



# Intergenerational Transmission in the Age of Postmemory: Rebecca Makkai's *Music for Wartime*

## Post-bellek Çağında Kuşaklararası Aktarım ve Rebecca Makkai'nin *Music for Wartime* Adlı Öykü Derlemesi

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### ABSTRACT

Rebecca Makkai's short story collection *Music for Wartime* (2015) features third-generation characters, like the author herself, who revisit the familial trauma narratives of the Second World War in Transylvania. The collection's postmemorial dynamics therefore relies on the first generation's lived experience mediated in transmission and the third generation's new aesthetic concerns in reinterpreting them. However, the increasing generational distance in our postmemorial age has caused the traumatic narratives to reach the third generation by affiliative transmission at the same time as it has universalized and mystified the victim and the survivor. In Makkai's collection, the fixed narratives mediated by the first generation and the past that is universalized by affiliative transmission demand a return to family narratives with a non-familial perspective. The collection's unity is established by a form closer to a short story cycle. In accordance with the form, the stories sequentially reveal how the contemporary subject responds to familial and affiliative transmission. The collection's intertwined dual structure encapsulates the strained connection between embracing and questioning the transmitted narratives. This article argues that, with its specific form, Rebecca Makkai's *Music for Wartime* problematizes and symbolically resolves the question of intergenerational transmission within the dialectic of familial and affiliative memory.

**Keywords:** Short story, trauma, memory, intergenerational transmission, Second World War

### ÖZ

Amerikalı yazar Rebecca Makkai'nin 2015 yılında yayımladığı *Music for Wartime* adlı kısa öykü derlemesi, yazarın kendisi gibi, ailelerinin İkinci Dünya Savaşı sırasında ve Transilvanya bölgesinde yaşadıkları travmalara dönen üçüncü kuşak karakterleri ön plana çıkarır. Bu bağlamda, birinci kuşağın aktarırken dolayımıldığı yaşanmış anılar ile üçüncü kuşağın bu anlatıları yeniden yorumlarken yararlandığı yeni estetik anlayışlar, derlemenin post-bellek dinamiğini oluşturur. Ancak günümüzün post-bellek çağında kuşaklar arasındaki uzaklığın gün geçtikçe artması, travmatik geçmiş anlatılarının üçüncü kuşağa kültürel aktarım yoluyla ulaşmasına neden olurken, aynı zamanda kurbanı ve kurtulanı hem evrensel hem de gizemli bir hale getirir. Makkai'nin



derlemesinde birinci kuşağın dolayımıladığı sarsılmaz anlatılar ve kültürel aktarım ile evrenselleşen geçmiş, üçüncü kuşağın, aile anlatılarına aile dışı bir perspektiften bakmasına neden olur. Koleksiyonun kendi içindeki bütünlüğü, kısa öykü döngüsüne yakın bir edebi biçimle sağlanmıştı; buna göre öyküler, derlemedeki sıralama izlendiğinde çağdaş öznenin ailesel ve kültürel bellek aktarımlarına nasıl yaklaştığını ortaya çıkarır. Derlemenin iç içe geçen ikili yapısı, yani özyaşamöyküsel ve kurgusal kalıplar, aktarılan bellek anlatısını kabul etmek ve sorgulamak arasındaki gergin ilişkiyi gösterir. Kuramsal çerçeve için travma çalışmalarından ve kısa öykü kuramından yararlanan bu makale, sonuç olarak Rebecca Makkai'nin *Music for Wartime* adlı kısa öykü derlemesinin, ailesel ve kültürel belleğin diyalektiği içinde kuşaklararası aktarım sorununu saptadığını ve biçimsel özellikleriyle bu sorunu simgesel olarak çözdüğünü ileri sürmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Kısa öykü, travma, bellek, kuşaklararası aktarım, İkinci Dünya Savaşı

## Introduction

In an interview, American author Rebecca Makkai explains that she developed the structure of *Music for Wartime* after her initial manuscript was rejected by an editor who meticulously assessed her manuscript and suggested it could be organized on the themes of music and war. “Up till then I’d viewed these as ruts more than themes – and even then, I didn’t see the two themes working in concert,” (Rice, 2016, par. 25) she says, and notes that “[t]he title came to me as a way to combine those themes, and I liked that it sounded like an album title,” (par. 26). Makkai’s musical references like “in concert” and “album title” in describing her collection imply a composition for thematic and structural coherence, but the word “rut” for the illustration of incoherence also allocates disturbing yet simultaneously productive power to the stories. This disturbance lies at the heart of Makkai’s collection and determines its form of disagreeable negotiations when its third-generation characters, like Makkai herself, respond to the traumatic narratives of the Second World War in the wider Transylvania region.

Rebecca Makkai’s collection concentrates on the belated and mediated characteristics of postmemory. In *Family Frames*, Marianne Hirsch uses the term postmemory for “the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood nor recreated” (1997, p. 22). In other words, postmemory represents the younger generation’s act of indirectly witnessing and remembering the traumatic past of the first generation in the form of haunting, belated and vivid memories so strongly that such narratives replace their own. Furthermore, “postmemorial work” writes Hirsch, “strives to reactivate and re-embody more distant political and cultural memorial structures by reinvesting them with resonant individual and familial forms of mediation and aesthetic expression” (p. 33). The notion of postmemory, therefore, complicates the mimetic relationship between lived experience and inherited memory, and entails the appropriation of cultural transmission.

The problem of generational transmission in postmemory also demands a return to familial structures as they are universalized in cultural memory. Thomas Bender writes that “community is a fusion of feeling and thought, of tradition and commitment, of membership and volition” and asserts that the family serves as the “archetype” of community (1982, p. 9). Family historian Stephanie Coontz adds that “visions of the

past family life exert a powerful emotional pull on most Americans, and with a good reason, given the fragility of many modern commitments" (2016, p. 2). The family has been indeed an enduring myth in American culture, and the variants of the idealized American family<sup>1</sup> have functioned as foundational myths on which communal and national ideals were built. The family, therefore, still haunts the American imagination whenever a threat of social disintegration is felt. However, in the case of postmemorial culture, what is at stake is the continuity of the family itself at a time when the fixed narratives of the first generation no longer function for the younger generation who were brought up in a different cultural climate. In this sense, Makkai's collection problematizes the gap between two kinds of mediation: mediation by the first generation and that by the younger generation. Having only indirect access to the belated memories of the past generation, her characters reflect on the familial narratives and gradually learn to notice and expose this gap.

While the overarching themes in *Music for Wartime* are music and war, some stories were integrated to the collection regardless of their apparent irrelevance. To maintain the unity in the collection, Rebecca Makkai has focused on the connection of her previously published stories since 2002 into a form closer to the short story cycle with recently added sections, particularly the vignettes in the form of shorter autobiographical stories dubbed as legends. Forrest Ingram defines the story cycle as "a book of short stories so linked to each other by their author that the reader's successive experience of various levels of the pattern of the whole significantly modifies his experience of each of its component parts" (1971, p. 19). As a literary form, the short story cycle has been regarded as the symbolic integration of experiences belonging to disintegrated society. Gerald Lynch, for example, argues that short story cycles are instrumental in "conveying a character's fragmentary experiences" (2007, p. 223). Furthermore, Jennifer J. Smith maintains that the antecedents of the American modernist story cycles in the nineteenth century "reflect a desire to unify the nation in the wake of the Civil War by appealing to a sense of lost rural traditions and incorporating new populations into

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1 Undoubtedly, the myth of the American family has considerably changed and varied since the colonial period. The Puritan family, for example, was marked by its rigid discipline and piety that aimed to prepare the children to become exemplary members of the congregation and society. Describing the Puritan family as "a little commonwealth", John Demos shows that those who committed petty crimes were employed as servants in the Puritan households, underscoring the Puritan family as a disciplinary institution (Demos, 2000, p. 70). In addition, the myth of the self-reliant and virtuous agrarian family, as a model community, permeated the early nineteenth century American political discourse, most evidently through Thomas Jefferson's defense of farming society against the presumed problems of industrialization and urbanization. In this sense, the representation and critique of the modern dysfunctional family in the twentieth century suggest a nostalgia for and investment in what is considered bygone family values.

the nation" (2018, p. 21). Lynch's and Smith's arguments on the form's counterpoint to social disintegration are further highlighted in Paul March-Russell's and Michelle Pacht's analyses of modern cycles. Considering Ernest Hemingway's *In Our Time* a point of departure from the earlier examples for an even more fragmentary form, March-Russell states that "the scarring and suturing of the text act as analogies to physical mutilation" (2009, p. 112) and relates Hemingway's poetics to the momentary experiences of trench warfare of the Great War. For Pacht, Hemingway's literary mediation of war experience in the form of short story cycle comprises a fractured consciousness in order to give voice to the whole generation suffering from the traumatic effects of war, as he "uses setting (though varied), related imagery, and organization to connect the disparate elements of the text into a unified whole." (2007, p. 63).

*Music for Wartime* will be studied here as a short story cycle, if an untraditional one, firstly due to its deliberated form in which the connections between stories gradually resurface, and secondly because the first and last stories significantly unify the collection. This aspect of short story cycles has caused a taxonomical debate and starting with the publication of Robert Luscher's influential essay "The Short Story Sequence: An Open Book", a number of scholars have concluded that the term 'short story sequence' describes the genre more aptly. Luscher defines the short story sequence as "a volume of short stories, collected and organized by their author, in which the reader successively realizes the underlying patterns of coherence by continual modifications of his perceptions of pattern and theme" (1989, p. 148). Consequently, the reader is encouraged to "construct a network of associations that binds the stories together" (p. 149). Makkai's story collection similarly follows a sequence in which a theme is introduced, developed by variations, and finally resolved. As a result, in *Music for Wartime*, the stories were not arranged in the chronological order, and were rather organized to represent the characteristics of a story cycle, responding to the postmemorial urge to acknowledge and adopt the previous generation's transmission of lived experience while appropriating them in a form which simultaneously evokes fragmentation and unification of traumatic memories. The short story cycle, therefore, provides Makkai's collection a form to gather the already mediated fragments of inherited memories, and to reflect on literary mediation itself.

For the framework of this study, I will focus on the stories which constitute the basic structure of the cycle, in order to distinguish between the vignette pattern and the story pattern. The vignette pattern starts with "The Singing Women", which introduces

the key problems of universalization and mystification to be gradually counterbalanced with the autobiographical yet fable-like vignettes until "Suspension: April 20, 1984", which particularizes Makkai's own family history. The story pattern, on the other hand, starts with the specificity of a family history in "The Worst You Ever Feel", depicting a teenage violinist's endeavour to reconnect with the traumatic past of the Second World War survivors in Romania, hence initiating the development of consciousness to depict the mechanism of familial postmemory. Finally, the last story, "The Museum of the Dearly Departed" functions as an "anchor story", also defined by Lundén as the story which "assume[s] a hegemonic position in the text" and is usually "placed at the end" (1999, p. 124). In this context, "The Museum of the Dearly Departed" features an elderly Hungarian woman's chance survival from a deadly gas leak in an apartment building and her shocking confessions of survival from the Second World War to her younger American neighbours. In my analysis, I will therefore follow a twofold sequential pattern, addressing firstly the autobiographical vignettes, and then the first and last stories in order to illustrate how the contemporary subject responds to the transmitted memories of the survivors to mediate their own narratives. Consequently, this essay will concentrate on the aesthetic mediation of intergenerational transmission in Makkai's *Music for Wartime*, and show that even though the familial memories persist, the fact that they are universalized and mystified is acknowledged simultaneously as they are questioned by the younger generation. In this sense, I argue that, with its specific form of the short story cycle, Makkai's collection problematizes and symbolically resolves the question of representability and universalization within the dialectic of familial and affiliative memory.

### **The familial transmission of memory in the vignette pattern**

The five vignettes in *Music for Wartime* constitute a pattern of sequentially waning fables. This pattern starts with the non-historicized, anonymous and universal human condition in "The Singing Women" and ends with the historically specific story of a family member in "Suspension: April 20, 1984". The three vignettes in between, namely "Other Brands of Poison", "Acolyte" and "A Bird in the House" are fabled narratives, numbered and alternately named as legends. Makkai's use of fabled narratives resonates with the form of memories inherited by Holocaust survivors' children. In *After Such Knowledge*, for example, Eva Hoffman, as the daughter of Holocaust survivors herself, describes her own inherited memory from her formative years similarly as "a sort of fairy tale deriving not so much from another world as from the centre of the cosmos:

an enigmatic but real fable" (2004, p. 6). Because they are "both more potent and less lucid", these memories were, in her own words, "closer to enactment of experience, to emanations or sometimes nearly embodiments of psychic matter - of material too awful to be processed and assimilated into the stream of consciousness, or memory, or intelligible feelings" (p. 7). Hoffman here elucidates the process of postmemorial transmission as the first generation's memories of direct experience are transformed into the second or third generation's indirect memories. In this sense, the inexplicably traumatic, hence belated and fragmented memories of the first generation are made intelligible in the form of fabled narratives by the younger generations. By the dismissal of causality and the omission and/or selection of information to be shared, fabled memories establish an intergenerational link. Shoshana Felman relates this conjecture in postmemory to basically all acts of interpretation, and states that fabled narratives are "the reduction of a threatening and incomprehensible event to a reassuring mythic, totalizing unity of explanation" (1992, p. 266). Makkai's initial vignettes therefore serve to establish the postmemorial link without mentioning the possible intergenerational or intragenerational conflicts.

Although the proponents of trauma theory mentioned above have approached such fabled narratives as the consequent aesthetic configuration of fragmented memories, Makkai does not follow an entirely fabled vignette pattern in her postmemorial reworking of her family's past. The gradual change from fable to documentation in *Music for Wartime* operates in two ways, namely on the levels of form and representation. On the level of form, the problem of verification and universalization due to the fable's allegorical character eludes any potential argument on literary mediation itself. For instance, Maria Tatar writes on fairy tales that their "overvaluation [...] promotes a suspension of critical faculties and prevents us from taking a good, hard look at stories that are so obviously instrumental in shaping our values, moral codes, and aspirations," and maintains that "[t]he reverence brought by some readers to fairy tales mystifies these stories, making them appear to be a source of transcendent spiritual truth and authority" (1999, p. xii). On the level of representation, Makkai's vignette pattern raises a question that can be found in Holocaust-related critiques, such as Gillian Rose's argument on the risky lapse into what she calls the fascism of representation. Here, Rose challenges the critical position of justifying the non-representability of the Holocaust, such as Adorno's announcement that "[t]o write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric. [...] Absolute reification, which presupposed intellectual progress as one of its elements, is now preparing to absorb the mind entirely;" (Adorno, 1983, p. 34); or

Lyotard's assertion that as an event, Auschwitz has caused an "unstable state and instant of language wherein something which must be able to be put into phrases cannot yet be," (Lyotard, 1988, p. 13) which he calls "the differend." Rose, on the other hand, takes her cue from Primo Levi's metaphor of "the gray zone" for the blurring of moral codes in the concentration camp, in which "gray, ambiguous persons, ready to compromise" (Levi, 2017, p. 37) collaborated with the perpetrators in order to stay alive. At this point, Rose finds that fabled narratives universalize the condition of the survivor. "To argue for silence, [...] that is, non-representability," she writes, "is to mystify something we dare not understand, because we fear that it may be all too understandable, all too continuous with what we are – human." (Rose, 1996, p. 43). In this sense, *Music for Wartime's* vignette pattern gradually moves towards the representation of particular persons and events in order to avoid the mystifying and universalizing characteristics of fabled narratives.

The first vignette in *Music for Wartime*, "The Singing Women", similarly problematizes the wartime trauma from the point of non-representability and presents the cycle's organizing principles, from the thematic connection between music and war to its postmemorial aesthetics. The story depicts an ethnomusicologist, who records the music of an endangered dialect from his father's place of birth. However, upon discovering the ethnomusicologist's work, the unnamed dictator in the vignette realizes that the ethnic culture in the village is still alive despite the cultural assimilation policies, and sets "his men to finish the job" (Makkai, 2015, p. 2). In the acknowledgements section, Makkai identifies the story's ethnomusicologist as István Márta, the Hungarian composer who collected folk songs among the Csángó community in 1973 and used two of these recordings in his "Doom. A Sigh", a string quartet composed for the Kronos Quartet for their 1990 album *Black Angels*. His liner notes for the track explain that one of the songs "evokes [the singer's] long dead parents" and the other "recounts the scene of a bloody battle" (Márta, 1990, Track 5). Here, music acts as a way of generational transmission for the singing women and for Márta himself. This transmission is evoked just as the story begins, when "[t]he composer, with his tape recorder, crossed the barricades at night and crawled through the hills into the land his father had fled" (Makkai, 2015, p. 1). The vignette pattern, in other words, starts with an emphasis on the convergence of Márta's and Makkai's motives: Like the composer who crosses the border for collecting the remnants of paternally transmitted cultural memory, Makkai suggests that she will revisit the vulnerable fragments of her family history for connecting the present with the past. Like the composer's work on folk songs, Makkai focuses on the composition, collection and connection of shorter prose forms. Furthermore, Makkai's authorial voice



interferes in the narrative to explain the story's historical inaccuracy: "But I've made it sound like a fable [...] I've lied and turned two women into three, because three is a fairy tale number" (p. 2). "The Singing Women" therefore introduces the pattern's initial narrative norms which mystify, hence blur the social and historical context, and which Makkai will gradually work against.

Pursuing the fabled narrative of "The Singing Women", Makkai integrates other vignettes to the collection to achieve a cyclical form. After two stories that divert from the collection's conceptual framework, Makkai returns to the postmemory of war with the collection's second vignette, namely "Other Brands of Poison". Similar to the fabled form of "The Singing Women", "Other Brands of Poison" deliberately evades historical accuracy, although this time it features a memory from Makkai's own family history. Makkai makes this evident as she writes: "If the story is hazy, seventy years later, that is because it is [my father's]. If the details are strongly specific [...] that is because they are mine" (p. 58). The paternal transmission of memory, therefore, demands the daughter's reproduction of inherited memory; however, Makkai stresses that her narrative radically diverts from her father's version in terms of specificity. The vignette depicts the occupation of German or Russian soldiers into the house where Makkai's then eight-year-old father and grandmother lived. Heavily drunken, a soldier mistakes a bottle of ink for alcohol and consumes the one the grandmother provides for him. The reason why this event is marked as a family legend is that the grandmother "claimed for the rest of her life that she once killed a soldier with a bottle of ink"; furthermore, the author herself questions the possibility of death due to ink poisoning yet evades a confirmation since she calls it her "family legacy" (p. 58).

The next vignette, "Acolyte" similarly features another act of resistance by Makkai's paternal grandmother during the Second World War in Budapest. Like "Other Brands of Poison", the familial transmission in "Acolyte" is made possible by the father's memory of helping his mother and hence witnessing wartime conditions. In this vignette, Makkai also introduces her paternal grandmother's dubious political position during and after the Second World War by revealing how she "voluntarily strapped a yellow Star of David on her arm before walking into the ghettos to visit old theatre friends" (p. 104) and used her professional skills to help the Jewish women in her neighbourhood bypass the curfew and possibly send messages to the resistance movement, yet also that she was a political opponent of the Stalinist government during the post-war era and wrote an anti-communist novel in 1954, which could only be published a decade later when

it was smuggled out of the country. Makkai writes that as a theatre actor, her grandmother taught them how to walk like elderly women and applied a kind of make-up on their faces to make them look much older so that they could pass the checkpoints without being stopped. The vignette thus both returns to and diverts from "Other Brands of Poison": The previous vignette avoids specifying the national origin of the soldiers, hence trivializes the ideological conflict between the two parties; however, "Acolyte" clarifies the grandmother's political position against fascism. On the other hand, depicting the story of the Jewish women whose theatrical make-ups helped them escape the anti-Semitic laws of their time and presenting a political personality opposing Nazism and Stalinism at the same time, Makkai also suggests that any such trivialization can be ethically acceptable on condition that it serves for the tenets of democracy and human rights.

The sequential diversion from the initial narrative norms in Makkai's vignettes is made even more evident by the emphasis on women's solidarity in "Acolyte", which is not present in the previous vignettes. In "Acolyte", Makkai attempts to substitute the existing paternal transmission of postgenerational memory with the missing maternal - or female - narratives. Although the familial memory still requires the father's discourse, in this vignette Makkai also imagines that the Jewish women gossip about her grandmother, and through them it is revealed that she was selling the family's silverware to survive the war and that she was married to the Hungarian member of parliament who wrote the Second Jewish Law of 1939. Presented in the form of gossips, these pieces of information are followed by the convergence of questions posed by the women and Makkai herself, as she writes "their questions are my own" (p. 106). In other words, to elucidate the grandmother's memories, which are accessible only through the father's narrative, Makkai relies on the imaginary gossips of the Jewish women and positions herself outside the familial transmission but within a female narrative. This missing maternal link is made even more evident in the next vignette, "A Bird in the House". This vignette features a more recent familial memory, yet it connects the women in Makkai's family for the first time. Here, Makkai does not specify the source of her memory, and simply explains the context as "the scene, as it's been relayed to me" (p. 143). The words "scene" and "relay" evoke the sense that Makkai might be constructing her narrative based on a family photograph coupled with a series of other photographs for an extended view outside a single frame. She writes: "My mother in our family room, holding me. My grandmother at the kitchen table with my sister, peeling apples" (p. 143). The grandfather and the father are also present in Makkai's narrative, even though

they are in separate locations. The fact that this photo-like description brings the female members of the family together resonates with Holocaust and memory studies, particularly with Hirsch's reading of Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, the graphic novel that depicts the cartoonist's (named as Artie) interviews with his father, whose account of the past as a Polish Jew and a Holocaust survivor functions as the key text for Artie's work. The transmission in *Maus* is merely paternal, because Artie's mother committed suicide and afterwards Artie's grieving father burned her diary that chronicled her own experiences of the concentration camp. Focusing on the absence of Artie's mother from the formation of his inherited memory due to her suicide and her missing diaries, Hirsch observes that through her photographs "she remains a visual and not a verbal presence. She speaks in sentences imagined by her son, recollected by her husband. As a memory she is mystified, objectified, shaped to the needs and desires of the one who remembers" (Hirsch, 1997, pp. 19-20). In the case of "A Bird in the House", however, the photo-like narrative acts as a medium to connect the women in the family and to form a maternal continuity, albeit visually and not verbally. It is also not only Makkai herself who can observe the connection: She reveals that the grandmother used the sister's room for her writing, and five of her Tarot cards were found by the mother after she left for Hungary. Finally establishing female intergenerational transmission, "A Bird in the House" completes the cycle of Makkai's family legends in the sequential pattern of gradual demystification.

The last vignette, "Suspension: April 20, 1984" shifts from the previous three vignettes in that it is not dubbed a family legend and it rather documents the grandfather's past in detail. Using her conversations with him, his own writing and family photographs, Makkai presents her grandfather as a contrasting figure to her grandmother, not only in their differences of political opinion and action, but also in the way their stories are narrativized. Being left out of the family legends, the grandfather's past is not celebrated; as the member of the Hungarian parliament who "penned, revised, introduced and argued" (Makkai, 2015, p. 195) the anti-Jewish law, he raises the question of embracing familial transmission or abandoning it altogether. His becoming a yoga instructor in Hawaii and being "in the grips of dementia" (p. 196) later in his life prove that he was not also dedicated to transmitting his political cause to the next generation. Furthermore, the vignette follows a narrative based on family photographs which Makkai contextualizes within a disordered chronology. Still, the specificity of time and space fully or partially lacking in the previous vignettes emerges here as a counterpoint to the mystified and fabled trauma narratives universalizing the Second World War survivors.

In an attempt to dissect and clarify her family history, Makkai follows a sequential order of vignettes, and distinguishes between her grandmother's and grandfather's political choices. "I cling to [my grandmother] life like a raft" (p. 197) Makkai writes; still she does not exclude her grandfather's past. In "Acolyte", regarding her inherited memory, she writes, "[b]ut to claim one ancestor would be to claim them all, even those on the wrong side of humanity's decisive moral battles. [...] Wasn't the presumption of a genetic morality the effort at the very core of Nazi ideology?" (p. 105).

### **From familial to affiliative memory**

The first story in the fictional pattern, "The Worst You Ever Feel" integrates the themes of war and music to expose the mechanism of postmemory caused by rectilinear paternal transmission. The story features Aaron, a teenage violinist of Romanian musician parents who host a concert by the famous violinist Radelescu, the instructor of Aaron's father before the Second World War, a survivor of the Iași pogrom and a political prisoner under the Ceaușescu regime. The story is set in the 1990s, after the fall of the Berlin Wall and in Chicago. The convergence of historically significant events is only possible by postmemory, particularly with music, enabling Aaron to remember his father's account of the past and imagine the details he is yet to authenticate. Such momentary confluences recur throughout the cycle, and they are encapsulated in this story with images of invisible connections as the original and alternative sources of postmemory. Starting with his position while hearing the violinist play, Aaron is described as "a spider reigning over the web of oriental rug [...] and from his spider limbs stretched invisible fibers" (p. 3) surrounding the audience, the performer and his family. Additionally, the connection between people in the audience are described as "thinner strands" (p. 3), like those connecting Radelescu and his bow to the ghosts of his three students, killed during the Iași pogrom in Romania in 1941. As a result, Makkai puts Aaron's connecting abilities to the fore and thus prioritizes his postmemorial perspective.

Throughout the story, when individually considered, characters older than Aaron are described with images of deeper yet broken connections, as in Radelescu's vibratos, wrinkles, his limited use of English, and his finger cut off as a result of torture in prison. For the audience, maintaining the connection requires an exercise of personal responsibility, particularly as Aaron feels they are "breathing less, as if afraid to propel the old man back to Romania on the wind of their exhalations" (p. 5). For the ghosts, however, Aaron imagines a ceaseless connection and can guess where they are because

of his recently developed psychic powers, which have led his father to believe “he saw ghosts and fires and the evils of the world, past present, future” (p. 7). In this sense, Aaron’s postmemory comes in the form of revelations as he pieces together the remnants of the past. During the concert, his ability emerges via music and he visualizes and recollects Radelescu’s past as it supposedly reveals itself in music by the shifting tones in his performance.

Although his own musical training initially leads him to hear the music only, Aaron finds himself visualizing the conservatory where Radelescu used to teach alongside Morgenstern, another famous musician and instructor. Depending on his father’s memory of the two musicians, Aaron composes a narrative in which the now-broken connections were intact. Because they worked together for a long time, the names of Radelescu and Morgenstern have been pronounced “in one breath” ever since, their recordings have been shelved side by side, and the prolific work of their students at the conservatory was likened to a “music factory”; similarly, implying his natural and physical potential to extend his connections, Morgenstern himself is portrayed with “fingers like tree branches and legs like a stick insect’s” (p. 9). Aaron then starts to visualize the phases of the Iași pogrom as it affects the instructors and the students of the conservatory in the order of the changing tones in Radelescu’s performance. Gradually, the connections among the musicians dissolve as they barricade themselves in the classroom by moving the piano against the door, and as three of them die of fatigue and starvation or by the hands of the Iron Guard. Since the memory of the Iași pogrom depends heavily on Aaron’s imagination, he notices several gaps that require his father’s authentication.

Still, drawing from his inherited memory and old photographs, Aaron himself attempts to fill certain gaps in his own narrative. The first image he inserts to his visual dramatization of music is the farewell party at the conservatory organized for his father, who would soon leave Romania to study at the Juilliard School shortly before the war broke out. Two imaginary photographs are introduced at the beginning of the story like objects at the background while Radelescu is performing and the father is moving his empty wine glass to the rhythm. Even though both men overlook or evade the image’s significance at that moment, the narrator presents them as Exhibit C and Exhibit D, implying that they are physical evidence for something not yet uncovered, and that they require a narrative contextualizing the depicted event. In particular, Exhibit C shows the father “left the university, and Iași, and Moldavia, and all of Romania on June

20, 1941, nine days before the start of the Iași pogrom" (p. 4) and Exhibit D indicates his scholarship to the Juilliard. The narrator adds that "once you've gone to Juilliard you have connections, and connections are what matter in life, even more than talent" (p. 4). As the narrative discourse individually stresses all the places the father left and underlines the short time between his departure and the pogrom, it also accentuates the father's renewed connections in contrast to the broken connections among the Romanian musicians. The father's narrative of trauma, of having left his colleagues and formed alternative connections in the United States, constitutes the primary paradox of Aaron's postmemory. Presented as a demonstrative evidence, the photograph underscores the father's mediation of this memory.

In his visualization of the past during Radelescu's performance, Aaron notices information lacking in his father's narrative. At the farewell party, he is surprised to find that students had already been aware of other pogroms in other cities, since Aaron imagines "a stack of newspapers sitting on the lid of the piano" (p. 9), but also that they were ignored and the cake for the occasion was laid on them. Although Aaron relies on his father's memory to visualize and contextualize the picture, his revelation that the victims and survivors of the pogrom had been deeply connected to daily chores and to future plans largely contradicts the father's account of pain and suffering. From Aaron's perspective, it is understood that his childhood sicknesses had been neglected due to his father's conviction that his pain could not match the one suffered by the Romanian victims and survivors of the Second World War. However, Aaron's newly formed connections with Radelescu and the students' ghosts tell him a different version of the story and provokes Aaron to reconsider his father's narrative.

When the father invites Aaron for a surprise performance to accompany Radelescu, he becomes part of the crowd and their shared connection as "he felt everyone's gaze surround him, tie him in a knot" (p. 13). Unlike the spider as he was initially described, he is "the fly now in the web" (p. 13). Aaron's new association with the fly has two resonances: firstly, as a re-enactment of the three ghosts imagined in flight, and secondly as the victim position that he has been denied particularly by his father and his being American. Closely observing Radelescu's right hand, Aaron continues his postmemorial revelations by imagining Radelescu's imprisonment and his invented violin practice using the threads of his prison uniform and the wooden base of his bed. Such images of connection even under duress are juxtaposed to Aaron's momentary distractions from music, yet this time Radelescu guides Aaron to regain the endangered harmony

between them, as the narrator says that Aaron “waited a beat to rejoin on the right note, but found it was like a train he’s missed. Radelescu glanced at him, then seamlessly picked up the melody” (p. 17). Although Aaron’s consciousness has been shaped by the father’s accounts of memory, as in the expression of the missed train to express the guilt of leaving his close ones behind, playing with Radelescu integrates another resource of intergenerational transmission to his postmemory, this time via music. As a result, the audience “did not see him and Radelescu as two musicians, but saw Aaron as youth personified, a living example of what the old man had lost”; yet this newly formed intergenerational connection is only possible because Aaron is considered the “lucky American boy” who “does not know suffering” (p. 17). Aaron’s father, however, thinks that the performance lets him bridge the generational gap, as his instructor is performing with his son. Furthermore, as Aaron’s ability also connects him to the deceased, his postgenerational status is dignified and embraced by his father; yet it is also this ability that enables Aaron to question and reshape his father’s trauma narrative. As a result, watching his father closely, Aaron comes to a realization that the father had been experiencing guilt for purposefully leaving for the United States before the war to save himself, and that the revelations were nothing but reasoning. What is thought as psychic powers become available to him as he reconnects with his family’s past in his postgenerational perspective.

“The Museum of the Dearly Departed” returns to “The Worst You Ever Feel” to complete the cycle with a renewed reflection on the mechanism of postmemory. However, in contrast to the growing consciousness of an individual teenager boy in the first story, “The Museum of the Dearly Departed” addresses the persistence of fixed narratives that are now part of collective memory as experienced by adults. The story begins in the aftermath of a gas leak in an apartment building, which caused the death of twelve residents. Melanie Honing, the story’s protagonist, learns to her devastation that her prospective husband used to live with another woman in that building and is now among the dead. When she visits his apartment to collect his belongings, she meets Jed, a graduate student at the School of the Art Institute, who inherited his grandparents’ apartment. When Jed mentions to her his plan to design a miniature museum representing the dead by the objects they left behind, Melanie agrees to sort the objects he might use and accompanies him in his contact with the surviving elderly Hungarian couple who are also known to be Holocaust survivors. Towards the end of the story, when Melanie and Jed visit Zsuzsi, the elderly Hungarian woman to ask for an object reminiscent of someone they had lost during the Holocaust, they learn that her husband was actually

an Arrow Guard officer and saved Zsuzsi, a once-celebrated Jewish opera singer, from the concentration camp because of his love for music, and that they were married happily ever since. As Zsuzsi tells her story, she hands them a stuffed grey mouse belonging to her deceased little sister. The woman's testimony causes a strife between Jed, who is not affected by the truth and is still preoccupied with how he could use the mouse, and Melanie, who cannot process the information and relates the truth to her own shock of being betrayed by her fiancé. Although Melanie wants to return to the old couple and ask further questions after leaving the apartment, she changes her mind upon overhearing the old man's playing love songs to his wife on the piano.

The last story's major diversion from the first one is that it extends paternal and intergenerational transmission to a wider conception of cultural memory. In the first story, Aaron realizes as an individual that the paternal transmission he had received was shaped to the needs of his father as he visualized the past through the music of a violinist from his family history. The invisible link between Aaron and Radelescu finally relates the boy not only to the wider implications of his father's leaving Romania for the United States, but also elevates him in his father's eyes to the position of the witness, albeit psychic. However, Aaron forms a narrative known only to himself by preserving the unspoken truth; in other words, the postmemorial reworking in "The Worst You Ever Feel" is still kept as part of familial and intergenerational memory. The last story, however, presents postmemory in terms of what Hirsch calls "affiliative transmission". In *The Generation of Postmemory*, Hirsch explains that she has extended her conception of postmemory she described in *Family Frames* "from familial to affiliative structures of transmission" (2012, p. 21) and argues that "less directly affected participants can become engaged in the generation of postmemory which can thus persist even after all participants and even familial descendants are gone" (p. 111). Although Hirsch uses the term primarily to describe the postmemorial effort when no source of familial transmission remains alive, she works through the concept to explain the connections "available to other subjects external to the immediate memory" (p. 93). Rather than maintaining familial transmission, affiliative memory is closer to building collective remembrance; the characters in "The Museum of the Dearly Departed" therefore try to devise ways of remembrance for those with whom they lack any familial ties. In an apartment building where not even the immediate neighbours' faces are familiar, their initial endeavour evades the specificity and historicity of the deceased neighbours' life stories. Furthermore, the gas leak that is presented as an accident renders any differentiation among the deceased irrelevant, regardless of their past deeds.



“The Museum of the Dearly Departed” materializes the potentials and problems in affiliative transmission via Jed’s miniature museum. Jed initially plans the museum to eternalize the memory of those who could not survive the accident. However, his conception of victimhood leads him to find a similarity between them and the Hungarian couple. After the accident, the couple is interviewed by a journalist. Jed believes Zsuzsi is a “Holocaust survivor” and Melanie agrees with him by saying “the article said that, about the Holocaust” (Makkai, 2015, p. 205). In other words, the age and origin of the couple trigger a dominant cultural narrative within a reductive contextualization, since both the journalist and the characters imagine that they are Holocaust survivors, ignoring Zsuzsi’s own words which reveal that her husband “sings still all the Christmas carols” (p. 209). Such erroneous recontextualizations are acknowledged by the narrative voice, as the narrator first mentions Jed’s design as “a huge dollhouse, or a bookshelf without a roof” (p. 214). Melanie, too, uses the word “dollhouse” (p. 221) for the miniature museum, since the narrative voice is closer to her perspective. Jed also does not pronounce the word “museum” and calls it a “project” and “part of [his] thesis show” (p. 205). In addition, the objects Jed collects reveal the problem of representability. Demonstrating one item belonging to a neighbour’s deceased aunt, Jed says the neighbour “kept the collectible ones, but this crap [...] is more valuable to me” (p. 205). Similarly, as Melanie sorts the belongings of the woman with whom her fiancé cheated on her and about whose existence she was not previously aware of, she does not choose the objects that would best represent her, but distinguishes three categories: “the things on the family’s list, intriguing items for Jed, and the artifacts she intended to examine in greater detail when she had the stomach” (p. 205). In the story, what is left outside the familial and affective connections raises the problem of representing the victims. As a result, Jed’s miniature museum is presented with the risk of a similar reductionism and with the pitfalls of affiliative memory.

The affiliative transmission of traumatic memory in the story occurs between Zsuzsi and Melanie as she and Jed visit her for the museum and Zsuzsi speaks about her past in the form of testimony. Holocaust testimonies have occupied a central focus in trauma and memory studies, because they voice the unspeakable truth essential to narrativizing and historicizing the Holocaust. In “Bearing Witness”, Dori Laub illustrates a situation in which the losses in everyday life are “experienced by the camp survivor as a second holocaust” (1992, pp. 66-7). Zsuzsi’s testimony accordingly takes place after a deadly gas leak she survived by chance, reminding her of the gas chambers on the one hand, and her constantly returning trauma on the other. However, her testimony breaks with

the fragmented and belated characteristics of survivor narratives theorized in trauma studies, when she starts her testimony as "In 1944, in October, I am standing in the line at the train station" (Makkai 2015, p. 217). Zsuzsi's specific dating and her projection of her past in the present tense suggest that she is "re-externalizing the event" (Laub, 1992, p. 69) and that consequently, a previous therapeutical process had already provided her with the narrative conventions to compose her story. Furthermore, Zsuzsi's narrative act complicates the speaker-listener dialectic in the testimonial chain. As Laub argues, the speaker's cognitive awareness of the traumatic event produces a new kind of knowledge by the participation of the speaker as well as the listener. Laub writes "both parties have to pass a mutual test of safety" (p. 69) in that they share the same ethical norms to acknowledge the evils of the concentration camps, and the speaker's words take the form of testimony only when the listener "feel[s] the victim's victories, defeats and silences, know[s] them from within" (p. 58). Zsuzsi's testimony, however, compels Melanie into keeping completely silent first and then gradually questioning and opposing what she hears. In Zsuzsi's moment of silence, Melanie asks her "Are you saying your husband was there in the... he was in the capacity of a soldier?" (Makkai, 2015, p. 218). Compared to Zsuzsi's testimony, Melanie's question here is fragmented, because she cannot process the information she receives. Melanie becomes even more agitated when Zsuzsi continues to rationalize her marriage with the perpetrator. As the conversation proceeds, it reveals that Zsuzsi spoke about her past believing Melanie not to be the woman who was betrayed but the one who had an affair, and for the sole reason of advising her to date Jed. As the position of the analyst and the analysand is reversed, the conversation lays bare the reductive contextualization and the moral codes embedded in affiliative transmission, leaving Melanie with a set of suspicions regarding the conception of the victimhood in Zsuzsi's testimony and Jed's museum.

## Conclusion

The familial transmission of the Second World War memories has become threatened due to the increasing temporal distance between the first and third generations. To counteract this threat, new generations have been returning to established familial narratives with a new interpretative desire to reconnect to the past through a non-familial insight that would let them acknowledge yet also question the form and content of transmitted memories. Rebecca Makkai's *Music for Wartime* can be read as a return to the familial narratives of the Second World War in the form of the short story cycle. The sequential pattern of the cycle form provides Makkai with the means to elaborate

on the problems of familial and non-familial transmission, such as over-identification, universalization and mystification. Makkai's twofold sequential pattern of autobiographical vignettes and fictional short stories follows a procession from familial to non-familial transmission and vice versa, and thereby symbolically calls for a discourse maintaining the uneasiness in the negotiation with the past. What is emphasized, therefore, is the new generation's heightened awareness towards mediation, and with that, their dissecting reflections on the seemingly unified yet politically contentious pasts.

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