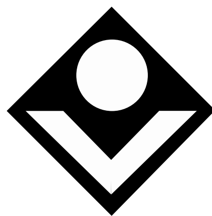
vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page i

LITERATURE AND BELIEF

Edited by Daniel K. Muhlestein



Literature and Belief
Volume 39.2

Center for the Study of Christian Values in Literature
BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page ii

LITERATURE AND BELIEF
A semiannual publication of the Center for the Study
of Christian Values in Literature
College of Humanities, Brigham Young University

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Subscription cost is $10.00; $14.00 outside the USA. Address all correspondence, submissions, and subscription inquiries to *Literature and Belief*,
3184 JFSB, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT 84602 (801) 422–3073
http://christianvalues.byu.edu/literature-and-belief/

Vol. 39.2 2019

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Brigham Young University, Provo, UT 84602.
ISBN 0-939555-31-X

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page iii

Contents

Editor's Preface v

PERSONAL ESSAY

Not Yet Able 1
James Silas Rogers

ESSAYS

Walt Whitman's Romantic Bible 9
Edward S. Cutler

"The Machine Stops":
Forster on Faith, Country, and *The Scarlet Pimpernel* 27
Terry W. Thompson

Catcher in the Rye as a War Novel 51
Reiko Nitta

The Traumatic Quotidian and Jewish Utopian Yearning
in Eshkol Nevo's *Neuland* 67
Ranen Omer-Sherman

INTERVIEW

Interview with Elie Wiesel, February 23, 2006 (reprint) 103
Alan L. Berger

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page iv

BOOK REVIEWS

Elie Wiesel: Teacher, Mentor, and Friend 126
Victoria Aarons

The New Jewish American Literary Studies 134
David Patterson

Holocaust Graphic Narratives: Generation, Trauma & Memory 139
Daniel K. Muhlestein

POETRY

Landscape Sacramental viii
Douglas L Talley

Slow Learner 7
Stephen Tuttle

The Birthday Party: Ferry Beach 49
Betsy Sholl

A February Snow 149
Tacey M. Atsitty

Contributors 151

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page v

Editor's Preface

These are strange days, indeed: A global pandemic. Economies in freefall. Lockdowns and quarantines. Vacant universities. Shortages—and hoarding. Given the press of the present moment, it is perhaps helpful to remind ourselves that others before us have faced far greater challenges and that in doing so, they have discovered reasons for optimism and faith as well as justification for sadness and despair. This issue of *Literature and Belief* explores that range of responses—responses to both good times and bad, to utopia and dystopia alike.

We begin our exploration of good times with James Silas Rogers's "Not Yet Able," a fond recollection of the joys and challenges and moments of illumination that come from reading and rereading St. Augustine's *Confessions*. "Not Yet Able" is personal essay, a relatively new genre for *Literature and Belief*. We are delighted to share "Not Yet Able" with our readers, and we hope to include more personal essays in future issues.

Augustine's *Confessions* is typically viewed as a helpful supplement to the scriptural canon. Walt Whitman's goal in writing *Leaves of Grass*, on the other hand, was less to supplement the Bible than to replace it, by creating a sacred poetic text of American democracy. And in "Walt Whitman's Romantic Bible," Edward S. Cutler contextualizes Whitman's project, identifies various of the formal and philosophical characteristics of poems like "Song of Myself," and celebrates the most expansive aspects of Whitman's claim that the very act of writing is itself a manifestation of the miracle that is daily existence:

> Whatever the Absolute is, or the Soul is, Whitman affirms, it is co-extensive with infinite and ongoing processes, so much so that no book can contain or delineate it, but only aspire to awaken reflection upon the processes themselves. Because those processes have given rise to this moment of our being, whatever purpose our being here portends is secondary to the miracle at hand, that we are here. (24)

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page vi

While Whitman uses *Leaves of Grass* to sing hymns of praise for what is for the most part a wildly idealistic description of nineteenth century American democracy, E. M. Forster uses science fiction to explore the bleakest aspects of a fictional dystopian future that bears an occasionally uncanny resemblance to our present moment in history. In "'The Machine Stops': Forster on Faith, Country, and *The Scarlet Pimpernel*," Terry W. Thompson introduces us to Forster's little-known foray into the newly emerging genre of science fiction short stories. In "The Machine Stops," Forster describes a dystopian future in which individuals live in underground isolation and receive virtually all of their information about both themselves and the external world by way of a god-Machine: a device which, from our present perspective, combines the functions of the internet, cell phones, and YouTube. In Forster's dystopian future, individual isolation is the expected and experienced norm, the god-Machine has replaced God as an object of worship, and death becomes preferable to life—the only escape from totalitarian group-think. Thompson rightly interprets Forster's fictional dystopia as a cautionary tale for both his time and ours.

Thompson's analysis of the conflict between utopian ends and dystopian means highlights the fact that such conflict inevitably generates trauma. In the next two essays, Reiko Nitta and Ranen Omer-Sherman explore the role of trauma in other literary texts as well: J. D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* and Eshkol Nevo's *Neuland*. In "*Catcher in the Rye* as a War Novel," Nitta concludes that "many elements in *Catcher* indicate the strong influence of Salinger's war experience on his writing and that the novel's serious and enriched theme and literary artifices grew out—in part, at least—of that traumatic experience" (52). And in "The Traumatic Quotidian and Jewish Utopian Yearning in Eshkol Nevo's *Neuland*," Omer-Sherman makes a compelling case that the best homeland for a traumatized and dispossessed people is a homeland graced by liberality and inclusion rather than by exclusion and domination. "Home," Omer-Sherman concludes, quoting David Grossman, is

> [w]here we will live a peace and safe life; a clear life; a life that will not be enslaved—by fanatics of all kinds—for the purposes

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page vii

> of some total, messianic, and nationalist vision. Home, whose inhabitants will not be the material that ignites a principle greater than them, and supposedly beyond their comprehension. That life in it would be measured in its humanity. . . . In a state that runs simply on the concern for the person living within it, for every person living within it, out of compassion, and out of tolerance. (99)

Tolerance, compassion, hope, humanity, a homeland: these are admirable goals in any time and place. They are particularly admirable goals in troubled times. Few have lived through more troubled times than did Elie Wiesel, and few have worked more fervently to engender hope in the face of despair and generosity in the face of cruelty. In celebration of Wiesel's life and of the humanity and hope he so earnestly advocated, we end this issue of *Literature and Belief* by reprinting Alan L. Berger's 2006 interview of Wiesel in *Literature and Belief* and by including three reviews of recent books that center on his life and on select aspects of contemporary Jewish American literary studies. In doing so, we hope to embody at least part of what Wiesel gestures toward near the end of the interview: "In the nineteenth century there was literature to entertain. Then afterwards, it was to offer knowledge. I think in the twenty-first century the moral dimension should be there, which means it should humanize or at least sensitize the reader. That should be the role of the writer today" (124).

—Daniel K. Muhlestein

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page viii

Landscape Sacramental

Dante again his ghost no more than a glint
of orange and green shadow in the woods

the air dense a bit musty
like the nave of a darkened cathedral

Sunlight filters through a stained-glass window
of maple leaves The Poet's shadow

his voice flickering in a light wind
Like Eden he says
at the end of a long day

He points to a black cherry toppled by a storm
massive a hundred feet in length

uprooted from earth
An altar begging for worship he says
Do you see

Look more closely Two trees grew side by side
until they paired at the hip became one

their limbs entwined they lie down together
now in an act of deepened prayer

make this earth their final resting place
Look again

he says fading with the Nazarene's words

for this will a man cleave to his wife and be one flesh

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page ix

Even in the Poet's absence I have learned
to hear the questions

How can the body heal on that altar
Travel the landscape of its aging skin and bone

in purity with another
Trample the dry leaves
of days and memory without remorse

–Douglas L. Talley

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page x

Fra Angelico "Conversion of Saint Augustin"
Circa 1430–1435

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 1

Not Yet Able

James Silas Rogers
University of St. Thomas

Some works of literature—we could all nominate at least a few—ought to be read every few years for the good of one's soul. My list of lodestone works would include *The Great Gatsby*, Flannery O'Connor's "Revelation," and James Joyce's "The Dead"—and also the first ten books of Augustine's *Confessions*, a book full of evasion, of occasional cowardice and occasional courage, and of vast ideas alongside unabashed pettiness.

One might notice that the last of those titles has been around fifteen-hundred years longer than the others, but that doesn't mean it's better-known. My own life proves this, as I spent my first eighteen years in St Augustine's parish (baptized there, confirmed there, a graduate of the parish school) without learning a single fact about the parish's patron. Not his century, not his country, not even his feast day (it's August 28; maybe if it had fallen in the school year I would have learned that much).

And yet somehow, in the summer of 1977, when I was in my early twenties, he lurched into my life. I don't recall who recommended I read Augustine. In an obscure way, the vagueness of my first exposure to his *Confessions* seems right.

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 2

Much of my initial reading of *The Confessions* took place while I sat on the shores of Lake Harriet in Minneapolis. All that summer, evangelicals were working the shores of the city lakes, introducing themselves to anyone reading a book and shortly thereafter thrusting a New Testament on them. At least six of them made a point, after intruding themselves on my reading, of urging me to read the Bible instead—indeed, gently reproving me for choosing Augustine rather than scripture. One wonders what they had to say to the sunbathers reading spy novels or grocery rack bodice-rippers.

As with many reading experiences, my memory of this lengthy work is dominated by a single passage—in this case the scene when Augustine hears a child calling, *tolle lege*, "Take and read, take and read" and then lifts the Bible, where he falls upon a passage that speaks to him with terrific meaning and poignancy. After trying to think his way into faith, that stern and oh-so-earnest man surrenders to something wholly irrational, and gives himself over to the distant words of a child.

But why did that scene click? Was I too rational? I don't think so; I hadn't read Aquinas or Cardinal Newman, either. Was I too stern, too earnest, myself? I suppose I was. After all, most of the young men at the beach hadn't come there to read a patristic text. It wasn't the romance of scholarship that drew me to Augustine: it was the romance of a story that hinged on illumination. Back then, I wanted the lightning bolt, the sudden transformation. Of course I did: in those days, we'd all just read *Siddharta* or seen the movie, anyway, not to mention that we had a president who spoke proudly of a born-again experience. Maybe having a *satori* wasn't a birthright, but the prospect of some sort of transforming experience was in the air.

Except they don't always happen. I've read *Confessions*, and taught it many times since. The text, I know, has not changed. But we're back at the old same-river-twice axiom: I changed over the course of the decades.

What's impressed me, when I've returned to the book, is not the moment of illumination in Augustine's story, but all of his caution. Now, *Confessions* reads to me as a long story—the span of a life, not

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 3

the story of peaks in a long life (and it was a long life: he lived another thirty years). There are still moments that stand out—the take-and read incident, of course, and also the moment in Book VII when Augustine says, "then, in the flash of a trembling glance, my mind arrived at That Which Is."

Yet, *The Confessions* isn't built on sudden epiphanies. It's the story of the gradual unfolding of a spiritual life. Even in that transforming moment from Book VII, Augustine does not feel an immediate spiritual bounce, nor does he even change his behavior appreciably. His next sentence reads,

> Now indeed I saw your *invisible things understood by the things which are made*, but I had not the power to keep my eye steadily fixed: in my weakness I felt myself falling back and returning again to my habits, carrying nothing with me except a loving memory of it and a longing for something which may be described as a kind of food of which I had perceived the fragrance but which I was not yet able to eat.

Not yet able: that's the Augustine I like. Others might take comfort in the severe philosopher making irrefutable pronouncements, but I am drawn to the human searcher. He shows us that we often live our lives in such a way that truth—even a truth to which we have assented—makes no compelling claim on us. His famous prayer, "Lord give me chastity, but not yet" is critical to understanding his, and our, spiritual starting place.

Confessions serves as a sort of counter-narrative to the model of conversion that ambushed Saul on the road to Damascus (it was so disappointing to learn much later that he didn't really get knocked off a horse), the model that informs so much evangelical experience and testimony, from *Amazing Grace* to Billy Graham weeping on his campus golf course.

His first steps toward becoming a Catholic are timid and without zeal: "I decided therefore to be for the time being a catechumen in the Catholic Church (the Church which my parents had encouraged me to join) until I should see some certain light by which to steer my

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 4

course." At the end of Book V, Augustine hears the command "take and read"—but an inner voice also tells him, "wait and see."

In the aftermath of his disenchantment with the Manichean heresy, still not entirely aboard the Catholic faith, Augustine declares "it was the same with me as with a man who, having once had a bad doctor, is afraid of trusting himself even to a good one." The chapter that follows this admission of doubt consists of two long paragraphs; the opening sentences of each reveal much. In the first, Augustine describes the pull of his conversion process as a gradual growth. "From now on, however, I began to prefer the Catholic faith." *Prefer*: what an understated word. In the second, he is clearer about his divagation: "I believed this sometimes more and sometimes less strongly." Augustine consciously records his hesitancy. He needs to include his spiritual fumbling and reluctance to give us a faithful record of his story.

One Saturday in August, I found myself bicycling around the lakes of Minneapolis with, of all things, a copy of *Confessions* in my knapsack. (Please don't get the idea that I never leave home without one. Not everyone cherishes the book; I'd stopped at a yard sale and picked up a paperback copy for a quarter.) Riding on the paved trail, I thought, What a chance to test the same-river-twice theory; what a chance to replicate the *tolle lege* moment.

It was late summer. Sailboarders were heeling on the lake; nearby, a cottonwood tree was just beginning to ease into autumn, a few errant yellow leaves scattered on the ground. No, nothing had changed. Well, some things changed since 1977: I wasn't looking for spiritual fireworks, and there were no evangelicals beseeching me to let Jesus into my heart. I parked my bike beside a bench, and thrust my finger into a random page. Book VI, chapter 14, and there was the Augustine I had met forty years earlier, describing how "A group of us, all friends together, after much thought and conversation on how we hated the whole wearisome business of human life, had almost reached the conclusion that we would retire from the crowd."

Half a lifetime after my first reading of *Confessions*, the book was still presenting me with the advice The Eagles has been singing throughout that earlier decade: Take it easy.

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 5

It's easy to understand this scene Augustine describes, to respond to the word "friends"—but also to the word "almost." His relationship with God evolved like the slow process of growth in friendship: not immediately intimate, not physically charged, and not freighted with the power and authority issues that confound relations with a stern parent. He had his own dark nights of the soul, to be sure. But he shared those tribulations with friends whose stories were close to his own. In other words, with grown people wondering what they ought to do next—just like a million college graduates every June, asking themselves, *What next?*, or like any young person who's had to wrestle with questions about a relationship, not entirely sure if he or she is really in love.

Reading around in that chapter, it's clear that his friends' faith journeys—their conversions and their problems with belief—mirrored the saint's. I was attracted to Alypius' story: he goes to Rome full of resolve after his conversion but the violence and rawness of the spectacle in the amphitheater capture him in spite of his good intentions. The friend whose tale is most relevant may be Victorinus, whose conversion to Christianity is quite diffident. As Augustine describes it, his friend "then said to Simplicianus—not in public, but in a private friendly conversation—'I should like you to know that I am now a Christian.'" Victorinus wants to avoid offending his non-believing friends. The tortoise is right again: slow and steady beats the sudden dash.

For Victorinus, as for Augustine in Book IX, conversion is a matter of winding down an old life before taking up a new one. After the last obstacles to belief fall, Augustine tells God,

> And I decided in your sight that, without making any violent gesture, I would gently withdraw from a position in which I was making use of my tongue in the talking-shop; no longer should my young students (who were not so much interested in your law and your peace as in absurd deceptions and legal battles) buy from my mouth material for arming their own madness.

He nonetheless puts in his time at the old job: "I thought it would look like ostentation if instead of waiting for the vacation that was

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 6

now so close, I should resign from a public position that everyone knew about."

It would look like ostentation. The bishop and saint who invented autobiography was, nonetheless, quite wary of public displays of faith.

Take that, you proselytizers on the shores of Lake Harriet.

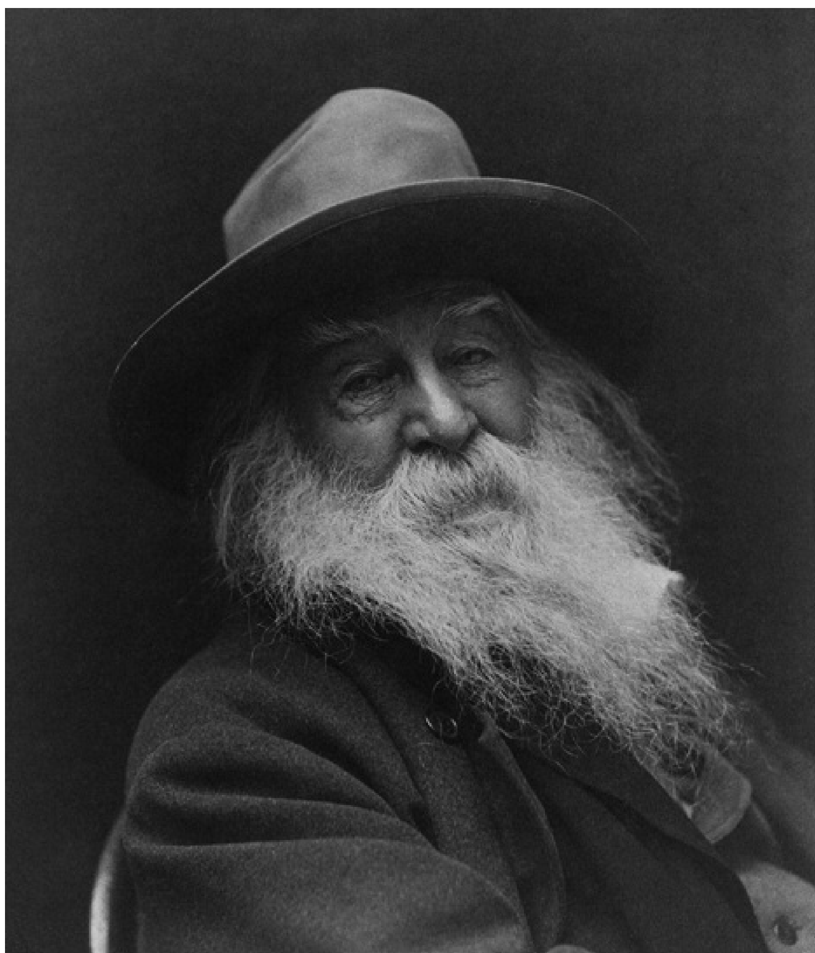
vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 7

Slow Learner

As Gideon busied himself at the winepress, an angel took a seat at the base of the oldest oak. The angel searched the ground for acorns, taking interest in some more than others. After a time, he made a table of his palm and whispered words until the acorn lying there became a tree, no taller than the span of his glowing hand. But this was no oak. It looked more like a fruit tree, maybe plum. Hey, Gideon said, what gives? What gives is what gives, the angel said. At this, he stretched out his hand as though to offer what grew there. When Gideon reached, the tree shriveled, returning to its husk before falling to the ground, soon lost among a thousand just like it. He watched for a moment, unsure of everything. Do that again, he said. But the angel said he wouldn't. There was work that needed doing. Enemies to defeat and people to free and idols to tear down. Gideon begged for a sign until the angel sighed and his shoulders sagged. The angel tapped a stone which released a fine river of honey. Flowers withered and died and then stood again, more vibrant than before. A bird became a lion and a lion became a sea of ants. The angel made fire out of nothing and baked a meal to share, after which Gideon finally called a miracle a miracle. Many years later, long after he had done what he was called to do, Gideon's seventy sons would sometimes find him at the oak tree, squeezing an acorn in his fist as though he believed a man could draw juice from a seed.

–Stephen Tuttle

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 8



Walt Whitman
1819–1892

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 9

Walt Whitman's Romantic Bible

Edward S. Cutler
Brigham Young University

> Shouldn't the Bible be understood as still developing? The Biblical utterances are infinitely variegated—History, poetry, all in profusion— —Novalis

Flush with the notoriety garnered from the first two editions of *Leaves of Grass* (1855, 1856), the American poet Walt Whitman laid plans for something truly ambitious with his greatly expanded third edition, which would appear in 1860. The poet was aiming at nothing less than "[t]he Great construction of the New Bible," according to his 1857 notebook entry (*Notebooks and Unpublished Prose Manuscripts I* [*NUPM I*] 353). Another fragmentary notebook entry from the same year, which Whitman termed a "[s]pinal idea" of "*[f]ounding a new American Religion*" and an 1859 note, "'Leaves of Grass'—Bible of the New Religion," have served to underscore the notion, for critics, that his antebellum aspiration was for *Leaves* to become the sacred text of American democracy (*NUPM VI* 2046). The preface to the first edition of *Leaves* had already prophesied that "[t]here will soon be no more priests. Their work is done. They may wait awhile . . . perhaps a generation or two" before "every man shall be his own priest" and "a

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 10

new breed of poets" shall "arise in America and be responded to from the remainder of the earth" (*LG55* xi; ellipses in the original unless bracketed). Combined with the provocative aspiration to fashion a new Bible and religion, the visionary tenor of the preface reinforces the perception that Whitman held an almost dispensational religious view of his book of poems. James Perrin observes, for instance, that "the soul" is a more featured concern in Whitman's "new Bible" edition (152), and Ed Folsom and Kenneth M. Price also argue that Whitman aimed to produce a "monumental work" that would stand as "a Bible for American democracy [and] would reconfigure morality on radically democratic terms."

Whitman's thought is difficult to separate from the overtly progressive commitments to American democracy that permeate his poetics. Yet the notes regarding a new religion and new poetic Bible may offer more direct insight into the transatlantic aesthetic and philosophical antecedents vital to the formation of his ground-breaking poetics. Whitman's predecessors in Germany—the *Frühromantik*, or early German Romantics—had used almost identical language to describe their poetic and philosophical innovations in the closing years of the eighteenth century. "The history of every man should be a Bible," reads a fragment from Georg Phillipp Friedrich Von Hardenberg, the philosopher-poet better known by his pen name, Novalis (Hedge 496). Whitman almost certainly encountered this and other romantic fragments in Frederic Henry Hedge's *Prose Writers of Germany* (1847), a collection of translations the poet would describe late in his life as "one of my resources," a "necessity," and "indispensable" to him for over forty years (qtd. in Traubel 7: 76, 9: 2). A characteristic of the early German Romantics is their penchant for paradox and ironic reversal—features that would come to distinguish *Leaves of Grass* as well—such as Novalis's association here of every common individual's history with the exceptional holiness of the Bible. A notebook entry from Whitman amplifies this same idea:

> There are [those] that specialize a book, or some divine life, as the only revelation:—I too doubtless own it whatever it is to be a revelation, a part, but I see all else, all Nature, and each and

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 11

> all that to it appertains, the processes of time, all men, the universes, all likes and dislikes and developments,—a hundred, a thousand other Saviour[s?] and Mediators & Bibles—they too just as much revelations as any[.] (*NUPM* 6: 2085)

This universalizing sentiment recurs throughout the successive editions of *Leaves of Grass*, from the 1855 poem "A Song for Occupations"—"We consider the bibles and religions divine. . . . I do not say they are not divine, / I say they have all grown out of you and may grow out of you still, / It is not they who give the life . . . it is you who give the life" (*LG55* 60)—to the "realms of budding bibles" in Whitman's celebrated poem, "Passage to India," written almost twenty years later (*LG* 418).

The figure of the common individual exalted to an original, transcendental communion with the divine is something of a romantic commonplace, one that may appear to connect Whitman as readily to American contemporaries such as Ralph Waldo Emerson or Henry David Thoreau as to the early German Romantics. Their unusual invocation of the Bible, though, underscores the distinction I wish to draw between the early German Romantics and Whitman on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the philosophy that fueled the Transcendental Club in Concord, Massachusetts. For American Transcendentalism—as the moniker itself implies—derives its faith in the immediacy of individual intuition from idealist systems philosophers like Immanuel Kant and Johann Gottlieb Fichte. While romanticism and philosophical idealism overlap to an extent, the early German romantics actively subverted systematic pretense in favor of an often fragmentary, hybridized fusion of philosophy and poetry. Kant (cautiously) and Fichte (zealously) sought to liberate the individual from *a posteriori* determinism by isolating the supposed *a priori*, unconditioned operations of mind and reflective consciousness to secure there a transcendental ground of selfhood not given in experience or through any forms of mediation. The early German Romantics, by contrast, would pursue transcendental insight by way of a reflexive and ironic relationship to language itself—in the very materials of representation, genre, types, and tropes.

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 12

Referencing Novalis, Maurice Blanchot thus observes that "one of the tasks of romanticism was to introduce . . . a veritable conversion of writing" that enabled "the work's power to be and no longer to represent[,] to be everything, but without content or with a content that is almost indifferent" (353). When *Leaves* tells its readers, "What you are holding is in reality no book, nor part / of a book" (*LG60* 242), or when the poet oddly insists that "it is not for what I have put into it that I have / written this book, / Nor is it by reading it you will acquire it" (*LG60* 346), we begin to discern in Whitman the same "ambition [toward] a total book, a kind of Bible, perpetually growing, that will not represent the real but replace it" that had motivated his romantic predecessors (Blanchot 358).

"The seed of all other books": Romantic Bibles

In 1798, Novalis first conceived the plan that would find its transatlantic echo in Whitman almost sixty years later: constructing a new bible. "My book shall be a scientific Bible—a real, and an ideal model—and the seed of all books" he wrote in his unfinished *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopedia* (99). The latter decades of the eighteenth century witnessed the publication of several magisterial compendia, from Denis Diderot's *Encyclopédie* to Edward Gibbon's *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire.* At first blush, Novalis might appear to be envisioning a universal project in the same tradition of Enlightenment historiography; his eclectic notes for the Romantic Encyclopedia bring chemistry and mineralogy into conversation with philology and philosophy, place fairy tales on the same conceptual plane as theology, and trace associations with so many open threads as to suggest that a fully realized product would indeed have been voluminous.

Producing a weighty tome or announcing a new Judeo-Christian revelation are not, however, apparent motives for Novalis's biblical project; his aim, rather, was the elevation of his book to something beyond a common book. "A Bible is the supreme task of writing," Novalis observes (*Notes* 67). This entry also contains the text of the fragment Whitman would later encounter in Hedge, that "[e]very

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 13

human history shall be a Bible." The egalitarianism of the idea along with Novalis's use of indefinite article—"a Bible" (*eine Bibel*)—underscore that his intention is not canonical but expansive, to inaugurate a new mode of writing, which Wm. Arctander O'Brien describes as Novalis's "typically ambiguous mixture of reverence and irreverence" (221). This same year Novalis's friend and romantic contemporary Friedrich Schlegel had independently hit upon the idea of his own biblical project: "Is there another word," Schlegel wonders, "to distinguish a common book from the idea of an infinite book as Bible, as a book per se, an absolute book?" (156). Schlegel answers and amplifies his own question, suggesting that just as all "poems . . . are only one poem when correctly viewed, all books should be only one book" (156). The early German Romantics believed the Bible's unique status as a book of books provided the contours of an absolute ideal worth striving toward.

While the biblical projects of Novalis and Schlegel never got beyond drafts and fragmentary reflections, the extent to which both thinkers—like Whitman later—gravitated toward the idea of the Bible elucidates romanticism's point of departure from the idealism of its philosophical contemporaries. For where Kant's transcendental idealism or Fichte's absolute idealism strove to articulate and secure the pure, unconditioned ground of selfhood, prior to experiential sensory mediations upon thought (including language), the biblical projects demonstrate that the early German Romantics viewed textuality as indispensable to their form of philosophizing, a kind of immanent critique of systems philosophy. For instance, Novalis zeros in on Kant's problematic notion of the transcendental schema in arguing for the "[e]levation of a book to a Bible": "The *accomplished Bible is a complete and well-organized library*—the schema of the Bible is at once the schema of the library.—The true *schema*—the true *formula*, also indicates its origin—its usage, etc. . . . [w]hat a *book* as such, can, may, and must contain" (*Notes* 120–21). Novalis's view of the schema of the Bible paradoxically extends Kant's slippery concept while turning it on its head. In *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant introduces the schema to solve a particular transcendental problem, namely, bridging the pure, *a priori* forms and concepts of

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 14

understanding with the phenomenal objects of the world, but without conditioning the operations of mind upon those very *a posteriori* experiences and models. In contrast with language, which murkily identifies concepts with sensory images, Kant declared the schema a "representation of a general procedure of the imagination for providing a concept with its image" (B180). Jonathan Bennett proposes that this "nasty phrase" describing the schema really "just means 'rule'" (149), but Kant's tortuous explanation of the schema—accounting for a procedure of "representation" derived from imagination itself—illustrates the extent to which the philosopher seeks a way around the other possibility, namely, that derived representations and images—the stuff of language and textuality—are in fact constitutive of cognitive processes, rather than its secondary effects.

The qualified function of Kant's schema, then, lays bare an aporia crucial not only for the early German Romantics but also for subsequent modes of semiotic critique that culminate in the French semiotic criticism of the 1960s and 70s. What is "imagination" prior to its population with derived images? Is "representation" possible without language? The role of the schema appears part of a broader structural attempt to exorcise such problematic questions. In marked contrast to the idealist philosophical systems of Kant or Fichte, which sought to derive smooth first-principles from the preconditions of cognition and the operations of consciousness itself, the Romantics and Whitman would foreground poetry, philology, and the vexed question of whether "immediate," non-linguistic thought is even possible. Blanchot thus references Novalis directly in making the decidedly un-Kantian claim that "the book is the *a priori* of knowledge," by which he means not simply that books "become identified with knowledge" as a "repository and receptacle of knowledge," but that we "would know nothing if there did not always exist in advance the impersonal memory of the book and, more essentially, the prior disposition to write and to read contained in every book and affirming itself only in the book" (423). Blanchot marks this literally counter-intuitive claim about the *a priori* of the book in terms that feature the philosophical stake of the question for the Romantics, which—following Schlegel and Novalis—he calls "the absolute of the book" (423).

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 15

The absolute book pushes beyond the merely empirical book toward "the condition for all reading and all writing" (423). As we will see below, this absolute conception of language and textuality becomes indispensable to Whitman's governing ideas about *Leaves of Grass*. For the totality an absolute book indicates, Blanchot argues, is only at the "lowest level . . . the presence of a content or a signified" (423). "On a higher level," Blanchot argues, it indicates "the presence of a form, of something that signifies or operates; and, on a still higher level, the development of a system of relations that is always already there, if only as a possibility to come" (423). A schema can be discerned on the Bible, or indeed in any individual or thing, so long as one pushes beyond seemingly determinate form and content to disclose the whole system of relations that always already inhere in things. From the perspective of early German Romantic philosophy—which Frederick C. Beiser thus describes as an "absolute idealism" (349)—the significance of the Bible is neither its particular content nor its regulative discursive authority, but its meta-status as a book of books, a book that transcends its own determinate existence qua book and begins thereby to disclose the immanent system of relations that make a bible, ourselves, reading, writing, thinking, and understanding possible.

"The romantics never really succeed in naming this something" they seek to produce, Phillipe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy argue in *The Literary Absolute*, because anything less than everything, that is to say anything partial and determinate, would foreclose their orientation toward the absolute (11). "They speak of poetry, of the work, of the novel," Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy observe, but what they ultimately seek is "[b]eyond divisions and all definition," a "new genre" capable of producing "an entirely new, infinitely new Work" (11). The emphasis, consequently, is on the activity of production itself rather a discreet form of product. Novalis likewise observes that a "book can have very different sorts of interest. The author, the reader, a purpose, an incident, its mere individual existence can be the axis around which it turns" (*Fichte Studies* [*FS*] 181). That it presents itself alone is enough to "awaken activity," Novalis holds, modifying the language of Fichte to underscore

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 16

the unbounded representational character of self-positing in romanticism: "[T]he I must posit itself as presenting. . . . There is a particular power of presenting—that merely presents for the sake of presenting—presenting in order to present is *free* presenting" (*FS* 181). Schlegel echoes this sentiment in a famous fragment, contrasting romantic poetry, which "alone is infinite" with "other kinds of poetry [which] are finished and are now capable of being fully analyzed": "The romantic kind of poetry is still in the state of becoming; that, in fact, is its real essence: that it should forever be becoming and never be perfected" (32).

"The origin of all poems": *Leaves of Grass* as Absolute Book

The first poem in the 1855 *Leaves of Grass*—eventually titled "Song of Myself"—remains the most startling illustration of the romantic theory of poetry as conceived by Novalis and Schlegel. Sprawling and formless, discursive and lyrical, the poem's most arresting feature may be its overt refusal to cohere into anything resembling a poem. "Have you practiced so long to learn to read? / Have you felt so proud to get at the meaning of poems? / Stop this day and night with me and you shall possess the origin of all poems" the speaker asserts (*LG55* 14). In the same way that the Bible is a book of books, the schema of all writing for Novalis and Schlegel, "Song of Myself" announces itself from the outset as a special case, a poem of poems. The orientation of *Leaves of Grass* is likewise toward the absolute—which Whitman often terms "the whole"—and the recognition that its highest task is laying bare the infinite system of relations that underlie ostensibly determinate contents and forms (*LG55* 51). The preface sets forth the task with a panoramic meditation upon "the fragments of annals we inherit" from a "few ancient nations" and the likelihood that "hundreds of far mightier and more ancient nations unknown to us by name or date or location" have also existed, on this globe or "on any of the wandering stars" (*LG55* x). Of these past or unknown lands or of all that is "thought or done this day on any part of the surface of the globe" Whitman asks, "Did you guess any of them lived only in its moment?" (*LG55* x–xi). The

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 17

answer only reinforces the ceaseless play of processes and causes: "The world does not so exist . . no parts palpable or impalpable so exist . . . no result exists now without being from its long antecedent result, and that from its antecedent, and so backward without the farthest mentionable spot coming a bit nearer the beginning than any other spot" (LG55 xi).

The 1855 *Leaves* speaks from the standpoint of the absolute, which it simultaneously recognizes is impossible, because the infinite does not resolve into a single logic of spatial points or temporal sequences. Consequently paradox, contradiction, and indirection become a vehicle for indicating the groundless processes of an incommensurable whole. "If one becomes infatuated with the absolute and simply can't escape it, then the only way out is to contradict oneself continually and join opposite extremes together," Schlegel observes (17). Whitman's nonchalant declaration in "Song of Myself," "Do I contradict myself? / Very well then. . . . I contradict myself; / I am large . . . I contain multitudes" captures this same sentiment (*LG55* 55). The paradox at the heart of "Song of Myself" lies in the poet's playful refusal of a message, despite his voluble enumerations. "Do you guess I have some intricate purpose? / Well I have . . . for the April rain has, and the mica on the side of a rock has" (*LG55* 25). A personification of the whole, the speaker remains elusive and indeterminate. "Writing and talk do not prove me," he insists, and "[l]ogic and sermons never convince" (LG55 31, 33). His words, rather, "are words of a questioning, and to indicate reality" (*LG55* 47). These indications throughout the poem feature nothing so much as the inability to arrest a form or object:

> There is no stoppage, and never can be stoppage;
> If I and you and the worlds and all beneath or upon their surfaces,
> and all the palpable life, were this moment reduced back to a
> pallid float, it would not avail in the long run,
> We should surely bring up again where we now stand,
> And as surely go much farther, and then farther and farther.
> (*LG55* 51)

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 18

"Song of Myself" rests in the observation that whatever has attained form and identity here has done so through processes whose results are palpable if incalculable, so much so that a "few quadrillions of eras, a few octillions of cubic leagues, do not hazard the span" of what brings us here; they "are but parts . . . any thing is but a part" (*LG55* 51).

A lingering challenge for Whitman's absolute poetics—one the early German Romantics understood well—is revealed in the unrelenting declarativity of a poem like "Song of Myself." If writing and talk are inadequate, and if whatever is is already sufficient on its own terms as explanation, does the Absolute require a forty-three page poem? What form best indicates it? "There are writers in Germany who drink the Absolute like water," Schlegel comically observes, "and there are books in which even the dogs make references to the Infinite" (127). It is not enough to talk about the Absolute, even if that talk is about the impossibility of encompassing it. The form and mode of Whitman's poetic embrace of the inassimilable whole would become the more pressing question when preparing his "new Bible" edition of *Leaves*. Regarding the possibility of a genuinely "transcendental poetry," Schlegel argues that while it necessarily begins with "the absolute disparity of ideality and [determinate] reality," we "should not care for a transcendental philosophy unless it were critical, unless it portrayed the producer along with the product," unless "this poetry should portray itself with each of its portrayals; everywhere and at the same time, it should be poetry and the poetry of poetry" (145).

The meta-reflexivity Schlegel calls for—the poetry of poetry—is answered in the ideal of the Bible as a book of books. Such a text vivifies itself as something higher than the mere sum of its discursive parts. A related fragment of Schlegel's holds that "[i]n the world of language, or in other words, in the world of art and liberal education, religion necessarily appears as mythology or as Bible" (153). As he prepared the 1860 edition of *Leaves*, which added 146 new poems to the thirty-two of the second edition, Whitman's interests grew increasingly to resonate with the intersections of language, art, education, religion, mythology, and bibles that Schlegel sets forth. A unique poem that draws heavily on German organic language

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 19

theory, "To the Sayers of Words" (later "Song of the Rolling Earth"), had first appeared in 1856; by 1860 much of *Leaves* presupposes this poem's view that language is immanent and diffuse throughout the cosmos and that when we speak we are actually translating the latent, "inaudible words of the earth" (*LG60* 329). These "vast words to be said" are already silently communicating themselves (*LG60* 330). Thus, against the semiotic, diacritical, phonic elements commonly thought of as the components of written or spoken language, the poem queries:

> Were you thinking that those were the words—those
> upright lines? Those curves, angles, dots?
> No, those are not the words—the substantial words
> are in the ground and sea,
> They are in the air—they are in you.
>
> Were you thinking that those were the words—
> those delicious sounds out of your friends'
> mouths?
> No, the real words are more delicious than they. (*LG60* 329)

For Whitman, the "real words" are elemental developments that in turn indicate ever more vast and ongoing evolutionary processes. All that has taken form and is capable of being communicated, human beings included, are intimately tied to the totality of planetary and cosmic developments. Even the "sayers of words" are themselves "words" in the absolute sense Whitman seeks to disclose: "Each man to himself, and each woman to herself, is / the word of the past and present, and the word of immortality" (*LG60* 333). The non-dogmatic contours of Whitman's new faith are exemplified in the perspective of this poem, where the reality of "the Soul" is indicated not by reasoning of proof, but by "undeniable growth" legible everywhere in "the dictionaries of the words / that print cannot touch" (*LG60* 335).

"To the Sayers of Words" reinforces the same paradox of an elusive, antecedent whole featured in "Song of Myself": "It is not what

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 20

is printed. . . . It is not to be put in a book. . . . It is not in this book" (*LG55* 68). Yet the 1860 edition's more overt equation of language as such with the Absolute is key to Whitman's quasi-religious conception of his new Bible. Novalis's interest in the Bible as a schema is illustrative, as we recall Blanchot's argument that we "would know nothing if there did not always exist in advance the impersonal memory of the book and, more essentially, the prior disposition to write and to read contained in every book and affirming itself only in the book" (423). What is routinely affirmed in Whitman's book is the disposition and orientation towards language itself, against which the particular semiotic or thematic contents of a given book are more or less incidental. "I swear I will never henceforth have to do with the / faith that tells the best! / I will have to do with that faith only that leaves the / best untold," the poet declares in "To the Sayers of Words," preferring the non-discursive, revelatory "hints of meanings" that "echo the tones of Souls, and the phrases of Souls" (*LG60* 336).

Whitman's ironic, negative affirmation of his book against the kind of book a potential reader might desire is equally an affirmation of the revelatory potential of language to communicate itself: "Who are you, that wanted only to be told what you / knew before? Who are you, that wanted only a book to join you in / your nonsense?" (*LG60* 110). For knowledge to be genuinely transcendental, it can not mistake the schema for the substance or the form for an explanation. To the extent that *Leaves* has a message concerning the Absolute, it is, following Novalis, that to attain it we must stop trying to grasp it:

> Only through a voluntary renunciation of the Absolute does our infinite, free activity arise—the only Absolute which can possibly be given to us and which we can only find through our inability to attain and know an Absolute. This Absolute which is given to us can only be known negatively, in that we act and find that what we seek is attained through no activity. (qtd. in O'Brien 115)

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 21

The Absolute begins to disclose itself only when presentation becomes in a sense autotelic, presenting only to present. Novalis's famous "Monologue" reinforces this paradoxical duality of the Absolute in regard to the revelatory "peculiarity of language," insisting that "speaking and writing are actually quite foolish things; and a real conversation is sheer wordplay" (qtd. in O'Brien 195). It is a "laughable error" when people believe "they speak for the sake of things"; yet when "someone speaks only in order to speak, he expresses the most magnificent, original truths" (qtd. in O'Brien 195).

Whitman's new Bible thus includes a caution to "[w]hoever you are holding me now in hand" that its message is provisional—even suspect—and "not what you supposed, but far different" (*LG60* 344). Apropos of Novalis's caution that instrumental uses of language backfire upon the subject, *Leaves* often stages Whitman—the poet himself—as a character betrayed by his own utterance. The 1860 poem that would eventually be titled "As I Ebb'd with the Ocean of Life," for instance, contemplates the "measureless float" of the sea and its "elemental drifts" as the poet walks the Long Island shoreline. He describes himself "baffled," "balked," and "[o]ppressed with myself that I have dared to open my / mouth":

> Aware now, that, amid all the blab whose echoes
> recoil upon me, that I have not once had the least
> idea who or what I am,
> But that before all my insolent poems the real ME
> still stands untouched, untold, altogether unreached,
> Withdrawn far, mocking me with mock-congratulatory signs and bows,
> With peals of distant ironical laughter at every word
> I have written or shall write[.] (*LG60* 195–96)

The frank candor of this poem ("O I perceive that I have not understood anything—not a / single object—that that no man ever has") undercuts the grounding promise of Fichtean or Emersonian romantic selfhood, presenting instead an unmoored, finite self, incapable

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 22

of approximating its absolute identity (*LG60* 197). For the early German Romantics, the very idea that philosophy could say how truth is to be understood is the problem. Yet poetic language can indicate the immanent language that speaks beyond the subject, whether in this poem—where the elemental drifts, "hoarse and sibilant," simultaneously convey the mortal finitude of the poet and impress on him the wish to "impress others as you and the waves / have just been impressing me" (*LG60* 195).

The poet as translator is the distinction that increasingly marks the 1860 edition of *Leaves*. Where the earlier poems adopted the paradoxical persona of the Absolute speaking, a tenor that does not entirely disappear in 1860, the deepened focus on language itself as an organic outgrowth of infinite cosmic processes and planetary life inculcates a kind of individual modesty and vulnerability less evident in Whitman's prior poems of celebratory assurance. In this sense, "A Word out of the Sea" (later "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking") compliments the tone of "As I Ebb'd with the Ocean of Life"; here the poet is again on the seashore, recalling a childhood epiphany of the mortality and eternal transience of things. Yet in direct contrast to the mocking rebuke from the elemental drifts, "A Word out of the Sea" finds the poet first discerning and translating the non-verbal language all around him. The aria of a mockingbird that lost its mate becomes suddenly intelligible to the boy: "O you demon, singing by yourself—projecting me, / O solitary me, listening—never more shall I cease / imitating, perpetuating you" (*LG60* 276). The boy's experience is orphic and prophetic: "Now in a moment I know what I am for—I awake, / And already a thousand singers—a thousand songs, / clearer, louder, more sorrowful than [the bird's], / . . . have started to life / within me / never to die" (*LG60* 276). The undertone of these myriad songs of "unsatisfied love" is set by the sea, which conveys "the word of the sweetest song, and all songs," which is "the low and delicious word / DEATH" (*LG60* 277). The poet's awakening to his art is simultaneously an awakening to his mortal limit relative to the absolute infinitude of death—"the sea whispered me"—namely, human mortality (*LG60* 277). All songs have their origin in mutability and longing, the poem suggests. The adult singer in "As I

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 23

Ebb'd with the Ocean of Life" and the boy in "A Word Out of the Sea" thus mark the dual character of language set forth by Novalis. While the sea conveys the same message of mortality to both, the boy merely listens, translates, and imitates what is being said about his own limit, while the adult strives to breach that limit, only to have it ironically redoubled upon him.

"Striving for the unknown—the indeterminate—is extremely dangerous and disadvantageous," Novalis holds, because "[r]evelations cannot be compelled by force" (*Philosophical Writings* 156). Taking this caution to heart, the final paradox of a book that aspired to be a Bible is that its transcendental message is in fact decidedly earthbound. Death is the threshold of the Absolute, the poet comes to affirm in the concluding "Calamus" section of the 1860 edition. "Give me your tone therefore, O Death, that I may / accord with it," he invokes, as if in response to the earlier messages of mortality from the sea:

> Nor will I allow you [Death] to balk me any more with what
> I was calling life,
> For now it is conveyed to me that you are the purports essential,
> That you hide in these shifting forms of life, for
> reasons—and that they are mainly for you,
> That you, beyond them, come forth, to remain, the
> real reality,
> That behind the mask of materials you patiently
> wait, no matter how long,
> That you will one day, perhaps, take control of all,
> That you will perhaps dissipate this entire show of
> appearance,
> That maybe you are what it is all for—but it does
> not last so very long,
> But you will last very long. (*LG60* 344)

Just as the surrender to language gives rise to the most splendid truths, the surrender to mortality and the unknown, to the ongoing

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 24

processes that undergird the whole of what appears, gives rise, paradoxically, not to fatalism but to satisfaction and untellable wisdom. A related "Calamus" poem thus openly acknowledges that "appearances" are illusory, and that "may-be reliance and hope are but speculations / after all" (*LG60* 352). But despite "doubtless" indications that "colors, densities, [and] forms // only seem to [be] what they are," and that "from entirely changed points of view" are "naught what they appear," the poet finds the "terrible question of appearances" non-discursively and "curiously answered" by his "lovers . . . and dear friends," by one "holding [him] by the hand" (*LG60* 352–53).

The final appeal of Walt Whitman's romantic Bible, then, is not to a philosophical or theological ground or standpoint. Nor is its message reducible to any particular cast of reasoning. Whatever the Absolute is, or the Soul is, Whitman affirms, it is co-extensive with infinite and ongoing processes, so much so that no book can contain or delineate it, but only aspire to awaken reflection. Because those processes have given rise to this moment of our being, whatever purpose our being here portends is secondary to the miracle at hand, that we are here. "The tracks which I leave, upon the sidewalks and / fields, / May but arrive at this beginning of me," the poet holds. "[Y]et it is enough, O Soul, / O soul, we have positively appeared—that is enough" (*LG60* 450).

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vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 25

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vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 26

E. M. Forster
1879–1970

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 27

"The Machine Stops": Forster on Faith, Country, and *The Scarlet Pimpernel*

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Although he published in multiple genres, everything from social novels to librettos, E. M. Forster (1879–1970) produced just a single science fiction story over the course of a lifetime spent in letters. And this amazingly prescient tale, "a pre-Orwellian prophecy of things to come" (Martin 60), appeared during an era when any piece of writing—good, bad, or indifferent—about space travel, alien creatures, alternative realities, and advanced technologies was quickly gobbled up by the reading public. That solitary science fiction effort is "The Machine Stops," first published in 1909 in *The Oxford and Cambridge Review*. This richly layered fable, which anticipated such popular films as *Metropolis* (1927), *The Terminator* (1984), *The Matrix* (1999), and more recently *Oblivion* (2013), is set many centuries hence, when nations, borders, flags, religions, and even time zones have been abolished in favor of globalist conformity, the inviolable "spirit of the age" (Forster 149). Human beings, rendered infantilized and largely irrelevant, live out their solitary lives in comfortable underground cubicles that have "buttons to call for food, for music, for clothing" (149). Within these automated cells—which most happy occupants choose never to exit for

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 28

any reason—the inhabitants, only "five feet high" (144) on average, are protected by a god-Machine, an all-powerful technology which oversees every single aspect of human life, from first breath to online eulogy.

Described by Claude J. Summers as a wickedly ironic treatise "on the notion of progress" (257) and by Silvana Caporaletti as "the prototypical mechanical beehive story" (32), Forster's lengthy tale draws obvious inspiration from Dante's *Inferno* as well as from Plato's "Allegory of the Cave" found in *The Republic*. The "beautifully written" (Widdicombe 95) story is also based, at least in part, on *The Time Machine*, H. G. Wells's 1895 novella about a future subterranean race, even appropriating a key word from Wells's title. In addition, Forster's narrative draws upon his beloved Greek mythology, most especially from the plight of Orion, the blinded hunter who climbs to the summit of a great mountain in order to regain his vision by bathing his face in Apollo's sunlight. However, Forster's lone science fiction tale with its stubborn English hero who dares fight against future tyranny—in the form of a French god-Machine and its many committees—gleans at least some of its thematic inspiration from *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, Baroness Emma Orczy's influential and "wildly popular" (Wilt 90) novel about the French Revolution. Her book was published just four years before Forster's apocalyptic fable, which likewise addresses matters of faith and country, oppression and liberty.

Although born and raised in Hungary—she immigrated to England in her teens—Baroness Orczy, much like E. M. Forster, was a huge fan of the British theater. She and her English husband sometimes attended several performances in a single week, especially when in London. Fittingly, in October of 1903, the aspiring dramatist (she had already published several short stories) first presented *The Scarlet Pimpernel* as a play in the city of Nottingham. However, this original production was not well received by the public. A revised version with a rewritten last act premiered three months later at the New Theater in the West End of London in January of 1905, and it quickly became a hit with the British public if not the critics, who largely dismissed it as too sentimental and old-fashioned for a brand new century. Some elites also did not care for Orczy's unabashed

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 29

English nationalism. Hoping to capitalize on the commercial success of her revised hit play, she soon busied herself with a novelization, finishing the book's thirty-one chapters in only five weeks of intense writing.

Published later in 1905, this "page-turning narrative of ingenious escapes and heroic individualism" (Dugan 36) became a huge best-seller. "Praise from every section of the Press," recalls Orczy in her autobiography, "was wholehearted" (*Links in the Chain* 107). Several radio and film treatments of the novel appeared in the years following. For instance, in the silent era alone, there were three movie versions of this "classic of low modernism" (Wilt 88), the first one in 1917. In short, Baroness Orczy's "eminently marketable commodity" (Dugan 8) took the mass media of the time by storm, and it soon became a tale for the ages, an English "myth that transcends its ideological fictions" (35). Indeed, during both World Wars and the lean years in between, her historical romance was embraced by the British people as a welcome paean to faith, liberty, and country, and its confident hero came to be seen as a new Arthur, the very embodiment of *Albion Indomitus*.

The novel's tall and athletic title character—a figure of "reckless daring" (Orczy, *Pimpernel* 152)—introduced the now common trope of a mysterious hero who plays two roles, polar opposites in effect, one dashing and courageous, the other preening, weak, and inane. According to many admirers of the character, Baroness Orczy's wealthy and cerebral protagonist served as the inspiration for many of the action heroes with secret identities who would appear in large numbers in the decades following the publication of her signature novel. For example, such figures as Johnston McCulley's Zorro (1919), the masked alter ego of Spanish nobleman Don Diego de la Vega, Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster's Superman (1938), the other side of the mild-mannered Clark Kent, and Bob Kane and Bill Finger's Batman (1939), the darker half of millionaire philanthropist Bruce Wayne, can all trace their origins back to Baroness Orczy's mysterious Englishman, a fearless hero who, in various disguises, rescues doomed French aristocrats from the guillotine by night but plays the frivolous and insipid clotheshorse during the day.

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 30

Early on in the novel—"a publishing phenomenon [that] within two years of its first appearance had been translated into six European languages, and had reached the furthest corners of the British Empire" (Dugan 2)—the stealthy English aristocrat makes his first appearance. The baronet, in his late twenties, is tall, handsome, and well-muscled, but he is seemingly uninterested in anything other than expensive haberdashery and the latest vogues in food, wine, and entertainment. He is Sir Percy Blakeney, a native son of southern England who spends his time flitting from one elaborate dinner party or ball to the next, hobnobbing with "the glamorous set surrounding the Prince of Wales" (1) and other style-obsessed members of the British nobility who have far too much time and money on their hands. Sir Percy, a creature of "Mechlin lace" and "affected gesture" (*Pimpernel* 161), appears almost "always passive, drawling, sleepy" (48), and otherwise out of touch with the deadly serious political events which are taking place just across the English Channel where "a mysterious hero" (52) has arisen to help save condemned innocents from "that relentless and stern France which was exacting her pound of flesh from the noblest of her sons" (42).

Sir Percy's exploits take place mostly at night or in the shadows, and the dreadful "monster" (74, passim) that is the focus of the Scarlet Pimpernel's subversive heroics is the Reign of Terror, controlled by "Robespierre, Danton, Marat" (52), and their agents who seek out all "aristos" and their supporters in order to purge France of any traces of the country's former ruling class. In Orczy's inspiring novel, the French Revolution, godless and seemingly unstoppable, is like a vast and efficient machine of tyranny, "implacable and bloodthirsty" (25). With tentacles reaching out in every direction in search of dissenters and people of faith, it is "a remorseless enemy, who had no pity for a brave heart, no admiration for the courage of a noble soul" (181), whether that soul be young or old, male or female, French or foreign.

"The Republic," declares Orczy's narrator early on, "had abolished God" (5). According to William Doyle, the revolutionary rulers of France, seeing "religion as the life-blood of counter-revolution," had cold-bloodedly "decided to dechristianize" their country. And soon

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 31

"a new 'revolutionary calendar' replaced the old Christian one." As a result of this and other such actions, "large numbers of churches began to close" (56). The ambitious rulers in Paris sought to stamp out all competing faiths in a brazen attempt to force an entire nation to embrace official atheism and the divinization of government. "Nature, poetic, silent, balmy, the bright moon, the calm, silvery sea," in summary, all of the "beauty" of creation was therefore repudiated by the Terror, a force which "cursed nature, cursed man and woman" (*Pimpernel* 201). The Creator's name was stricken from public discourse and treated like an expletive. Talk of a power beyond the "new, non-Christian state religion" (Doyle 58) was tantamount to treason. And those independent types who preferred to believe that centralized government—be it revolutionary or otherwise—was neither divine nor omnipotent became the hated enemies of the state and its red-capped citizen enforcers. Indeed, "The cathedral of Notre Dame," the greatest church in all of France, was soon "transformed into the Temple of Reason" by the radicals and made a secular shrine (Frey and Frey 44).

Sir Percy, in his "gallant and mysterious" (*Pimpernel* 52) alter ego form, stubbornly defends the autonomous English way of life that is under increasing threat from the godless Terror that is metastasizing on the other side of the Channel and may soon be exported —if the Revolution has its way—across that all-too-narrow waterway: "Feeling in every part of England certainly ran very high at this time against the French and their doings [and] the daily execution of scores of royalists of good family, whose only sin was their aristocratic name, seemed to cry for vengeance to the whole of civilized Europe" (16). Because of his heroism in the shadows, disguised as old women, beggars, and merchants, Sir Percy becomes the stalwart defender of the English worldview, a secret patriot who treasures independence and sovereignty—of self and place—above all else, even his own life. And so he becomes perforce a "daring plotter" (88, passim) and a "cunning" (74, passim) master of deception, diversion, and above all else, escape.

Forster's "The Machine Stops," called a "vivid sketch of a terrifying future" (Summers 256), is only about science fiction in the most

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 32

superficial of readings. For sub-textually, the tale is about the search for "a power outside the world" (Forster 160), something greater and purer than any manmade construct—be it mechanical or political—in a dystopian future where the human need for faith and liberty is considered "a relic from the former age" (156), a dangerous "superstition" (166), and the silly fancies of "a few retrogrades" (185). As the story gets under way, the main character, a young man named Kuno, who is far taller and stronger than his peers, begins to understand that he is simply "too different" (175)—in both height and attitude—to ever be content with living in an automated cubicle deep beneath the green and windswept surface of what was once called England, specifically the storied land of old Wessex in the south. By use of his "cinematophote" screen (157)—Forster's uncanny herald of the laptop computer—this insurgent of the distant future has gleaned enough information, in precious bits and pieces, to appreciate that people, strong and free, once thrived on the now forbidden surface of the world, a place which humanity long ago deserted in favor of Machine-guaranteed safety and security deep below ground in their hive-like cities.

In the ancient fields and forests of old England, there were once Celts, Angles, Jutes, and Saxons who pitted themselves against nature and sometimes each other in the great struggle to survive and prosper amid the natural elements. Now, deep under that variable surface, kept safe and well-fed in his climate-controlled cell, Kuno is watched over and protected year round by "the world-encompassing master Machine" (Jonsson 163). And that "master Machine," in a telling allusion to Orczy's leitmotif, is headquartered somewhere across the English Channel "far away in France" (Forster 193, passim). Perhaps it is in the very ruins of Paris itself. And from that French locus, the god-Machine's coercive tentacles of cold steel reach out literally to all of the inhabited continents, snaking into every single tunnel, cubicle, and air shaft extant. Young Kuno loathes this faceless "monster" (186)—the same pejorative Baroness Orczy uses for the French Terror—and the circumscribed existence which it forces upon him. However, the vast majority of Kuno's sedentary race relishes, welcomes, adores, such effortless underground living. "The

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 33

Machine is the friend of ideas and the enemy of superstition," the masses chant in their daily catechism; "the Machine is omnipotent, eternal; blessed is the Machine" (184).

Aside from their height and strength, one of the most significant commonalities between these two English protagonists, men of "individualism and derring-do" (Dugan 150), is that they both have lives of complete comfort and ease, so they do not have to battle their respective "monsters" for anything tangible. From their infancies, these two "cunning and audacious" (*Pimpernel* 92) men want for nothing material, and in each case, their catered lifestyle is inherited. Sir Percy was born to great wealth and title in a "free and happy England" (197), a place of "religious liberty" (26). As a member of the aristocracy, he has a huge estate in Richmond south of London and an army of servants to maintain it as well as his several other properties between the capital city and the Kentish coast. So it is of little wonder to the other socialites and soiree-goers who think they know him well that the baronet's passions appear limited to art, music, theater, fashion, and those other assorted distractions which are the purview of the idle rich. Consequently, few people on either side of the Channel ever suspect that this tall social butterfly—"six foot odd of gorgeousness" (37)—would ever attempt something risky or dangerous or selfless. Certainly any action of "a higher and nobler motive" (26) seems well beyond the narrow ken of such a well-dressed "nincompoop" (100), an English aesthete who lives a secret "life of devotion and self-sacrifice" (Orczy, *Links* 108).

In the case of young Kuno of Wessex, he too is a citizen of leisure, just like all others in his automation-dependent era. For there are no jobs or careers extant in the underground world, no offices, no paychecks, no currencies, no prices, no debts; and so his life deep below ground is "perfectly easy" (Forster 155) in the stress-free age "of the air-conditioned nightmare" (Beauman 214). That is because all sustenance, whether for mind or body, is provided by the omniscient god-Machine, that French-based *Pater Machina* which allows humans to live out their entire lives in their pajamas if they so desire. This carefree situation—an "utterly inactive lifestyle" (Natterman 120)—is Kuno's birthright, as much an entitlement as is Sir Percy's

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 34

English baronetcy: "Night and day, wind and storm, tide and earthquake, impeded man no longer. He had harnessed Leviathan. All the old literature, with its praise of Nature, and its fear of Nature, rang false as the prattle of a child" (Forster 156).

In this sterile subterranean world, safely removed from anything green or organic, any "face to face" (147) human interaction is considered antiquated as well as "vulgar" (181) since all conceivable wants and needs are supplied by voice commands or the push of a button. "The clumsy system of public gatherings," for example, "had been long abandoned" (150). Schools and universities, lecture halls, classrooms, theaters, and arenas have been likewise rendered anachronistic, totally unsuited to the "accelerated age" (150) of the deified "apparatus" (145), which now reigns "unchallenged" (190) from its headquarters somewhere across the Channel "in France" (193, passim). Naturally, all education in Kuno's rigidly programmed world—from childhood to old age—is delivered online by means of the ubiquitous cinematophote screen.

Hence, lectures about art, music, science, and what passes as history are just a simple click away, but they come only in ten-minute mini-lessons, whether live or in YouTube-style reruns. This is because human attention spans have become just as atrophied from disuse as have human muscle and bone. The notion of any real academic inquiry has all but disappeared in this worldwide "edifice of conformity" (Moffat 6) wherein all inconvenient "facts must be ignored" (Forster 183), be they historical or scientific. This is done in deference to the god-Machine's needs. "Dawn, midday, twilight, the zodiacal path, touched neither men's lives nor their hearts," and so, untold centuries ago, the people of the surface, of their own free will, "retreated into the ground" (160). As a result, their "faint blue" (145) cinematophote screens—glowing, beckoning, and addictive—are now their whole world, their one reality: "The room, though it contained nothing, was in touch with all that [they] cared for in the world" (150). And thus by Kuno's time, the human race is "united only by the Machine" (March-Russell 56) and not by God or family, country or flag. The Machine's will is law, its decrees sacrosanct, and its veneration obligatory: "O Machine! O Machine!" (Forster 152, passim).

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 35

In this grim cautionary tale "about identity, oppression, and definition" (Pordzik 56), there is but one book left in the world. Found in every underground cubicle, it is not a work by Livy or Virgil, Shakespeare or Milton. Rather, it is "the Book of the Machine," the Gideon's Bible of the far future. And in this state-issued techno-tome are "instructions against every possible contingency" (Forster 151) that might arise in a person's automated compartment, whether it be matters of physical comfort, like fresh pajamas or new sheets, or some trouble of the spirit. "The Central Committee published it," of course, and they make sure, by one means or another, that all citizens treat the Book "reverently" and with proper "ritual." Most followers of the French god-Machine kiss their copy of the sacred text "thrice" before going to bed, and thus they feel "the delirium of acquiescence" that comes with surrendering one's destiny—and all of one's decision making—to a controlling power. And so for the underground faithful, "the Machine hummed eternally," assuring them that all needs would be provided and all prayers would be answered, just like their "richly bound" (152) holy book promises.

These acts of social engineering parrot what the French Republic and its various committees did—"the substitution of revolutionary ceremonies for all religious ones" (Frey and Frey 31)—to maintain their hold over the people. Tellingly, the French Revolution (never the American) is referenced several times in Forster's apocalyptic tale, almost like a subtle homage to *The Scarlet Pimpernel* and its analogous gallant man of "noble cause" (*Pimpernel* 53) who will not be cowed or deterred regardless of the odds against him. One of the online lecturers in Forster's story addresses this ancient Revolution in particular, and he discusses what lessons the sedentary citizens of the fully-automated future should glean from that conflict in a country that has long since ceased to exist. "Beware of first-hand ideas," exclaims this highly "advanced" educator: "First-hand ideas do not really exist" (Forster 182), for they have not yet been filtered and redacted by the god-Machine in France.

And so this esteemed lecturer declares—to worldwide approbation—"Let your ideas be second-hand, and if possible tenth-hand, for then they will be far removed from the disturbing element—direct

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 36

observation. Do not learn anything about this subject of mine—the French Revolution.” This expert further urges his pale and biddable viewers to ignore the lessons of “the blood that was shed at Paris” and the “‘many windows that were broken at Versailles” (182) all those centuries prior to the final triumph of artificial intelligence. Instead, the people should desire to “see the French Revolution not as it happened, but as it would have happened, had it taken place in the days of the Machine” (183), thereby intimating that their god-Machine would not have allowed the Revolution to fail, to fall short of its absolutist ambitions. This contempt for real learning, for anything approaching critical understanding or individual discovery, is reinforced by every cinematophote lecturer on the planet, regardless of the subject matter. (Lectures which do not fit the Machine’s agenda or even hint at matters of faith are not allowed.) All of this is in order to protect the power and “dominion” (160) of a mechanized deity, a glorified idol that resides somewhere deep inside the very land that gave birth to the Terror.

Of course, Kuno hates this “artificial” (148, passim) world that was bequeathed to him by generations of his modern ancestors, figures of weakness and docility, the end product of the god-Machine’s longstanding eugenics program: “By these days it was a demerit to be muscular. Each infant was examined at birth, and all who promised undue strength were destroyed” (166). And so Kuno dreams of one day escaping this “imitation” (148, passim) of life in favor of the old ways, specifically the old English ways, the type of life—traditional, familial, and free—which the Scarlet Pimpernel defends at the risk of his head. “Cannot you see,” Kuno demands of his orthodox mother through the cinematophote screen one day, “cannot all your lecturers see, that it is we who are dying, and that down here the only thing that really lives is the Machine? We created the Machine, to do our will, but we cannot make it do our will now” (176). He then blasphemes, declaring hotly that it “has robbed us of the sense of space and of the sense of touch, it has blurred every human relation and narrowed down love to a carnal act, it has paralyzed our bodies and our wills, and now it compels us to worship it” (176). And thus this English-identifying “nonconformist” (Gillie 47) of the distant future

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 37

decides, all on his own, to plot and scheme in secret while isolated in his tiny cubicle, exactly as Sir Percy, hidden away in his "small study" (*Pimpernel* 117) with the door bolted shut, scrutinizes his maps and makes designs against the enemies of his own troubled times: the disastrous "Utopian doctrines of the Revolution" (47).

For both Sir Percy and Kuno, young Englishmen of similar "strength, energy, and resourcefulness" (164), the green and fertile lands which they call home, Kent and Wessex respectively, are considered sacred to them, special places to be protected and loved, are more than mere turf and forest, wind and water. Indeed, both men have a spiritual-mythical connection to their native soil and to the people who lived on it before them. Sir Percy, for example, speaks often of the natural beauty of southeastern England, of the rich fields and the rolling hills, the venerable rivers and the quaint villages that adorn "the green Kentish landscape" (48) of his revered ancestors: "A Blakeney had died on Bosworth Field, another had sacrificed life and fortune for the sake of a treacherous Stuart" (44). Sir Percy also loves and will defend to the death "the white cliffs of Dover" (142), the iconic English landmarks that welcome him home by starlight after his narrow escapes from the clutches of the Terror's notorious "Committee of Public Safety" (190) and its many agents, true believers who will stop at nothing to bring "that seething, bloody Revolution" (41)—an urban and religion-hating entity—to Percy's beloved England, which is, by contrast, a country "of civil and religious liberty" (26), a place where the object of worship is God, not government.

Young Kuno dwells deep below the green "meadows and hills" (Forster 167) of what used to be called England before the French god-Machine—just like the French Revolution—commandeered language itself and renamed everything in its own image, to its own purpose. For example, the god-Machine has abolished all "antique names" (156) and "unmechanical" (161) nomenclatures. Similarly, during the madness of the French Revolution, the twelve months of the year were renamed as were all religious holidays, and many frightened citizens even "abandoned their Christian names" (Frey and Frey 32) for something more secular, more politically correct. In Forster's tale of a regimented future, last names have been similarly

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 38

eliminated since everyone now is considered the progeny—and property—of technology: "Parents, duties of . . . cease at the moment of birth" (Forster 155).

And because "neither day nor night existed under the ground" (151), the god-Machine has put the entire planet on Machine Standard Time. Therefore, when it is twelve noon in what used to be called Asia, it is also noon in Europe, the Americas, and every place in between, so that now not one second separates the four hemispheres. Kuno has, on rare occasions, had glimpses, fleeting and stolen, of that open land high above him, a place that once spawned free people, men and women of faith, purpose, and energy who took the wind and the storm and asked no quarter. Moreover, there were once ancient humans above who believed in a power higher and nobler than committees and governments and machines, something spiritual, inexpressible. He confesses to his shocked mother at one point how he wants to gaze up at "the infinite heavens" (158) and marvel at the grandness of creation, to walk upon "the surface of the earth, as our ancestors did, thousands of years ago. I want to visit the surface of the earth" (148).

Kuno has asked for lawful permission to do this from a faceless entity called "the Central Committee" (185), whose job it is to ferret out and suppress any and all threats "against the Machine" (146). This group of true believers also provides propaganda and enforcement, and in the case of the latter, it is physical as well as psychological. Of course, Kuno's request is immediately rejected because the Central Committee members—the Robespierres, Dantons, and Marats of their time—know that if he is allowed a temporary permit to visit the natural surface, whether for minutes or for hours, he will almost certainly never return to his cubicle, thus setting a dangerous precedent for their underground universe wherein the phrase "private will" (163) has become an oxymoron. Kuno has also requested permission to become a father and so leave some evidence that he once existed, a son or a daughter. But that application has also been "refused by the Committee," since his attitude "was not the type that the Machine desired to hand on" (169). And so the human race, "in its desire for comfort, had overreached itself. It had exploited the riches

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 39

of nature too far. Quietly and complacently, it was sinking into decadence, and progress had come to mean the progress of the Machine" (186), the deified, all-powerful Machine.

The ultimate goal for both of these "broad-shouldered and massively built" (*Pimpernel* 33) English haters of French-based tyranny is not just self-preservation or individual freedom, but rather the liberation of others, body and spirit. In Sir Percy's case, he rescues as many prisoners of the Terror as he can, whole families on some missions, spiriting them across the Channel in his swift yacht, the *Day Dream* (he is a master sailor), and delivering them to English-style freedom and liberty. Kuno likewise seeks not just his own escape from coercive underground living, for he hopes somehow to reawaken the desire for freedom in the hearts of all his fellow subjects, declaring that "The Machine is much, but it is not everything" (Forster 146). And if these two brave resisters are caught by their respective antagonists, they face death, via the guillotine for Sir Percy and probable "euthanasia" (167) for Kuno. In short, these two young men, so artful and secretive, fight to end oppression and despotism in their eras, from man and Machine correspondingly, as they both defend the old ways—the English ways—including the God-given right to be self-reliant and sovereign, unbound and unbowed.

To accomplish their objectives and to cover their subterfuges, both English heroes resort to deception and play acting so that their "lazy nonchalance [is] nothing but a mask" (*Pimpernel* 111). Sir Percy's public persona is worthy of the London stage, so convincing is his portrayal of the unserious baronet, a "foppish dullard" (Wilt 88) who enjoys wine and song and dance to the extreme. His "latent passion" (*Pimpernel* 118) for liberty is kept well hidden beneath layers and layers of fine silk and linen, is camouflaged by endless party banter, all of it "inane and flippant" (40). He never once allows "the mask" (111) to slip, for he knows that—on both sides of the Channel—"the sharpest eyes in the world are watching his every movement," and the architects of the Terror machine, "Robespierre and his gang" (130), are relentless and will never rest until they can put the Scarlet Pimpernel into the tumbrels and claim his Anglo-Saxon head as a trophy of their "glorious Revolution" (2).

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 40

In parallel, young Kuno of Wessex also has to mask his dream of one day freeing himself and others from their "subservient" (Forster 189) lives deep beneath the surface, and so he pretends to be just another faithful member of the god-Machine religion, as much a disciple of artificial intelligence and its blessings as is his fanatical mother, a popular online lecturer who fears that her son may be straying from the one true faith of the future: "undenominational Mechanism" (185). And so, with great piousness, she offers extra "praise and prayer" (184) to the almighty "god-head" (Summers 256) in France in hopes that her headstrong son will not stray from official orthodoxy, will not ask yet again for "an Egression permit" (Forster 165) to visit what she calls "the horrible brown" (147) surface of the world. Hence, just like Sir Percy, Kuno knows that he must try to disguise the longing for liberty, both physical and spiritual, that burns hot in his breast. "We have lost a part of ourselves," he hints to his mother at one point mid-story. "I am determined to recover it" (167).

Consequently, in the quiet solitude of his little cell, he begins to plot and plan his intrigue, hoping to design some way to escape the tentacles of his own French-based oppressor and so flee to the freedom that awaits him on the surface of what used to be England, a place of sanctuary where he can at long last "discover what really matters in life" (Seabury 62). In the meantime, though, Kuno pretends to be just another "civilized and refined" (Forster 159) citizen of the god-Machine's underworld, happy and carefree and well-fed in the climate-controlled bosom of intelligent technology: "What was the good of going to Pekin when it was just like Shrewsbury? Why return to Shrewsbury when it would be just like Pekin? Men seldom moved their bodies" (156).

After much waiting and pretending, Kuno has his chance to do "the tremendous thing" (165), as he calls it, and escape from the regimented terror of the god-Machine. For weeks on end, he exercises his muscles in secret to make himself even stronger, an alien concept in his time, thereby improving the odds of completing his marathon climb up to the surface once he finds a venue. After many days of clandestine searching, dodging the automated trams and lifts

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 41

that service the underworld of the Machine worshippers, he discovers a long-abandoned ventilation shaft not far from his cubicle. In the dim light there, he happens upon "a ladder, made of some primeval metal" (171), and it rises into the blackness high above: "Perhaps our ancestors ran up and down it a dozen times daily in the course of their building" (171). At that point, Kuno begins his epic climb, rung by rung, foot by foot, until, with bleeding hands and aching muscles, he finally reaches the surface of his world and steps out onto the forbidden grass and sod of "freedom" (194). He inhales the air and fragrance of what used to be called the south of England, happy at last in the wind and "the sunshine" (173) of the place he considers to be his long-lost ancestral home, the hallowed land of Arthur and Aelfrid.

After he adapts to the "new air" (175) of the surface world, Kuno stretches and moves about like he could never do in the confines of his cramped cubicle below: "Man is the measure. That was my first lesson. Man's feet are the measure of distance . . . his body is the measure for all that is loveable and desirable and strong" (167). But then he is stunned to see, moving about in the foliage, another human being. It is an athletic young woman—"I have seen her in the twilight" (181)—and he realizes that the natural surface of the globe is not a place of death and toxicity as he has been told via the cinematophote screen all of his life: "The surface of the earth is only dust and mud, no life remains upon it. . . . The cold of the outer air would kill you. One dies immediately in the outer air" (149). Instead, Kuno comprehends, and happily so, that at least a few humans still roam the land above, still dodge in and out of the forests and glades just as back in the primal times "long before the universal establishment of the Machine" (153) and its monotheism of technology.

He now theorizes that perhaps not all of humanity, untold centuries before his birth, made the move underground to dwell in automated bliss far away from the wind, the rain, and the cold. At least a handful of them, of their own free will, chose the challenge of life on the uncompromising surface. He further surmises that it is possible some of these people moving swiftly and nimbly through the ferns and copses are escapees, or maybe even the offspring of

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 42

men and women who made the noble climb long before he did, and who, without aid or permission from the French Machine, created families, interacted, lived "face to face" (147) lives as in the "antique" (156) times, far beyond the reach of "the Machine's ruthlessness and power" (Summers 257). So this young insurgent who "resists the Machine on a physical level" (Herz 60) marvels at "the peace, the nonchalance, the sense of space" (Forster 173) that surrounds him, welcomes him. He feels flushed, vindicated by the spiritual fulfillment of his successful plot to escape the clutches of the all-powerful state and walk on free ground while inhaling the unfiltered air of what he considers his ancient homeland: "Happy the man, happy the woman, who awakes the hills of Wessex. For though they sleep, they will never die" (176).

However, within a few hours, the French Machine discovers Kuno's absence, and so the troublesome rebel, distracted by the rising of the constellations in the east, especially Orion and its seven main stars—"they were like a man" (147)—is arrested by the enforcement tentacles which uncoil silently out of the shaft behind him: "Then my feet were wound together, I fell, I was dragged away from the dear ferns and the living hills. . . . I did fight, I fought till the very end, and it was only my head hitting against the ladder that quieted me" (179–80). In the fading light of that short but glorious time spent on the forbidden surface of his world, the lithe young woman in the bushes, hearing Kuno's cries—"she came to my help when I called"—ventures too close to him, and he sees her become likewise "entangled" (181) by the steel tentacles, Forster's oily, writhing serpents in the garden. Then, as one of them holds her fast, another tentacle quickly, silently, cuts her throat, not quite guillotining the poor girl in the process.

Pulled back down into the "poisoned darkness" (197) by the steel *gendarmes*, Kuno must now face charges for exiting the underground empire without permission and for standing tall and independent in the sunshine and fresh air of southern England, a place that once boasted free men, free women, free minds. Kuno fully expects that, as a threat to peace and mechanical good order, he will soon "suffer euthanasia" (167), which is a common penalty for such

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 43

crimes against the provident god-head that is located "far away in France" (193, passim). This is because "the Machine can have no mercy" (172) on non-conformity since such "extravagantly independent" (Caporaletti 35) behavior by even a single citizen threatens the stability of the grand collective.

To his surprise, perhaps even his disappointment, Kuno's punishment for his heroic "expedition" (Forster 149) to the earth's surface, a place of rolling hills and blue skies, is much worse than a quick execution. Judged guilty of the crime of disobeying the god-Machine that protects the Lotus-Eaters below and answers all of their prayers, this dangerous apostate is spared the death penalty in the end. Instead, he is soon "transferred from the northern hemisphere" (187) by means of an automated airship—Forster's anticipation of a modern-day drone—to one of the hive cities located deep beneath the surface of the continent that used to be known as Australia. There, for "his blasphemies" (177) against technology, Kuno is to be exiled far, far away from the green "hills of Wessex" (176) that were his Eden, his version of the Promised Land. In this new cubicle, identical in every way to the old one—same table, same chair, same small bed—he will remain "imprisoned" (174), forced to live "automatically" (154) until his natural death shall occur many years later. But just to be on the safe side, before this incorrigible rebel is relocated to the antipodes, Kuno is castrated by the god-Machine's tentacles, without benefit of anesthesia, lest he one day escape again and seek to sire a whole race of muscular misfits. "I screamed," he tells his mother through the cinematophote screen. "That part is too awful. It belongs to the part that you will never know" (179).

Throughout Baroness Orczy's "howling commercial success" (Wilt 119) of a novel, Sir Percy Blakeney is also pursued, not by steel tentacles, but by "Chauvelin, the accredited agent of his Government" (*Pimpernel* 63). He is a determined spy sent over from France to find out the identity of the meddlesome Englishman who, as the Scarlet Pimpernel, has made complete fools of French guards aplenty with his many successful escapes from right under their Gallic noses. Hence, this English threat to "the glorious Revolution" (2) and its totalitarian ambitions must be eliminated at all costs. He must be dealt out

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 44

"punishment swift, sure and terrible" (184). And so, for chapter after chapter, Citizen Chauvelin, the oily agent "of the Reign of Terror" (52), searches and eavesdrops, blackmails and threatens, kidnaps and tortures. What is more, he scatters other French agents throughout Kent in order to discover the real name of "that arch-meddler, the Scarlet Pimpernel" (66), and so spirit the Englishman away to a small cell in Paris, there to await his appointment with the National Razor. This network of French spies, almost automated in their devotion to the Revolution, are the tentacles "of the Committee of Public Safety" (2), reaching out in search of fugitives, dissenters, and rebels. That includes any man or woman who, by word, deed, or thought, might betray the grand collective that now wields power over all of France and seeks to extend the dominion "of that monster republic" (74) well beyond its own borders and so eventually "stamp out all forms of Christian practice if not belief" (Doyle 56). In order for the Revolution to accomplish that transnational goal, the Scarlet Pimpernel, an "impudent Britisher" (*Pimpernel* 197) with an "almost superhuman strength of will" (165), must be identified and then executed.

There is, of course, no one-to-one correlation between these two classic works of fiction which celebrate "the heroic individualism" (Dugan 36) of young men from southern England, brave souls who, although separated by eons, are willing to risk everything they have "in order to liberate the wretched" (*Pimpernel* 2) from revolutions gone mad. For instance, Sir Percy has a beautiful French wife named Marguerite St. Just, a woman of "magnificent presence and regal figure" (29). She adores her husband, even immigrates to England to be with him, but like everyone else in their social orbit, she is completely fooled by his outer façade, his "foppish ways, and foolish talk" (118). She learns that her preening and "passive" (48) spouse is actually the dashing Scarlet Pimpernel only toward the end of the novel. Moreover, on an ill-advised trip back to her native France to help free her brother, the Lady Blakeney places herself in great jeopardy, for she is, of course, a detested "aristo." She is eventually captured by Citizen Chauvelin and so must be rescued by "the mysterious hero" (132) who is the "ghostlike" (112) bane of the Terror machine and its network of enforcers.

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 45

Furthermore, Sir Percy, projecting "a stolid sense of English justice" (Wilt 98), commands nineteen intensely loyal followers who are referred to as "the League of the Scarlet Pimpernel." All of them are "young Englishmen" (*Pimpernel* 25) of excellent pedigree, and they assist their leader in "his noble work" (143) on both sides of the English Channel, obeying him like Paladins, for they all relish playing at fox and hounds every bit as much as he does. These nineteen stalwarts happily risk their lives in the sacred struggle to protect a "fog-ridden, loyalist, old-fashioned England" (74) from that "godless" and "bloody Revolution" (41) across the Channel that hopes one day "to eradicate Christianity and its alleged corollary, superstition" (Frey and Frey 44).

In stark contrast, Kuno is all alone in his mission to combat a future tyranny that is likewise based across the Channel in France. For Kuno has no spouse, French or otherwise, no friends, and no League of like-thinking patriots to help him escape the Central Committee of the despised god-Machine. And what is more, at the end of *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, Sir Percy—all "for the sake of humanity" (53)—wins his long battle of wits against the French Revolution and its state-sponsored Terror network; and thus he escapes "the clutches of the Committee of Public Safety" (2) and so delivers liberty to "those who had endured so much suffering, yet found at last a great and lasting happiness" (211) in a free England. In addition, the tall baronet goes on several more secret missions in popular sequels to the original 1905 novel, sixteen in all, each one of them also addressing, celebrating, the ennobling ideals of God and country, love and liberty.

However, in Forster's much darker tale "of hope and freedom" (Furbank 162), Kuno, despite his valiant efforts, is unable to liberate either himself or his brethren, most of whom do not yearn to be free but would rather wallow in comfortable entropy protected day and night by their all-powerful god-Machine. And so Forster's heroic rebel dies as an imprisoned eunuch thousands of miles away from the green land of Wessex which he loved so dearly but saw so briefly. He is killed by flame and falling debris in his new cubicle in Australia when the worldwide network, amid "horrible cracks and

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 46

rumblings" (Forster 194), at last wears out, breaks down, and as the title promises, "The Machine Stops." Once this happens, amid much weeping and wailing—"O Machine! O Machine!" (152, passim)—the vast fleets of drones that have been circling the globe for centuries, landing and taking off with automated efficiency, suddenly pitch over and fall from the skies. Without any guidance from the dead Machine in what used to be France, these giant airships, laden with fuel, crash back into their hive cities, "rending gallery after gallery" (197) with their steel wings and setting fire to all of the oxygen-rich tunnels deep beneath Europe, the Americas, and the rest. This inferno quickly engulfs every corner of the "screaming, whimpering" (194) underworld: and it is all "broken like a honeycomb" (197), consumed.

Nevertheless, Forster's rebel of the distant future who has "seen the hills of Wessex as Aelfrid saw them when he overthrew the Danes" (176) is defiant to the last. His body has been kept a prisoner, but not his spirit, his soul. He never worshiped the French Machine, never once offered prayers to that carved idol or begged it for mercy, never once kissed its sacred book or recited its techno catechisms. Even though it is many years after his daring escape to the surface of the world and his brief walk in the sunshine and his glimpse of the stars, the aged Kuno gains a moral victory of sorts. For he cannot stop believing in and "thinking of a power outside the world" (160), something more fulfilling than physical comfort and ease. Plus, he recalls even as he dies that free men and women, small in number, but strong of will and body, still roam the green surface. They are, of course, his kinsmen in spirit, the children he never sired, the friends he never had. "I have seen them," he tells his mother as the end comes and real sunlight penetrates the broken depths, "spoken to them, loved them. They are hiding in the mists and the ferns until our civilization stops" (197). And as those surface primitives advance and learn over the coming eons, Kuno has faith that they will not repeat the sins of his degenerate branch of the human species, who are now rendered into nothing but ashes, fittingly so, by the unmasking of their false god.

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 47

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vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 48

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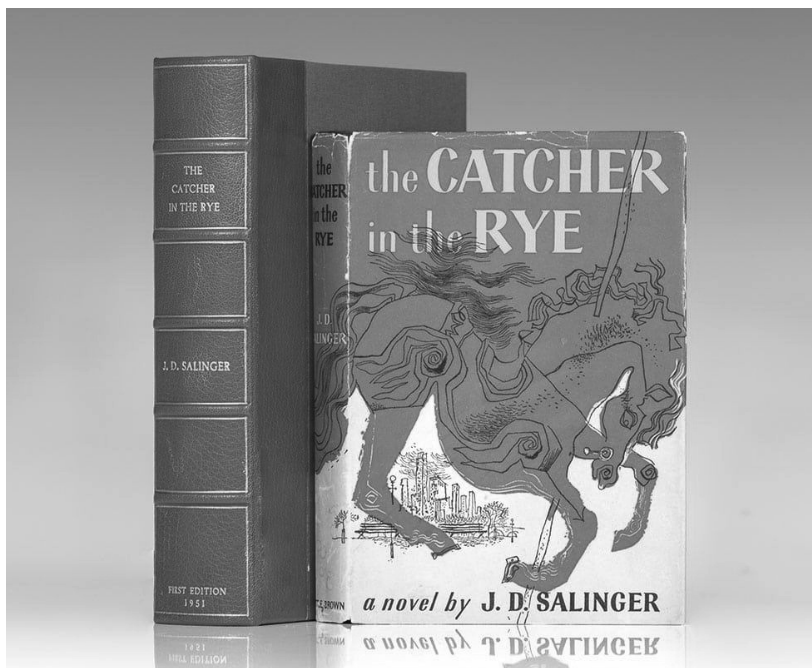
vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 49

The Birthday Party
Ferry Beach

The hand of God, on the lips of a bikini'd woman as she trudges through the sand with a friend, could be wind, or a burning tree, a stranger brushing her shoulder, or maybe a kind of answer to the boy, newly ten, who's just asked if being grownup is hard. What to say? Even the history of these stones, tossed by waves and now skipped across them by the boy, may include fire, ice, crushed ferns. So little is straightforward. First the kiss he gave his mother, then his squirm out of her arms, back to the water. Whoever said love isn't complicated, if he wasn't a fool, must have passed through some burning gate found only by those who have stopped trying to grasp or explain. How to tell the boy none of us, when we agreed to breathe, crawl, walk, read, knew the journey would not reveal itself in advance, so our best maps are dreams, Escher-like roads that dissolve, then reappear, looped through tilting scaffolds. But never mind, never mind. Now the boy's mother photographs the sky, slant of clouds rippled and glowing, a sermon in which awe overwhelms uncertainty, and dread has no place here when low tide reflects the splendor overhead. Yes, the sky will dissolve its radiant path, as if to say looking elsewhere is not the answer. *This* will turn into *that*, cake into crumbs, bright wrappings into balled up trash, and yes, it is hard, but there are gifts, Child, gifts. You among them.

–Betsy Sholl



The Catcher in the Rye by J. D. Salinger.
Partially published in serial form in 1945–1946
and as a novel in 1951.

Catcher in the Rye as a War Novel

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In the spring of 1942, J. D. Salinger was drafted into the United States Army. He saw combat with the 12th Infantry Regiment, 4th Infantry Division, and was present at Utah Beach on D-Day, in the Battle of the Bulge, and in the Battle of Hürtgen Forest. A budding writer before the war, Salinger continued to write periodically during his time as a soldier, drafting fragments of what was later to become his magnum opus. Indeed, based on the evidence available in Salinger's letters, Ian Hamilton concludes that Salinger had already started writing *The Catcher in the Rye* before joining the fighting in France: "during the pre-D-Day buildup he was writing hard and had actually completed six chapters of the Holden Caulfield novel" (82). Shane Salerno also mentions this fact in *Salinger*, which Salerno coauthored with David Shields: "Salinger carried the first six chapters [of *Catcher*] with him on the beaches of Normandy and into the Hürtgen Forest, through the concentration camp, and into the psychiatric ward" (244). Shields and Salerno also emphasize the influence of the war on the novel by quoting with approval Andy Rogers's assertion "that *Catcher*, although published in the 1950s, is a novel of the 1940s: a war novel" and that as a consequence, "Holden . . . has more in common with a traumatized soldier than an alienated

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 52

teenager" (qtd. in Shields and Salerno 261). Given other Caulfield stories before *Catcher*, it is very probable that the chapters Salinger carried to Europe were subsequently largely rewritten. However, it is still true that many elements in *Catcher* indicate the strong influence of Salinger's war experience on his writing and that the novel's serious and enriched theme and literary artifices grew out—in part, at least—of that traumatic experience.

Catcher can therefore be profitably understood as a novel written by a war writer, for postwar American society. And in fact, Salinger himself seems to stress precisely such a perspective, for in his 4 August 1945 letter to *The Saturday Review of Literature*, he states his strong desire to be read as "a war writer—which is the only kind of writer I want to be" ("Sorry" 21). The lasting influence of World War II on Salinger's life can be also assumed from the fact that he maintained a good relationship with the other three members of his group in the Counter Intelligence Corps during the war—Jack Altaras, John Keenan, and Paul Fitzgerald. Even after he became notorious for his seclusion, Salinger attended Keenan's retirement party and "was willing to expose himself to strangers, even journalists, to relive and share the memories of Normandy with his former—and perpetual—comrades" (Shields and Salerno 140).

On the other hand, to the extent that Salinger's fictional characters express their author's own perspective, Salinger also increasingly felt the need to shift away from a focus on the subject matter of war itself—a perspective made clear in a story Salinger wrote just before leaving for the European front to join the D-Day landings, "Last Day of the Last Furlough." In the story, one of Salinger's characters—Babe Gladwaller—emphasizes the danger of talking about war: "I believe . . . that it's the moral duty of all the men who have fought and will fight in this war to keep our mouths shut, once it's over, never again to mention it in any way" (62). Babe's suggestion is typically treated as very naïve pacifism, but after "For Esmé—with Love and Squalor," which was written about the same time as *Catcher*, Salinger himself abandons war materials as his main subject.[1]

[1]According to Shields and Salerno, Salinger wrote some works based on his wartime experience for posthumous publication, such as "one novel, a

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 53

Actually, Salinger may have experimented with using what might be called a dual-track approach to depicting the nature and consequences of war, by writing *Catcher* together with "Esmé." In both works, he continued exploring various war-related themes, but he did so using very different writing styles: he used a war setting proper to explore the war theme directly in "Esmé," but he chose to explore the same themes indirectly in *Catcher*, setting the novel not in World War II itself but rather afterwards, in affluent postwar American society. Salinger's intention to make *Catcher* a special kind of war work can be glimpsed in his 1945 letter to Hemingway, where he observes, "*I have a very sensitive novel in mind*" (qtd. in Shields and Salerno 171). The word "sensitive" must have signified his efforts in *Catcher* to practice what Babe suggests in "Last Furlough" and to create a new kind of war work without using war materials.

In this essay, therefore, I treat *Catcher* as a subterranean war novel and—in doing so—analyze how Salinger projects his war experience and war theme into a young American boy's daily life.

I. The Sanatorium Setting and Looking Back on World War II

The narrator of *Catcher* is Holden Caulfield, an angst-filled teenager presently residing in a sanatorium and looking back on "this madman stuff that happened to me around last Christmas just before I got pretty run-down and had to come out here and take it easy" (3). Like Holden, Salinger hospitalized himself for a nervous breakdown some weeks after the end of World War II in Europe. While staying in the sanatorium, he wrote the above quoted letter to Hemingway and affirmed, "*Removed from the scene, it is much easier to think clearly? I mean with your work*" (qtd. in Shields and Salerno 171).

World War II love story based on Salinger's complex relationship with his first wife, Sylvia Welter" (575) and "a novella that takes the form of a counter intelligence agent's diary entries during World War II" (575). His experience during the war was apparently so strong that Salinger could not fully abandon it. Yet it cannot be denied that he was very careful in the way he used his war experience in his fiction.

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 54

Holden's situation in the sanatorium thus recalls Salinger's own hospitalization after the war and for similar reasons. Because Salinger could have a quiet environment to face his traumatic war experience and adjust to it in his own way in the hospital, he chose the sanatorium setting for Holden as well, in order to make it easier for the character to look back at his own "madman" experience.

The similarity between Salinger's wartime experience and Holden's high school experience is not limited to the fact that both of them seek refuge in a sanitarium and use that liminal space and time as an occasion for reflection and reevaluation. It is also found in the structural contradictions and ambivalence implicit in each of their resulting attitudes. For example, although Holden's critiques and condemnation are often aimed at affluent American society, he simultaneously enjoys that society's privileges as a son of a wealthy family. His criticisms are therefore always undercut by his own acts and place of privilege. Even when he claims about his red hunting hat, "This is a people shooting hat . . . I shoot people in this hat" (30), Warren French is surely right to conclude that Holden "is no rebel" (119). "Whatever Holden wants," French notes, "he does not wish to overthrow society" (119).

A similar ambivalence is evident in Salinger's attitude toward World War II—an ambivalence perhaps best expressed by Babe in "Last Furlough." Babe is frustrated by his father's talk about World War I and resents the fact that such talk may have helped lead to World War II; in that respect, it is clear that Babe is basically against war generally. Nevertheless, he simultaneously announces without any qualm, "I believe in this war" (62). This contradictory perspective must have been common for many American soldiers, including Salinger. Salinger witnessed a great deal of suffering and death during D-Day and the subsequent battles, as well as in his never-told experience of the concentration camp, Kaufering Larger IV.[2] It is not difficult to imagine that he detested war. Yet, because

[2]In the spring of 1945, Salinger was among the first American soldiers to liberate Kaufering Lager IV. Everhard Alsen, the author of *Salinger's Glass Stories as a Composite Novel*, "who undertook extensive research throughout

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 55

the United States went into the war against the Axis under the threat of totalitarianism and proclaiming its defense of democracy, it is likely that Salinger could not have done anything but accept World War II as a righteous war, as Babe does.

Salinger's complex feelings toward war resurfaces, in fiction, in Holden's tendency to avoid fist fights, a tendency that corresponds to Salinger's attitude toward German soldiers. Holden confesses: "what scares me most in a fist fight is the guy's face. I can't stand looking at the other guy's face, is my trouble" (117). Interestingly, Holden's reaction fits the dual-process psychological profile described by Jonathan Evans and Keith Stanovich. Evans and Stanovich study dual-process accounts of human reasoning in relation to higher cognitive processes, such as judgment and decision making. They explain that the first of the two processes is usually fast and instinctive and grows out of a generalized understanding of life and circumstances grounded in negative biases designed to protect oneself. The second, slower cognitive process, however, is more controlled and is characterized as distinctively human, involving explicit knowledge and complex emotions (223–25). Holden's outspoken verbal attacks on other people are examples of the first of the two processes—he verbally attacks others without considering the details of their circumstances or the inconsistencies his criticisms involve. When he is forced to face others directly, however, Holden transitions into the second and slower cognitive process sufficiently to consider the complex reality of human experience, which makes it more difficult for him to physically attack others.

Holden's tendency to judge others prematurely and to criticize them quickly but then to hesitate to actually hit another person is typical behavior for an immature adolescent, but it is also easily associated with the reaction of a soldier in the front line. In battle, a

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Europe and America as a consultant to this [Shields and Salerno's] book" (Shields and Salerno 589), states that "Salinger's nervous breakdown was not due to the stress of combat . . . because he was not an infantryman. Kaufering Lager IV was what broke Salinger" (qtd. In Shields and Salerno 167).

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 56

solider may initially rationalize killing soldiers on the other side by regarding them as indistinct and generic enemies. However, as soon as a soldier comes face to face with the enemy, he is forced to recognize the enemy combatant as a distinct individual who has his own family and friends and who has been sent to the front by his own country. This recognition will sometimes generate complex feelings that are difficult to square with the soldier's initial generalized view of the enemy combatants, and it is likely that when Salinger was working in the Counter Intelligence Corps and investigating German soldiers directly, he began to recognize the essential humanity of those soldiers. As Eberhard Alsen points out, "Salinger goes remarkably easy on German soldiers who appear in the story ["A Girl I Knew"]" (qtd. in Shields and Salerno 107). Alsen also notes, "He [Salinger] would later tell his daughter, Margaret, that anybody—for instance, the clerk at the post office—could turn out to be a Nazi" (qtd. in Shields and Salerno 107).

Thus, although in *Catcher* Holden's behavior and perspective initially seem to have little if anything to do with war, the way he retreats into the sanitarium and the way he reflects back on his own earlier experiences parallel at least part of Salinger's experience during and after World War II. And Holden's ambivalence or discrepancies in his deeds are a fictional analogue for Salinger's unsettled and irreconcilable feelings toward the war.

II. Games, Prosperity, Religion, Art, Hemingway: Antiwar Messages Embedded in *Catcher*

The affluent society described in *Catcher* represents ordinary postwar life in America. In his characterization of that society, however, Salinger generalizing the same war theme and reality he explores in "Esmé," not by directly referencing the horrors of war in the novel but rather by way of his representation of the important connections that exist among games, prosperity, religion, and what might be called the profit-motive inherent in certain kinds of art.

In *Catcher*, Salinger critiques games in much the same way he critiques war in "Esmé," and for many of the same reasons. At the

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 57

beginning of the novel, for example, Holden looks back at Pencey's enthusiasm for winning the football game with Saxon Hall but finds something unfair in it: "all yelling, deep and terrific on the Pencey side . . . and scrawny and faggy on the Saxon Hall side" (5). Holden is sympathetic towards Saxon Hall, the enemy side, which has a much smaller number of supporters. His uneasiness in this scene is soon connected to his disgust at President Thurmer's preaching phrase, "Life being a game" (12), and at Mr. Spencer's endorsement of that view: "Life *is* a game, boy. Life *is* a game that one plays according to the rules" (12). Mr. Spencer is an old teacher whose advice is supposed to be sensible enough to tell one how to live properly in society. Holden understands that the world functions as Mr. Spencer advises and outwardly agrees with him. In his heart, however, he cannot accept it: "Game, my ass. Some game. If you get on the side where all the hot-shots are, then it's a game, all right—I'll admit that. But if you get on the *other* side, where there aren't any hot-shots, then what's a game about it? Nothing. No game" (12–13).

It is possible Holden's secret repulsion is not simply—or even primarily—due to the fact that he is on the weaker side of society, being expelled from schools again and again. When Holden's statement is read in light of Salinger's wartime experience, but read replacing the word "game" by "fight" or "battle," Holden's response to the football game is better understood. Salinger witnessed disastrous battles without any "hot-shots" in the Battle of Hürtgen Forest, which was called the "killing field." There, where the stakes were as high as is humanly possible, Salinger found himself on a side that was considered to be, if not weak, at least expendable. Salinger was part of the 4th Infantry Division, which paid a terrible price during the Battle of Hürtgen Forest. According to John McManus, "The rate of personnel turnover in 4th Division companies was mind-boggling, something like 200 percent casualties [That is, so many replacement soldiers were killed or wounded that its casualty rate surpassed 100 percent.]" (qtd. in Shields and Salerno 128). Shields and Salerno also quote Lieutenant Colonel William Gayle's statement on the subject: "In Hürtgen Forest the 4th Infantry Division was virtually expended for the second time since it landed in Normandy. Seven

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 58

thousand men were lost in four weeks of this operation, which meant a turnover of 100 percent to 200 percent in rifle companies and battalion staffs" (128).

Because he was part of the 4th Infantry Division's Counter Intelligence Corps, Salinger did not have to fight in the front line and so survived the bloodbath of Hürtgen Forest. It is still apparent that he was sufficiently traumatized by the experience to develop a feeling of anger toward—and an attitude of skepticism about—the leadership of the Allied forces, however righteous their campaign was supposed to be. This experience could well have been traumatic enough to make him doubt the nature of World War II itself. In war, soldiers are after all nothing but pawns in the game. Salinger could not have done anything better than what he was ordered to do, as Holden agrees with Mr. Spencer on the surface. However, at the bottom of his heart, Salinger must have strongly resented the terrible cost of war, regardless of how justified the war may have appeared to have been.

Even when the Allies finally won, Salinger could not have simply reveled in the victory without regret—a fact perhaps gestured at in an important moment in *Catcher*. In the novel, Holden mocks Ossenburger, who "made a lot of dough in the undertaking business" (22). Ossenburger is treated as one of the winners in affluent postwar American society, but his business is like the business of war itself in that its success is based upon death—the death of other people. When he proudly announces that he thinks of Jesus all the time, as if his religious behavior justifies his business, Holden imagines Ossenburger "shifting into first gear and asking Jesus to send him a few more stiffs" (23). By associating the winners in affluent postwar American society with innocent deaths, Salinger implicitly expresses scorn for the leaders of the Allies who reveled in the final victory in World War II, even though that victory came at the cost of the sacrifice of so many soldiers' lives.

Just as Holden criticizes Ossenburger's work as an undertaker because the undertaker's financial success grows out of the suffering of others, in *Catcher* Holden also criticizes other instances of material success (such as earning money and gaining social fame) that seem

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 59

to him to include elements of insensitivity to or negligence of humanity generally. Holden's response to Hollywood is a case in point. In *Catcher*, Hollywood is critiqued for its commercialism in making good stories into sentimental movies to entertain a mass audience and to earn as much money as possible. As a consequence, Holden believes that D.B.'s decision to work for Hollywood degrades D.B.; indeed, Holden openly expresses disgust at D.B.'s work there: "Now he's out in Hollywood, D.B., being a prostitute" (4).

D.B.'s decision to work in Hollywood highlights how enticing monetary success and social fame can be, even for a first class writer. D.B. may be the prototype of such a writer; he is sensitive and intelligent enough to ask his younger brother Allie, "who was the best war poet, Rupert Brooke or Emily Dickinson" (182) when Allie asks him, "wasn't it sort of good that he was in the war because he was a writer and it gave him a lot to write about and all" (182). As D.B. expects, Allie regards Dickinson as the better war poet, even though her poems never dealt with war directly. In this episode, D.B. thus evidently gestures towards the kind of splendid writer Salinger himself hoped to be, for he valorizes the attempt to describe and critique the horrors of war indirectly, as Salinger does, in *Catcher*.

This is not to suggest, however, that D.B. should be understood to represent Salinger himself when D.B. puzzles Holden by recommending *A Farewell to Arms*. Indeed, quite the opposite. In *Catcher* Holden complains, "I don't see how D.B. could hate the Army and war and all so much and still like a phony like that [Lieutenant Henry]" (182). French interprets Salinger's attack on Hemingway's masterpiece as a manifestation of Salinger's high sensitivity and natural impulse to reject self-righteous toughness: "The seemingly inexplicable attack upon Hemingway's extremely individualistic hero is puzzling until we recall that there is little approval anywhere in Salinger's writing for those who enjoy sexual intercourse out of wedlock, reject the world, make 'a separate peace,' and do not allow the unfeeling world to defeat or destroy them" (58). French's interpretation may be supported by a historical anecdote that he highlights: "he [Salinger] met Ernest Hemingway when the author-correspondent visited Salinger's regiment, and . . . Salinger became disgusted

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 60

when Hemingway shot the head off a chicken to demonstrate the merits of a German Luger" (25). Partly because French is one of the most influential critics writing about Salinger and partly because this episode recalls a scene in "Esmé" where Sergeant X is shocked by Corporal Z's shooting a cat during the bomb shelling (166–67), for a long time the anecdote was widely believed to reflect a real incident.[3]

After Salinger's death, however, more autobiographical facts became available, some of which suggest that Salinger had actually been on good terms with Hemingway all through the war. In discussing Salinger's 9 September 1944 letter to Whit Burnett, for example, Kenneth Slawenski notes that in the letter Salinger described Hemingway as a "really good guy" (101). Slawenski also points out that Salinger's letter to Hemingway of 27 July 1945 makes clear that "Salinger was grateful for Hemingway's friendship and thanked him for providing rare moments of hope" (102). Because of these letters, Slawenski regards the episode introduced by French as "an unverified and fanciful account" (101), concluding: "it is doubtful that the chicken story is true" (101). At the same time, however, Slawenski acknowledges that Salinger's response to Hemingway was unusually complex and points out that "He [Salinger] had never professed admiration for Hemingway or his work" (101) as openly as he did for Sherwood Anderson and F. Scott Fitzgerald. Slawenski also reports Salinger's objection to Hemingway's selling his works to Hollywood: "In 1945, he had warned Ernest Hemingway against the sale of movie rights to Hollywood" (183).

Given Salinger's complex attitude toward Hemingway (an attitude that combined admiration and disagreement), it becomes clear that in important respects Holden's relation to D.B. resembles Salinger's relation to Hemingway. Holden's personal relationship with D.B. has

[3]Hamilton refers to this episode as the one introduced by French, too. Though he admits that there is no supporting evidence for it, he seems more or less to have accepted it when he relates this episode to Salinger's negative attitude toward Hemingway's macho heroes in war: "There is no firsthand evidence to authenticate this tale, but we do learn from Salinger's letters that he had little patience for Hemingway's macho posturing" (86).

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 61

never been bad, and he is under D.B.'s care and protection after his breakdown. Yet D.B. puzzles and disturbs Holden by appreciating a novel such as Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*, which both uses war materials and celebrates a questionable macho hero. As Hamilton points out, "Salinger's war heroes rarely have a taste for war" (86), and Hemingway's war novels and heroes are not what Salinger intended to write as a war writer. D.B.'s admiration of Hemingway and Holden's resentment at it, therefore, reflect Salinger's anxiety about war materials and warn us that even a first-class writer like Hemingway can succumb to its dangers.

Holden's objection to D.B.'s work in Hollywood also both reflects Salinger's disappointment at Hemingway's selling his works to Hollywood and highlights his anxiety that the enticement of material success will prey on even the sensibility and intelligence of a first class writer. Besides, to pursue money or social fame in the affluent society is, for Salinger, nothing but to join a life game—another battle and war. It can easily become the cause of another war in the future.

Holden's critiques of his favorite brother, D.B., thus grow out of two major concerns: he is bothered by the fact that D.B. sold out to Hollywood, and he is bothered by the fact that his brother so uncritically recommends and celebrates a novel like *A Farewell to Arms*—a novel which can be interpreted as an indirect celebration of war. In historical context, those concerns reflect Salinger's anxiety that even a highly talented writer like Hemingway may ignore the danger of causing another war and commit himself to it in spite of himself. What is more, by denouncing Hemingway's war masterpiece, Salinger makes clear that he desires to be a very different kind of war writer than Hemingway and that *Catcher*—which is set not in war proper but in affluent postwar American society—can be a better war work than Hemingway's novel because it conveys an authentic war theme without creating any risk of another war in the future.

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 62

III. The Implicit Antiwar Message Embodied in Holden's Mourning for Allie

Unlike D.B., Holden's younger brother, Allie, is praised profusely by Holden, without restriction—for example, as "the most intelligent member in the family" (50) and "the nicest, in lots of ways" (50). Allie's left-handed fielder's mitt has poems written all over it, and the mitt serves as a convenient symbol of Allie's character and goodness. Allie is left-handed, and in Salinger's work, the left hand represents mental work because of its dissociation from daily chores.[4] The poems written on Allie's left-handed mitt, therefore, embody Allie's essential purity, which is suitable for such a first-class poet as Raymond Ford in "The Inverted Forest." Further, Allie wrote poems on his mitt so that "he'd have something to read when he was in the field and nobody was up at bat" (49). The baseball game is another battle, and its "field" is another battle zone. Allie, who reads poems in the "field," can be, therefore, plausibly associated with soldiers killed prematurely in battle during World War II—a connection that emphasizes the fact that each of the fallen soldiers should be regarded as being equally precious.

In various of his short stories, Salinger describes what it feels like to mourn for those missing or killed in action, including his description in "This Sandwich Has No Mayonnaise" of Vincent's distraction due to the fact that his younger brother, Holden, was missing in action and his description in "The Stranger" of Babe's total puzzlement over his account of Vincent's death. In *Catcher*, Holden's intense and apparently irrational reaction of breaking all the windows with his fist at Allie's death is more understandable when it is compared to Vincent's and Babe's similarly irrational acts in the above mentioned stories. Seen from this broader perspective, Holden's outburst is in response not merely to the cruel reality of this world in killing his favorite younger brother but also in response to the cruelty of the world in general, and the cruelty of war in specific.

[4]The role of the left hand as an interpretive code is explained in detail in Nitta.

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 63

Allie's death especially calls up the deaths in the "killing field" when Holden remembers how it rained on Allie's tombstone when Holden visited the cemetery in which his brother is interred: "It was awful. It rained on his lousy tombstone, and it rained on the grass on his stomach. It rained all over the place. All the visitors that were visiting the cemetery started running like hell over to their cars . . . everybody except Allie" (202). According to Shields and Salerno, "Salinger's 4th Division entered the Hürtgen Forest on November 6, 1944" (123). It can easily be imagined that the weather was as cold and as wet as is described in "A Boy in France." And the Battle of the Hürtgen Forest, known as the most prolonged and devastating battle during World War II, must have left so many dead bodies on its cold and wet battlefield as to terrify Salinger with their misery.[5]

It is perhaps not surprising, then, that when Shields and Salerno discuss one of Salinger's unpublished stories of 1947, "An Ocean Full of Bowling Balls," they identify its main character, Kenneth Caulfield, with Allie.[6] In the story, Kenneth is full of lively spirit with a delicate heart and is killed by a large wave of the ferocious ocean. When Kenneth's beautiful spirit prematurely perishes due to the malignant outside power, Shields and Salerno see in that description clear evidence of "Survivor's guilt" (172). The deep sorrow felt by his older brothers, Vincent and Holden, would be the same as that felt by Salinger, who survived so many unreasonable deaths in the war. And the more splendid Kenneth and Allie are, the more tragic and impermissible their early deaths look. As a result, Holden's mourning over Allie's death functions as more than just a commemoration of all the unwarranted and inexcusable deaths in World War II. It also rouses "survivor's guilt" and highlights the survivors' obligation never to allow such an inhuman event as war to be repeated.

[5]Allie's death may also hint at the large number of dead bodies left in the deserted Kaufering Larger IV, though the weather could have been a little better in spring.

[6]Slawenski notes that this title appears in a document dated 10 April 1945 in the archives of Salinger's agent, Harold Ober Associates (127).

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 64

IV. A New Kind of War Work Designed to Prevent Another War in the Future

In *Catcher*, Salinger avoids using war materials directly by setting the novel in affluent postwar American society. At the same time, however, he ports into the novel his wartime experiences having to do both with war's typical negligence of beautiful and essential human elements and with its unfair and inhuman social battles. In doing so, Salinger generalizes his war theme and—in the process—acknowledges that the danger of war exists in any man or woman, and in any society. His view of war is endorsed by D.B.'s hatred for many of the soldiers in his own army: "My brother D.B. . . . hated the Army worse than the war. . . . He said the Army was practically as full of bastards as the Nazis were" (181–82). Holden does not mean that D.B. cares less about war. He surely hates it but by regarding the American army as being almost as bad as the Nazis, D.B. intimates that the real cause of war lies not in a particular foreign country's characteristics or social regime but rather in an ordinary human deficit found around us all in our daily life.

This is also why Sergeant X in "Esmé," who suffers from a nervous breakdown due to the war, falls into a hell with "the suffering of being unable to love" (160). X can no longer love anyone because he recognizes the insensitivity that allowed inhuman killings in the war, even in his comrade, Corporal Z, as well as in his family members in the United States. Like Sergeant X, Holden is too sensitive to the failings of people around him to get along with them. He thus falls into isolation with "the suffering of being unable to love," too. His condition was probably close to Salinger's own when Salinger hospitalized himself after the war with a nervous breakdown. And as both X and Holden are saved by the altruistic love of Esmé and Phoebe respectively, Salinger must have found a hope in pure concern about other people without asking for anything in return, which he believed can mend human failings and prevent another war in the future.

"Esmé" is Salinger's masterpiece based on his war experience, but by avoiding the direct use of war materials, *Catcher* surpasses that short story as an original kind of war work. Being set in affluent

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 65

American society after the war, *Catcher* succeeds in looking at war from a wider perspective than "Esmé" and in generalizing the war theme enough to consider basic human weaknesses generally. What is more, by refusing to use any war materials as the manifest content of the novel (which is what Babe asks all soldiers to do in "Last Furlough"), *Catcher* works hard to minimize the risk of attracting young readers to another war, while still managing to convey the same war theme as does "Esmé." It is perhaps not surprising, then, that Salinger afterwards abandoned war materials completely. *Catcher* decided his new direction of writing as "a war writer."

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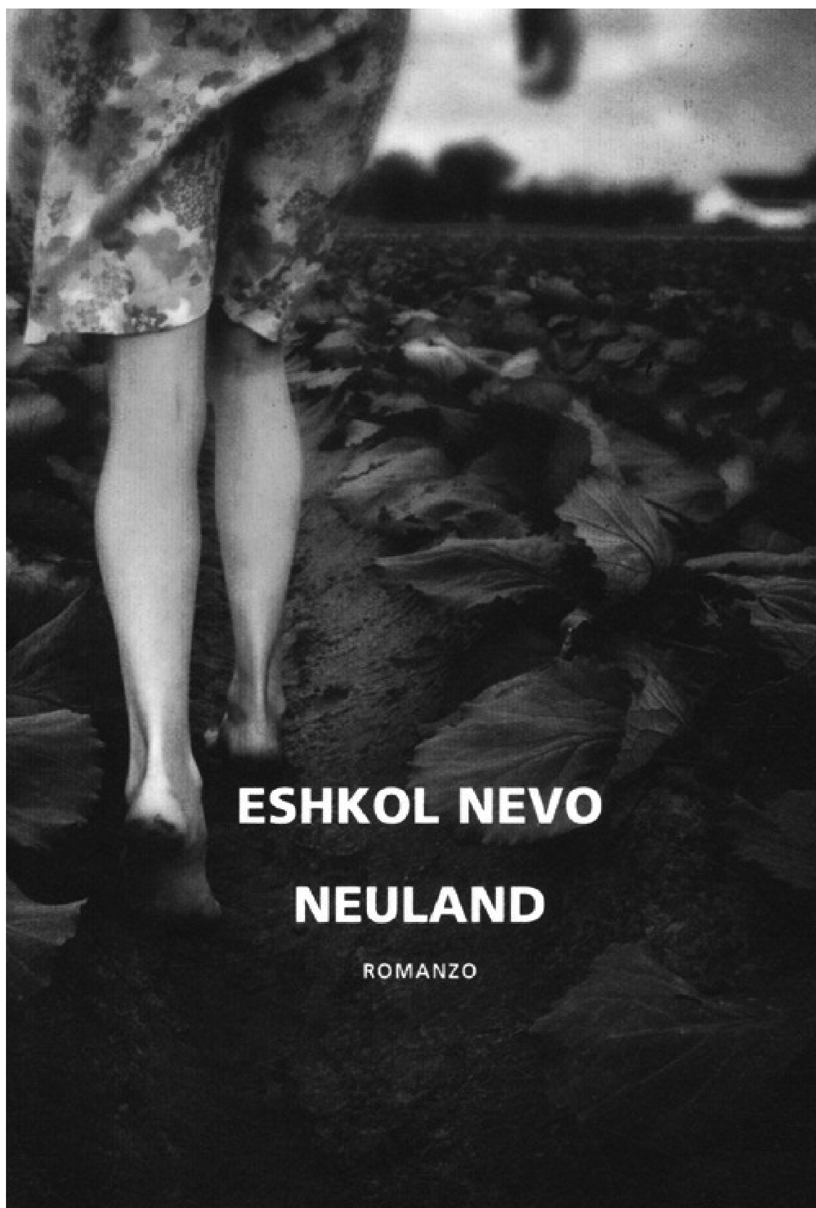

Neuland by Eshkol Nevo published 2014.

The Traumatic Quotidian and Jewish Utopian Yearning in Eshkol Nevo's *Neuland*

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> Israel has not yet managed to establish among its citizens the sense that this place is their home. They may feel that Israel is their fortress, but still not truly their *home*. The State of Israel has failed to assuage in the hearts of many of its citizens the urge—so Jewish, so human and understandable—to constantly examine alternate ways of existing and possible places of refuge.
>
> —David Grossman

> *How joyfully people leave this country*, she began the first sentence of her journal, *and how relieved they look. Two thousand years of longing to kiss the ground here, and turning to face east three times a day at prayer, but the minute they arrive, all they want to do is to go west.* —Eshkol Nevo

There is an evocative but thorny term in German, *Heimat*, meaning something roughly akin to a passionate sense of belonging to a landscape or culture, an "emotional connectedness" providing a formidable bulwark against the ruptures of modern alienation (apparently there are no precise equivalences in English

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 68

or even other European languages).[1] Juxtaposed with recent historical memory, such a concept will clearly sit uneasily with many. In its extreme forms, construed as a binding collective identity of the *patria* (who is included, who is excluded?), such a sentiment obviously carries the risk of emboldening the nativist distortions and ultimately the murderous ideologies of "blood and soil" to which the West has proved all too susceptible, and lately as we have unfortunately seen, by no means confined to the more distant past. And yet perhaps if understood as a more intimate sense of strictly *individual* experience or subjectivity, this romantic paradigm carries a kind of spiritually-sustaining sense of belonging, its absence a dangerous deprivation to the soul.

Given the long sweep of Jewish diasporic history (expulsions, migrations), there would seem to have been centuries of opportunities for Jews to form their own sense of *Heimat*, possibly even to multiple or simultaneous locales of belonging. Zionism's daunting historic burden was to vigorously counter and repudiate those stubborn attachments, instilling a fierce sense of fealty to a distant, mythical homeland. Consider the fraught early years of Jewish statehood,

[1]In her acclaimed graphic memoir, *Belonging: A German Reckons With History and Home*, Nora Krug translates the concept from the German *Brockhaus* encyclopedia as

> an imaginarily developed, or actual landscape or location, with which a person . . . associates an immediate sense of familiarity. This experience is . . . imparted across generations, through families and other institutions, or through political ideologies. In common usage [it] also refers to the place (understood as a landscape) that a person is born into, where they experience early socialization that largely shapes identity, character, mentality, and worldviews (26).

At one point, Krug's quest for an "untainted" *Heimat* leads her to a group of Jewish immigrants from Austria and Germany who have been meeting in New York City since 1943 "to speak German and maintain their sense of cultural identity" (they dub themselves the "Fourth Reich") (38). When Krug meets the group, their host has just turned 100, and the group deliberates on matters such as America's lack of universal health care and the prospects of Democratic candidates. See also Bittner.

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 69

when the virile New Hebrew (invariably construed as masculine), Zionism's ideal citizen, was construed as utterly rooted, uninterested in travel abroad, the antithesis of the "Wandering Jew." In that exceedingly anxious time, when emigration from the Jewish state was perceived as traitorous or "deviant behavior," even the young country's very few travel agencies sometimes attracted police attention. As Orit Rozin recounts in *A Home For All Jews*, her groundbreaking study of the formation of national identity in the dominant civic discourse of the era (largely molded by the young country's pervasive labor movement), the pejorative term "travelitis" was applied to those deemed the antithesis of Israel's self-confident and rooted New Jew, a discourse that seemed to borrow heavily from Christian tropes about the "Wandering Jew" (91) and that continues to serve as a catalyst for Israeli arts and culture, especially in the Hebrew literary imagination.[2]

Indeed, when examining that early history of statehood and reimbodied identity, one of the most fascinating and often-neglected dynamics in the modern Hebrew novel is that of the Jewish Israeli who finds her or himself outside the borders of the Jewish State, plaintively adrift and uncertain of their place in the world. As Vered Karti Shemtov observes:

[2]From 1948 through the early 1960s, citizens hoping to travel abroad were required to secure an exit permit. Extremely difficult to acquire, they were typically limited to very short periods. Rozin cites a variety of reasons for this draconian measure, including the country's desperate shortage of foreign reserves, fears that massive emigration from the young country might cripple its economic development, military readiness, and public morale. From the perspective of the classical Zionist ideology that shaped state policy, the desire of the citizen to travel abroad was "subversive on the functional level, but even more so on the symbolic level . . . a contagious disease seen as undoing prior achievements and calling the entire Zionist revolution into question" (95). For their part, members of Israel's beleaguered middle class, many of whom fully intended to return after their travel to visit family members (which often included Holocaust survivors too ill to join them in Israel), protested vociferously against what they considered a policy that felt came frighteningly close to totalitarianism.

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 70

> Israeli literature does not present a solid and unified attitude toward space and home. Different waves of immigration, different socioeconomic and ethnic groups, and different individuals within these groups portray a variety of homes and diverge in the ways they relate to their surrounding spaces. But even within these variations, one can clearly see the centrality of discussing and questioning the many meanings of home and homeland. In fact, one can argue that a complex relationship to dwelling and space (personal space and collective space) is one of the main defining features of Hebrew literature to this day. Despite more than sixty-seven years of existence in an independent nation-state, Hebrew literature still focuses quite heavily on issues of place, wandering, dwelling, and home. (281)

It is as if, even in their re-territorialized circumstances, Jewish-Israeli writers are unable to resist the stubborn lure and restless temptations of diasporic subjectivity, especially when it comes to unleashing their characters' imaginative empathy beyond borders. Over time, the unrooted literary subject's peripatetic condition has invariably served as a wry and sometimes profound commentary on the fragility of the entire Zionist enterprise, the distance between a homeland that is merely a domicile and not intrinsic to one's affective condition. Given the increasing affordability of flights to Europe, the commonality of post-army treks and so on, the presence of peripatetic Jewish Israeli characters would seem to be an altogether unremarkable, even urgent subject for recent Israeli literature.[3] Yet by way of contrast, it

[3]At the time of this writing, a growing number of Jewish Israelis have expressed deep disaffection with the state of their society, with as many as a third in a recent poll indicating that they would leave the country if they had the means. The 2017 poll in *Jewish Daily Forward* further indicated that "secular Jews were the most likely to want to immigrate, with 36% saying they would leave the country if they could." According to Uri Cohen, the poll's director, "the survey data indicates a problem with a sense of identity, connection and belonging to the people, to the land and to the state among a growing part of society in Israel and that reality already has created a rift and split in all of Israeli society" (qtd. in Zeveloff).

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 71

should be noted that fictional Zionist portrayals of such wanderers in the early decades of the state were relatively rare and those that did usually cast harsh judgment on such characters' Zionist fealty in ways that went beyond their apparent lack of sufficient patriotic fervor to insinuate deeper moral or psychological failings. Unarguably, the pre-eminent and unwavering exemplar of that dogmatic mode has long been A. B. Yehoshua, in whose plethora of popular novels from *Ha-Me'ahev* (*The Lover*, 1977) to *Nitzevet* (*The Extra*, 2014) the Jewish Diaspora itself is indicted as a neurotic condition that can infect the health and wellbeing of patriotic Israeli families, who in turn serve as synecdoche or surrogate for the Israeli polity as a whole.[4]

Notably diverging from this model, a younger generation of Israelis (those emerging in the wake of Yehoshua, Oz and Grossman's canonical trinity) have lately imaginatively recast the nature of Jewish identity in the Diaspora and indeed the very notion of "homeland" itself. Increasingly, there seems to be less and less daylight between such writers and Nathan Englander's characterization of Jewish American novelists whose emblematic concerns "revolv[e] around fluidity, of borders drawn and redrawn, of changing landscapes and altered realities." Quintessential among this newer wave of Israeli writers is Eshkol Nevo (b. Jerusalem, 1971), whose growing body of work is on a continuum with the older writer's celebrated obsession with the intimacies of family life, the things that bind husbands and wives, parents and children, and the things that sometimes drive them apart.

Not unlike the oeuvre of Yehoshua, Nevo's novels delve deeply into the question of just how much the state can demand from its subjects before cracks appear in even the most zealous citizen's fealty.

[4]Judgments continue to fall heavy on such protagonists well into the second half of the twentieth century. In one memorable example, Nathan Shaham's 1977 novella, *Kirot Etz Dakim* (*Salt of the Earth*), the grizzled protagonist, a veteran of seven decades of kibbutz life, rewards himself after a life of hard labors with a sojourn in the United States, only to find himself embattled by the ugliness of both American capitalism and the shallow materialism of Jewish life that he finds there. In the story's punitive denouement, he dies fearful and lonely in a hotel bed, far from the utopia that had once sated him.

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 72

In that respect, it seems revealing of the distance traversed from the days of the aforementioned "travelitis" taboo that Nevo's *Neuland* so matter-of-factly affirms the irrepressible human (perhaps also *humanizing*) desire for elsewhere—other loves, other localities—that decades of either matrimony or statehood will never solve. That transformation is most explicit in a charged exchange between two of *Neuland*'s major characters, a Holocaust survivor and her young Sabra granddaughter, that occurs late in the novel:

> You think you're so special? Look around. Everyone sitting here in this café is also sitting in a different place now, in his mind, with someone else. Sitting beside every couple you see here is a third person that one of them is imagining. That one of them has to imagine in order to keep on sitting here. This Tel Aviv of yours—how could you stand it if you didn't imagine a different city, a more beautiful one, all the time? And what about our country? So many Jews living in one place, but in their minds, they have another place they came from and other place they want to run away to tomorrow. And that's a good thing . . . because imagining and thinking about wandering is the only way they can give up real wandering. And stay here. (600)

The question of just how these characters arrive at this understanding about the transience of belonging, while perhaps unremarkable in the context of other national literatures, amounts to an almost radical epiphany in the circumstances of history and culture Nevo outlines. This intergenerational exchange proves representative of many instances in which the novel insinuates the degree to which the diasporic imagination remains stubbornly inextricable in the consciousness of Israeli citizen-subjects. Set in 2006 on the brink of the Second Lebanon War, Nevo's third novel concerns the fate of Menny, a businessman in late middle age who has gone missing in South America, with his adult son Dori in dogged pursuit. In jazz-like variations, Nevo employs that familial crisis throughout the novel to form a dialectic interrogating the entrenched Israel-Diaspora hierarchy. One character's pithy observation of the clashing worldviews separating

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 73

her from another captures the wrenching essence of that reverberating dialectic throughout the novel: "He knows her views (territory is death). She knows his views (territory is life)" (585).[5]

Throughout his childhood and early adult life, Dori has known his father to be this "cool, level-headed war hero . . . one of Israel's most successful strategy consultants for the management of business crises" (28). Yet mysteriously this reliably competent, if emotionally remote parent has abruptly severed ties with all his responsibilities, and Dori's sister, convinced something terrible has befallen their father, persuades her diffident brother to leave his wife and young son and fly off to South America where he hires a local specialist in missing persons cases. Due to the many diversions and obstacles that frustrate his progress in this labyrinthine novel, the catalyst behind the patriarch's sudden disappearance is not revealed until midway through, when an increasingly frustrated Dori stumbles across a diary intentionally/accidentally left behind, the searing contents of which account for the novel's most genuinely heart-wrenching passages.

Traumatized by his Yom Kippur War experiences (to the extent that he only distantly alludes to it as "the Inferno"), unrelieved suffering further exacerbated by the recent loss of his wife, Menny's stream of consciousness log reveals a deeply wounded psyche:

> in the evening I climb to the top of the hill here and eat in the imperio amara restaurant steaks on a bed of quinoa hoping that no Israelis sit down next to me that one of them doesn't recognize me from the financial newspaper that some mother my age who decided to join her daughter on a girl's holiday won't come in i have no epidermis now and that Israeli pain is too heavy a load for me please god sit some australians down next to me they exude such great naivety happiness that has no wound in its heart you can even sit americans here they're phony but anything's

[5]To his credit, Nevo never reductively stacks the deck on either side of the complex Israel-Diaspora equation. For example, even as another hopeless war rages on in the novel, 170 eager new immigrants are reported to have arrived.

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 74

> better than that Israeli pain first intifada second intifada operation defensive shield it doesn't matter they all have the same terrible fear in their eyes about what's going to happen if we're not. . . . (360)

The degree to which this passage (with its resounding "terrible fear") encapsulates Nevo's insistence on linking the plight of individuals to that of their homeland cannot be overstated; denuded and inconsolable beneath his brash and capable surface, Menny's affliction will be recognized (especially by native Israeli readers) as inextricable from that of tormented Israel itself. For many years, there was a palpable utopian streak in Israeli society (most iconic in the kibbutz movement but with myriad expressions of socialists ideals elsewhere), but today the country's increasingly marginalized and beleaguered progressives find little space for their idealism—and hence a rapidly shrinking sense of belonging.[6]

[6]Such disaffected Israelis have begun to create satellite communities abroad, especially those whose desire to live independently on the land have been thwarted by the state's embrace of industrial-scaled agricultural practices. For an extensive feature published in the *Haaretz* weekend supplement, the poet, musician, and journalist Roy Arad spoke to a significant number of Israelis who have relocated in recent years to rural Portugal. Haim Feldman's plaintive account of his choice to emigrate is representative of many Arad interviewed, touching on a gamut of concerns ranging from a desire for fulfillment in traditional farming and dismay at the insidious presence of militarism even in his children's preschool:

> I am heartbroken from love. In Israel I was battered as a political activist and also as an ecological gardener. Israeli farmers are very condescending about environmental concerns – they think that farming is only done with a tractor. Portugal is a country of small gardens, with great appreciation for the environment. Another reason I left was so that my daughters wouldn't go to school in a fascist educational system. The brainwashing in Israel begins at an early age. A photograph of the chief of staff is hung on the kindergarten wall. Here the people are charming, and we mustn't forget that in Portugal there was a Jewish community that lived together with the Muslims. It's important to understand that there was a connection here.

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 75

Even as he avoids any outright polemic in portraying this alienation, Nevo's morally imaginative rendering of his character's plight nonetheless bears considering alongside that diminished being that David Grossman prophesied would be the inevitable outcome of the hardening and coarsening of fortress Israel:

> I fear that after decades of spending most of our energies, our thoughts and attention an inventiveness, our blood and our life and our financial means, on protecting our external borders, fortifying and safeguarding them more and more—after all this, we may be very close to becoming like a suit of armor that no longer contains a knight, no longer contains a *human*. (*Writing in the Dark* 48)

Menny's psychic breakdown, after years of suppression and denial, conjures up precisely the inverse of Grossman's stark image. In Nevo's poignant portrayal of his broken character, Menny is exposed *without* the hypernationalized armor, not unlike a naked crustacean scurrying on the oceanic floor in search of a suitable shell, desperate to shield himself from the lingering traumas left by his militaristic past.

When it at lasts surfaces with explosive force, this revelation of Menny's once-hidden trauma powerfully reawakens the atmosphere of malaise first introduced in the novel's early pages, which begin on a discordant note with Dori and Inbar urgently messaging one another, each with their alarming news. Like much of the country, both their households are caught in turmoil when a vast number of reservists are suddenly called up to the north due to an unspecified security emergency. Yet habitually self-absorbed Dori seems even more resentful of the chaos caused by his in-laws (who have fled their northern kibbutz after a rocket smashed their collective dining room). His grumblings culminate in a peculiar utterance. While on the surface his complaint comments on how their indefinitely extended visit disrupts his domestic life, it also serves as a sly allegorical reinforcement of the novel's ultimate concern with a wider disaffection, namely the growing rift between subject and state or perhaps

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 76

the interminable conflict with the Palestinians: "maybe I'm actually the stranger in this house" (4). Perhaps somewhat elliptically linked to Dori's petty concern with unwelcome encroachments on his household routine is a deeper source of anxiety: the entire country's growing unease as Hassan Nasrallah (Hezbollah's Secretary-General), threatens bombardments of rockets capable of reaching the entire country.

Neither the "particularity" of domestic space nor the "universality" of homeland provides these two correspondents any sense of refuge. Each sense of refuge suddenly seems terrifyingly ephemeral. Through the intimate vocabulary of Dori and Inbar's emails (Nevo's novels are often distinguished by adroitly interwoven epistolary elements), the reader gradually gleans critical knowledge about their interior as well as external realities: most explicitly that Inbar and Dori have had an intensely emotional entanglement of some kind in the very recent past; and that the deteriorating security situation is actually the eve of the Second Lebanon War. The more this unpleasant reality bears down, the more each finds refuge in the "separate, utopian world" of their exchanges (14). After a rocket destroys the home of Lily, Inbar's Holocaust-survivor grandmother (her frequent appearances remind us that Nevo is concerned with multigenerational displacements and traumatic histories), Inbar is beset by a bleak sense of déjà vu, a cynical apprehension that most Israeli readers are bound to recognize as their own:

> The craziest thing is that all of this is actually a repeat of the first Lebanon war. Do you think that from now on all the wars will start to repeat themselves in reverse order? That we'll have a second Yom Kippur War? A second Six Day War? Do you see why there's something to be said for what Mr. Neuland is trying to do? True, his means are radical, but maybe only radical means can work when everything else is at a stalemate. (12)

War's sickening cyclical inevitability—the unhealed traumas of the previous still festering even as a new state of emergency arises to confront a new generation—is palpable from *Neuland*'s very first

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 77

pages and remains unrelenting throughout. While readers are not rewarded with answers to precisely how Menny Neuland's startling disappearance (and rumors of his "radical" new venture) relate to this deep pessimism for many pages, enough critical revelations of Menny's character are filtered through Dori's rueful recollections to cogently foreground his crisis. Those disturbing glimpses of this distant, physically withholding figure also illuminate one of Nevo's most enduring preoccupations as a novelist—that of Israel's warrior masculinity, the ways in which the latter's perniciously corrosive power distorts relations between men and women, fathers and sons, citizens and the paternalistic, seemingly insatiable state.

That concern becomes most explicit on the occasion when, hastily preparing for his emergency trip to South America, Dori gathers photos from a family album so that the locals can help in his search and the sight of one taken on a childhood ski trip to Mount Hermon conjures up a skein of reveries. The mere recollection of that frozen landscape (like so many regional settings in this novel, a pleasurable vacation spot for some connotes violent death for others) conjures up melancholy recollections of his father's physical aloofness: "They never really hugged. Not all the way. Even when Dori would come back from [serving in] Lebanon, even at his mother's funeral, their hugs were always tentative—his father would tap his back lightly with one hand, and with the other he'd already be pushing him away" (23). Dori ardently vows that given another opportunity he will hug his father so fiercely that Menny would not be able to resist reciprocating the embrace. Soon after this wistful admission, Dori casually lets drop another vital crumb of information—i.e. "He survived the toughest battle of the Yom Kippur War" (24)—that proves crucial to the reader's understanding of his father's demons.

For readers unfamiliar with that era, it is worth pausing briefly to stress that for Israel, the War of 1973 proved so traumatic that, with one or two notable exceptions, few novelists have directly confronted its lasting impact on the society's emotional climate. The underlying causes of that numbing might be evident in the conclusions reached by Yoram Bilu and Eliezer Witztum, a pair of sociologists who argue that

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 78

> Some of Israel's most cherished myths crumbled in this war and the subsequent ambiance of disorientation, demoralization, and mistrust made it difficult for the bereaved to cling to the older collectivist discourse of bereavement . . . the 1973 War, despite the confusion and defeat that marked the first days of fighting (and partly because of them), was replete with episodes of heroic fighting, in the course of which the Israeli army eventually overturned the wheel, took over territories in Egypt and Syria, and removed the initial threat of annihilation. But in the Israeli collective memory, the military achievements and gallantry of the combatants were overshadowed by the dark aspects of the war: the political and military arrogance that left the army ill-prepared for the war and in utter surprise when it erupted, the high number of casualties, and the resultant weakening of Israel's political stance, both regionally and internationally. (14)

Subsequently, Bilu and Witztum conclude of the country's postwar trauma, that the Jewish society's official

> 'work of mourning' was poisoned by the excruciating awareness that the war could have been avoided or could have taken an entirely different course. This awareness detracted from the meaningfulness of the loss, since it became extremely difficult to articulate it within the Zionist ethos at large and the myth of heroism in particular. For the first time, the delicate balance between personal sense of loss and societal mechanisms for its symbolization and commemoration was undermined. (15)[7]

Traces of this traumatic collective history indelibly inform Nevo's characterizations of both father and son (though an exploration of the topic exceeds the scope of this essay, it is manifestly clear that Dori's relationship with his young son is also tainted by the stigma of war).

[7]See Bilu and Witztum.

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 79

Though much of the emotional history behind their fraught relationship unfolds in rather intricate ways over 600 pages, it bears noting that long before Dori and his father are dramatically reunited, readers encounter myriad examples of how each man's cherished sense of place and at-homeness "has been contaminated by fear" (70) and dread to the extent that their failed intimacy owes in part to how similarly each responds to such a precarious sense of belonging. Indeed, though of a later generation (and though he prefers to think that he has shrugged off the past), Dori's inured mode of interacting with his environment has been indelibly affected by his military experience. Once in Ecuador with Alfredo, the colorful local he has hired who makes a lucrative living from locating lost children and spouses, it takes a considerable amount of time and effort for Dori to learn to relax enough to adapt the sensibility of a casual tourist—nothing could be more exotic to his conditioned state—and to take in the "breathtaking view."[8] Trained as a military spotter—a legacy Nevo employs to suggest that a heightened degree of paranoia has become Dori's natural state—Dori's "first look around is always aimed at enemy action" (46). Such clues suggest that this same state of constant suspicion and hyper-vigilance plays a role in his painful incapacity to submit to Inbar's love even with the clear evidence of his failing marriage, long after the intimacy of their South American experience demonstrates both their eminent suitability and the passion they stir in one another.[9]

[8]Tellingly, when in their earliest negotiations, Dori's guide Alfredo shares his lasting impression of Israelis, it matter-of-factly sets up the novel's overarching theme of an entire society's existential dislocation and lassitude: "Twenty per cent of my clients are Israelis. . . . Sometimes I have the feeling that you Israelis really want to get lost" (30).

[9]Yet another factor in Dori's stubborn resistance to a love affair, that will likely be seen as inevitable by most readers, is linked to the single trait in which father and son seem to most resemble one another: "His father was polite but didn't flirt, not even for a second; after all, he was a member of the conservative party of one great love in life, maybe even the chairman of that party" (91).

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 80

Yet as Dori's accustomed tension slowly gives way in Quito, he experiences an utterly alien sensation of comforting familiarity and ease, an almost spiritual attunement, to the degree that that he's somehow convinced that "he and the city were matched in advance," an ease certainly unlike anything he has ever felt in Tel Aviv (49). He is all too mindful that he remains traumatized by how his relationship to his previously most cherished spatial attachment—the sensual seascape of Sinai where foreboding mountains meet shimmering turquoise reefs—was irrevocably destroyed by the televised carnage he witnessed in the aftermath of the 2004 terrorist bombing at Ras al-Satan, an iconic shoreline of campsites and bamboo beach huts beloved by many Israelis (that gruesome attack coordinated with another at a nearby hotel left thirty dead and over one hundred wounded). Ironically, at the time of the attack, Sinai was especially beloved by Israelis, for its breathtaking remote beauty but especially as a safe escape from the pressure-cooker of their society—an escape they could achieve without having to fly abroad. In the years following 1967, the Sinai became a near-sacred refuge, a place of exploration and discovery for the adventurous and a restorative balm for those merely seeking relief from the pettiness and stifling intensity of Israel's heavily urbanized society (in spite of grave security concerns, it remains an almost mystical lure for Israelis of every generation to this day).

For Menny of course, Sinai now represents only death and destruction, and he is never able (or willing) to overcome that sense of horror. So deeply ingrained was the military in the man's psyche that Dori grew up never doubting that his father's most prized possession was his watch engraved "To Menny, with admiration, from your buddies in 162" (87), a gift from his storied army unit. By the end of the Yom Kippur War, this watch had acquired "the special status of a lucky charm" (88), and Menny would allow himself to remove the watch only when he showered; hence Dori is severely discomfited when he happens across that very watch for sale at one of the outdoor stalls known inauspiciously as "Thieves Market" (87). For Dori, this artifact constitutes his first tantalizing shred of evidence indicating Menny's fate. Unable to believe his father would have willingly parted from his prize talisman, Dori naturally suspects the worst

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 81

(much later in the novel the revelation that Menny indeed willingly parted from what had practically become a bodily appendage, a fetishized extension of his core being, happily underscores the degree to which he has transcended his state of grief and paralysis).

For Dori, the visceral contact with his father's most beloved possession stirs up long-suppressed memories of the ritualistic occasions Menny would bar himself alone in his study each Yom Kippur, and other uneasy occasions when film documentaries about the war were screened on national television:

> [H]is father would be trapped in front of it like a moth in front of a flame, and Mum would sit down next to him and hold his hand, to keep it from burning. The bookcase in the sitting room had an entire shelf of books on other heroes of that war . . . and Dori read them in the desperate hope that he would find some mention of Major Menny Peleg . . . that would lift the fog surrounding what happened to his father. (89)

In the wake of these revelations, the enormity of Menny's transformation becomes apparent to the reader (if not to Dori); Menny's expanding perception that the paralyzed society, haplessly lurching from one outbreak of violent conflict to the next, shares the figurative condition ("trapped . . . like a moth in front of a flame") he himself triumphantly sheds.

As for his son, it becomes abundantly clear that a significant part of Dori's difficulty with his wife Roni is that (even in his vulnerable state searching for his father), she is unable to reciprocate on the emotional level he desperately needs. Yet as a former kibbutznik, Roni is a product of the "classic" days of collective childrearing, a society admirable in its extreme dedication to the outward demands of the state but sometimes considered by its own progeny to stunt their emotional growth and inner lives. Hence, from the earliest days of their relationship, Dori was gently cautioned that

> she didn't know how to miss anyone. And that he shouldn't be hurt by it. That's how it is with kibbutz survivors. When you cry

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 82

> for your mother all night in the children's house and no one comes to you . . . . I don't know . . . my missing mechanism must have got screwed up. (117)[10]

Consequently, when Dori's path crosses that of Inbar, who has impulsively fled to South America to escape her own war-related losses and messy estrangements, the contrast between the two women's capacity for emotional connection can not be more apparent (if for much of the novel, Dori and Inbar's relationship is strictly platonic, Nevo teasingly accentuates their eminent suitability and the reader inevitably roots for them.) But perhaps their most immediate connection becomes evident in the tragic revelation that Inbar's family has suffered their own heavy loss on behalf of the militarized society; their daily struggle to cope in the wake of the apparent suicide of Yoavi (Inbar's brother) during his army service is almost unbearable.

That pain is compounded by the lack of any clear motivation (the boy did not leave behind a letter), and Inbar's mother, Hana, plaintively tells anyone who will listen: "My son didn't play with guns. . . . He just wasn't like that. They crushed him there. That's what it was. They must have crushed his soul so hard that he didn't have enough strength left even to write a letter" (252). Like so many families coping in the aftermath of suicide, she is filled with guilty rage: "And we didn't see a thing. That's what hurts the most. We had a dead man walking here at home and I didn't notice" (252). After the marriage of Inbar's parents dissolves in the traumatic aftermath of Yoavi's death, each now lives on separate continents with new partners.

Inbar's mother had thought to have shut that violent reality behind her forever by fleeing to a new life in Germany. Yet now having returned to Israel for a brief visit just to see her Holocaust-survivor mother, she finds herself trapped again by the outbreak of war. Grimly, helplessly she watches the television news (a scene that immediately parallels Dori's childhood memories of his father

[10]For a discussion of other literary portrayals of "kibbutz survivors," see Omer-Sherman.

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 83

fixated on Yom Kippur War documentaries), frozen in mournful déjà vu:

> Every once in a while, there's a picture of a boy in uniform, and the words, "the funeral will take place tomorrow" and her heart bleeds with longing for Yoavi. . . . Only later does she remind herself that she's here, in this ghetto called the State of Israel, for a limited time only. (585)[11]

Soon after this juncture, Nevo leavens readers' impression of Hana's estrangement with poignant irony when the subject of one of her dissertation chapters turns out to be the legend of the Wandering Jew.

In Nevo's novels, the dispossession of the Palestinians rarely goes unaddressed (he frequently juxtaposes the exilic histories of both peoples). Accordingly, when she rereads the words of her younger self, Hana ruefully speculates that perhaps "I should write an addendum about the Jews who cause other people to wander. After all, when we finally stopped wandering, we drove others out of their villages" (587). And even as she struggles to refine her thesis, her speculative language seems a metatextual commentary that ultimately encapsulates the spirit of *Neuland* itself:

[11]The family's complex relationship with Germany is revealed in all its ironic layers in Inbar's musings late in the novel:

> And then, as if her grandmother were the optical illusion that can be seen as both an old lady and a young girl, depending on your focus, she suddenly sees her as a twenty-one-year-old, on the train from Warsaw . . . . With her small, bursting suitcase. The first traveler in the family. If she hadn't had the courage to get up and leave, there wouldn't have been any other journeys. There wouldn't have been a home to leave. (597)

And through this shift in Inbar's self-understanding, we witness her triumphal emergence from depressive solipsism to seeing herself as part of an intergenerational continuum of strong women overcoming trauma and historical adversity.

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 84

> I believe that the legend of the Wandering Jew existed, exists, and will continue to exist, not only as a result of the historical rift between Judaism and Christianity, or the anti-Semitism that is so deeply rooted in European culture, but as a result of human longing—a longing underpinned by fear, of course—to leave the permanent residence and move to another, better place, to believe that the repetitious, daily routine is not the only possibility. (587)

That irony is of course intensified by the fact that during her South American trek, her daughter develops a strange fixation with the Wandering Jew, whose literal traces she begins to see everywhere. In the novel's sole surreal device, Nevo fashions a brilliantly imaginative encounter in which the Wandering Jew himself wryly imparts this wisdom to her: "you can give a country to a wandering people, but you can't take the urge to wander out of them" (556).[12]

In spite of their shared grief, the raw intensity of her loss prevents Inbar from either taking comfort from, or bringing solace to, her

[12]This fantastical subplot is too convoluted to recount here in much detail except to note that Inbar has been the sole character attuned to the tantalizing hints left behind by the Wandering Jew of his existence and that she eventually encounters him in Neuland where she learns that he is continually wrenched from one time period to another so that his wanderings are both temporal and spatial and that his sojourns include the Inquisition, a torture cell in Franco's Spain, and the second Intifada; of the latter he concludes "What a nightmare, I did things there that a Jew shouldn't do" (556). In addition to these dark ordeals, he claims credit for a Leonard Cohen lyric after a 1970s era encounter in a Manhattan bar at 2:00 in the morning. Most importantly, the Wandering Jew expresses strong misgivings about Menny's entire venture because he worries that rather than a "wandering shadow camp" or "diaspora Sanhedrin," Menny will establish "a kind of permanent mini-country: "I have a bad feeling . . . the cactus has gone to his head" (557). And though he shudders about what the IDF troops did in Nablus during the Intifada and recognizes that he cannot conceive of returning in the near future, "I already have a country . . . what is it I always say? A home is not a place you live in: it's a place you know you can go back to if you want" (557).

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 85

parents. Each spins apart from the others in their separate orbit of suffering:

> while her father tried to throw the stun grenade that had landed in the middle of their sitting room back into the world, and her mother tried to lie on top of it, Inbar chose to run as far away from it as she could. The pain was too terrible to bear, so she tried to cut-and-paste it to the future, to better days when she'd be strong enough to cope with it. (253)

As her libido plummets and she shrinks into a deep depression, Inbar's hermit-like existence is largely confined to an apartment entirely devoid of furniture save for a bare mattress recovered from the street. Drifting from one featureless day to the next, nearly a year passes before she can bring herself to hang a Modigliani reproduction to the otherwise bare walls of the apartment, and desultorily enters into a relationship that proves unsatisfying.

When she at last resurfaces from that self-imposed isolation, Inbar is shocked to discover that the world has moved on; not only have her parents divorced but her father has moved to Australia. To her further consternation, she learns that he has not only remarried but already has another son. Reluctantly agreeing to meet him for a brief reunion in Hong Kong, she is too shaken by the child's uncanny resemblance to her beloved dead brother to absorb her father's pleas for understanding his plight (which is effectively that of her mother's): "There was no more air for me in Israel" (256). Evidently there is none left for Inbar either; for at that point, still reeling from the destruction of the tightly-knit family she long took for granted after the unbearable death of her little brother in the IDF, she echoes the actions of her parents and impulsively flees the country.

Yet Inbar's South American trek provides no relief from her mounting losses, which only intensify after joining up with Dori and Alfredo, especially when she picks up disquieting clues suggesting that the origins of Menny's unhappiness bear a resemblance to her own. That affinity becomes explicit when they spend a night in a remote jungle encampment presided over by a mysterious figure

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 86

named "El Loco" who granted Menny hospitality. The man turns out to have been a Vietnam veteran who left the United States after the war, purchased a huge piece of land, and barricaded himself behind an unwelcoming boundary of cacti. Most travelers are turned away, but the moment Menny appeared at his gates, El Loco mysteriously discerned that Dori's father "was a member of the club," meaning a former combatant traumatized by PTSD (122). And when El Loco recognizes Dori's obvious family resemblance to his former guest, the three are invited to stay as well.

This and related incidents from Dori and Inbar's trek are artfully interwoven with fragmented passages from Menny's travel diary so that the reader gradually accumulates firsthand impressions of the broken man's crisis. In a Guatemalan marketplace, Menny learns of a powerful native hallucinogen used by the locals in their ancient rituals. Under its influence and guided by the village shaman, he experiences an achingly tender phantasm in the form of the soul of his beloved late wife Nurik which dances with him on the rooftop of his hostel. Before parting from him one last time, the spirit mysteriously whispers "Baron Hirsch" in his ear (377). That inexplicable utterance introduces one of this historically imaginative novel's most inventive conceits, as emerging from his hallucinogenic state, Menny is seized by a newfound sense of urgency and meaning.

A quick search on the internet leads to the Baron Maurice de Hirsch's unlikely historical scheme to help redeem the masses of Russian Jews (who were struggling with poverty in the best of times and the cruelty of pogrom violence in the worst) by helping their resettlement in Argentina where less than a thousand had attempted to establish themselves in agricultural colonies in the late 1880s. In the Baron's impossible dream, which historically received enthusiastic support from antisemitic Russian officials, millions of Jews would supposedly emigrate to Argentina and create new lives in its vast rural landscapes. It is worth noting that even among the modest numbers who were somehow lured to Argentina rather than the United States after the horrific violence of the Kishinev pogrom of 1903, few actually chose its struggling agrarian colonies over Buenos Aires, and neither Moïseville (as it was quaintly dubbed)

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 87

nor any of the later settlements, ultimately proved a success; yet inexplicably, the unfulfilled promise of that relatively empty land beckons like a beacon to Menny Peleg.

In a feverish rush of renewed purpose, Menny formulates the sacred principles of the new community (or rather, as with all true prophets, the principles are "revealed" to him) and in doing so is restored to himself: "I'm a different Menny Peleg, Menny Peleg who has received a call. Like a taxi driver who receives a call with the exact address he must reach as quickly as possible. . . . I don't hear MiGs any more. I don't want to die any more" (381). As he hastily conceives the utopian blueprint of his redemptive new order, he poignantly hearkens back to Benjamin Ze'ev Herzl's original ethical vision of a future Jewish State as outlined in his novel *Altneuland* (*Old New Land*, 1902). Menny even determines that the commune's gated entrance will be emblazoned with a huge inscription: "Man, you are my brother" (381), lifted directly from Herzl's novel, and translated into Hebrew, English, and Spanish (381).[13] However Menny also departs from his predecessor's illustrious but ultimately quixotic dream of reconciling Jewish redemption of their territorial past with world justice ("Altneuland"). Instead, championing a more universal humanism (devoid entirely of nationalism) than Herzl advocated, Menny is inspired to anoint his haven simply "Neuland."

Upon careful rereading, one of the most striking qualities that emerges from *Neuland* is the degree to which Nevo creates space for sharply divergent readerly responses. Even as some may feel themselves entranced by Menny's gentle messianism, conservative undercurrents of homeland create an oppositional force that others might

[13]The surrounding passage from Herzl's text is a paean to inclusion and coexistence:

> It would be immoral if we would exclude anyone, whatever his origin, his descent, or his religion, from participating in our achievements. For we stand on the shoulders of other civilized peoples. . . . What we own we owe to the preparatory work of other peoples. Therefore, we have to repay our debt. There is only one way to do it, the highest tolerance. Our motto must therefore be, now and ever: "Man, you are my brother." (84–85)

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 88

consider far closer to reality. For one thing, Inbar and Dori's expatriate idyll cannot last forever; each is guiltily aware of neglected responsibilities requiring urgent attention once the question of Menny's wellbeing is resolved. Shortly before they at last reach the impoverished grasslands where the historic Moïseville languishes in disrepair, Inbar calls her grandmother Lily, an elderly survivor of the Holocaust, expressing her concern over how she is faring in Inbar's absence.

Lily gently but firmly rebukes Inbar in language strikingly reminiscent to sentiments consistently expressed in Yehoshua's novels, sentiments that notoriously contrast characters healthily rooted in the Jewish homeland with neurotic diasporic wanderers from an earlier era: "You can't worry from far away, dear. Worrying from far away is like kissing through a sheet. Or like buying Israel bonds. You want to worry about me? Then come home" (497). However, that guilty tug on her attention is set aside as both she and Dori are inundated by a dizzying rush of bewildering impressions of Neuland shared by an effusive young woman named Cecilia-Aharona, a resident of the historic Moïseville, not far from Nevo's imagined Neuland.[14] Cecilia-Aharona explains that the commune's young people are hugely popular among the residents of the small town due to the former's apparent altruism in providing medical and educational resources and even free labor and expertise to area farmers.

Yet once Dori and Menny reach the entrance itself, that impression of an open society is dissipated by a haughty gatekeeper who forbids them to bring their mobile phones into the community. Moreover, it seems that a formal appointment is required to see "Mr

[14]By the time Dori and Inbar would have made their way to this remote outpost of the pampas founded in 1889, it would have had a population of roughly 200 Jews, markedly reduced from its halcyon days of the 1940s when its population grew to over 5,000, with several synagogues and even a Yiddish theatrical troupe. Most of its residents immigrated to Israel over the decades, but Nevo perversely imagines a reversal, with many discontented Israeli backpackers and wanderers almost mystically finding their way to Menny Peleg's visionary community on a weekly basis, rapidly swelling its numbers.

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 89

Neuland" himself, since the latter cannot be interrupted from his daily meditative practice of "envisioning" the community's future. Dori is left aghast by his father's shenanigans as they conjure up hurtful memories of his childhood when Menny sequestered himself in his office, forbidding Dori and his sister to disturb him for any reason.

In stark contrast to Dori's growing frustration with and open hostility to his father's absurd scheme, Inbar is instantly smitten: "You can fall in love with places too. A place can bring a long-dormant joy to life inside you. And that's what happened to Inbar when she and Dori walked through the entrance gate and saw Neuland: a blast of beauty smashed straight into her heart" (506). Enraptured by its old farmhouse (which resembles her secret fantasy of her future dwelling when she becomes a famous author), its gracious avenue lined with tall trees unfamiliar to her ("Paradise Trees" naturally), and the "harmonious, balanced symmetry" and "vibrant, joyous life" of the bustling community at work and play, she feels like the artist protagonist in the famous "Crows" segment of Kurosawa's film *Dreams* who enters the world of a van Gogh painting: "new to me, but not foreign" (508). Hoping to share her enthusiasm with Dori, she is disappointed when he retreats to his inured defensiveness, "scanning the place with a spotter's eyes, trying to locate threats" (507). Turning her attention back to the convivial life of the community, she realizes that she has overlooked various signs of its surface imperfections and incompletion ("A lane . . . ended abruptly, as if someone had run out of earth," an empty pool that "looked more like an open wound than a swimming pool" and so on [507]). Yet strikingly, it is the very "unfinishedness" of Neuland that apparently leads her to conclude "that it was somehow comfortable in its own skin" (507). While on the surface Inbar's casual notion may seem an inconsequential detail, it is difficult to resist speculating that its deeper significance lies in Nevo's awareness that any true utopian project (even one striving to reconcile the conflicting expectations of home, spiritual needs, and the urgent practical needs of a heterogeneous community) must necessarily remain in a state of incompletion.

When Sarah, a fervent young girl dressed in the garb of a cowgirl, arrives to give them a tour of the farm (construed as a "community

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 90

therapeutic space," she explains [510]), the novel's entwined themes of trauma and liberation from corrosive norms moves to the fore: "The basic principle of . . . your father's vision—also because of his own personal experience—is that life in the source country, in Israel, is an ongoing trauma. And everyone who comes from there is wounded to some degree or another" (510). That curious choice of words, "source country," turns out to be the commune's favored euphemism for the state of Israel; the latter is never directly named by Neuland's members. In Menny's utopian thought, this seems intended to overcome the outworn hierarchal Israel-Diaspora equation, intrinsic to his secularized messianic aspiration, to repudiate the territorial fetishism that has only led to crippling cycles of violence in both the past and present.[15]

Inbar is drawn deeper into the mystique of the community when Sarah mysteriously alludes to "special ceremonies" that support the healing of former Israelis, Palestinians, and other members (called the "wounded" in the community's insular parlance, they include a pregnant woman whose husband was killed by a terrorist attack in "the source country").[16] Though it remains unspoken, Sarah's own grievous loss is clearly a factor in her attraction to anything that promises to facilitate such healing. These encounters (as well as their kibbutz-like weekly general meetings) are held in a large tent

[15]There are nevertheless certain features of the "source country" that Menny cannot resist retaining, including paddleball, or matkot as it is known (undoubtedly Israel's most popular game of leisure) because someone speculates, the game "promotes cooperation and non-violence" (509). And music because as Menny himself remarks, it remains Israel's "greatest cultural achievement. . . . All the inner pressures that poison the society there have made its music brilliant" (528).

[16]This aspiration seems reflected in an actual ceremony initiated in recent years. Held on Israel's official Memorial Day (*Yom Hazikaron*) this "alternative" Israeli-Palestinian Memorial Ceremony was inaugurated in 2004 by the organization Combatants for Peace (well before the publication of *Neuland*) and aspires to transform each people's "traditional narrative of victimhood into a narrative of togetherness and hope." Since 2017, the Israeli government has sought to cancel the participation of Palestinians, but the Supreme Court has overturned that edict.

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 91

that Menny acquired from a bankrupt circus. Unfortunately, Sarah refuses to disclose more, and it soon becomes apparent that most of what goes on at Neuland is withheld from casual visitors. However, Inbar gleans enough to understand that Menny intended Neuland first and foremost as a kind of "purifying experience" for Israelis or others fleeing locales of traumatic experience.

Refusing to let down his guarded cynicism, Dori's unrelenting sarcasm eventually gets under Sarah's skin until she responds with a dignified defense of the experimental spirit undergirding the community's secretive practices:

> This is a real kibbutz you have here, Dori said, his voice clearly mocking. General meetings of the members. Celebrating the birth of the first child. Now I bet you'll tell me that on Shavuot you have a first-fruits ceremony. You're not the first person to say that, Sarah said, but the kibbutzim belong to the past. And we look to the future. . . . Did you see those brightly coloured benches when you came in? People have "personal vision" meetings there. Neuland is a cooperative society, like the one described in Altneuland but we take it a step further and believe that true cooperation can only work if it allows every person to realize their personal aspirations. . . . [W]e try, in hothouse conditions, to implement some of the principles Herzl set forth, and the source country diverged from but there's no way we can ignore the fact that more than a century has gone by since Herzl's book . . . and we have to make adjustments. (511)

Though Sarah refuses to disclose further details about the nature of Neuland's "adjustments" (except to admit that much remains in flux, apparently dependent on Menny's "envisioning" process), just before depositing the pair at their guest lodgings, she offers them these cautionary and sobering words: "Neuland came into being to disturb people and arouse their doubts" (513).

When Dori remains too tensely sullen about finally confronting his father to be drawn deeper into conversation, Inbar pores over the visitor's guide to Neuland. Though the document proffers the

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 92

kind of boilerplate aspirational language (non-violence, progressive equality, enlightenment and study among others) common to progressive movements, Inbar is impressed that those familiar platitudes are softened by a measure of rhetorical humility rendered in its final sentences: "Neuland . . . exists in the real world, and as such it is filled with contradictions, defects and problems. In many areas, we are still searching for the golden mean and we would be happy to hear any illuminating comments you might have at the end of your visit" (516). If much of this language seems derivative (insofar as the manifestos of modern utopian communities are generally inclined to attractive but unsustainable ideals), Menny's intimately agonistic relation to Israel and his tormented past are immediately apparent to Inbar.

She is further struck by Menny's apparent fixation on the core values and principles of Benjamin Ze'ev Herzl himself (that impression is intensified when she sees that Menny is so enamored that he styles his beard to match Herzl's iconic prophetic image). Given that Herzl's core ideals have been woefully forsaken by the State of Israel, Menny has construed Neuland as a bold corrective:

> **An important point!** Neuland was not established to be a substitute for Altneuland, which is the State of Israel. Our goal at the moment, is to challenge, to place a mirror, to bring people closer together, to be a miniature "shadow state", if you will, to remind the State of Israel what it was supposed to be. And what it can be. (515; emphasis in original)[17]

[17]Apropos of which, it seems apt that even the community's version of Israel's anthem *Hatikvah* is a departure. While sung in the familiar melody, "instead of 'looking towards Zion' they sang 'looking towards the universe'; and instead of 'to be a free people in our land, the land of Zion and Jerusalem' they sang 'to be a free people living as we choose, in respect and serenity'" (526). The notion of Neuland as a "shadow country" that might one day feed and help redeem the troubled "source country" is underscored later when Sarah speaks of her dream of returning to Jerusalem with a few others to create a model community modeled on the egalitarian and inclusive principles of the Argentine commune (549, 560).

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 93

In his wistful rebuke to Israel (the community's customary euphemistic references to the "source country" forsaken here), Menny comes across as a betrayed child, struggling against yet ultimately unable to define himself apart from the paternal state. By now, that dysfunctional relationship seems peculiarly echoed in Dori's own sense of estrangement from Menny, his flesh-and-blood father.

Perhaps Nevo intends for readers to surmise that there really is something to Neuland's purported "therapeutic space," because when at last Dori is reunited with his father, he is both startled and gratified by the unprecedented intensity of Menny's obvious affection: "His father hugged him. He didn't pat his shoulders. He didn't pat his back. He really and truly hugged him. Dori had yearned for such a hug for so many years" (520). Menny's dramatic transformation is subsequently confirmed through Inbar's eyes: "she tried to see the broken, confused man who wrote the diary. And couldn't" (525). Moreover, Inbar senses herself becoming "infected" with the "reverence" that Neuland's members apparently feel toward their founder (528). Unfortunately, for Dori that initial solace fades all too quickly. It is surely a sign of the far-reaching grip of the "source country" that during the night he is beset by a nightmare in which he is sent to the Suez front during the Yom Kippur War where General Gorodish (an historical figure often blamed for Israel's heavy losses on the southern front) appears as a ghoulish figure who persecutes Dori as "a traitor" (533).[18]

In Dori's restless night of warring impulses, Eros eventually conquers Thanatos as he is overtaken by lustful dreams of Inbar, stirred up by her earlier invitation to join him in her hut, which he reluctantly declined. Though in the morning he regrets rejecting her attempted seduction, he is too preoccupied by the next encounter with his father to give the fleeting moment further thought. At last, Dori is able to vent his frustration about his father's refusal to communicate

[18]Intriguingly, a similar episode occurs in Yehoshua's classic novel *The Lover* in which a hapless character on the catastrophically embattled Suez Front during the 1973 War feels persecuted by his commanding officer for the "sin" of living in Galut.

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 94

by phone to any of his children or grandchildren while an unyielding Menny insists that the commune proscribes any use of telephones for their adverse impact on true intimacy and understanding—until an exasperated Dori accuses his father of fostering a cultish army "like in *Apocalypse Now*" (537). Patiently, Menny counters that he intends precisely the opposite, revealing both the community's raison d'être and its origins in his own trauma: "This place is meant, among other things, to allow former soldiers who . . . have been emotionally damaged . . . to work out their trauma in an appropriate therapeutic space, so that what happened to me won't happen to them, and all the pain won't explode out of them years later" (537). From his balcony (an element that Nevo surely intends to evoke the famous photo of Herzl leaning out from the balcony of his luxury hotel in 1901, as he supposedly contemplates the future Jewish state) overlooking the bustling community of farmers and builders spread out on the plain below, Menny further explains how after fleeing Israel he had been a shiftless trekker not unlike the youth who ramble into the commune as if by sheer accident, until his hallucinogenic experiences led to the epiphany that has instilled his life with newfound vigor and purpose.

Not unlike the army veteran who hosted him in the jungle, he has the gift of recognizing the telltale signs of younger countrymen who bear the stigma of a traumatized society:

> When you're an older traveler, you have almost no one to be friends with, so . . . I observed. Either nature or young people. At first, I watched youngsters from all over the world, and slowly, I began focusing on Israelis. There was something mesmerizing about them. So much energy. And so little joy. I saw each one's wound. I didn't imagine it, I saw it. The precise spot where the shrapnel had entered. (539–40)

Though Menny's allusion to wounds and shrapnel are metaphoric, their corrosive capacity seems no less damaging; the young people he observes appear "so defeated" (540). Grieving for their lost human potential, Menny seizes on the transformative nature of travel and

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 95

distance, realizing those magical effects of fresh perceptions and newfound self-understandings "melt away" once the youth return to the claustrophobic, conformist pressure-cooker of the Israeli quotidian. If only they too might experience "something significant" before returning "to the war of survival" that might release the tremendous creative and spiritual energy "bottled up" within each of them (540). "That's what gave me the idea . . . they needed a hothouse where they could actually effect the changes they'd promised themselves they'd make, both on the personal and the social level, before they boarded the plane home" (540). Burdened by Dori's own impending departure, the two make a sincere attempt to heal the rift between them.

Their rapprochement is complicated by the fact that Dori's heightened emotions leave him with little patience for meeting the commune on its own terms. Hence, the success of Menny's endeavor is measured solely through Inbar's eyes as she adventurously explores the community at firsthand. Given her low ebb ever since her brother's disturbing death, the striking enthusiasm of Neuland's nascent community proves irresistible, their life-affirming conviviality expressed even in simple little things like a gourd of *mate* passed among them. She is drawn to the young people's freewheeling exchanges of ideas, their spirited and yet decidedly uncultish willingness to argue about the clauses in their own community charter (especially the sticky issue of what if any role Judaism should play in the commune's life in its struggle to preserve a sense of connection to the 'source country' while creating a singular identity and home of their own). Above all, she is won over by their ability to laugh at themselves.[19]

[19]Inbar is especially charmed that the members have a truly deliberative, argumentative general assembly dubbing it "the Sanhedrin" (546) which often overrules "Mr Neuland" as Menny is known. Menny himself compares their venture to "the Sanhedrin of Yavne, which Ben Zakkai establishes when he fled . . . besieged Jerusalem. A different Judaism, more spiritual, and free of the heavy burden of the siege, was born there after the Temple was destroyed" (552). In Neuland's dedicated educational outreach to the surrounding villages, Nevo may be indebted to the vision of the *irbutz* or modern urban kibbutz movement whose progressive and socially transformative work in development towns and other peripheral

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 96

Perhaps inevitably, she cannot resist weighing their ebullient spirit of self- and collective creation against the idealistic malaise engulfing Israel:

> She hadn't taken part in a discussion about principles for years —not since her youth movement days. . . . Inbar zoned out of the words flying around her I've never tried to define what I believe in. And I'm not the only one. Everyone around me—they're all sceptics, all suffering from a quiet, dark despair. They all abstain in advance, all bow their heads in advance, curl up into their castles, stay locked into "that's just the way it is," convinced there's no way out. (544)

In an era of rapidly fading dissent and rightward conformity, it is hard to imagine that many Israeli readers have not found themselves nodding in rueful recognition at this juncture. And if here Nevo indulges in a bit of rather forced symmetry, it is nonetheless appealing that Inbar witnesses the arrival of three visitors from Lebanon, the site of the very military conflict anticipated in the novel's early pages. Apropos of which, Sarah informs Inbar, "Mr. Neuland . . . said [this] would be one of our greatest tests. The way we treat people who are not us, he said, that was one of the source country's greatest failures. And it's because were extraterritorial that we can do it better" (548).[20] Inbar is clearly stirred by that idealism

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urban areas is markedly different from the more insular model of the traditional kibbutz. Or as Sarah enthuses to Inbar: "That's what grabs me most about Neuland. Beause it really means that we stop being the persecuted Jews of the Holocaust and start being 'a light unto the nations', as Herzl envisioned. Do you know the blessing we say on Friday nights? 'You have chosen us together with all the nations'" (547; italics in original).

[20]Or as Menny responds to his son's demand to know why Menny couldn't create his ideal in Israel: "It's impossible, Dori. Any organization you set up in the source country will encroach on someone else's territory, and that's why it would immediately be labelled as being 'against' something, and it would have enemies" (551–52).

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 97

while in his father's company, Dori remains resistant, disgruntled by what he considers his father's guru-like condescension.

Ironically, father and son actually share quite similar views on the spiritual sickness that has overtaken Israeli society. Sensing their unspoken bond, Menny desperately attempts to push past his son's resistance:

> Neuland will be a reminder. . . . A reminder of the Athens that the State of Israel was supposed to be if it hadn't turned into Sparta.[21] . . . After all, you're the one who refuses to go with your students on the March of the Living in Poland. . . . You're the one who claims that those marches instill only fear and suspicion. So what we're trying to do here is just the opposite, to invite young people on a journey of enlightenment and openness. (551, 552)

Just when the foundation for a renewed understanding between them seems palpable to the reader, Dori recoils, unable to overcome misgivings over what seems to him his father's dangerously hubristic delusions. Thus, ultimately the deep grief each separately feels for the death of Dori's mother brings them only to an uneasy, perhaps untenable truce.

In sharp contrast to her companion's acute unease, Inbar has witnessed enough of the community to persuade her that they should extend their sojourn. She has a burning desire to experience Neuland's mysterious therapeutic ceremonies, to work alongside its members in the local villages. Unfortunately, news of war's sudden outbreak in the "source country" (the conflict with Hezbollah alluded to in the early pages) brings their idyll to a wrenching end, and they depart in haste on the second day. And even as Menny and Dori conscientiously struggle to preserve something of their tentative reconciliation, tremors from that distant violence drive them further apart, with

[21]Cf. Stuart Schoffman, a translator of David Grossman, Meir Shalev, and A,B. Yehoshua among others. In 2012 Schoffman wrote, "I continue to yearn for a Jewish Athens and not a Jewish Sparta, and this is the daily struggle. So for the Love of Zion, call me whatever you will, it won't change what I am. Liberals like me, walking and talking like Zionists, are Zionists. That's a truth the 'authorities' cannot duck."

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 98

Dori essentially accusing his father of betrayal for not returning to Israel even when the lives of his daughter and grandchildren are endangered by Hezbollah rockets. So just as the two men had finally become accustomed to hugging one another, all that passes between them at the end is a "brief, almost hostile handshake" (567).

Far more ambivalent about their hasty departure, Inbar has seen enough to leave her anguishing over whether Mr. Neuland might indeed possess some form of mysterious healing insight, struck again about "how he could have been so friendly to her . . . when he knew that Dori had a wife and a child . . . he acts as if he'd envisioned me, as if I were Neuland" (566). But in the end, she too feels morally obliged to return to Israel. At the El Al counter in the Buenos Aires airport, she and Dori survey the crowd of tense Israelis awaiting the flight to their war-torn country. Signs of anguish are clearly written all over their faces, and if ostensibly divided over Neuland itself, the companions share a new perception of their fellow citizens: "Wounded, she said to Dori. Just like your father said. Wounded, he had to agree" (567).

Given that Nevo's sprawling quest story culminates with its beleaguered characters stumbling across glimmers of light in the wilderness, the resolution of *Neuland* (in the end not the scarcest hint of dystopia or an iota of collective dysfunction mars even skeptical Dori's impressions of his father's achievement) seems to strain toward a kind of redemptive antithesis of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Yet it is surely a sign of this author's perspicacity that didacticism does not overtake *Neuland* nor steer it into any form of tidy resolution (whether of the foibles of individuals or society) so that in the end we are pointedly treated at best to spare, if tantalizing, impressions of just how the society of "Neuland" actually works, leaving the question of whether its ideals will ultimately take hold gapingly open, perhaps precisely because it is in that very withholding that preserves its utopian potentiality (or alternatively its utter impossibility) lingering unresolved in readers' imaginations.[22]

[22]In that respect, Nevo joins a pantheon of writers who resist the temptations of, in Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi's memorable phrasing, "a final epic closure that threatens the storytelling enterprise itself" (14).

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 99

Still, by way of a coda and at least a partial answer, one might do worse than contemplate the basic values that many might agree inform humanity's basic yearning for something worthy of being called home, spiritual and otherwise. A haven that might encourage us all to heed "the better angels of our nature." In the words of Nevo's fellow writer David Grossman, who vigorously urges us all to consider the contours of what properly constitutes a state worthy of our love and respect, one that at the very least aspires to recognize the vulnerable humanity and shared homeland longings of its citizens:

> Home.
>
> Where we will live a peace and safe life; a clear life; a life that will not be enslaved—by fanatics of all kinds—for the purposes of some total, messianic, and nationalist vision. Home, whose inhabitants will not be the material that ignites a principle greater than them, and supposedly beyond their comprehension. That life in it would be measured in its humanity. That suddenly a nation will wake up in the morning, and see that it is human. And that that human will feel that he is living in an uncorrupted, connected, truly egalitarian, non-aggressive and non-covetous place. In a state that runs simply on the concern for the person living within it, for every person living within it, out of compassion, and out of tolerance.[23]

[23]Grossman's reflections were delivered in the context of his 2018 speech to bereaved Israelis and Palestinians at an event dubbed an "alternative" Memorial Day. On that occasion, Grossman (who lost a son in the 2006 Lebanon War with Hezbollah) not only spoke of the possibility that shared grief might connect Israelis and Palestinians but stressed that each people's happiness was absolutely contingent on a genuine sense of belonging to a "homeland" ("Israel").

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 100

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vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 102

Elie Wiesel
1928–2016

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 103

Interview with Elie Wiesel, February 23, 2006

Alan L. Berger
Florida Atlantic University

ALB: Our conversation is being held against the backdrop of a world in turmoil, an increase in state-sponsored anti-Semitism, an existential threat made to Israel, terrorism in the name of God, genocide in Darfur, among other places.[1] What are your thoughts at this moment in history?

EW: I am feeling rather melancholy because I have, together with so many millions and millions of people, hoped that the twenty-first century would be a better and surely not a worse one. There was so much hope and so much fervor and so much enthusiasm. It was

[1]Holocaust survivor and Nobel Peace laureate Elie Wiesel is the subject of Alan L. Berger's *Elie Wiesel: Teacher, Mentor, and Friend*. Victoria Aarons reviews Berger's collection of essays in this issue, and in honor both of Wiesel's life and work and of the excellent new collection that documents Wiesel's generosity, care, and influence, we are reprinting Wiesel's 2006 interview with Berger, which appeared in *Literature and Belief* the following year. We hope—and expect—that the resulting intertextual dialogue between Wiesel, Berger, Aarons, and the contributors to *Elie Wiesel: Teacher, Mentor, and Friend* will make for illuminating—and inspiring—reading.

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 104

burning in us and you felt it throughout the planet. Here we are in the sixth year of the century and hatred is ravaging the human heart, there are more and more conflicts, fanaticism is reigning over hundreds of millions of people, and the open threats to each other and, especially, to Israel, the oldest scapegoat. Anyone who needs a target turns against us and, as you mentioned, for the very first time a head of state came out and said that he wants Israel to be wiped off the surface of the earth. The madness of his statement! Does he think of what it would do to the Jewish people and what it would do regarding humanity as such? So, I am skeptical of my own work. I feel, when I say I, I mean the witness in me, was convinced that the world would be a better world because of those of us who bear witness. We try to bear witness. Surely the last year many of us have tried to warn people, the world, to say, "look: whatever happened to the Jewish people is only the beginning." And the witness's testimony was not received. Otherwise, the world would be a safer world.

ALB: Our discussion also coincides with the appearance of the fiftieth-anniversary edition of *Night* and the publication of your recent novel *The Time of the Uprooted* (2005). Can you comment on the connection that you see?

EW: What I say in my preface is true: had it not been for *Night*, I would not have written anything else. If there had been no war, I would have stayed in my *shtetl*, my small village, and become a local *Rosh Yeshivah*. That was my goal. And here I am. Together with you, we teach and we write and try to communicate. Certain experiences cannot be communicated, but still we try. As you know—you know my work better than many others, Alan—it is a mosaic. One brings the other, one is linked to the other. And if you remove one from this body of work, the whole edifice can collapse. But the fundament, the foundation, is *Night*. In *The Uprooted*, I felt a whole century was uprooted, as was history itself. I felt the divinity of God was uprooted, which is a mystical concept. We call it the *galut* of the *Shekhinah*: the exile of the *Shekhinah*. Therefore, I wrote it like that.

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 105

But then I just finished another novel, because it takes me four or five years to write a novel.

ALB: And what is it called?

EW: In French it is called *Un désir fou de danser* (2006), *A Mad Desire to Dance*. It is about madness. I always have a madman in every one of my books. In my other books he is usually a secondary character. In this one he is the principle protagonist. It came out in France in May. I have always been obsessed with the notion that history *can* go mad. Just as history could be uprooted and everything else with it. The Time of the Uprooted is the twentieth century.

ALB: Indeed it is.

EW: And as for *Night* the difference is that my wife re-translated it. It is amazing what one woman could have done. I mean Oprah. The book appeared in 1955, '56 in Yiddish, nearly fifty years ago in Argentina. In two or three weeks, the new version sold more than a million copies and all of a sudden was on the bestseller list. Oprah has extraordinary power, extraordinary moral power.

ALB: You once wrote in *One Generation After* (1970) that one of the Just Men, a *Lamed Vav Zaddik*, comes to Sodom to save its inhabitants, and despite his preaching nothing changed and a child, moved by compassion, asks the preacher why he continued since his words have no visible effect. And the Just Man replied, "In the beginning, I thought I could change man. Today, I know I cannot. If I shout today, if I still scream, it is," he attests, "to prevent man from ultimately changing me" (72).

EW: I am the same person who wrote that story then, and I would write it again now the same way. I would not change a word. The tale is still valid. I remain the same. I consider myself the same Hasid of my town, a *Yeshiva Bucher*. I did not change much. If the experience *then* did not change me, does anybody think that a Nobel Prize can change me?

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 106

ALB: But the world has yet to learn completely.

EW: Of course. My worry is that *they* try everything. They try sometimes to change you by seduction. In one of my novels, *The Oath* (1973), a preacher comes and speaks. Instead of screaming and shouting at him they applaud him. It is the worst compliment they can give him.

ALB: I want to pursue this issue. What is the role of the witness in these turbulent and terror-filled times? I am thinking of Moshe the Beadle: is he the paradigm of the plight of the witness destined to be unheard?

EW: To me he was the first and therefore he was the most tragic of all. He tried to tell the tale. He tried to tell the tale and I remember it because he told it to me. Nobody wanted to listen, and I myself did not believe him. As I say in my memoir, people did not believe him. And I love stories. And I felt sorry for him. I did listen. But I did not believe. And then I saw him, he was part of the first transport. In retrospect, I remember his face, he started shaking his head as if to say, "I warned you. I warned you."

ALB: And you wrote about that in *Night*.

EW: In retrospect, if someone else had warned us . . . had Churchill, Stalin, or Roosevelt sent a message on the radio, at that time we listened to the B.B.C., "Jews of Hungary, do not go. Do not board the trains," many of us would have gone into hiding. There were people who were Christians. . . . Our maid pleaded with us. She implored us with tears in her eyes to accompany her to the mountains where she had a hut but again we did not know. Nobody warned us. But later on I remember Moshe the Beadle. So he, of course, is to me the first witness. But since then, I believe that his tragedy was that he was not believed. When a witness comes and speaks and nobody listens . . . woe to him.

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 107

ALB: You wrote about *Night* that it was the end of everything and the beginning of everything, and I want to ask about then and now. What has changed and what remains the same? One thing that is changed is the recognition of the Holocaust by the culture at large. Education, of course, has improved. So it seems that at least part of the witness's testimony is being heard.

EW: It is. And it is not. Take Darfur today. Our protests worked. It did not help the people there but at least there is a lot about their suffering in the media. I was one of the first to sound the alarm on Darfur. Did it help much? I am not sure, but Colin Powell and Kofi Annan went there. United Nations observers are there. More military will come. In Rwanda, nobody cared. Nobody. 600,000 or 800,000 people could have been saved and were not.

ALB: Why do you think that is?

EW: Maybe because it was the end of the century. People were tired or became numb.

ALB: Which is a danger.

EW: Which is a danger. When it comes to our own subject that you and I are so involved in, reminding the people of what happened in the past, the danger is numbness.

ALB: Can this pitfall be avoided?

EW: That is why I stopped. I could not teach this subject. I admire you for doing it. I cannot. I taught it for two years and it was difficult. Very difficult. Therefore, I was spared the danger of numbness. But I can imagine the high school teacher who teaches this course every single day. That teacher must at one point become numb. One cannot repeat the same poem and cry, one simply cannot. Maybe some do, I do not know how. Therefore there *is* a danger there. And if I protested the T.V. docudrama "Holocaust," it is for

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 108

that reason: because it appeals to what is cheap in people. I would like our destiny to appeal to what is purest and most noble, generous, and compassionate in a human being, not what is kitsch.

ALB: Some things remained the same since *Night*: anti-Semitism, prejudice, contempt for the other. Concerning anti-Semitism, you once observed that at Auschwitz its victims died, but the disease remained. Do you see an end to this bi-millennial pathology which is the crutch on which tyrants perpetually lean?

EW: Alan, I said in the same context, "if Auschwitz didn't cure the world of anti-Semitism, what will?" But there will always be anti-Semites. At the least we should protest against those anti-Semites and surely against the system that condones anti-Semitism. In France there was a young Jew, Ilan Halimi, who was kidnapped. He was caught by a band of twenty so-called "Barbarians." They were convinced that because he was a Jew they would get money; stereotypically all Jews are rich. They tortured him and they killed him. In the beginning the police simply said it was a matter of ransom. Then they realized that it was an anti-Semitic act. In France they have laws against anti-Semitism. So, things are changing in some places.

ALB: I think that the French president went to his funeral. Is that true?

EW: It is possible. I would not be surprised.

ALB: It is a terrible scandal and a personal tragedy.

EW: Every murder is a tragedy. Last year French Jews were worried. The wave of anti-Semitism hit France. Jews were afraid to wear a kipa on the street.

ALB: Do you foresee in the near future a massive aliyah of French Jews?

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 109

EW: This I do not know. But all over Europe, wherever I would go, people would come to me asking something that should worry me even more. They did not say, should we leave? They asked, *when* should we leave? That is more traumatic.

ALB: That is very frightening.

EW: But then, the French government, I must say, did everything it could to take measures, extraordinary measures, against anti-Semitism and the anti-Semites. That quieted down the situation.
ALB: So the measures had some effect?

EW: Yes, they had an effect.

ALB: You write in the introduction to the new edition of *Night* that the *Shoah* was a war against Jewish memory. Yet again we are hearing the ominous rantings of deniers. I know it is a complex question, but what is it about the Jewish historical presence that our enemies wish to extirpate?

EW: They cannot leave the Jews alone. These people cannot let the Jews live in peace. I say the world is a world for all of us. God created the world; He was not the God of the Jews. God in *Bereyshit* is God of all people, not only of the children of Israel.

ALB: That message is frequently ignored.

EW: But they also say we cannot live *with* you. This means you do not deserve to live and therefore we do whatever we can to deprive you of the taste for living, of the passion for living and of life itself. Sometimes I am asked at international conferences, why are you Jews hated so much? And I say, why do you ask *me*? Why should I make the hater's task easier? Ask the hater.

ALB: I want to return briefly to the Oprah show. Your decision to appear, like many things associated with the *Shoah*, brought some

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 110

controversy in its wake. I assume that you view it as a teaching moment, an occasion to educate a new generation.

EW: I did not ask to appear. I did not realize that the controversy about James Frey had implicated, though lightly, *Night*. Some articles said that she wanted to atone for defending Frey.

ALB: I read that.

EW: That was the controversy. But was there a controversy about my appearing on it? I did not see it.
ALB: Let me suggest one.

EW: Please.

ALB: There are many junior scholars hoping to gain a reputation by attacking the giants. They are looking for discrepancies in the two translations.

EW: I am the one who said it in my memoir, *All Rivers Run to the Sea* (1995).

ALB: You brought it out. I know.

EW: I put it in the memoir myself, of course. That is why I did not wait for them to say so.

ALB: Your readers understand this.

EW: I quoted and wrote full passages which came out in 1994.

ALB: The careful reader is aware of this fact.

EW: It came out in 1994 in France and here in '95. But I am the one who revealed it. We must be honest about these kinds of things.

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 111

ALB: Precisely.

EW: You said that there was controversy about my appearance on "Oprah," but I have not heard anything.

ALB: For example, some might emphasize a disparity which appears on a certain page in the two editions. But, more importantly, are you concerned that the necessary dialectic between speech and silence and the insufficiency of language itself which you emphasize in the introduction to *Night* are nuances which will be lost in popular culture?

EW: It is quite possible, but who knows? Look, I have to be I. Come back to the story of the Just Man. I cannot let others govern my life. Or my writing, or my attitude toward writing, or what I think. I am not the sole possessor of truth. I write and write and yet I am drawn to silence. That is what I do, I cut and cut.

ALB: And it is very effective. Have you taken Oprah to Auschwitz yet?

EW:. Yes.

ALB: What was that experience like?

EW: She is a great lady. Some ten or twelve years ago she already had a program on *Night* and interviewed me.

ALB: I read about that. It is a remarkable story.

EW: It was Oprah's idea to go with me to Auschwitz. She actually came to Auschwitz on her birthday. She gave up her birthday in Chicago and we went there. She has tremendous sensitivity. I will give you an example. I came from a conference. She was there already. And she told her people that she does not want to see me before. The first meeting must be in Auschwitz. She did not want to

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 112

have small talk. That is the truth. And the way she behaved there, in that place, was admirable.

ALB: You may not feel comfortable commenting on this, but do you think she had done much reading in preparation?

EW: She had to. When she interviewed me the first time, she knew *Night* by heart. And again now, she has read a lot, she knows a lot, she wants to learn more. I have great admiration for her.

ALB: I want to switch to *The Time of the Uprooted*, which I find a richly complex novel that raises many philosophical and religious issues. It also appears to be a departure from your earlier writings in that the female characters are more fully drawn and at least two of them, Ilonka and Dr. Lilly Rosenkrantz, play salvific roles. Would you comment on this?

EW: I have been criticized in the past that all of my main heroes are men. In every novel of mine the feminine presence is there, but this time more than before. Life is mixture. Art seeks to discern what makes the two one. And literature is a refined word for the metamorphosis of that artistic endeavor. The women here of course are actually great. Even Gamaliel's unhappy wife. His wife wishes to help him. What did she want? To make him happy. And because he *could not* be happy, she could not understand him.

ALB: And she was unable to succeed.

EW: So it was her failure *and* his failure; it was a double failure. The book is a despairing book. But the story is not an appeal of despair. It is a desperate appeal for hope. Everyone wants hope. But it is also uprooted. The writer who writes for other people, under their names. And finally, when he writes his own book, he does not finish it.

ALB: Why not?

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 113

EW: Because the Messiah has not come. So how does he finish it? By personal redemption. Everyone has a tragedy there and the only way for this tragic character to find any redemption is through others. So at the end, of course, it is more hopeful. It remains a question mark: who was that woman?

ALB: We do not know her identity.

EW: We do not know. Except I hint: is that the two Shabbat candles? Maybe it is another woman, but who knows, maybe not.

ALB: It could refer to the universality of the Jewish experience.

EW: Of the Jewish experience, exactly.

ALB: Gamaliel's identity is clearly an issue. Forced to change his name because of the *Shoah*, he becomes Péter, he has to learn Christian rituals, he must hide his whereabouts and remain silent. He clearly emblemizes the plight of the refugee and all those who, as you say, have been uprooted in that terrible century. Do you think he represents the state of post-Auschwitz humanity?

EW: Absolutely. I believe that whatever happened to humanity in general happened to Jews first. It is not a statement of superiority. It is simply the universality of our experience. Never before has an entire people been not only uprooted but out-rooted the way we were during the Second World War. Since then it happened to others. It is not the same event though. I never compare. But these things happen to others. Supposedly uprooted is a condition that is a twentieth-century product. Never before have so many people been uprooted, become refugees, immigrants, and illegals. No one here in America is illegal, they are uprooted. So therefore Gamaliel represents all of them, and therefore he and his three friends, what did they do? They became a self-appointed United Nations to try to help those immigrants with papers or with social help or even to find a husband for the poor woman who needs a husband for her daughter.

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 114

ALB: They were the shining example of humanity.

EW: Absolutely they were, yes.

ALB: For me, this novel raises a disturbing question about the future of Holocaust memory. Gamaliel has two estranged daughters. But unlike *The Forgotten* (1992) in which you portray a loving relationship between Elhanan and Malkiel, both of whom are committed to embrace memory, although on different levels, *The Time of the Uprooted* suggests that Gamaliel's memory or a portion at least would be committed to paper in *The Book of Secrets*, but what about the second generation?

EW: We do not know. We do not know. They may come back. But for the moment we are seeing among the young people an attraction to India mainly. To Nepal. To the Orient in general. To leave western culture behind.

ALB: Among Israelis as well.

EW: It is almost a rule in Israel that soldiers at the end of their military service go to India or Tibet. I try to understand why. Why Tibet? And the only answer I could find is that the Orient had nothing to do with the Holocaust. All the other countries had somehow a relationship to it, except the Orient. Therefore, they want to go away. The Dalai Lama, my friend, is a great hero to them. It is because Tibetan monks have nothing to do with the Holocaust.

ALB: But yet you write in your autobiography that you went to India.

EW: But I left it. I studied the *Vedas*. *The Upanishads*. Extraordinary texts. But they weren't for me.

ALB: Why weren't they for you?

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 115

EW: I am a Jew. It is through Jewishness that I find universality, not through denying it.

ALB: Gamaliel loves stories and I am reminded of your father's unfinished story in *Night*, but Gamaliel's literary efforts are on two levels. He is a ghostwriter for a "famous novelist." But his own authentic meditations are contained in *The Book of Secrets*. What are the secrets? Is he also the ghost of either himself or those murdered in the *Shoah*?

EW: He is not that ambitious. Not that pretentious. But he seemed to believe he must find the words. That is what I felt all my life. The need to find the words. I am not sure I found them but I try. That is why for others it is easy to write, or in another's name, whatever they want, but for oneself, in one's name it is different. But to come back to what you say about the two daughters, it is the most tragic chapter in the novel. The two daughters denied their father. And therefore, Gamaliel may have another child with Rosenkrantz.

ALB: She is also a healer.

EW: I hint that hope is not to be excluded.

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ALB: I wonder if we could switch for a moment to the issue of Jewish-Christian relations. In a *Beggar in Jerusalem* (1970), you have Shlomo reporting on an imagined meeting with Yeoshua: "you think you are suffering for my sake and for my brothers, yet we are the ones who have been made to suffer for you because of you" (56). After hearing what the future held in store for the Jewish people, Jesus attests that he wants his heritage to be a gift of compassion and hope, not punishment in blood, but it was already too late. How do you see contemporary interfaith dialogue?

EW: I am much more optimistic now than before. It has to do with Pope John XXIII. He was the great man in Christianity. He

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 116

was the first to open the church, to admit its failings, and to correct the liturgy omitting all the insulting sentences. And then he was followed by John Paul II.

ALB: Pope Paul VI and then John Paul the II.

EW: Paul VI was not our friend.

ALB: No indeed. John XXIII intervened, as you know, to have the word *deicide* removed from *Nostra Aetate* (1965).

EW: But the next pope, John Paul II, was good. Though not in the beginning. I had big problems with him in the beginning. Why? Because the first thing he did was go to Auschwitz, which I liked. He managed to be there and deliver many homilies, but he did not once mention the word Jew there. Never. He went only to see the graves of Edith Stein, a Jewish woman who became a Carmelite, and Maximilian Kolbe, an anti-Semitic Polish priest who did a heroic thing when he chose to die in place of a cellmate. But I must say that afterwards John Paul II improved a lot. He changed. He was the first pope to go to a synagogue. He was the first pope to visit Israel, Jerusalem, the Kotel, and Yad Vashem, and he had a musical commemoration of the *Shoah* in the Vatican. But, never have Jewish-Christian relations been as good as they are now.

ALB: Yet the Vatican continues to send mixed signals concerning the Holocaust. The beatification of Edith Stein that you mentioned and the, I think, completely inexplicable beatification of Pius IX.

EW: There are so many groups there and so many currents, trends, influences, policies, bureaucracies, and theologies; it is not one monolithic institution.

ALB: Jules Isaac when he went to see John XXIII, as you know, requested that "a voice from the summit" speak.

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 117

EW: But John XXIII did. Jules Isaac knew him from before, that is why he sought him. They spent three days and three nights together. "May I leave you with hope," he asked. And the Pope said, "You deserve more than that."

ALB: Anecdotally, there is a story about John XXIII being asked how many people work in the Vatican, and his response was, "about half."

EW: And the question should be, which half? Now the new Pope, let us wait and see. For the moment I think he is following in the footsteps of John XXIII.

ALB: Several of your works refer to the *Hasidei Umot haOlam* (righteous gentiles), beginning with *Night* and the police inspector who perhaps tried to warn your father, *The Gates of the Forest* (1966) certainly, *The Trial of God* (1979), and your autobiography. Two questions: What do you think motivated the moral minority, and why so few?

EW: These are the questions I ask them. When I was chairman of the United States Holocaust Memorial Council, I organized a conference called The Courage to Care.

ALB: I remember attending that conference.

EW: I brought people together. Those who saved and those whom they saved. I would go from one of the rescuers to the other asking, what made you heroic? And they said, Oh come on, we are not heroes. Do not call us heroes. One of them said, when you see a child running in the street from pursuers, do you not open the door? If your neighbor is hungry will you deny him a slice of bread? I remember George Schultz, the Secretary of State, was at the opening ceremony. He was a very close friend. That is when I said in those times, "Woe to us, it was enough to be human to become a hero" ("Against"). There is one story which I heard, a beautiful story. A woman in Berlin was honored as a Righteous Gentile because she saved a family. A simple woman, just like our maid. And the journalists asked, "why

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 118

did you do it, why did you do it?" She pulled herself up and said, "I will tell you why: out of self-respect."

ALB: *Kol Hakavod.*

EW: Therefore, I do not know why they think there was no choice. When you hear about the onlookers, the bystanders, who said, we could not do a thing, I say, nonsense. There *was* a choice. Always.

ALB: To go to the other end of that continuum, what do you think the uproar over the Mel Gibson movie, *The Passion of the Christ*, tells us about Jewish-Christian dialogue?

EW: I call it the Second Crucifixion of Jesus. I did not want to enter the polemic then. It is not for me; it is undignified. I saw the film; I thought it was a bad film. But it *was* anti-Semitic. And why? He showed his hand at the end. All of a sudden you noticed far away the Jewish Temple burning, and whom do you see then? The devil among the Jews. What does it mean? The Temple was burning because we Jews did not recognize Christ. Because we crucified Christ. This is exactly what Christian anti-Semitism has been repeating for centuries and centuries. The film is anti-Semitic—but I did not want to enter the debate.

ALB: Many, many others did, and I think that what it showed was that despite how much distance we have come, we still have a ways to go.

EW: Right.

ALB: Elsewhere, you have commented about the difference between the Crusades and Auschwitz.

EW: I felt for a long time and I still do that Christianity, because of what has been done to the Jews, lost many of its values in Auschwitz. In a way it was a defeat of Christianity, because it happened in the

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 119

heart of Europe which was a Christian continent. Both Catholics and Protestants were baptized. Hitler himself was baptized. But to compare it to the Crusades, no. The Crusades were in a way actually worse because they did whatever they did in the name of Christ. The crusaders carried a crucifix. They went and killed and killed in the name of Christ. In Germany they did *not* kill in the name of Christ. They did it for Germany, for German power, for German glory, for German interests. What they said was for the sake of Germany and not for Jesus. To make things easier for the Catholics? No I do not think so. They have enough to atone for and Christians have enough to reflect on. And by the way, the fact that the Christians were killers, that hurts the good young Germans. They do not sleep at night. The killers were Christians. But only the killers are guilty.

ALB: Do you see a certain irony in the fact that when the Christians were going on the Crusades they viewed the Jews and the Muslims as infidels? Now, the Muslims view the Christians and the Jews as infidels.

EW: For Jews nothing changed. Nothing changed because this hatred of the Jews is so deeply rooted in so many nations' memories. For some reason they need it. Why should the president of Iran need that? His problem is not with Israel, there are no common borders between Iran and Israel. His problem is not with Jerusalem under Jewish control. But he feels he cannot live otherwise except when he preaches hatred toward the Jewish people.

ALB: One wonders about the Jewish community in Iran and what will happen to them.

EW: There are 25,000 Iranian Jews.

ALB: 25,000 hostages.

EW: They are. When the Shah left, so many left and went to Israel and to America. I am worried, but I am a worrier.

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 120

ALB: But you are also a doer.

EW: I try, I try, but I am a worrier.

ALB: How do you interpret the response in much of the Muslim world to the cartoons depicting Mohammed that were published in a Danish newspaper?

EW: Obviously, a cartoon is disrespectful to Mohammed. What was the disrespect? In Islam the image of Mohammed should not be shown. We Jews do not have that attitude. For us only God's image should not be shown. There were so many images of Moses made afterwards. Michelangelo made a sculpture. Did we protest? Did we organize demonstrations in the street against it? But the Muslims have a right to their belief and we should respect each other's beliefs. I believe in such respect. As you know, we are duty bound to respect the others and the Jew in me has respect for Christians who are really believing Christians, who respect others. I have the same respect for Muslims who are Muslims and respect others for what they are. Therefore those who printed the cartoon should acknowledge their disrespect. But from there to organize world-wide demonstrations with violence and with burnings is too much. And the attacking of embassies, beating up people, that is outrageous. It is out of order. Is *that* their religion? Is this what Mohammed taught them? Is *that* what the Koran teaches them? At the same time I am worried about who is organizing this. This is like a wildfire lit by the fanatics. Does it mean that Islam is now seeking to conquer what it lost? With what they are trying to do to Israel, who knows? I do not know. I am worried about the reaction. As distasteful as the cartoon was, the reaction to it was equally out of place. It was uncivilized; it was a protest against civilization, against the other, against humanity, against their own beliefs. I hope that some of them know that. A religion which preaches only violence must become a victim of that violence and I hope it is not so. There are a few journalists there who write articles urging Islam to stop the bloodshed. Good for them. I would give these journalists prizes for they need courage to say that or do that but they are so few, so terribly few.

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 121

ALB: What do you say about the double standard here? Certain Arab newspapers print very offensive images of Jesus and publish the noxious forgery, *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.

EW: What they show on television, my God, what they show on television: Rabbis drinking blood and killing children for Passover to bake matzoh. Where do we live now? If we Jews had used the same method, can you imagine what would have been after the Holocaust? We would have turned the whole world into a flame.

ALB: You mean we would have incinerated the world?

EW: Absolutely. What we *could* have done but we did not. We don't believe in that kind of response. We believe in trying to find an answer. The only answer must be a humanizing one.

ALB: You wrote in *Somewhere A Master* (1982) that the Besht was the first to publicly proclaim that "the way to God leads through your fellow man" (151). This Islamic fury is in fact killing in the name of God.

EW: They do not realize that when they do that, they turn their God into a killer. That is a fanatic, that is what we see in history. The fanatic is making God at least an accomplice when he invokes God's name. He turns his God into a killer.

ALB: How can we Christians and Jews reach out to Islam, when the tradition does not appear to have undergone a period of self-critical theological reflection?

EW: Education, only by education. Do not use violence to stop violence. Whatever the answer, and I must have said it elsewhere, education must be its major component.

ALB: Are there voices on the other side willing to listen?

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 122

EW: Not for the moment. Most of them are afraid, but I am not giving up hope.

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ALB: What is the role of the writer today? You share Rebbe Nahman of Bratzlav's aspiration that your tales should be understood as prayers. You wrote in *Paroles d'étranger* (1982) that "hopefully no one will be able to distinguish between the ones, stories, and the others, prayers. Not even myself. And, myself less than anyone else" (180, Berger's translation).

EW: Yes. But I wrote about prayer a lot in *The Town Beyond the Wall* (1964) which is one of my earliest novels. It is divided not into four chapters but four prayers. I think our capacity for prayer, our need for prayer, our ability to pray, and our hope, there is hope in prayer, means the prayers will be received. As always, since my childhood, we would pray and, therefore, like Rebbe Nahman of Bratzlav, of whom I am a great admirer as you know, who would like his stories to be turned into prayers. I would like *my* prayers to be told, to be turned into stories. The question is, why should God need our prayer? Why should God need our flattery? How come He is not really repulsed by all that? And there is only one answer I have. God does not need our prayers. We need them. We need to be able to pray in sincerity and beauty. And the prayer should not be against somebody but always for somebody. That is a true prayer, when it is for someone else, not for yourself.

ALB: Who is listening to these prayers and will it help?

EW: Has it helped? Has it accomplished anything? I do not know. I am not sure. I write about it in my memoirs. Inside the camp I one day discovered teffilin that somebody brought in, probably paying many portions of bread. Every morning, my father and I would get up early and say the prayers. Today when I say these prayers, I wonder how I could have said that then? It was hypocrisy. It was a lie to

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 123

say *there* that our God is a God of mercy. There is a sentence, *Ahava rabbah Ahavtainu*, with great love You have loved us, what great love You have given us, and You loved us, and Your compassion was not only great but excessive. *There*? Yet we said it.

ALB: And you did not lose faith there, unlike Akiba Drummer whom you write about in *Night*.

EW: But he did not either. He asked for Kaddish. He wanted us to say Kaddish. He did. He did. Yes. We knew. We saw the smoke.

ALB: A final question about the role of literature, what is hope? You observed that readers should consider Sisyphus happy. Do you still believe this?

EW: Actually, it comes from Camus.

ALB: But I have the feeling you endorse that.

EW: Is Sisyphus happy? Yes and no. Which means that he is not happy. I say I would like him happy. But when he is happy I would want him to be unhappy. But how could he be happy? Which means to accept not this ambiguity, but this conflict in us. Saints have no conflicts. They have surpassed, they have vanquished, they have resolved their conflicts. I am not a saint, nor do we believe in saints. A human being is not a saint. He always oscillates. I talked about the oscillation between good and evil. Therefore, he is still oscillating. When he is on top of the mountain, maybe he is one thing and then below he is another thing. But he is not the same anymore, except if he forgets and he is down. Maybe he has done it so often that he forgets that he will go up.

ALB: What role do you see literature playing in a culture that seems obsessed by television, movies, and the Internet. People seem to have stopped reading. Are you concerned?

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 124

EW: I am not an Internet person, so I do not know. I do know literature today should not be what it used to be. In the nineteenth century there was literature to entertain. Then afterwards, it was to offer knowledge. I think in the twenty-first century the moral dimension should be there, which means it should humanize or at least sensitize the reader. That should be the role of the writer today. I say to humanize or at least sensitize the readers to the subject, to the theme, to the implications, to the hopes of the character or the despair in the story, not to the story itself. If a person reads my books and does not become sensitive to pain, other people's pain, then I have failed.

ALB: Well, you certainly have not failed.

EW: I hope not—not always.

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vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 125

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vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 126

Book Reviews

Elie Wiesel: Teacher, Mentor, and Friend. **Edited by Alan L. Berger. Cascade Books, 2018. 107 pp. $30.98 (hardback); $18 (paperback).**

In Elie Wiesel's 1964 novel, *The Gates of the Forest*, a young boy, shattered by loss, betrayal, and the collective madness of war, vows, "I shall make my death a gate" (112). The specter of death for Wiesel's character, who comes of age in the midst of legislated hatred and genocide, becomes an opening, an invitation to others to "resume the struggle," to pick up where one righteous individual, one *lamed vov*, leaves off, departing from this earth (*Gates* 225). Such a pledge becomes, here and elsewhere in Wiesel's long and prolific life's work, a commitment to tender and confer what one has learned—through suffering and survival—to future generations. For, as Wiesel once put it, "not to transmit an experience is to betray it" ("Why I Write" 13–14). Such a pledge affirms one's connection and responsibility to others, a moral imperative that transcends time, geography, and the span of a single life.

This pledge is the legacy taken up in the memorial volume dedicated to the memory of this deeply influential man of letters and learning, but also a man of action, a survivor who devoted his life to the cause of justice. *Elie Wiesel: Teacher, Mentor, and Friend*, edited by Alan L. Berger, Holocaust

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 127

scholar and director of the Center for the Study of Values and Violence after Auschwitz at Florida Atlantic University, captures, with understated eloquence, not only the significant impact of Wiesel on the lives of others but also the continuing extension of his legacy. This collection of reflections and meditations on Wiesel's influential work makes claims for his life's labors: his recognition of the mutuality of suffering; his advancement of ethical action; his unremitting commitment to justice; and as John K. Roth succinctly puts it, "his ways of being *for* humanity" (42). "Suffering," as Wiesel tells us, "must open us to others" (*Gates* 178). Through this slim yet deeply felt volume, Wiesel's enduring legacy makes of his death a gate, its portal an opportunity to enter the space of memory and to secure both ongoing testimony and a sustained engagement with the conditions and challenges of a post-Holocaust world. As Roth points out, the central question that preoccupied Wiesel takes root in responsible moral conduct: "what are we doing on this earth?" (43). After all, as David Patterson suggests, "In the post-Holocaust context," testimony requires a conscious reckoning "not only about what was done, but also about why it matters" (72). And it is very clear that responsible testimony matters, not only to Wiesel, but also to those committed to perpetuating his legacy, those whose lives and work were shaped by his teaching and friendship and whose testimonies constitute the fabric of this collection of essays.

The contributors to this volume are the eight judges of the Elie Wiesel Prize in Ethics Essay Contest. Established in 1989 by Elie and Marion Wiesel, through the Elie Wiesel Foundation for Humanity, the contest, open to college and university students, was created in response to Wiesel's commitment to "passing the witness and the responsibility to the next generation" (xii). The book grew out of talks delivered at the Elie Wiesel Memorial Symposium, a gathering held at Florida Atlantic University on 5 February 2017, seven months after Wiesel's death. The individual chapters, with a Foreword by Rabbi Irving (Yitz) Greenberg and concluding with an Afterword by Carol Rittner, RSM, reflect the multi-dimensional reach of Wiesel's intersecting interests and learnings: Kabbalah, Midrash, Torah, Talmud, secular literature, Hasidism—"a dazzling tapestry" of interests, as Carolyn Ross Johnston puts it (15). Despite the complexity and scope of subjects covered, the volume is fashioned by a kind of minimalism, a self-conscious restraint that pays homage to Wiesel's humble and unassuming

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 128

ethos. The book's brevity is, I suspect, by design. There is something in the book's economy that speaks to the modesty, humility, and lack of pretention of the man portrayed between its covers. The abbreviated length of the collection of essays is set against the depth of the learning and teaching made manifest within. The understated design, then, is a recognition that less is more, that what is left unsaid reflects an acknowledgement of and appreciation for the incalculable scale—the breadth and depth—of Wiesel's erudition and influence.

Elie Wiesel: Teacher, Mentor, and Friend thus gets at the heart of the matter, bringing together, as the title suggests, the various roles, interests, and preoccupations of this complex writer, public figure, and generous interlocutor. The book's chapters unpack the layered characteristics of the man, the survivor, the Nobel laureate, the scholar, and the public intellectual, creating a dialogue among impressions and perspectives created over time. The chapters taken together, as Berger suggests in his nicely framed introduction to the volume, "tell a particular tale that reveals dimensions of Wiesel as both a *mentsch* (moral human being) and a major thinker . . . two qualities [that] are, in his case, intimately related," friend and teacher as well as public persona (xviii). The challenge taken up by the contributors to this volume is how to talk about a figure who is so prominent, so public, and still capture the depth of his character. As Rabbi Greenberg proposes in the Foreword to the collection, Wiesel's prominence as a witness to the Shoah, his well-recognized public personality, would seem to overshadow the private individual, a survivor eclipsed by history, a public figure "known as the person who, by force of his witness and writing played a central role in bringing the Holocaust from the margins of public awareness to its recognition as a seminal event in history and a moral touchstone for all of humanity" (xi).

Multiple, interconnecting portraits of Wiesel take shape as this book unfolds. On the one hand, there is the very public, representative figure, a celebrated authority on the Holocaust, a spokesperson against genocide, against intolerance and injustice, "a messenger to mankind," as the Nobel Committee pronounced. On the other hand, there is the private figure, the much more complex and multifaceted individual whose voice and intellectual dispositions emerge from behind-the-scenes of his very public persona. The book's contributors avoid subordinating the one to the other. The person is not confused with the personality. That is, the contributors—all of

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 129

whom were fortunate to have forged lasting relationships with Wiesel—abjure the kinds of platitudes that often define public figures. Instead, through an honest assessment of their debt to Wiesel's experience, learning, and teaching, to the standard he set, the contributors to this elegant volume capture, with gratitude, the complex voice that informs the work of "teacher, mentor, and friend."

Indeed, these essays are as much about the effects that Wiesel, through his work and friendship, had on the contributors to the volume as they are encomia of Wiesel's achievements. One of the central refrains, a melody to which each of the contributors returns, is Wiesel's influence as teacher, as one whose experience and knowledge were the source of moral, intellectual, and ethical instruction. But equally pronounced are the ways each of these writers not only learned *from* him but *with* him. As Patterson suggests, Wiesel was "above all a *Jewish* writer," and thus, in the long tradition of Jewish teaching and hermeneutics, studying—making meaning—is understood as a process of learning together (61). Reading these essays, one grows to understand and appreciate the experience of participating in a *chavruta* (from the Hebrew *chaverim*, friends), a traditional method of studying together, small groups who actively engage with texts, ideas, and interpretive exegesis—knowledge made collectively, a like-minded companionship of those who draw from the collective strength, knowledge, and abilities of one another. Thus, the chapters together create a dialogue, all testimonies to this remarkable man, none that singly capture everything, but that together get as close as one might come to uncovering the substance of this many-figured public and private individual as he is reflected in the eyes of others.

Following Berger's introduction, which provides the history of the Elie Wiesel Prize in Ethics and sets the stage for the direction of the volume, the opening chapter establishes the logistics of administering the award and the kinds of responses elicited from new generations of students in their efforts "to analyze the urgent ethical issues confronting all of us in today's complex world" (3). In "The Elie Wiesel Ethics Contest: Twenty-Five Years of Reading Students' Essays and Being the Better for It," Judith Ginsberg, a reader for the prize since its inception, looks at some of the specific issues raised in the winning essays and the impressive ways in which these young voices articulate the challenges we face. "One of the most compelling themes of

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 130

these essays," as Ginsberg writes, "is dehumanization," a central concern in Wiesel's work (6). In this chapter, Ginsberg offers a reading, by way of example, of "two wildly different essays" that approach this theme from very different perspectives and that, as Ginsberg says, "stayed with me": one on AIDS and the distribution of resources that places inequitable value on human lives; and another on the destructive nature of prison culture (6). In both, Wiesel's ethical framework becomes the impetus for a call to action, "where there is injustice and cruelty . . . to help one another and not turn away with . . . indifference" (6). Ginsberg's discussion of the ways in which Wiesel's legacy has continued to influence generations of young people is followed by a related discussion in Chapter Two of Wiesel's influence on the poet Barbara Helfgott Hyett. In "Is It Possible to Be Seated and Yet to Dance?" Hyett, who took coursework with Wiesel, focuses on his penchant for contradiction and paradoxes, not unlike Talmudic riddles, in which something can be "always possible and impossible at once" (14). Such an open embrace of paradox, as Hyett suggests, constitutes, in Wiesel, an "open mind" and a "generous imagination" (14). This defining creative spirit, as Carolyn Ross Johnston, in Chapter Three suggests, is shaped with a rich and fluid imagination that "draws deeply from Hasidism, the bible, and the Talmud, as well as Kabbalah" (15). Johnston, in "Moments of Grace," describes Wiesel's "literary universe," a landscape peopled with "characters from both imagination and memory, and more often from an alchemical mix of the two . . . a style possessed of both elegance and extraordinary power" (15). Here, Johnston, Elie Wiesel Professor of Humane Letters at Eckerd College, argues that those, like herself, who were fortunate enough to have been Wiesel's colleagues and students, "have been transformed. . . . His stories are now our stories, and we are now witnesses" (15).

Storytelling, another primary concern of Wiesel, is the focus of Chapter Four, "When the Rainbow Breaks." Henry F. Knight, Professor of Holocaust and Genocide Studies at Keene State College, structures his chapter around a question that Wiesel asked on the occasion of a lecture he delivered early in Knight's career at Baldwin-Wallace College. His question: "Why did Noah get drunk?"—a question that "stayed with [Knight] for thirty-three years"—becomes here the impetus for a midrashic retelling of both the Noah story and the story of Wiesel's interpretive commentary on the biblical text

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 131

(23). In the chapter, Knight puts Wiesel in dialogue with other writers and artists, including Shakespeare, Fackenheim, Dürer, Doré, and Bak, who produced work in response to traumatic rupture as a reminder to "heed our responsibilities to and with one another" (31).

Chapter Five, "The Impact of Elie Wiesel," makes claims for Wiesel's "global influence but also recall[s] that his significance continues and needs to be local and personal" (38). John Roth's essay is situated at an important moment in the collection; it draws upon the chapters that precede it and anticipates those that follow. Roth opens the essay with the call to memory, an essential and controlling trope in Wiesel's work, without which, Roth quotes Wiesel, "life has no meaning" (33). Indeed, this collection of essays might be thought of as a kind of Yizkor book, a memorial, a metonymic remembrance of those victims of the Holocaust, filtered through the work of one who survived the atrocities and devoted his life to the call to memory. This is a book about memory, the memory of Elie Wiesel set against the backdrop of the tragic and catastrophic events of the past, but it is also a book about what it means to remember, the process of remembering and commemorating. The chapters implicitly ask: what is remembered and what is forgotten? How do we remember? How do isolated memories create a composite of history, of an individual caught in the throes of that history? Roth, in this spirit, contextualizes Wiesel's literary career in terms of his pursuit of the truth through a process of deliberation and interrogation. Wiesel's insistent inquires, as Roth argues, "pursue a conversation, a debate—often one-way and ever disconcerting—with God before and after Auschwitz" (41). Arguing with God, a feature of Jewish tradition, is one of Wiesel's characteristic tropes, a point of departure in his writing that opens the discussion of the conundrum of the role of God in the Shoah; as Wiesel wrote in his Nobel Prize Speech, "It seemed as impossible to conceive of Auschwitz with God as to conceive of Auschwitz without God." At a crucial moment in *The Gates of the Forest*, one character will ask another: "After what happened to us, how can you believe in God?" The response, delivered in characteristic Jewish fashion, raises the stakes and becomes the opening for ongoing dialogue: "How can you not believe in God after what has happened?" (194). The process of disputation, for Wiesel, one that negotiates contradictions and rejects empty platitudes, becomes an argument for the efficacy of protest. As Roth notes,

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 132

> [Wiesel's] disputing interrogations of God, his ways of being *for* humanity and even for God by being *against* God, emphasize ethics and especially justice. If protest against God does not lead us to resist injustice, then such protest is senseless. But absent protest against God—or against whatever ultimately grounds our tragic if not absurd existence—then we are likely to accept too much and our resistance against injustice may be needlessly weak and bereft. If God is silent, that silence must be broken. If God is indifferent, we should at least try not to be. If God refuses to be accountable, we ought to be responsible all the more. (42)

Finally, for Wiesel, the onus, the accountability, is not located in a conception of God but in human beings. This credo of responsible reckoning is central to Wiesel's thought and comes through in all his writings. Human beings, in Wiesel's way of thinking, must be held accountable and hold themselves accountable if the atrocities of history are not to be repeated.

David Patterson's discussion of Wiesel as a Jewish writer follows directly from Roth's conclusions. Patterson's central claim, framing Chapter Seven, "A Jewish Writer's Teachings on Writing," is that, finally, for Wiesel, "to write is to write as a witness" (59). As Patterson argues, Wiesel was steeped in Jewish tradition and scriptural sources: "As a distinctly Jewish writer, Wiesel turned to the Written Torah, the model for creation itself . . . in order to come to an understanding of what writing is about" (61). Wiesel exhibited the writer's life, that is, a life made in the creation of words as well as in recognition of the value of the silences among words, the spaces of meditation, contemplation, and completion. According to Patterson, put very simply, for Wiesel, "writing is testimony," which is to say that writing is a form of prayer: "More than to speak, to write is to listen. And in the Jewish tradition to pray is to listen" (69).

In Chapter Six, "Capturing the Fire, Envisioning the Redemption," Alan Rosen continues the discussion of the deeply religious composition of Wiesel's life. Wiesel, with understated simplicity, once wrote, "Why did I pray? Strange question. Why did I live? Why did I breathe?" (*Night* 4). In his essay, Rosen argues for the redemptive nature of Wiesel's writing. Through an examination of the recurring trope of fire, Rosen, who did his doctoral work under Wiesel's supervision, demonstrates his professor's

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 133

"deeply poetic engagement with Jewish history and tradition" (54). In doing so, Rosen suggests the ways in which Wiesel's work was informed by a wealth of Jewish sources as a way of linking the past and present and thus carrying the memory of Jewish history and the basic tenets of the faith into the future.

In the closing chapter, "Elie Wiesel and Interfaith Dialogue," editor Alan Berger extends the emphases on dialogue and responsibility in his discussion of Wiesel's writing about Jewish interpretive traditions and ethics. As Berger argues, Wiesel established an opening for fruitful opportunities for a "trialogue of Abrahamic faiths" (75). Berger thus shows the extension of Wiesel's work, its impact especially on Jewish-Christian relations as a means for reaching and engaging a broader audience in the pursuit of justice and equality, a mutual undertaking that begins in open and honest dialogue. In speaking of their "more-than-four-decade friendship that dramatically impacted [his] life and teaching," Berger concludes his remarks with Wiesel's hope for the future, a future that began with dialogue (74).

Testimony, in this volume, is conducted through dialogue, a conversation among the contributors for whom Wiesel was "teacher, mentor, and friend," but also, a dialogue, in memory, with Wiesel, as if, Patterson writes, "I feel his presence looking over my shoulder even now" (72). The deeply felt presence of this single and singular man will continue to resonate long after his death. For, as Rittner concludes in the Afterword to the volume, Wiesel, one of the *Lamed Vov* (the thirty-six just men), left us with the injunction that "words are important but that concerns must lead to actions," to the ongoing commitment to bring about change, to intercession, on behalf of others (Rittner 94). As the central character in Wiesel's *The Gates of the Forest* insists, "if speech has been restored to me it is in order that I may use it" (111). In this commitment to bearing witness, Wiesel, as Rittner insists, "spoke out and spoke up for all humanity," not unlike his literary messengers, such as Moshe the Beadle in *Night*, Gavriel in *The Gates of the Forest*, and others who become "the voice of the voiceless" (Rittner 94). Wiesel consistently poses for us an ethics of responsible storytelling, but also an ethics of responsible reading, calling upon us to read as we would live, "to reach out in concern for all people in need. . . . Wherever there is oppression" (Rittner 94). The answer to Wiesel's question, one that he insistently posed to himself, "What have I made of my life?" is

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 134

implicitly answered in *Elie Wiesel: Teacher, Mentor, and Friend*—a testament to righteous action, ethical conduct, and the compassionate embrace of others. In these "perilous times for all humanity," may his memory continue to guide us (Rittner 94).

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—Victoria Aarons
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***The New Jewish American Literary Studies*. Edited by Victoria Aarons. Cambridge UP, 2019. 298 pp. $100 (hardback).**

In her edited volume *The New Jewish American Literary Studies*, Victoria Aarons has brought together a group of distinguished scholars from around the world to open up what amounts to a new field of literary studies—and not simply Jewish American literary studies, for these essays have implications for literary studies generally. With regard to its subject matter, the essays in this book insightfully elucidate the key terms in the book's title: *new, Jewish, American*, and *literary*. Examining the *new*, Jessica Lang in "Gender and Feminism in Contemporary Jewish American Writing" and Catherine Morley in "Women's Voices: The Assimilated Subject and the Persistence of Marginalization" explore important connections among gender and the genre of Jewish women writers, an increasingly important

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 135

genre in Jewish American literature. Their essays demonstrate that a consciousness of gender expands both Jewish consciousness and literary consciousness as such. In the process, Lang and Morley highlight various of the ways in which Jewish women writers provide important new perspectives on what it means to be a human being, on the life of the soul, and on the complexities of human relationships.

Shifts in our vision of humanity produce a corresponding shift in our understanding of Jewish identity—an identity that is central to our understanding of Jewish American literature. In "A Guide for the Heretic," for example, Avinoam Patt follows the journey of Jews and the term *Jewish* "off the path of tradition," while in "Story into Memoir, Memoir into Story," Julie Newman examines how Iranian-Jewish-American writing complicates Jewish American identity. Similarly, in "Jewish-Latin American Literature," Darrell Lockhart explores ways in which a Latin American ethnos might enter into the literary expression of what exactly is Jewish about Jewish literature. It has been thoroughly demonstrated that the term Jewish is not reducible to the designation of a race, culture, ethnos, religion, or accident of birth. But what, then, does *Jewish* mean? Surely the Torah and its covenant have something definitive to do with tradition, but it may not be so simple, as Patt shows: ethnicity cannot be ignored, as Newman and Lockhart demonstrate.

Taking the matter of identity to another level, Berel Lang's "'Jewish American' or 'American Jewish'" is a brilliant reexamination of the term *American* in Jewish American literature—or in American Jewish literature. Interestingly, Lang points out a disagreement that Aarons had with her publisher with regard to the title of the volume: should the phrase be *Jewish American* or *American Jewish*? Aarons had preferred American Jewish (28). The difference is significant: *Jewish American* suggests an accent on Jewish identity, perhaps even to the point of being a counterculture, while *American Jewish* might imply a larger American cultural identity into which the Jewish identity assimilates. Reading Aarons' own chapter, "A New Diaspora: Jewish American Writers from Across the Globe," one can well ask: is there any similarity between writers from various countries who assimilate into the American artistic culture and Jews who are faced with the dilemma of assimilation? What, in each case, is being assimilated into what? Is it American into Jewish or Jewish into American?

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 136

As for the term *literary*, David Brauner's "Reimaging the Past, Imagining the Future: Myth, History, and Mystery in Contemporary American Jewish Fiction" provides insights not only into Jewish literature but also into what makes literature *literary*. Exploring the literary articulation of that which surpasses utterance, Brauner helps us think in detail about the dimension of the transcendent that permeates literature. Giving voice to the ineffable, literary texts employ symbolism drawn from myth and mystery to delve into those transcendent depths that impart meaning to life from beyond life. Brauner accomplishes his task in his skillful analysis of works by Cynthia Ozick, Michael Chabon, Sarah Schulman, and Gary Steyngart. Just as profoundly, Gary Weissman's "Rethinking Literary and Ethical Response to the Holocaust: Reading 'With Hitler in New York'" argues for a definitive relation between the *ethical* response to the Holocaust and the *literary* response to the event. The implication of his analysis is that after the Holocaust, the *literary* aspect of Jewish American literature must bring to bear an ethical demand, inasmuch as the work's post-Holocaust context charges it with *testimony*. In the movement from generation to generation, we come up against an increasing ethical demand of the dead upon the living.

As Aarons deftly explains in her introduction, recent decades have unlocked new horizons in the study of Jewish American literature, horizons that cry out for a book such as *The New Jewish American Literary Studies*. With the movement from generation to generation come new inquiries into the transmission of memory through tales, not only over time but also across geographic, demographic, and generic borders. No longer dominated by a single ethnic group or even by a single language, Jewish American literature grapples with new questions of Jewish identity, American identity, and the human ethical obligation attendant upon both. "The 'new' Jewish American literary studies," writes Aarons, "engages with a plurality of multi-faceted voices and contexts as it adjudicates history," with an eye toward the future (7). Only through an adjudication of history can literature assume an orientation toward the future. As literature takes on an orientation toward the future, it assumes a corresponding ethical imperative; the *yet to be* that constitutes this literary time lies not only in unrealized dreams but also in unfulfilled ethical obligations.

A sense of futurity always entails breaking new ground, and this collection breaks new ground in its examination of both new Jewish American

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 137

authors and authors from earlier generations. Indeed, the book is compiled with a conscientious orientation toward the future in its pursuit of a "twofold" aim, as Aarons describes it: "to introduce this emerging body of literature to its readers; and to offer new critical perspectives on the changing field of Jewish American literary studies" (14). Thus, some of the book's sixteen chapters explore the works of newer figures, such as Shulem Deen, Farideh Golden, and Maxi Shrayer, while others articulate new approaches to familiar authors such as Philip Roth, Cynthia Ozick, and I. B. Singer. One striking feature of these essays is that their exploration of the works of more recent authors—a task that requires the application of new concepts—leads to a new understanding of those works that belong to the older Jewish American literary canon. For scholars who are engaged in the study of Jewish American literature, then, this book elucidates the timelessness of their discipline. Why timeless? Not because the scholar can repeatedly go over the same old ground but because new perspectives and new possibilities are constantly emerging from that ground.

The essays in the book are organized into three sections: "Concepts," "Contexts," and "'New' Forms and Histories." New literary forms, themes, and formats require new categories of thought in order to sound their artistic depths, and in the twenty-first century especially, new social and political developments require an examination of Jewish American literature through new conceptual lenses, as happens in Dean Franco's "Jewish American Writing and Race." In the essay, Franco examines ways in which the prominence of race and race theory in America, both politically and intellectually, has influenced the writing and reading of Jewish American literature. Franco is particularly attuned to (1) the differences between African Americans' racial "blackness" and the "whitening" of American Jews and (2) how this difference affects the interactions among African American and Jewish American writers. Because race is always a part of American politics, Michael Staub's "Wrestling with Politics: Jewish American Writing from Left to Right (and Back Again)" is enlightening. For better and worse, this piece is both important and timely, in the light of a clearly antisemitic discourse arising from the political left.

Concepts, of course, must be fleshed out by being situated within specific historical and methodological contexts, which is what happens in Timothy Parrish's "Rethinking Post-war Jewish American Writers." There, Parrish

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 138

examines the impact of generational changes in outlook and experience in the post-war period and, more specifically, in the post-Holocaust contexts of Jewish American literature. Parrish is very much attuned to the link between what it means to be a Jew *and* what it means to be a Jewish writer as the post-Holocaust generations unfold. Parrish's analysis naturally leads us to a deeper reflection on the role of Jewish memory in Jewish literature.

Willis Salomon, on the other hand, invites us to consider an equally important but quite different conceptual context. In "The Insistence of Psychoanalysis in Contemporary Jewish American Fiction," Salomon highlights the prominence of psychoanalysis in both Jewish American novels and Jewish American literary criticism. In the process, Salomon makes a convincing case for Freud's impact on Jewish modernity, particularly in the Anglophone world. The pronounced presence of psychoanalysis, of course, implies the pronounced presence of various neuroses that turn up in Jewish American literature, particularly in the novels. To be sure, in the process of writing, novelists often undergo a kind of self-psychoanalysis. It seems that the same may be said of the scholars of Jewish American literature.

The new Jewish American literature has had an impact on other artistic forms and other literary cultures. And so we have essays such as "Jews in Contemporary Cinema and Television," by Nathan Abrams. Abrams delves deeply into the themes, stereotypes, and motifs that one finds among the portrayals of Jews on the screen. One question that arises from his analysis is: what are implications of the visual images defining cinema and television for how we read Jewish American literature? One would like to see something more than a comment here. In his "Jewish American Literary Studies Abroad," Gustavo Sánchez Canales takes yet another innovative approach to Jewish American literature by shifting the geographical orientation of the study. Examining works by Cynthia Ozick, Michael Chabon, and Jonathan Safran Foer, Canales discusses the foreign reception of Jewish American literature, highlighting the fact that that the way other peoples and cultures respond to Jewish American literature can teach us a good deal about our own vision of that literature. With this eye toward teaching, Canales also addresses pedagogical implications for the use of these texts in the classroom.

In short, then: Victoria Aarons has gathered together a powerful and impressive collection of literary analyses into the new Jewish American literature. This book is of immense value to students and faculty in Jewish

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 139

literature, American literature, and Jewish American literature, on both the undergraduate and graduate levels. It is a stellar addition to a growing body of scholarship in a new field of literary study.

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***Holocaust Graphic Narratives: Generation, Trauma & Memory.* By Victoria Aarons. Rutgers UP, 2019. 256 pp. $120 (hardback); $25 (paperback).**

In their groundbreaking 2017 collaboration, *Third-Generation Holocaust Representation: Trauma, History, and Memory*, Victoria Aarons and Alan L. Berger 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). In their analysis, Aarons and Berger note that each generation typically experiences different kinds of trauma and different ways of remembering—and negotiating—that trauma: Holocaust survivors experience the Holocaust directly and remember its horrors first-hand; the children of Holocaust survivors grow up immersed in their parents' distress—either spoken or unspoken—and remember the Holocaust indirectly, by way of what Marianne Hirsch calls "postmemory"; and the third generation experiences the lingering trauma of what Ellen S. Fine calls "absent memory"—a sometimes poorly defined but nevertheless pressing awareness of familial disconnection and rupture that can generate an almost overwhelming sense of loss and longing (126). After discussing each generation, each kind of trauma, and each kind of memory, Aarons and Berger provide detailed readings of representative third-generation writers, cycling through memoirs, novels, and short stories in sequence, before returning to a consideration of a final novel, Julie Orringer's *The Invisible Bridge* (2010).

In her newly published *Holocaust Graphic Narratives: Generation, Trauma & Memory* (2019), Aarons builds upon her and Berger's earlier analysis of the connections among trauma, memory, generations, and art by

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 140

analyzing examples of Holocaust representation in graphic narratives, a genre not covered in *Third-Generation Holocaust Representation*. The benchmark for graphic narratives about the Holocaust is of course Art Spiegelman's monumental achievement *Maus* (1980–1991), the first graphic novel to receive a Pulitzer Prize. But although Aarons pays homage to *Maus*, the lion's share of her focus in *Holocaust Graphic Narratives* centers on a handful of twenty-first century graphic narratives, contemporary responses to the Holocaust that "pose contrasting yet overlapping generational perspectives through which memory is shaped and re-evoked" (15). The narratives Aarons analyzes include *We Are on Our Own* (a 2006 graphic memoir written by a child survivor), *Mendel's Daughter* and *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* (two second-generation memoirs published in 2006), *Flying Couch* (a third-generation narrative published in 2016), and 2003's counterfactual "what-if" narrative, *Yossel: April 19, 1943*. Interestingly, the last graphic narrative Aarons discusses as a kind of coda to her book is a comic that predates *Maus* by a quarter of a century: an eight page 1955 comic entitled "Master Race," which—in Aarons's words—"provides a context for reading more contemporary Holocaust graphic narratives, setting the stage—if only in retrospect—for the ongoing dialogue that has taken place over time, an expansion of both memory and genre" (177).

Aarons's selection of genre-specific core samples is simultaneously strategic and fortuitous, for the half-dozen twenty-first century graphic narratives she chooses to explicate allow her both to acknowledge important generational differences in our responses to the Holocaust and to highlight various of the ways in which the formal characteristics of the genre itself facilitate what she calls "the midrashic imperative of Holocaust testimony" (9). Even after the critical and commercial success of *Maus*, the genre that includes cartoon strips, comics, graphic novels, graphic narratives, and the like might appear to some readers to remain an inappropriate medium through which to represent the historical truth and catastrophic tragedy of the Holocaust: "This is not to say"—Aarons writes in acknowledging the ongoing controversy—"that issues of the appropriateness of the comics graphic form and the aesthetics of Holocaust representation, in general, are not still debated both in and out of the academy" (5). But although Aarons attempts to mitigate at least part of that concern by using the term *graphic narrative* rather than the more usual *graphic novel*, she is ultimately less concerned

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 141

with the possibility that the genre might call into question the veracity of the Holocaust as a brute fact of history than she is with the genre's unique ability to establish a "visual testimony to memory" (9)—a testimony that helps negotiate both successive generations and conflicting perspectives.

In "The Performance of Memory: Miriam Katin's *We Are on Our Own*, a Child Survivor's (Auto)Biographical Memoir," Aarons explores various of the ways in which "the dialogical interplay of text and image" (18) in the memoir articulates three different perspectives: Katin's early childhood memories of Hungary during the Nazi invasion, her mother's later fragmented accounts of those same events, and Katin's adult "imaginative, projected reinvention of both the events and their meaning at the time of their occurrence," which Aarons calls the memoir's "authorial presence" (21). Building upon Harriet Earle's earlier insight into the extent to which "[i]n comics of trauma, the symptoms of traumatic experience are mimicked in the formal techniques of the comic," Aarons makes a compelling case that *We Are on Our Own* might also profitably "be thought of as a way of performing or reenacting the [Holocaust] trauma in order to *control* it" (22, emphasis added). Central to this attempt at interpretive midrash are the memoir's strategic use of white space, gutters, silent panels, and the periodic juxtaposition of images of completion and incompletion, which—taken together—both "mimic . . . the imperfect and fragmented condition of memory and its traumatic iterations" (42) and demand of the reader a concurrent ethical response. Along the way, the perspectives of successive generations coalesce into a single braided narrative, and "Katin's story of their individual histories is contextualized within the wider landscape of the collective history of the Shoah, illustrating here and elsewhere Earle's contention that in the graphic novel, 'history gets humanized'" (50).

In "Memory Frames: *Mendel's Daughter*, a Second-Generation Perspective," Aarons expands her analysis of the midrashish potential implicit in graphic narratives to include a discussion of the ways in which various of the formal elements of *Mendel's Daughter* gesture toward both the obligations and limitations of second-generation postmemory. *Mendel's Daughter* is a second-generation account of the events of the Shoah, narrated by a son of survivors, and in *Mendel's Daughter*, Martin Lemelman uses panels as memory frames designed to "re-create his mother's past, a past from which he has been excluded: her prewar life in Poland, the murder of her

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 142

parents by the Nazis, her escape and concealment . . . and the deportation and death of members of her extended family" (53).

As Aarons points out, Lemelman is careful to stress the primacy of his mother's witness by drawing images of the video in which she talks about her life and then declaring "This is her story. It's all TRUE" (5). At the same time, however, he—like many members of the second generation—feels anxiety about appropriating the suffering of those who experienced the Holocaust first-hand, and he recognizes that *Mendel's Daughter* is necessarily "complicated by the doubling of perspectives, a double-voicing in which the survivor's story is mediated through the filter of the son, who did not witness the events he imaginatively recalls" (55). To highlight that fact, rather than using conventional text bubbles for speech and thought, he "places text—his mother's and his own words—next to the images, thereby establishing two voices, two perspectives, a structural choreography of narrating voices" (56). He also uses images of hands, eyes, photographic artifacts, and sketches of photographs to create a scrapbook effect designed both to emphasize the historiographical authenticity of the account and to acknowledge his role in the process as a second-generation narrator and documentarian. In doing so, he "attempts to bring his mother into a future that is, for her, an absence. He gestures toward *tikkun olam*, repairing the world, from the very personal perspective of family" (60).

Aarons rightly associates the resulting graphic narrative—which culminates with a quotation from the Passover Haggadah—with midrash proper: "What is passed on to future generations is, in a long midrashic tradition of Jewish ritual and belief, the story and, as ritualized in the Passover Seder, its relevance to the present day" (60). The resulting link between the past and the present, between first-generation witness and second-generation postmemory, and (perhaps most tellingly) between the second-generation's felt obligation to witness and its concurrent anxiety concerning what it can—and cannot—appropriately say is memorably expressed in a panel that includes an image of Lemelman's mother drawn on her gravestone, "facing outward, her hand raised with finger beckoning, pointing toward her own image. Speaking from the grave, she calls to her son: 'Listen to me,' she insists. 'Sometimes your memories are not your own'" (62). Above the gravestone, Lemelman's hand tentatively extends into the frame, placing an offering on his mother's gravestone.

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 143

In "'Replacing Absence with Memory': Bernice Eisenstein's Graphic Memoir *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors*," Aarons continues her exploration of how the formal elements of graphic narratives embody select aspects of the second-generation's response to the Holocaust. *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* is a second-generation hybrid narrative that blurs autobiography, memoir, biography, and testimony. The complicated perspective of the narrative is telling, as its status as a hybrid of text and graphics. As Jean-Philippe Marcoux observes, "The temporal and spatial dislocations that characterize the graphic novel are . . . indicative of the difficulties of the second generation to negotiate the burden of memories they do not share" (208). Members of the "hinge generation," many children of Holocaust survivors both desire to bear witness of their parents suffering and worry that their own lives will be forever lived in the shadows of their parents' experiences.

In Aarons's view, this constitutive tension is expressed as early as in the title of Eisenstein's memoir. For while the *I* in *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* initially highlights the author's privileged position in the narrative, that privileged position is immediately undercut by the similarity between the title and such campy 1950s teen horror films as *I Was a Teenage Werewolf*, by the way in which the size and font type and vivid yellow color of *Holocaust Survivors* overwhelms the diminutive font and light white shade of *I Was a Child of*, and by the depiction of the author as a prematurely aged young girl dressed in childhood attire and holding a doll, looking anxiously toward the side of the book—a drawing that (in Aarons's considered opinion) embodies the weight of postmemory bore by the second generation, a weight that is simultaneously infantilizing and aging.

The complicated relationship between first-generation memory and second-generation postmemory is also articulated in various of the drawings that depict Eisenstein as a naked and undeveloped child, sitting either on a chorus of Yiddish words or on stacks of books written by or about Holocaust survivors. Surely the most disturbing graphic that can be interpreted as a representation of what Eisenstein identifies as the comingled curse and blessing of second-generation postmemory centers on the image of the deserted grounds of Auschwitz and the barracks where Eisenstein's mother was imprisoned. Surrounded by smoke that billows outside of the frame and including bare trees that extend their branches imploringly above the frame, smoke, frame,

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 144

and image alike are all separated from the reader by a barbed wire fence that runs horizontally across the page. "Such an image," Aarons concludes,

> reflects not only the receding range of distance from which (through which) we view the Holocaust . . . but also the layers of trespass through which subsequent generations must penetrate to enter that imaginative space. It is through the understated simplicity of the drawing that Eisenstein paradoxically expresses the complexity of the endeavor to reanimate history and to project the past into the present. (96)

Although other of the images in *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* ultimately bookend the narrative in ways that soften the implications of the image of smoke, barracks, and barbed wire and point the way toward the emergence of a new generation, thereby "gestur[ing] toward a shift in guardianship of that memory, from first to second and now, by the narrative's end, to the third generation" (118), Aarons is surely correct in suggesting that when taken as a whole, the graphic elements embedded in *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* consistently highlight the cost—as well as the importance—of witness, memory, and postmemory alike.

In "*Flying Couch*: A Third-Generation Tapestry of Memory," Aarons turns her attention to the ways in which the formal features of graphic narratives can simultaneously articulate and mitigate third-generation concerns about their place in the transmission of Holocaust memories. In *Flying Couch*, Amy Kurzweil recreates her grandmother's personal history as a Holocaust survivor by transcribing and illustrating her grandmother's story. The specific form the resulting graphic narrative takes makes it possible for Kurzweil—a member of the third generation—to draw herself into her first-generation grandmother's story in the most literal way possible: by drawing images of herself reading and transcribing her grandmother's oral testimony, thereby creating a visual embodiment of her third-generation role as an author/illustrator/character.

As Aarons points out, such drawings serve a number of epistemological and therapeutic functions. They highlight the process and artifice of storytelling in ways that acknowledge the extent to which third-generation accounts of first-generation suffering are creative reconstructions of the past,

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 145

an acknowledge for which—as Rocco Versaci observes—graphic narratives are particularly well suited: "the very nature of the medium—the fact that the images are drawn, the details arranged within panels, the panels arranged within a page—foregrounds . . . an active reconstruction of the past . . . the ideal medium in which to explore how 'truth' is constructed" (58). In doing so, the drawings acknowledge "Kurzweil's anxiety about her relation to the narrative that she writes, the position of the third-generation inheritor of the story to that history" (128). In Aarons's view, "Such self-reflexive representation, the book within the book, the story within the story, calls attention to the differences in generational testimony and the distance between witness and second- or third-hand recipients of the stories, a witness to the witness's memories" (139). At the same time, however, the panels illustrating Kurzweil's transcription of her grandmother's testimony help mediate at least part of that anxiety by emphasizing the difference between the grandmother's oral testimony—which is in smudged manual typewriter font—and Kurzweil's interior monologue response, which is represented using hand-printed letters.

The drawings also physically embody the quest narrative, a characteristic conceit among third-generation writers. Most third-generation quest narratives overlay a compulsion to exhume the past with anxiety about the third-generation's ability to mediate and animate that past. Kurzweil's drawings express some of that anxiety, but in doing so, they also highlight ways in which successive generations can transmit both memory and connection. As Aarons rightly concludes, "Thus the three generations here create a kind of tag team, participating in a relay race in which memory in the form of the story . . . is the material artifact that is passed along. . . . Once unleashed and made available, the survivor's stories become both the catalyst and medium for intergenerational participation in the continuation of memory" (143). In that respect, the formal features of this part of *Flying Couch* simultaneously express and mitigate third-generation anxiety, resulting in what Aarons calls a "posture of calculated reckoning, a measured, critical view of [Kurzweil's] role in the transition of another person's stories, one that is both performatively self-reflexive and explicit about its felt obligations" (126).

The last two graphic narratives Aarons discusses, *Yossal: April 19, 1943*—in which Joe Kubert creates a fictional doppelgänger who is a resistance

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 146

fighter in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising—and the 1955 comic "Master Race," do not fit comfortably within the generational model of analysis that frames the rest of *Holocaust Graphic Narratives*. But though the last two core samples are outliers of a sort, Aarons's discussion of the narratives is excellent, particularly her analysis of Kubert's use of perspective in his depiction of one of the ovens in a concentration camp crematorium. The text within the frame narrates the cremation of the victims from the perspective of the concentration camp prisoners forced to dispose of bodies: "How many bodies did I carry to be incinerated? How many children? How many have I prodded into the furnace?. . . And how was it that I continued to live while so many others died?" (62). The accompanying image, however, is drawn not from the perspective of the Sonderkommandos but from the perspective of the body about to be burned, which—Aarons reminds us—produces a particularly disturbing moment of double vision and double consciousness:

> Here, unsettlingly, we are in two places at once. We see the faces of the Sonderkommandos looking directly at us, yet they are looking into the incinerator. The viewer is outside looking in, yet we see the image—the feet as they extend outward—as if from inside the furnace—as if, in other words, we are the dead corpse. . . . Kubert thus bridges the gap between distance and proximity by creating the conditions in which we become direct witness through the angle of vision by which we view the image. Here the image attempts to bridge the distance between knowing and unknowability and thus creates the visual experience of witnessing *the other* from the tenuous position of *otherness*. (163–64)

The attempt to understand the horror of the Holocaust from the perspective of those who experienced it is of course impossible—it is, ultimately, the attempt to represent "that which cannot finally be shown" (164). Nevertheless, even attempts which can never fully express the absolute truth of that horror can themselves serve as important instances of midrashic intervention, of which *Yossel: April 19, 1943* is a compelling example:

> [A] midrashic reading both addresses and repeats textual dislocation and absence. Such midrashic moments create the interpretive

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 147

> space for the mediating perspective of the narrating voice through whose imagined filter the meaning of experience is explored and extended. . . . In transferring his imagined self . . . onto a character whose actions, whose emotions and reactions, and whose fate he could control in the moments of the narrative, Kubert participates in a mediating midrashic intertextuality, a midrashic intervention into the text of history by creating another coexisting visual and textual narrative. (152, 155–56).

In that respect, *Yossel: April 19, 1943* is of a piece with the other graphic narratives Aarons analyzes. Each of the narratives she discusses uses a combination of text and graphics to attempt the increasingly difficult task of fighting Holocaust fatigue, bridging the gap between successive generations, and intervening in both history and histories the way midrash typically intervenes—by lamenting the fact of absence, loss, and silences that cannot be filled, but by doing so in a way that "calls for—that demands—a response" (176). In Aarons's view, graphic narratives can be a particularly effective form of midrash. "Holocaust graphic narratives," she concludes "provide a unique space for the exploration and expression of traumatic rupture. Through the intersection of text and image and the wide range of modes of visualizing trauma, graphic narratives contribute to the project of the midrashic extension of memory" (194). In expanding our perspective to include the midrashic aspects of Holocaust graphic narratives, Aarons's persuasive new book does much the same thing itself: *Holocaust Graphic Narratives: Generation, Trauma & Memory* is an example of midrash at work. It is an important addition to the expanding corpus of Holocaust studies.

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vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 148

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—Daniel Muhlestein
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A February Snow

I get like this when it precipitates: fall
like salt. Muscles in my back tear

to the point of floating, bearing
flakes. They come heavy now,

lacking grace, exposing the weight
my collarbones carry. The wind

can only lift so much with its song:
snow is a blessing; its color

amplifies silence, so you can hear
every crunch or offering of self:

a sugar cookie wrapped in napkin.
I thought I knew love in every drag

of the tongue across icing, sparkle
in glaze, thought I went wading

into stars, pulling my dress up
to my knees— Alas, all that's here

is a field of snow & a napkin to cleanse
my lips of any leftover sweetness.

I ate that cookie for days, until I fell
brittle. It's the time of year when I sink

into my armchair, into threads
of branches gone bare. It's tough to tell

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 150

in this scene if it's birth or dying
time. All I know is it's the season

when wind comes crying, like a baby
whose head knocks a pew during the passing

of the sacrament, that silence—
her long inhale filling with pain

–Tacey M. Atsitty

vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 151

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vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 152

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vol.39.2 front matter.qxp_vol.23.2 frontmatter 4/4/20 5:37 PM Page 153

teries, *Northern Orchards: Places Near the Dead*, as well as a volume of poetry, *The Collector of Shadows*. Four of his essays have been selected as a "notable" in the annual *Best American Essays* volumes.

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