

ADDICTED TO THE HOLOCAUST – BERNICE EISENSTEIN’S WAYS  
OF COPING WITH TROUBLESOME MEMORIES IN *I WAS A CHILD  
OF HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS*

DAGMARA DREWNIAK

*Faculty of English, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań*

ABSTRACT

In her *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* published in Canada in 2006, Bernice Eisenstein undertakes an attempt to cope with the inherited memories of the Holocaust. As a child of the Holocaust survivors, she tries to deal with the trauma her parents kept experiencing years after WWII had finished. Eisenstein became infected with the suffering and felt it inescapable. Eisenstein’s text, which is one of the first Jewish-Canadian graphic memoirs, appears to represent the voice of the children of Holocaust survivors not only owing to its verbal dimension, but also due to the drawings incorporated into the text. Therefore, the text becomes a combination of a memoir, a family story, a philosophical treatise and a comic strip, which all prove unique and enrich the discussion on the Holocaust in literature. For these reasons, the aim of this article is to analyze the ways in which Eisenstein deals with her postmemory, to use Marianne Hirsch’s term (1997 [2002]), as well as her addiction to the Holocaust memories. As a result of this addiction, the legacy of her postmemory is both unwanted and desired and constitutes Bernice Eisenstein’s identity as the eponymous child of Holocaust survivors.

Keywords: Bernice Eisenstein, *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors*, graphic memoir, Jewish-Canadian literature, postmemory, post-Holocaust literature, life writing

The genre of life-writing has substantially evolved over the last few decades into the direction of a more experimental and creative rather than a purely straightforward, account of one’s life. Within the Canadian literary context the autobiographical texts have received quite a remarkable position, which is visible, for instance, in the fact that *The Cambridge Companion to Canadian Literature* (2004) devotes the whole, cross-sectional chapter to the phenomenon of life writing practices. Canadian literature from the times of early explorers until today,

responding to a steady influx of immigrants from various corners of the world, has always embraced numerous attempts at tracing the autobiographical and recording the processes of self-discovery, which frequently accompany immigration and one's reconsideration of identity and the past. The recent popularity of the genre and the development of both trauma theory and scholarly inquiry into life writing have, in a way, though of course not directly, led to the appearance of Bernice Eisenstein's *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* (2006) classified as a graphic novel and an illustrated memoir (Harris 2008: 129). The aim of the present work is to look at the interplay and correspondences between the text and the drawings accompanying it as well as to discuss Eisenstein's story from the perspective of postmemory.

In the book, published in Canada in 2006, Bernice Eisenstein undertakes an attempt at coping with the inherited memories of the Holocaust in the form of a written text and the black-white-and-grey drawings which accompany this text. As a child of the Holocaust survivors, born in Toronto a few years after World War II, she tries to deal with the trauma her parents went through during the war and kept experiencing years after World War II had finished. Eisenstein became infected with the suffering and felt it to be inescapable. Reminiscing on her father's origins, she goes back in a figurative voyage to Miechow in Poland and traces the way her father went from this small town through the 1940-established Miechow ghetto, a concentration camp in Plaszow near Cracow, and Auschwitz, to Canada which offered peace and a safe place to live, but no consolation and forgetting.

Alongside the powerful message, which the memories encapsulated in the book convey, Eisenstein's text poses the formal questions referring to the boundaries of a literary text. By being probably the first Jewish-Canadian graphic memoir, the book appears to be a very strong voice of the children of the Holocaust survivors also owing to the drawings the author created and incorporated into the text. Although the aforementioned critical response from Harris has already set the boundaries wide, in fact, Eisenstein's text extensively crosses various generic boundaries and becomes a combination of a memoir, a family story, a philosophical treatise and a comic strip, which all prove unique and enrich the discussion on the place of the Holocaust in Canadian literature. Moreover, having had two great North American (both US and Canadian) predecessors in the form of Art Spiegelman's *Maus: A Survivor's Tale* (1991) and Chester Brown's *Louis Riel: A Comic-Strip Biography* (2003), Bernice Eisenstein's book offers a further development of the genre(s).

*I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* predominantly reconsiders what Marianne Hirsch calls the effect of "postmemory," that is the legacy of the Holocaust and its trauma, which the people, who were not directly affected by it, still identify with and bear the burden of. Eva Hoffman's approach to this phenomenon

was expressed in *After Such Knowledge*, where she refers to the “shadows” that the second generation inherits from the silenced stories of their parents, from the “half-heard information” (Hoffman 2005: 65-66). This kind of shadowing or haunting inspired Eisenstein to recreate her family’s story through words but also through pictures which symbolize the gap-filling process. It is the process of “replacing absence with memory” (Eisenstein 2006: 16) that she undertakes and expresses through a drawing which appears in one of the first pictures. These are the black silhouettes of her parents accompanied by the following statement: “I have had to create their shadows for myself” (2006: 17). The shadows surrounding her parents’ figures prove two-fold. Firstly, they stand for the lack of full knowledge about the past, which also includes the inability to completely recreate emotions of the Holocaust survivor strange to Bernice Eisenstein herself. In order to show the aura of the lack of knowledge, Eisenstein often claims in her text: “I am lost in memory” (19) or “I do not remember” (62) or “there is nowhere for me to locate when or how I first became aware of it [her parents’ Holocaust past]. As a child, I had somehow absorbed the fact, yet until today its relationship to me had remained invisible” (19-20). Secondly, the grey shadows encircling the parents allude to the drawing on the next page which presents a whole number of family members and their friends visualized as shadowy ghosts calling from the distance of the dead to Eisenstein: “Oy, will we never get any rest? (...) Dahlink, Go – dance, live. It’s enough just wanting to speak our names (...) What can we do? Don’t ask us questions. Einkele, little one, we are the answer” (Eisenstein 2006: 18). This two-fold approach reveals the quandary Eisenstein tries to solve through rewriting her parents’ story: whether she, as a child of Holocaust survivors, should haunt the ghosts in order to get to know them better, constantly eliciting the stories of their lives; or, perhaps, she should let them live in oblivion which might, but not necessarily must, offer peace and forgetting. The graphic form of the book is supposed to recreate the unspoken, this reading in between the lines of stories offered by her parents, grandparents and their friends. Powerful as this section of the book is, it displays perfectly the way in which the drawings correspond to the written words. By adding the shadowy drawings of the family members and the shadows around her parents’ silhouettes, the writer can visualise the spectral void in her life and the existence of the phantoms around her, a phenomenon paradoxically felt and experienced all the time. The artful representation of the metaphor of absence also alludes to the interplay between the drawings and text in general. When dealing with the void, the author of an autobiography or a memoirist has to rely on imagination. In this way, Eisenstein privileges a subjective and creative mode of talking about her family and her own relationship with them. As Elisabeth El Refaie claims: “Indeed, imagination may sometimes provide a more adequate expression of subjective truths than can be achieved by sticking to the literal facts, if they are even accessible” (2012: 16).

What Eisenstein makes clear in her book is, therefore, the absence which the child of the Holocaust survivors enters. It is the absence of the dead, the absence of her parents' place of birth, the absence of memory and her creative response is not only to dig for stories, to question her parents but to resonate to a statement expressed by Primo Levi: "I fear that my language has become inadequate, that you need to speak a different language today" (Eisenstein 2012: epigraph page). This is the very same absence that underlies Hirsch's message included in *Family Frames*, where she claims that although people like herself or Bernice Eisenstein have not gone through the genocide of the Holocaust, they have grown up with the immense burden of loss and absence as

the idea of home, of place (...) would remain out of reach. I share [Hirsch says] with many European Jews of our generation this sense of exile from a world we have never seen and which, because it was irreparably changed or destroyed not by natural or historical evolution over time but by the sudden violent annihilation of the Holocaust, we will never see. (Hirsch 2002: 242)

The epigraph page with the aforementioned statement by Levi includes a series of mottoes conducive to the interpretation of the whole book but the one by Primo Levi seems to be crucial for the discussion concerning the form of the text. The suggestion is supposed to signal the fact that the form of a traditional text, understood as a plain series of words, is worn out and needs to be replenished with a new variant. The form that Eisenstein employs is definitely such an attempt of a new approach to personal writing about the experience of the Holocaust. Obviously, such attempts have already been made by other authors (Spiegelman being probably the most outstanding example), but Eisenstein offers possibly a more versatile vision of what a graphic memoir can be, since she includes sections written in a plain textual format, sections constructed in the form of comic strip panels, drawings taking up parts of or whole pages as well as drawings with bubbles. The function of the preface is realized through the above-mentioned epigraph page with quotations from Primo Levi, Bruno Schulz, Hannah Arendt, Elie Wiesel, and Charlotte Salomon. This selection of quotations from the drawn figures of these writers and philosophers adds the layer of a philosophical treatise this book also possesses. It is not a coincidence that the arrow on the table at which these figures sit is directed at Primo Levi's statement pinpointing the importance of creating a new language.

While looking for the exact form and considering if drawing is an option, Eisenstein reflects upon the moment in history when the Holocaust entered popular culture through Hollywood movies. The entrance of the topic to popular culture sanctions the choice of form, which might be considered not serious enough for the gravity of the topic. At the same time what troubles her is the dilemma she visualizes in the drawing "The three faces of Eve made me think van Gogh's

mood swings were reasonable” (Eisenstein 2012: 93), in which one can see a three-faced girl and each face asks a different question: “Who to be?”, “What to think?”, “Why?” (93). This indecisiveness refers to the personage of Bernice Eisenstein but also to Bernice Eisenstein as a writer and artist, who has to choose the best form of expression for her story but simultaneously resists any unambiguous choices. She, thus, favours a collage of techniques rather than any homogeneous form she would stick to consistently throughout the whole book. As a result of that, it is very difficult to clearly define the book as a comic strip or even a more versatile comic book.<sup>1</sup> It goes without saying, however, that Eisenstein draws upon these genres but what has to be emphasized is the fact that she creatively mixes and transgresses different traditions and genres to find the most unique and elusive form for her memories.

Moreover, Eisenstein’s book, by offering such a diverse range of techniques and genres alluded to, defers from privileging any of them. What seems to be of vital importance is a message coming from the narrative, which calls for a creative reading of the text and looking at it at the same time. For almost two hundred pages of *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors*, Eisenstein offers about sixty pages with no pictures and drawings at all, only about fifteen pages composed as comic strip panels, and over a hundred pages are combinations of text and illustrations. That is why, it would be an overstatement to name the text a comic strip proper. Instead, the two names suggested by Harris (2008) and referred to at the beginning of this article would probably offer more space for an interpretation of Eisenstein’s text. Both genres: a graphic novel and an illustrated memoir refer to the employment of illustrative techniques while highlighting the creative, open forum for elusiveness of memory and the spectral void which Eisenstein wants to address. However, in his *Alternative Comics*, Charles Hatfield defines graphic novels as sequential, highlighting their serialization (2005: 152-163), while Eisenstein’s text departs from being sequentially constructed at times. Taking these aspects of Eisenstein’s story into consideration, *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* could be labelled as a graphic memoir. Seen as a combination of two terms proposed by Harris, the graphic memoir would characterize Bernice Eisenstein’s text in a more adequate way. A similar approach is shared by Elisabeth El Rifaie, who also favours the term ‘graphic memoir’ suggesting that the new strategies of writing such books “could be used to bridge the gap between some old themes and conventions and the more ambitious, personal formats that were gradually emerging” (2012: 38).

Eisenstein’s book concentrates on rendering the visual image of memory with its voids, gaps and disparities, and, as a result of that, the pictures do not always accompany the text. Paul John Eakin in his analysis of Spiegelman’s *Maus*, and

---

<sup>1</sup> For a discussion on differences between a comic strip and a comic book, see Witek 1989.

his lecture on this type of writing, recounts that Spiegelman, referring to the outlook, layout and the way readers concentrate on graphic texts, “made two eye-opening points: all the words in the balloons were *drawn*, and each page had an architecture of its own. I needed to learn to *look* at the words, to *look* at the pages” (Eakin 2011: 14, italics original). As a result of this quite a revolutionary approach to a written text, we should apply such a pictorial perspective and design codes to reading/looking at the book such as Eisenstein’s rather than predominantly stick to the traditional, chronological and linear study of the page. The analysis and *seeing* of a graphic memoir or an autobiographical text should equally value the GRAPHICAL alongside words<sup>2</sup>. In the case of Eisenstein’s work, there are interesting parts when a particular sentence points out to a picture which escapes being a mere reflection of the words next to it, and, pushes the reader to fill in the blanks.

One of the sections in which Eisenstein reconsiders her fascination with drawing and writing opens with a suggestive statement: “There were no books or paintings lining the rooms in home where I grew up. My parents read the newspaper (...)” (Eisenstein 2006: 89). And this page is accompanied by a drawing of a little naked girl sitting on a pile of books and thinking “If only my parents had read books to me when I went to bed...” (Eisenstein 2006: 88). The titles, ranging from *Night, After such Knowledge* to *Kaddish for an Unborn Child* and *Nothing Makes You Free*, offer an insight into Eisenstein’s approach to her childhood. Although her parents silenced their past and did not want to infect their children with the grim memories of their own, the kids somehow discovered their ancestors’ past on their own and immersed themselves into in the whole body of knowledge about the past that the titles symbolize.

Despite the fact that the parents did not discuss their past openly with their children, they celebrated Jewish festivals and traditions or spoken Yiddish, which is remembered by Eisenstein as the only “harmonic language” (2006: 63) and as a result of that she states “Yiddish defines the world that I came from. It was the language that was spoken for most of my childhood years. It was my parents’ mother tongue, their *mamaloshen* (65). Yiddish was the soul and substance of the life in our home. A *veltele*, a world within a world” (2006: 61). As a result of these texts-based memories, it is interesting to see the naïve dialog in one of the drawings which accompanies the above-mentioned text. Alongside the acknowledgement of the importance of Yiddish at home, her mother expresses a shock at the fact that her daughter understands the language. The commentary Eisenstein offers in the bubble says: “What is it with all the Altes! Don’t they know they

---

<sup>2</sup> Erin McGlothlin uses a similar mode of writing which distinguishes the graphic in the term: autobioGRAPHICAL in her text entitled: “Art Spiegelman and the AutbioGRAPHICAL Re-Vision” (2011).

created the air I breathe? The chutzpah not to think it mattered. But I've only just begun to let them know" (2006: 62-63).

One of the initial chapters of the book develops the idea of being infected by and addicted to the Holocaust. The chapter starts with a blurred, greyish drawing presenting a group of people, members of the family, chanting messages to the little girl, the figurative little Bernice Eisenstein, who concludes with a question: "Can I be trusted to look into my heart and find theirs?" (2006: 19). This scene proves the impossibility of distancing oneself from the Holocaust, from the legacy of postmemory which she has inherited. Moreover, this is not mere plain, objective, distanced knowledge Eisenstein can analyse and discuss, this has become a vital part of her life and creativity, a haunting ghost of the past which is not her own and simultaneously is hers as well. Furthermore, this is something one cannot separate from and stay aloof as this death-permeated past of her parents becomes her life. She states in one of the most powerful, textual, and at times humorous at times, parts of the book:

The Holocaust is a drug and I have entered an opium den, having been given my first taste for free, innocently, by everyone here. I have only glimpsed its power, scanning the trail of needle marks on the left forearms of each person in the room. This is when the addiction takes hold. My very own monkey on my back. I will discover that there is no end to the dealers I can find for just one more hit, one more entry into a hallucinatory world of ghosts. (...) My parents don't even realize that they are drug dealers. They could never imagine the kind of high, H gives. (Eisenstein 2006: 20)

Eisenstein claims here that she has been addicted so strongly to the Holocaust by the aura her parents created and by her own pursuit which led her to a secret reading of *The Diary of Anne Frank* at the age of 8 or Andre Schwarz-Bart's book *The Last of the Just* or Primo Levi's texts, all of which, as she discovered, offered the same hype and disintegration of her psyche and body. Like a drug addict, what she only feels is the syndrome of drug withdrawal when she does not think and read about the Holocaust. Eisenstein also addresses the problem of being aware of her own addiction to the Holocaust and discusses the plausible symptoms of such a dependence, as being infected with the Holocaust can lead to unhappiness, sadness, and depression. How unproblematic these symptoms are in comparison to the grim reality of the trauma of her parents and others who died! The drug of the Holocaust acquired through "an intravenous transmission," as Hoffman says (2005: 130), leads Eisenstein to the feeling of being chosen and privileged to ransack the books, films, and other texts in search of the authenticity in the presentation of the Holocaust to legitimize the validity of her own emotions. This absorption in and addiction to the topic has led to the feeling of other-

ness, which Eisenstein summarizes in the following way: “Hey, man, I’m different than you are. My parents were in Auschwitz. What do you have that can top that one?” (2006: 21). This boasting has taken many different forms and has led to being ashamed of it as well, but the feeling of pride was undeniable and could not be eradicated completely, although “There were minutes, days, months, when my addiction subsided, crawled back into my skin, and I had no need to see The Man for another dose. But the craving is there, it is always there. I’m tied to it” (Eisenstein 2006: 23; capitals in the original). In this light, the dilemma Eisenstein has in the text—whether to explore the past or let the victims of the Holocaust stay in shadows of the unknown—seems to be solved beyond her will. Being a child of the Holocaust survivors is like a stigma and a stamp one cannot get rid of, and, as such is unescapable. What Eisenstein offers in a slightly ironic way is the Holocaust Anonymous program which she would welcome as a Holocaust addict. This proves the desire to try some therapy which would bring consolation to the tormented mind which has to relive her parents’ traumas. Thus, she realizes two aspects of this addiction. Firstly, Eisenstein declares:

[t]here’s no end to how far an obsessed imagination can run with all of this. Yet to rid myself of this habit, this calling, I would have to blind my eyes, cover my ears, seal my lips, and erase the truth that without the Holocaust *I would not be who I am*. It has seared and branded me with its stippled mark on my forearm and pulled me into its world, irrevocably, as its offspring.” (2006: 25, italics mine)

And, secondly, it turns out that the only available cure and therapy for the malady of Holocaust addiction is writing and drawing as the only ways of coping with the inherited memories of her family and of her own postmemory.

Although Eisenstein wants to recreate the history of the Holocaust so meticulously trying to read and watch everything that has been written and filmed on the subject, she feels the substantial gap concerning her own the past. She undertakes, thus, the task of writing down the story of her parents’ lives in this memoir trying to record her mother’s storytelling for the archives on the one hand; and composing the word and picture memoir on the other. One of the first attempts at filling the blank procedure is the story of a gold ring which her mother found in one of the coats in Auschwitz during the task of segregating Jewish possessions in the section of the camp called “Canada”. This very same ring, which had belonged to another Jew, probably already dead when the ring was found, was offered by the mother to Eisenstein’s father on the day of their wedding. The allusion to this story is a point of departure for another, fictional one about the owners of the ring. The very fact that the ring had belonged to someone else and the inscription on it referred to another wedding made the Eisensteins feel they form a communal continuum of the people marked with the Holocaust. Bernice Eisenstein, who has finally inherited the ring states: “So, from a stranger to my mother,

to my father as her gift to him, then to me, I wear this ring as a bittersweet inheritance. (...) My father has come back to me, and I carry the spirits of the dead within a circle of gold. The ring holds all that I have come from” (2006: 16). What she inherits, is not only the legacy of her parents, but she tries to encapsulate the whole of the Holocaust although she realizes the impossibility of the task.

Moreover, if the drawings corresponding to the story of the ring are studied, it can be noted that they are supposed to emphasize the most important themes in the whole text. Their centrality is signalled by the very fact that they simply appear at the beginning. The first drawing corresponding to the opening of the chapter entitled “The Ring” offers a portrayal of a small girl (the little Bernice Eisenstein herself), sitting on a heap of Yiddish words and offering her thoughts in a thought bubble: “I am lost in memory. It is not a place that has been mapped, fixed by coordinates of longitude and latitude, whereby I can retrace a step and come to the same place again. Each time is different” (Eisenstein 2006: 10). What is being suggested at this moment is the fact that the territory mapped with memory is different with each and every visit. The story of the ring will also prove the inability to pinpoint a stable meaning and to fully recreate the past of the ring. What Eisenstein enters is the flexible void of memories. The following pictures offer a magnified ring with the date of the wedding, a smaller drawing of a married couple: the original owners of the ring as well as her parents cherishing the ring and their love. The last drawing accompanying this story shows Bernice Eisenstein with her mother, with a bubble in between, and only one, single thought coming from both of them: “Do you know what this ring means to me...” (2006: 15), which summarizes the whole deeply symbolic meaning of the ring for the family (corresponding to the love of some unknown people who died in the camp, the meaning of ‘Canada’ in the camp and the parents’ safe arrival in Canada, their love and marriage, but also the death of the father to mention only a few possible interpretations) but also alludes to the whole burden of the unknown, as the thought itself proves quite obscure.

The greatest paradox of this situation stems from two aspects. Firstly, Eisenstein can wear a ring with the date of a wedding that is not her parents’, but at the same time in a mysterious, ghostly way it has become theirs as well through the communal experience of Auschwitz. Secondly, the knowledge of the Holocaust frequently thrives on memory. And it is the fluidity which she also analyses in her text. She claims that “Water and memory both share the same elusive nature” (2006: 132) and thus memory is never fully reached. This elusiveness of memories is reflected in the images produced alongside the text. The narration also literally goes back and forth with the loss of linearity and its repetitive nature, as for instance the text inscribed into a picture on page 83 is repeated on page 182, and as such it triggers another flow of her dying father’s memories: “There is no center to be found in memory, but each place holds its heartbeat” (Eisenstein

2006: 182; spelling original). This elusiveness of memory that the text tries to posit makes it an example of creative rewriting of memories and through the process of redrawing allows Eisenstein to cope with the legacy of the Holocaust trauma. She is, however, aware of the lack of distance she feels, but this traumatic topic and the autobiographical form do not require weighing the balance of objectivity. Therefore, Eisenstein writes:

while I knew from an early age that I did not possess the particular magnetism that would draw my parents to me, the pull of their history was irresistible. I think in some way I have always been able to step into the presence of absence. It is something that I have needed to do. But I have never found for myself the right distance from the time when their lives had been so damaged (2006: 167).

Alongside drawings, Eisenstein employs humour and irony in the account of her family's traumatic history. It is also one of the ways in which she personalizes the story as the humorous aspects are usually imbedded in the drawings which, by definition, demonstrate her own, private contribution to the rendition of the story. One of the instances when irony creates a new dimension is the aforementioned picture of the parents encapsulated by greyish shadows and one of the inscriptions situated under the picture states: "The Jewish version of Catherine & Heathcliff..." (Eisenstein 2006: 17). This overt allusion to *Wuthering Heights* offer a reinterpretation of the idea of a tragic fate and proves Eisenstein's ability to distance herself from the very concept of tragedy. A similar attitude is visible in the picture which portrays Bernice Eisenstein's father as a cowboy leaving the concentration camp through the "Arbeit Macht Frei" gate with a rifle and a Jewish star in which one can spot allusions to sheriffs' stars and a subversive reading of the position of victims and perpetrators (Eisenstein 2006: 51). Also, next to the statements evoking the drug craving Eisenstein feels, she places a drawing of Moses throwing a large stone in the shape of a letter H onto the invisible crowd at his feet. As Harris has noticed, "[s]uch an image may be regarded by some readers as distasteful blasphemy" (2008: 132) but it is a powerful, though seditious, illustration of a need to understand the effects of such a hecatomb on the whole generations of Jewish people. As she says: "Knowing that the Holocaust happened was not enough, I needed to know what it had done to my parents" (2006: 24); and in an equally ironic sentence states: "backpacking in Europe, the heaviest part of my luggage was my parents' history, and the Europeans I met were receptive to being informed of it every time I unpacked" (2006: 22). As has been demonstrated here, Eisenstein is not afraid of reusing the symbols and milestones of Jewish traditions even if it means to be ironic about her own legacy. The aim of using humour is definitely not to be blasphemous but to release the pain and weight of the burden carried throughout her whole life in the aforementioned "backpack."

Having been rooted in the spectral world of her ancestors, both known and unknown, Bernice Eisenstein embraces the double-sided feeling of an abundance of memories, fears, and traumas handed down by her parents to her and a substantial lack of knowledge about her parents' lives. Although her grandparents and parents survived the war and concentration camps and went to Canada afterwards to establish a new, peaceful life, the rift that has been created in their own and Eisenstein's lives, is unbridgeable. The attempt to write an autobiography of one's emotions towards the Holocaust from a perspective of a child of a survivor only emphasizes the gap. It is the daughter who is infected with the Holocaust although she was born in Canada a few years after the war. It is the next generation who have to bear the burden of the past trauma. In their "Generations of the Holocaust in Canadian Auto/Biography," Egan and Helms confirm the importance of postmemory the generation of children of Holocaust survivors offer as they are the first generation born after the trauma but still the last one which bears a direct link to it (2005). In this context, Eisenstein's text can be seen as the one which combines visual art with life writing. Thus, Egan and Helms claim: "To find respectful ways of analysing auto/biographical writing about the Holocaust does not mean that art has displaced memory; instead, it allows us to recognize both" (2005: 44).

Employing a graphic form of an autobiography, thus offering the reader not only words but also pictures requires some visualization of the Holocaust postmemory. The process of decoding the text alongside pictures makes it more creative than only reading the words in more conventional life narratives. As has been demonstrated, through the drawings, Eisenstein's world becomes tangible and her postmemory is anchored in pictures. As a result of an interactive *reading* combined with a simultaneous *seeing* this graphic memoir works as a holistic attempt at "transforming the ghostly into a form that is corporeal" (Harris 2008: 129).

**This research was supported by grant PRO–2012/05/B/HS2/04004 from the Polish National Science Centre (Narodowe Centrum Nauki).**

#### REFERENCES

- Eakin, John Paul. 2011. Reading comics: Art Spiegelman on CD-Rom. In Michael A. Chaney (ed.), *Graphic subjects. Critical essays on autobiography and graphic novels*, 13-16. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press.
- Egan, Susanna and Gabriele Helms. 2005. Generations of the Holocaust in Canadian auto/biography. In Julie Rak (ed.), *Auto/biography in Canada. Critical directions*, 31-51. Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press.
- Eisenstein, Bernice. 2006. *I was a child of Holocaust survivors*. New York: Riverhead Books.
- El Rifaie, Elisabeth. 2012. *Autobiographical comics: Life writing in pictures*. Jackson: University

- Press of Mississippi.
- Harris, Miriam. 2008. Releasing the grip of the ghostly. Bernice Eisenstein's *I was a child of Holocaust survivors*. In Samantha Baskind and Ranen Omer-Sherman (eds.), *The Jewish graphic novel: Critical approaches*, 129-142. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Hatfield, Charles. 2005. *Alternative comics: An emerging literature*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.
- Hirsch, Marianne. 2002 [1997]. *Family frames. Photography, narrative and postmemory*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Hoffman, Eva. 2005. *After such knowledge. A meditation on the aftermath of the Holocaust*. London: Vintage.
- McGlothlin, Erin. 2011. Art Spiegelman and the autobioGRAPHICal re-vision. In Michael Chaney (ed.), *Graphic subjects. Critical essays on autobiography and graphic novels*, 45-50. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press.
- Witek, Joseph. 1989. *Comic books as history: The narrative art of Jack Jackson, Art Spiegelman, and Harvey Pekar*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.