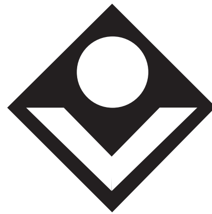
LITERATURE AND BELIEF

Edited by Daniel K. Muhlestein



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EDITOR'S PREFACE

This issue of *Literature and Belief* celebrates the work and lives of Jewish authors in the past and present and looks forward to the continuing contributions of American Jewish writers in specific in the twenty-first century. The issue is dedicated to the proposition that few things matter more than memory and that in an historical moment increasingly shot through with attempts to marginalize the history, contributions, and suffering of the Jews, a celebration of the writings of select Jewish authors is not merely helpful but needful. In *From the Kingdom of Memory*, Holocaust survivor and Nobel Peace laureate Elie Wiesel observes, "I fear forgetfulness as much as hatred and death." This issue of *Literature and Belief* is The Center for the Study of Christian Values in Literature's most current attempt to help insure that memory, witness, hope, and faith continue to find place in an uncertain world.

Although both Christians and Jews link their fates to the Messiah, the two faith traditions hold radically different views concerning who—and what—the Messiah is. And in "On Being a Jewish Author: The Trace of the Messiah in Elie Wiesel's Novels," David Patterson both provides a helpful overview of teachings concerning the Messiah in Jewish tradition and highlights traces of the Messiah in various of Wiesel's novels—traces that help define Wiesel as a distinctively Jewish author. In a post-Holocaust era, Patterson concludes, "God Himself needs the advent of the Messiah as much as His children do. And man is, indeed, God's link to the Messiah" (23). Wiesel's personal commitment to wait for the Messiah by seeking to help repair the world—*tikkun ha-'olam*—is alluded to in Asher Z. Milbauer's "Life Encounters: Reflections on Elie Wiesel." In his reflections on his periodic encounters with Wiesel, Milbauer—who grew up in the Carpathian Mountains, a son of Holocaust survivors whose presence was barely tolerated in the land of his birth—praises Wiesel's efforts on the behalf of Soviet Jews (including members of Milbauer's own family), noting that "in the course of his entire life," Wiesel had "never given up praying and wishing for a world of tolerance, peace, and grace" (27).

Wiesel's 1986 Nobel Peace Prize came some twenty years after S. Y. Agnon shared the Nobel Prize in Literature with Nelly Sachs, and in certain respects Wiesel's novels bear what might be called a family

resemblance to Agnon's stories and allegorical tales. Like Wiesel, Agnon is concerned with memory and the act of witnessing, and in "Transcending Textual and Temporal Boundaries: S. Y. Agnon on Witnessing and Belief," Gila Safran Naveh makes a convincing case that Agnon challenges the boundaries between the sacred and the profane by reviving the art of quotation from sacred texts. In the process, Naveh notes, Agnon creates a complex intertextual web that "take[s] Agnon's reader back to a multitude of cultural contexts, both Biblical and post-Biblical[,] . . . which ultimately put into question the relationship between the sacred and the secular and point to a new mode of spirituality" (39).

While Naveh's essay reminds us of important links between the past and the present, Victoria Aarons' "American Jewish Writing in the Twenty-First Century: New Global Directions" argues persuasively that contemporary American Jewish literature "is in the process of redefining what it means to be Jewish at this particular moment in history and of locating the expansive possibilities for a range of Jewish literary expression" (60). Aarons both highlights significant differences between such post-war writers as Saul Bellow and Philip Roth and the current generation of American Jewish writers and identifies a number of typical characteristics and trends in twenty-first century American Jewish literature. Aarons uses two case studies—the work of the Guatemalan Jewish novelist Eduardo Halfon, who lives in the United States and writes in Spanish, and that of Ayelet Tsabari, a Canadian writer of Yemeni descent who grew up in Israel—to highlight a number of such characteristics, including what Aarons aptly labels "a performance of the complexities in the inheritance of diasporic invention" (65). Contemporary American Jewish writers like Halfon and Tsabari —Aarons concludes—are increasingly part of "a generation of travelers, traveling among contrastive geographies and languages and the spaces of the imagination . . . / While earlier generations of Jewish writers in North American might be thought to have mapped 'America' on to their emerging identities, this new diasporic generation seems to transfer identity onto newly found place" (65, 75).

Aarons' analysis is a logical extension of what might be called the generational model of post-Holocaust writing, and the next two essays in the issue revolve around examples of the second, third, and subsequent generations of such writing. In "The Reluctant Witness: A

Meditation on Andrew Grof's *The Goldberg Variations*," Milbauer and Alan L. Berger explicate Grof's welcome—if belated—addition to the literature of the second generation, that written by the children of Holocaust survivors. As Milbauer and Berger make clear, although *The Goldberg Variations* arrived somewhat late on the scene, it is quintessentially second generation in that it

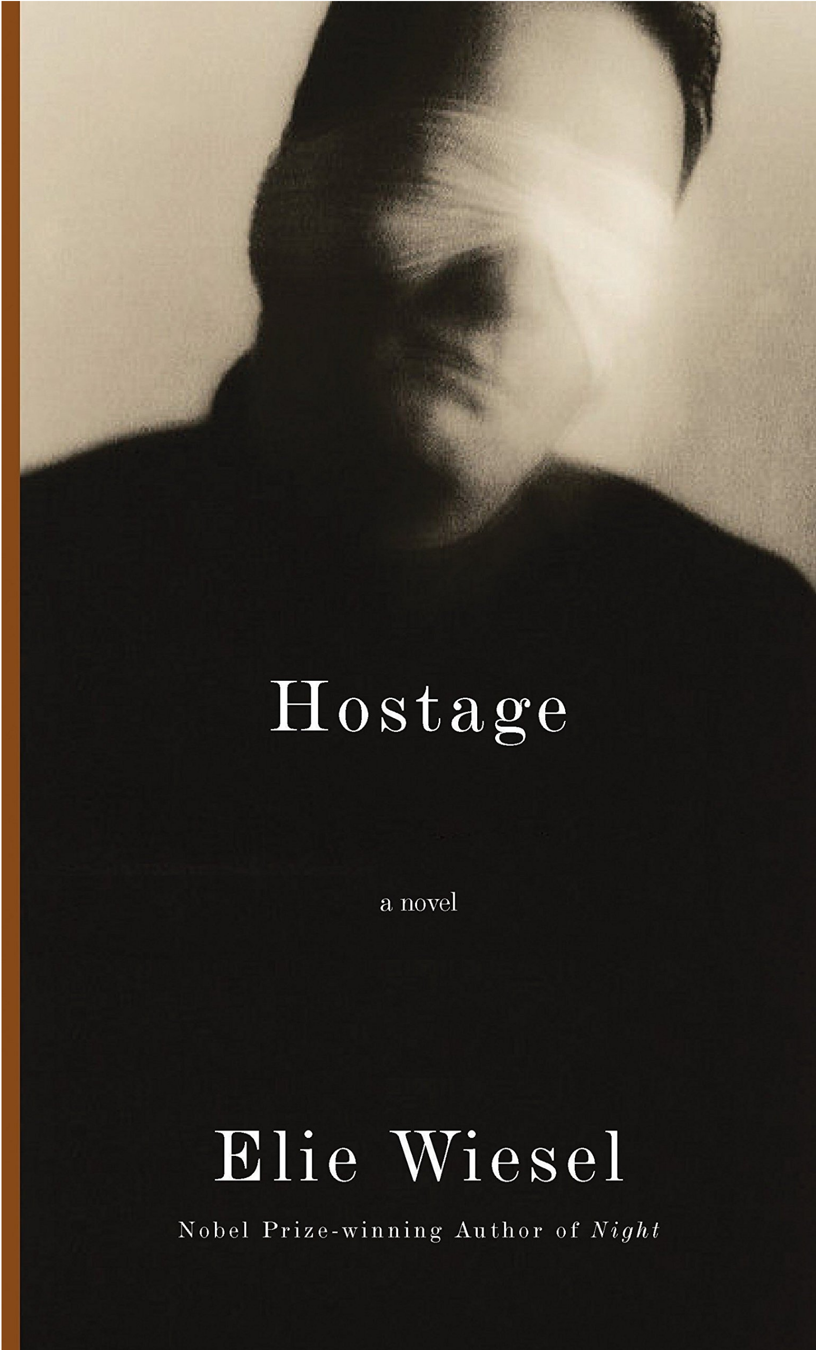
> treats core issues of identity, the nature of memory, transmission of trauma, and the complexity of bearing witness to an unexpected event. Furthermore, Grof's novel problematizes the key second generation notion of time by insisting on the burning need to seize the moment and bear witness while defying the seductive, yet illusory, clear-cut lines of demarcation between the past and the present. (79)

This abiding concern with memory, trauma, and the ways subsequent generations are likely to remember—or misremember or fail to remember—the Holocaust is similarly evident in Berger's analysis of Nava Semel's recent *And the Rat Laughed*. In "The Future of Holocaust Memory: Nava Semel's *And the Rat Laughed*," Berger shows how Semel's novel, opera, and film script dramatize the challenges faced by the remembearers of successive generations as they attempt—in a number of different times and settings—to become links in the chain of Holocaust memory transmission. In that respect, Semel's work—Berger concludes—reveals in the fraught age of the internet and visual culture "both the difficulty and the necessity of transmitting traumatic memory and its manifestations in the generation of 'postmemory' and beyond" (120).

In addition to contributing articles to this special issue of *Literature and Belief*, Aarons and Berger recently published *Third-Generation Holocaust Representation: Trauma, History, and Memory* (2017). This issue concludes with a brief review of their book.

I appreciate the excellent work done by all of this issue's contributors, and I am particularly grateful for Alan's generosity and care in helping bring this issue of *Literature and Belief* to fruition. Thank you, my friend. *Shalom*.

—Daniel K. Muhlestein


Hostage
a novel
Elie Wiesel
Nobel Prize-winning Author of *Night*

On Being a Jewish Author: The Trace of the Messiah in Elie Wiesel's Novels

David Patterson
University of Texas at Dallas

In *Somewhere a Master* (1982), Elie Wiesel invokes a teaching from Pinchas of Koretz, a disciple of the Baal Shem Tov, founder of Hasidism: "To be Jewish is to link one's fate to that of the Messiah—to that of all who are waiting for the Messiah" (23). To link one's fate to that of the Messiah is not only to await but also to work for the coming of the Messiah, even though he may tarry—even though, if one may speak such words, he may never come. To be sure: the Messiah is the one who has forever *yet to come*, so that to be Jewish is to forever be engaged with an eternal *yet to be*. To live is to live on the edge of the *yet to be*. Or, for Wiesel, to live is to live in the midst of the *and yet*. There abides the Messiah: in the *and yet*. For Wiesel, to link one's fate to that of the Messiah is to link one's fate to the *and yet*, particularly after the Shoah. The Shoah altered forever the meaning of the Twelfth of Maimonides' Thirteen Principles of Faith, the belief in the coming of the Messiah, even though he may tarry—a belief that would recur throughout the works and the life of Elie Wiesel.

Bearing witness to the truth and the wisdom of the Jewish messianic tradition was, for Wiesel, the tie that most profoundly bound

him to the Jewish tradition and therefore to Jewish life: for Wiesel the tie to Jewish tradition *was* his post-Holocaust connection to life, and that bond lay most profoundly in his link to the Messiah. In *Open Heart* (2012), he recalls the tale of a survivor, a Hasidic rabbi, who finally agreed to say what happened to him "over there." Suddenly the rabbi began to sing the *nigun* of "Ani Maamin," "the most beautiful, most moving *nigun* I had ever heard. He added nothing: For him, the song said it all. Shall I be able to sing up above? Shall I too be able to intone this *nigun* that contains all that I have tried to express in my writings?" (46). The words of the *nigun* are the words of the Twelfth Principle of Faith, recited every day in our prayers: *Ani maamin beemunah shlemah beviat haMashiach; veaf al pi sheyimanmeah, im kol zeh achakeh lo bekol yom sheyavo*—"I believe with complete faith in the coming of the Messiah; even if he may tarry, *no matter what*, I shall await his coming every day." These words contain all that Wiesel struggled to express throughout his voluminous writings. These words contain all that made him or any Jew a Jewish witness and therefore a *Jewish* author, words that perhaps come to a single word: *HaMashiach*.

Linking his fate to that of the Messiah, Wiesel linked his fate to the fate of humanity and thereby quickened the steps of the Redeemer, both in his writing and in his life. He exemplified the words of Emmanuel Levinas, whom he knew very well: "To love one's neighbor is to go to Eternity, to redeem the World or prepare the Kingdom of God. Human love is the very work, the efficiency of Redemption" (*Outside the Subject* 58). In *Souls on Fire* (1972), Wiesel paraphrases Levinas: "Every encounter quickens the steps of the Redeemer; let two beings become one and the world is no longer the same; let two human creatures accept one another and creation will have meaning" (33). A *living* human love is messianic to its core: like God, the Messiah is not to be studied—he is to be *lived*. To be sure, "for most writers," Wiesel once said, "their work is a commentary on their life," but for Jewish writers "it is the opposite; their lives are commentaries on their work" (*Against Silence* 2: 255). And their lives as Jews are linked to a messianic redemption of humanity. Wiesel was above all a Jewish writer who lived and

wrote from the depths of Jewish teaching and tradition, steeped above all in waiting and working for the coming of the Messiah.

"One of the characters who has been present in all my writings," says Wiesel, "is the character of the Messiah, and who is the Messiah, what is the Messiah, if not the embodiment of eternity in the present, the embodiment of eternity in the future. He is waiting for us as long as we are waiting for him" (*Against Silence* 3: 288). The embodiment of eternity in the present and in the future lies at the core of the messianic sense of history that guides Wiesel's literary endeavor: rarely has there ever been a more intimate sense of the link between literature and history, between the Messiah and time itself. "The awaiting of the Messiah," says Levinas,

> is the duration of time itself—waiting for God—but here the waiting no longer attests to the absence of Godot, who will never come, but rather to a relationship with that which is not able to enter the present, since the present is too small to contain the Infinite. ("Revelation in the Jewish Tradition" 203)

In the words of Wiesel, "the Messiah symbolizes our preoccupation with time instead of space" ("A Portrait of the Messiah"). Perhaps better: time is the tarrying of the Messiah. That the Messiah tarries is what gives meaning to life, for the dimension of meaning is the dimension of time. The Messiah, therefore, does not end history—the Messiah *is* history, inasmuch as the meaning of the Messiah lies in the wait for the Messiah. In the words of Levinas, to link one's fate to that of the Messiah is to affirm that salvation "remains at every moment possible" (*Difficult Freedom* 84). Indeed, in the *Ani Maamin*, the word translated as "wait," *achakeh*, means "expect": I shall *expect* the coming of the Messiah because it can happen at any moment. Thus, the mentions of and allusions to the Messiah, even though fleeting, pervade Wiesel's novels.

"In order to bring the *Mashiach* into one's full consciousness," writes Rabbi Yitzchak Ginsburgh, "each of us must strive to purify and make potent our faculty of speech in Torah, prayer, and the communication of love between us" (20). No Jewish author has

strived to purify and make potent his faculty of speech and his facility with the word more than Wiesel. And this is the point, what sets Wiesel apart from many other Jewish writers: he tirelessly waited, worked, and wrote for the coming of the Messiah. That is why his novels assume an aspect of prayer, as in, for example, *The Town Beyond the Wall* (1964), which is divided not into chapters but into prayers. Reading his tales, one can hear the call of the great storyteller of Hasidism, Nachman of Breslov, who enjoined his listeners, "Make my tales into prayers" (Wiesel, *Souls on Fire* 173). Where tales are transformed into prayers, eternity is embodied in the present and looms on the horizon of the future. Where tales are transformed into prayers, they become "the substance of language and the language of silence" (Wiesel, *Paroles d'étranger* 172; my translation). When tales are transformed into prayers, their fate is linked to that of the Messiah. But who, in Jewish teaching, is the Messiah?

The Messiah in Jewish Teaching: A Brief Background

There are perhaps no teachings in Jewish tradition more confused and conflicting than the teachings on the Messiah. A few things, however, are clear. The one whom the Jews await is not the son of God any more than any other human being is a child of the Holy One. The Messiah is neither the incarnation of God nor part of a triune divinity; the Midrash, in fact, speaks of his mortal death, saying that when the Messiah dies, the World to Come will be ushered in (*Tanchuma Ekev* 7). Further, he is not born of a virgin, who in turn requires an immaculate conception. Indeed, from a Jewish perspective, the conception of any human being can be "immaculate," since in marriage the sexual union that produces a child is itself holy, as is the one born from that union. Hence the dual meaning of *kiddushin*, which translates both as "holiness" and as "marriage." And because we do not inherit Adam's sin, we are born innocent and untainted, as we affirm each morning in our prayers: *ha-neshamah shenatata biy tehorah hiy*—"the soul You have placed within me is pure."

According to Jewish teaching, children are not in need of redemption—they are the source of redemption, as the Vilna Gaon

maintains (45). In the Midrash, Rabbi Assi teaches that children begin their study of Torah with the Book of Leviticus because "children are pure, and the sacrifices are pure; so let the pure come and engage in the study of the pure" (*Vayikra Rabbah* 7.3). The one whom we await, then, is not one whose blood will cleanse us of our inherently sinful being; rather, he will return us, body and soul, to the inherently holy relation to God and to one another. This may be one reason why the Midrash calls the Messiah the Son of Perets (*Bereshit Rabbah* 12.6), the child born to Judah and Tamar (see Gen. 38.29): the name *Perets* means "breach" or "opening," and the Messiah is he who creates the most complete opening for holiness to flow into this realm.

Jesus' statement, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18.36), is alien to Jewish thinking about the Anointed One. From their perspective, the Messiah's kingdom is *in* this world and *of* this world, for as Adin Steinsaltz points out, *this* world, the Olam Asiyah, "is the most perfect form of the Revelation of God. It is said, 'The existence of the material is the substance of the Divine.' In other words, the highest values are found within matter, in the material world" (229). Therefore, the Messiah comes not to deliver us *from* the world but to draw Torah into the world, so transparently that the word of the Holy One will be engraved upon every human heart (Jer. 31.33), and justice and righteousness will reign (Isa. 9.6). Swords will be beaten into plowshares, and "nation will not lift up sword against nation" (Mic. 4.3). The Jewish wait for the Messiah is a waiting and a working for such a world.

With regard to other prophecies of the Messiah, in the famous disputation at Barcelona held in 1263, Nachmanides pointed out that "you will never find in any book of Jewish tradition—neither the Talmud nor the Hagadoth—that the Messiah son of David will be killed, that he will be handed over into the hands of his enemies, or that he will be buried with the wicked" (2.667). Most prevalent of all the unfulfilled prophecies concerning the Messiah is that the Jews will be returned from exile. Various prophets invoke various signs of the coming of the Messiah, but almost all of them invoke this one: the ingathering of the Jews (for example, Isa. 11.11–12; Jer. 23.3, 29.14,

32.44, 33.7; Ezek. 39.25; Joel 4.1; Zeph. 3.20; Zech. 10.8–10). The Midrash, in fact, teaches that in the time of the Messiah, the nations of the world will assist in the return of the Jews to the Holy Land (*Shir Hashirim Rabbah* 4.8.2).

Beyond that, the teachings are less clear and often more mysterious. In the Talmud, for example, it is written, "Know that there exists on high a substance called 'body' [*guf*] in which are found all the souls destined for life. The son of David will not come before all the souls which are in the *guf* have completed their descent to the earth" (*Yevamot* 63b; *Avodah Zarah* 5a; *Niddah* 13b; see also *Zohar* I, 119a). This mystical tradition underscores the connection between the upper worlds and this world. This mystical view associates the completeness of creation with the coming of the Messiah; it also articulates a connection between each soul and all of creation—between each soul and the Messiah himself. On the day of his coming, "Hashem will be One and His Name will be One" (Zech. 14.9). Which is to say: in the Tetragrammaton the upper letters *yud-hey* and the lower letters *vav-hey* will be joined, so that the holiness of the Holy One will be manifest throughout the world. Thinking and doing will be one; teaching and practice will be one; love of God and love of neighbor will be one.

There are other teachings concerning the Messiah. The Midrash, for example, says that Gog and Magog will launch three wars against the Messiah in the winter month of Tevet. Messiah ben Joseph will fight those wars; in some accounts, he will be killed and then followed by Messiah ben David, who will usher in the everlasting age of peace (see Rashi's commentary on Talmud tractate *Sotah* 51; see also the *Or Hachayim* on Lev. 14.9). In addition to Gog and Magog, the archenemy of the Messiah is sometimes called Armillus, who is spawned from Satan's mating with a stone statue in Rome. Forty days after the spawning of Armillus, Messiah ben David will rise up to build the Temple in Jerusalem and defeat the offspring of Satan (Eisenstein 466). That Armillus is born from a stone is indicative of the Messiah's defeat of the view that what is real is what can be weighed, measured, and counted and that power, therefore, is all that matters. Further, it is said that the Messiah will reveal the meaning of the blanks between the words and

in the margins of the Torah, the meaning of the white fire (Patai 257). Perhaps he will also reveal the meaning of other flames.

Because we are prone to tarry, the Talmud teaches that two times are destined for the coming of the Messiah: now and the appointed time (*Sanhedrin* 98a). This teaching is based on the words from the prophet Isaiah: "I HaShem will hasten it in its time" (Isa. 60.22); that is, I will either hasten it to make it now, or it will be in its appointed time. *Now*, if we perform the task for which we were created. *Now*, if we treat others, especially those who are most defenseless, with loving kindness. In short, now *is* the appointed time for *me* to act for the sake of another. Without the wait for the Messiah, there is nothing to hasten and no time appointed. Waiting for the Messiah, though he may tarry, is just the opposite of the languishing that characterizes so much of our intellectual game playing, which is no more than a means of marking time or killing time.

How long must we labor for the coming of the Messiah? According to the *Pesikta Rabbati*, 365,000 years (1.7). Which is to say: the wait is infinite, as infinite as our responsibility. Thus, said Rabbi Samuel ben Nachman, in the name of Rabbi Yonatan, "Cursed be the bones of those who calculate the end. For they would say, since the predetermined time has come, and yet the Messiah has not come, he will never come. Nevertheless, wait for him" (*Sanhedrin* 97b). In this *nevertheless* we have the needful response to the despair that haunts the post-Holocaust world: do not calculate the "end"—hasten it. The time of the coming of the Messiah that is now is the time for which I am always too late, because it is always *already*: the Messiah abides in the nexus of the *not yet* and the *already*. To be sure, in the Talmud it is written that there will be no Messiah because those days have already passed, in the time of Hezekiah (*Sanhedrin* 99a); the point, however, is not to put an end to the task but to underscore its infinite duration. Even though—and precisely because—I am too late, I must hasten the coming of the Messiah.

Wiesel has said that "for Christians, the Messiah is God's link to man; in Judaism man is God's link to the Messiah" ("A Portrait of the Messiah"). And so we see this insight unfold in the teachings of the Jewish tradition, as well as in Wiesel's novels: there is, both

throughout this tradition in general and throughout Wiesel's novels in specific, a sense that somehow God's link to His own redemption as Creator is tied to humanity through the fate of the Messiah. If everything is in God's hands except the fear of God, as it is written in the Talmud (*Berakhot* 33b; *Niddah* 16b), then the advent of the Messiah is in the hands of humanity. The Talmud teaches that the name of the Messiah is among the seven things that preceded creation (*Pesachim* 54a). (The other six are Torah, Teshuvah, Gan Eden, Gehenna, the Throne of Glory, and the Temple.) The Zohar teaches that "the 'spirit of God which hovered over the face of the deep' (Gen. 1.2) is the spirit of the Messiah" (*Zohar* I, 240a). The Messiah precedes the beginning to oppose the darkness that would undermine the beginning: bearing the name that preceded creation, the Messiah is essential to all of creation. Therefore, the Messiah is present in every generation, a name in search of a man, as well as a man in search of a name, often disguised as a beggar, a leper, or an orphan—or as an old man, a child, or a madman, the three characters who, as Wiesel once told me, form the foundation of his novels. And so we come to the fleeting traces of the Messiah in the novels of Elie Wiesel, the traces that define him as a distinctively Jewish author.

The Traces of the Messiah in the Novels of Elie Wiesel

In *The Gates of the Forest* (1966), Wiesel brings to bear several of the Jewish traditions surrounding the Messiah. The central character is a Hungarian teen named Gregor in the time of the Shoah, whose murdered parents left him to hide and survive in a cave—rather like Shimon bar Yochai and his son in the second century, whose task in the cave was to learn from Elijah what it would take to bring the Messiah, who would put an end to the Roman persecution. Instead of encountering the Messiah, however, he encounters a mysterious figure named Gavriel—like the Archangel Gabriel, the Angel of Judgment—who has spoken with Elijah, the herald of the Messiah. What did Elijah say to him? This: "The Messiah is not coming. He's not coming because he has already come. . . . The Messiah is everywhere. Ever present, he gives each passing moment

its taste of drunkenness, desolation, and ashes" (32). The Messiah abides in the desperate longing for his coming, in the desperate laboring for his advent, in the desperate insistence that we want Mashiach *now*. Perhaps this is what leads Gregor to declare to a Rebbe, "And I tell you this: if their death has no meaning, then it's an insult, and if it does have a meaning, it's even more so" (197). This is the dilemma, the needful tension, that only the Messiah can resolve—or sustain.

In the end Gregor realizes that "the Messiah isn't one man . . . he's all men. As long as there are men there will be Messiah" (225). For as long as there are men there abides the possibility of the answering of "Here I am for you" to the other human being, which is the only way we can answer to the Holy One. As long as there are men, there will be the responsibility to pose the question of meaning that Gregor poses above. There will be the responsibility to bring the Messiah that devolves upon humankind, since, according to the Hasidic masters Zadok ha-Kohen (Lamm 576–77) and the Stretiner Rebbe (Newman 248), in each of us there is a spark of the Messiah. "In concrete terms," says Levinas, "this means that each person acts as though he were the Messiah. Messianism is therefore not the certainty of the coming of a man who stops History. It is my power to bear the suffering of all. It is the moment when I recognize this power and my universal responsibility" (*Difficult Freedom* 90). If, as Gregor's father tells him, "the Messiah is that which makes man more human, which takes the element of pride out of generosity, which stretches his soul towards others" (33), then the Messiah summons man to an infinite responsibility to and for the other human being. In Wiesel's novels the one who waits is the one who awaits this realization and who will then act upon it.

Only in that way can we ascend through the fifty gates of the orchard alluded to in this novel's title. These are the gates that we count during the counting of the omer, marking the fifty days' journey from Egypt to Mount Sinai. The whole point of the revelation of the Torah at Mount Sinai is the redemption brought about through the Messiah, who awaits his entry through the fiftieth gate. Thus we glimpse the mystical significance of the Messiah in *The Gates of the Forest*. Says Rebbe Barukh of Medzebozh, "Beyond the fiftieth gate

there is not only the abyss but also faith—and they are one next to the other" (Wiesel, *Somewhere a Master* 74). The tension between these two poles is the tension of the wait for the Messiah, the tension that runs throughout Wiesel's novels.

In *A Beggar in Jerusalem* (1970), the tension between the abyss and faith has its parallel in the tension between the past and the future. Here we see more clearly the profound link between the Messiah and history itself, as the time of the novel shifts between the abyss of the Shoah and the faith reborn after the Six Day War. Weaving midrashic tales with mystical imagery, Wiesel tells the tale of a Holocaust survivor named David, who goes to Jerusalem upon the outbreak of the Six Day War. He joins a tank unit, where he makes a pact with another soldier, Katriel, whereby each promises to tell the other's tale if one of them should not survive. When Katriel goes missing, David proceeds to tell his tale. Indeed, Katriel, the son of a mystic from Safed, is himself a storyteller, a teacher, and something of a mystic, so that his name suits him: it means "God is my crown," from *keter*, the highest of the ten *sefirot*. Rabbi Shimon teaches in the Mishnah that there are three crowns: the crown of Torah, the crown of the priesthood, and the crown of kingship (*Avot* 4.3), and the crown of kingship culminates in the scion of David (Jer. 23.5–6). Katriel, then, is a pivotal figure with regard to the motif of the Messiah in this novel.

Indeed, Katriel's father tells him, "You are the bridge between the Babylonian Sages and the generations to come. Each man must consider himself responsible for both, each man contains all." Katriel asks if that burden is not too heavy, and his father replies, "You won't always have to bear it alone. You'll soon take a wife, you'll raise children, and they will transmit my name and yours so that one day the Messiah himself will hear their voice" (96). If the Messiah is not one man but all men, his presence lies in the responsibility of all men to transmit the name that was before the beginning, so that the voices, the outcries, of all humanity might be heard. We discover how deep this responsibility runs in the cry of a Hasidic master as the Nazis are about to murder him and others:

> I address myself to you, witnesses! Open your ears and remember. We do not want to die, we want to live and build the kingdom of the Messiah in time and prayer. Someone opposes this wish and that someone is One and His name is One. We know that His eternal secrets transcend us. But does He know the pain they cause us? Even so, brothers: we shall make Him a gift of our lives and our deaths. We wish Him to use them as He pleases, and may He be worthy of them. (74)

God opposes the wish of the Jews to live and build the kingdom of the Messiah? How can this be? And how can one wonder whether God Himself might be worthy of anything? This is where the Wieselian "and yet . . ." enters.

To add even more depth to the paradox, in the novel we see the Messiah, too, aligning himself with those who made God a gift of their lives and deaths. In a midrashic moment, Wiesel relates that the three Patriarchs once came before the celestial court and reported to God that all is in keeping with His divine plan. The heavenly hosts gathered together and celebrated. Then God asked, "The Messiah, where is the Messiah? Why isn't he here taking part in the festivities?" The angel Michael reported that the Messiah has disappeared. God ordered that he be found and brought before Him. And so His bidding was done: the Messiah was brought before the Holy One, and God asked him, "Where have you been?" He answered that he had been in Jerusalem. He explained that he had decided to stay with God's people, rather than join in the heavenly festivities, saying, "I had to join them, be one of them. Their will was stronger than mine, stronger than Yours, and so was their love. You see, they were six million" (54–55). And so we see the link between the Messiah and the beggar in Jerusalem. We understand, if only just a little, the meaning of one of the early passages in the novel:

> Jerusalem: The face visible yet hidden, the sap and the blood of all that makes us live or renounce life. The spark flashing in the darkness . . . a name, a secret. For the exiled, a prayer. For all others, a promise. . . . Jerusalem: the city which miraculously trans-

> forms man into pilgrim; no one can enter it and go away unchanged. (11)

For anyone who enters Jerusalem is, more powerfully than ever, charged with the responsibility to hasten the coming of the Messiah.

The responsibility to hasten the coming of the Messiah is a responsibility to save lives, to save even a single life, as we see in Wiesel's novel *The Oath* (1973). Here we have the story of Azriel, the survivor of a pogrom over a blood libel in the Hungarian village of Kolvillàg. He bears the secret of the destruction, and he bears the oath that he would never reveal its secrets. Fifty years later, however, he meets a young man bent upon suicide. And so, even though his oath binds him to the dead, he decides to tell the tale to this one human being and transform him into a witness. "Speak, the old man thinks. The best way. Make him speak. Speak to him. As long as we keep speaking, he is in my power. One does not commit suicide in the middle of a sentence. One does not commit suicide while speaking or listening" (22). So what is the dilemma facing the old man with regard to his oath? It is an oath not only to the dead who have passed but also to the Messiah who is yet to come:

> The survivor resents his survival. That is why the Christians imagine their Saviour expiring on the cross. They thus situate him outside the circle of shame; he dies before the others, instead of the others. And thus the others are made to bear his shame. The Messiah, as seen by the Jews, shows greater courage; he survives all the generations, watches them disappear one after the other—and if he is late in coming, it is perhaps because he is ashamed to reveal himself. (79)

Azriel shares in the Messiah's shame.

Among those who were murdered in the pogrom is a man named Moshe, a madman reminiscent of Moshe the Beadle in *Night* (1960). "What is the Messiah," said Moshe,

> if not man transcending his solitude in order to make his fellow man less solitary? To turn a single human being back toward life is to prevent the destruction of the world, says the Talmud. Do something good and God up there will imitate you; do something evil and suddenly the scale will tip the other way. (90–91)

Hence Azriel's effort to save the young man determined to kill himself is tied to his effort to bring the Messiah, to bring a time when the scale will tip the other way. God and man—each requires the other; neither can bring the Messiah on his own. "The Messiah," says Moshe. "We seek him, we pursue him. We think he is in heaven; we don't know that he likes to come down as a child. And yet, every man's childhood is messianic in essence. Except that today it has become a game to kill childhood" (132). Making children a first target in the extermination project, the Nazis set out to exterminate the Messiah. Because of the children, "we must be worthy not only of the Messiah but also of the wait for the Messiah. Let us be thankful for the wait," as it is written in Wiesel's novel *The Oath* (236). And so we see that, above all, the motif of the Messiah has to do with the children. If, as it is written in the *Tikkunei HaZohar*, the children are the face of the Shekhinah (cited in Polen 102), then, as the first targets in the Shoah, the enemy targets the Messiah by targeting the children first.

In *The Testament* (1981) we have a character who turned from the Jewish messianism that he grew up with and sought another messianism, a "messianism without God," as Wiesel has called it: communism ("A Portrait of the Messiah"). The novel relates the story of a Russian Jewish poet named Paltiel Kossover, who was arrested 12 August 1952, on what is known as the Night of the Murdered Poets, when thirteen Soviet Jewish intellectuals and artists were executed in Moscow's Lubyanka Prison. Unlike the other poets in real life, however, the fictional Paltiel was allowed to leave behind his written testament before being murdered. In it he relates the tale of his life, largely for the sake of his son Grisha. It is the tale of a Jew's return to his Judaism, with the Messiah haunting almost every page. In fact,

among the characters is a mysterious figure named David Aboulesia, who identifies himself as a Messiah Seeker (160).

In his youth, Paltiel explains to his interrogator,

> [M]y questions revolved endlessly around the Messiah. I was aching to hasten his arrival, knowing that he would surely abolish the distance between rich and poor, sad and happy, beggar and landlord: put an end to pogroms and wars; unite justice and compassion, making certain that both were true. (71)

Of course, communism had promised to do all these things. However, unlike the interrogator, whose Messiah is named Marx, he adds, "Ours has no name. That is the majesty of our tradition: it teaches us that among the ten things that preceded Creation was the name of the Messiah—the name no one knows and no one will know before he appears" (72). Paltiel continues:

> But this Messiah, how could we hasten his arrival? Reb Mendel-the-Taciturn knew how: We needed to study our holy texts closely, immerse ourselves in our esoteric tradition, learn the names of certain angels and free certain forces. Such is the disquieting beauty of the messianic adventure: only man, for whose sake the Messiah is expected, is capable and worthy of making his advent possible. What man? Any man. Whosoever desires may seize the keys that open the gates of the celestial palace and thus bring power to the prisoner. The Messiah, you see, is a mystery between man and himself. (72)

If any man may seize the keys that open the gates, then every person, beginning with the Jews, is summoned to the task of hastening the coming of the Messiah. If the measure of our days lies in the pursuit of that task, then so does the measure of our identity, of who we are. According to the Talmud, among the six questions that the heavenly tribunal puts to us is the question of whether we worked for the coming of the Messiah (*Shabbat* 31a; the other five questions pertain to honesty in our business dealings, our study of Torah, bearing children, our pursuit of wisdom, and our fear of heaven).

Recall what David Aboulesia, the Messiah Seeker, says to Paltiel. The Messiah, he tells him, is

> of this world, young man. The Talmudic sages place him at the gates of Rome, but in fact he lives among us, everywhere. According to the Zohar, he is waiting to be called. He is waiting to be recognized in order to be crowned. Remember, young man, the Messiah looks like anyone at all except a Messiah. His name, which preceded Creation, also preceded him. The story of the Messiah is the story of a quest, of a name in search of a being. (160)

The unknown name in search of a being is a name that summons each of us by name, a name that seeks us out, forever putting to us the questions put to the first human being and his firstborn: "Where are you?" (Gen. 3.9), "Where is your brother?" (Gen. 4.9), and "What have you done?" (Gen. 4.10). Just so, when Paltiel runs into Aboulesia some years after their first encounter, he asks him if he is still seeking the Messiah, whereupon Aboulesia answers, "When he's not looking for me, I'm running after him" (188–89). If, as Aboulesia says, "the great thing is to not to be the Messiah but to seek him" (163), it is because the one way we have of answering, "*Hineni!* Here I am for you," is to undertake the quest and to raise the question that itself is the source of redemption.

Here it is worth briefly explaining Aboulesia's reference to the gates of Rome. According to the Talmudic tale, one day the great third-century sage Joshua ben Levi was deep in meditation at the grave of Shimon bar Yochai, when the Prophet Elijah paid him a visit, as Elijah sometimes did with the great sages. Joshua ben Levi asked him, "When will the Messiah come?" And the Prophet replied, "Go ask him yourself. He is sitting outside the gates of Rome, a leper binding his wounds. But, unlike the other lepers, he binds just one wound at a time, so that he may be ready to reveal himself at a moment's notice." Joshua ben Levi went to the gates of Rome, found the Messiah, and asked him, "Master and Teacher, when will you come and reveal yourself?" And the Messiah replied, "Today, if you will heed the voice of the Holy One" (*Sanhedrin* 98a). That is where the

story ends. It is said, however, that if Joshua ben Levi had helped him with his wounds, the Messiah would have revealed himself.

Having lived through the carnage of the mid-twentieth century, Paltiel has serious questions about the whole messianic endeavor, questions that arise out of compassion for the Messiah himself. He says to Aboulesia,

> The more blood flows, the nearer peace. But I cannot stand the sight of blood. If, in order to appear in his immaculate glory, the Messiah has to have himself announced by shrieking nations massacring one another, let him stay home. . . . Poor Messiah! All the things done for you in your name—all those things you're made to do. (189–90)

Perhaps for Wiesel one key to redemption lies in this suggestion that the price of redemption is too high. And yet . . .

Although in Wiesel's novels discussed so far the Messiah is only alluded to, awaited, or sought out, in *Twilight* (1988) the Redeemer makes an appearance as a patient in a sanatorium, a place that is indeed in a kind of twilight zone. The novel is about a Holocaust survivor and professor of Jewish mysticism named Raphael, who goes to a sanatorium that specializes in treating patients who take themselves to be biblical and other religious figures, including God Himself. Raphael goes to defend the mysterious figure of Pedro, who made his first appearance in Wiesel's *The Town Beyond the Wall*, against a certain slanderer. Taking a professor of Jewish mysticism as his main character, Wiesel wastes no time drawing upon his own vast knowledge of the teachings on the Messiah in the mystical tradition. Nor is it any accident that we find his character Raphael, the "professor" of mysticism, mingling with the madmen. "Mystical madness," says Wiesel, "is redeeming. The difference between a mystical madman and a clinical madman is that a clinical madman isolates himself and others, while a mystical one wants to bring the Messiah. What is the ultimate aim of mysticism? To bring the Messiah" (*Against Silence* 3: 232). And so Raphael turns to the madmen.

Early in the novel, Raphael encounters an old man who is also a madman:

> The patient spoke, and Raphael listened. The more he listened, the less he understood. The old man spoke of God and His attributes, and of the ten *Sephirot*, which collectively symbolize the king's crown and majestic power. He described an invisible palace surrounded by fiery walls where the Creator of the world awaits the *Shekhina* to restore his Creation to the origins of innocence. And the eagle's nest where a lone, melancholy Messiah prays for time to accelerate its rhythm, for words to open themselves to the Word. . . . (13)

In these few lines we see the depth of Wiesel's understanding of the kabbalistic tradition and its impact on the motif of the Messiah in his novels.

The reference to the eagle's nest is crucial to a reading of the motif of the Messiah in *Twilight*. This reference to the nest where the Messiah prays stems from a passage from Torah:

> If a bird's nest chance to be before you in the way, in any tree or on the ground, with young ones or eggs, and the mother sitting on the young, or on the eggs, you shall not take the mother with the young: you shall surely let the mother go, but the young you may take to yourself, that it may be well with you, and that you may prolong your days. (Deut. 22.6–7)

The *Tikkunei HaZohar* says that the "bird's nest" refers to the exile of the *Shekhinah*, or the Divine Presence (12b). The Zohar explains that the meaning of the bird's nest is revealed in the prophecy of Isaiah: "And they shall go into the holes of the rocks and into the caves of the earth, for fear of the Lord and for the glory of his majesty, when he arises to shake terribly the earth" (Isa. 2.19). "The glory of his majesty" refers to the Messiah, who will reveal himself only to launch a war. After a time of tribulation, the Messiah will be crowned, and all the nations of the earth will behold him. And so Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai teaches his son:

> The Messiah is hidden in [Eden's] outskirts until a place is revealed to him which is called "the Bird's Nest." This is the place proclaimed by that Bird [the Shekinah] which flies about the Garden of Eden. . . . The Messiah enters that abode, lifts up his eyes and beholds the Fathers [Patriarchs] visiting the ruins of God's Sanctuary. He perceives mother Rachel, with tears upon her face. . . . Then the Messiah lifts up his voice and weeps, and the whole Garden of Eden quakes, and all the righteous and saints who are there break out in crying and lamentation . . . until it reaches the highest Throne. . . . Then from the holy Throne the Bird's Nest and the Messiah are summoned three times, and they both ascend into the heavenly places. . . . Then the Bird returns to her place. The Messiah, however, is hidden again in the same place as before. (*Zohar* 2.8a–8b).

Thus we see the depths of this Jewish writer's engagement with the Messiah. It is an engagement rooted not only in the passionate longing and working for the coming of the Messiah but rooted also in the millennial Jewish tradition targeted for extermination in a time when the Messiah was more desperately needed than ever before.

As one might expect, one of the patients in the sanatorium identifies himself to Raphael as the Messiah. Perhaps reminiscent of the Nazarene, he is in his early thirties. Taking Raphael to be a little skeptical, he assures the professor:

> Don't worry. I'll save you anyway. I'll even save those who refuse to be saved. In fact, I'll save them first. That is my mission. The Lord entrusted me with it. He has several saviors, the Lord. One takes care of wise men, the other of fools. The Messiah of the Just lives next door. I'm the Messiah of the Wicked. Thieves and killers come to me for salvation. (174–75)

The reference to two Messiahs brings to mind the two Messiahs of the Jewish tradition mentioned previously: Messiah ben Joseph, who comes in a time of great evil, and Messiah ben David, who comes in a time of great goodness. "This patient," we read, "holds a special

fascination for Raphael. Since childhood, he has loved messianic talks. Mystification intrigues him because of the Messiah's role in it" (175). Raphael engages this patient and explains to him some of the Jewish teachings and traditions on the Messiah. "In my tradition," says Raphael, "the Messiah is anonymous. Our sources put greater emphasis on messianic times than on the Messiah's personality. For us, the wait is more important than the wish to be the Messiah" (177). The waiting and working for the Messiah is more important because it is a way of coming to the aid of the Messiah, to extend a hand to the anonymous, leprous beggar outside the gates of Rome.

Raphael relates that when he was a child, his parents gave him the blessing that he should live to see the coming of the Messiah. Never mind whether living to see the tribulations surrounding Messiah ben Joseph is such a blessing. To that the patient answers, "Well, their blessing has been realized! Here you are in the presence of the Messiah. . . . Have you nothing to say? You repudiate me just as your people repudiated Christ? Never mind. I'll save you in spite of yourself" (177). Again the overlap with the Christ of Christianity, even though the Christian Messiah bears little resemblance to the Jewish Messiah. And yet Jesus of Nazareth was Jewish. Could it be that, as the Christians of the early centuries de-Judaized the Anointed One, they themselves repudiated him? Indeed, in *A Beggar in Jerusalem* a character who encounters Yehoshua (Jesus) on the day of his crucifixion tells him that his brothers the Jews will be made to suffer for him, whereupon Jesus broke into tears of despair (56–57). And, given the anonymity of the Messiah and the teaching that he comes to us in various disguises, could it be that disguising himself as a madman who claims to be the Messiah is among the most cunning of his disguises? "Sometimes I envy my colleague," says the patient to Raphael, "the Messiah of the Just. His kingdom is filled with beauty and holiness, mine is ugly and twisted. His radiates joy, mine is steeped in violence. And yet . . ." (177). Again the *and yet*. . . . And yet what? Perhaps this: the Baal Shem Tov taught that gratitude and joy run deepest precisely when they are most groundless (see Wiesel, *Somewhere a Master* 133–34). The groundlessness yawns in the *and yet*. . . .

So we come to Wiesel's novel *Hostage* (2012). The year is 1975, and Shaltiel, a storyteller by profession, is kidnapped on the streets of Brooklyn by an Arab and an Italian, members of the Palestinian Revolutionary Action Group; they hold him hostage and threaten to kill him unless three Palestinians are released from captivity. In order to keep from being overcome with terror, Shaltiel does what he does best: he tells stories to his captors and to himself. Haunted by the years he spent as a child in hiding during the Holocaust, his tales are a weave of memories, Hasidic teachings, and mysterious figures such as One-Eyed Paritus. In the end the Italian releases the hostage. When Shaltiel believes that his captors are indeed going to kill him, we are told, "A Talmudic saying comes to his mind. On the first day of the funeral, the dead person hears an angel who comes to his tomb, knocks and asks his name [see Nachman of Beslov 102]. Woe to the one who forgets it. Don't forget, don't forget, Shaltiel mumbles to himself. Shaltiel, son of Haskel and Miriam, don't forget." And

> Paritus asks him in a whisper: it's the second question that soul is supposed to answer: Did you hope for Redemption? Redemption: Is Shaltiel still waiting for it? Is it for the Jewish people, whose destiny and faith are defined by a timeless expectation, waiting for the one who puts off coming to save them, Shaltiel and the entire world? (204)

The capacity for raising such questions—and not the capacity for fixed formulas and ready answers—lies at the heart of working for the coming of the Messiah. Near the novel's end, therefore, we hear the voice of the one whose words form its epigraph, which ends with "Oh, if only I knew the art of questioning" (1). Of course, Shaltiel's name means "I have questioned God."

In Wiesel's *The Sonderberg Case* (2010), One-Eyed Paritus is said to be a mysterious figure supposedly found among the Apocrypha from the age of the prophets (63). In fact, One-Eyed Paritus turns up in several of Wiesel's novels, including *The Judges* (2002) (77, 193), *A Mad Desire to Dance* (2009) (183), and *The Fifth Son* (1985) (129, 194). In *Hostage* Paritus tells Shaltiel,

> Someday I hope to meet the man who knows the Messiah's name and identity as well as the date of his advent. When that happens, the whole world will know it, including you. On that day, man will understand that, faced with his destiny, which is his truth, questions and answers will have become one. (124)

There we have the messianic age: it comes not with the elimination of the question—the *shelah*, with *el* or "God" at the heart of the question—but with the merging of the question with an answer to become yet another question. "Somewhere," said Nachman of Breslov, "[t]here lives a man who asks a question to which there is no answer; a generation later, in another place, there lives a man who asks another question to which there is no answer either—and he doesn't know. He cannot know, that *his* question is actually an answer to the first" (Wiesel, *A Jew Today* 158). Thus, the first question put to the first man becomes at once an answer and another question, turned back on itself—or on Himself: Where are you?

In the latter portion of *Hostage*, we have an episode that sums up Wiesel's decades-long engagement with the Messiah and what underlies the trace of the Messiah found throughout his novels. It comes from a Hasidic tale that Shaltiel's grandfather related to him, the story of how the Baal Shem Tov once gathered his closest disciples to teach them the mysteries of the final Redemption: How and when to recite certain of the litanies; say the number for each of the heavenly angels; take the ritual bath and cite specific verses of the Psalms and the Zohar; practice an absolute asceticism of silence and chastity for a specific number of days and nights. All the things that had come down to him from his Masters—and to them from theirs, going back to the sixteenth-century Rabbi Hayim Vital and his master the ARI (Issac Luria), and as far back as Moses, all the things concerning the advent of the Messiah—he passed on to them.

They were to meet at an appointed time in a secret place in the forest, where they would confront the Messiah with the suffering of the Jewish people. But the Master was late. Even the Messiah was kept waiting. "But on my way here, a few steps before reaching you," explained the Besht,

> I heard a child crying in a hut near the edge of the forest. His cries were heart-breaking. His mother had probably gone to fetch wood for the hearth, or milk. So, brothers and friends, I couldn't help opening the door to the hut, stepping inside, looking at the baby in his shabby cradle, singing a lullaby for him and consoling him. Do you understand? When a child cries like this, the Messiah can and must wait. (160–61)

Do we understand?

This is why the wait for the Messiah is more important than being the Messiah, even more important than the advent of the Messiah: waiting for the Messiah rests upon our ability to hear the outcry of a child. If the wait does not sharpen our sense of hearing and our capacity for answering "Here I am for you," then it is truly in vain. Each time we answer such an outcry, we create an angel, as the Talmud teaches: our thoughts and words and deeds create angels, and they go out into the world to do their work, for good or for ill, to unlock the gates and open the way for the Messiah or to close them, both here below and on high, as in Jacob's dream of the angels ascending and descending the ladder to the upper realms (see *Avot* 4:11; *Chagigah* 41a). Thus we hold the Messiah hostage—or is it the other way around? Perhaps we are his hostages, held as a ransom for creation and the redemption of this world.

Concluding Thought: On Being a Jewish Author

Scholars are fond of holding forth on Jewish thought, Jewish literature, Jewish identity, Jewish this and Jewish that—and I am as guilty as anyone. But what is Jewish about a Jewish author? I think we have the trace of an answer in the trace of the Messiah that permeates the novels of Elie Wiesel. As he has said, "[O]nly when night seems irrevocably sealed can the messianic light break through. With the dawning of the messianic era good and evil and light and darkness will become one. All nations will hate Jews. They will hate themselves" ("A Portrait of the Messiah"). Is the age upon us? Is it about to dawn? In a sense, it does not matter: as long as there is the

outcry of a child to answer, we must first respond to that outcry with our own cry of "Here I am for you!" Like firefighters, we must be first responders to the children and to the child within each human being, each *ben adam*, because there was a time when "with each hour, the most blessed and most stricken people of the world numbers twelve times twelve children less. And each one carries away still another fragment of the Temple in flames. Flames—never before have there been such flames. And in every one of them it is the vision of the Redeemer that is dying" (Wiesel, *Ani Maamin* 27, 29). Wiesel breathes a breath of life into that dying vision.

That dying vision haunts the messianic visions that leave their trace throughout Wiesel's novels. It is a vision fraught with an overwhelming, unprecedented tension, a tension that constitutes the trace of the Messiah. Wiesel articulates that tension in a passage from *Sages and Dreamers* (1991): When the Rabbi of Kretchenev was deported to Auschwitz, "he began consoling his disciples: It is written, he said, that when the Messiah will come, God, blessed be He, will arrange a *makhol*, a dance, for the Just. *Makhol*, said the Rabbi, may also come from the verb *limkhol*—to forgive. . . ." And so, declared the Rabbi, "there will come a time, when the Just Men, the Tzaddikim, will forgive God, blessed be He" (131). And so we come to the ultimate realization, the thread that forms the trace of the Messiah in the novels of Elie Wiesel: in the post-Holocaust era, God Himself needs the advent of the Messiah as much as His children do. And man is, indeed, God's link to the Messiah.

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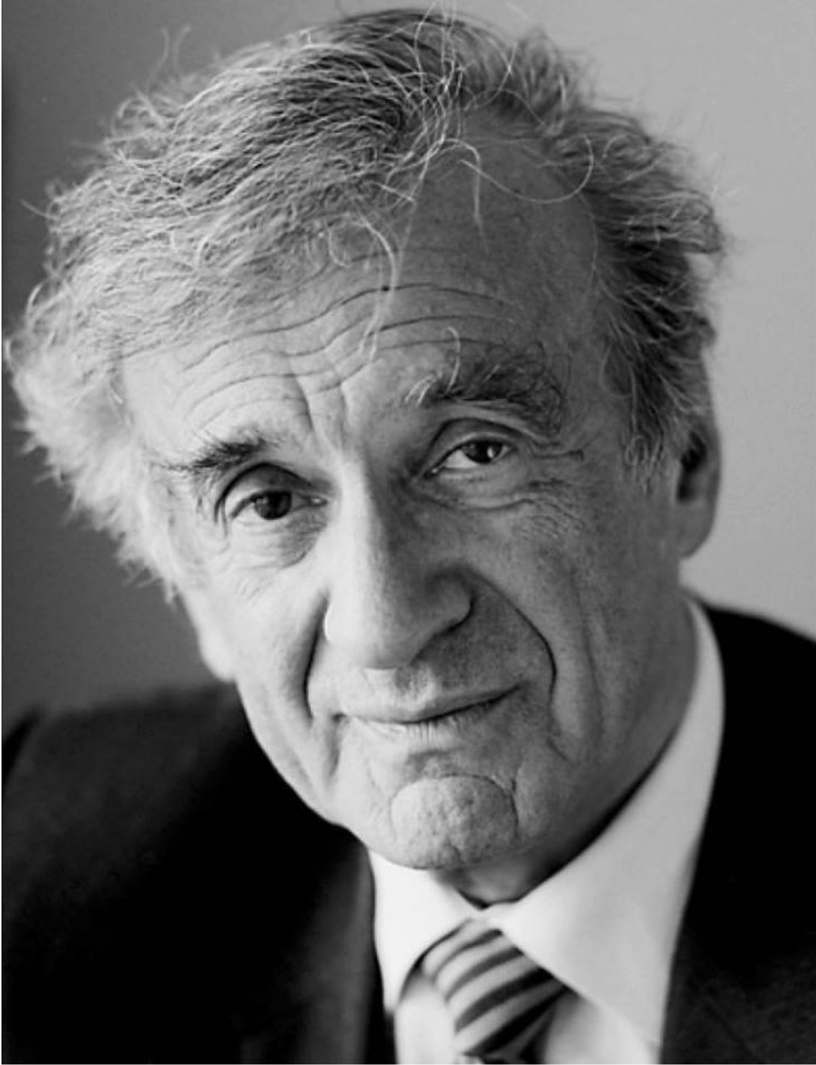

Life Encounters: Reflections on Elie Wiesel

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"Somewhere in the Carpathian Mountains, at the other end of my life, a Jewish child is saying his daily prayers," writes Elie Wiesel in the first paragraph of his autobiographical essay, "To Believe or Not to Believe" (23). In his prayers, like generations of Jews before him, he reaffirms his "perfect faith" in the Creator and the intransience of the Torah gifted to the Jewish people on Mount Sinai. He acknowledges the imperfections and uncertainties of the world he inhabits, yet he maintains that it "was up to man, God's creation, to make the universe more welcoming, to bring redemption closer," and to have the strength to not stray from the path of Judaism he inherited from his ancestors (24). Ever faithful to the child he once was, Elie Wiesel, in the course of his entire life, has never given up praying and wishing for a world of tolerance, peace, and grace.

In the 1990s, when I first came across Wiesel's essay, I thought of another Jewish child who grew up in the Carpathian Mountains, a son of survivors, a college student and a person whose presence was barely tolerated in the land of his birth, the former Soviet Union. And what was he praying for? Just like men and women throughout the precarious history of Jewish existence, I was also praying for a

speedy deliverance from the "realm of fear and silence," as well as an opportunity to live openly and proudly as a Jew in a less uncertain and more inviting world (Wiesel, *The Testament* 1). More often than not, I felt that my prayers fell on deaf ears, that the Jews of Russia were forgotten, and that the free world would never be able to transcend the same indifference and apathy that, just some twenty-five years earlier, had contributed so devastatingly to the destruction of European Jewry. After all, to quote one of Alexander Solzhenitsyn's despairing protagonists, "How can you expect a man who's warm to understand a man who's cold?" (Solzhenitsyn 19). And yet, there were moments of hope as well, when we listened clandestinely to rare and poorly defined messages embedded in barely audible and invariably jammed broadcasts of *Kol Israel, Voice of America*, or *Radio Free Europe*, broadcasts that drew the world's attention to the voiceless Russian Jews trapped behind the Iron Curtain. Just the mere mention of our plight sparked celebrations, as it asserted our existence before an otherwise blind and indifferent world. *We exist!*

It must have been during one of those broadcasts that I learned about *The Jews of Silence: A Personal Report on Soviet Jewry* (1966), a book that was shaking up world Jewry and calling it to action on behalf of Soviet Jews. I heard that its author, Elie Wiesel, visited Moscow and other major cities during the High Holidays in 1965, and that he had pledged to become a messenger of hope and freedom to the yearning masses of Jews he met in the few still-functioning synagogues. While fully aware that Wiesel's book had no chance of publication in the Soviet Union, I prayed that one day soon I would have an opportunity to read it and, maybe, even meet its author.

My first prayer was answered when, shortly after my arrival in Israel in 1972, I was able to read *The Jews of Silence*. And, although I had to wait for several more years to meet Wiesel, still it is worth noting that even that improbable prayer was ultimately answered too. In his brief introductory notes, Wiesel casts himself as a witness to the fears and isolation of the Russian Jews. Furthermore, he wants the world to know about how some of them, at least, were courageously defying the Soviet regime's unrelenting efforts to write the

Jews out of Russian history and to destroy both their spirit and their spirituality. "I went to Russia drawn by the silence of the Jews," wrote Wiesel, "and I brought back their cry" (*The Jews of Silence* VIII).

Yet, he did more than that. Wiesel pointed an accusatory finger at Jews and non-Jews around the world, calling on them to break *their* silence and heed the Russian Jews' heartbreaking plea to be heard and delivered. He could not remain silent, and neither should the world, he insisted; for, as he once put it, quoting an ancient philosopher, "When truth is in danger, silence equals guilt" (*And the Sea is Never Full* 136).

And silent he has not remained. As I followed his public and literary careers, I came to admire his indefatigable efforts to keep the fate of Russian Jewry central within his larger mission of promoting human rights. Whenever he was allowed, he returned to the Soviet Union to pressure the authorities to ease the plight of Jews, to allow them to emigrate, and to free the Prisoners of Zion. His passionate actions on behalf of Soviet Jews manifested the *Pidyon Shvuyim* commandment (Redemption of Captives) in the Talmud, which asserts the moral, ethical and religious obligation to secure the release of unjustly detained Jewish captives whose love of Zion caused their imprisonment. Likewise, in his actions and his writings Wiesel responded to his own creed of decency that considers indifference to the plight of a fellow human being to be a grave sin. In his highly celebrated and widely circulated White House Millennium Lecture, "The Perils of Indifference," Wiesel pointedly and succinctly spells out the consequences of remaining silent and standing by in times of crisis. "Indifference," he declares,

> is always the friend of the enemy, for it benefits the aggressor—never his victim, whose pain is magnified when he or she feels forgotten. The political prisoner in his cell, the hungry children, the homeless refugees—not to respond to their plight, not to relieve their solitude by offering them a spark of hope is to exile them from human memory. And in denying their humanity we betray our own.

Moreover, the injunction "Do not stand idly by while your neighbor's blood is shed" reverberates through every page Wiesel has written and every deed he has undertaken in his fight against the abuses of human rights in general and the abandonment of his Jewish brothers and sisters in particular (Lev. 19.16). Years later, Natan Sharansky, one of the most well-known and celebrated Prisoners of Zion, writing two days after Wiesel's death on 2 July 2016, underscored the significance of Wiesel's activist role in the lives of Russian Jews:

> Perhaps better than anyone else of our age, Elie Wiesel grasped the terrible power of silence. He understood that the failure to speak out about both the horrors of the past and the evils of the present is one of the most effective ways there is to perpetrate suffering and empower those who inflict it.

It was, in fact, precisely this profound understanding that led Wiesel some ten years before the publication of *The Jews of Silence* to write and publish his Yiddish-language memoir, *Un di Vellt Hot Geshvign* (*And the World Remained Silent*), subsequently known as *Night* to millions of his English-speaking readers. Arguably Wiesel's most celebrated book, *Night* continues to warn the world of the perils of silence and calls on humanity to heed the lessons and legacies of the Holocaust. *Never Again* and *Let My People Go* are the battle cries that inform Wiesel's life-long fight for decency and tolerance.

While still in the Soviet Union, I was comforted to learn that world Jewry was beginning to recognize that urgent actions were essential for protecting the Russian Jews. In the late 1960s, several of my Uncle Philip's siblings, all Holocaust survivors residing in America, obtained extremely-hard-to-acquire tourist visas and visited us in the Soviet Union. Meeting them was a privilege, for they represented freedom, democracy, and liberty: everything we also hoped to enjoy one day soon. They asked us to be patient, for many in the United States and Europe had begun to demand freedom of passage for Russian Jews. Wiesel, as we learned, stood at the forefront of this effort.

Wiesel's activism was matched by his literary efforts. In 1974, he published *Zalmen, or the Madness of God*, a play and subsequently

a television movie. As Wiesel recounts in his introduction, *Zalmen* is based on his encounter with a Russian Rabbi whose synagogue he visited on the eve of Yom Kippur in 1965. He saw the old Rabbi sitting on the *bimah*, "praying and sighing as though in a trance. . . . He seemed to be living elsewhere, resigned, beyond hope, foundering into a faraway past, even perhaps into oblivion" (VII). To Wiesel, the Rabbi symbolized "the tragic isolation of Russian Jewry, humiliated and scarred by the time of the pogroms to the reign of Stalin, enduring a destiny apart, always apart, as though banned from history" (VII). And yet, while fully cognizant why the Rabbi had lapsed into hopeless resignation, Wiesel longed to see him "wake up, shake himself, pound the pulpit and cry out, shout his pain, his rage, his truth" (VII). He wanted him to call on his congregants to refuse to be "prisoners of [their] past, of [their] fear" (VII). The *Kol Nidre* service, however, went on uninterrupted, leaving Wiesel's prayer unanswered.

However, Wiesel took it upon himself to use the powers of *his* artistic imagination to give the Rabbi another opportunity to find his voice. In *Zalmen* Wiesel has the Rabbi undergo a profound metamorphosis: his fear gives way to courage, his lethargy to action, his stifled self-expression to vocalized affirmation of Jews' right to live with dignity. Before concluding the Yom Kippur service, the Rabbi breaks his silence and exhorts his fellow Jews to become masters of their own lives and fate. And, indeed, about the time *Zalmen* was produced, Jews inside the Soviet Union began to break their own silence and resist the regime.

Wiesel's continuous involvement with Russian Jews and his profound awareness of the precariousness of Jewish existence behind the Iron Curtain next compelled him to depict a horrendous moment in Soviet history that had haunted him for years: the eradication of Soviet Yiddish writers, Leib Kvitko, David Hofstein, Itzik Fefer, David Bergelson, and Peretz Markish, among them, all of whom Stalin had executed during the Night of Murdered Poets in 1952. Wiesel's unpublished manuscript, *The Trial of Krasnograd*, set the foundation for the publication in 1981 of his highly-acclaimed novel, *The Testament*. In his memoir, *And the Sea is Never Full*, Wiesel states that

the main character of *The Testament*, Paltiel Kossover, the author of a slim collection of Yiddish poems, is "loosely based" on Wiesel's two favorite Yiddish writers: Peretz Markish, the murdered poet, and Der Nister, the novelist who perished in the infamous Gulag (88). The novel, Wiesel declares, is an exploration of the "soul and conscience" of a Jewish intellectual, a Talmudist turned into a devotee of Marx, who "exiled himself to the margins of Judaism" to live as a communist (87). He realized, too late, however, that once a Jew always a Jew, that having been born a Jew he never "ceased to be one" (87). Kossover dies as a Jew in the dark recesses of the Lubyanka prison, the final destination for many an intellectual who belatedly realized that paradise cannot be built on an ideology in which the ends justify the means.

Before his death, however, Kossover composes a narrative of his intellectual journey in which he settles accounts with his youthful illusions. Through the good services of a righteous prison stenographer, Victor Zupanev, the narrative/testament/confession is preserved and passed on to his son, Grisha, who manages to bring the manuscript with him to Israel in July of 1972. In a brief letter that prefaces his testament, Kossover admonishes Grisha to remember his roots and remain true to Judaism. "Don't follow the path I took," he pleads. "It doesn't lead to truth. Truth, for a Jew, is to dwell among his brothers. Link your destiny to that of your people; otherwise you will surely reach an impasse" (*The Testament* 7).

Kossover's admonition reverberates throughout Wiesel's writing, and it resonates with me personally as well. My parents, like many survivors, insisted that my brothers and I retain an identity that caused millions to be exterminated, that we remain Jews, that we not surrender to the seductive forces of assimilation. They insisted that we learn Yiddish, the language of grandparents we never had, a language rendered nearly dead because of the Holocaust. To retain Yiddish meant to resist, to remember, and to commemorate. Com-manding us to memorialize the past, they encouraged us to laugh, enjoy life, acknowledge the kindness of the stranger, and, most importantly, hope that one day the Iron Curtain would crumble and the Soviet dictatorial regime would collapse under the weight of its

own perfidity, thereby allowing us a chance to choose our own destiny and effect an exodus not unlike that of our ancestors. This was my parents' legacy, and by transmitting it to us, they hoped that each in our own way would bear witness and remind the world that their suffering was not in vain.

While following Wiesel's journey as a social-justice activist and Jewish-American writer, I hoped that one day I would be able to tell him in person how much his writing and his commitment meant to me. That opportunity finally came in the late 1970s at the University of Washington, where I was a doctoral student. Our conversation was brief but highly rewarding. He was pleased to be acknowledged, and I was happy that my prayer was answered. We both hoped that we would meet again in the near future.

As chance would have it, a few years later our paths crossed again. When I arrived at Florida International University in fall 1982 as a new Assistant Professor, I learned that Wiesel, as part of a three-year arrangement with the university, would come each spring to teach a course for both the English and Religious Studies departments. Since he taught every second week, the chairs of these respective departments worked with his students during the off-weeks, when he was at Boston University. They asked me to join them, and even though this offer came with a few minor strings attached—when needed, I was supposed to help with transportation and share my office with him—I jumped at the opportunity.

Watching him teach was a truly inspiring experience. Whether he talked about Franz Kafka or Ann Frank, major biblical figures or Holocaust writers, Hasidic masters or Bruno Schultz, he invariably mesmerized the students and encouraged them to ask questions. He was not afraid of classroom silence, and he knew how to listen to his students. He was curious about their lives and made them feel that they mattered.

During our occasional rides to and from the hotel, he often asked me about my teaching agenda. I told him that in addition to my usual repertoire of academic offerings in American and English literature, I would like to teach a course in Holocaust literature. I was not sure, however, that I would be able to muster the emotional stamina

needed to teach a semester-long class on the Shoah and literary responses to it. Wiesel quietly responded that it was not an easy task to write about the Holocaust, either. Years later, in his 1999 memoir, *And the Sea is Never Full*, he expanded on this point: "to teach their writings is to respond, however inadequately, to their desperate call for justice" (105). I knew he recognized and understood my anxiety, for he stated in his foreword to Alan Berger's *Children of Job: American Second Generation Witnesses to the Holocaust* that the children of survivors "will never detach themselves from the tragedy that gave birth to them" (VIII).

During one of the classes in which someone raised the matter of Soviet Jews and their resettlement in Israel, Wiesel suggested the students also talk to me about the issue, as first-hand knowledge would give them the fresh perspective of a witness. I appreciated his acknowledgment of the worth and validity of my own experience, but I was sure, as I told him later, that given his long-lasting intimate involvement with the fate of Russian Jews, there was hardly another authoritative voice more fit to speak about the Russian Jews. As evidence, I cited the brief essay signed by E. W.—presumably Elie Wiesel under a quasi-fictional disguise—that precedes *The Testament*'s full text. E. W. describes the arrival of a planeload of Russian Jewish immigrants in Lod airport in July 1972. He finds it thrilling to come frequently to the airport to observe the miraculous exodus of the Jews on whose behalf he'd been aggressively advocating for almost a decade. E. W. never fails to be moved by the ecstatic reunions of friends and family, the impromptu celebrations, the rivers of tears flowing down the cheeks of the new arrivals and their hosts. I told Wiesel that his incredibly authentic recreation of the sights and sounds he witnessed at the airport invariably brought me back to my own arrival in Lod in May 1972, just two months before the time of his narrative, and I often thought it would have been a charming coincidence if he had been among the crowd greeting the new immigrants when I arrived. After all, Grisha Kossover, Paltiel's son, was among the arriving crowd Wiesel saw disembarking in July 1972. Wiesel looked at me inquisitively, as if to say: "when it concerns Jewish people, miracles do happen."

On a different occasion, as he was probing me on Jewish life in the Carpathian Mountains after the Shoah, I told him about my Uncle Chayim, a hat maker and a Holocaust survivor, who was continuously refused permission to leave the Soviet Union. I asked Wiesel if he could help. His response was immediate: "Give me the information and I will see what I can do." I know he tried his best, but for some inexplicable reason my uncle continued to remain trapped behind the Iron Curtain. He died a few years later, in the midst of what Wiesel earlier called "realm of fear and silence" (*The Testament* 1). When I told Wiesel what happened to my uncle, he sadly shook his head in disbelief.

Years later, I was pleased to be the bearer of happier news. At a dinner hosted in Wiesel's honor at Florida Atlantic University, Wiesel asked me again how I was faring and what I was teaching. I told him about the courses I developed in the fields of Exile Literature, Witness Literature, and Holocaust Literature. The one I was the proudest of, I said, was a graduate seminar on Vasily Grossman and Ilya Eherenburg, two of the first writers and war journalists to expose the world to the horrors of the Shoah. He nodded approvingly. When I added that I co-taught this seminar with a University of Geneva professor, Shimon Markish, the son of his favorite Soviet Yiddish writer, Peretz Markish, and that Florida International University had invited Shimon to hold the year-long Jordan Davidson Chair in the Humanities, a chaired professorship that Wiesel had helped establish, his eyes lit up and a broad smile crossed his deeply wrinkled face. And at that moment I knew that there was no mystery in the crossing of paths of two Jewish boys from the Carpathian Mountains. *Vhais bashert iz bashert.* What's meant to be is meant to be.

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The Middle of the Story

You know the beginning—how God told
my husband to build that ark.
And you know the ending—the dove, the rainbow,
the promise never to drown the world again.
We all remember beginnings and endings and forget
what's in between. Let me tell you how it was.
When the heavy sheets of rain began to fall,
we felt snug and safe. But after the first few
days all those pairs of animals grew restless and irritable.
Grunts, howls, shrieks, barks, whistles, bellows—
the noise was deafening. What odors and filth!
As the ark rocked and trembled in the mountainous waves,
all of us lost control of our bodies: blood, vomit, excrement everywhere.
Our cozy ark became a prison. Some delicate animals,
the tiny pitlap and hairy faloons, disappeared overboard.
If it had gone on any longer, I too may have chosen death—
if I could even stand up by then.

–Bonnie Lyons

Transcending Textual and Temporal Boundaries: S. Y. Agnon on Witnessing and Belief

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S. Y. Agnon, the Russian born Israeli writer and Nobel Prize recipient, pondered frequently the nature of belief as well as the reasons for unfaith in modern times. His unique allegorical tales function as secular commentaries on classic sacred texts, which challenge the boundaries between fact and fiction and between the sacred and the profane. This narrational strategy is replicated in a number of ways in his vast opus. Through repeated incursions into Midrash (an ancient commentary on the Hebrew scriptures dating to the second century and earlier), Agnon revives the art of quotation from the sacred writings, commonly pointing back to Talmudic, to Chasidic, or to figures from Kabbalah, in the shape of "pseudo-quotations." The text, the meta-text, and the interpretation of each cited scriptural unit take Agnon's reader back to a multitude of cultural contexts, both Biblical and post-Biblical. This complex intertextual web draws from and relies on a complex system of connotations and values, which ultimately put into question the relationship between the sacred and the secular and point to a new mode of spirituality.

In exploring the process of sanctification, Agnon's stories ultimately call attention to the fictive or real status of each. The unexpected

byproduct of Agnon's approach to storytelling is that the sacred authority of the ancient texts he cited extends its domain further into Agnon's own modern text. In this fashion, Agnon's work becomes a modern exemplum of the imaginary quotation communicating to the world its newness as well as its ancient pedigree.

Agnon's textually embedded quotations not only elude the boundaries of the sacred; they succeed in evading the precincts of the purely imaginary as well. His stories, built upon authentic passages from sacred literature, mediate for the modern reader unfamiliar with the Scriptures his / her reacquainting with ancient traditional Jewish writings that focus on belief and the nature of faith. The uniqueness of Agnon's tales consists in the fact they enable us, modern readers, to grasp the authenticity of the unfolding of each of their elements in the light of an originary divine discourse, as well as the spirit in which these stories were invoked.

In pondering the manner in which Agnon blurred the boundaries between his modern stories and traditional Jewish texts, one may ask whether the postmodern impulse could give birth to anything beyond what Fredric Jameson has called a "pastiche" or parody. How could a talented modern Jewish writer, steeped in the Jewish tradition, become more than a "ventriloquist" of the past? How could Agnon reinvigorate the sacred texts while also acting as the spokesperson of his generation of men and women ravaged by savage racist forces and ask his fellow men and women to regain faith? With the specter of the Holocaust still haunting our memory and the transgenerational trauma still making itself felt, Agnon needed to "transfuse" the wisdom of the ancient sages and make them relevant to our times.

I suggest here that through authentic "pseudo-quotations" from the Scriptures and erasure of textual and temporal boundaries, Agnon successfully engages us in the politics of remembrance and goes beyond poetics and aesthetics to a position from within which he is able to raise ethical questions about Jewish survival, memory, resilience, and the possibility of regaining faith after the Holocaust. As early as the 1960s, Jacques Derrida—the famed Jewish French philosopher—claimed in *L'écriture et la différence* (1967) that the Jews have lived for two thousand years between the pages of the Book and the broken

tablets of the Law. Agnon, the 1966 Nobel Prize laureate, shows his readers how the Book and the tablets can be made to signify in the present, by offering a model which initiates a productive dialogue with the *Sayings of the Fathers*, while, at the same time, keeping open what Derrida would call "the wound," "the gap," or "the lack" in his modern story / text.

"He speaks enigmatically who speaks by ways of parables," claimed Thomas Aquinas (qtd. in Naveh 6). I mention elsewhere the productive discussion delineating the power of allegorical and parabolic stories developed by Edward Synan, who reminds us that Aquinas understood that while these narratives present an impediment to understanding, the unlearned learn better through parables in many other ways (Naveh 227). Evidently, this graspable "doubleness" characterizing parabolic and allegorical narratives has always been confounding. At the core of their discursive makeup exists a signal that propels the addressee into two equally powerful yet opposing directions. On the one hand, one learns that parables, a primitive communicatory force, invoke elementary passions and short-circuit the path to understanding by putting the addressee in touch immediately with a primeval "ought" or "must do," an early, inbred in humans, deontic mode (performance as obligation). On the other hand, parables baffle the mind because their messages are allusive and their means indirect. Exegesis and parable arise out of a practical crisis of some sort—the incomprehensibility of a word or a rule or the failure of the covenantal tradition to engage its audience. Parables, like annotations, allusions, and other synthetic reasoning, come to engage further the audience.

Agnon's allegorical tales—*The Bridal Canopy*, *A Guest for the Night*, "A Whole Loaf," *Edom and Enan*, to name a few—revisit creatively the Bible and evoke with great vigor the ancient sages' discursive practices. With Agnon, these tales seem to come full circle. By that, I mean not only a return to the cradle of their beginnings, the land of the sages; but also a revival of their function, namely, the teaching of the Scriptures offering moral lessons to the folks who have distanced themselves from the ancestral Law. In so doing, Agnon aligns himself further with the teachings of the ancient Jewish

sages, who used to parabolize as well to the masses about their need to regain faith.

After the Holocaust, the historical watershed postulated upon the possibility and the reality of unspeakable evil, when the Jewish people were targeted for complete annihilation, many feel that the covenant with God was broken. Many have questioned Jewish "chosenness" and put into question the very existence of God. Post-Holocaust Jewry thus wanted a divine sign in the present. Jews demanded guidance from the divine. Thus, Agnon, who was intimately familiar with pogroms and persecutions against Jews, set out—just as did the ancient rabbis before him—to persuade his people to reinstate their covenant with God and return to faith. By this, I mean that in speaking allegorically and by invoking the sacred texts to point to a lack of belief in present times, Agnon showed his reader a path toward assuming obligation (do *mitzvoth*) and engaging in ethical dialogue.[1]

Agnon's narratives have a hybrid status. On the one hand, the quotations from ancient texts function as echoes of that past and bring it to life for those who have lost their faith after the Holocaust. Interweaving biblical quotations and narratives with the secular destabilizes both to the point that one never knows if the sacred sanctifies the secular or the secular sanctifies the sacred. On the other hand, to enter Agnon's mythical universe, one must acknowledge the central place occupied by the Torah as the fabric of the word that contains Creation and that binds God to Israel. As the fabled center of Agnon's universe, Torah constitutes a text of presence where word and thing join. As Anne Golomb Hoffman has perceptively observed, "Mystical and rabbinical approaches to language and writing constitute an attractive source for Agnon, insofar as they retrieve a relationship to the letter of a holy alphabet out of which the world was formed" (5).

[1]Commenting on the multifunctional aspects of parables, David Stern concludes, "The literary form of the parable becomes in this way a guarantee of meaning and stability that also lies behind the story's ideal equation between Torah scroll and child, or art and life" (233).

In commenting on its own textuality, Agnon's work also arouses in the reader a nostalgia for the imaginary coalescence of signifier with signified, as well as a sense of their inevitable separation and dislocation in discourse. His stories suggest a set of parallels between an imagined fictional event and an immediate real situation with which both their addressor and addressee must contend. Given the religious and cultural vicissitudes suffered by his people and their perennial persecution by hostile authorities, Agnon's hybrid fiction indeed provides access to processes of subjectivity by encouraging the reader to "wrestle" with the Scriptures in the illusory safety of the act of reading them. Agnon creates a web of connected and contradictory layers of text and meta-texts, of signification and signifying gaps and, ultimately, demands to be seen as a legitimate heir to the old sages. At the same time, Agnon opens up the Scriptures toward a global dialogue, which allows him to voice concerns about brokenness and homelessness away from God, as well as the need for acknowledging the humanity of those seen as "Other."

A passionate student of the Scriptures, Agnon writes from the point of view of belatedness and exile. In his view, after the destruction of the Second Temple, when all the priests have perished, the Jewish writer is "starving himself over the words of the ancient sages and laments a profound perhaps irremediable loss" (qtd. in Naveh 208). Of all the delights possessed in ancient times, there remains only the memory and the feeling of grief. Agnon claims that this grief makes his heart tremble, and it is out of that trembling that he write stories, "like one exiled from his father's palace who makes himself a little hut and sits there telling of the glory of his father's house" (qtd. in Naveh 209). The signs of exile, outsideness, and belatedness frequently appear also in modern American Jewish writers' work. Philip Roth's *Patrimony: A True Story* (1991) and Saul Bellow's *Mr. Sammler's Planet* (1970) are good examples. Yet, with Agnon, exile is insurmountable. His fiction shows the desperate condition of modern men and women who have lost the intimate knowledge of the divine.

The dilemmas displayed in Agnon's fiction transcend the parochial issues of an epic world. His work projects a vision of the human condition that is universally valid for our times. Some suggested that

Agnon's work was epic in conception and meant to encompass all aspects of traditional Jewish life. Others saw him as a neoromantic writer whose work, Kafkaesque in some of its subtle comic impulses, revolves nonetheless around a lyric center. Like Kafka, Agnon moved away from the univocal fiction predominant in Hebrew literature and proceeded to build into his work multiple strategies of indeterminacy. Thus, his reader needs to infer, evaluate, re-evaluate, and accept apparently contradictory information. Agnon teaches us that literature can seek and teach irreplaceable things. His work illuminates the manner in which one looks both at one's fellow men and women and at oneself, the manner of relating personal and general facts, and the discovery of one own limitations. At the same time, Agnon's allegorical stories enable us to ponder the role of death and the manner of thinking about it or not thinking about it while we learn about harshness, compassion, sadness, irony, humor, and so many other necessary and difficult things. Indeed, Agnon emboldens us to ask from literature something more than to merely acknowledge the period or a mimesis of the external aspects of objects or the internal aspects of the human soul. His stories empower us to ask for a cosmic image from literature.

I place Agnon with Kafka. In both Kafka and Agnon, "hunger" is an overwrought or overdetermined sign that leads to the open-ended question of its subject. Hunger for what? Both authors show that hunger defies the capacity of language to name the object of desire. Kafka's hunger artist—the protagonist of his 1922 short story "Ein Hungerkünstler"—cannot name the food he wants, and thus he starves to death, while Agnon's narrator in "A Whole Loaf" insists on having a "whole loaf" that not only opens up a yearning for wholeness but also opens up a universe of citations, a sampling of intertext (see especially Naveh 210–11 and Hoffman 51–53).

In attempting to understand how Agnon opens up "a universe of citations," we find that in *A Guest for the Night*—which was serialized in the Tel Aviv newspaper *Ha-Arets* as "Oreah nata lalun" and reproduced in volumes VII and IV of the first and second Works of *Kol sipurav shel Shai Agnon*, respectively—Agnon bemoans the erosion of the culture of a village and the waning of its people. As their

tradition is vanishing, the "The Song of the Alphabet" is no longer sung; they can no longer speak their language. The language and its alphabet have become inaccessible to the people of the village. All that is left of their tradition are the vision of it and the consciousness of people such as the hapless Guest. Samuel, the main character, confesses that he would like to live by the Torah, "but the vessels of our souls are broken and cannot hold them. The Torah is whole but the ark in which it is kept is broken" (4: 254). Agnon's allusion to the notion of "broken vessels" in the Jewish Kabbalah is obvious here.

Agnon's attempt to transcend "unwholeness" through art, through transcendence of textual boundaries, in order to arrive to a kind of cenesthesis, from crossing out temporal and spatial gaps, is most poignant also in the 1943 story "Bein habait velehatzer" (which was later retitled and published in English as "At the Outset of the Day"). In the tale, the daughter's clothes are on fire, the father's home has been destroyed. Both father and daughter escape to the courtyard of the House of Study. Standing outside, at the door of the House of Study, the old author of one of the scrolls has a transformation. Agnon's art here is not to clothe the naked girl, which is the soul in the mystical sense, but to show father and daughter transformed on the Day of Atonement by the vision of Jews praying passionately in the House of Study. The Torah scrolls are visible from the door of the open Ark. In this image, Agnon narrativizes his own position vis-à-vis tradition and the artistic re-creation of tradition. We witness a kind of *aufhebung*, an uplifting—in the Derridean sense—of the old into the new writing, when we read, "the scrolls of the Law stand silent in the Ark, all love and mercy and compassion are enclosed and enfolded in them" (qtd. in Naveh 261 n24). Yet, while the protagonist, Reb Alter, mimics ancient spirituality to perfection, present circumstances render him foolish. Perhaps, in this sad story, where going back to spirituality seems not a real option, Agnon attempts, in a gentle way, to give his bitter answer to the struggling "guest."

Agnon reflects also about the sources of social cohesion and the basis for nationhood, from the position of an alienated hero who remains at the margins of society and questions the very sources of leadership to conclude that the basis of society is religious, perhaps

mystical, beyond the reach of the rational investigator. He offers the reader a double vantage point in his relation to traditional wisdom and modernity; a kind of ellipsis with foci that are far apart and are determined, on the one hand, by mystical experience, in particular the experience of tradition, and on the other, by the experience of a modern big-city dweller.

Like Kafka, rather than clinging to truth—or whatever one regards as truth—and forgoing its transmissibility, Agnon's real genius was to cling to its transmissibility: its Haggadaic element (Benjamin 144–45). Agnon talks about his existential despair at the loss of legitimizing forces to morality and, like Kafka, Agnon lived in a time when one could no longer speak of wisdom, only the products of its decay: rumors about the true things, a sort of theological whispered intelligence and folly. However, unlike his precursor, who had the boldness to confront the void and make peace with it, Agnon refused to fathom its depths. Agnon told stories in which he glorified as marvelous the past with eloquence and passion, in the false hope that, like Scheherazade, he could fend off the future.

Many of Agnon's protagonists are facing the deaths of loved ones, or empty lives, lacking meaning, or wholeness. However, unlike his precursor Kafka, Agnon hopelessly tried to avert the void. This is perhaps the point where Agnon and his famous precursor stand farthest apart: Much as his protagonist Yitzhak averts his eyes from the terror in himself, Agnon struggles to fill the void of his terror and unbelief with lovely evocations. As Nitza Ben-Dov observed, "While Agnon confronts here nullity and negation in their most extreme forms, one feels disappointed that Agnon failed to take hold of those implications sooner and to press them relentlessly to the end" (5).

To explore the sacred grounds of Auschwitz and Maijdanek, Agnon uses abundantly paradox and the fusion of antinomies. He breaks down logically marked categories and reveals the chaos in the belief systems of apparently naive legends whose heroes appear to be models of mental and spiritual integrity. By subtly reversing the readings that he himself has constructed, Agnon represents more poignantly than had anyone before him the unfathomable tragedy that befell the Jews in the twentieth century (Ben-Dov 17).

Agnon's canny work of deconstruction and his tendency to erase the boundaries between Scriptural material and his own textual production in order to make statements about a moral obligation to witness in the present are vividly demonstrated in his short allegorical tale about events preceding the *Kaddish*, the recitation of the prayer for those who were killed in the Land of Israel. In "Introduction (Petiha) to *Kaddish*: After the Funerals of Those Murdered in the Land of Israel" (originally published in *Ha-Aretz* and then reprinted in *Kol sipurav shel Shai Agnon*), Agnon sets out to explain to the mourners gathered to cry over one of their dead the inclusion (in the *Kaddish* prayer) of the bewildering Scriptural saying typically associated with Ezekiel's vision, "*Yitgadal Veytkadash Shmeih Rabba*," "Magnified and sanctified be God's Name." In doing so, Agnon engages the mourners to think once more about God and his love and thus perpetuates an ancient Jewish tradition of teaching.

The traditional saying embedded in the "Proem to Mourning" has always been puzzling to mourners, who clearly expect that the name of the departed be glorified on that particular moment, rather than that of the Almighty. The uninitiated experiences a paradox. Is this not the moment to talk about the dead Jew's deeds? Is it not the moment to praise him / her, as one does in other religions? Is this the time for yet another parable? Why shift grounds now, when yet another Jew has died for being a Jew?

Agnon chooses to tell a story about God and his glory as an opening presentation to the recitation of the ancient, traditional mourners' prayer for those killed in the Land of Israel. Like the old rabbis who saw in funerals propitious moments for teaching their flock about faith and the divine, Agnon sees the present sad event as the right moment to inculcate in his fellow compatriots a new ethical stance. He wishes to teach those gathered for a funeral a moral lesson about God and his chosen people, and he uses parable as a vehicle. Agnon thus mimics an ancient custom in the hope of getting results in the present.

In affixing his tale to the ancient Jewish communal ritual, Agnon offers important cues about his intention to revive the age-old Jewish tradition of telling stories to explain difficult scriptural passages for

the sake of convincing the Jewish people to believe once more in their God. The strategy to accomplish this task is to erase textual borders between old and new and to challenge the boundaries between the sacred and the secular. To this end, Agnon grafts every segment of his own discourse onto the content and the form of the Scriptural classic text. He engages here with scores of Biblical verses as well as with classic Jewish prayer pieces. To erase in the reader's mind these demarcations, Agnon imbricates the tale's narrational isotopies in multiple layers of traditional Jewish texts. He does this to the point where the listener stops distinguishing the old texts from this new one, and the voice of Agnon, the modern author, becomes indistinguishable to the reader from that of the ancient sages. At that point, the single voice of the modern Jewish writer, resonating with familiar ancestral chords, acquires the register of the ancient choirs he wishes to bring back to life.

A close reading of the proem reveals that its structure follows very closely those in traditional Midrash.[2] Like many of the "king" stories in the Midrash or in the Gospels, the first narrational segment of Agnon's tale brings to the foreground the endeavors of a "king." To teach his present lesson, which is "why we say magnified and sanctified be His name" when remembering the dead Jew, and to teach why we need to believe in God after the Holocaust, Agnon generates two parallel narrative paths, connected by the disjunctive "but." The first one, about "a king of flesh and blood," and the second, about "our (God) king, the King of kings of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He." In each of the two segments, Agnon uses abundantly Biblical verses and stereotypical phrases from the Jewish prayer books, where the Lord is designated indeed as "*malkheneu melekh malkei hamlakhim, hakaddosh Baruch hu*," "our king, the King of kings of kings, the Holy One blessed be He."

[2]The reading of the poem that follows is partly based upon Naveh's earlier discussion of the text in *Biblical Parables and Their Modern Recreations*. The full English translation of "*Petihah le-Kadish*"—cited in the discussion above—is available in *Biblical Parables*, pp. 211–12.

With the formulaic structure, "in accordance with this," Agnon introduces an additional shift, and the third narrational segment. In this segment, he moves the reader from glorifying God, who has chosen Israel as his people and loves Israel despite its scant numbers, to the protocol of "mourning after one person." At this point, Agnon encourages the listener to pause and remember the Holy Scriptures where God declares that the Hebrews are His people.[3] At the same time, Agnon gives his reader a taste of the elegant sophistication with which the ancient sages were reasoning.

A new narrational path begins with the formulaic expression "how much more," which imports into the narrative a favorite rabbinical mode of presenting an argument. This subtle but unmistakable use of inference and allusion is bound to resonate very strongly in the hearts of the assembled mourners. This new segment is inlaid as well with allusions to Psalms, to Jeremiah, to Isaiah, and to other Biblical descriptions of the unique relations between God and the men and women living in the Holy Land.[4] Numerous religious and cultural elements are shrewdly entwined and brought together in the moral lesson.

The proem is thus a dialogue with the classic genre. To a certain extent, it is the beginning of a polylogue with tradition engraved in the mourners' mind. The lesson Agnon teaches to the modern reader is in truth not about mourning—he knows well that Jews have had many opportunities to learn how to mourn. It is a moral lesson about the need to bring the Jewish people back, after the Holocaust, to a proper posture in relation to God, to the Covenant, and to Judaism. A man who saw his native town turned into ashes and his people annihilated because of unfounded anti-Semitism,

[3]Relevant passages include Isaiah 5.7, "For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel and the house of Judah are his pleasant planting" and Isaiah 10.24, "again, the Lord calls the Jews his people: Therefore thus says the Lord, the Lord of hosts: 'O my people, who dwell in Zion.'"

[4]See, for example, Isaiah 4.3, "And he who is left in Zion will be called holy," and Isaiah 5.7, "For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel and the house of Judah are his pleasant planting."

Agnon takes advantage of another tragic event in the lives of the Jews living in Israel. He wishes to inculcate in his fellow citizens the belief that they must regain faith in God and go back to their old tradition, to find solace. To bring his readers back to God even in such moments of deep sorrow, Agnon chooses to speak in parable. In addition, even though mourning over the men and women who died for Israel was the event that occasioned his parable, Agnon built it around the need to glorify the greatness of God, reflected in the ancient tradition, and not around glorifying only the dearly departed. Thus, Agnon adroitly shifts the focus from mourning for the departed to the reason for which Jews must exalt God and pray for His power, during the recitation of the *Kaddish*. This covert shift in the center of gravity of the story is a common discursive ploy, and Agnon uses it flawlessly.

In the first segment, he tells of the "king of flesh and blood" and the king's relation to his "soldiers." The "king of flesh and blood" is depicted as insensitive and, in essence, indifferent to his people. To impress this upon his readers, Agnon uses several parallel structures, which lend an air of doubt and ambiguity about the qualities of a king of flesh and blood: Do they matter? Do they matter not? Does he love them? Doesn't he love them? His love, if it exists, is compared to that of "the Angel of Death," since he sends his people to die for him. Here, Agnon uses the augmentative structure to show how little the people count in that king's life. This clever parabolizer adds next two qualifying statements: "the king hardly notices that one was slain" and "the king hardly knows that someone is missing." In preparation of a comparison with God in the next narrational segment, Agnon proceeds to explain the reason for such indifference on the part of that king and suggests a different kind of king to the listener: "the population of the nations of the world is big and their troops are many."

With a disjunctive conjunction in the next segment, Agnon juxtaposes God with the "king of flesh and blood." To each of the ambiguous statements in the previous narrational segment, he opposes a statement meant to exalt God's kindness and love of His people. First, Agnon opposes the greatness of God to the blunt materiality

of the king's "flesh and blood." He gives "Our king" the titles God has been given since antiquity in the Bible and which persist to this day in whose prayers: "King of king of kings," and "the Holy One, blessed be He." Following the names come God's many attributes—also repeated perennially during prayers, and, therefore, undoubtedly known by the mourners as well—"a King who delights in life," "who loves peace and pursues peace, and loves His people Israel."[5]

Next, there is a shift from the love of God to the limited numbers of the people of Israel. Thus, the choice God has made is connected not to "numerous folks" but to the Jews being "so few." Agnon can proceed now to claim that "we matter as much before Him as a whole legion, for He hasn't many to put in our place." In this fashion, Agnon shrewdly reconnects the very power of God to the numbers of the people of Israel.

First, he evokes God's love for His people and the importance they have to Him, then, he connects the survival of each of the Jewish people to the greatness of God Himself. This major shift enables Agnon to talk finally about the pain experienced by the loss of "one" of the fellow Jews. This pain, however, is experienced now not as mere human loss; it has been elevated to the status of a divine loss, which must be prevented. As one understands it from Agnon's tale, a loss of Jewish life is a loss in God's own dominion and a "decline in strength [in the divine], as it were, for His kingdom now lacks one of its legions and His grandeur, has been diminished."

Agnon finally extrapolates from "one" fallen Jew, to "all" the inhabitants of the land of Israel. He introduces this sequence with another stereotypical phrase, "*Im kah anu*," "that is why we," which allows him a new incursion into the Kaddish's lines he re-inscribes systematically in the story and intersperses with his own commentary.

[5]For example, "*Malkenu meleh malkei hamelahim*," "our King the King of kings," is recited during the *Rosh Hashanah* [Jewish New Year] prayer. "*Bahar banu mikol ha'amim*," "He chose us from among all other people," is recited during the *Alyah laTorah*, or coming up to the Torah. And "*ahav* Israel '*amo*," "Hear O Israel," is recited during '*tefilat ma'ariv*,' the afternoon prayer, just before the '*Shema*.'

Agnon restates the entire prayer, while deconstructing all its lines in order to elucidate its deeper meaning in the present.

Agnon ends his proem with yet another stereotypical phrase, "*leficah*," "therefore." The moral lesson becomes an appeal to his compatriots to pray for God when praying for the dearly departed. The connection Agnon has established in the antecedent sequences of the parable enables him to make a rhetorical pirouette and beseech the people of Israel who mourn their beloved to pray for God and to go back to loving God, as He loves them. Only by loving in return a God who loved them will the people of Israel be able to return finally to a more happy way of living in the world.[6] Umberto Eco, who says the following about the postmodern, best captures Agnon's ironic rethinking of the past and his brilliant return to fictional forms of coherent story telling:

> I think of the postmodern attitude as that of a man who loves a very cultivated woman and knows he cannot say to her, "I love you madly", because he knows that she knows (and that she knows that he knows) that these words have been written by Barbara Cartland. Still, there is a solution. He can say, "As Barbara Cartland would put it, I love you madly". At this point, having avoided false innocence, having said clearly that it is no longer possible to speak innocently, he will nevertheless have said what he wanted to say to the woman that he loves her, but he loves her in an age of lost innocence. If the woman goes along with this, she will have received a declaration of love all the same. Neither of the two speakers will feel innocent, both

[6]See, for instance, Isaiah 14.3, 5, 7, "When the Lord has given you rest" and "[t]he Lord has broken the staff of the wicked . . . the whole earth is at rest and quiet; they break forth into singing." See also Jeremiah 31.12–14, "They shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion, and they shall be radiant over the goodness of the Lord. . . . I will turn their mourning into joy, I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow . . . and my people shall be satisfied with my goodness, says the Lord," and Psalms 106.1, "Praised be the Lord! Give thanks to the Lord for He is good; for His steadfast love endures forever!"

> will have accepted the challenge of the past, of the already said, which cannot be eliminated, both will consciously and with pleasure play the game of irony. . . . However, both will have succeeded, once again, in speaking of love. (67)

Agnon blurred demarcations and generated hybrid stories, which meant and still mean a great to deal to his people and to all those who are in search for a deeper understanding of self and of the divine. In raising ethical questions about witnessing in modern times, about the politics of remembering, and about assuming obligations after the Holocaust, Agnon inscribed himself as one of the most incisive authors of our times, unafraid to look back to the Scriptures for inspiration and for answers. In engaging with holy texts, Agnon puts his addressee in a new emotional state. The hunger aroused by the act of asking questions about belief through allegories and parables is mirrored vividly in the way Agnon's readers look for new interpretations to the ancient texts long after they finished reading his tales. Interestingly, a transformation (a passion) also occurs in the writer who teaches through parables. A seductive absorbing of the addressee and the addressor into the parabolic space and time keeps both the storyteller and his listener in a heightened emotional state, in an impassioned state. The storyteller, as it were, enters a higher sphere of shared knowledge together with his freshly enlightened disciple / addressee / listener. Agnon's parabolic stories are analogical and produce a unique change: they uplift the master and the disciple to a higher level of understanding, to a realm where the competence of the master and of that of the disciple are being construed as the locus of enlightenment.

Who were his masters and mentors in poetry and literature? How did he come to have a strong faith? Agnon acknowledges them all in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech:

> I will try to clarify from whom I received whatever I have received. First and foremost, there are the Sacred Scriptures, from which I learned. Then there are the Mishna and the Talmud and the Midrashim and Rashi's commentary on the Torah. After these

come the Poskim—the later explicators of Talmudic Law—and our sacred poets and the medieval sages, led by our Master Rabbi Moses, son of Maimon, known as Maimonides, of blessed memory.

Why, then, did I list the Jewish books? Because it is they that gave me my foundations and my strong belief. And my heart tells me that they are responsible for my being honored with the Nobel Prize. . . . There is another kind of influence, which I have received from every man, every woman, every child I have encountered along my way, both Jews and non-Jews. People's talk and the stories they tell have been engraved on my heart, and some of them have flown into my pen. . . . If I have praised myself too much, it is for your sake that I have done so, in order to reassure you for having cast your eyes on me. For myself, I am very small indeed in my own eyes. Never in all my life have I forgotten the Psalm (131.1) in which David said: "Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty; neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me." If I am proud of anything, it is that I have been granted the privilege of living in the land which God promised our forefathers to give us, as it is written (Ezekiel 37.25): "And they shall dwell in the land that I have given unto Jacob my servant, wherein your fathers have dwelt; and they shall dwell therein, even they, and their children, and their children's children forever."

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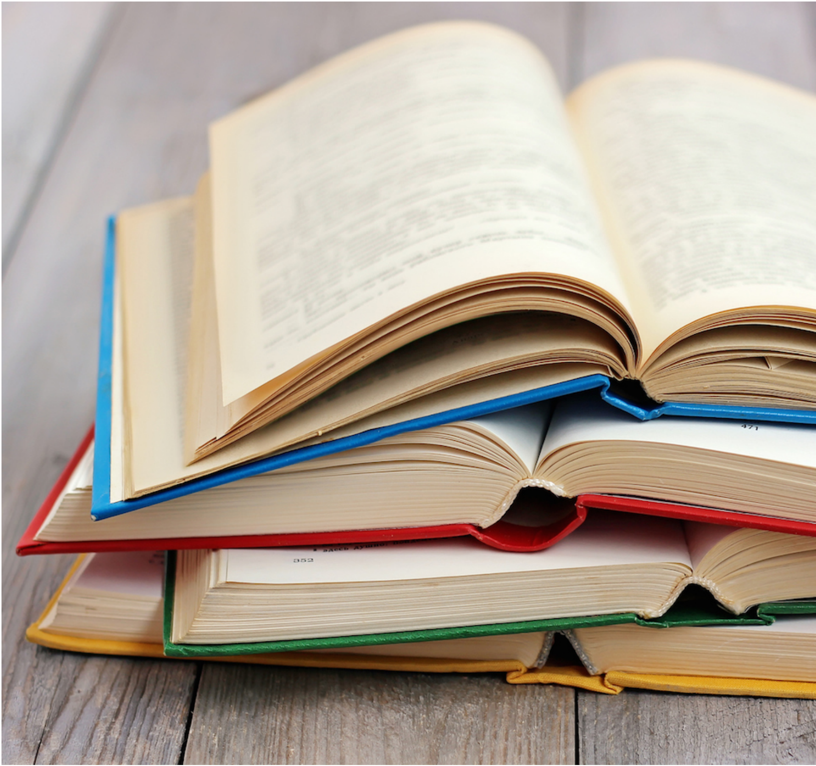
Bathsheba’s Sons

“I am with child,” I told David.
Is adultery acceptable to The Inscrutable?
Despite charms and herbs, Uriah and I
were childless. I learned the answer when Ephraim died
soon after birth, and I feared I would never again say

“I am with child.” Did our second son prove
that God had forgiven me? All my life I watched
over Solomon, maneuvered to make him king.
My old age was sweetened by his devotion,
yet in my dreams Ephraim cries,

his tiny fingers grasp air.

–Bonnie Lyons



American Jewish Writing in the Twenty-First Century: New Global Directions

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Contemporary American Jewish literature is experiencing something of a second literary renaissance.[1] The decades surrounding the turn of the new millennium have introduced a wide array of writers and genres, marked, as Morris Dickstein has recently characterized it, by "new ways of being Jewish and of writing about it" (5). The literary production by a generation of American Jewish writers "coming of literary age" in the twenty-first century challenges some of the longstanding assumptions about the expression of American Jewish identity and the defining characteristics and recognizable disposition of an American Jewish literary voice. As the editors of the recent anthology *The New Diaspora: The Changing*

[1]The first, of course, is the literature that emerged in the decade following the Second World War. Described by Andrew Furman as a "golden age of Jewish American fiction," the postwar period is generally thought of as the defining moment in American Jewish literature, a renaissance that saw the development and rise of an identifiable American Jewish voice and presence in American letters (see Furman 2). The writers of this period were enormously influential—and continue to be—on generations of American Jewish writers.

Landscape of American Jewish Fiction (2015) propose, rather than familiar and, in many ways, "familial" preoccupations and conceits, contemporary American Jewish literature is perhaps best characterized by a rich and fluid "diversity of Jewish expression in America," distinguished by "its attitude and reach" (1–2). Twenty-first century American Jewish literature is in the process of redefining what it means to be Jewish at this particular moment in history and of locating the expansive possibilities for a range of Jewish literary expression.

As Josh Lambert has recently put it, "Everything changed in the field of American Jewish literature around the turn of the millennium" (622). And the changing disposition of this body of literature is only gathering momentum in the years following the turn of the century. The opening decades of the twenty-first century have produced a new wave of Jewish writers in America, writers who have come from elsewhere and staged and, to a significant extent, grafted the cultures, languages, and comportments of other countries onto a mutating American landscape. The very definition of the American Jewish writer and, by extension, American Jewish literature has changed. As the editors of *The New Diaspora* explain,

> Significantly, since the turn of the twenty-first century, an increasing number of Jewish writers who reside in North America are not Americans by birth. The United States and Canada are the ports at which they have dropped anchor and established their careers, though they come from elsewhere and sometimes from other languages. . . . Emigrant writing in America is scarcely remarkable in itself, but the vast contribution at present by Jews surely can't escape notice, and speaks to the intersection of cultures, histories, and identities that marks our time . . . a uniquely contemporary demographic . . . part of a larger global movement. (2–3)

As a result of this fusion of demographic factors and factions, the work of Jewish writers from outside of North America merges with the work of those Jewish writers born in America. Thus, our conception of the makeup of American Jewish literature has expanded

to include writers from a multiplicity of cultures and languages, Jews from elsewhere. "Jewish," in this context, is best defined broadly for the purposes of talking about the body of literature that has emerged in recent years. What seems important here is less whether individual writers identify themselves as religious or secular Jews, or even draw upon a recognizably Jewish history or background. Rather, what strikes me as fruitful in these discussions is the openness that expands the performance of a Jewish cultural, religious, ethnic, or secular ethos as it both informs and is informed by the mutating shape of America. To pose this group of writers as Jewish writers in America does not create a closed condition; instead, it provides a useful means by which to engage readers and writers in a mutual project of "reading" history and thinking together about issues of identity and place. "Jewish" in this new context is not singularly defining. Furthermore, rather than a place of origin, "America" becomes the stage for performing a fluid interplay of histories and identities. Here the return to history—Jewish history both proximate and distant—becomes both a measure of and a ground for individual stories of families and generations. There is no longer the need to choose between the often-competing terms of *Jewish* and *American*, for the terms and shape of identity have widened.

American Jewish writers no longer write from the same position of postwar anxiety that preoccupied their literary predecessors, nor from the need to establish a Jewish voice in American letters, a legacy that would arguably shadow them for the four decades following the Second World War. Instead, as Dickstein puts it, the literature of a contemporary generation of American Jewish writers exposes "an embarrassment of choice, not the burden of necessity" (5). No longer burdened by the felt necessity to lay claim to a literary inheritance and preemptively to dodge the ambushes of the restricting duality of the hyphenated, if fluctuating, condition of "Jewish-American / American-Jewish," a new generation engages the project of redefining the possibilities for Jewish expression. The current generation of American Jewish writers preoccupies itself far less with setting the terms of their geographical and literary capital or with announcing, as does Saul Bellow's protagonist in the opening lines of *The Adventures of*

Augie March (1953), his arrival on the scene: "I am an Ameri-can, Chicago born . . . and I will make the record in my own way: first to knock, first admitted" (1). Rather, for the wave of contemporary Jewish writers in America, having a voice in the cultural conversation is assumed.

The need to insist, as does the generation of Bellow and Philip Roth, on being American, that is, *essentially* American, is no longer the arbitrating factor in the literature of contemporary American Jewish writers. The postwar generation was in large part characterized by its preoccupation with both America and being American, a situation in which, as Roth insists, "one's American connection overrode everything" (47). As Roth puts it, "An American Jew? A Jewish American? For my generation of native-born . . . no such self-limiting label could ever seem commensurate with our experience of growing up altogether consciously as Americans, with all that that means, for good and for ill" (47). The postwar generation, in a move away from their earlier immigrant literary forebears and invested in establishing their newly minted place and voice in American letters, self-consciously entertained issues of authority and the legitimizing ethos of writing as an American, not as a "Jewish-American" but rather from an "unhyphenated" position, as Roth unequivocally reiterates,

> in no need of an adjective, suspicious of any adjective that would narrow the implications of the imposingly all-inclusive noun that was—if only because of the galvanizing magnum opus called the Second World War—our birthright . . . irrefutably American, fastened . . . to the American moment, under the spell of the country's past, partaking of its drama and destiny, and writing in the rich native tongue by which I am possessed. (47)

The literature of this influential generation was, understandably, self-referentially and at times defensively invested in assertions of their position as American "insiders," despite, or perhaps made explicit by, Cynthia Ozick's paradoxical description of her position as "a third-generation American Jew (though the first to have been

native-born) perfectly at home and yet perfectly insecure, perfectly acculturated and yet perfectly marginal" (152). Still closed in by the defining borders of "otherness," the writers of the postwar generation were engaged in the project of defining a Jewish voice in their own terms. In doing so, they began the process of expanding the possibilities for being Jewish and American that we appreciate today, of setting the terms for an appreciation of the signifier "Jewish" in its ranging resonance and multidirectional perspectives, an identity not rooted in any one thing but rather drawing upon a rich inheritance of histories and identities.

No longer shaped by the "innate provincialism" to which Roth refers, contemporary American Jewish writers engage with an array of cultures and geographies, moving fluidly among the languages and histories of other backgrounds as they intersect with American life and thought (47). This is not to say that the contemporary literature does not return to issues of belonging and identity but rather that the expression of these concerns looks different now. As the editors of *The New Diaspora* suggest,

> [F]ormerly vital questions about identity have lost their traction, as an entire conceptual framework that once sustained them has become to seem transient and inessential. Identity remains an issue, but often it metamorphoses into something else, ironized, detached from the traditional anxieties about acceptance and exposure. . . . The "self," the grandly declared and anxiously defended "self" that once reigned as the dominant subject of earlier generations of Jewish writers in America, has all but disappeared. (3–4)

Contemporary American Jewish writers are no longer primarily preoccupied with issues of "self-validation" or of America as the place of their own making. Instead, "[i]n much of the best newer fiction, the arias of 'me, me, me' have faded into choruses of 'us, us, us,' the Jews as a collective body embedded in history, culture, and a collective memory," even as those histories and memories erupt from diverse geographical and cultural backdrops (Aarons *et al.* 5). The current colloquy of writers, in a dialectical exchange, find their way

both in America and among the histories of the past, both contenders for the immediacy and urgency, the extraordinary range of expression that constitutes American Jewish writing today.

In concert with those who originate in North America, the current generation of émigré writers reflects a diverse geographical scope. In order to give a sense of the range of Jewish writers of the "new diaspora," I would point to the following, by no means an exhaustive list: Russian / Soviet writers David Bezmozgis, Nadia Kalman, Maxim Shrayer, Gary Shteyngart, and Lara Vapnyar; the Hungarian-Canadian writer Joseph Kertes; South African writers Tony Eprile, Shira Nayman, and Kenneth Bonert; the Egyptian-born André Aciman; French writer Anouk Markovits; the Mexican-American writer Ilan Stavans; and Iranian writers Dalia Sofer, Gina Nahai, Farideh Goldin, and Roya Hakakian. In what follows, I would like to consider two Jewish writers in North America whose work draws upon the complexities and intersections of cultures, communities, and histories: the Guatemalan Jewish novelist Eduardo Halfon, who lives in the United States and writes in his native Spanish; and Ayelet Tsabari, a Canadian writer of Yemeni descent who grew up a Mizrahi Jew in Israel. These two writers reflect the preoccupations, the narrative tropes, and tensions that characterize twenty-first century American Jewish writing, though each comes at these recurring figures and patterns from different points of departure. Each writes against the backdrop of Jewish history: Halfon, whose semi-autobiographical fiction returns to the events of the Holocaust by way of his grandfather's experiences; and Tsabari, whose fiction moves back and forth between Canada and Israel, the one always poised comparatively to the other. We see each perspective more clearly because of the other. Both Halfon and Tsabari are travelers, diasporic writers juxtaposing and overlaying the countries from which they originated with the ones they now occupy. As Tsabari explains, she has inherited the impermanence of place: "I am . . . an immigrant, and a granddaughter of immigrants. I call two countries home and seem to always be pining for somewhere" ("Interview with 2015"). Both Tsabari and Halfon live and write between and among worlds, Tsabari navigating Israel and Canada, Halfon, the United States and Guatemala. Their

fiction reveals the diasporic displacement of their own backgrounds. As Halfon puts it,

> I feel as if I've been traveling my entire life. We left Guatemala when I was ten, and I've been shuffling along ever since. But I've never felt at home anywhere. Never felt rooted to any city or country. I suppose I was educated that way, brought up in the permanent diaspora that was my childhood. . . . I find myself yearning for a piece of land somewhere, or at least for the nostalgia of land somewhere. But I've never found it. Never felt it. Perhaps that's why I travel so much, both in life and in fiction. Since I don't have a city of my own, I write as if the entire world was my back yard. ("We Become the Mask")

The fiction of these two contemporary North American Jewish writers becomes a performance of the complexities in the inheritance of diasporic reinvention. This is a generation of travelers, traveling among contrastive geographies and languages and the spaces of the imagination, "the entire world [their] back yard."

Eduardo Halfon, named by the Hay Festival of Bogota, Colombia, as one of the best young Latin American writers of 2007, is the author of eleven works of fiction, only two available to date in English. (Several short stories have been translated into English and a third book, *Mourning*, is forthcoming in 2018.) Although Halfon, along with his family, left Guatemala for the United States, he has continued to spend time in both places. Halfon's fiction reflects the exchanges and the hybridity of languages, cultures, backgrounds, and heritages from which he draws: Guatemalan, American, Lebanese, Polish, Jewish. Halfon is part of two directions in contemporary American Jewish literature. His fiction is a reflection of the "new diaspora," as I have discussed previously, the body of literature written by Jewish émigrés in North America. His writing is also part of a newly emerging direction in Holocaust writing, the literature of the third-generation, that is, literature written by and about the grandchildren of Holocaust survivors. These are writers who constitute a generation that will witness the end of direct survivor testimony.

Thus, they turn to the events of the Shoah in an attempt to reanimate that which was so irretrievably lost and to navigate the continuing legacy of the Holocaust for generations increasingly removed from the Holocaust.

There are now, as Geoffrey Hartman has proposed, "three generations . . . preoccupied with Holocaust memory. They are the eyewitnesses; their children, the second generation, who have subdued some of their ambivalence and are eager to know their parents better; and the third generation, grand-children who treasure the personal stories of relatives now slipping away" (1). Third-generation Holocaust representation transcends geographical and experiential borders. The twenty-first century has seen an outpouring of writing by the third generation, by those writers who are the direct descendants of Holocaust survivors and also those of a generation twice removed from the survivors, those coming-of-age at a particular time in history. This period will be marked by a diminishing of the living memories of survivors as well as by the extension of those narratives of memory for a generation that did not emerge in the direct aftermath of the war. Third-generation Holocaust writers find themselves in an uncertain position. They did not grow up with survivors in the post war era, as did their parents, the second generation. However, they did grow up with a plethora of available information relating to the Shoah: archives, documents, memorials, school curricula, popular culture, films, and televised accounts—a mountain of material. The "big picture" has been laid before this generation. What is missing are the more idiosyncratic accounts of family histories, the individualized shape of trauma and the way in which the traumatic memory of the past extends intergenerationally. As third-generation memoirist Daniel Mendelsohn, author of *The Lost: A Search for Six of Six Million* (2006), the narrative account of those members of his extended family who were killed in the Holocaust, in what has become a refrain for his generation of writers, explains,

> I am a fervent believer in the necessity of carrying over the testimony to future generations. . . . How do you become responsible for other people's narratives? . . . [M]y generation—the

> "generation of the grandchildren" . . . the grandchildren of those who were adults during the Holocaust—is the last on earth who will have had the opportunity to know people who were survivors. . . . [W]e are the last ones who'll have been living receptacles for the stories of those who were in the event itself; and I'm acutely conscious, obviously, of what it means to be someone who becomes the "transmitter" of another's stories, another's past. (Qtd. in Birnbaum)

With the end of direct survivor testimony, memory becomes narrative, and narrative takes the place of direct testimony.

As the late Israeli psychologist Daniel Bar-On has suggested, "[T]he more temporally distanced from the events of the Holocaust, the more tenuous the stories become—stories of stories told, second and third-hand versions of names, places, and the unfolding of events" (10). In such instances, there are, Bar-On argues, "historical" truths—"what happened"—but there are also "narrative truths"—"how someone tells what happened" (10). It is through such "intergenerational transmission" that "one generation's story can influence and shape the stories of the next generations" (335–36). Thus, the writing of the third generation often takes the form of metafictional accounts, a layering of stories, individual histories, and memories. These metafictional accounts are, characteristically, self-referential narratives, stories shaped and emboldened by a sense of a knowable, if imagined, past. These narrative opportunities for the uncovering and extension of memory extend the opportunity to recount personal and collective histories. Thus, third-generation Holocaust writing consists of return narratives, stories that travel back to the past both physically and imaginatively as a means of mediating historical absence and creating the conditions for the contiguity of past and present, absence and presence. Ever since the onset of the new millennium, as Alan Berger and Gloria Cronin point out, the entwined genres of American Jewish and Holocaust literature have been "experiencing a renewal" (3). While they each, as Berger and Cronin suggest, have, in significant ways, come to "form their own distinctive subgenre," as we move farther into the twenty-first century,

these two genres increasingly overlap (3). As Emily Budick Miller has suggested, "By and large, American Holocaust fiction is American fiction," and thus it "incorporates the Holocaust experience into the legacy of Jewish American identity" (360). Furthermore, as I have suggested here, both American Jewish and Holocaust literatures have seen a literary revival in the early decades of the twenty-first century.

The grandson of a survivor of Auschwitz, Halfon draws upon his grandfather's past and his own "place" in that history. For, as Halfon's eponymous narrator in the short story "Monastery," says, "In the end, our history is our only patrimony" (145). Here memory becomes a process of reconstruction. Halfon's recurring narrator will return, in story after story, to his grandfather's experience in Auschwitz and to his pre-Holocaust life in the Poland of his birth, but also the land of his betrayal. Amid moments of dislocation and disorientation, Halfon's narrator will attempt to bridge the gap between absence and presence, between the lacunae in knowing and being able to imagine his grandfather's life. Thus Halfon creates a labyrinthine narrative through the past but also through grief. In doing so, he links present and past, mediating and measuring his own life in the present against that of his grandfather's history. Such arbitration becomes a measure of locating his own identity in the inheritance of the past. Halfon, through the semi-autobiographical voice of his recurring narrator, returns again and again throughout his writing to the story of his grandfather's experience of captivity and fortuitous survival. As Halfon explains in an interview with Joshua Barnes, "I lugged this story around for a long time, afraid to tell it, unwilling to tell it, not knowing how to tell it. Still, it would come out everywhere because it was an intimate part of my family and my life" ("No Borders"). The telling and retelling of his grandfather's story—a story revealed to him only at the end of his grandfather's life—becomes a way of reckoning the events of those traumatic moments and also an effort to reclaim and reanimate his grandfather's pre-Holocaust life.

In "Monastery" and its companion piece, "The Polish Boxer," as well as several other interrelated stories in his oeuvre, Halfon imaginatively returns to the events of the Shoah and to the story of trauma

and chance survival told to him by his grandfather. Having been held prisoner in various concentration camps, including Sachsenhausen, Neuengamme, and Buna Werke, it is in Auschwitz's Cellblock Eleven, in 1942, that Halfon's grandfather is imprisoned with the man who will inexplicably save his life. Held captive in the darkness with those reciting the Kaddish in anticipation of their impending deaths, Halfon's grandfather comes upon a landsman, a Jewish boxer kept provisionally alive because the Germans "liked to watch him box" ("Polish Boxer" 90). It is this fellow prisoner, the Jewish, Polish-speaking boxer from Łódź, who schools Halfon's grandfather in what he should and should not say during his impending interrogation the next day. And thus his life is fortuitously spared as enigmatically as the chance encounter with the man he would never see again and whose name he never knew but whose "words saved [his] life" ("Polish Boxer" 90). The story, finally told by grandfather to grandson "after almost sixty years of silence," remains regrettably incomplete, for Halfon is never to learn the boxer's saving words, for his grandfather "refused to speak Polish," the language of "those who, in November of '39, he always said, had betrayed him" ("Polish Boxer" 80, 90). Left only to "imagine the face of the Polish boxer, imagine his fists, imagine the possible white pockmark the bullet had made after going through his neck, imagine his words in Polish that managed to save my grandfather's life," Halfon's self-appointed transgenerational courier of memory must midrashically fill in the gaps of the fragmented narrative of the Holocaust ("Polish Boxer" 91). He must reconfigure and interpretively link the events of his grandfather's history despite his own ambivalence about his motives and his project. As the narrator in one of Halfon's interlocking stories, "Oh Ghetto My Love," self-reflectively, self-critically, and uneasily asks himself, "Why had I come to Poland? Why this insistence on tracing my grandfather's footsteps? What did I think I was going to learn . . . ? What was I really hoping to accomplish? Was I trying to get close to my grandfather, to a tradition? To rummage through the last remaining bones and fossils of a truncated family history?" Despite such uncertainties, the incomplete ending of his grandfather's story sets Halfon on a journey to Łódź in an attempt to locate the "coordinates"

of his grandfather's life before the betrayal of his "countrymen . . . his native land, and his native tongue" and to Auschwitz, despite his intangible fears: "Fear of Auschwitz? Fear of the word Auschwitz? . . . [F]ear of something" ("Monastery" 144, 143). Halfon measures the fear of knowing against the fear of not knowing, of being mortgaged to the abyss of traumatic history.

Thus, driven by the felt obligation to bear witness to the past, to give meaning to the events of his grandfather's experience, and to identify his own place in that history, Halfon's narrator, characteristic of the return narratives of the third generation,[2] will revisit the geography of his grandfather's past in an attempt to retrieve and enliven those memories. Armed only with the barest artifacts of memory, the "wrinkled sheet of yellow paper" bearing his grandfather's prewar address in Poland, and the "old black-and-white photo" of his grandfather taken "at the end of '45, shortly after being freed from Sachsenhausen concentration camp" ("Monastery" 145), Halfon's narrator, as he puts it, "might, just might, be able to . . . find what [he] was looking for" ("Oh Ghetto My Love"). Despite the incompletion of the narrative of the past, the story, provisionally reclaimed, reveals a calculation of all that was irretrievably lost. Such narratives take on history; they arbitrate, reckon with, and pass judgment on that history, all the while holding on to what is valuable and cautionary in its memory. Giving voice to such loss, as if, as Halfon's autobiographical narrator says, "you could speak the unspeakable," provides a preamble

[2]Other third-generation return narratives include Jonathan Safran Foer (*Everything Is Illuminated*), Daniel Mendelsohn (*The Lost: A Search for Six of Six Million*), Andrea Simon (*Bashert: A Granddaughter's Holocaust Quest*), and Sarah Wildman (*Paper Love: Searching for the Girl My Grandfather Left Behind*). For a fuller analysis of third-generation return narratives, see Victoria Aarons' and Alan L. Berger's *Third-Generation Holocaust Representation: Trauma, History, and Memory*, especially chapters 1, "On the Periphery: The 'Tangled Roots' of Holocaust Remembrance for the Third Generation," and 3, "Third-Generation Memoirs: Metonymy and Representation in Daniel Mendelsohn's *The Lost*." See also Alan L. Berger's "Life After Death: A Third-Generation Journey in Jérémie Dres's *We Won't See Auschwitz*."

to the recovery of historical memory ("Polish Boxer" 84). As Halfon's grandfather learns, there is a saving power in words, one that transcends and connects generations. Thus the narrator in the short story "Oh Ghetto My Love" returns, once again, to his grandfather's birthplace of Łódź in order to reconstruct the past, to recall his grandfather to life, if not to mitigate loss, then to transmit the story, because, as the narrator makes clear at the story's close, what matters is "that we write it. Narrate it. Leave testimony. Put our whole lives into words . . . until we're sure we can leave our story in the world, here in the world, buried deep in the world, before we turn to ash," once again an expression of the saving power of words that extends and links one generation's story to the next. Thus Halfon's stories express in a kind of distillation of ancient forms of lamentation and midrash the necessity, the urgency, the obligation, and the immediacy of transmitting the events of the Holocaust, all the while acknowledging the limits of such representation, the limits of turning absence into presence.

In the collection of stories *The Best Place on Earth* (2013), Ayelet Tsabari sets up the conditions for the clash of cultures, histories, and generations as they bend, mutate, and reinvent themselves elsewhere in different temporalities and spaces. The stories in this debut collection are informed by and draw upon Tsabari's Yemenite ancestry and her Mizrahi upbringing in Israel set against the contrastive strains of a life reinvented in Canada. In an interview with Andrea Bennett, Tsabari situates her writing in the context of the intersections and juxtapositions of histories and geographies when she explains,

> Cultural clashes abound in my life. . . . Growing up in Israel, I was fascinated by my grandmother who, despite living in Israel for decades, remained very traditionally Yemeni. Now I have my own family, with a man who's Canadian and a daughter who was born in the heart of Toronto. I can't even fathom how different her upbringing is going to be and how hard it would be to reconcile it with my own. ("Interview with Ayelet Tsabari")

At the heart of these stories are defining and arbitrating notions of place. As Tsabari acknowledges,

> I've always been interested in place and belonging, maybe because I've always felt like an outsider, or because I've been fascinated by the idea of reinventing oneself and seeking myself in other places. For me, these issues of place and identity also tie in with language. I am writing from a strange place about a faraway homeland, in an adopted language that is a stranger to that place I write about. . . . There's displacement in every step of the process. ("Interview with Ayelet Tsabari")

The Best Place on Earth, in moving back and forth between Canada and Israel, stages these kinds of reinventions against the changing shape of place. These are stories of contrasts, contrastive voices and perspectives, set against the central contrast of the land. "Place" becomes almost a character in Tsabari's fiction, a "mirror of emotion" ("Interview with Ayelet Tsabari").

In the title story, two Israeli sisters embody both the material and the imagined extension of the lands they occupy. Tamar, who "had inherited [their] father's temper, his intensity and his charm," abandons Israel for a small island off the coast of Vancouver, British Columbia, where she reverses the course and temper of her life (233). No longer living, as her sister Naomi continues to do, in Jerusalem, a city "in a constant state of urgency, verging on emergency . . . a city that would forever be contested, forever divided, never at peace," Tamar, by nature the immoderate, impassioned sister, remakes herself in Canada, abandoning, as far as her sister Naomi can see, everything Jewish (242). Visiting her sister's home on the island, "Naomi noticed that there was nothing Israeli or Jewish about it, no mezuzahs on the door frames, no hamsas like the ones their mother had hung all over their home for good luck, no dangling strings with blue beads to repel the evil eye, no calendar with Jewish holidays marked upon it" (234). In a kind of doubling that juxtaposes lives and continents, the one sister, the risk-taker, wild and unconstrained, and the other sister, staid and timid, will reverse places. The sisters by nature

and temperament are "doubled," that is, they are set in contrastive opposition, a measure of the geographical and cultural differences in the places they live. The tenor of the landscape to which, in some essential, defining way, each sister is drawn exposes the doubling of identities and the possibility of change. The two sisters come to reflect the two lands they inhabit by choice: the one rooted in history, the other remade, willfully unencumbered by the past.

Tsabari's stories recreate the sensations and textures of both the Israeli and the Canadian landscape, as if offering a choice. There would seem to be no middle ground here. The starkly contrastive portraits of the land—the one calm, restrained, "peaceful, serene," the other "beautiful . . . not in the way BC was, but in a hard, raw and broken way . . . alive, a kind of beast pulsating, breathing, vibrating" (241, 243)—make emphatic the dualities of diasporic reinvention, of constantly being "torn between two places" (247). Tsabari stages the generational, familial, and geographical tensions as tropes of exchange. The one sister's reinvention becomes the motive for the other sister's re-entrenchment, an invitation for re-allegiance to the land that in some fundamental way is intrinsic to her. Each sister defines herself in contrast to the other, that is, by what she is not, a position that defines in many ways Tsabari's portrait of Israel itself, a land divided. Just as the two competing lands—Canada and Israel—juxtaposed to each other come to embody the divided self, so too Israel is itself a land of contrasts, divided, on edge, quarrelsome with itself. And, as Tsabari proposes, the defining distinction between "us" and "them" is not always clear. Insomuch as the contrast of geographies reflects the push and pull of diasporic transference, Tsabari exposes the trade-offs, the ways in which an embrace of the new evokes the loss of the other. Tsabari in this way also draws upon tropes of omission, suggesting that, in embracing one place, we elide fundamental and character-forming aspects of the other one. Tamar, on a return trip to Israel, recognizes that "something had shifted":

> She had missed Jerusalem so much when she was in Canada, but having finally made it there, she couldn't wait to go back to BC. For the first time, she saw the city through a foreigner's eyes; the

> chaos, the traffic, the aggression, what Israelis loved calling "passion." It was as if the city was stuffing itself into your throat. She no longer belonged. (238–39)

She no longer "belongs" in Israel because she identifies elsewhere, an exchange of existences and of allegiances that allows her to assume the perspective of *the other*, viewing the internalized structure of her previous life from the outside.

In part, these anxieties are generational. Tamar, having by choice defected from land and heritage, "[d]idn't want to end up like their mother, who had never let go of Tunisia, had never stopped talking about their family home on the little island of Djerba, pining for it," so much so that "[e]ven after thirty years in Israel, their mother remained removed from Israeli culture" (247). In some essential way, of course, as her sister wants to tell her, Tamar "was, and always would be, an Israeli" despite the fact that, like her mother, she now "feels like a stranger, a tourist" there (230, 228). There is, for Tamar, a seductiveness to the Canadian landscape as there is in the promise of reinvention. Rather than simply "one more stop" in the diasporic wandering, Tamar finds herself in British Columbia, "slowing down, unwinding, as if she'd been holding her breath for twenty-four years and could finally let it out" (234). What Tsabari seems to be advocating in these stories is that one can maintain the place of insider and outsider simultaneously and with some measure of equanimity. Naomi, adrift in British Columbia, listening to news from home—reports of an attack, "a pigua in Jerusalem"—shifts from the subjective interiority of her own familiar, "inside" position, momentarily picturing her home and the land that encompasses from juxtaposed perspective: "For a moment, she could see how her country might look to a Canadian. How Jerusalem could be perceived as the worst place to live, raise a family, a dangerous, troubled city, torn between faiths, a hotbed for fanatics and fundamentalists" (241–42). Here the texture—the "feel"—of the country reflects the divisiveness inherent in the geopolitical history of the land, as the corresponding response to such schisms: Naomi "loved and hated Jerusalem" (242). These internal textual dialogues—both within and among characters—as we

find here and elsewhere, expose the ambivalences and contradictions of a diasporic consciousness mapped on the body of literature it produces. "Place" itself becomes the central mode of transference.

While earlier generations of Jewish writers in North America might be thought to have mapped "America" onto their emerging identities, this new diasporic generation seems to transfer identity onto newly found places. These kinds of narrative transferences result in an emerging body of literature by younger Jewish writers whose representation of identity brims with the complexities of juxtaposed, contrastive versions of both recovered history, as in the case of Halfon, and reinvented place, as Tsabari's fiction suggests. Both Halfon and Tsabari, as I have suggested here, are part of a larger movement that includes Jewish writers from North America and those who have arrived from elsewhere. This is a literature that can, as the title of one of Tsabari's stories would have it, synchronously "Say It Again, Say Something Else," a gesture that returns to the past but, in doing so, transforms it, a matter of *being there* again and being somewhere—someone—else. This is a movement that expands and widens the possibilities for Jewish identity and expression as it returns to the past, writers who are all travelers, moving among the geographies and cartographies of lived and imagined worlds.

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Denen Liebhabern zur Gemuths-
Ergetzung verfertiget von
Johann Sebaſtian Bach
Königl. Pohl. u. Churfl. Saechs. Hoff-
Compoſiteur, Capellmeiſter, u. Directore
Chori Muſici in Leipzig.
Nürnberg in Verlegung
Balthaſar Schmids.

The cover page of the *Goldeberg Variations* written by Count Hermann Karl von Keyserlingk and his harpsichordist Johann Gottlieb Goldberg in 1741–42

The Reluctant Witness: A Meditation on Andrew Grof's *The Goldberg Variations*

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Andrew Grof's 2013 novel *The Goldberg Variations* is a richly complex work and a welcome—if belated—addition to what may rightly be termed second generation canonical literature. Grof's novel raises with great intensity many important questions about the Shoah's aftermath—both for its survivors and for the second generation. His slim volume treats core issues of identity, the nature of memory, transmission of trauma, and the complexity of bearing witness to an unexperienced event. Furthermore, Grof's novel problematizes the key second generation notion of time by insisting on the burning need to seize the moment and bear witness while defying the seductive, yet illusory, clear-cut lines of demarcation between the past and the present.

For both survivor and offspring, these two temporal phenomena become inseparably fused in several ways. Mrs. Schaeffer, the protagonist's survivor mother, is dying of uterine cancer and wants to bear witness while there is still time. The way she remembers and talks about her past threatens to consume her son's present. Laci, the son, helpless to avoid and resist the engulfing nature of her narratives of the "years of madness," has no choice but to reluctantly enter her past. "I felt," he attests, "I could no longer exist in the present if I was

to truly experience, exist in her past" (26).[1] While not explicitly stated, both mother and son are fully cognizant that failing to bear witness will severely jeopardize their compulsively held wish to have future generations attain what in the post-Shoah world seems nearly unattainable: a sense of personal security and safety.

The Shoah shattered all notions of personal and communal safety. "Is there any place in the world where one can be safe, absolutely safe, Laci?" asks Mrs. Schaeffer (109). For the survivor the query is purely rhetorical. The post-Auschwitz world is indelibly and eternally marked by the moral stain of death camps and the Nazi's genocidal obsession to make the world *judenrein* (literally, Jew free). Mrs. Schaeffer's East Side New York apartment overlooking the river is permanently crowded by the ghosts of dead relatives and friends clamoring to be remembered. The Danube and its floating cargo of Jewish corpses is what she sees while staring out her apartment windows—not the East River and the United Nations headquarters where her son works. A tragic figure, she exemplifies Jean Améry's contention that Holocaust survivors will never be able to recover from the deeply traumatic wounds they suffered at the hands of fellow human beings. "Whoever was tortured, stays tortured," asserts the survivor Améry in his memoir *At the Mind's Limits: Contemplations by a Survivor on Auschwitz and its Realities* (1966). "The tragedy of the survivor," he maintains, is "reflected in their loss of trust in the world" (28).

So distrustful is Laci's mother of the world where "human beings [are] not worthy of the name" that she refuses to circumcise her son: "I wouldn't have you circumcised," she says, "I denied, I stole your heritage. I didn't want you to become one of the drowning, one of the drowned" (127).[2] Laci correctly senses that his mother's apparently

[1]An earlier version of a portion of this essay appeared in *Confrontation Magazine* in the fall of 2014.

[2]It is noteworthy in this context, that the survivor / writer Primo Levi employs the terms "The Drowned and the Saved" as a chapter title in the English translation of his memoir *Se questo è un uomo* (1947; translated into English as *Survival in Auschwitz* in 1959). In addition, *The Drowned and the Saved* is the English translation of the title of Levi's posthumously published work, *I sommersi e i salvati* (1986; translated into English in 1988).

rhetorical question embodies a desire to start, not end, a conversation, to solicit a response, to—against all odds—regain some hope in the redeemability of the post-Shoah world. After all, she is still "thinking of places to hide, dreaming of Sweden, of Switzerland" (109). Hence, the son's rewording of his mother's question: "Is there any safe place from the past?" (109). Consequently, by reinterpreting the question's thrust, he turns it into his question as well, thereby illustrating the profound impact of the inheritance of trauma.

In spite of the nihilism embedded in Mrs. Schaeffer's belief that no place exists on earth where one is safe from his or her fellow human beings, and in spite of her efforts to make her son invisible as a Jew, she insists, indeed demands, that Laci bear witness to her Holocaust experiences. She further demands that he honor the memory of his grandparents, aunts, and uncles who fell victim to the deadly collusion between murderous Nazis and their Hungarian fascist allies who were obsessed with ridding the world of Jews. Mrs. Schaeffer's witness translates into a "call to memory." It echoes Elie Wiesel's plea to commemorate the vanished European Jewish civilization. "Remembering," writes Wiesel in his Nobel Lecture, "is a noble and necessary act. The call to memory reaches us from the dawn of history. No commandment figures so frequently and insistently in the Bible."

Grof's novel makes irrefutably clear the fact that there is no escaping the past; there is "no safe place" for either survivors or their offspring where they can respectively avoid either the excruciatingly painful experiential memory of the Shoah or its inherited traumatic memory. At this point we need to clarify the term "inherited memory." Of course memory, unlike blood, resists being transfused or inherited. Survivors' memory can, however, impact enormously on their offspring. Grof, for example, attests that the Holocaust has always been central to his creative and professional development.

Three daughters of survivors have advanced heuristic notions that help in investigating the dynamics of survivor memory and second generation witness bearing. In 1979, Helen Epstein, who like Grof was born in Eastern Europe (Prague), published her pioneering work *Children of the Holocaust: Conversations with Sons and Daughters of Survivors* that began the conversation about a distinctive group

having a particular angle of vision concerning the Shoah. She writes of the psychic tumult found in the second generation:

> For years it lay in an iron box buried so deep inside me that I was never sure just what it was. I knew I carried slippery, combustible things more secret than sex and more dangerous than any shadow or ghost. Whatever lived inside me was so potent that words crumbled before they could describe. (9)

Two years later in "Guardians of a Legacy" she described children of survivors as "the guardians of a problematic, unique and volatile legacy" who "need to learn how to translate our consciousness of evil, our skepticism, our outrage into constructive action" (7). This legacy impels the second generation to bear witness to the psychosocial and theological imprint of their parents' survival, and to seek—even subconsciously—to move the world away from the edge of the abyss.

Writing in *After Such Knowledge: Memory, History, and the Legacy of the Holocaust* (2004), Eva Hoffman locates a specific role for the second generation. She shares Epstein's contention that second generation intellectuals and artists must play a major role in memorializing the Shoah and bearing witness to the atrocities their parents had to endure. Moreover, she specifically writes, "The guardianship of the Holocaust is being passed on to us. The second generation is the hinge generation in which received, transferred knowledge of events is transmuted into history, or into myth" (xv). Hoffman notes that the Holocaust for the second generation "is part of our interior landscape and mental theater, not so much a 'collective memory' as a 'post-memory'—a memory not of theoretical abstraction or ideological strategies, but of proximity charged with feeling" (180). Consequently, remembering—in the literal sense—the Holocaust is not the issue. Rather, as Hoffman notes, "In the psyche, time moves slowly, if at all, and 'the Holocaust,' or at least the portion of it that is personal to me, is part of my psychic formation" (180). Consequently, what is at stake is the mental effects of the process of integrating inherited memories into one's own identity.

Like Grof, Epstein, and Hoffman, Marianne Hirsch—the Romanian-born daughter of Holocaust survivors—accords significant attention in her writings to the intricate relationship between memory and individual and collective identity construction that evolves in the process of transferring survivor history to the next generation. Grof's novel illustrates both the perils and the promise of this transference. He also grapples with questions raised by Hirsch, who in *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* (1997) contends that postmemory, rather than actual memory, is the defining characteristic of second generation writing on the Shoah. "Post-memory," she writes, "is distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection" (22). She continues, "Postmemory characterizes 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" (22). In *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* (2012), Hirsch inquires, "How, in our present, do we regard and recall what Susan Sontag has so powerfully described as the 'pain of others?' What do we owe the victims? How can we best carry their stories forward without appropriating them, without unduly calling attention to ourselves, and without, in turn, having our own stories displaced by them?" (2).

Memory itself belongs to the survivors. The witness generation alone is legitimate heir to Holocaust memory. They, along with the messengers who relay news of the terrible calamities that befell Job in the biblical Book and attest, "I alone have escaped to tell thee" (Job 1.15, 16, 17, 19) are qualified to bear witness to the disaster. Thus, properly speaking, the second generation has no Holocaust memory. They possess instead what the second generation writer Henri Raczymow terms a "memory shot through with holes." What they do recall is growing up in survivor households and being profoundly influenced by the tales their parents told. Hirsch, as we have noted, describes the second generation as instantiating what she terms "postmemory," which she defines as

> The relationship that the "generation after" bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before—to experiences they "remember" only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right. (*Generation of Postmemory* 5)

Andrew Grof—Writing About the Holocaust

Like his fictional protagonist, Andrew Grof was born in Budapest shortly after World War II to a Jewish mother and a Hungarian father. He grew up with a strong awareness of the Holocaust—a type of postmemory. However, the magnitude of the catastrophe was not actively discussed in his household or, for that matter, in Hungary as a whole. In most Communist states, the Holocaust was a taboo subject. Allowing its history to be seriously examined and taught would raise questions concerning those countries' role in the destruction of the Jews and the paucity of efforts to save the Jewish people. Most of Grof's mother's family perished during the Holocaust, and if it were not for his non-Jewish father, she, too, would have shared their tragic fate. Defying his family's counsel, he did what a righteous person is expected to do, and what just a precious few had the courage to do: he hid his wife-to-be and her brother, thereby enabling their survival.

In 1957 the Grof family fled to Vienna, where Andrew, now ten, attended the prestigious Schottengasse / Wasegasse Gymnasium. After two years, the family moved again, this time to New York. Grof's interest in education and philosophy led him to New York University, where he received his B.A., and to Fordham, where he earned an M.A. in Philosophy. Pursuing his love of learning, he was awarded a master's degree in Library Sciences at Queens College. In the early 1980s he moved to Miami, where he embarked on a successful professional career at Florida International University as Head of the Humanities and Social Sciences section of the university library and as an instructor in both the English Department and the Honors College.

Grof began writing about the Holocaust at the very beginning of his creative career, always exploring its lessons and legacies in his classes. He felt a strong kinship to a number of writers, filmmakers and intellectuals—children of Holocaust survivors—who started to come of age in the 1970s. Like him they questioned issues related to post-Shoah memory, identity, intergenerational transmission of trauma, the quest for social justice, and the responsibilities of inheritance, among other matters. He followed closely the emerging academic interest in the second generation phenomenon and especially works of fiction and memoirs of that generation. Such writers as Art Spiegelman, Thane Rosenbaum, Julie Salamon, Lev Raphael, and Melvin Bukiet, to name but a few, instantiate Helen Epstein's second generation summons to translate their unique legacy into constructive creative action.

As more and more novels, short stories, poetry, films, and essays by children of survivors began to appear, literary critics started to take note of these authors and made them the subject of their scholarly explorations. For example, in 1997 Alan L. Berger published *Children of Job: American Second Generation Witnesses to the Holocaust*, which analyzes second generation writers and filmmakers, maintaining that their work "comprises a secular midrash of Post-Auschwitz Jewish identity" (see chapter six especially). In 2001, Berger and his wife Naomi Berger coedited a collection entitled *Second Generation Voices: Reflections by Children of Holocaust Survivors & Perpetrators*, which explores the impact of the Shoah on the second generation of both Jews and Germans and which thus serves as an important companion piece to Dan Bar-On's earlier *The Legacy of Silence: Encounters with Children of the Third Reich* (1991) and Erin McGlothlin's later *Second Generation Holocaust Literature: Legacies of Survival and Perpetration* (2006).

Grof told a number of his colleagues at Florida International University—including Professor Asher Milbauer in particular—that like many members of the "hinge generation," he thought often and hard about the issue of "howness" invoked by Helen Epstein and Alan L. Berger: How to translate, how to commemorate, how to transmit post-memories, how to exercise discretion and responsibility. Grof also routinely gave serious consideration to Hirsch's concerns about the

"ethics and aesthetics of remembrance after catastrophe" ("The Generation of Postmemory" 104). This involved the issue of not only *if* one can speak, which in-and-of-itself looms exceedingly large, but—as noted earlier—how to speak, and how to strive to ensure that the memory of and discourse about the Shoah does not become normalized.

Grof is also fully cognizant of the doubts expressed by survivor writers such as Theodore Adorno and Elie Wiesel about the ability of anyone to capture the enormity of the horror of the Shoah. He was encouraged, however, by Samuel Beckett's insightful comments on the nature of art in his "Three Dialogues," from which one may infer that to not write about the Holocaust imaginatively is not an option. "There is nothing to express," writes Beckett, "nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express . . . together with the obligation to express" (qtd. in Rosenfeld 8). Grof grapples with this paradox in *The Goldberg Variations* while adding a strong voice to those coping with the artistic and human responsibilities and possibilities for the second generation witnesses.

The Goldberg Variations

"Whoever listens to a witness," attests Elie Wiesel, "becomes a witness" (Yad Vashem Speech). The plot of Grof's novel fully embraces the wisdom of Wiesel's aphorism. James, a journalist, is the novel's first person narrator. The story revolves around a single encounter between James and his friend, Laci Schaeffer, who—as noted earlier—works as a translator for the United Nations. Their encounter lasts for approximately twelve hours. The two meet for drinks in a Greenwich Village bar on a rainy afternoon. Here Laci begins to tell James the story of his mother's life and death. At times the narrative is unwieldy, fragmented, and transgressive. There are digressions into meditations on philosophy, literature, and music. It is from the latter discipline that the author derives the title of his novel. Nonetheless, the narrative is imbued with a sense of urgency and intensity that deeply affects James, who becomes increasingly drawn into the story. Later in the evening, the two men move on to James's Manhattan apartment where he lives with Marie, his estranged girlfriend. Almost

immediately Schaeffer renews his account, with both James and Marie becoming increasingly absorbed in the story of Schaeffer's mother's Holocaust experience.

Grof's choice of a journalist, a man of words, as a first person narrator is not accidental. As James listens to Schaeffer, he begins to realize that Schaeffer was "not at all satisfied with the simple telling of the story of his mother's life and death but wanting more, wanting the impossible perhaps" (72). By psychically pulling James and Marie "into his mother's apartment the way his mother had pulled him into her mad, her distant past (that was eternally present), both of them in desperate need of witnesses, Schaeffer [was] in need of witnesses as well" (72). Ultimately both James and Marie are ready to assume the role of witnesses. Schaeffer, however, needs a "broader audience," comments James (50). And so does Grof, who finds it in his novel. "Bach's 'Goldberg Variations,'" notes James, "as played by Gould with neither a beginning nor an end, that in the beginning already the end and in the end the suggestion of a new beginning. Bach as if endlessly composing, Gould endlessly playing, and the three of us endlessly listening to the 'Goldberg Variations'" (169). The Goldberg variations is a symbolic Mobius strip possessing neither beginning nor end, but encompassing both, like the testimony of Holocaust witnesses, the variations requiring endless listening and endless repetition.

Grof's novel makes it irrefutably clear that there is no escaping the past; there is no "safe place" for either survivors or their offspring where they can, respectively, avoid the excruciatingly painful experiential and inherited memory of the Shoah. "Escape is not the way," Laci proclaims as he realizes that to stay "sane" and "balanced" he must stop his ceaseless travels from one country to another, from one continent to another (175). Instead, he must make a concerted effort to suspend—at least temporarily—his state of "permanent transience"—a phrase André Aciman employs to describe the exilic predicament (25). Laci needs to begin listening carefully to his mother's life story of dispossession, dislocation, abandonment, and orphanhood before she succumbs to cancer. He must take a hard look at the woman "incapacitated by the burdens of her past" and obey the deathbed legacy she urgently sought to impart

(149). "In the end," states Laci, "my mother wanting nothing less than to have me look, stare at her past without blinking, my mother caring nothing for either her own sanity and balance or mine, my mother simply wanting me to stare unblinking at her past in the end, avoidance not the way. I simply had to do it and hope for the best, hope to come out sane and whole at the end" (150).

Not quite a *roman a clef*, Grof's novel nevertheless contains a major autobiographical element. His mother, a Holocaust survivor, passed away a few years ago, and as a devoted son he spent a great deal of time with her, listening to her stories of life in Hungary before, during, and after the Holocaust. Listening attentively and lovingly is a precious talent. To listen to a parent in pain can be an excruciatingly difficult experience, especially when the story of the Holocaust is at the center of what often turns into a non-linear narrative imbued with tragedy and question marks. At times Grof found it unbearable to listen to her stories of loss and unrealized dreams while being unable to alleviate her pain as she sought vainly to make sense of her life. At other times, however, he felt privileged by his mother's desire to convey to him her recollections, her innermost thoughts and secrets. It is this tension that gave rise to *The Goldberg Variations*, a finely composed meditation on intergenerational relationships, on filial obligations, on life's ambiguities, on intricate complexities associated with remembrance and memorialization, and, most importantly, on the ambiguities of second generation witnessing.

Given the wide range of truly complex issues the novel treats, the reader cannot help but respect Grof's skill in organizing such difficult subjects into an accessible narrative. It was indeed a challenging task. As Grof noted in a 2014 interview in *A Goldberg Variációk: Regény*:

> To deal with the impossible, in this case the Holocaust, I had to personalize the impersonal, and move from the universal to the specific and, hopefully, back to the universal once more. The work had to be all of a single piece (run-on sentences, no chapter headings, etc.). Inhaling without exhaling to the very end.

To translate his artistic vision into a curative process that could produce an original and multifaceted novel, he "had appropriated the

continuous movement of Bach's *Goldberg Variations* and had it inform the structure and rhythm of his work. Glenn Gould's obsessiveness in playing [Bach]," he told his interviewer, "is mirrored by Schaeffer's obsessive retelling of his mother's tale. Schaeffer's obsession, like Gould's, is a life obsession." It is inspired by his mother's obsession to impart her story of the "years of madness" to her son. Grof's mother bears witness so that her son can do the same. In publishing *The Goldberg Variations*, Grof bears witness so that his readers may all become witnesses of a sort as well.

Laci is, in Milbauer's felicitous phrase, a "reluctant witness." He, like the true prophets of ancient Israel, considers himself unworthy. He is *compelled* to inherit his mother's legacy, which consists of "her numerous deaths in the past" (26). Laci's act of bearing witness while accentuating the difference between survivors—for whom memory comes unbidden—and the second generation who have much more control over when and what they remember, nonetheless compels recognition that his inherited trauma continues to shadow—and even threatens to overwhelm—his psychic life. Helpless in the face of his mother's witness, Laci confides "all my life I wanted nothing so much as to be fully sane, fully balanced" (149). He is, however, unsuccessful in distancing himself from his mother's past. In the end, he confides this was "no longer possible" (10). The second generation seeks to negotiate the treacherous terrain between proximity and distance.

Grof's novel trenchantly evokes several central second generation tropes: The role of narration itself; intergenerational transmission of trauma and the meaning of memory; and the impossibility yet necessity of bearing witness. Together these tropes dramatically impact the narrator's identity in the face of the Shoah's shattering of classical paradigms. Grof's novel takes the reader a step further in his focus on the deep psychic wounding Laci experiences, calling to mind both Art Spiegelman's *MAUS* volumes (1980–91) and the British novelist Anne Karpf's *The War After: Living with the Holocaust* (1996). While both of these works reveal the psychological stress of transmitted trauma, Karpf's novel details as well the physical wounding that can occur as a result of this inheritance. Psychologically induced somatic stigmata, as portrayed in Karpf's novel, are real and painful. In

The Goldberg Variations, Mrs. Schaeffer's obsessive retelling of the "years of madness" and the extermination of her family underscores the reality of Elie Wiesel's observation that for survivors "the Holocaust continued beyond the Holocaust" (*A Jew Today* 246). Laci, ensnared by his mother's Holocaust narratives, is unable to live fully in the present, thereby illustrating what the theologian Michael Wyshogrod termed the Shoah's ability to destroy succeeding generations.

The Role of Narration

Laci's narrative contains certain phrases, e.g., "my mother's life and death," "my so-called father" (the man was a fascist who, as noted above, had saved Laci's mother even while condemning other Jews), "Bach and Gould playing The Goldberg Variations," and "the years of madness," which in their constant repetition have an incantatory effect, imprinting the horrific nature of the Shoah on the reader. These incantations are uttered with a ritual intensity influencing both the narrator and his listeners. They comprise a defining characteristic of bearing witness: allowing for no word to be omitted and seeking the inclusion of every detail the narrator finds pertinent to the act of witnessing. Laci's telling, as noted earlier, had begun in the afternoon and lasted into the night. The *duration* of his telling brings to mind a comment made by Herman Broder, the protagonist in Isaac Bashevis Singer's novel *Enemies, A Love Story* (1972). Broder states that in antiquity the ancients would narrate the Passover story throughout the entire night. The Passover Seder celebrates freedom from slavery as reported in the Exodus but also invests history with a meaning as the stage on which redemption occurs. The Haggadah's four sons (the simple, the wicked, the child, and the wise) demonstrate four discrete attitudes toward history and a particular understanding of God's role in the saga of the Jewish people.

Laci, however, bears witness to an anti-Exodus in which the Jews are led not to freedom and redemption but to humiliation and extermination. The saving God of Sinai has metamorphosed into the wounded, or absent, deity of Auschwitz. The Shoah is a paradigm-shattering event, a watershed moment in the history of the Jewish

people and western civilization which problematizes traditional assertions about God's role in history and the eternality of the Jewish people. Bearing witness after Auschwitz demands acknowledgement of the Holocaust's devastation. While Mrs. Schaeffer confesses to Laci that she "stole his heritage" by not having him circumcised (127), she does bequeath him an attenuated Jewish identity, i.e., as a son of survivors and the inheritor of trauma. Symbolically, and referencing the Passover Seder, Laci becomes a fifth—traumatized—son.

Intergenerational Transmission of Trauma

Commenting on the relationship between history and trauma, the cultural historian Cathy Caruth observes: "The story of trauma, then, as the narrative of a belated experience, far from telling of an escape from reality—the escape from a death, or from its referential force—rather attests to its endless impact on life" (7). Laci attests to meeting the ghosts of his mother's dead, even in broad daylight. "I followed them," he observes, "or they followed me, it was impossible to tell, doing my best at times to catch up, at others to leave them behind" (138). Moreover, Laci experiences the physicality of this trauma noting, "my mother . . . dragged me physically into the past just the way she dragged the dead of her past physically into the present" (116). The phenomenon of intergenerational transmission of trauma has been noted by many second generation writers. In addition to those already mentioned, we think of the Israeli novelists Nava Semel, Michal Govrin, and Savyon Liebrecht, as well as those in other countries such as Carl Friedman, Myiam Anissimov, Alain Finkelkraut, and Bernice Eisenstein. Their protagonists—or in the case of the memoirists they themselves—are in Thane Rosenbaum's phrase "survivors of survivors" (2).[3]

[3]Inheriting stress has also been documented in the animal world. Professor Inna Gaisler Salomon of the University of Haifa notes that when rats or mice are put under duress, particularly during early development, their second and third generation offspring exhibit behavioral irregularities (see Rosenbaum generally).

Bearing witness to the Holocaust is a necessary but seemingly impossible mission. Language itself seems inadequate to the task. Wiesel notes that we "write not *with* words but *against* words" ("The Gates of the Holocaust" I: 211). Nevertheless, bearing witness is a moral necessity. Laci confides to James and Marie that in his mother's life as in her dying he "served no other role but that of a witness" (67). Moreover, short of turning his back on her, he "had absolutely no choice in the matter" (67). Furthermore, Laci's witness-bearing helped ease his mother's survivor guilt, as well as assisting him to achieve a *tikkun atzmi* (self-healing). Laci attests to fantasies of rescue which he and his mother had. "All the dead," he, along with his mother, attest "climbed the train and entered Auschwitz, the very gas chambers at Auschwitz where my mother *single-handedly shut off the killing gas* and led all the condemned [her relatives] . . . back to her apartment" to introduce them to me (115, italics added).

Laci understands that one cannot "undo" the Holocaust. What one can do, however, is bear witness. "Escape," he notes, "[is] not the way (142). Instead, he tells his companions "the most we can do is bear witness, to the dead as well as to the living, helpless, all of us helpless in every other way." (142). Comparing bearing witness to the act of playing and listening to Bach's musical composition, Grof writes: "the Goldberg Variations never entirely repeating themselves, both Bach and Gould realizing this, and that we the listeners would be changing as well, Schaeffer, Marie and I never to be the same, as we were then, in listening to the Goldberg Variations at that particular time and place." (169). Yet the second generation witnesses, or those whom Berger terms the Children of Job, occupy a peculiar place in the emerging chain of literary representations of the Holocaust. They instantiate, in the words of the late novelist and theologian Arthur A. Cohen, "those who bear the scar without the wound" (2).

Conclusion

To be a witness is to possess knowledge, which, in the final analysis, may help repair both the self and the world—*Tikkun Atzmi* and *Tikkun Ha'olam*—two concepts that contextualize Jewish ethical and

moral values. Thus, Mrs. Schaeffer's legacy facilitates her son's metamorphosis from a man who avoids facing a past that produced a set of "confused identities" into a witness who possesses self-knowledge and knowledge of the world (79). Consequently, she reveals her faint belief and hope that there might, after all, be a place in the world where one is safe. This will also be a world where her son can marry, have a family, and perform good deeds—thereby sustaining from generation to generation (*le dor vedor*) the ultimate Jewish refusal "to grant Hitler a posthumous victory" (Fackenheim 188). Every Jew who embraces life is an emphatic repudiation of the Nazi tyrant's intention to eradicate the Jewish people from the face of the earth. While accepting responsibility for denying her son his Jewish heritage, Mrs. Schaeffer does not deprive him of the knowledge of a past that can instill Jewish values in Laci and, indeed, implicitly help all children of survivors live a meaningful life even in the shadow of the Holocaust.

Endnote

[1]The interview was included in the Hungarian publication of *A Goldberg Variációk: Regény* and and is presented in its original English for the first time to facilitate easy access by English readers. Used by permission of the author.

> QUESTION: What was the genesis of your novel, *The Goldberg Variations*? How did it come about?
>
> GROFF: Its genesis was my sudden, inescapable need to both deal with and, in the process, surpass the past. (Not to obliterate memory, of course. Memory is forever.) "Sudden" is a relative term, of course. The novel had been germinating in me for quite some time and "exploded" shortly before my mother's death.
>
> QUESTION: How did your own life experiences influence the thematic and philosophical underpinning of the book?
>
> GROFF: I have been, and have felt like, an outsider all my life, and the only appropriate philosophy for this—short of lasting,

total depression—is to embrace life to the full. In spite of the miseries lived through in the novel (first, second, and third-hand), I feel all the characters somehow still manage to do this.

QUESTION: Many writers and scholars talk about the difficulty of finding adequate tools to communicate the nearly incommunicable horrors of the Holocaust. The Holocaust is a palpable presence in your work. How did you cope with the representation of a subject matter that defies human imagination?

GROFF: Only impossible books are worth writing, and this is where style, the voice is of tremendous importance. To deal with the impossible, in this case the Holocaust, I had to personalize the impersonal, and move from the universal to the specific and, hopefully, back to the universal once more. The work had to be all of a single piece (run-on sentences, no chapter headings, etc.) like a deep, single breath. Inhaling without exhaling till the very end.

QUESTION: Gould's performance of Bach's "Goldberg Variations" powerfully resonates throughout the entire length of the novel. Why? What is its significance? How does it inform your insistence on a close link between music and literature?

GROFF: I had to totally appropriate the continuous movement of Bach's "Goldberg Variations." In fact, they dictated the very structure and rhythm of my work. Gould's obsessiveness in playing it is mirrored by Schaefer's obsessive retelling of his mother's tale. But Schaeffer's obsession, like Gould's, is a life's obsession, unlike the Nazis' obsession with death.

QUESTION: You have been writing for a long time. How did your prior artistic experiences influence the writing of *Goldberg Variations*, which in its structure and narrative techniques differs drastically from your earlier works?

GROFF: I have been in love with writing from my childhood, both as a means of escape as well as a most meaningful way of discovery—a back and forth movement between the inside and the outside. All my previous experiences, including books read, etc., buttress and form each new writing. The hope is always to go beyond, and I may well have done this with *Goldberg Variations*.

QUESTION: Most of your characters are loners and outsiders. Is this a result of your personal exile and your family's transplantation from Hungary to America?

GROFF: As a war baby in then Communist Hungary and the child of a Holocaust survivor, I felt twice estranged from my surroundings. (The Holocaust was not talked about while I was growing up.) Add to this my natural inclination to solitude and you have a perfect recipe for an "outsider." Camus's "Stranger" comes to mind . . . although with a bit more feeling, I should hope.

QUESTION: What are your writing habits? How do they relate or even define your identity?

GROFF: My writing habits are ceremonial, almost religious (in a very non-sectarian sense of the word). I write daily in the middle of the night, removed from noise, from the presence of others. I attempt to dive deep without force, descend gradually. From one session to the next I never know what I will come up with, but the emotional as well as the physical act (I still work on a typewriter) seem essential to my identity.

QUESTION: How did your academic career at Florida International University come about? How did your teaching experience as well as your duties of a humanities reference librarian "coexist" with your creative endeavors?

GROFF: My academic career (university teaching and librarianship) came about through the necessary compromise of having

to make a living. Dealing with books and with students fit in rather well with my writing efforts, although more often than not I viewed them as obstructions. I may well have been mistaken.

QUESTION: You are a voracious reader. You read widely in philosophy and the literary arts. You insist that in order to write one must also read. Why? Who are the authors that influenced and shaped you as an artist?

GROFF: One cannot hope to write reasonably well without reading intelligently and deeply into the classics of all ages and societies After all, a serious writer always has the greats of the past in mind, hoping in some way to respond to them and, if possible, move beyond them (which is not to say surpass them). The short list of writers who influenced my work, my life (the list is much too long to mention all) may be the following: Homer, Sappho, Sophocles, Lucretius, Geoffrey Chaucer, William Shakespeare (the *sine qua non*), Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson, Leo Tolstoy, Herman Melville, Mark Twain, James Joyce, Franz Kafka, Bruno Schulz, Samuel Beckett, Thomas Bernhard, Paul Auster, J. D. Salinger, Philip Roth, Anne Carson, Gyorgy Konrad, and Peter Eszterhazy.

QUESTION: Do you think literature has the ability to influence, change, and / or inform human existence? Can it make the world a better place?

GROFF: No. Literary works (the social, exposé types, like those of Upton Sinclair, aside) have never changed the socio-economic and political events of our miserable world. What the better ones have done, though, is to make us aware of our common humanity, and the best ones (like the works of Shakespeare) create that very humanity for us. Nietzsche dictum comes to mind: “We have art so we don’t die of the truth.”

QUESTION: Those who will have the pleasure of reading *Goldberg Variations* will recognize your passion and drive to create a novel that at least partially embraces Nietzsche's sentiment, one that is imbued with the desire to heal the tattered body of the post-Shoah humanity and bear witness to a nearly destroyed civilization.

GROFF: I do hope that the world we live in is not beyond redemption. It is that hope that moves Schaefer to tell the story of his mother's life and death during the years of madness.

QUESTION: Thank you for your enlightening thoughts and observations. Let's talk more in the future.

GROFF: I'd like that. Let's.

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David Dances

He unstraps his sandals
drops his robe into a heap

and stands wondering
if he is ridiculous or posturing.

Shaking his curly head to cast
off doubt, he begins. Empty-minded

he lets his body tell his tangled story—
legendary triumphs, weakness, cunning

errors and sin—Uriah! Uriah!
On and on, arms and legs, head and torso

confess and exult before he collapses
on the cold floor, panting.

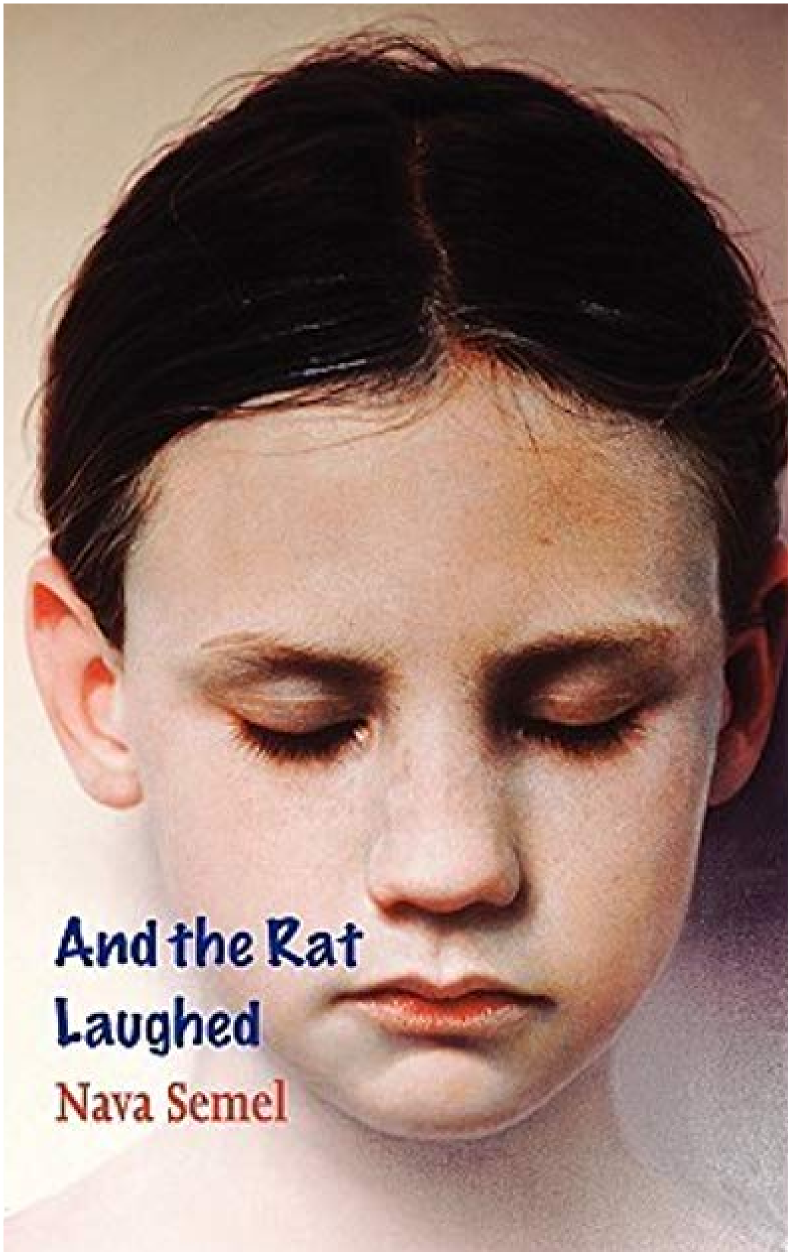
When again breath enters his lungs he stands.
Am I moving, he wonders,

or is something moving me?
Without answering he begins to dance again.

Leaping, crouching, stretching, lunging
now a fetal ball, now a flowering tree,

desert wind, frigid Jordan River
his body, prayer.

–Bonnie Lyons



The cover art for *And the Rat Laughed*

The Future of Holocaust Memory: Nava Semel's *And the Rat Laughed*

Alan L. Berger
Florida Atlantic University

As the Shoah recedes in time, and its survivors rapidly disappear, a paradox has emerged: more and more continues to be written about the destruction of European Jewry, but memory of the event becomes increasingly distorted, indistinct—ultimately—corrupted. Today the Holocaust has emerged as a cultural, ceremonial, and political phenomenon—spoken and written about, performed in cinema and theater, memorialized in museums, and trivialized by politicians. Nevertheless, and because of all this attention, memory of the Shoah is fraught.

Distortion of Holocaust memory has serious ethical, historical, moral, and theological implications. These implications come stridently to the foreground as Shoah representation enters the age of digital culture. On the one hand the internet provides near universal access to information, disinformation, and misinformation about the Holocaust. Denier sites and other lunatic fringe groups are easily accessible. So, too, are sites which either blur or ignore the relationship between the unique and the universal in terms of grappling with the legacy of the Shoah. On the other hand, as Anna Reading notes, "The computer has enabled the translation of previously divergent

media into one form that includes the iconic, which perhaps offers a new generation different possibilities for speaking the unspeakable and remembering the atrocious" (336). The digital age requires, even as it makes more challenging, critical thinking about the Holocaust and its legacy.[1]

Nava Semel

Nava Semel, daughter of Holocaust survivors, was an award-winning Israeli novelist and the younger sister of the celebrated Israeli singer Shlomo Artzi. Her Shoah fiction, which focuses on female survivors, grapples with issues of intergenerational transmission of trauma and the way members of the second, third, and future generations remember or mis-remember or fail to remember the Shoah. Her novel *And the Rat Laughed* (which was published in Hebrew in 2001 and translated into English in 2008) contemplates the future of Holocaust memory transmission in the digital age, twenty-first century Israel, and beyond, after the last survivors have disappeared and after an ecological disaster has laid waste to the earth.[2] The novel raises a host of questions concerning both Shoah memory and the role of art in trauma transmission. A veritable Midrash on the unfolding of Holocaust representation, Semel's richly suggestive novel speaks of three sets of "rememberers": those in 1999 Israel, those in 2099 cyberspace, and those in 1943 Poland, reflecting the chronology of the novel. The author treats the role of myth in both transmitting

[1]An earlier version of this essay was read at the Annual Psychology and the Arts Conference held at the University of Ghent in Belgium in July of 2012.
[2]The novel was produced as an opera—composed by Ella Milch-Sheriff (whose idea, confides Semel, it was)—in Canada, Israel, Poland, and Romania. Translated into several languages, the book is currently being made into a film in an international production directed by the renowned Hungarian director Janos Szaz. On 28 April 2014 Semel participated in a special event at the United Nations headquarters in New York City titled, "Learning about the Holocaust through the Arts." Portions of the novel were read by the Academy Award Winning actress Olympia Dukakis. I had the good fortune of having a long conversation with Semel in June of 2012 and will refer to this conversation in my article. Sadly, Semel passed away on 2 December 2017.

and distorting memory of the Shoah while raising key issues: ways to tell the tale in a manner that is believable; the difficulty of comprehending testimony; and what happens when Holocaust memory loses its historical reference and goes viral on the internet and the World Wide Web. There are two unique dimensions to Semel's novel: its early recognition of the impact of digital culture on Holocaust memory and its transmission, and its utilization of genre-bending as a necessary component of post-Shoah presentation.[3]

Prior to writing *And the Rat Laughed*, Semel published her widely acclaimed 1985 collection of short stories, *A Hat of Glass*, the first Israeli prose book to address the issue of the second generation.[4] Most of the major protagonists are children of survivors, whose lives have been unintentionally but unavoidably damaged by their parents' psychic and physical wounding. The book's title story tells of a sixty-year-old nameless Israeli grandmother who had survived the Shoah but lost her first husband and birthed a stillborn fetus during the War. The survivor recalls the kindness of a Jewish prisoner who exploited her lesbian relationship with a German guard to aid the grandmother during an illness. Reflecting on the effects of her Holocaust experience transmitted, non-verbally, to her post-War children, the grandmother muses: "There, a great darkness emerged. They say: it will heal. They say: I will be healed. I am grateful for the sun and for the new light, but on the children's heads, my anguish and torment sit like a hat of glass" (201). Her unresolved psychological issues, including that of incomplete mourning, and her inability to work through her Holocaust legacy signal that while the Shoah as a historically anchored phenomenon is over, for its survivors and their descendants, its psychic legacy continues, calling to mind Elie Wiesel's trenchant observation: "For them (survivors) the Holocaust continued beyond the Holocaust" (246). But what of their children and successive generations?

[3]In her 24 June 2012 conversation with me in Tel Aviv, Semel pointed out that her book was written in early 1999, when the internet was new and innovative.

[4]Semel herself emphasized this fact in our conversation.

Second Generation Memory and Postmemory of the Holocaust

Eva Hoffman terms the second generation the "hinge generation," those who live at "the point at which the past is transmuted into history or myth" (xv). Among the most intriguing examples of the transmutation is *And the Rat Laughed*, which Semel dedicates to her family. This generation did not experience the trauma of the camps. Consequently, they do not write of its horrors. They are instead what the second generation novelist Thane Rosenbaum terms "survivors of survivors" (2). They remember growing up in survivor households with frequently dysfunctional family relations. What they remember, therefore, is not their own experience but that of their parents. Their novels, short stories, and poetry embody what Marianne Hirsch terms "postmemory"—a "structure of inter-and trans-generational transmission of traumatic knowledge and experience" ("Generation of Postmemory" 106). Hirsch further qualifies her observation by writing that postmemory is "The relationship that the 'generation after' bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before—to experiences they 'remember' only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right" ("Generation of Postmemory" 106). Moreover, postmemory "is a *consequence* of traumatic recall but (unlike post-traumatic stress disorder) at a generational remove" ("Generation of Postmemory" 106).

The second generation does not inherit memory in the literal sense of the word. Rather, as Hoffman notes, "In the psyche, time moves slowly, if at all, and the 'Holocaust,' or at least the portion of it that is personal to me, is part of my psychic formation" (180). This phenomenon is clearly revealed in Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (1980–91). The author, feeling blocked creatively and depressed because he doubts his right to write about the Shoah, seeks help from Pavel, a psychiatrist-survivor. Pavel tells Art that he is the "real survivor" (44).[5] For Semel,

[5]The literature on the second generation and the traumatic effects of their Holocaust inheritance is extensive. In addition to Helen Epstein's groundbreaking work *Children of the Holocaust* (1979), one can profitably look at

the phenomenon of "postmemory" informs her concern for how—and if—the Shoah will be recalled in the future.

My essay first discusses the main parts of *And the Rat Laughed*. I then focus on digital culture and genre issues as they relate to Holocaust representation. I also note the novel's thematic concerns: sexual abuse of Jewish women; the specific trauma of hidden children; the role of Jew-hatred in traditional Christianity; the importance of the precious few Christian helpers; and the relationship of God to the Holocaust. I note relevant points of comparison between the novel and the opera and the film script. While each genre shares an emphasis on an imagined cyber future's impact on Shoah memory, significant differences remain. I conclude by articulating Semel's central and singular contribution to the issues surrounding future Holocaust memory, including both the use and abuse of digital culture.

The Novel: Digital Culture, "Memory," and Genre

The book's cover painting, "Head of a Child," is by Gottfried Helnwein, an acclaimed Austrian-born artist. The painting, originally hung in Vienna's *Minoritenkirche*, was subsequently displayed at the Albertina Museum as part of a Helnwein retrospective (25 May–13 October 2013). The image represents childhood innocence and compels the viewer to contemplate the depravity visited on children by war and adult violence. The ubiquity of child suffering from war is emphasized by the fact that the painting has been shown

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Alan L. Berger's *Children of Job: American Second-Generation Witnesses to the Holocaust* (1997); Alan L. and Naomi Berger's *Second Generation Voices: Reflections by Children of Holocaust Survivors and Perpetrators* (2002); Erin McGlothlin's *Second-Generation Holocaust Literature: Legacies of Survival and Perpetration* (2006); and Dina Wardi's *Memorial Candles: Children of the Holocaust* (1992). In addition, Marianne Hirsch's *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Post-Memory* (1997), her *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust* (2012), and Eva Hoffman's *After Such Knowledge: Memory, History, and the Legacy of the Holocaust* (2004) are important works in this context.

in installations world-wide. In addition to the one and a half million Jewish children murdered in the Shoah, the artist's representation of mutilated children strikes contemporary resonance, bringing to mind the youngest victims of post-Shoah genocides.

Like Semel's earlier "A Hat of Glass," *And the Rat Laughed* portrays a nameless Tel Aviv grandmother. In this case, however, the victim is not a camp survivor. Rather, Helnwein's painting alludes to the victim's experience as a five-year-old child hidden in a Polish potato pit, a rat her only companion in that dark place. While in hiding, the little girl is repeatedly raped by Stefan, the son of anti-Semitic Poles paid to hide her.[6] The little girl / grandmother is ultimately rescued by Father Stanislaw. "Stash" is a recurring name in the novel—referring not only to the Polish priest (the "Black Angel," so named because of his priestly garment) but also to a future anthropologist who eventually becomes a "remembearer." Father Stanislaw's own childhood is damaged by the trauma of being abandoned by his father and by his mother's desire for an abortion to rid herself of an illegitimate son. In Israel, the survivor's twelve-year-old granddaughter interviews her for a class project; however, the young girl—who is part of the third generation—completely misunderstands her grandmother's Holocaust experience. The novel, in its effort to find an appropriate way to confront the issue of transmitting emotional memory of the Holocaust, conflates a variety of genres: story, legend, poetry, science fiction in the form of futuristic fantasy, and diary in grappling with the issue of Holocaust representation over the span of a century.[7] Dealing with time in a non-linear fashion, Semel renders the twin perils of both distorted memory and forgetfulness: on the one hand, she challenges readers to test all representational claims against survivor testimony and, on the

[6]For an insightful discussion of Semel's novel within the larger context of sexual violence against Jewish women in the Shoah generally, see chapter thirteen of Sonja M. Hedgepeth's and Rochelle G. Saidel's 2010 *Sexual Violence Against Jewish Women During the Holocaust*, "Nava Semel's *And the Rat Laughed*: A Tale of Sexual Violation."
[7]Semel later confided that after completing the first chapter of her novel, she was ready to throw out the manuscript since it resisted traditional genre classification. Her agent insisted that she keep it ("Conversation").

other hand, she insists readers resist the temptation to forget, distort, or sensationalize the Shoah in the face of digital distortion.

The novel's use of multiple narrators—the little girl, the grandmother she eventually becomes, the granddaughter, a priest, and a future anthropologist named Y-Mee Prana—heightens awareness of the *transformation of memory* as it leaves the domain of the witness, thereby losing its specificity and becoming vulnerable to varying cultural fads, a constant issue in visual culture where the World Wide Web lends itself to various interpretations. This is a fraught but inevitable process. Unlike blood, memory *per se* is not transferable. However, as noted, one can speak of postmemory which, buttressed by archival research, pilgrimages to the sites of death camps, and immersion in history, instantiate characteristics of the postmemorial generation. Specifically, Hirsch writes: "Postmemory characterizes 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" (*Family Frames* 22).

Perhaps anticipating Gary Weissman's subsequent argument against the usurpation of Holocaust memory by non-witnesses,[8] in *And the Rat Laughed* Semel seeks to scrupulously guard authenticity in Holocaust representation. Her novel thus expresses both a warning and a hope for the future. The warning deals with the dangers of bearing false witness. On the one hand, postmemorial writers e.g., those without direct experience of the Shoah, must not usurp or distort the survivors' memories. To do so is to cheapen and trivialize

[8]In *Fantasies of Witnessing: Post War Efforts to Experience the Holocaust* (2004), Weissman writes: "In an effort to distinguish between the actual witnesses who lived through the Holocaust and those who know the Holocaust only in mediated form, some commentators refer to the latter as 'secondary witnesses,' 'vicarious witnesses,' 'retrospective witnesses,' 'witnesses by adoption,' or 'witnesses through the imagination.' I resist these terms because I believe that such a broadening of the term *witness*, as well as similar uses of the terms *memory* and *trauma*, contributes to a wishful blurring of otherwise obvious and meaningful distinctions between the victims and ourselves, and between the Holocaust and our own historical moment" (20).

such memory. Those who engage in this behavior are comparable to Job's false friends, who do not understand the reality of the biblical figure's position. On the other hand, her novel suggests that the power of love and historically anchored imagination are vital for those wishing to bear true witness. This, in turn, has the possibility of perpetuating generations who feel responsibility for transmitting Holocaust memory.

And the Rat Laughed utilizes several tropes which identify the novelist's on-going concerns: *Christian religion*, a theme she honed in her Tel Aviv University M.A. thesis on Medieval Christian art which routinizes the subjugation of women; *hidden children*—Semel attended the inaugural conference on hidden children held in New York City in 1991 and became convinced their story must be told;[9] *myth* in the form of re-imagining the creation of the world; and *Holocaust memory*, including the uncertainty of its future status. In the process of writing her novel, Semel also deftly utilizes the ambiguity of language itself, thereby underscoring the complexity of how adequately to represent Holocaust memory and the changing cultural circumstances of its transmission.

The novel's first part, "The Story," is the volume's second longest chapter. It concerns the grandmother's ostensible recounting of her Holocaust experience to her twelve-year-old granddaughter, one of the Israeli adolescents who seem fully informed about human depravity. The youngster muses that the members of her own generation—"the kids with TVs and computers," from whom nothing is hidden—"can see the worst atrocities live on TV . . . planes crashing and people cutting each other's heads off or doing drugs, and buses exploding" (73). The granddaughter's reference to an intifada reveals the difference in kind between the Nazi assault on Jewish existence and the Palestinian Muslim extremists' terror campaign against Israeli civilians. "What could she possibly tell me," thinks the granddaughter, "that I don't already know?" (73). This statement expresses

[9]In an 8 September 2009 email to Berger, Semel responded to an earlier question about the evolution of *And the Rat Laughed* by noting that after leaving the 1991 conference, she heard a voice whispering in her head: "someone must give voice to these 'mute' children," concluding, "I never thought this someone would be me."

the granddaughter's naïveté about, and ignorance of, the evil of National Socialism and the Holocaust.

Moreover, in "The Story" Semel portrays the grandmother, despite her age, as being keenly aware of the internet's potential. She intends to ask her granddaughter to search for the grandmother's mother and father on the internet, which allegedly "is spreading to the world beyond this world" (46). The granddaughter's friends think her grandmother is "cool," especially when she began to surf the net. The grandmother, noting the changed circumstance of communication at the beginning of the twenty-first century, takes special computer classes for mature adults. Here digital culture is viewed as a potential bond rather than as a barrier between the generations. Yet the survivor herself is the living presence necessary to authenticate Holocaust representation.

The novel's second part, "The Legend," refers to the grandmother's employing a transgressive version of the biblical theme of creation. In the beginning, God allows Himself to be persuaded to endow animals with jealousy—a trait which is the "epitome of human traits"—and the ability to weep, which further puts them on a par with humanity (83). But the *Ur-* rat, ancestor of the hidden child's companion, "had the audacity—a trait you get directly from God—to confront the Almighty" and "demand the ability to laugh instead" (83). God would only permit this if the rodent hears another underground creature laugh.

The proto rat's descendant

> tried everything he could to make the little girl laugh. He hopped around in the pit, he crawled out of the tunnel, he climbed back in, he sniffed at her smooth skin covering, he ate out of her hand, and she almost laughed, till the rat was convinced that pretty soon he'd succeed in laughing along with her. That's how he figured he'd prove to God that promises should always be kept. (87)

On the verge of making the little girl laugh, the rat is thwarted by the appearance in the pit of the farmer's son, who begins to sexually torture the young girl. The rat indicts God: "God, that son of a bitch, had cheated him, and had broken the promise without so

much as blinking" (88). In her conversation with Berger, Semel pointed out that in this passage "son of a bitch" (*ben zona* in the Hebrew original) is intentionally ambiguous. On the one hand, it is clearly sacrilegious. But on the other hand, it is a grudging acknowledgement of God's power as well.

The granddaughter inadvertently points to the difficulty of accurately listening to survivor testimony in reporting her interview to the teacher the following day. The youngster is deeply disappointed because her notebook is empty except for a reference to the myth of *Girl and Rat*. She "realized I didn't have a thing . . . to teach the coming generations a lesson" (79). Furthermore, she had imagined that the Polish couple was kind to her grandmother and that their son befriended her. "I was so happy," attests the granddaughter, "that there was something human in the pit with her" (92) referring paradoxically to the rat. Only a rodent proved to be human in those dark days.

The grandmother tells the youngster that she experienced "a Little Holocaust" (53). This statement reflects the initial tension between survivors of the camps and hidden children concerning the meaning of the term "Holocaust survivor." At first, older survivors told the hidden children: "You couldn't possibly remember, you were too young" (Marks xvi). Camp survivors repeatedly told hidden children: you were "safe," you were "lucky" because they had been neither in a concentration camp nor a death camp (Marks xvi). Many hidden children, too young to understand that they were placed with strangers to save their lives, mistakenly viewed this as an act of parental abandonment. They were also frequently told—as Robert Krell, who had been hidden in Holland at age two and reunited with his birth parents at age five, and who subsequently became a distinguished child psychiatrist, remembers hearing—"Don't talk about it. Get on with your life" (41).[10] The First International Gathering of Hidden Children (1991) did much to validate the experience, emotional state, and identity of these now adult hidden children.

[10]For a long time hidden children themselves practiced a form of self-censorship. Schooled in hiding during the Holocaust, they continued to hide the trauma of their experience long afterward.

As a result of the granddaughter's misunderstanding, readers are left to ponder three possibilities: Did the grandmother actually relay her experience to her granddaughter, providing all of the details? Did she only reflect on the terrible events of her mutilated childhood? Or Did she intentionally mask the horror by overlaying it with the myth of the girl and the rat? Semel, writing as an omniscient narrator, observes, "The old woman is worried about how the stories are liable to evolve. Whatever the next storyteller adds worries her even more than what he may leave out. The Stefan must never turn into the main character, God forbid" (43). The reader may also wonder if the granddaughter, unable to process the horror of the story, cloaked it in the metaphor / myth of *Girl and Rat*.

Whatever the case may be, the grandmother reflects what the literary critic Lawrence L. Langer terms "Humiliated Memory." Langer describes this type of memory as recalling "an utter distress that shatters all molds designed to contain a unified and irreproachable image of the self" (77). This engenders a theological question as "the little-girl-who-once-was kept thinking that even God, whoever He may be, was ashamed of her. Otherwise He wouldn't be hiding her in the dark" (24). Moreover, reflecting the trauma of being separated from her parents, the little girl muses, if God does exist "(He) is a mother who turns her back" (24). Langer notes that humiliated memory "expresses a latent resentment toward a world that had betrayed the individual by promoting values that proved useless in the presence of catastrophe, *especially values espousing family loyalty*" (92, emphasis added). This raises the issue of narrative identity. Such an identity is one means to remember. This self-interpretation, in turn, requires coming to grips with suffering while recognizing that the trauma remains.

Part three contains forty-four poems. Each poem is titled ranging from basic feelings ("Afraid," "Happy," "A Hug") to binary oppositions ("Addition-Subtraction," "Big-Little," "Male-Female," "Up There-Down Here, "Mother-Father," "Far-Near," "Cold-Warm") to single concepts ("Dolly," "Pretending," "Catch," "A Ladder," "A Tree"). These poems all deal with the disparate parts of the grandmother's appalling childhood experience. No matter the title, each

poem references various dimensions of the little girl's / grandmother's Shoah ordeal; a capsule summary, as it were, of the little girl's thoughts and experience. Appearing on the internet within days of the grandmother's testimony being reported to the granddaughter's class, their initial interpretation marks the beginning of a century-long period of varying understanding dependent on various cultural circumstances. One youth, whose email name is "nave" in the English translation (a play on the author's first name or, possibly, a shorthand form of "naïve"), accidentally hits on a "really weird, horrible, disgusting" site (98). Nevertheless, she is mesmerized by the *Girl and Rat* myth and, sitting at her computer, sends the poem to her internet friend whom she had never physically met. Underscoring the incomprehensibility of the story, "Nave" writes: "You don't have to understand everything. It's enough to feel things: www.girlandrat.com" (96).

Nave adds a line of her own to the poems because she believes that is what the site owner would have wanted. "Only by reacting will we remember," Nave attests (98). But tellingly the youngster adds, "Even if we don't quite know what it is that we're supposed to remember" (98). This is the challenge confronting those born after the Shoah. It also reinforces the point made by Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright that in visual culture, "the movement of cultural products and visual images throughout the world is always about the production of different kinds of cultural meanings" (345). Nave's parents were outraged; her mother thought the poems were "sick" (97). Her father believed the site's creator was "a basket case" (97).

"The Dream" (part four) is the most complex and suggestive portion of Semel's novel as it deals with the imagined fate of future Holocaust memory; a time when technology supplants and / or manipulates human emotions, and skills surpass values. This section of the novel opens with a chart revealing a century beginning 2009–11– of the chronological development of the *Girl and Rat* myth. It begins with the website established by classmates of the survivor's granddaughter and concludes a century later with the discovery of the ruins of the Madonna of the Rat Church "in a geographical place once called 'Poland'" (118). In between these times there is much distortion about the Holocaust and its memory as the global

public discovers the myth. Chronologically, events move from the present to the future to the past.

In the century since its digital incorporation, the *Girl and Rat* myth undergoes various transformations depending on cultural (mis) understanding and natural disasters. Discovered by the general public in 2011, the myth inspires a Japanese animated series two years later. Two years after that, mass hysteria ensues following the hit *Tail*. In 2020 Mickey Rat supplants Mickey Mouse at the PanEuro Disney. In 2025, an unspecified Great Ecological Disaster occurs. This may have been the result of natural causes or perhaps a nuclear war. The *Girl and Rat* myth is multimindbeamed by the Art Corporation Festival in 2029. Eight years later, the Warsaw Conference decides to exterminate rats. In 2099 two oppositional events occur; the virtual game of the girl-killer is spread across the known universe and, as noted, the ruins of the Madonna of the Rat Church "in a geographical place once called 'Poland'" are discovered (118). Semel's chronology is crucial. It reveals the asymmetrical relationship between time and memory. Just as the digital girl-killer game is viewed globally, the ruins of the Madonna of the Rat Church are discovered, thereby reinforcing the necessity of listening to witness testimony when speaking of representations of Holocaust memory.

Y-Mee (Why me?) Prana, K-0005275-149, is a female anthropologist who wants to preserve Holocaust memory. She narrates this portion of the novel. The reader learns of a multiplicity of advanced technological features, logical extensions of the World Wide Web, including: "ImplaChips," "REMakers," (artificial dream machines), and the practice of "multi-mind beaming." Furthermore, there is the emergence of Remembearers. A Remembearer is defined in terms that recall Hirsch's concept of postmemory. The Remembearer is "one of those who have the traumatic event registered in their consciousness without actually having experienced it themselves" (150). They are "the second circle of witnesses to the violent experience" (150). This future dystopia is controlled by a committee whose function is to keep order and banish those who break the rules. The committee denies Y-Mee's request to have a child, thereby symbolically putting an end to Holocaust memory. Y-Mee seeks to interest her

colleague Stash, Director of the Pan-Euro Anthropological Institute, in the *Girl and Rat* myth. Stash, however, dismisses the past in order to "focus on the New Man perfectly networked and genetically repaired" (126).

The nature of memory is at the heart of "The Dream." Stash views memory as dangerous, nothing more than a "romantic longing for our lost origins, for roots" and an "infinite number of conflicting perspectives that have led us only into anarchy" (126). Y-Mee, for her part, believes that "it was precisely because of a lack of perspective based on the past that the human species was liable to be trapped into an endless cycle of horrors" (127). Yet she insightfully acknowledges the shape-shifting nature of memory in conceding that "Memory . . . excels at the art of nullification anyway" (127).[11] Various scholars had sought to trace the origin of the *Girl and Rat* myth. All had eventually agreed with Stash that the poem was the "outpouring of a subversive entity that had been taking advantage of the electronic networks in their earlier days to gain maximum circulation within a short period" (129). A myth, attests Y-Mee, is "an encrypted historical memory" (131). She views it as her duty to discover the truth which it overlays. She invades Stash's own implachips in order that he may come to understand the reality of *Girl and Rat*, thereby becoming a link in the chain of Holocaust memory transmission. In the opera, Y-Mee is supplanted by Lima Energelly, an anthropologist in 2099 who implants her own memory in Stash's Remaker. He subsequently embraces the grandmother's testimony and connects with his own, human, feelings for Lima. Here both technology and human emotions unite in seeking to bear witness.

Forgetting and / or denial of the Holocaust is far more rampant in the future than in the present. Y-Mee seeks to beam Stash to the Holocaust,

[11]Memory is of course a complex phenomenon, especially when dealing with photographs. Barbie Zelizer, observing the "barrage of snapshots of atrocity," asks whether such photos desensitize us to the pain of others. "Remembering to Forget," she continues, "ruptures the connection between representation and responsibility . . . . [P]icturing atrocity may sometimes push it from memory" (203).

described as a "huge submemoryfolder" (153). However, entrance to this folder is restricted to a "handful of people" (153). Pointedly, Semel writes, "even fewer take an interest in it" (153). Y-Mee muses on the relationship of Jews to memory: "Theologians claim this is a people that has succeeded in refining memory into the Ultimate means of spiritual survival, by handing down hundreds of commandments and prohibitions through the chain of the generations" (141).

The novel references the last documented testimony of the last survivor which occurred in what Semel terms *TheIsrael* in 2039. The witness, over a hundred years old, is being interviewed by his granddaughter (the third generation). Also present are the man's three great-grandchildren (fourth generation) and nine great-great-grandchildren (fifth generation). He attests that they "will never understand" (154). Consequently, Semel reveals two salient points about Holocaust memory: It is crucial to listen to survivor testimony and, this testimony will never be fully comprehended. Nevertheless, she privileges the third, fourth, and fifth generations who have direct contact with the last witness, thereby accepting responsibility for transmitting his story.

Y-Mee, seeking the origin of *Girl and Rat* in a post-religious and post-ecological disaster era, is expelled from a bubble-enclosed pod, home to her and her colleagues in a dystopian future. Consequently, she is freed to directly confront the truth behind the myth. Before her expulsion, however, she convinces Stash to pursue the truth, i.e., the importance of bearing witness to the Shoah. Both exiles find themselves deposited on the ravaged earth.

Israel and the Problematic of Holocaust Memory

Prior to her expulsion, Y-Mee beamed herself to the future Israel which she imagines as a bifurcated Jewish State: *TheIsrael* and *JuIdeah*. Semel clearly projects into the future the secular / religious divide which plagues contemporary Israel. Paradoxically, her protagonist discovers that memory has been exiled. Historic Israel, the Third Jewish Commonwealth, was created in the aftermath of the Holocaust at least in part as a refuge for survivors. Moreover, the

nation observes a two minute period of national silence on Yom HaShoah, the day of Holocaust Remembrance. People cease whatever they are doing and stand at attention. *TheIsrael* is, however, a secular state that has ruled out "any link to tradition" (142). Embracing the digital revolution which, as noted, enables distortion of history, *TheIsrael* has obliterated the past, including Zionist ideology, the Jewish religion, and Holocaust remembrance. This, in turn, has led to a "pathological distortion" of perception (143). Mythologically, the future is represented as short term and cataclysmic. Y-Mee's obsession with Holocaust memory falls on deaf ears.

The *Ju-Ideah*, in contrast, is inhabited by religiously orthodox Jews who do view the past as holy and sacrosanct. It is their solemn duty to remember the Holocaust. Initially, they welcome Y-Mee and her advocacy of Holocaust memory. They are committed to preserving memory of the *kedoshim* (holy martyrs of the Shoah). However, when *Ju-Ideah*'s leaders discover that a Christian rescuer is at the center of the *Girl and Rat* myth, they angrily reject the story. Their militant and religiously intolerant orthodoxy is virulently anti-Christian. Thus, both parts of the future Israel refuse, for different reasons, Holocaust memory. Where then does Semel locate future memory of the Holocaust?

The Witness of the Witness

Part five, "The Diary," is the novel's longest section. It tells of the journal kept by Father Stanislaw. The Christian rescuer reveals details of his efforts to nurse the traumatized little girl. Part of his therapeutic efforts include mimicking a rat in order to help make the youngster feel at ease. The priest himself is overcome with despair at the imperfection of God's creation and the hypocrisy of the majority of those calling themselves Christian. The teaching of contempt—to use Jules Isaac's phrase—for Jews and Judaism underlay much of traditional Christian piety and functioned as the seedbed of the Shoah. On Ash Wednesday of 1944, Father Stanislaw's diary entry reads: "My inner self was aflame at the thought that they [his congregants] were branding their fellow humans. Abstaining from eating meat,

yet devouring human flesh" (198). Moreover, the official silence of the Vatican during the Shoah was deafening.

Theologically, Stash identifies the suffering of Jesus with that of the little girl in the pit. The priest's diary is nothing less than a trial of God (*din Torah*). Stash prays to God that it would have been better if the deity had "left the *Tohu* and the *Bohu*"—these Hebrew words describe the original Chaos in Genesis 1.2—"as they were, and not separated darkness from light, because the order you created is nothing but a delusion" (170). But Stash does not stop there. He radically questions not the existence, but the very essence of God: "I do not question Your existence, Father. You exist, as I do. I was created in your image—cowardly, selfish and weak" (193). If God is unjust, it is up to humans to remember. In the entry dated 1 September 1944, Stash writes "I have been doing everything in my power to erase her memory. *For her forgetting is healing, but for the world, forgetting is the very disease itself* (221, emphasis added).[12]

Forgetfulness is the disease of humanity. Committed to bearing witness, the priest—like Chaim Kaplan and Emanuel Ringelblum, both of whom kept records of the fate of Warsaw's Jews and both of whom buried their testimony in metal containers[13]—buries *his* testimony in hope that it will someday be discovered. "Lazarus in shrouds," he muses. "Someday it will rise from the dead.

The Jews did exist.

Against all forgettings, this memory shall prevail" (231).

The biblical Adam, the first man, was born without memory. Consequently Father Stanislaw's diary will help people in the future bear witness.

[12]Semel reports receiving emails from readers inquiring about the fate of Father Stanislaw. Some wonder if he killed himself. Others thought that the priest might have gone to India to meditate. Semel feels that she abandoned Stash ("Conversation").

[13]Both Kaplan and Ringelblum were historians murdered in the Shoah. Both men buried their testimony—Kaplan in a kerosene tin and Ringelblum in milk cans—in order to leave a historical record of Nazi crimes against the Jewish people in the Warsaw ghetto and in hopes that these records would eventually be discovered. Their hopes were realized.

The Opera and the Film Script

The opera departs from the novel in two transformative scenes. The first has Lima and Stash descend to the potato pit and speak to the grandmother, who hears their words as her own inner voice. Stash acknowledges his feelings for Lima, which enable him to accept her memory. The grandmother, the little girl that she was, and the granddaughter join hands, indicating that the survivor has worked through her traumatic memory and is able to bear witness to the third generation, keeping memory of the Shoah alive.

The second movement portrays a mass. Father Stanislaw rebels against God, who has abandoned His children. The priest's theological rebellion includes a meditation on the meaning of laughter, which is not only what the rat desperately seeks. It is also a reminder to God that His creation is flawed. Drawing upon the sixteenth century Kabbalistic thought of Isaac Luria—who asserted the necessity of human action to repair the world (i.e., *tikkun ha-olam*), concluding that the messiah appears only *after* humans have done so—Semel utilizes computer language in observing that God needs human help to "reboot" in order to correct creation. Semel suggests God is saying it is up to humans to "improve" the world. The opera concludes with the granddaughter saying to her grandmother: "You are laughing."

Unlike the novel's fraught mother—daughter relationship, the second generation in the film script is represented by Ami ("My Nation"), a son. He has a loving relationship with Eva, his survivor mother. Nevertheless, Semel skillfully portrays the distance between survivors and the second generation by inserting a Skype session where Ami speaks to both Eva and his daughter Shelly ("Mine')—who is part of the third generation—in their Jerusalem hotel room. Ami asks, "Mom, where are you? You keep disappearing" (97).

The survivor is lost in her memories. Psychically, she, like the novel's nameless grandmother, is not always present in the moment. She disappears. Her last words to Ami are both a farewell and a command: "Good bye, son. And remember" (97). In addition to naming the central figures, the screen play has Eva, a New York res-

ident, die early in the story. In the screen play there is also an indication that Y-Mee / Lima is Shelly's biological descendant.

In the novel proper, Stash underscores the theme of Helnwein's painting, observing that "A world where children need to be placed in hiding ought to be destroyed completely and started from the beginning" (99). Eva, reflecting the experience of many children in hiding, is initially fearful of and hostile to Judaism. "Stash," she utters, "promise me that (God) isn't a Jew" (104). She also tells the Jewish Agency representative who wants to take her to Israel, "I don't want to be a Jew" (108). To a young child's mind, the issue was simple: Judaism was bad because it caused her to be separated from her parents, forced her into hiding, and resulted in her terrible suffering.[14] Prior to leaving the church, Eva rips a page out of the priest's diary. Much later, this page will be scanned and shown to the world as the *Girl & Rat* myth, uploaded on computers everywhere.

Conclusion

Semel's meditation on the future of Holocaust memory in the World Wide Web era leaves the reader with several major points to ponder. First, there is the issue of how memory is shaped, both by the teller and the listener. The grandmother wrestles with the dilemma of wanting and not wanting to transmit her story. Moreover, she realizes that, as Wiesel notes, to tell is to betray the experience. Her challenge is to bear witness in a way that the granddaughter can comprehend what is in reality beyond comprehension. Flowing from this situation is the fact that the survivor seeks to suppress her experience even while constantly living with its traumatic impact. This is, as noted earlier, one of the consequences of "humiliated memory." The grandmother lives in constant uncertainty, being unable to call the father of her own daughter her husband because she is unable to believe he will not abandon her, as her parents had done many years earlier.

[14]On the issue of Jewish identity and hidden children, see Mahler.

Semel deftly weaves together the plight of hidden children, the notion of broken promises, and the universal implications of the Holocaust. In the child's mind, her parents had not only "abandoned" her, they had broken their promise to return. The child is unable to comprehend that the parents acted in order to save her life. This is a traumatic scarring that endures for a lifetime. Even in the twilight of her life, whenever the grandmother visits a foreign city she frantically searches the phone book seeking her murdered parents.[15] As noted earlier, she also thinks that a computer may be able to trace her lost parents. The priest's experience, on the other hand, is literally a case of parental abandonment from which he also never fully recovers. The theme of broken promises is revealed on both the cosmic and personal levels. God breaks his promise to the proto-rat and his descendants, and implicitly the covenantal promise to protect the Jewish people. Christianity breaks its promise of love in the case of the priests' parents, who reject him. Moreover, the male infant's birth itself was a sin according to Christian teachings. The little girl's birth was not a sin but, following the dictates of National Socialism, a "crime."

The universal impact of the Shoah and its aftermath is reflected in Semel's use of various genres and different narrators living in different historical times, both real and imagined. The memories of the grandmother and the priest each contribute to the act of bearing witness. Moreover, by inserting a "Stash" (or Adam) in various time periods, Semel attests that "In every time zone one needs to find his own Stash. He becomes a symbol of a good human being who is there somewhere. The symbol of comfort, compassion and human behavior" ("Conversation"). Thus, the novelist imagines that in

[15]Semel writes that "The last trigger for writing [*And the Rat Laughed*] was a meeting with a survivor who asked me to write his memoir. During the conversation in a café in Tel-Aviv on a winter night in 1998, the door opened and closed constantly and I noticed his body reaction. He became edgy and his face became that of a boy. He then told me how he is still waiting for his mama to come and take him back, as she promised so many years ago" ("Email").

every generation, despite the omnipresent temptation to either forget, deny, or mis-remember the Shoah, there will always be the precious few who remember. Semel thereby alludes to the myth of the *lamed vov zaddikim* which states that there are thirty-six hidden righteous in every generation, although the generation may itself be unworthy. The presence of these hidden righteous insures the existence of the world. Semel thus equates memory with the awesome task of seeking to build or repair—in so far as possible—a humane post-Holocaust world. This begs the question of whether a computer search might in the future help discover clues to the existence of such *zaddikim*.

The novel also points to the uneasy relationship existing between the survivor and the second generation. The grandmother's daughter does not bear witness to the Holocaust. Quite the contrary is the case. The daughter is angry and refuses her mother's testimony. "You're a lousy mother," she attests, "You should never have had children" (35). Furthermore, the daughter warns her mother not to "mess up" her own daughter's mind with what happened to her during the Shoah (36). Semel, as the omniscient observer, notes that the daughter's anger at her mother may have stemmed from the fact that "she had a story too, one that was no less important than her mother's" (35). She did not realize, Semel notes, "that her mother was immersed not in the story, but in the question of how to tell it or to refrain from telling it" (35). Many in the second generation report being raised in silence about the Holocaust. Their survivor parents wanted to "protect" their children on the one hand, while, on the other hand, they wished to protect themselves by remaining silent and thereby not re-visiting the trauma—at least by refraining from speaking of it.

However, the third, and subsequent, generations have a plethora of cyber aids to help in their research about the Shoah and their own family's experience. Consequently, it is possible to assert that the web is a tool that can be used to reinforce Jewish identity, even though there is ample evidence for asserting that various cultures can, and do, utilize the web either to mis-remember, to deny, or to manufacture totally corrupt versions of the Shoah. Consequently, Semel's juxtaposition of the genres of cyberspace and witness of the

witness diary reveals the often fraught dynamic of continuity and change in Holocaust memory.

Semel's provocative and eloquent work also raises the issue of detachment and objectification. The grandmother thinks of her experience as "the story," which is a form of detaching from it even while telling her tale. The story wants to be told more than she wishes to tell it. For survivors, as Primo Levi notes, memory comes unbidden. The nameless grandmother also refers to the farmer's son as "the Stefan," thereby objectifying him. His savagery could not be committed by humans. Furthermore, the Kafkaesque lack of names—her own, her parents, their servant, the farmers—reveal that the young girl in her self- interpretation is a disconnected stranger in the world of the Shoah.

Pondering Semel's novel gives rise to additional reflection on Holocaust memory transmission. The role of myth is crucial in both enabling and transmitting memory, but it can also serve to distort memory. Everything depends on the sensitivity of the audience and their willingness to engage survivor testimony. One must learn to become an attentive listener. Semel also warns against what can be termed the "descent" of Holocaust memory. Once the story leaves its original teller, it becomes first a cultural fact and then a ceremonial event bereft of any historical connection, a mere abstraction. Memory is a life-sustaining but fragile phenomenon. It is difficult to remember, and memory is a slender reed blown about by the changing winds of culture. Consequently, it is crucial to immerse oneself in survivor testimony in order to anchor the Holocaust historically, morally, and theologically. Furthermore, it is vital to recognize the few righteous among the nations. Their life-saving activity demonstrates that one person can make a difference. Semel also reveals the fact that the artist can humanize history, making the reader empathize with and more fully appreciate the horrific experience undergone by the Holocaust's nearly forgotten victims, the hidden children. Moreover, females are portrayed as both victims of the Shoah *and* remembearers, those who are committed to remember and refuse to forget: the grandmother, Y-Mee Prana, and Lima Energelly. Finally, Semel's work reveals both the difficulty and the necessity of

transmitting traumatic memory and its manifestations in the generation of "postmemory" and beyond while emphasizing the interplay between cultural facts and digital culture.

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Book Review

Third-Generation Holocaust Representation: Trauma, History, and Memory. **By Victoria Aarons and Alan L. Berger. Northwestern UP, 2017. 263 pp. $100 (hardback).**

Third-Generation Holocaust Representation: Trauma, History, and Memory is a collaborative effort by Victoria Aarons and Alan L. Berger, two distinguished scholars who have published extensively on literary representations of the Holocaust generally. Their jointly authored volume both builds upon such earlier works as Berger's 1997 *Children of Job: American Second-Generation Witnesses to the Holocaust* and Aarons' 2016 *Third-Generation Holocaust Narratives: Memory in Memoir and Fiction* and sits comfortably alongside such related texts as Helen Epstein's *Children of the Holocaust: Conversations with Sons and Daughters of the Survivors* (1979), Eva Hoffman's *After Such Knowledge: Memory, History, and the Legacy of the Holocaust* (2004), Erin McGlothlin's *Second-Generation Holocaust Literature: Legacies of Survival and Perpetration* (2006), and Marianne Hirsch's *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust* (2012).

Third-Generation Holocaust Representation is not precisely a capstone for this tradition of scholarship (more work necessarily remains to be done

on the still-emerging third-generation of Holocaust representation), but it provides a helpful overview of our present understanding of successive generations of Holocaust writing and includes a number of insightful readings of specific third-generation texts.

The book's first two chapters—"On the Periphery: The 'Tangled Roots' of Holocaust Remembrance for the Third Generation" and "The Intergenerational Transmission of Memory and Trauma: From Survivor Writing to Post-Holocaust Representation"—are arguably the strongest part of the book. The chapters discuss both the challenges unique to and modes of representation common to three successive generations of Holocaust and post-Holocaust writers: Holocaust survivors, their children (the second generation), and their grandchildren (the third generation). Part of the material on the first two generations is a review designed to provide context for the book's extended discussion of the third generation.

Unlike their Holocaust survivor grandparents, members of the third generation have no personal memory of the Holocaust and frequently feel ambivalent about even attempting to describe it, for fear of fraudulently appropriating an experience and suffering not their own. And unlike their second-generation parents, who grew up witnessing firsthand the trauma that so often held their survivor parents hostage, the grandchildren of Holocaust survivors tend to face a quite different challenge: a felt need to search out, record, and memorialize the experiences of a generation of survivors whose histories typically filter down to their grandchildren piecemeal, if at all.

Eva Fogelman's intriguing argument notwithstanding, all three generations are susceptible to trauma, but the kinds of trauma they experience differ materially from one generation to the next. The defining trauma for the first generation is the Holocaust itself, which creates a cluster of post-Holocaust symptoms ranging from aporia to repetition compulsion to the despair that can come from perpetually reliving the past as the present. "Can one die in Auschwitz, after Auschwitz?" Elie Wiesel's narrator in "An Old Acquaintance" asks rhetorically (52). The answer is of course, Yes.

The trauma experienced by the second generation, on the other hand, is experienced indirectly, as the children of Holocaust survivors grow up immersed in their parents' distress—a distress that is transmitted from parent to child either by way of stories of what the survivors experienced or

(as is more often the case) by way of what Aarons and Berger rightly call "a weighted silence that becomes solidified as felt anguish on the part of the survivor parent and dread on the part of his or her offspring" (57).

For the third generation, the residual trauma arising from the Holocaust manifests itself as a kind of second-degree absence, a sometimes poorly defined but nevertheless pressing awareness of familial disconnection and rupture that can generate an almost overwhelming sense of loss and longing. This subterranean awareness of loss and longing typically surfaces by way of what Ellen Fine calls "absent memory," a memory vacuum "filled with blanks, silence, a sense of void" (126). Naomi Diamant further characterizes the experience as "a perception of memory as *loss*" (7), which third-generation novelist Nicole Krauss describes as follows:

> [I]t has something to do with—everything to do with—the fact that my grandparents came from these places that we could never go back to because they'd been lost. . . . And people were lost. My great-grandparents and lots of great-uncles and aunts died in the Holocaust. I don't know; maybe it's something that's inherited in the blood, a sense of a loss of that thing and a longing for it. (Qtd. in Wood)

The most illuminating part of the first chapters of *Third-Generation Holocaust Representation* is Aarons' and Berger's analysis of the ways in which this sense of loss and longing plays out in the memoirs, short stories, and novels written by grandchildren of Holocaust survivors. Aarons and Berger make a persuasive case that what third-generation writers most want is to discover the stories of their own families, the stories of their own, singular loss. And they want to do so precisely in order to "forge a connection among generations, . . . to reanimate the fractured family by means of the orderliness of historical reconstruction" (12–13). In the process, they hope to memorialize the dead, commemorate those who survived, and embody an appropriate response to the atrocities of the Holocaust by binding into one the families and generations so brutally fractured by the Nazis.

This search for knowledge is typically expressed by way of a quest narrative that begins and ends in the present but that returns—partway through

the narrative—to the scene of the Holocaust crime by making pilgrimages to what Pierre Nora calls "sites of memory"—a process of historical reconstruction that may include interviews, archival research, and the use of a variety of sources of information that can be gained piecemeal, including "vague references, indirect stories, conversations overheard, oblique observation, and from documents, abstract 'histories'" (6).

Much of what the third generation discovers is likely to be incomplete and even contradictory, in part because a reasonable amount of the available evidence filters down to them by way of what Marianne Hirsch calls the second generation's "postmemory" of the trauma suffered by their survivor parents. "'Postmemory,'" Hirsch writes,

> describes the relationship that the "generation after" bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before—to experiences they "remember" only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right. Postmemory's connection to the past is thus actually mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation. (postmemory.net)

The second generation sometimes resents postmemory because the brute fact of their parents' suffering tends to trivialize their own suffering by comparison. But the third generation often searches out postmemory as a treasure-trove of knowledge that will help them reclaim a lost inheritance. Postmemory is for the third generation technically an indistinct rather than an indirect memory, and in fact the second and third generations react to postmemory so differently that it makes sense to distinguish second-generation postmemory from a third-generation phenomenon that is increasingly associated with the phrase popularized by Eva Hoffman, "after such memory." In Gerd Bayer's subsequent expansion of Hoffman's initial phrase, "after such memory" is best applied to the experiences and expectations of the third generation: "the 'after' in this phrase," Bayer concludes, "has a significantly different relationship to the past from the 'post' in postmemory. The latter defines itself through a sense of belatedness that

puts the zero degree of memory at the moment of trauma. The former phrase firmly holds on to the present and looks for a place of memory within everyday life" (132).

As Aarons and Berger are careful to note, the third generation's quest for insight and connection is anything but easy. The third generation worries that they will necessarily misrepresent the past. Their parents are often reluctant to help, in part because they want to shield their children from the knowledge of the worst horrors of the Holocaust. And although their grandparents may less reticent to recount the stories of their lives, they may be "resistant to the efforts to uncover that which was secreted in their own attempts to repress and compensate for both individual and collective grief" (64). And lurking behind all that is the sure knowledge that time is running out and that sooner than later, the last of the first-generation witnesses will die.

Given how difficult it is can be uncover and sift through the available evidence, it is perhaps not surprising that the literature of the third generation tends to focus, sometimes to the point of obsession, on specific pieces of information, especially information about family members. Indeed, one of the signal contributions of *Third-Generation Holocaust Representation* is Aarons' and Berger's consideration of the extent to which the work of the third generation is shot through with "careful attention to detail, numbers, places, dates, and identities, as if the recreation and visualizing of the particulars will fill the empty spaces created by time and distance" (15). Not surprisingly, at the heart of this accumulation of details resides a deeply felt psychological need: "Such quests for the particulars . . . are compulsory and, in some ways, compensatory attempts to offset the haunting and chronic condition of loss" (19).

After discussing the third generation's felt sense of loss, its employment of the quest narrative, and the way it excavates sites of memory, postmemory, and the information gleaned "after such memory" for relevant information about family members who suffered in the Holocaust, Aarons and Berger conclude their analysis of third-generation representation by linking that generation's goals to the goals of the generation that precedes them. As *Third-Generation Holocaust Representation* makes clear, the grandchildren of Holocaust survivors return again and again to the technical residue of the past in order to work through the same five stages of development

Daniel Bar-On initially identified with respect to the work of the second generation: knowledge, understanding, emotional response, attitude, and behavior, including a cluster of insights designed, as much as anything, to help establish "ethical constraints and guidelines for future generations" (39).

In the pursuit of those difficult, worthy goals, the third generation necessarily "finds itself engaging in a tenuous balance between identification and distance. On the one hand, there is the compelling impulse to understand the particulars of the events . . . . On the other hand, there is a very clear, if regrettable, sense of the distance that must be transversed" (34). At its best, the third generation's quest for enlightenment and connection does more than simply mine the past and follow the second generation's lead. At its best, the third generation's quest for a kind of narrative truth that supplements—though it does not replace—historical truth holds the looming threat of forgetfulness at bay by simultaneously discovering and enacting the kind of collective memory that "does not erode with time, but rather, gathering momentum, as Lisa Appignanesi suggests, 'cascades through the generations'" (33). And in analyzing that important and laudable process, *Third-Generation Holocaust Representation* does much the same.

The remaining chapters of *Third-Generation Holocaust Representation* provide individual readings of representative third-generation writers, cycling through memoirs, novels, and short stories in sequence, before returning—in the last chapter—to a consideration of a final novel, Julie Orringer's *The Invisible Bridge* (2010). The readings in this part of the book are interesting in their own right, but their primary function is to provide detailed examples of the generational tendencies described in the book's first two chapters.

"Third-Generation Memoirs: Metonymy and Representation in Daniel Mendelsohn's *The Lost*" highlights both the anxiety Mendelsohn feels while attempting to narrate his family's past and the pressure he feels to do so regardless, a pressure that—in the words of Emily Miller Budick—"has intensified as increasingly temporal distance has made speaking or writing about the Holocaust that much more precarious and forgetting it all that much easier" (330). *The Lost: A Search for Six of Six Million* (2006) also illustrates the tendency among third-generation writers to rescue particularity from generality: "My book," Mendelsohn reminds Andrew O'Hehir, "is about six people, not six million people." In discussing *The Lost*,

Aarons and Berger emphasize the extent to which found objects—old photographs, letters, postcards, Holocaust memorial objects, and the like—represent an individual path to memory and, in the process, "become the frame, the scaffolding upon which [Mendelsohn] erects the lost narrative of his great-uncle's life" (85). They close the chapter by acknowledging the challenges inherent in the task of using the technical residue of the past to return to a place one has never been: "The third-generation memoirists, regardless of the number of return visits to the actual and approximate sites, still find themselves lost in the fragments of memories and the accumulation of artifacts and names and dates, and of the places they traveled" (100). The resulting return is necessarily as much novel as memoir, the unstable embodiment of what Anna Richardson rightly calls "a dialectic between knowing and not-knowing" (159).

The three chapters on third-generation novels use novels by Joseph Skibell, Michael Chabon, Jonathan Safran Foer, Nicole Krauss, and Julie Orringer to illustrate a related cluster of third-generation tendencies, including a return to the site of memory, a preoccupation with found objects, an exploration of the relationship between displacement and nostalgia, and various attempts to repair the world by way of magical realism, Jewish myth, mysticism, folktales, and such figures as the golem and the *lamed vov zaddik*. Krauss' novels in particular bear witness to her Holocaust inheritance in ways designed to deny the Nazis ultimate victory by responding to her family's catastrophic loss with hard-fought—and ultimately hard-won—hope. In *Man Walks into a Room* (2002), *The History of Love* (2005), and *Great House* (2010), Krauss simultaneously acknowledges the material reality of intergenerational transmission of trauma and attempts a partial repair of the world—*tikkun ha-olam*—through loving memory, witness, writing, and family. As Aarons and Berger put it, "In Krauss's worldview, the burdens of inheritance and intergenerational transmission of traumas can be turned into joys of a rich and a reciprocally nourishing relationship between parents and children, one deeply anchored within a family unit and based on a tradition developed out of stories of loss, survival, and redemption" (155).

"Nicole Krauss: Inheriting the Burden of Holocaust Trauma" is a reasoned analysis of Krauss' work as a representative third-generation novelist, and after what is essentially an extended aside into the use of found objects—especially photographs—in various third-generation short stories

and works characterized as "imagination based on fact" (Johanna Adorján, qtd. in Bottom), *Third-Generation Holocaust Representation* closes with a surprisingly helpful chapter on *The Invisible Bridge*. Aarons' and Berger's discussion of the novel is solid, but more importantly, "'There Were Times When It Was Possible to Weigh Suffering': Julie Orringer's *The Invisible Bridge* and the Extended Trauma of the Holocuast" also includes an extended meditation on various of the issues raised earlier in *Third-Generation Holocaust Representation*, including an important discussion of the connections among memory, history, and fiction.

After reviewing the ongoing controversy concerning the use of the word "memory" to describe what is for the third generation necessarily an act of imaginative creation, Aarons and Berger both concede the point—"To be sure, those who were not present for the unfolding of events of the Holocaust cannot in any literal measure of the term 'remember' such incidents" (205)—and reach an eminently reasonable middle-ground concerning what can properly be said to constitute memory, history, fiction, and—ultimately—truth:

> Given the inevitable constraints of language and perception, "memory" is an inexact term to describe the way in which post-Holocaust generations absorb and transmit the events that they do not, in fact, remember. That being said, the term "memory" has a useful place in these discussions, especially when conceived of differently, as more fluid. . . . The generic boundaries between history and fiction must especially be fluid and are so for third-generation Holocaust writers. The ideal of remembrance becomes, not just a matter of the known facts . . . but of histories still needing to be revealed, both personal and general. These histories are built from a combination of discovered historical data, often from personal sources and the recollection of such, but also from visits to places and archives. Because we lack the precise vocabulary to identify the unique relationship that post-Holocaust generations have to the event, we require a metaphor that will approximate the way in which post-Holocaust generations identify themselves with the collective and individual traumatic imprint of the Holocaust. . . . That metaphor

> is "memory," but understood generically as the mixing of memoir and fiction.
>
> Thus memory as a central critical metaphor operates in the same way that we "remember" the more quotidian events of our more proximate familial pasts, those moments we transferentially identify, occasions in which we may not have been literally present, but we are made affectively present through iterations of stories, photographs, artifacts that have been handed down throughout the generations. Memory as a trope becomes a means of mediating loss and arbitrating distance and temporality. (205–06)

This valorization of constructed, mediating memory both links the final chapter of *Third-Generation Holocaust Representation* to its first two chapters and affirms constructed memory as a concept and mode of analysis that stands shoulder to shoulder with such associated concepts as collective memory, postmemory, and "after such knowledge." Indeed, in the final analysis, Aarons' and Berger's advocacy of the kind of memory brought into being by way of the related processes of recovery and creation may be *Third-Generation Holocaust Representation*'s most important contribution of the evolving field of Holocaust study.

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