words or the right words, there is never enough time or the right time, and never enough listening or the right listening to articulate the story that cannot be fully captured in *thought*, *memory*, and *speech*' (Laub, 1995:p.63). In the British documentary film *The Pervert's Guide to Ideology* (2012), directed by Sophie Fiennes, Slavoj Žižek (2012: 01:42:03–16) states that the tragedy of mankind's predicament is that one needs 'an agency, which, as it were, registers our predicament; an agency where the truth of ourselves will be inscribed, accepted; an agency to which to confess.' The issue is, however, that in most cases no such agency exists, as when survivors return home upon experiencing a great tragedy they discover 'there is no one really to listen to them' (Žižek 2012: 01:42:45–47). When asked about her experience, Vera realises, despite any inherent desire to share her story, that either nobody can understand her testimony or they have no genuine interest in hearing it.

[3] In the "House of Joy" Vera was sterilized and raped: "They strapped my legs to a metal frame, tied my hands to my body, and a doctor wearing a mask and rubber gloves came in. They all bend over me. I saw a long drill-like needle that ended in a corkscrew, then felt a burning between my legs and, despite the numbness, a sharp pain deep inside, in the womb, as if it were being pulled out" (Tišma 1989:p.248). Vera's sterilization is depicted as "her first sexual intercourse, her loss of innocence" (Antić 2009:p.53). Aware that Officer Handke held the power to end Vera's life with a simple command, merely for disobedience, she gradually adopted a stance of submission, obedience, and docility. This adjustment became her survival strategy in the camp, a moment marking not just the loss of innocence but also the profound loss of her former self. Tišma's protagonists exhibit a marked passivity, refraining from assuming active roles in shaping their destinies. This aspect notably reinforces the novel's title, *The Use of Man*, as they find themselves being used rather than becoming those who use in their respective narratives. Prior to the war, Vera's life had been marked by passivity; during the war passivity was a survival mechanism amidst trauma. It was only in the aftermath of the war, when she set Fräulein's diary ablaze and made the decision to leave Novi Sad, that Vera exhibited the first signs of actively taking command of her memories and her life.

4. Finding Closure in the Aftermath of Trauma

The diary's significance in Vera's life is revealed by its position in the novel, as it frames the narrative and presents the main point of intersection between her carefree childhood and the traumas in her adulthood. Vera perceives her life as fragmented, disorganised, and chaotic, yet it is entirely controlled by the Nazi regime and, later, the Communist regime. 'Vera mourned everyone who had ever spoken to her, who had longed for her [...] They were all shadows now, voices from the past. Was there anything solid on this earth, anything that stood firm, so one would not need to say of it: 'That, too, has passed?' (Tišma, 1989:p.195). The diary stands as a symbol of endurance, strength and reliability in Vera's life, having remained unchanged despite the evils that plagued humanity and marked her life irrevocably. Even when Sredoje returned to Novi Sad after the war, 'there was no trace of his former existence, with the exception of Anna Drentvenšek's diary' (Tišma, 1989:p.291), establishing it as the singular constant of the novel. *Why did Vera not start writing her own diary?* Fräulein's diary greatly impacted her, and she formed an attachment to the idea that such a little book could hold an entire life, yet she never attempted to write down her own thoughts and experiences from the war. Anna Drentvenšek, though unhappy and traumatised by the events of her life (living in a foreign country, being left by her husband, having unrequited love), did have a stable grasp on who she was. On the other hand, Vera was faced with a dissociation from her previous identity, feeling a discontinuity between her prewar and post-war self. Writing in a structured, organised, and chronological manner, as a diary typically suggests, was not possible for Vera. A diary, however, proves to be a futile attempt at organising one's life and trying to establish dominance and control over events through their carefully structured retelling. The organisational strategies of political and ideological forces overpower the ordinary man as he is *used* by various people, institutions, and regimes.

Rereading the diary after their traumatic experiences imparts it with a different meaning (Tišma, 1989:p.333), a fresh perspective, as both Vera and Sredoje have matured, and their reading cannot be the same as it was in their innocent childhood. Similarly, post Holocaust literature undergoes a transformation and is relocated within a new context that demands an altered reception. Following the cathartic conversation about each other's Holocaust trauma, the pair were able to perceive each other based on who they had become, not by what they were in the past, making the choice not to meet again and to refrain from dwelling in the past.

In the act of burning the diary, Vera allows herself to confront her trauma, enabling it to penetrate deeply and move beyond the void of the symbolic order where trauma resides. We recall Vera's initial sense of division within her identity, a disunion of two worlds that, in the fire, undergo a process of melting and merging. The diary stands as a testament, encompassing not only Vera's trauma but also the broader spectrum of pain and suffering. Ignited in flames, it undergoes a transformative process, symbolising purification and revealing the potential for healing and addressing traumatic memories. The protagonists release the past and embrace their current traumatised identities through the act of burning pages symbolising adolescent bonds, prewar memories, and the remnants of a world irreversibly changed. Embracing their fragmented selves, they let the fire purify their wounds, acknowledging their trauma and striving to progress in life without being burdened by the unspoken, overshadowing weight of traumatic memories. The diary resists ignition on the initial try, symbolising the persistent nature of trauma and the difficulty of letting it go. Its pages catch fire sequentially, reflecting the gradual recording of experiences. What was once documented now disappears. The diary's conflagration reaches completion, guided 'as if driven by a need, a conviction' (Tišma, 1989:p.342), echoing the protagonists' yearning for completeness and healing.

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Александра З. Стојановић
Универзитет у Крагујевцу
Филолошко-уметнички факултет

СВЕДОЧАНСТВО ТИШИНЕ: ИСТРАЖИВАЊЕ ТРАУМЕ У РОМАНУ *УПОТРЕБА ЧОВЕКА* АЛЕКСАНДРА ТИШМЕ

Резиме

У раду се бавимо истраживањем комплексне мреже сведочења и приповедања, истичући посебно (не)могућност говора која прати протагонисте романа *Употреба човека* Александра Тишме. Тематски оквир рада обухвата критичке перспективе у вези са представљањем

Холокауста, неизговореним наративима и лечењем трауме, приказујући сложена искуства преживелих и њихове трајне приче. Приступ који Тишма користи у представљању Холокауста поставља основу анализе, истичући важност сведочења као начина да се осветли неописиво страдање у Холокаусту. У раду се истиче разлика између тишине од немости и посматрају се тишине које испуњавају животе ликова. Препознајемо да су неке приче превише болне да би биле испричане, чак и у интимном окружењу писања дневника. Као и многи преживели, Тишмини протагонисти пролазе кроз процес поновног уклапања у своје претходне животе, што омогућава темељно истраживање отпорности људског духа у суочавању са незамисливим патњама. Повезивањем ових тема, анализа наратива који израњају из пепела историје показује да тишина понекад може бити најдирљивији облик сведочења.

► ***Кључне речи***: представа Холокауста, сведочење, тишина, дневник, траума, *Употреба човека*, Александра Тишма.

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