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Witnessing from a Distance: Postwar Literary Representations of the Holocaust

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WITNESSING FROM A DISTANCE:

POSTWAR LITERARY REPRESENTATIONS OF THE HOLOCAUST

by

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Abstract

This thesis concerns itself with the possibilities and limits of witnessing the Holocaust from a distance. It analyzes the ways in which the notion of distance – temporal, geographical, linguistic, and aesthetic – influences, shapes, and alters the act of bearing witness to a remote historical event, which, because of its enormity, seemingly defies the act of witnessing and thus of representation. This study investigates the long-lasting impact of the Holocaust on subsequent generations, particularly on third-generation descendants of victims and perpetrators, and explores how the traumatic legacy of the Holocaust locates new forms of representation within the context of postmodernism, which, because of its emphasis on fragmentation, on the loss of teleology and causality, and its suspicion of master narratives, offers innovative and experimental representational strategies for what has commonly been regarded as unrepresentable.

By focussing on the figure of the distant witness, that is, on members of postwar generations, this thesis highlights the representational complexities prompted by the complication of attempting to remember and to represent an event whose very extremities and incomprehensibilities render it, in itself, unrepresentable. Investigating the ways in which memory is constructed and in turn represented, and how this representation, or non-representation, of traumatic memory affects cultural and collective identities, and the ethical responsibility for ongoing remembrance, this thesis ultimately explores the ways in which the notion of distance, as an integral part of the act of witnessing, influences, determines, and shapes how a culture situates itself in relation to its past.

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Introduction

In *Unclaimed Experience*, Cathy Caruth states that one's own trauma is "tied up with the trauma of another" and that a "trauma may [thus] lead...to the encounter with another, through the very possibility and surprise of listening to another's wound" (8). The trauma of survivors, which revolves around having experienced the Holocaust personally, can lead, through the act of bearing witness, to a secondary trauma. While the trauma that affects post-Holocaust generations is not the traumatic memory of having endured the atrocities of the Holocaust itself, it nonetheless stems from and is inextricably linked to the trauma experienced by its victims. The trauma of subsequent generations can therefore be defined as a trauma of memory, that is, of carrying the ethical responsibility of ongoing remembrance of an event not directly experienced, of keeping alive the memory of the dead, and of the moral obligation to simultaneously remember and mourn the loss of people, history, and humanity.

Any approach to the Holocaust and its impact upon subsequent generations is thus marked, on a broad level, by an often overwhelming, sometimes even traumatizing, confrontation with the incomprehensibility, the extent, and the brutality of this particular genocide, which, to this day, remains unique in Western history. It is precisely this incomprehensibility that makes "the Holocaust difficult to approach neutrally," as Pascale Bos suggests (50). Working on an "unrepresentable" subject matter like the Holocaust is always a highly subjective and personal undertaking, as it simultaneously requires and entails a negotiation of one's own subject position in relation to the horrible events of the past. As Daniel Schwarz contends,

> Jews respond to the Holocaust differently than non-Jews do, and children of those Jews who survived their family's decimation respond still another way from the more fortunate Jews, who, like myself and other American Jews, were protected by accidents of geography. (5)

In an attempt to explain the inevitable influence of any author's personal investment, background, history and cultural roots on his or her respective works – both fictional and scholarly – and the impossibility of scholarly neutrality within the realm of Holocaust studies, Bos reverts to the concept of positionality, a concept borrowed from feminist studies where it is used to explore questions of gendered constructions of identity. Bos applies this term to Holocaust scholarship, arguing that positionality is an important issue that should not be neglected, precisely because "[i]n the context of working on the Holocaust we are expected to take sides, to pass judgment" (54). She asks,

> Where, in relation to the events of World War II and the Holocaust, do we place ourselves? It is reasonable to assume that both our different academic affiliations (as literature or history scholars, in German studies, Jewish studies, women's studies, and so forth) and our own family histories in this regard matter, as does the cultural context in which we were raised and were exposed to this history. (54)

In that respect, any work of the Holocaust is not only an investigation of past events, but also of the present, and often entails a process of self-seeking on behalf of the author, that is, of trying to understand and come to terms with the past and its long-lasting effects on the present.

This project, then, is intricately connected to my own positionality as a third-generation German, who was brought up in postwar Germany, where, particularly on a personal level and within family narratives, responsibility for or implication in the Holocaust remains to this day largely unacknowledged, repressed, and sometimes even denied, while simultaneously the notion of collective guilt is continuously reinforced, especially as part of the high school curriculum. It was in Grade 9 that my history class had to watch Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* (1993), a deeply disturbing movie for a number of reasons.[1] Yet discussion about the movie and its effects on us was not possible; our teacher did, however, make us blatantly aware of the fact that even we, as third-generation Germans, are still responsible for what happened to more than six million people, and that we therefore have to carry this burden of collective guilt. At the same time, he said, it is our responsibility to remember the Holocaust and its victims so that an industrialized mass murder like the Jewish genocide can never happen again. We agreed that, generally, remembering the Holocaust is a vital means for reconciliation with both the victims as well as with the world at large. But we were confronted with the problem of how to remember victims whom we had never known,

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[1] The movie perpetuates, for instance, the stereotypical victim-perpetrator dialectic by over-emphasizing characteristics associated with these binaries, such as helplessness, passivity, and stoic acceptance of one's fate, on the one hand, and evil, brutality, and inhumanity, on the other. Holocaust survivor Imre Kertész regards Spielberg's representation of the Shoah as "kitsch" ("Who Owns Auschwitz" 269), because, as he asserts, "American Spielberg, who incidentally wasn't even born until after the war, has and can have no idea of the authentic reality of a Nazi concentration camp" (269-70). Similarly, Dominick LaCapra posits that "*Schindler's List* [not only] presents stereotypical Nazis [but also] has a strong element of harmonizing *Heimatsgeschichte* [sic] American-style...as the Schindler-figure is converted into a saint and martyr" (*History and Memory* 61). Miriam Hansen, who shares both Kertész and LaCapra's concerns regarding the movie, also sees, however, a positive effect in the controversy surrounding Spielberg's movie, as the discussion and reception of the film brings to the fore "key issues involved in the representation of the Shoah" (297), and, I would add, of the growing Americanization and popularization of the Holocaust. For further discussion of *Schindler's List*, see also chapter 5 in Geoffrey Hartman's study, *The Longest Shadow: In the Aftermath of the Holocaust*, (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1996).

not only because of the temporal distance from the actual event but also, and more importantly, because of the complete absence of Jewish life in our community today, an absence caused by the particular and specific consequences of the genocide.

I was raised in a small town close to the northern-Bavarian city of Coburg, a former dukedom, which is fairly well-known for its ties with the British Royal Family.[2] Besides the historic monuments the city has to offer, it is precisely this historical connection with the British Royals, of which Coburg and its inhabitants are extremely proud, and which therefore plays a vital part in Coburg's tourist industry. However, Coburg is not only known for its place in the history of the Royal Family – Coburg was also the first German city that elected a mayor belonging to Hitler's National Socialists, a detail with which many people are not familiar. Even before the election, Hitler paid a visit to Coburg in 1922, together with 650 SA members. In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler refers to this visit as a vital experience for the movement; in the following years, Coburg developed into the first Nazi town in Germany.[3] Coburg was also the first city to publicly display the swastika by decorating its town hall with numerous flags and banners as early as 1929, a time in which any display of the swastika was still officially prohibited by the government of the Weimar Republic. Even before Hitler came to power, Coburg and its Duke Carl-Eduard of Saxe-Coburg-

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[2] Queen Victoria was married to Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha. Both visited Coburg on a regular basis and resided in castles and mansions in both the city itself and the countryside that were built especially for them. Even more importantly, however, Queen Victoria had a unique ability as a match-maker and married off quite a few of her children into other European royal families. Today, Coburg is therefore often referred to as the cradle of European Royalty. And indeed, the current Prince of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha is a distant cousin of Prince Charles and King Carl Gustav of Sweden, among others. For a detailed account of Queen Victoria's life and success as match-maker, see Erika Bestenreiner, *Die Frauen aus dem Hause Coburg: Aus dem fränkischen Herzogtum auf die Throne Europas* (München: Piper, 2004).

[3] See Hubertus Habel, *Voraus zur Unzeit: Coburg und der Aufstieg des Nationalsozialismus in Deutschland* (Coburg: Initiative Stadtmuseum, 2004).

Gotha, who was himself a strong admirer of the National Socialist movement, had already begun to establish close-knit ties with the future *Führer*.[4] This very early admiration for and support of the Nazis is, however, only one aspect of Coburg's lesser-known history.

When walking through the inner city, through the old part that is confined within the remnants of the historic town wall, one sees a lot of indications that Coburg once had a large and thriving Jewish community. *Judengasse* (Lane of the Jews) and *Judentor* (Gate of the Jews) are only two examples of various, sometimes rather hidden, traces of what was once Jewish life in Coburg. Upon closer investigation, one will also find the remains of a small synagogue, which by now has been transformed into and rebuilt as a Catholic church; and, beside a major street, one will find a very small Jewish cemetery, where the members of a wealthy Jewish family were laid to rest until the early 1920s, with no more than six graves, and gravestones whose engraving in Hebrew is now barely legible. Yet all of these remnants bear witness to Jewish life in Coburg, from the early Middle Ages until the late 1920s, a time that coincides with the Nazis' rise to power.

Around the same time that Nazism was on the rise in Coburg, that is, as early as the 1920s, early signs of anti-Semitism were also apparent, which later resulted in involuntary beatings of Jews, and the destruction of Jewish stores. This first rise of violence against Jewish neighbours culminated in the closing and partial destruction of the synagogue in 1932. During the Third Reich, Coburg's Jewish population was almost completely exterminated; only six Jews were able to escape, and later

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[4] See Joachim Oltmann, "Seine Königliche Hoheit, der Obergruppenführer: Wie Carl-Eduard von Sachsen-Coburg und Gotha, Enkelin Königin Victorias, zu einem Wegbereiter Hitlers wurde," *Die Zeit*, 2001.

emigrated to Israel or Britain. On November 9, 1938, during the so-called *Kristallnacht*, or night of broken crystal, almost all of Coburg's Jewish shops were destroyed; Jews were beaten, or even killed, and the ones who survived the frenzy of their former neighbours and the SA were shortly thereafter deported to concentration camps. In 1942, Coburg's Nazi mayor proudly declared that his city was *judenrein* (free of Jews).[5]

Until recently, only one, almost invisible, sign remembering the events and the ordeal that Coburg's Jews had to endure existed: a small plaque on a brick house commemorating the life and achievements of Sally Ehrlich, who once owned this house and the biggest department store in the town. It was in the 1960s when Ehrlich's brother, by then living in Britain, initiated the change of a street name into *Sally-Ehrlich Straße*. It is as though, along with the Jewish inhabitants of Coburg, their history, culture, and memory also vanished, until, in September 2009, German artist Gunter Demnig laid Coburg's first so-called *Stolpersteine*.

These *Stolpersteine*, or stumbling blocks, have a brass plate on top, bearing the full name, date of deportation and death of the victims of National Socialism, and are set in the sidewalk right in front of the entrance to the house where the persecuted last lived before their deportation (see fig. 1). Demnig first started to lay *Stolpersteine* in Freiburg in 2003. Since then, stones have been laid in more than 480 cities in Germany, Austria, Hungary, and the Netherlands.

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[5] For a detailed study of the history and destruction of Coburg's Jewry, see Hubert Fromm, *Die Coburger Juden: Geschichte und Schicksal* (Coburg: EBW Coburg, 2001).

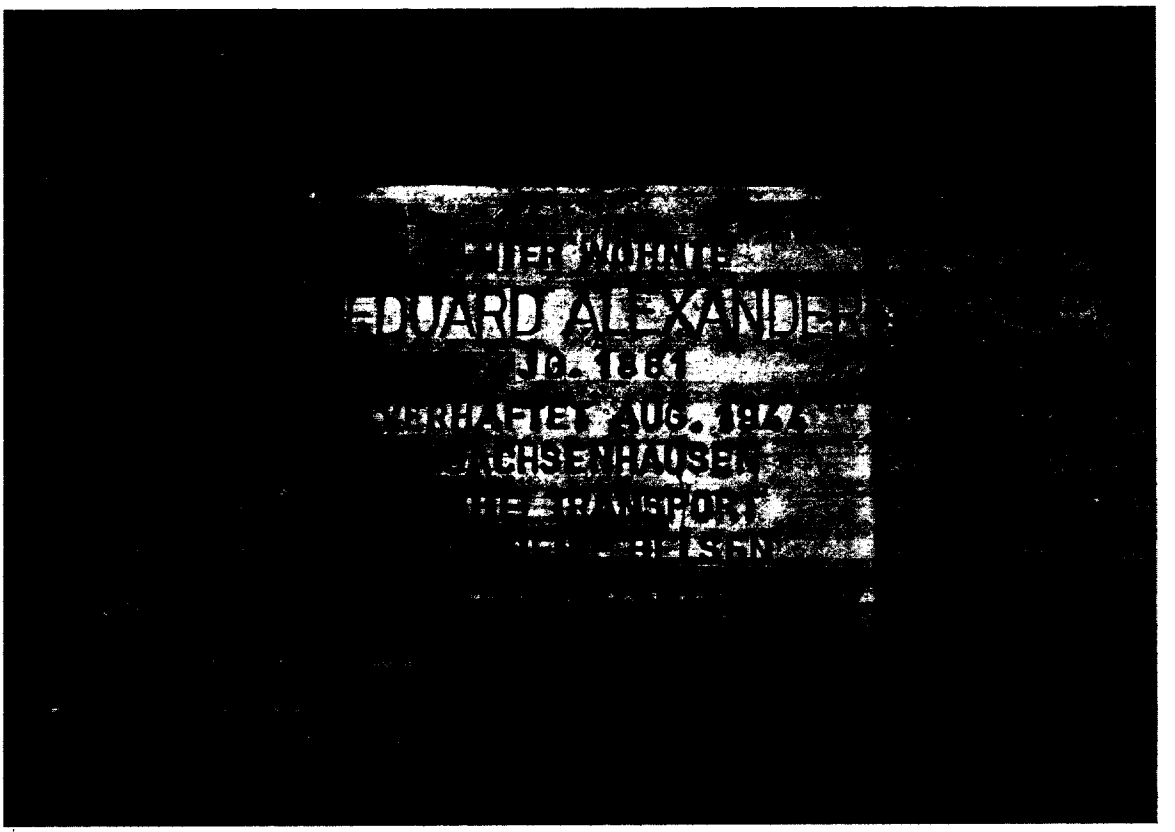

Fig. 1. *Stolperstein*, Berlin-Nikolassee, Cimbernstr. 13b (photograph taken by the author)

On his website, www.stolpersteine.com, Demnig explains the motivation for his actions, for which he has been criticized, as, for instance, by Charlotte Knobloch, current president of the Central Council of Jews in Germany. In a 2004 interview with the German newspaper, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, Knobloch explained her deprecatory opinion of these stones.[6] To Knobloch, the stones, embedded within the sidewalk, are just another way of trampling the memory of the victims of National Socialism under foot. Demnig, in contrast, defends his mission by highlighting its purpose of

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[6] See Anne Goebel, "Opfer des NS-Terrors – Neue Diskussion über die Stolpersteine," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 13 June 2004.

countering amnesia by commemorating individual victims of Hitler's politics of exclusion and persecution, including Jews, Gypsies, the politically persecuted, homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the victims of the Nazis' euthanasia program. As he succinctly puts it: "Ein Mensch ist erst vergessen, wenn sein Name vergessen ist" – a person is only forgotten when his or her name is forgotten.

Yet despite these recent and commendable attempts to commemorate the fate of some of Coburg's Jews, there are, today, still no Jews living in Coburg and hence no Jewish community or any sign of vibrant Jewish life in this town, as was the case before 1933. And this complete absence of Jewry brings me back to the question which troubled my whole class, namely, how to remember the loss of German and East European Jewry, that is, the loss of something that we had never experienced or known in the first place. Or, put differently: how can we as third-generation Germans simultaneously remember and mourn a lost object that is not lost to us, but instead characterized by its complete absence?

Björn Krondorfer points out that in postwar Germany Jews are perceived as "an unknown entity"; yet, what is even more important is that "[n]obody has taught [subsequent generations] how to grieve the loss of the former Jewish population of Germany and Europe, or to gain a realistic view of Jewish life today" (35). However, the act of mourning is a crucial prerequisite for any process of subsequent remembering, and becomes a very complex and challenging task for the heirs to the legacy of mass murder. Lawrence Langer rightly asks,

> Should the post-Holocaust community in Germany, searching for a proper space and adequate form to commemorate the disappearance of

> the Jews, focus on the victims, the crime or the general population who...chose never to acknowledge or mourn their involvement in the nefarious activities of the Third Reich. (*Using and Abusing* 137-38)

Accordingly, the postwar generation, in their duty to commemorate the past, has to negotiate two intertwined issues: the issue of content, which can focus on the general German war generation, their crimes, or the Jewish victims; and the issue of finding an adequate form of representation within public memory. Of course, the easiest way for third-generation Germans would be to simply revert to silence, denial, and repression of past events, strategies which were so self-deceptively employed by their grandparents and, to some extent, even by their parents. Yet third-generation Germans have the responsibility to remember the past, while they simultaneously also have the chance, due to the temporal distance from the Holocaust, to initiate the first step towards reconciling with the descendants of victims of Nazi Germany, not just on a monetary basis, but as human beings. "There can be no reconciliation without remembering," said former German president Richard von Weizsäcker in a highly acclaimed speech commemorating the fortieth anniversary of the end of World War II; he also stated that the postwar generation "cannot profess a guilt of their own for crimes they did not commit... But their forefathers left them a grave legacy" (qtd. in Hartman, *Bitburg* 263, 265). Future generations have a responsibility towards this legacy because, as Weizsäcker further noted, "we must accept the past. We are all affected by its consequences [...]" (qtd, in Hartman, *Bitburg* 265).

As a third-generation German, I still do indeed feel a sense of guilt and responsibility, not for the actual acts of atrocities the Nazis committed between 1933

and 1945, but rather for how we as heirs to the legacy of mass murder can counter the forgetting, denial, and repression so characteristic of the generation of our grandparents and parents in order to preserve the memory of the dead. At the same time I am also interested in how descendants of victims cope with this moral responsibility for ongoing mourning and remembrance. My thesis revolves around this question, focussing particularly on how third-generation writers, descendants of victims and perpetrators, Jews and Germans, and members of groups not affiliated with the Holocaust, address and negotiate the ongoing impact of the Holocaust on their lives, because, since the last survivors as well as perpetrators are passing, it becomes vital to explore strategies that enable subsequent generations to keep alive the memory of the Holocaust and to preserve it in the form of collective, cultural memory.

Chapter 1 serves to situate the Holocaust within history as an event which has altered and affected traditional historiography, engendered a historical crisis of witnessing, and irrevocably changed the notion of bearing witness. Through an analysis of the figure of the Holocaust witness and of the crucial role played by the idea of distance in testifying to an event that exceeds the capacity for understanding, this chapter investigates the crisis of witnessing and calls for the conceptualizing of a new poetics of witnessing that finds particular expression in contemporary fiction. Such contemporary representations serve as a means for subsequent generations to bear witness to a remote event not experienced personally, but whose traumatic impact is still ubiquitous.

Chapter 2 provides a rapid overview of the various discourses surrounding German *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (mastering the past) in both German states until

re-unification, discourses which significantly shaped the way in which contemporary generations, the grandchildren of the perpetrator generation, negotiate the legacy of mass murder, and remember its victims. Utilizing Tanja Dückers's novel *Himmelskörper* as an example of a third-generation novel written within the current context of the Berlin Republic's struggle to create an adequate culture of commemoration of the victims of the Holocaust, this chapter investigates the ways in which Germans address the past. Their proximity to and imbrication with the place where the annihilation of European Jewry was planned and implemented continues to affect and determine the ways in which they commemorate its victims, and struggle to find a particular German identity in this context.

Chapter 3 investigates how descendants of victims and perpetrators alternate between acknowledgement and repression of traumatic memory, and it examines the efficacy of new formal and generic possibilities, such as postmodernism. Strategies of postmodernism are frequently used by post-Holocaust novelists as a response to the moral obligation of remembering. Through a comparison of Rachel Seiffert's *The Dark Room* and Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything is Illuminated*, both novels which deal with the attempt of subsequent generations of Germans and Jews, respectively, to cope with the ongoing traumatic impact of a remote past, this chapter analyzes the ways in which the descendants of both perpetrators and victims attempt simultaneously to gain access to the traumatic memory of the past and to preserve and incorporate it within cultural memory.

Chapter 4 illustrates how the complexities and possibilities engendered by the idea of distance allow for a fictitious investigation of the psychological motivation of

the perpetrators. Using Martin Amis's *Time's Arrow* as an example, this chapter examines the recent proliferation of post-Holocaust fiction that concerns itself openly with an investigation of the psyches and underlying motivations of the perpetrators for carrying out the mass murder, and argues that such an investigation can only be possible from a distance.

Chapter 5 provides a critical analysis of John Boyne's children's novel, *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*. This chapter examines the ways in which children of today, for whom the Holocaust will irrevocably become history, and who can therefore only learn about the Holocaust through representations of it, can potentially represent the future of memory. This chapter investigates how they can bear witness to a remote event while simultaneously critically addressing and negotiating the present they live in, in which genocides are still an issue of considerable significance, and where Neo-nazism, particularly in Germany, the country of the perpetrators, is, once again, on the rise.

Chapter 1

Towards a New Poetics of Witnessing

The Holocaust in Historical Perspective

On September 1, 1939, Hitler's army invaded Poland. This marked the beginning of World War II, which would last until 1945 and during which millions of people would lose their lives. Hitler's goal was to conquer so-called *Lebensraum* (living space) in the East in order to expand his Reich; yet while at the outset the Second World War seemed to be merely a war fought between various nations, there was simultaneously a war taking place within this territorial war, namely a "war of extermination" (Bessel 5).[1] The purpose of this particular war was to free Europe from what Hitler considered to be a threat to the creation and purity of the so-called Aryan master race. Amongst the victims of this war-within-the war – and I use the term "war" rather hesitantly in this respect, since, by definition, a war always includes at least two adversary parties or enemies, and this war of extermination was carried out by one party only, the Nazis – were the elderly, the mentally challenged, the physically disabled, children, homosexuals, and political opponents. Yet it was the Jews who comprised the largest number of victims – approximately six million of them were

[1] In *Anmerkungen zu Hitler* (1981), historian Sebastian Haffner writes that "[t]he mass murders demanded by Hitler were carried out during the war but were no acts of war. Rather, one can posit that Hitler used the war as pretext in order to commit mass murders which were disassociated from the war but which had been a personal want of his. As he had already stated in *Mein Kampf*, after the best had died at the front one could at least extinguish the vermin at home. The obliteration of people, who were vermin to Hitler, was only insofar associated with the war itself in that the war at home drew off the attention from the killings. Ultimately, to Hitler this obliteration was an end in itself, not a means of winning the war or of averting defeat" (122; my translation).

killed in an industrialized mass murder in Auschwitz, Sobibor, Treblinka, and Belzec, to name but a few of the places where the genocide was carried out.

The discrimination against, ostracism of, and later destruction of European Jewry did not, however, coincide precisely with the outbreak of World War II. Rather, it has to be seen within the context of Germany's loss of the First World War, and the inability of the German population to come to terms with the deplorable state of Germany after the war. Instead of assuming responsibility for the status quo, the German population looked for possible scapegoats that could be blamed for the loss of the war and the resulting peace treaty of Versailles. The so-called *Schanddiktat* of Versailles demanded that Germany pay reparations to the victorious nations, and refrain from re-establishing an army.[2] The climate in which Germany found itself after World War I was characterized by widespread resentment against those whom the Germans believed to be responsible for the catastrophe the country suffered – the rich, and most importantly, the Jews (Bessel 10). It was within this atmosphere of anti-Semitic hatred that Hitler established his political agenda in *Mein Kampf*, which he wrote in 1924 while he was serving a sentence at the fortress of Landsberg for plotting a revolution to overturn the Bavarian government in 1923 (the so-called Beer Hall Putsch).

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[2] Haffner explains the predominant perception of the peace treaty of Versailles amongst the German population as a so-called *Schanddiktat* as follows: "From a psychological point of view understandable, the German populace conceived of the treaty of Versailles, that is, that particular part of the peace treaty of 1919 which affected Germany directly, foremost as the defamation that it indeed was. This defamation manifested itself in the way that this treaty came into existence. The treaty did indeed represent what the offended Germans perceived it as, namely a diktat. Unlike other, previous European peace treaties, this treaty was not negotiated between victors and defeated... rather, Germany was forced, by an ultimatum threatening war, to sign the treaty. As a result, the German populace did not feel obligated to obey something they had been forced to sign (*Anmerkungen zu Hitler* 64; my translation)

In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler addresses various crucial issues that he believed necessary for the re-establishment of Germany's pride, power, and strength, which he saw as having been deeply affected by Germany's loss of World War I and the peace treaty of Versailles. The anti-Semitic climate in Germany provided Hitler with a fertile ground for the expression and justification of his anti-Semitic views; at the same time, it offered ways in which the intolerable demands of the treaty of Versailles could be revoked, and in which the ostracism of the scapegoats, that is, foremost the Jewish population of Europe, who were considered to pose a threat to the so-called *Volksgemeinschaft* (national community), was not only welcomed but also seemed to be justified.

Hitler's *Mein Kampf* is essentially an anti-Semitic attack on the Jewish population, whose elimination Hitler demands, because he considers it a threat not only to Germany's economical growth but also to the purity of the Aryan race, the *Volksgemeinschaft*. While he addresses topics such as the expansion of Germany towards Eastern Europe, that is, the idea of conquering living space in the East where Germans could settle, he vividly and more importantly called for the creation of a National Socialist Movement in Germany, which would be founded upon a belief in the superiority of the Aryan master race, and whose main purpose it would be to eliminate those who posed a threat to this superiority. Overall, the ideas Hitler put forth in *Mein Kampf* are not so much political as they are racial; his notion of politics is almost exclusively focused on race as the decisive factor in revoking the treaty of Versailles and in re-establishing Germany's superior status within Europe. He

therefore repeatedly stressed the importance of a racial war, the purpose of which should be the complete extermination of world Jewry.

After Hitler's rise to power in 1933, his ideas promoted in *Mein Kampf* were slowly put into action. The re-armament of the German *Wehrmacht* was initiated, and the war economy began to thrive, both sure signs that Hitler was planning on starting a war in order to achieve his goal of *Lebensraum* in the East; simultaneously, anti-Semitism increasingly developed as the reigning mode within Germany itself, and the lives of German Jews were deeply affected by violent outbreaks, racial hatred, and prejudice.[3] Between 1933 and the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, the living conditions of Germany's Jews rapidly deteriorated. Shortly after Hitler became Chancellor in January 1933, German-Jewish professor Viktor Klemperer wrote in his diary on 25 April that "[t]he destiny of the Hitler movement lies without a doubt on the Jewish question" (25). And Lucille Eichengreen, growing up during the 1930s in a Hamburg Jewish family, describes the sudden impact Hitler's politics had on the Jewish population:

> Until 1933 it was a very nice and comfortable life...But once Hitler came to power the children that lived in the same building no longer spoke to us – they threw stones at us and called us names. And we couldn't understand what we had done to deserve this. So the question

[3] Anti-Semitism was already widespread within Germany even before Hitler came to power in 1933. The prevalence of strong anti-Semitic feelings was one of the contributing factors to Hitler's quick and rather uncomplicated rise to power, as his political agenda was founded on anti-Semitism. For a detailed outline of the development of anti-Semitism in Germany, see Iring Fetscher, "Political Anti-Semitism in Germany: Its Rise and Function," *Coping with the Past: Germany and Austria after 1945*, (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1990) 22-36.

> was always – why? And when we asked at home the answer was pretty much, "it's a passing phase – it'll normalize." (qtd. in Rees 12)

In September 1935, the Nuremberg Laws, including the so-called *Arierparagraph*, were implemented. This decree distinguished between Aryans and non-Aryans, defining the latter as someone with at least one Jewish parent or grandparent (Rigg 78). In order to qualify for serving in the German army, and more particularly, in Hitler's SS, candidates had to demonstrate their Aryan origins and provide a detailed genealogy of their family. These racial laws also forbade so-called "interracial" marriages between non-Aryans and Aryans, Jews and Germans. The enactment of the Nuremberg Laws was the first of many steps that would lead to the social marginalization of the Jewish population in Germany. But while this social marginalization of German Jewry may have been instigated by political acts such as the Nuremberg Laws, it could only be carried out on a large scale through the silent complicity and assistance of the German population itself. In *Hitlers Volksstaat: Raub, Rassenkrieg und nationaler Sozialismus* (2006) German historian Götz Aly explains that Germans were well aware of their Jewish neighbours being driven out of their homes, their offices, and ultimately of being deported. Yet instead of questioning what was happening to their neighbours, Germans shied away from investigating the fate of the Jews. Rather, they profited from the deportations and often took possession of the homes and offices that had become available. The fact that Germans did indeed profit from the Nazis' anti-Semitic politics becomes particularly obvious after the so-called *Reichskristallnacht*. On November 9, 1938, Jewish shops were destroyed all over Germany, their owners killed by the Nazi storm troopers – the SA – and

numerous Jews were incarcerated in newly-built concentration camps like Dachau.[4] The confiscated shops, offices, and goods were sold to Germans who were well aware that this property had formerly belonged to Jews. Indeed, the Nazis themselves referred to the foreclosure of these homes and goods as an auction of non-Aryan, that is, Jewish property.[5] 1938 marked a pivotal moment within the history of the Third Reich and Hitler's anti-Semitic politics. By now, Jews were forced to have the name "Israel" or "Sarah" stamped into their passports, and to wear the Star of David, thus visibly marking them as expellees from the German idea of a *Volksgemeinschaft* (Silbermann 12-13). More importantly, however, 1938 was the year in which a decisive shift took place from discrimination against the Jewish population to the violent outbreaks, outbursts of racial hatred, and random killings, which foreshadowed the genocide. By the time the war broke out in 1939, the ostracism of the Jewish population was ubiquitous with Jews no longer being allowed to hold German citizenship, marry non-Jews, or work in certain professions.

After the outbreak of World War II in September 1939, the military strategy of the *Blitzkrieg* ensured the rapid advancement of the German army into Eastern Europe. As the *Wehrmacht* was conquering land, special killing squads, which consisted

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[4] The so-called *Reichskristallnacht* was a revenge action of the Nazis after the Jew Herschel Grynszpan shot the German diplomat, Ernst vom Rath, on November 7, 1938 in Paris. Vom Rath died two days later and his death provided the Nazis with a welcomed justification for their violent outbreaks against the Jewish population of Germany.

[5] After Jews had been given notice that they would be deported to the East, they were forced to list every single item in their household. The Nazis would later use these lists to auction off these items to Germans. The fact that Germans took advantage of the social marginalization of the Jews leads Aly to refer to the regime as a so-called *Gefälligkeitsdiktatur* (dictatorship of courtesy) which allowed even ordinary Germans, who were not necessarily in the Party, to profit from the Nazis' anti-Semitic politics. Even later, after the mass murder of the Jews was at its peak, various important German companies, such as Siemens and I.G. Farben, who opened factories adjacent to Auschwitz, profited from forced labourers – in a sense, the victims were exploited to foster Germany's war industry.

mainly of members of the SS, simultaneously started to kill the Jewish population of Eastern Europe.[6] During the early years of the war, up until 1941, the Jewish genocide that was occurring behind the front lines was indeed mass murder, but not yet systematic or industrialized. Although the Nazis had already experimented with various ways of making the killings more effective – for instance, the use of gas was first put into practice under the cloak of the euthanasia program which demanded that the mentally challenged and physically disabled were killed as they posed a threat to purity of the Aryan master race, industrialization did not take hold of the genocide until after 1941, after the idea of deporting Europe's remaining Jews to the African island of Madagascar was abandoned. It was on January 20, 1942, that high-ranking Nazi and SS officials, including Reinhard Heydrich and Heinrich Himmler, decided on the so-called *Endlösung* (Final Solution) during the Wannsee conference, a solution which envisioned the complete annihilation of European Jewry.

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[6] The mass shootings of European Jewry during the early years of the war were primarily attributed to the SS; however, recent research has shown that the mass murder was not only carried out by special killing squads or members of the SS but by Police Battalions and, more importantly, the *Wehrmacht* itself, and thus by ordinary German soldiers, as a 1995 exhibition of photographs taken by soldiers of the German army showed. These pictures attest to the fact that it was not only the SS who were shooting Jews, but that soldiers of the *Wehrmacht* likewise knew of the killings, and even actively participated in them. The *Wehrmacht*'s role in the implementation of the Holocaust, publicly illuminated for the first time by this exhibition, has stirred great controversies within the German population, particularly amongst those belonging to the second generation after the war, that is, the children of the perpetrators. The majority of them still shy away from addressing and negotiating the role that almost every ordinary soldier played in the Holocaust; instead, many of them still prefer to retain the belief that only a small number of members of the SS were in fact responsible for carrying out the genocide behind the front lines. For a detailed analysis of the role of the Police Battalions in the genocide, see Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: Harper Perennial,1998); for a critical look at the various reactions evoked by the exhibition of photographs, which is still on display at various places in Germany, called "Verbrechen der Wehrmacht" – "Crimes of the German Army," see Hannes Heer, "Von der Schwierigkeit einen Krieg zu beenden – Reaktionen auf die Ausstellung 'Vernichtungskrieg – Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941 bis 1944'," *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 12 (1997): 1068-1101.

The decision to implement the 'Final Solution' was reached at a time when German military strategists were planning *Operation Barbarossa*, a code name used to camouflage Hitler's plan to invade the Soviet Union. In fact, there is an intricate connection between these two plans; the industrialization of the Jewish genocide has to be seen within the context of Operation Barbarossa. Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union began on June 22, 1941 (Higgins 11-59). Reassured by the quick successes in Western Europe, Hitler had likewise hoped for a fast invasion of the Soviet Union. However, the battle took longer than expected and continued into the winter months of 1941/1942. The battle of Stalingrad, which began in August 1942 and ended with the defeat of the German army by the Soviets on February 2, 1943 resulting in more than 1.2 million victims on both sides, represented a decisive point both for the German Wehrmacht as well as for the German population. Yet the battle of Stalingrad proved to be a crucial turning point not only for the outcome of the Second World War but for the progression of the Holocaust as well.

Even before the battle of Stalingrad, the lack of progress in the East, the army's first experiences of vulnerability, and the threat of defeat had already led to an intensification of the mass killings of Jewish people in Eastern Europe. The war of expansion seemed to be almost lost to Hitler's Germany, yet the war of extermination the Nazis had simultaneously been carrying out still seemed to provide them with a sense of power and superiority. It is thus feasible to argue, as Laurence Rees does, that during the war with the Soviet Union, and particularly after the battle of Stalingrad, the emphasis shifted from winning World War II to completely exterminating the Jews, an

idea which had always been at the core, and indeed been one of the most important aspects, of Hitler's political agenda (36).

Auschwitz, which has become a metonym for the extermination of European Jewry, played a vital role in terms of the industrialization of mass murder.[7] The main camp of Auschwitz was built in May 1940. At first, it served as a concentration and work camp where Poles and political prisoners were incarcerated. It also served as a location where medical experiments, during which numerous prisoners were intentionally killed, were conducted, but it was at another camp, Birkenau, built in the fall of 1941, where the systematic mass murder was carried out. Birkenau had four gas chambers in which approximately 1.1 million Jews were killed. The systematic and industrialized mass destruction of European Jewry was made possible through the Nazis' use of Zyklon B gas, which for them proved to be an effective way of carrying out the killings en masse; at the same time, Rees explains, the use of Zyklon B also made it "easier for the Nazis to kill human beings rather than shooting them" (293) because this particular method allowed the murderers to distance themselves not only from the actual act of killing but also from their victims, and from feelings of individual guilt, as well as moral repercussions in a postwar world. The method of gassing reduced the psychological effects of the act of killing on the perpetrators because of the reduced proximity to the victims. Often, the member of the SS who dropped the can of Zyklon B into the hatch did not even see the victims' faces. It was

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[7] To this day, Auschwitz is regarded as the synonym for the Holocaust mainly because the other death camps, such as Belzec, Treblinka and Sobibor, had been almost completely destroyed by the Germans before the Russian army arrived. According to Rees, "the Nazis themselves wanted those names erased from history and sought to ensure that every physical trace of them was removed once they had completed their murderous task." Therefore, "[l]ong before the end of the war, the Nazis had destroyed the camps and the land was left to return to forest or ploughed back into farmland" (147).

thus the use of twentieth-century technology that led to the systematic intensification of the Holocaust. Auschwitz-Birkenau became a factory of death where approximately 24,000 people were killed on a daily basis until January 27, 1945, when the Russian army liberated Auschwitz.

Within the short span of six years, from the outbreak in 1939 until the defeat of Hitler's Germany in 1945, over five million Jews were murdered, a whole culture and ethnicity almost extinguished, and the physical traces of the crimes mostly erased. Historian Raul Hilberg argues that the difficulties in grasping the idea of the Holocaust are due to the fact that the "operation was over before anyone could grasp its enormity, let alone its implications for the future" (*Destruction* 3). The Holocaust, which remains to this day virtually inaccessible, has thus become an event unprecedented in history, and one that has irrevocably altered the writing of history.

The Holocaust and the Reconfiguration of Historiography

The Jewish genocide is not only an event of historiography but has also radically changed the idea of historiography itself. The Nazis attempted to completely annihilate history, and particularly towards the end of the war, special SS squads desperately tried to destroy any evidence that would lead to the discovery of the genocide.[8] Because of this destruction of the majority of the official documents, survivor testimonies have obtained a special status within historiography, as these

[8] See also Himmler's 1943 Posen speech delivered to SS officers, in which he stated that "[i]n our history this [the annihilation of Europe's Jewry] is an unwritten, never-to-be-written page of glory..." (Dawidowicz 133). It was in this speech that Himmler foregrounded the complete extinction of European Jewry as well as of any evidence of the genocide itself.

accounts represent the only sources that can attest to the Holocaust as a lived historical reality.[9]

Traditional historiography is, for the most part, comprised of official documents; in the case of the Holocaust, however, those few that were preserved merely documented – in a typically German, that is, bureaucratic manner – the names and dates of death of the victims.[10] More importantly, however, the content of these documents was recorded by the perpetrators, with an overt focus on numbers and dates, on what Yehuda Bauer terms "the where and when and how and in what sequence" (*The Holocaust in Historical Perspective* 4). This is not to say that the actual victims lack a place in official Holocaust historiography. The victims of the Nazis do play a role in this particular historiography, albeit often only as a collection of numbers, which seems to be completely void of any personal histories. Official Holocaust historiography tends to exclude the victims and their personal histories because its focus is by definition on the context in which the genocide took place rather than on the actual victims themselves. Thus, by subjugating the individual fates and histories of its victims to mere numbers, Holocaust historiography runs the risk of creating a master discourse of history in which the personal histories of the victims become excluded yet again. Similarly, those who could attest to the Holocaust as a personal experience, the survivors, have also been excluded from the writing of

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[9] These accounts also include testimonies by other groups that were persecuted and eventually killed by the Nazis, such as Sinti and Roma, homosexuals, and political opponents.

[10] Auschwitz main camp even had a civil registry office, where so-called death books were stored. Until 1944, when the Final Solution was implemented, and the genocide became, through the use of Zyklon B, industrialized in nature, the Nazis neatly listed their victims' names, place of origin, and date of death in so-called death books.

Holocaust history, because their testimonies, in contrast to official documentation, are characterized by traumatic recall and subjective memory.[11]

Addressing the exclusion of eyewitness accounts within the writing of the history of the Shoah, Dominick LaCapra highlights the limits of traditional Holocaust historiography, stating that "History may never capture certain elements of memory: the feel of an experience, the intensity of joy or suffering, the quality of an occurrence" ("Lanzmann's *Shoah*" 20). LaCapra does not exclude the importance of history as a discipline because "it includes elements that are not exhausted by memory, such as demographic, ecological, and economic factors" (20), but he does highlight the importance of memory within Holocaust historiography, because memory, in contrast to history, validates and allows for individual stories to come to the fore, to be recognized, and to be told, and, in doing so, can create an emotional proximity to events disallowed by traditional Holocaust historiography. In *History and Memory after Auschwitz* (1998), LaCapra elaborates on the importance of memory, arguing that "Memory is a crucial source of history" (19) and he calls for a new way of writing the history of the Shoah, one that recognizes the interdependence of history and memory and which perceives and situates itself as a "complex phenomenon at the intersection of history and memory" (*History and Memory* 2).[12] In this new Holocaust

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[11] Pierre Nora, investigating the reasons for this exclusion of eyewitness testimonies from official historiography, explains that "History is perpetually suspicious of memory, and its true mission is to suppress and destroy it" (9). Similarly, in her study, *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition* (2001), Kelly Oliver highlights the opposition between subjective recall and historical facts by providing the example of a Holocaust survivor interviewed at Yale University. The survivor reports four chimneys going up in flames whereas in reality only one was blown up. This example serves to illustrate the tension between historical fact, that is, what is considered to be historical truth, and something that lies beneath the surface, yet is equally important, namely psychological truth (84).

[12] Aleida Assmann also highlights the complex positioning of Holocaust historiography in both history and memory. She asserts, "[w]hile memory is indispensable, as a view from the inside, to

historiography, the concepts of history and memory are no longer mutually exclusive but do in fact rely and build on, as well as complement each other, thus highlighting the complex nature of the Holocaust as an event in both history and memory.

As early as 1979, Saul Friedländer, himself a Holocaust survivor, stated in his memoir, *When Memory Comes*, that memory "is the initiating impulse for the reconstruction of the past in general and for the holocaust [sic] in particular" (219). For Friedländer, as for LaCapra, writing the history of the Shoah only becomes possible when history and memory are not rivals, but work in conjunction. Because history cannot tell itself, he thus, like LaCapra, demands a reconfiguration of the concept of historiography, where personal memories and testimonies are seen as vital components of the history of the Holocaust ("History, Memory, and the Historian" 4-5). The writing of the history of the Holocaust relies on the voices of eyewitnesses, but also, due to its unprecedented nature, on the imposition of a coherence and logic that can foster an understanding of the interrelations, causalities, and consequences of this particular historical event.

In "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact" (1978), historian Hayden White suggests that history achieves a certain "coherence" through the incorporation of aspects that are usually associated with the writing of fiction. Arguing for the "fictive nature of historical narrative" (42), history, says White, abides by the conventions of narrativity by "alternative descriptive strategies...and all of the techniques that we would normally expect to find in the emplotment of a novel or a play" (47). White puts forth the notion that historians deliberately incorporate aspects of narrativity into

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evaluating the events of the past and to creating an ethical stance, history is needed, as a view from the outside, to scrutinize and verify the remembered event" ("History" 264).

their writings of history because the use of literary devices and tropes, such as metaphor, metonymy, and irony, are seminal for facilitating an understanding in that they help demonstrate and explain processes and causalities of historical events which would otherwise remain inaccessible; the writing of history, White argues, is always narrative in nature.

Seminal Holocaust research, including influential studies such as Hilberg's *The Destruction of the European Jews* (1961) and Lucy Dawidowicz's *The War Against the Jews* (1975), seems largely to follow White's postulate that the writing of the history of the Shoah is essentially narratological. Moreover, both Hilberg and Dawidowicz are concerned with documenting the Holocaust in writing, stressing the superiority of written records over oral accounts. Oral discourse, they posit, is largely unsuitable for representing the history of the Holocaust because it is characterized by the lapses and tricks played by memory. Since oral discourse "relies on the faithfulness and memory of its transmitters and receivers, neither of which can be perfect means of recording events" (Cobley 32), oral accounts are inadequate for recording and preserving historical events due to memory's unreliable nature. The ensuing exclusion of the victims' voices paradoxically repeats the Nazis' attempt to not only annihilate history but also to create one single master narrative of History, a narrative written from the perspective of the perpetrators.

Addressing the silencing of the victims within Holocaust historiography, Bauer posits in his 2001 study, *Rethinking the Holocaust*, that it is his "predilection to deal with the Jewish victims of the Holocaust" (xv). He does so by including a variety of reactions of Jewish resistance fighters to the genocide, testimonies and eyewitness

accounts of Jewish men and women, which have traditionally been neglected within the writing of the history of the Shoah because of their alleged unreliability.[13]

In his 2007 seminal study, *The Years of Extermination: Nazi Germany and the Jews, 1939-1945*, Friedländer subverts the predominant understanding of the writing of the Holocaust by demanding a new way of writing this particular history where historical accounts as well as survivor testimonies become equally important sources. It is his contention that the machinery of destruction cannot solely be described or even explained from the perspective of the perpetrators, simply because the "'history of the Holocaust' cannot be limited only to a recounting of German policies, decisions, and measures that led to this most systematic and sustained of genocides" (xv). Therefore, Friedländer does not discard memory as an unreliable source that stands in opposition to history, but rather considers oral discourse as an important aspect in the reconstruction and representation of past events. The writing of the history of the Holocaust, according to Friedländer,

> must include the reactions (and at times the initiatives) of the surrounding world and the attitudes of the victims, for the fundamental reason that the events we call the Holocaust represent a totality defined by this very convergence of distinct elements. (xv)

He thus postulates that "the history of the Holocaust should be both an integrative and an integrated history" (xv).[14] Elaborating on and illustrating the notion of an

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[13] Interestingly, the first volumes containing important documents about the extermination of Europe's Jews that were published in Germany only included testimonies of surviving academics because of their alleged tendency to remain emotionally detached (Poliakov 1).

[14] The first volume, *The Years of Persecution: Nazi Germany and the Jews, 1933-1939* (1998), also already bears traces of Friedländer's notion of integrative historiography, but it is only in the

integrative history Friedländer incorporates, compares and contrasts various perspectives of the victims, perpetrators, and bystanders in his study in order to arrive at an overall picture of the historical event, while simultaneously emphasizing the importance of oral discourse in making the voices of the victims heard. Thus the perspectives of both victim and witness as well as their testimonies, "which can essentially be regarded as a combination of history and memory" (Assmann, "History" 264),[15] become an integral aspect of the writing of the history of the Holocaust, and provide survivor-witnesses in particular, with the opportunity to act as witnesses to the course of history.

The Holocaust – A Crisis of Witnessing

The systematic mass murder of the Jewish people carried out by the Nazis essentially engendered a radical crisis of witnessing; it is, in Maurice Blanchot's words, "an event without witnesses" (98). In *Testimony: Crisis of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (1992), Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub likewise refer to the Holocaust as an "event without witnesses," arguing that the lack of witnesses leads to a "crisis of witnessing" (206). Felman explains that the Holocaust is "an absolute historical event whose literally overwhelming evidence makes it, paradoxically, into an utterly proofless event" (211). This is not to say, however, that witnessing the Holocaust is an impossibility; rather, it implies that "[t]he

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second volume that he overtly draws on eyewitness accounts which he accepts as valid historical sources.

[15] Assmann specifically refers to the video testimonies stored at the Fortunoff Archive, arguing that "[t]he new genre of testimony…presents an intrinsic mixture of history and memory: it renders accounts of the ways in which the historical event of the Holocaust has deformed and shattered the patterns of an individual life" ("History" 264). However, I suggest that her insights hold true for any kind of Holocaust testimony, both in oral and written discourse.

historical imperative to bear witness could essentially *not be met during the actual occurrence*" (Felman and Laub, in Brinkley and Youra 114). The unprecedented nature of the Holocaust, the speed with which it was carried out, and the number of victims it produced in so short a period of time exceeded any possible frame of reference, and rendered impossible any attempt to witness and ultimately comprehend the event; instead, the Holocaust left the victims, as well as other nations, ethnic and cultural groups who were not directly affected by the mass murder, numb, empty, and speechless – in short, deeply traumatized.

The act of witnessing was profoundly affected by the paradoxical framework in which it was expected to occur. One aspect of this paradox is the Nazis' attempt to eliminate all physical witnesses of their crimes, particularly towards the end of the war. When the Russian army was already approaching Auschwitz, SS guards were frantically gassing inmates, by far exceeding the capacity of the gas chambers. Therefore, the SS decided to force those inmates, who were still in relatively good health, to move westwards on so-called death marches. The Nazis' plan was to intern and ultimately kill the inmates who would survive the death march in those camps that were still out of reach of the impending approach of the Red Army (Friedländer, *The Years of Extermination* 650-51). No one should remain who could possibly bear witness to the atrocities committed by the Nazis.

Another aspect of this paradox was the impossibility of bearing witness from inside so unprecedented an event. The immensity of which could hardly be grasped by those within this particular moment of history who therefore lacked a frame of reference in which to address and come to terms with their experiences (Laub, in

Brinkley and Youra 114). The so-called 'Final Solution' was carried out with such speed and on such a large scale that the victims were unable to fully comprehend what was happening to them. As well, most of the victims were sent directly into the gas chamber after their arrival at the death camps so that they had virtually no time to realize that they were in fact not interned at the camps in order to work but rather to be exterminated. Those inmates who were spared the fate of immediate death were faced with the daily struggle of survival and the incomprehensibility of their surroundings, which was foremost engendered by the fact that a nation, which was once considered one of the most civilized and cultured countries in Europe, could carry out a genocide characterized by its inhumanity and barbaric nature.

Similarly, bearing witness to the Holocaust from the outside, from the other side of the fence, as it were, was equally impossible, as the example of the Vrba-Wetzler report illustrates.[16] Vrba and Wetzler, two escapees from Auschwitz who had witnessed the mass murder of the Jewish people firsthand, wrote a report about their experiences for the Allies and the Polish government in exile; yet neither group could comprehend or grasp the event because, for them, the Vrba-Wetzler report testified to a reality unimaginable for those who had not been inside the camp themselves. Rudolf Vrba and Alfred Wetzler were able to escape from Auschwitz-Birkenau on April 7, 1944 (Porter 143). They had both been working in "Canada," where the bags and

[16] Even before Vrba and Wetzler submitted their report about the killing machinery at Auschwitz, Jan Karski, a Pole who belonged to the Polish underground, had written a report in 1942 about the situation of Jews in Poland. He stated, "the policy towards the Jews...is not a policy of subjugation and oppression, but of cold and systematic extermination" (qtd. in Baron 172). He reported about the plans for mass extermination of the Jewish population of Poland, but, exactly like the Vrba and Wetzler report two years later, the events Karski's document described were beyond belief and imagination. It was not until the genocide was already in full operation that Karski's report was finally seen as an important account which could prove helpful in rescuing the Jewish population of Poland. By then, it was, however, too late, as most of the European Jewry had either already been killed, or were incarcerated in the death camps in the East, awaiting almost certain death.

suitcases of the internees were stored. Because of their work in "Canada," Vrba and Wetzler were privy to information they gathered from overhearing conversations between the SS guards. This way they were able to find out that the Nazis were planning on exterminating the Hungarian Jews, the last remaining large group of European Jewry. Vrba and Wetzler ceaselessly tried to alert the Hungarian government about the impending extermination of their Jewish population. However, Rezsö Kasztner, the Jewish leader of Hungary,

> was negotiating at this time with the Gestapo about a German offer to exchange the lives of Jews for goods and money... [and] the circulation of the report evidently threatened to undermine his efforts with the Nazis. (Baron 184-85)

Kasztner and other members of the Jewish population of Hungary were under the impression that they were still in a position to save lives by negotiating with the Nazis, completely unaware of the fact that the Nazis planned on exterminating Hungarian Jews regardless, as they had done with other European Jews. The Auschwitz protocols, as Vrba and Wetzler's report came to be labelled, give a detailed description of the atrocities committed at Auschwitz death camp, and provide firsthand account of the machinery of death and the industrialized nature of the genocide.[17] Yet Vrba and Wetzler's testimony was simply put away with a note stating that there was no proof as to the reliability of their report (Hilberg, *Destruction* 1212). Interestingly, the question of the reliability of the report is an ongoing issue within Holocaust scholarship; it

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[17] A German translation of the Auschwitz protocols is reprinted in John Conway, "Der Auschwitz-Bericht von April 1944," *Zeitgeschichte* 8.11-12 (1981): 413-42.

would seem that the controversies surrounding its authenticity still highlight to this day the nature of the events the report described.[18]

The Holocaust has led to a historical crisis of witnessing, since, as the above examples suggest, the very nature of the genocide, at the time of its occurrence, precluded any possibility of bearing witness: bearing witness from the outside was impossible, "since for the outsider, even in the very grief of his full empathy and sympathy, the truth of the inside remains the truth of an *exclusion*" (Felman and Laub 232); and likewise, bearing witness to the event from the inside was foreclosed, since it meant assuming the paradoxical position of bearing witness to the destruction and annihilation of one's identity, and ultimately, to one's own death. In his seminal study, *The Drowned and the Saved* (1988), Holocaust survivor Primo Levi elaborates on the impossible position of the historical witness by arguing that the only true or complete witnesses are those who were murdered, the "drowned."[19] They not only experienced the mass destruction but bore testimony to the horror of the Holocaust through their own deaths, through the fact that they "have not returned to tell about it" (83).[20] Because the true witnesses are not able to bear witness for themselves, Levi argues that the survivors must act as "witnesses by proxy" (84). Survivors, however, can never entirely bear witness to the experiences of the dead. The testimony of those

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[18] See, for instance, A.R. Butz, *The Hoax of the Twentieth Century*, (Torrance: Noontide P, 1977), and Wilhelm Stäglich, *Der Auschwitz-Mythos: Legende oder Wirklichkeit? Eine kritische Bestandsaufnahme*, (Tübingen: Grabert Verlag, 1981).

[19] *The Drowned and the Saved* first appeared in Italian as *I sommersi e i salvati* (1986).

[20] Levi posits that the true witnesses are, in the jargon of the Lager, the *Muselmänner*, the living dead, the walking corpses of the extermination camps. The figure of the *Muselmann* is first mentioned in Levi's *Survival in Auschwitz*, written two years after the liberation of Auschwitz. Only recently has the figure of the *Muselmann* been given due attention within Holocaust studies as a liminal figure situated at the intersection of life and death, For a detailed description and analysis of the figure of the *Muselmann*, see Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, (New York: Zone Books, 2002).

who perished will forever remain inaccessible because there will always remain an inexplicable void that cannot be filled by language. This void as identified by Levi has been endemic to Holocaust studies and to the complexities surrounding the very idea of witnessing. Levi argues that the survivor can only attain the position of a witness by proxy by placing the potential for articulating the experiences of the dead – and by extension, his own – within an impossible framework that is, above all, characterized by the failure of language, a framework that paradoxically seems to foreclose any possibility of the very act of witnessing on behalf of the dead.

In *Remnants of Auschwitz* (2002), elaborating on the problem of language highlighted by Levi, Giorgio Agamben argues that "at a certain point, it became clear that testimony contained at its core an essential lacuna; in other words, the survivors bore witness to something it is impossible to bear witness to" (13). He suggests that it is precisely because of this impossibility of language that manifests itself as lacuna, gap, or lack, that the survivor is able to become a witness. In other words, the survivor's lack of an adequate language, of words, and of expressions in testifying to the Holocaust, becomes in itself a testimony to the event.

Despite the fact that survivors, as explained by both Levi and Agamben, cannot bear witness to the totality of the event, these by-proxy witnesses of whom Levi speaks, can nevertheless assume the position of a witness: it is through the very act of survival itself that these survivor-witnesses are able to testify to the death of millions of people as well as to their lost voices, and therefore, ultimately, to the Holocaust.[21]

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[21] Claude Lanzmann, director of the documentary *Shoah* (1985), in which he interviewed survivors, perpetrators, and bystanders of the Holocaust, pointed out, as Assmann writes, that his witnesses "were witnesses for those who were no longer there to yield any testimony. This is why he

The Figure of the Holocaust Witness

The Holocaust witness is thus an extremely complex phenomenon, comprised of differing and even contradictory functions. First, s/he is a survivor, testifying to his/her own survival; second, a witness testifying to the Holocaust; and, finally, a figure who bears witness on behalf of the dead. Due to its complexity, the figure of the Holocaust witness essentially inhabits a gap that manifests itself between history and impossible testimony. On the one hand, the Holocaust witness is an historical witness because s/he has lived through the event and actually experienced this history s/he describes; on the other hand, his/her testimony is impossible because s/he has to bear witness from outside the history s/he has been a part of, and thus lacks, due to the gap between history and subjective recall, a frame of reference in which to address his/her experiences; and, lastly, his/her testimony is impossible because s/he must testify to the totality of the lost voices.

Elaborating on the complex and seemingly impossible position of the Holocaust witness by examining Levi's notion of witnesses by proxy, or pseudo-witnesses, whose position is characterized by the paradox of testifying on behalf of the "true witnesses," the dead, who can no longer bear witness for themselves, Israeli philosopher Avishai Margalit, in *The Ethics of Memory* (2002), has coined the term "moral witness" to delineate the importance of the moral imperative inherent in the act of testifying to the Holocaust. Margalit highlights the moral responsibility that Holocaust survivors associate with the notion of witnessing, a responsibility which translates into the possibility, for Holocaust survivors, of reclaiming their subjectivity.

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referred to these witnesses also as 'porte-parole des morts,' as vicarious voices, as stand-ins and deputies for the dead" ("History" 267).

By regaining their subjectivity, survivors are able to negotiate the impossibility of their testimony engendered by the gap or incongruity between history and memory, between official Holocaust historiography and subjective recall.

In order "to become a moral witness," Margalit asserts, "one has to witness the combination of evil and the suffering [this evil] produces" (148). The moral witness of the Holocaust has a responsibility towards the dead, him/herself, and a public that has, quite often, no knowledge of the event. Hence, as Margalit explains further, "[t]he moral witness plays a special role in uncovering the evil he or she encounters. Evil regimes try hard to cover up the enormity of their crimes, and the moral witness tries to expose it" (165). The role of the moral witness is thus twofold: first, the moral witness testifies to the nature of the Holocaust; and, second, in doing so, Margalit's moral witness, like Levi's by-proxy witness, assumes the responsibility of bearing witness on behalf of the dead. While for both Levi and Margalit testimony is the means by which the Holocaust can indeed be represented, the position of Levi's by-proxy witness and of Margalit's moral witness can only be assumed by Holocaust survivors themselves, precisely because they have been inside and experienced the history they are testifying to.

A New Poetics of Witnessing

Since the last survivors of the Holocaust are now passing, the era of the direct witness and of living memory, according to French historian Annette Wieviorka, is also coming to an end, and with it the possibilities for conducting firsthand interviews with people who lived through the actual event (136). While the age of the firsthand

witness to the Holocaust is soon to end, the imperative of bearing witness to the event will not vanish, yet undoubtedly will have to undergo a significant transformation, which demands a new poetics of witnessing that searches for ways in which the Holocaust can be remembered in the absence of eyewitnesses. This new poetics of witnessing has to negotiate the complexities surrounding the notion of bearing witness to an event not experienced firsthand, and, most importantly, investigate the role and position subsequent generations can occupy with regard to fulfilling the moral imperative of remembering the dead.

Subsequent generations cannot assume the position of a moral witness as delineated by Levi and Margalit. They have not undergone the direct sufferings of the Holocaust victims, which Margalit sees as one important prerequisite for acting as a moral witness.[22] Holocaust scholars frequently use the term "secondary witnesses," to emphasize the temporal – and generational – gap between direct, that is, firsthand witnesses, and subsequent generations, who wish to bear witness to the Holocaust yet did not experience the horror of Auschwitz themselves. Langer, for instance, understands the concept of secondary witnessing in a situational sense, which allows

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[22] Even before Margalit coined and subsequently explained the position of the "moral witness" as a category reserved for survivor-witnesses, questions surrounding the notion of authenticity and authority in acting as a primary witness to the past were brought to the fore after the publication of Binjamin Wilkomirski's childhood memoir, *Bruchstücke: Aus einer Kindheit 1939-1948* (1995), later published in English as *Fragments: Memories of a Wartime Childhood* (1996). Here, Wilkomirski, whose real name is Bruno Dössekker, a non-Jew, presented himself as a primary witness, as a Holocaust survivor, who experienced the horrors of Auschwitz himself; his memoir stirred a controversy about the authenticity and reliability of eyewitness accounts, the juxtaposition of fact and fiction in testimony, and the problems inherent in an over-identification with the actual victims. Instead of acting as a secondary witness, as a witness to a witnessing, Dössekker presented himself as a primary witness, and hence assumed the position of a moral witness, a position which can, as outlined by Margalit, be occupied by survivors only. For a discussion of the Wilkomirski scandal, see Michael Bernard-Donals, "Beyond the Question of Authenticity: Witness and Testimony in the *Fragments* Controversy," *Witnessing the Disaster: Essays on Representation and the Holocaust,* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 2003) 196-227, and Rachel Carroll, "Possessed by the Past: Agency, Inauthentic Testimony, and Wilkomirski's *Fragments*," *Lit: Literature Interpretation Theory* 18.1 (2007): 21-36.

for the inclusion of all generations born after the war, and also of cultural groups not affiliated with the Holocaust. In his study, *Holocaust Testimonies* (1991), he describes the role of the analyst or interviewer of survivors as that of a secondary witness, arguing that the analyst/interviewer becomes a secondary witness through the act of listening, which requires an empathic predisposition that fosters an engagement with the eyewitness's account. Likewise, Dori Laub posits that without an attentive listener, any testimony remains void, and the historical event it attempts to contain surrounded by silence. He highlights and explains therefore the necessity of another person, who assumes the position of an attentive listener.[23] And LaCapra, in an analysis of Lanzmann's documentary, *Shoah*, also emphasizes the role of the interviewer as that of a secondary witness who, through listening to eyewitness testimonies, reactivates the initial trauma which now manifests itself in gaps and silences in the survivor's account ("Lanzmann's *Shoah*" 267). In contrast to Langer, Laub, and LaCapra's situational understanding of the idea of secondary witnessing, Geoffrey Hartman, in *The Longest Shadow* (1996), uses the term "secondary witness" in a purely generational sense, referring to the sons and daughters of Holocaust survivors as "second generation witnesses." Later, however, he refines his perception of the notion of secondary witnessing as being exclusively defined by and dependent upon the generational proximity between survivors and their children because, as he states, "[t]he passing of the survivor does not mean the passing of the witness" ("Shoah and Intellectual Witness" 39). Since the actual dialogue with survivors is

[23] At the same time, Laub also stresses the difficulties inherent in assuming the role of such a listener, cautioning that the listener's "knowledge [about the historical event] should not [however]...obstruct the listening with the foregone conclusions and preconceived dismissals, [that it] should not be an obstacle or a foreclosure to new, diverging, unexpected information" (61).

about to become a thing of the past, it becomes now our task, as those who come after, to engage in a dialogue with what they have left behind, namely their firsthand eyewitness accounts in the form of testimonies.

These testimonies, which testify to the horrors of Auschwitz, are stored in what Agamben calls the archive of the witness (158), an arsenal of metaphorical pictures and mental images which conveys – not so much in a literal as in a figurative sense – a glimpse of the real atmosphere and horrific nature of the historical event. The importance of this archive lies in its function as a guard and preserver of historical truth. In a sense, this archive represents, particularly for subsequent generations who lack the actual, personal experience of suffering but wish to investigate the nature of the Holocaust, the key to gaining access to the often-cited inaccessible nature of the Shoah, as it contains individual testimonies that attest to the genocide. This archive will, in the near future, serve as a witness itself, gradually replacing the actual survivor-witnesses. Yet an archive is, by definition, an inanimate, dormant object that relies completely on the interest of those who wish to get closer to an understanding of the past. While subsequent generations have the possibility of actively entering the archive of the witness, and of engaging with survivor-witnesses' accounts stored in this archive, not all members of generations born after the war develop an interest in exploring the past and history. The lack of interest in and the ensuing indifference to the occurrences of the past, amongst subsequent generations, on the one hand, and the active engagement with and interest in preserving and accessing the past, on the other, are reminiscent of the behaviour of the onlookers and bystanders during the Holocaust, who either remained passive and lethargic, or did in fact try to help and rescue the

persecuted. In his article, "Shoah and Intellectual Witness" (1998), Hartman addresses this parallel discernible between historical bystanders and subsequent generations who alternate between a state of indifference and of responsibility to the imperative of rescuing the memories of the victims from oblivion. He coins the term "intellectual witness" to refer to those members of subsequent generations who develop an interest in actively entering the archive of the witness. While the notion of intellectual witnessing, as put forth by Hartman, can be considered "an active reception that is relevant both for our time and the encroaching future" ("Shoah and Intellectual Witness" 37), and is thus able to "[provide] a witness for the witness" (48), it is an indirect act of witnessing, as it were, since it occurs within the context of the absence of the actual eyewitnesses, generating what Alison Landsberg terms "prosthetic memories" (25).[24] An intellectual witness can therefore only act as a witness to a testimony, that is, to a representation of the historical event.[25] Simultaneously, as Hartman writes, the concept of intellectual witness can refer to those "who look at the Shoah not as something enclosed in the past but as a contemporary issue requiring an

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[24] In *Prosthetic Memory* (2004), Landsberg explains that "[w]ith prosthetic memory...people are invited to take on memories of a past through which they did not live" (8), and, in doing so, to act as witnesses to the past.

[25] Gary Weissman evokes the term "nonwitness" in order to stress that subsequent generations only experience the Holocaust through representations of it: "the term *nonwitness* stresses that we who were not there did not witness the Holocaust, and that the experience of listening to, reading, or viewing witness testimony is substantially unlike the experience of victimization. We can read books or watch films on the Holocaust, listen to Holocaust survivors, visit Holocaust museums, take trips to Holocaust memorial sites in Europe, research and write about the Holocaust, look at photographs of the victims, and so forth, but in none of these cases are we witnessing the actual events of the Holocaust. Rather, we are experiencing representations of the Holocaust, all of them created or preserved in its aftermath" (20). Similarly, James Young contends that subsequent generations have to negotiate the existence of a multiplicity of representations, which determines and shapes their memory of a remote event. He writes that "All they remember, all they know of the Holocaust, is what the victims have passed down to them in their diaries, what the survivors have remembered to them in their memoirs. They remember not the actual event but rather the countless histories, novels, and poems of the Holocaust they have read, the photographs, movies, and video testimonies they have seen over the years" ("The Holocaust as Vicarious Past" 26).

intensity of representation close to eyewitness report" (38). Here, Hartman is gesturing towards the universalization of Holocaust memory because the position of the intellectual witness is, in contrast to his earlier understanding of the idea of "secondary witness," no longer dependent upon the idea of a generational framework, but can be assumed, in a contemporary, globalized context, by anyone who wishes to engage with the archive of the witness. The removal of the generational framework also suggests that everyone born after the war is a bystander to the history of the Holocaust, a notion which foregrounds the increasingly global character of Holocaust memory while it also gestures towards the shifting cultural contexts for Holocaust representation.

As early as 1992 Friedländer highlighted the inevitable universalization and globalization of Holocaust memory. He contends that the Holocaust is "an event of a kind which demands a global approach" (*Probing the Limits* 1), implying that addressing, representing, and, in doing so, ultimately bearing witness to the Shoah, can no longer be merely confined to a national context and limited to the respective remembrance cultures in the countries of the victims and perpetrators, Israel and Germany. Friedländer foregrounds the necessity of revisiting the idea of witnessing, particularly within the current, global context, which is not only characterized by temporal distance from the Holocaust, but also by geographic and linguistic distance alike. The specifics and possibilities engendered by the global context demand a reconfiguration of the notion of witnessing, and a closer examination of the limits and possibilities of the idea of witnessing from a distance, which I would like to introduce here.

In fact, the Holocaust itself has engendered a diversification of the notion of temporal and spatial distance in relation to the act of bearing witness: most survivors left Europe after the end of the Second World War, taking with them their memories of suffering, and often settled in foreign countries, surrounded by an unknown language. Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi explains that

> [t]he literature that many of the survivors produced shares certain unique qualities of cultural dislocation and of crosscultural perspectives precisely because it is a literature of uprooted persons, most of them writing in acquired languages. (12)

Ezrahi highlights the fact that both the geographical and linguistic distance have shaped and influenced yet also complicated the act of bearing witness to an event such as the Holocaust, which, precisely because of its gruesome and unprecedented nature, can only be witnessed from a distance.

The unprecedented nature of the event demands the creation of a frame of reference in which the Holocaust can be situated and addressed, a framework that is not only an artificial, artistic creation, but one also characterized by the use of novelistic techniques that serve to highlight the particular difficulties inherent in testifying to a trauma which paradoxically defies representation while it simultaneously and incessantly demands witnessing. The paradoxical task of containing such event in narrative inevitably evokes an aesthetic distance. Even early eyewitness accounts, such as Tadeusz Borowski's *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen* (1959) and Elie Wiesel's *Night* (1958), albeit grounded in and based on firsthand experiences, essentially bear witness from a distance, more specifically, from

an aesthetic distance that highlights the collapse of the binary between history and imagination, between fact and fiction, a collapse caused by the unprecedented nature of the Holocaust. The use of fictional or at least novelistic techniques, even in the earliest eyewitness accounts, demonstrates that the very act of representation already creates distance among the survivors' horrific experiences and the trauma endured. The use of novelistic techniques in early eyewitness accounts has to be understood as a direct response to the trauma endured, that is, "to the acts that cannot be...assimilated into full cognition," as Felman and Laub highlight (5). The metaphorical and allegorical qualities characteristic of fiction allow for the circumscription of personal suffering, while they simultaneously create the necessary distance for survivors to be able to address and narrate their ordeals, and to ultimately bear witness and testify for those who perished at the hands of the Nazis.

The literary career of Elie Wiesel, a Holocaust survivor himself, and as such a primary, firsthand witness, attests to the impossibility of establishing and maintaining a clear-cut distinction between factual testimonies and fictional representations of personal experiences. While he argues that a novel about Auschwitz cannot and should never be written, thus completely discarding the idea of any imaginative rendition of the Holocaust, his own memoir, *Night*, about his time in this concentration camp, bears obvious traces of novelistic techniques itself, and has thus been classified as a literary biography, as Alvin Rosenfeld and Irving Greenberg have done in *Confronting the Holocaust* (1978).[26] Despite his memoir's affinity with fictional

[26] See also Daniel Schwarz's chapter on Wiesel's *Night*, "The Ethics of Reading Wiesel's *Night*" in his study, *Imagining the Holocaust*, (New York: St. Martin's P, 1999). Schwarz, like Rosenberg and Greenfeld, describes Wiesel's memoir as a "fictionalized autobiographical memoir of the Holocaust" (49).

devices, Wiesel, assuming the position of a moral witness, stresses that the authenticity and legitimacy of survivor accounts such as his are affirmed by the moral imperative of bearing witness on behalf of the dead, and by the experience of personal suffering, both of which provide the survivor-witness with a moral authority that cannot be obtained otherwise: "If someone else could have written my stories, I would not have written them. I have written them in order to testify. My role is the role of the witness...Not to tell, or to tell another story, is...to commit perjury" (qtd. in Felman and Laub 204).[27] Yet if authority in writing about the Holocaust, as Wiesel so vehemently asserts, is limited to the generation of the survivors, to the actual eyewitnesses, the impending loss of this generation and their firsthand experiences will also affect the ways in which the Shoah will be remembered and knowledge about it transmitted (Young, *Writing and Rewriting* 13) because, as Joachim Paech points out, the loss of eyewitness memories will inevitably lead to the loss of "the inner truth of personally experienced horror" (14; my translation).

In order to preserve lived memory, Lillian Kremer argues, quite in contrast to Wiesel, that authority in writing about the Holocaust should no longer be exclusively limited to survivors like Wiesel, Borowski, and Levi, that is, "to those with personal suffering." Instead, Kremer writes, "[a]uthority may be achieved from the will of the artist to learn and shape the material" (15). In their wish to address and negotiate the ongoing impact of the Holocaust, subsequent generations should therefore be allowed to actively enter "the archive of the witness" (Agamben), and to use the witnesses'

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[27] Other literary accounts that are situated between fact and fiction, between the author's personal experiences and their subsequent fictionalized representations, are Jerzy Kosinski's *The Painted Bird* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), Imre Kertesz's *Fateless* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern UP, 1992), and Ruth Klüger's *weiter leben. Eine Jugend* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 1992).

memories stored in said archive as a starting point in arriving at their own interpretation and understanding of the Jewish genocide.

Jorge Semprun, himself a Holocaust survivor, recognizes the need for memory of the Holocaust in the twenty-first century to undergo a transformation, from authentic, albeit reconstructed memory of survivors, to increasingly imaginative renditions of the event by subsequent generations, who wish to address and negotiate the ongoing impact of the Holocaust, and thus bear witness to it. This shift highlights the importance of transferring the responsibility towards the memory of the dead, onto subsequent generations. Semprun argues that

> The memory of the Holocaust as well as of the resistance dies, if not young writers who were born after the Holocaust, take care of these matters. Soon, the surviving witnesses will perish. We do, of course, have the testimonies left behind by the victims, as well as the documents stored in the archives. The historians will continue to write about the Second World War. But only the writers can renew the memory. (*F.A.Z.* 8 Feb 2008; my translation)[28]

Yet Semprun also asserts that, precisely because of the lack of personal experiences of suffering, which Wiesel believes to be paramount in bearing witness to the Holocaust, writers born after the war can only revert to the use of their imagination in creating their own responses to the Shoah. Thus the Holocaust inevitably becomes, in Efraim

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[28] Upon the 2008 publication of the German translation of Jewish American writer Jonathan Littell's highly controversial novel, *Les Bienveillantes*, which represents a fictional monologue of a German perpetrator, the former SS officer Max Aue, Semprun was interviewed in the German newspaper, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (*F.A.Z.*). Asked about his reaction to the novel in particular, and about his view of so-called Holocaust literature in general, Semprun made it quite clear that without literature and imaginative renditions of the Shoah, its memory and the memory of the dead will eventually vanish.

Sicher's words, "public property for the postwar generations" (315), gesturing once again towards a shift from fact to fiction, from the personal experience of suffering preserved in testimony, to the belated, imaginary experience of suffering and empathy created by subsequent generations.

This shift also affects Holocaust literature as a genre, which has changed since the end of the Second World War from solely consisting of firsthand eyewitness accounts in the form of testimonies, diaries, letters, and memoirs, to Holocaust fiction, that is, imaginative renditions of the event, written by authors of the second and third generations after the war, and also by writers who reside at a cultural, geographical, and linguistic distance from the Holocaust. These renditions move from the question of representation to the question of ethics, by warning the reader that an event like the Holocaust must not happen again yet also by forcing the reader to recognize and negotiate his or her own positionality in relation to the past. Indeed, the ongoing preoccupation with the event in contemporary fiction can be regarded as an act of intellectual witnessing, or as an expression of witnessing from a distance.

Foremost, there is the idea of an aesthetic freedom that is associated with the notion of distance. Contemporary authors have nothing but their imagination and the possibilities engendered by fiction to represent and thus bear witness to the Holocaust. For them, the Holocaust is nothing but an inexplicable, vast void, the trauma it engendered an "impossible history" (Caruth, *Trauma* 5). It is, in Caruth's words, this "impossible history" that postwar generations have constantly to negotiate.[29] An

[29] In order to negotiate this "impossible history," third-generation writers of Jewish descent often concern themselves with their own, lost family history, and employ main or central characters who are quite frequently children or grandchildren of survivors who wish to learn more about their extinguished family history and cultural roots. See, for instance, Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (New York:

investigation and, ultimately, a witnessing of this "impossible history" seems, however, only to be possible from a distance, because, as Laub states, "it is only now, *belatedly*, that the event begins to be historically grasped and seen" (84), thereby foregrounding the idea that distance is an integral part of the act of witnessing the Holocaust, particularly in the twenty-first century, and in the absence of the generation of survivors. Wiesel, as discussed above, only grants legitimacy to survivor accounts; yet I suggest that this legitimacy does not vanish with the last survivors. Rather, the ideas of legitimacy, authority, and responsibility seem to be increasingly dependent upon and intricately associated with the notion of distance: it is this temporal, geographical, linguistic and, ultimately, aesthetic distance that has allowed for a proliferation of postwar Holocaust narratives which, in continuing to address the major catastrophe of twentieth-century Western history, fulfill the moral imperative of bearing witness on behalf of the dead and, in doing so, affirm their own legitimacy. Contemporary authors often do so by assuming the position of the bystander, which, as a figure removed from a specific historical context, can function both on a contextual and situational level. In fact, it is the flexibility of the position of the bystander that allows subsequent generations to write about the Holocaust from an imaginative distance, and in doing so, to assume the position of distant witnesses to the past. Additionally, the bystander is a figure that exists outside the confinements of the victim-perpetrator dialectic, and can therefore offer subsequent generations a perspective from which to critically investigate the past and the ways in which it is represented in the present. Indeed, it is the flexibility of the contemporary, distanced

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Pantheon Books, 1991), Bernice Eisenstein's *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 2006), and Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything Is Illuminated* (London: Penguin, 2002).

bystander as a figure that exists outside the history it represents, that accounts for the diversity of Holocaust representations in contemporary fiction, because it allows authors who are not only temporally, spatially and linguistically removed from the Shoah but also culturally distanced from the event, to create their own memories of the Holocaust and its aftermath.

The complexities surrounding the idea of distance and the position of the bystander can serve to illustrate the ways in which subsequent generations, particularly third-generation writers, who represent the last link to the generation of survivors, occupy a seminal position in reconfiguring and shaping a culture of Holocaust remembrance. This contemporary culture of remembrance is characterized not so much by an investigation of the Holocaust as an historical and thus remote event, but rather by a critical analysis of how a society and its culture address, negotiate, and represent this event in the present. A deeper investigation of the notion of witnessing from a distance therefore serves to explore the ways in which a culture situates itself in relation to its past, how memory is constructed and in turn represented, and how this representation, or non-representation, of traumatic memory affects cultural and collective identities, and the ethical responsibility of ongoing remembrance.

Chapter 2

Between Guilt and Suffering –

German Memory of the Holocaust and the War

Introduction

Ever since the end of World War II, German society has been deeply affected by the traumatic experience of the Nazi regime, individual experiences of wartime suffering, and by the postwar experience of a ruined society; most of all, however, it is affected by the collective guilt for the Holocaust. Since the members of the war generation refrained from addressing, coping with, and ultimately working through the traumatic past, possibly because of an unwillingness to accept responsibility for the Holocaust on a personal, individual level, the processing of their traumatic experiences both as victims of Allied bombings and of the expulsion from the East, but also as perpetrators of the mass murder, transformed and transcended into a traumatic burden and task for subsequent generations. The complex task of negotiating this past has also influenced and shaped postwar German literature.

The early years after the war were characterized by an inability to address the trauma caused by the Holocaust; instead the focus of immediate postwar German literature remained on the plight of the Germans, who found themselves surrounded by ruin both literally and figuratively. They were encased in the destruction caused by the Allied air raids towards the end of the war, which left the country for the most part in rubble and in the psychological debris caused by the sudden disintegration and loss of

Nazi ideology. Two important representatives of this initial German postwar literature are Wolfgang Borchert and Heinrich Böll. Borchert's 1947 play, "Draußen vor der Tür," thematizes the problems faced by a German repatriate who, upon his return to Germany, has to cope with the loss of his family and come to terms with his position within a society which refrains from admitting responsibility for the war and its consequences. Heinrich Böll's short story, "Wanderer, kommst du nach Spa" (1950) also focusses on the idea of homelessness, confusion, and forlornness as immediate consequences of the war. Both Borchert's play and Böll's short story thematize the so-called *Heimkehrerthematik*, that is, the plight of the German soldier who returns to a traumatized and devastated country; in contrast, Borchert's short story, "Nachts schlafen die Ratten doch," written in the same year as his aforementioned play, focusses, in a more general sense, on German life after the war, on life amidst the rubble, as it were, and the overwhelming sense of hopelessness in the face of destruction felt by the German population at home. The focus on the notion of destruction and devastation led German literature produced in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War to be called *Trümmerliteratur*, literature of rubble.[1]

While the literature of rubble employed a self-pitying tone focussing on the overall sense of devastation and addressing the collective feeling of hopelessness of a

[1] Very suggestively, an extremely similar term – the term *Trümmerfrau* – was used to refer to the German women after the war, who helped rebuild the buildings that had been destroyed by Allied bombings. The term is suggestive firstly because of the all-encompassing physical destruction experienced by the German population at home, a population which consisted mainly of women. Furthermore, the term is also once again suggestive of the psychological experience of destruction. These widows, whose husbands never returned from the war, were faced with the rubble that remained of their previous, pre-war life. As well, the genre of the so-called *Trümmerfilm* (rubble film) thematizes life in rubble in a postwar Germany. One of the most important movies belonging to this genre is Roberto Rossellini's *Deutschland im Jahre Null* (original title: *Germania anno zero*) (1948), which tells the story of a 12-year-old boy and his daily struggle for survival in an almost completely destroyed Berlin, where the film was shot in the summer of 1947.

nation surrounded by its own ruins, the literature of the next generation seemed to function as its opposite by reverting to an accusatory tone that aimed at exposing the correlations between the behaviour of the German populace during the Third Reich and their subsequent psychological destruction. The German literature of the 1960s and 1970s, produced in the West, thus became extremely politicized. The generational conflict of 1968 engendered a climate in West Germany in which the sons and daughters of the war generation publicly accused this whole generation of its implication in National Socialism and the Holocaust. German authors of the second generation increasingly assumed within their works the self-confident perspective of those born after the war. This critical perspective seemed to be made possible and justified by the aforementioned generational conflict which provided members of the second generation with the moral right to accuse their parents of having been willing perpetrators of Hitler's regime or unquestioning followers of his politics. Bernward Vesper's *Die Reise* (1977) is a seminal text in this newly emerged, so-called *Väterliteratur* – literature of fathers – that illustrates one of the main thematic concerns of this particular literature, namely the son's accusation against his father for having been, not only infiltrated by Nazi ideology, but also for having been an active participant as a soldier of the German Wehrmacht in the Second World War. Similarly, Sigfrid Gauch's novel *Vaterspuren* (1979) also investigates and represents the same problematic relationship of a son with a father who had participated in the war, and also possibly in the Holocaust. The angry, accusatory nature of these narratives foregrounds the children's unwillingness and inability to face the difficult task of negotiating their own identity as direct heirs to the legacy of mass murder.

The increasingly political nature of the so-called *Väterliteratur* is indicative of the attempt to bring private and personal questions and concerns surrounding the Holocaust, that is, familial implication in the Holocaust and in the war in general, into the public realm. Yet the few examples that belong to the *Väterliteratur* were actually met, in the public arena, by a ubiquitous wish for silence, denial, and forgetting, exemplified by the publication of Vesper's *Die Reise*. Vesper had written his novel already in the late 1960s, yet it was not published until 1977, six years after the author had committed suicide. This repression was instigated not only by the war generation itself, but also by the second generation's unwillingness to uncover unpalatable truths about their families. It also arose out of fear as to what an investigation of their father's role during the war could reveal.[2] In so doing, members of the second generation actually perpetuated a certain silence surrounding the war generation's complicity in the Jewish genocide, and the personal confrontation with and public

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[2] In the last decade, a new form of *Väterliteratur* has emerged; in contrast to the mostly autobiographical novels published in the 1970s and 1980s, recent examples that could be regarded as constituting a new strand within this pre-existing kind of literature overtly focus on the interconnectedness between the author's own upbringing and the father's participation in the war. A notable example of this new way of writing *Väterliteratur*, which, in contrast to its predecessor, refrains from assuming an accusatory position, is Wibke Bruhns' *Meines Vaters Land: Geschichte einer deutschen Familie* (München: Econ Verlag, 2004). In it, the author traces her family's history – as exemplary of many German families – from the late 1890s to the present day, with a particular focus on her family's role during the Second World War, investigating her father's implication in the 20 July plot, for which he was later tried and subsequently executed, when Bruhn was only five years of age. While her father was one of the men taking part in the operation, 'Valkyrie,' Bruhns refrains from merely focussing on his role as a resistance fighter during the Nazi reign, which could be regarded as an attempt to exonerate him from having participated in the war as a fervent admirer of Hitler; instead she acknowledges the minor role he played in the events surrounding the 20 July plot, and also analyzes her father's early admiration of Hitler and his politics, and his silent and passive support, as confidant, of the group around Claus Schenk Graf von Stauffenberg. Stauffenberg and other high-ranking members of the German Wehrmacht, amongst them Henning von Tresckow, Werner von Haeften and Albrecht Ritter Mertz von Quirnheim, had planned on overtaking the German government in order to stop the war, in an operation known as *Operation Walküre*, by assassinating Hitler during a meeting at his military base in East Prussia on July 20, 1944. While the bomb, which Stauffenberg had placed under a massive oak table in one of the meeting rooms, detonated, killing one person and severely injuring others, Hitler himself only sustained minor injuries. For a detailed description of the military resistance during the Third Reich, see Joachim Fest, *Staatsstreich: Der lange Weg zum 20. Juli* (Berlin: Siedler, 1994).

accusation of the war generation remained nothing but a flash in the pan.[3] The tension apparent within the second generation, between publicly accusing the war generation and deliberately refraining from uncovering and subsequently addressing the possibility of their parents' implication in the politics of the Third Reich and the Holocaust, foregrounded a fundamental opposition between the private and the public sphere in Germany, between the notion of victimhood, on the one hand, and of culpability for the genocide, on the other; ultimately, it was this paradox that posed an insurmountable obstacle for finding an adequate way in which to publicly remember the victims of Nazi Germany, while also adequately acknowledging the societal need for mourning one's own losses.[4]

It was only after re-unification in 1990 and the coming-of-age of the third generation, the grandchildren of the war generation, that a new culture of commemoration emerged, a culture which aims at establishing new ways of addressing and negotiating Germany's Nazi past. These new modes of commemoration also find expression in and affect the choice of themes and narrative strategies of current German literature, shifts which can be seen as a medium and reflection of social change. In contrast to the *Väterliteratur* of the 1970s and 1980s, recent memory texts by members of the third generation openly focus not so much on the distinction between public and private discourses of memory, a distinction which seemed to make

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[3] The notion of the second generation's culpability, in complying with their parents' silence surrounding the Holocaust, has been succinctly analyzed and explained by Ralph Giordano in *Die zweite Schuld, oder von der Last Deutscher zu sein* (1987). While Giordano refrains from overtly accusing the second generation, he nevertheless posits that they purposefully dismissed their responsibility for uncovering the truth behind the war generation's implication in the Jewish genocide, and, in doing so, have contracted a guilt of their own, a second guilt, as it were.

[4] Of course, the division of Germany into West and East also, and quite literally, posed an insurmountable obstacle for any attempt to establish a shared German remembrance culture.

it impossible for the second generation to find a formal consensus on how to address and negotiate the past, but more on the interrelation and intersection as well as on the differences between public and private discourses of memory. Recent novels such as Marcel Beyer's *Flughunde* (1995), Simon Werle's *Der Schnee der Jahre* (2003), and Stefan Wackwitz's *Ein unsichtbares Land* (2003), investigate individual German family histories during the Second World War. These texts focus on the ways in which private memories are embedded within a more general and public discourse about recent German history, highlighting both the tension and apparent disparity on the one hand, yet also, on the other, the interconnectedness and similarities between private and public discourses of memory. At the core of these narratives, which are essentially motivated by the third generation's urge for understanding their own position in and relation to history by tracing and re-creating their family's history, is the representation and examination of until now publicly tabooed topics such as flight and expulsion, air war and destruction, topics that have always been present in the private realm of family narratives, and previously served as the common denominator for an identification with the notion of victimhood. By exploring the nexus between the public and private memory of the Nazi past through the introduction of formerly tabooed yet continuously subliminally present topics into the public discourse of memory, and by investigating the impact of the past on the present, third-generation postwar German literature foregrounds a new culture of remembrance which thematizes not only the past until 1945, but also exposes and highlights the ways in which Germany positions itself in relation to its past, particularly within the context of re-unification.

Discourses on German *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in a Divided Germany

Vergangenheitsbewältigung, or mastering the past, succinctly describes the evasive nature of how Germany, since the end of the war, has either tried to or refrained from trying to address its past. Indeed, the term itself was introduced into the German vocabulary after the war, and has to be understood as a direct response of the German population to the complexities endemic to addressing the Holocaust. The word's awkward nature foregrounds the uncomfortable methods Germany has adopted in order to confront its recent history. At the same time, its meaning also serves to provide Germans with a false, illusory sense of security and closure as it suggests that even such an atrocious event as the Holocaust can eventually be mastered, and therefore understood, and eventually overcome. Yet a closer examination of the various stages of Germany's way of coping with its past exposes the complexities and impossibilities engendered by the idea of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* throughout the generations, as well as on both sides of the wall.

In the West, the processes of de-Nazification and the Nuremberg trials of 1946 were organized by the Allies, but the persecution of German war criminals by Germans almost came to a standstill after the foundation of the Federal Republic of Germany in 1949. While the underlying idea of the Nuremberg trials was to educate the German people about the war crimes committed by Germans, this was not effective. "After the first emotional effects took their toll," explain Jean-Paul Bier and Michael Allinder,

> the German people became concerned more with survival in their country's ruins and were not ready for the moral indignation and the

> feeling of collective guilt that these trials were supposed to provoke in them. (9)

And indeed, after 1945 there seems to have been an attempt at a complete break with the past, a break which is perfectly signified by referring to 1945 as *Stunde Null* (zero hour). As Anton Kaes remarks,

> [t]hat *something* had come to an end was recognized by calling 1945 *Stunde Null*, as if history could ever begin at point zero. *Post-histoire* in Germany always means history after the apocalypse, in the face of Hitler and Auschwitz. (207)

In order to achieve this radical break, German society employed a variety of defense mechanisms in an attempt to avoid a confrontation with the past, the most important being a preoccupation with the rebuilding of the shattered economy, a preoccupation which helped them avoid the past by focussing on the future. Occupied with advancing the process of democratization in West Germany, the public interest in prosecution and subsequent condemnation of Nazi war crimes and war criminals retreated behind attempts toward achieving a certain "normalcy" after the war. Consequently, in the early 1950s, high-ranking members of the Nazi party and war criminals were amnestied and silently integrated into West German society.[5]

The bizarre silence surrounding the events of the Holocaust is well illustrated by a comparison with the remembrance of the battle of Stalingrad. The battle of

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[5] German lawyer Hans Globke, for instance, a leading and important figure in implementing the Nuremberg racial laws, was appointed state secretary in 1953 by chancellor Konrad Adenauer. For a detailed examination of Globke's role during and after the Nazi regime, see Jürgen Bevers, *Der Mann hinter Adenauer: Hans Globkes Aufstieg vom NS-Juristen zur Grauen Eminenz der Bonner Republik* (Berlin: Christoph Links Verlag, 2009).

Stalingrad was the only event of the war that remained an integral part of West German memory of the Nazi period within family narratives. The battle began in August 1942 and ended with the defeat of the German army by the Soviets on February 2, 1943, resulting in more than 1.2 million victims on both sides. The battle of Stalingrad proved to be a crucial turning point of the Second World War and represented a decisive event both for the German Wehrmacht as well as for the German population at home.[6] For the first time since the beginning of the war in 1939, Germans were not victorious and had to come to terms with the undeniable fact that they were no longer successful victors and invaders but defeated; this shift was cataclysmic and had far-reaching consequences for their subsequent perception of themselves. Frank Trommler states that

> Stalingrad became the crucial event, though not as planned. The therapeutic intent of the Stalingrad myth was to take everybody through the war to the bitter end, thereby evoking in the survivors the feeling of obligation and determination. (146)

The nationalistic Nazi newspaper, *Völkischer Beobachter*, emphasized Germany's uncompromising will to win, stating that the German soldiers who lost their lives at Stalingrad "died so that Germany could live" (qtd. in Fischer, 127; my translation). The Nazi propaganda developed Stalingrad into a myth about German heroism and perseverance, a myth which survived as an integral part of West German culture. The events at Stalingrad, the lost opportunities that might have led to the victory of the

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[6] For a detailed analysis of the battle of Stalingrad and its impact on the German population at home, see Wolfram Wette and Gerd Ueberschär, *Stalingrad: Mythos und Wirklichkeit einer Schlacht* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 2003).

German army, and the perception of the dead of Stalingrad as both victims and martyrs was already thematized and discussed in early postwar German literature such as Theodor Plievier's *Stalingrad* (1949), Willi Heinrich's *Das geduldige Fleisch* (1955) and Fritz Wöss's *Hunde wollt ihr ewig leben* (1958).[7] In contrast to Stalingrad, the topic of the Holocaust was surrounded by a long and lasting silence, predominantly in the public sphere (Schlant 10), but also in the private sphere, particularly within family narratives. One major reason for this was the emergence of a culture of victimhood, as shaped initially by the battle of Stalingrad. The defeat of Stalingrad not only caused feelings of heroism, but also evoked emotions of pathos and vulnerability within the German population. After the events of Stalingrad, many Germans regarded themselves as victims of the Soviets, but also as victims of Hitler, the Nazi party, and their frenzied ideas about conquering land in the East. Germans saw themselves as victims, not as perpetrators, and, for the first time, the notion of being victims of the war became the reigning ideology within large parts of the German population (Trommler 147).

The idea of German victimhood was further enhanced by the Allied bombings of major German cities such as Hamburg, Cologne, and Dresden, during which approximately 75,000 Germans were killed.[8] Sociologists Daniel Levy and Natan

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[7] Trommler comments that literature written shortly after the war is characterized by "the rise and frequent dominance of a self-pitying tone with which Wolfgang Borchert and Heinrich Böll shaped the literary image of the German soldier as victim" (147).

[8] This is only an approximate, estimated number. To this day, it is virtually impossible, for a number of reasons, to determine the exact number of German civilians killed during the Allied bombings. In 2008, a commission of independent experts, mainly consisting of historians, tried to provide an accurate number of the civilian victims killed during the air raid on Dresden in February 1945. Despite the prevalent contention still voiced by revisionists and neo-Nazis that more than 100,000 civilians lost their lives, the commission has come to the conclusion that no more than 25,000 people died during these nights. For the detailed report see Rolf-Dieter Müller, Nicole Schönherr and

Sznaider note that, "[b]y pointing to the suffering that resulted from expulsion and the bombings of civilians, question of moral responsibility were assuaged" (74). The civilian casualties sustained by the Germans as a result of these bombings close to the end of the war, and the invasion of the Russian army shortly after the end of the war, during which approximately 100,000 women were raped and some even killed,[9] particularly in Berlin,[10] led to the overwhelming and imperturbable belief amongst Germans that they, too, were in fact victims of the war. Richard Bessel comments that "Germans emerged from the rubble in 1945 with a profound sense of their own victimhood" (134). West German memory of the war seemed to focus almost exclusively on the lost battle of Stalingrad, on the Allied bombings at home, and on the plight of the female population after the armistice in 1945, decisive events that had an immense influence on the ways that almost all Germans perceived their role during the Third Reich, from high-ranking Nazi officials, ordinary soldiers, silent supporters of Hitler's politics, to large portions of the population at home. It seems as if seeing themselves as victims completely precluded seeing themselves as perpetrators,

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Thomas Widera, *Die Zerstörung Dresdens 13. bis 15. Februar 1945: Gutachten und Ergebnisse der Dresdner Historikerkommission zur Ermittlung der Opferzahlen* (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2010).

[9] Again, this is only an estimated number, based on Helke Sander and Barbara Johr's book, *BeFreier und Befreite* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 2005). The authors note that the dark figure is possibly a lot higher.

[10] See Anonyma, *Eine Frau in Berlin. Tagebuchaufzeichnungen vom 20. April bis 22. Juni 1945* (Frankfurt a.M.: Eichborn Verlag, 2003). In this diary, a young German woman narrates her experiences and ordeal in Berlin after the fall of the city and the subsequent invasion by the Soviet army. She describes, in detail, not only the overwhelming sense of desperation felt by the German population at home, particularly in the nation's capital, and their attempts to survive in the rubble without food, and water, but also vividly depicts her own daily struggle for food and the constant fear of being raped and even killed by the Russian soldiers. The diary was first published in 1959, yet did not receive great public attention until it was reprinted in 2003. The author of the diary remained anonymous until the year of its reprint; the author's name was then revealed by journalist Jens Bisky to have been Marta Hillers, who died in 2001, and who had worked as a journalist in Germany during and after the war. See Jens Bisky, "Wenn Jungen Weltgeschichte spielen, haben Mädchen stumme Rollen/ wer war die Anonyma in Berlin? Frauen, Fakten und Fiktionen/ Anmerkungen zu einem großen Bucherfolg dieses Sommers," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 24 Sept. 2003.

collaborators, or as mere passive bystanders. The predominant sense of victimhood and self-pity overshadowed the apprehension over the atrocities that Germans had inflicted upon not only the Jews but onto other groups as well during the Nazi reign of terror, and subsequently led to a complete denial of any guilt or shame for suffering inflicted by Germans. It is this prevalent notion of German victimhood that informed a certain kind of German self-perception after the end of the war because it led to a distinct and pronounced separation between the majority of the German population and a minority of fervent admirers and followers of Nazism (Bessel 151).

In order to not perceive themselves as perpetrators but as victims, Germans separated the idea of the German people from the Nazi system. This clear-cut distinction between the German people and the Nazi system was first made in a speech by the president of the German *Bundestag*, Paul Löbe, as early as 1949. He opened the first parliamentary debate after the end of the Second World War by stating, "We don't deny even one moment the enormous guilt that an evil system has brought upon the shoulders of our people" (qtd. in Dubiel 39; my translation). Thus this distinction is carefully constructed as an opposition between good and evil, between innocence and guilt. Similarly, Konrad Adenauer, first German chancellor after the war, stated in a speech delivered to the German Parliament in September 1951: "in the name of the German people, unspeakable atrocities have been committed which demand a moral and material reconciliation with the Jewish victims" (Speech, September 27, 1951; my translation). The rather abstract wording, "in the name of the German people" which commonly precedes the announcement of a court decision, served as an exculpatory clause that both represented the German people's condemnation of the genocide, while

it also, precisely because of its generalizing nature, exonerated all Germans from having to assume, on an individual level, any culpability for the Holocaust. The West German legal system similarly shied away from investigating the implication of individual Germans in war crimes until well into the 1960s, when the so-called Auschwitz trials took place, during which a number of high-ranking former Nazis were convicted of crimes against humanity, although given only mild sentences (Bönisch 52).[11] Nevertheless, the Frankfurt Auschwitz trials had both the educational and moral function of keeping alive the memory of the mass murder and, even more importantly, of testifying to the atrocities committed by the German people. Furthermore, the Auschwitz trials shed light, for the first time, on the industrialized nature of the mass murder, and implicated high-ranking German engineers in the genocide. As well, the trials evoked an enormous public response, which resulted in German historians finally undertaking the investigation and documentation of the Jewish genocide (Frei, "The Frankfurt Auschwitz trial" 124, 126).

The Auschwitz trials were a symptom of a larger shift that took place in West German society during the student revolts in 1968, foregounding the re-emergence, in the public sphere, of the long-lasting effects of Jewish mass murder on the German psyche. The generational conflict between parents, who belonged to the war generation, and their children led to intensive discussions of the role of the war

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[11] The legal investigation of war crimes and crimes against humanity committed during the Third Reich was initiated through the founding of the "Zentrale Stelle der Landesjustizverwaltung zur Aufklärung nationalsozialistischer Verbrechen" in Ludwigsburg in 1958. The founding of the institute in 1958, after a decade of silence surrounding German culpability for the Holocaust, was intricately connected to the idea of raising public awareness about the crimes, and the perpetrators and to initiating a thorough documentation of the mass murder (see Norbert Frei, "The Frankfurt Auschwitz trial and German historical research," *Jahrbuch zur Geschichte und Wirkung des Holocaust* (1996): 123-38.). It was the groundbreaking and thorough work of this institute that led to the Frankfurt Auschwitz trials. The institute's work also led to the current trial of Ukrainian John Demjanjuk in Munich. Demjanjuk is suspected of having assisted the SS in the killing of Jewish inmates at Treblinka and Sobibor.

generation in the genocide. Children blamed their parents, who portrayed themselves as victims and who were unwilling to address and come to terms with their culpability, for their failure to accept responsibility for the genocide. In their seminal 1967 study, *The Inability to Mourn: Principles of Collective Behaviour*, psychoanalysts Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich diagnose a failure of the war generation to mourn the victims of the Holocaust, arguing that the Germans were unable to address and ultimately work through their belief in National Socialism, and their narcissistic attachment to the fantasy of omnipotence embodied by Hitler (288). As Eric Santner explains in his analysis of the Mitscherlichs' study, *Stranded Objects* (1990):

> what struck the Mitscherlichs even more was the fact that the population of the new Federal Republic had avoided what might – in a certain sense should – have been the psychological reaction to the defeat in 1945, the direct confrontation with the facts of the Holocaust, and, above all, the loss of Hitler as *Führer*. (1)

The sense of defeat and of humiliation was never openly dealt with, and the loss of the fantasy of omnipotence embodied in the figure of the *Führer* was never acknowledged in postwar German society. Their parents' failure to directly address the loss of Hitler and the disintegration of Nazism deeply affected the members of the second generation, for whom it became an issue of considerable difficulty, and which often led to a radical break with the previous generation. In spite of the generational conflict of 1968, the difficult and complex yet necessary task of addressing the country's Nazi past was once more avoided.

In West Germany, the defense mechanisms of the parents were handed down to the children, who likewise refrained, for the most part, from confronting the past. Santner identifies a number of these defenses, such as the "derealization of the past," a strategy that calls the existence of the past into question, and "the sudden and radical shift of (narcissistic) identification with Hitler to the democratic allies and, finally, identification with the victim" (*Stranded Objects* 4), which I discussed above. By identifying themselves with the victims of war, Germans were able to collectively mourn for their own losses, while they could simultaneously evade the ethical and moral task of the perpetrator nation, of accepting responsibility for the Holocaust, and mourning its victims. Mourning the victims of National Socialism would have meant, according to Santner, that "Germans had to mourn *as Germans* for those whom they had excluded and exterminated in their mad efforts to produce their 'German-ness'" (*Stranded Objects* 6). This implies the difficult task of negotiating the very essence of German identity, the core of German self-esteem, as it were, yet it is exactly this negotiation of what constitutes German-ness that would have allowed for mourning the victims of the Holocaust. Germans would have had to identify themselves as perpetrators and thereby acknowledge their association with their belief in the superiority of the Aryan race and the creation of racial binaries instigated by Hitler, which made the marginalization of the Jewish population of Germany possible in the first place. By acknowledging and exposing the bizarre nature of these racial binaries on which Hitler's political agenda exclusively drew, Germans could have assumed responsibility for the Jewish genocide and ultimately could have been able to mourn. Despite the difficulties endemic to the process of mourning, particularly from the

position of a perpetrator, a collective mourning, as a nation, of the loss of the fantasy of omnipotence attached to National Socialism and Hitler would have it made possible for a mourning of the victims of the Holocaust to occur.

The first attempt to accept culpability, as a nation, for the Holocaust, and to publicly mourn Nazi Germany's victims outside of Germany, was made by German chancellor Willy Brandt on December 1, 1970, twenty-five years after the end of the war, when he humbly fell on his knees in front of the memorial erected for the Jewish resistance fighters and victims of the Warsaw ghetto. It was only a brief episode, but it had far-reaching implications not only for the perception of Germany in the world, but also for the self-perception of the population at home.[12] Questions of how to negotiate feelings of shame and guilt evoked by culpability for the Holocaust, and of how to achieve reconciliation with the surviving victims moved into the foreground. After Brandt's visit to Warsaw, responsibility for the Holocaust was slowly, but also often unwillingly, accepted on a public and political level (Conze and Metzler 313). Yet it was a fictitious, Americanized version of the Holocaust, the NBC miniseries, "Holocaust," broadcast in 1979, that finally caused more emotional uproar than any of the aforementioned trials or Brandt's gesture in Warsaw. The series, which functioned on an emotional level, demanded an empathic identification with the protagonists, a Jewish family named Weiss, a family portrayed not as part of a nameless and faceless

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[12] See Christoph Schneider, *Der Warschauer Kniefall: Ritual, Ereignis, und Erzählung* (Konstanz: UVK-Verlag, 2006). Schneider explores the ritualized nature and effect of Brandt's gesture on the German public psyche, arguing that it was the media attention that turned his "Warschauer Kniefall" into a national symbol for Germany's acceptance of the culpability for the Jewish genocide (18).

mass, but as having personal histories and feelings.[13] But the powerful effects of this series were not only due to the portrayal of the touching, sometimes exaggerated, history of this Jewish family named Weiss, and the atrocities they had to endure.[14] Far more significant for its impact on the German population was that this particular American series provided the Germans with a term for referring to the genocide. Until then, the industrialized mass murder was simply referred to as "Auschwitz," a term which became synonymous with the genocide; it was only after the miniseries was shown that the term "Holocaust" was adapted into the German vocabulary to designate the Jewish genocide.[15]

Memory of the Second World War and the Holocaust was fundamentally different in the Soviet sector of Germany, that is, in the so-called German Democratic Republic (GDR), which was founded in 1949. In East Germany, memory of the Holocaust was based on the founding anti-fascist myth of the German Democratic Republic, which propagated that this particular German state, unlike West Germany, which was seen as being mainly ruled by former Nazis and war criminals, evolved out of the anti-fascist resistance during the Nazi reign. And while coping with the past in the West, designated by the aforementioned idea of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, or

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[13] As well, the broadcast of the American television series "Holocaust" on German television in 1979 instigated a rise of German films about the Third Reich. While there is a remarkable absence of German literature addressing the Holocaust, this subject matter has, in contrast, continued to preoccupy German directors, especially from the 1990s onwards. See, for instance, Oliver Storz's *Drei Tage im April* (1994), Michael Verhoeven's *Mutters Courage* (1995), Max Färberböck's *Aimée und Jaguar* (1999), and Joseph Vilsmaier's *Leo und Claire* (2001).

[14] For an analysis of the reception of the American miniseries and its effect on the German psyche, see Jürgen Wilke, "Die Fernsehserie 'Holocaust' als Medienereignis," *Historical Social Research* 30 (2005): 9-17.

[15] Norbert Frei explains that "before a three-part American movie introduced the term *Holocaust* to us in 1979, *Auschwitz* was both term and symbol for the murder of Europe's Jews during the Second World War" ("Auschwitz und Holocaust" 101; my translation).

mastering the past, was a continuous and ongoing process of coming to terms with feelings of shame, guilt, and responsibility for the industrialized mass murder, the GDR dealt with the past not as a process but rather as an aspect of history for which closure could be achieved through the erection of numerous monuments and memorials designed to function as visible reminders of the past. Socialism and anti-fascism were the two major ideologies that determined the path of education in the East, and the central method of coping with the past was based on the idea of a successful fight against fascism. East German society perceived itself as consisting primarily of anti-fascists, that is, of historical victors and not victims or even perpetrators of the atrocious events of the past.[16] The rhetoric of victimhood so prevalent in West German society was thus virtually absent in the East, where the focus both in public and private remained on the notion of the anti-fascists' victory over the Nazis.

Memory of the Holocaust after Re-Unification

The fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 represented a decisive event in the creation of a new culture of remembrance in a re-unified Germany. Despite the development of two vastly different cultures of remembrance, East and West Germany had in common a variety of defense mechanisms with which to avoid an open confrontation of their shared Nazi past, the most prominent one certainly being the strategy explained earlier

[16] Santner comments that "Antifascism was the sign under which the GDR received and maintained its legitimacy and became something of a state-supporting myth foreclosing genuine possibilities of sustained moral and political reality testing. Perhaps most perversely, the practice of what might be called anti-fascist self-fashioning allowed the citizens of the GDR to avoid all too disturbing encounters with questions of individual complicity in the twelve years of fascism" ("The Trouble with Hitler" 13). See also Wolfgang Bialas, "Antifaschismus als Sinnstiftung. Konturen eines ostdeutschen Konzepts," *Die NS-Diktatur im deutschen Erinnerungsdiskurs*, (Opladen: Leske und Budrich, 2003) 151-70.

of "de-realizing" the past. It was only after re-unification in 1990 that Germany as a nation was able, for the first time, to display a sense of self-criticism in analyzing the ways in which the atrocities of the past had been remembered on both sides of the wall. Since 1990, then, the impetus for remembering the Holocaust and its victims has changed from being a necessity imposed on the German population by the Allies after the war to educate them about the wrongs that they had committed to being a moral imperative triggered from within the population itself and perceived therefore as a vital aspect of Germany's development as a democratic and unified nation.

The fall of the wall thus made it possible for the German population in the East and West, for the first time since the end of the war in 1945, to collectively address the trauma of a shared past; this possibility was, however, not recognized, since it was quickly superseded by overwhelming feelings of joy and happiness after forty years of separation. In the introduction to Heiner Timmermann's study *'61 – Mauerbau und Aussenpolitik*, a study which outlines the reasons for and consequences of the erection of the wall in 1961, politician Peter Müller writes that "the Berlin wall was a stigma; it separated families and friends; it divided a city; it divided a nation" (15; my translation). The wall represented a visible wound in the middle of the nation's body, and, as such, also stood in for the idea of German guilt and the consequences for the whole European continent of Germany's responsibility for World War II and the Holocaust. Yet when the wall finally came down after decades of separation, feelings of repentance embodied in the fact that Germans had to live with a border separating them from each other also vanished; but, most importantly, with the opening and subsequent fall of the wall, the ideas of collective guilt, shame, and unspeakability, so

visibly embodied by the nature of the wall, were also literally breached, and thus made addressable for the nation as a collective. However, the opportunity that had suddenly presented itself to the German people for addressing the events surrounding World War II and the Holocaust was rather short-lived and soon to be lost completely.

Instead, a discourse emerged that focussed on the more recent German history and the memory of the plight endured by East Germans under the dictatorship of Erich Honecker. Indeed, remembering recent German history and its victims, that is, the people living in the East who endured the harassment of the East German regime on a daily basis, appears to have become an issue of significantly greater importance than the Holocaust. In turn, a new public discourse of commemoration has emerged within the context of re-unification, which is characterized by the prevailing assumption that along with the fall of the wall as the visible reminder of the guilt engendered by the Nazi regime and the German war generation and the separation of Germany into two states, the long-lasting effects of National Socialism have finally been overcome as well. Memory of the Holocaust has been equated with memory of life under the regime in the former GDR, and thus has been appropriated into a general discourse of past atrocities, hardships, and victimization experienced in Germany – a discourse which seems to deny the Holocaust its uniqueness by "[t]urning the trauma of genocide victims into a homogenizing metaphor for a universally shared human condition" (Stimmel 10).[17] This rather abstract discourse is symptomatic of the nature of the memory politics of the Berlin Republic.

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[17] Joanna Stimmel's observations are well demonstrated in Bernhard Schlink's 1997 novel, *Der Vorleser*. The protagonist of the novel, Michael Berg, conceives of the Holocaust as a totalizing trauma that equally enwraps victims, perpetrators, and members of the second generation like himself, a view that both engenders and justifies the all-encompassing silence surrounding the event, which is so

The appropriation of the Holocaust into a more general discourse of remembering wartime suffering is visibly embodied in the *Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas* (Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe) in Berlin (see fig. 2).

Fig. 2. *Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe*, Berlin (photograph taken by the author)

The memorial was designed by architect Peter Eisenman, and was built between 2003 and 2005 in close proximity to the Brandenburg Gate and the German parliament. It

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ubiquitous in post-war Germany. Omer Bartov comments that "*The Reader* is about Germany as victim. It is a victim of its history of murder, to be sure, but then, even the murderers themselves are victims, and those they ultimately victimize are the next generation of Germans" (34).

consists of 2,711 concrete blocks with paths in–between the various blocks in which visitors can walk.

These blocks are extremely abstract, and non-referential, and their generalized nature invites the visitors to choose what they would like to see them symbolizing.[18] To find the actual real stories of the victims, however, one has to go underground. Underneath the memorial, hidden from sight and with great difficulties of access is a so-called "place of information" (*Ort der Information*). This houses an exhibition about the Jewish genocide from its beginnings to its long-lasting impact and to life in Europe in the aftermath of this catastrophe. The memorial fulfills its double function perfectly. It meets the moral imperative set up by the German population itself in the aftermath of re-unification of remembering the victims of the Shoah, yet it simultaneously displays the tendency endemic to this newly emerged public German remembrance culture of commemorating the Holocaust as an abstract entity creating what Imre Kertész bitingly terms a "Holocaust Park." Given that the memorial itself is surrounded by various tourist shops, cafés, and restaurants, and also serves as a playground for young visitors in particular, who enjoy jumping from one block to the next, Kertész' ironic vision does not seem far-fetched:

> The time will come when Berliners – along with foreigners who end up in Berlin, of course (above all, I imagine groups of assiduous Japanese tourists) – will stroll, sunk in peripatetic reflection and surrounded by the roar of Berlin traffic, through the Holocaust Park, complete with

[18] For some visitors the blocks could potentially symbolize gravestones, which, precisely because they are void of individual names and dates of the dead, could serve as a visual reminder of the unfathomable number of victims. For others, walking through the memorial can evoke a feeling of vulnerability, helplessness, and despair. However, some also regard the memorial as merely a playground, or as a place to relax.

> playground, while Spielberg's 48,239th interview-partner whispers – or howls? – his own individual suffering in their ears. ("Who Owns Auschwitz" 269)

It is the overall inclusiveness of the memorial that serves to fabricate the illusion that closure can be achieved; the suffering of the victims of the Holocaust is absorbed into a generalized culture of suffering, allowing Germans once again to disassociate themselves from culpability for the Holocaust.[19]

Along with the new culture of public remembrance is a new way of remembering the past, in the private sphere, within families. A. Dirk Moses explains that

> [n]o consensus has ever been obtained about remembering the Holocaust [because many] Germans opposed the new memory politics, which they felt was imposed on them by distant leaders attuned to the expectations of Atlantic political and cultural elites. (69)

Therefore, he contends, "a considerable gap exists between the pieties of official statements and the intimate sphere of the family, where stories of German suffering and survival endured a half century after the end of World War II" (69).[20] And indeed,

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[19] The Holocaust memorial stands in stark contrast to the ways in which the architecture of the Jewish Museum in Berlin addresses and elucidates the idea of public commemoration. This museum consists of two buildings, one of which was designed by Daniel Libeskind and built in 1999. From an aerial perspective, the form and shape of the building is reminiscent of a broken Star of David. The building also contains a number of rooms that are completely empty and that are meant to visually represent and accentuate the void that the Holocaust has left in Germany. Ernestine Schlant remarks that "Libeskind has used the properties of broken lines (the broken Star of David) of absences and voids to achieve the extraordinary experience of the absence of Jewish life in Berlin and at the same time express its past integral presence" (242).

[20] See Olaf Jensen's analysis of the structures of intergenerational transmission of memory within German families, *Geschichte Machen: Strukturmerkmale des intergenerationellen Sprechens über die NS-Vergangenheit in deutschen Familien* (Tübingen: Diskord, 2004).

quite in contrast to the public memory of the Holocaust and the Nazi past, the way in which Germans remember their own civilian victims and experiences of wartime suffering is characterized by a concrete emotionality and personal investment which both allow for an identification with and empathy for the victims. Therefore, within the private discourse of family memories of the Third Reich, the Holocaust does not occupy a central role; rather, it is memories of German victimhood that prevail where members of the family perceive and subsequently present themselves as victims of the Third Reich, as resistance fighters, or as mere bystanders, but, interestingly, never as Nazis. Laurel Cohen-Pfister comments that, "[i]n reconfiguring the past, the narrative of wartime suffering, a narrative shared by Germans in both East and West, has re-emerged to complement, and more radically, to compete with the narrative of the Holocaust" (125). The memory of wartime suffering and the notion of German victimhood have always existed in both Germanies as an intricate part of family narratives ever since the end of the war (Cohen-Pfister 125). Obviously, the prescribed public discourse of commemorating the past and the victims of the Holocaust on both sides of the wall could neither suppress individual German memories of wartime suffering, nor hinder their transmission in the families, where they have always been part of family narratives. As Assmann asserts,

> [i]n family and other semi-private circles, the trauma was given a verbal form, was repeatedly communicated and was thus transformed into a social event...[yet] the communicative effect of family narratives...did not find a larger public resonance in the society as a whole. ("Guilt and Suffering" 189-90)

Individual stories about wartime suffering have always been "kept in the dark" (Krondorfer 32), and have only been told and preserved in family narratives. While they have become an integral part of the private discourse of war memory in Germany, they have never, however, found expression and verbalization in the public realm.

In his 1997 Zurich lectures, entitled *Luftkrieg und Literatur* (Air War and Literature), German author W.G. Sebald addresses this gap between public and private wartime memories, arguing that "the sense of unparalleled national humiliation felt by millions in the last years of the war had never really found verbal expression" (viii). His comments highlight that neither German suffering nor the notion of collective trauma seems to have found adequate representation in postwar German literature. While the two German countries had competing, and often diametrically opposed, ideas as to how to remember the victims of the Nazi regime, ideas that were in the case of the former East quite often used for propagandistic ends to denigrate the West and its politics,[21] re-unified Germany grounds its politics of and discourses about public memory in the suffering of German civilians during the War and the idea of victimization precisely because it is this aspect of memory politics that allows for a reconnection with a once shared history.

Ever since re-unification, but particularly after the turn of the century, there has been a proliferation of postwar German literature that concerns itself with exploring – and sometimes even exploiting – the notion of victimization and the impact of the idea of German victimhood on cultural memory. Third-generation Germans play a key role in transmitting and incorporating private memories of wartime suffering into the public

[21] The prime example of this propaganda is certainly the euphemistic labelling of the Berlin Wall as *antifaschistischer Schutzwall* (anti-Fascist protective barrier).

discourse of Holocaust remembrance. Through public Holocaust education, the grandchildren of the war generation are well-informed about and acknowledge the Nazi crimes as crimes against humanity. They are therefore able to see the Holocaust as a crime committed by the Germans against the Jewish population of Europe.[22] Furthermore, as the last members of the war generation are passing on, these members of the third generation, the grandchildren of perpetrators, victims, and bystanders of the Holocaust, represent the last vital link to the survivors. Precisely because of their close and loving relationship with the war generation, their grandparents, the belated re-appearance of the repressed trauma of a nation is allowed to come to the fore; this offers the possibility that this national trauma be acknowledged, addressed, and ultimately worked through, albeit within the specific context described above. This framework is characterized by re-unification, by the negotiation of diverging memories of East and West Germany, and, most importantly, by the differences between public and private discourses of memory. It is the discrepancy between public and private wartime memory that evokes the complexities that must be addressed by members of the third generation. They must negotiate the intricate path between the detailed knowledge of the events of the Second World War, the Nazi regime, and the Holocaust, on the one hand, and the intimate, emotional relationship with the war generation and the belated re-appearance of personal and traumatic memories, on the other. This is the context in which members of the third generation have to

[22] In his 2001 study, *Generation Berlin*, German sociologist Heinz Bude coined the term *Generation Berlin* to refer to those born in the late 1960s, that is, the first members of the generation of grandchildren. He goes on to explain that members of this generation, in contrast to their parents, were able to acquire a deeper and more detailed knowledge about the undeniable facts of the Holocaust in an environment free of ideological constraints, which eventually helped them in adopting, as adults, a more flexible, nuanced, and critical perspective in their approach to the past.

simultaneously investigate the role of their grandparents during the war and attempt to establish a new, untainted and unbiased relationship between Jews and non-Jews in Germany. The future of Holocaust remembrance in Germany is thus situated at the intersection of private and public discourse and memory, constantly negotiating the gaps between individual suffering and collective guilt.

"Warum erst jetzt?" – On the Belated Re-Appearance of Traumatic Memories

"Why now?" – asks the narrator of Günter Grass's 2002 novella, *Im Krebsgang*, referring to the sudden and overwhelming interest in representing German wartime suffering. Particularly since the year 2003, narratives that concern themselves with the portrayal of German civilian suffering during World War II have made a sudden and almost explosive appearance in the public arena in Germany (Cohen-Pfister 126). The current and abundant resurfacing of memories of civilian wartime suffering and the steadily growing interest in incorporating personal and individual memories of the war generation into public processes of mourning and remembering gestures towards the need for a collective German memory that spans across times, locations and generations.[23] The urge for establishing such a collective memory happens within the larger context of re-unification and the subsequent struggle of the Berlin Republic to create an adequate culture of commemoration which equally remembers the victims of the Holocaust and German civilian wartime suffering, without neglecting Germany's culpability for the Second World War and the Shoah,

[23] Sigrid Weigel also stresses the importance of memory in creating a link between the generations, because "memory is something that should cross and link generations rather than cause rifts between them" (275).

and without suppressing the consequences of the historical trauma caused by the events between 1939 and 1945.

The necessary inclusion of private memories in the public realm coincides with the coming-of-age of the third generation. Members of the third generation are now the same age their grandparents were when the Second World War and the Holocaust took place; it is the question of age and agency that leads third-generation Germans to inquire not only into the nature of their grandparents' living conditions under the Nazi reign of terror, but, most importantly, to ask themselves how they would cope with the idea of growing up and living in a dictatorship characterized by uniformity, terror, and ubiquitous ideological claims that determine and control every aspect of one's life. An exploration of the powerful nature of Nazi ideology during the Third Reich and its impact on and consequences for the war generation, allows third-generation Germans to come to terms with their affiliation with a cultural group that was responsible for the Holocaust. By displaying a deep and genuine interest in their grandparents' life under Hitler's regime in particular, the grandchildren allow for private wartime memories to be voiced without assuming the accusatory tone or position of silent denial so prevalent amongst the second generation (Assmann, "Guilt and Suffering" 192). Friedländer points out that members of the third generation in Germany have "now acquired sufficient distance from the events in terms of both the sheer passage of time and personal involvement to be able to confront the full impact of the past" ("History, Memory, and the Historian" 7). It seems as if the temporal distance from the events of the past allows grandchildren to assume the role of "empathic listener" (Laub 68) for the war generation and, in doing so, to allow for a belated witnessing, that is for a

witnessing from a distance to occur. At the same time, however, the temporal distance paradoxically limits the very possibility for witnessing it has itself engendered.

From Historical to Structural Trauma – The Absence of European Jewry

The growing temporal distance from the Holocaust has also affected and altered the notion of trauma associated with the events of the past, as it has transformed the historical trauma experienced by the war generation into a structural trauma for the third generation. This historical trauma is partially caused by the loss of European Jewry, witnessed by the grandparents;[24] however, postwar German generations, in contrast, have to negotiate the absence of Jews, who, for them, are "an unknown entity" (Krondorfer 35). Sabine Reichel, a member of the second generation, explains that to her

> Jews were introduced...dead: as enormous piles of skin and bones, twisted limbs and distorted faces, waiting to be tossed into carts bound for the crematory...I met them through old newsreels in the sixties – wordless, grainy celluloid figures caught in a deadly pantomime. (133)

Reichel's words vividly highlight that the historical trauma and the loss of Europe's Jews experienced by the war generation have translated into what LaCapra has labelled a "structural trauma" (*Writing History* 79), informed by an absence, which, since the process of losing the object was never experienced, precludes any possibility of working through or overcoming this structural trauma. According to LaCapra, the loss

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[24] LaCapra highlights the intricate connection between historical trauma and loss, stating that "historical trauma is related to particular events that do indeed involve losses, such as the Shoah" (*Writing History* 80).

engendered by a historical trauma such as the Holocaust can be worked through, and thus, in some sense, overcome (*Writing History* 65); in contrast, the structural trauma evoked by an absence or gap, such as the absence of Jewry in Germany, can only be lived with, but never worked through (*Writing History* 84). While the victims of the Holocaust are signifiers of ultimate suffering and victimhood, they remain, precisely because of their absence in the country of the former perpetrators, an abstract, unspecified entity, a faceless and nameless mass, only occupying a marginal role within the lives of third-generation Germans who subsequently struggle with establishing an empathic and emotional relationship with the victims.[25] It is this notion of absence that demands the inclusion and negotiation of an essential gap endemic to postwar German identity.

Postwar German memory texts testify to this absence since the majority of these narratives are, in fact, void of Jewish characters or of an investigation of German-Jewish relations. The collective structural trauma subliminally yet powerfully influences the ways in which the Holocaust is remembered in post-reunification Germany, as it is both the structural trauma and the lack of closure that can be achieved through the act of working through that affects postwar German generations; the continuing and intrusive, even overwhelming, nature of this structural trauma can thus be seen to manifest itself in the prioritization of German wartime suffering and victimhood in third-generation writing about the past. Foregoing the impossibility of

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[25] Jewish life is slowly re-emerging in Germany; Jewish communities have evolved, particularly in Berlin, the nation's capital, where many Jews from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union are now settling in their search for a better life and future for their children. However, contact between Jews and non-Jews in Germany remains rather limited because, as Schlant asserts, "the attitudes of the non-Jewish citizens...are profoundly marked by the largely unresolved consciousness of the Holocaust" (237). See Schlant 235-39.

negotiating the idea of absence, members of the third generation rather assume the role of empathic listeners for their grandparents, and, in doing so, become witnesses to a witnessing of individual experiences of German victimhood; as distant witnesses, third-generation Germans accept ownership and responsibility for the ways in which these memories are being preserved in the public sphere, in the form of collective cultural memory.

Using the present context as a starting point and driven by the desire to act as witnesses to their family's past, contemporary memory texts by third-generation authors often concern themselves with an investigation of their family history during the Third Reich, and its impact on their search for a German identity in the twenty-first century. Through the fictitious reconstruction and subsequent investigation of a family history, members of the third generation create an intergenerational memory discourse through which they thematize the prevalent self-perception of the war generation as victims, based on that generation's shared and "collective memories [that] accentuate German suffering" (Jarausch and Geyer 326-27), yet at the same time drawing attention to the various interpretations and representations of German victimization throughout the generations.[26]

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[26] As of late, the representation of traumatic memories endured by the war generation also finds expression in the mass media, particularly in films and so-called docudramas. Recent productions focussing on the German civilian suffering during the Second World War include *Dresden*, a film about the bombing of the East German city, and *Die große Flucht* (The Flight), a documentary about the expulsion of Germans from East Prussia, to name but a few. German state-owned television plays a pivotal part in incorporating private memories within the public discourse of remembrance of wartime suffering. Helmut Schmitz remarks that "*Die große Flucht*, on the expulsions of ethnic Germans from the eastern territories…[which] was broadcast between 20 Nov and 18 Dec 2001, [attracted] an audience of over 5 million or 16% of viewing figures…. The two-part 'event movie' *Dresden* – a love story between an English bomber pilot and a German nurse set during the firebombing of the city and broadcast by the *Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen* (ZDF) on 5 and 6 March 2006 – had viewing figures of over 30%" (1). Films about the Holocaust, in contrast, such as *Babiy Yar – Das vergessene Verbrechen* ("Babiy Yar – The Forgotten Crime"), and *Der letzte Zug* ("The Last Train") about one of many deportations of more than 600 Jews from Berlin-Grunewald to Auschwitz, are usually shown after 10pm

Between Public and Private Discourses of Memory: Tanja Dückers's *Himmelskörper*

Using the structure of the family narrative in her novel, *Himmelskörper* (2003), third-generation author Tanja Dückers thematizes and explores the transmission of traumatic memories between the generations by focussing on the expulsion from the East, and, to a much lesser extent, on the sinking of the *Gustloff*, an actual historical event, which merely serves as a point of reference for examining one of many personal German family histories and the silence surrounding the trauma of the past.[27]

In an essay published in the German newspaper, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, in 2002, Dückers highlights the importance of the temporal distance from the events of the war to her capacity to gain access to an understanding of recent German history and to her acting as a witness to the history of the generation of her grandparents:

> What I am hoping for is that within my generation, any reflection upon the past will be more nuanced and sober-minded, without the hateful accusations made by the 1968 generation, accusations which were understandable yet did not foster an understanding or dialogue, since they were borne out of the children's anger with the parental generation,

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where they cannot compete with the number of viewers that the aforementioned films, in which German suffering is at the forefront, are able to attract.

[27] Helmut Dubiel explains that "the recent wave of 'family novels' testifies to the issue of transgenerational transmission of family secrets, trauma and silence" (9). These 'family novels' include, for instance, Stefan Wackwitz' *Ein unsichtbares Land* (2005), in which he explores his grandfather's past, travelling back in time, as it were, to the place where his grandfather used to work as a pastor before the outbreak of World War II. It is at this place in the past that the grandson Wackwitz is confronted with the dichotomy of private and public history. Similarly, in Marcel Beyer's *Spione* (2002), three third-generation Germans try to learn more about their late grandmother's past; and Simon Werle's family novel, *Der Schnee der Jahre* (2003), set in a small village in Germany, tells the story of the Callzig family, spanning four generations, from World War II into the present.

> and the elders' self-pitying rituals of justification. (*Süddeutsche Zeitung* 27 April 2002; my translation)

Instead of perpetuating the emotionally-charged generational conflict that was so characteristic of the literature of the second generation, the so-called *Väterliteratur* of the 1960s and 1970s, Dückers suggests that it is the temporal distance of over 65 years which allows her to assume a more nuanced, sober-minded, yet also empathic perspective in relation to uncovering history at large and in re-creating family history in particular, as an important aspect in finding her own identity and position within German history as a member of the third generation after World War II. In order to investigate her identity as a third-generation German, the protagonist and narrator of *Himmelskörper*, the meteorologist Freia,[28] born in 1968, the same year as the author, wishes to write a memory book in which she can not only record her family's memories but also create a place for herself within history,[29] at a time when she is pregnant, that is, about to produce the next generation:

> So many things remain unresolved in my family, and they continue to haunt me. It's as if with my pregnancy a competition with time has begun, a competition during which I can answer questions that have

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[28] Interestingly, phonetically the pronunciation of Freia's name which the protagonist adopts as the plot advances (her real name is Eva Maria) strongly resembles the German word *freier*, meaning "freer" – a detail that could indicate that Dückers's protagonist has indeed more freedom in addressing the past and in asking questions than members of the second generation, whose negotiation of their parents' history was characterized by their often accusatory stance. At the same time, the connection between Freia's name and the notion of being freer also seems to tie in with Dückers's contention that the temporal distance from the war provides members of the third generation with a more flexible, open-minded perspective on their family's past.

[29] Jens Stüben remarks that "at the core of this novel is not the flight of 1945, but the exploration of this past undertaken by subsequent generations. The main subject matter consists of a negotiation of personal and collective guilt as a seminal part of the process of finding one's own identity" (4; my translation).

> been left open. All of a sudden, I was a part of a long chain, of a connection, of a construct, which always seemed to be suspect to me. (26; my translation)

Cohen-Pfister asserts that for Freia, "[r]emembering...provides continuity and a sense of belonging, as well as an opportunity to understand familial trauma and complicity" (129), while her attempts to investigate her grandmother's past within the context of public discourses of history in post-reunification Germany, also illustrate the tension apparent between public and private wartime memory, between acknowledging culpability for the war and the Holocaust and perpetuating the notion of German victimhood.

Born and raised in Berlin, and thus deeply ingrained in the history of the city,[30] Freia is torn between private and public discourses of memory, between acknowledging notions of guilt and remembering experiences of suffering. Her struggle is symptomatic of the current context of the Berlin Republic's attempt to find an adequate way of remembering equally the victims of the Nazi regime and German civilian suffering.[31] When Freia attempts to uncover her grandmother's war-related secrets, she learns that, contrary to the family's presentation, her grandmother was not just a victim of the war, but a perpetrator as well. "The central question that remains

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[30] Freia grows up in West Berlin, in a rather bourgeois suburb, in close proximity to the "Teufelsberg." The fact that Freia sees this hill on a daily basis is important insofar as the hill itself was actually made of rubble left over from World War II. During the Cold War the *Teufelsberg*, then located in the British sector of Berlin, was home to a listening post installed by the Americans to spy on communication in the city's Soviet sector, and to control the city's airspace.

[31] In relation to the author's treatment of the subject matter of flight and expulsion and its causal relation to the notion of German victimhood, Stüben explains that "Dückers highlights that not everybody who has lost their home can assume the position of a victim...Yet she tries to be fair to the fugitives, to the grandparents who constitute the war generation, as a whole: the plight of the population at home, of the civilians, amongst them many innocent – women and children – is not suppressed" (186; my translation).

more than sixty years after the end of World War II," Herman Beyersdorf writes, "is whether the Germans as 'Täter' (perpetrators) [of the Second World War] can also be seen to be 'Opfer' (victims) [of the Second World War]" (103), a paradox that continues to inform Germany's culture of remembrance.

Endemic to both public and private discourses of memory in Germany, this paradox also underlies Freia's investigation of her grandmother's wartime memories and forces her to alternate between the notion of victimhood, on the one hand, and the notion of guilt, on the other. Freia learns that her grandmother Johanna, her sister Lena and her daughter Renate – Freia's mother – were saved from having to board the *Gustloff* before it embarked on its final voyage on which it was destroyed by a Russian submarine because five-year old Renate denounced a boy her age for refusing to do the Nazi salute. In turn, her grandmother tells Freia, they were allowed to get on board the minesweeper *Theodor*, while the boy's family had to leave Gotenhafen on board the *Gustloff*, and embark on a fatal trip that ended in the sinking of the ship.

Her grandmother's wartime memories, which centre around the family's expulsion from their East Prussian home, and the subsequent flight to the West, bear obvious traces of trauma, which manifests itself on a textual level by the fragmented nature of her sentences, and the overabundant use of ellipses and punctuation (246, 247); the traumatic nature of her experiences seem to justify, or at least foreground, the notion of victimhood. Yet Johanna's self-perception as a victim is shortly thereafter called into question when she acknowledges, "aber Renätchen hat uns das Leben gerettet...so war das," meaning that Renate's action saved their lives (250). In doing so, she unconsciously portrays herself and, by extension, her daughter, as perpetrators.

While Johanna sees Renate's action as being justified since it saved their lives, Freia's mother, in contrast, feels the repercussions of her action that manifest themselves in abundant nightmares, and in her having to continuously re-live this incident. Speaking in general terms and not in reference to Dückers's novel, trauma theorist Judith Herman points out that

> [f]eelings of guilt are especially severe when the survivor has been a witness to the suffering or death of other people. To be spared oneself, in the knowledge that others have met a worse fate, creates a severe burden of conscience. (54)

Renate, who is both a witness and a perpetrator when she inadvertently denounced the other family seems to indeed exhibit "survivor guilt," which eventually culminates in her committing suicide. Freia's grandmother, in contrast, who, her granddaughter discovers was a fervent admirer of Hitler and a passionate follower of the Nazi party, never assumes responsibility for her daughter's denunciation of the other family, a denunciation which eventually led to their death. Instead, Johanna acts as a silent yet complicit bystander in this scene, behaviour that also seems to be characteristic of the role she assumed during the Nazi regime. It is precisely this silent complicity, the passive bystanding, that allowed her to distance herself from having to assume feelings of guilt and remorse in the aftermath of World War II.

Unlike the generation of her grandmother, the war generation, Freia is willing to accept her guilt-infused family history by establishing a link between the past and the present and by creating a chain of generations (26) when she is about to give birth to the next generation, and thus, metaphorically, also to the future of this chain of

memory, "der Zukunft der Geschichte" (255). Freia, as a representative of the third generation and its position at the intersection of private and public discourses of memory has realized, through the process of remembering, that "persönliches und kollektives Erleben untrennbar [sind]" (255), that personal and public memories overlap and intersect, and that "[r]ecognition of the family memory of suffering must not lead to ignoring the national memory of guilt, [while] the national guilt cannot be a barrier closing off the stories of experienced suffering" (Assmann, "Guilt and Suffering" 199).

Conclusion

Initiated by the coming-of-age of the third generation in Germany and its interest in family history, a shift has taken place from representing and examining historical events, such as the Second World War and the Holocaust as events of a remote past, towards exposing and analyzing the various, often ambiguous and difficult ways in which this past is perceived and incorporated into the present. At the same time, this shift also foregrounds the necessity of investigating how the apparent discrepancy between public and private wartime memories and the paradoxical nature of the idea of German victimhood are exposed, addressed, and highlighted in the present context of post-reunification. As Dückers shows in *Himmelskörper*, the third generation is less interested in minutely investigating the past itself than in addressing the legacy of guilt and shame that deeply affects its own identity, the core of its self-esteem, as it were, thus illustrating Santner's contention that "Germans are faced with the paradoxical task of having to constitute their "Germanness" in the awareness of the

horrors generated by a previous production of national and cultural identity" ("History beyond the Pleasure Principle" 145).

While the temporal distance from the events of World War II allows for traumatic memories to come belatedly to the fore, and thus enables grandchildren like Freia to investigate her family history and address experiences of both complicity and suffering, the lack of a spatial distance from the place where the Holocaust was planned and initiated along with the almost complete absence of Jews in Germany, poses an almost insurmountable obstacle for any investigation of the Holocaust. Surrounded by visible reminders of the country's Nazi past, concentration camps, monuments, and memorials, such as the Holocaust memorial in Berlin, even members of the third generation still feel the omnipresence of the notion of collective guilt and the far-reaching consequences of what Sebald terms "unbewältigte Vergangenheit" (qtd. in Schmitz 9). It is this lingering and unresolved presence of a past that has not been worked through yet that informs the context in which the generation of grandchildren reconstruct their family histories. This context is a paradoxical one, characterized not only by the complexities engendered by the discrepancy between public and private discourses of memory, but also by the emotional and spatial proximity to the past. This proximity seems to prohibit the use of a flexible perspective in approaching Germany's Nazi past and of critically addressing the institutionalized nature of the current culture of remembrance in Germany, while it also impedes the possibility of working through the trauma engendered by German culpability for the Holocaust.

LaCapra posits that "[for mourning as a social process to be possible] losses would have to be specified or named" (*Writing History* 69); but, as Krondorfer observes, "nobody taught [young Germans] how to grieve the loss of the former Jewish population of Germany and Europe" (35). As a result, the victims of the Shoah remain – again – unmourned, thereby foreclosing any possibility of working through the past; rather, by focussing on their own struggle with finding, in light of their country's past, a distinct German identity in the twenty-first century, members of the third generation, like their grandparents and parents, once more run the risk of marginalizing the memory of the actual victims of the Holocaust.

Chapter 3

(Un)Covering the Past:

'Post-Holocaust Memories' in Rachel Seiffert's *The Dark Room* and Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything Is Illuminated*

Introduction

Witnessing the Holocaust from a distance becomes a complex phenomenon in the current age of globalization and multiculturalism, and within the context of the imminent loss of the last survivor-witnesses. The complexities surrounding the idea of distance as they come to the fore within the context of globalization allow for Holocaust memory to be "[transposed] from confines of its formerly national context to a broader global one" (Levy and Sznaider 25). The process of globalization thus foregrounds that Holocaust memory can no longer be solely confined to the cultural and collective memory of nations that were responsible for or affected by the Holocaust. Instead, Holocaust memory has become an integral part of global memory and has been transmitted and incorporated into the cultural memory of nations whose history and culture are not directly affiliated and associated with the Jewish genocide. Therefore, the importance of distance for the act of witnessing has to be re-evaluated within the specifics of a global context, which, by definition, already foregrounds the inevitability of geographical and linguistic distance, while it simultaneously emphasizes the role that this complex, multi-layered understanding of the concept of distance will, and inevitably has to, play for the future of Holocaust memory.

The almost complete absence of German post-Holocaust fiction, the marginalization of the Holocaust and its victims, and the overt focus of German postwar narratives, including texts by third-generation writers, such as Tanja Dückers, on the idea of German victimhood, demonstrates that the temporal distance from the events of the past can in fact impose a limitation on the act of witnessing the Holocaust as it can lead to a distorted perception of the past, in which even perpetrators appear to be victims. Schlant contends that "the West German literature of four decades has been a literature of absence and silence contoured by language" (10). And indeed, even in post-reunified Germany, literary explorations of individual responsibility for the Holocaust are almost non-existent. There is, however, a growing body of post-Holocaust literature written by Germans who emigrated or were born in another country than Germany, as well as by non-Germans, a proliferation that foregrounds the necessity of a geographical and, by extension, linguistic distance for the act of witnessing the Holocaust by contemporary generations to become possible. The Jewish genocide was carried out on European soil and the history of the Holocaust has thus become an intricate part of European history. Particularly in Germany, but also in almost every other European country, foremost in France, Poland, and Italy, remnants of the past in the form of museums located within the former concentration camps, memorials, and other monuments continuously remind their citizens of the role that their nation played in the implementation of the Holocaust as either perpetrators, collaborators, or bystanders. These remnants of the past, which continue to remind the population, particularly in Germany, of its country's shameful history, often tend to foreclose the possibility of working through the past by instilling feelings of shame

and guilt in the population, feelings which can prohibit an objective investigation of the nation's past. In contrast, in countries such as Britain and America, which were not affiliated with or responsible for the Holocaust, feelings of guilt do not hinder a critical examination of this particular past. At the same time, their primary language, English, was not abused and subverted by Nazism and existed outside the confinements of the concentration camps as a language un-associated with either victim or perpetrator. English has thus remained untainted and detached from the history of the Holocaust. Therefore it is both the geographical and linguistic distance, as well as the different social context in which contemporary authors are writing that provide these writers with a more flexible and emotionally detached point of view, one which allows a better critical engagement with the haunting and far-reaching issues and ongoing impact of the Holocaust. However, remembering the Holocaust seems to still be of particular importance to younger generations of Jews and Germans, especially descendants of victims and perpetrators such as Jewish-American writer Jonathan Safran Foer and German-Australian author Rachel Seiffert. These authors did not live through or endure the actual atrocities, yet attempt to preserve the lived experience of the Holocaust in the form of public memory. In order to bear witness to a history with which they are culturally associated yet from which they are temporally and spatially removed, descendants of victims and perpetrators, who wish to bear witness from a distance, frequently assume the position of the bystander-witness, a position, which allows these writers to negotiate the complexities surrounding their own familial affiliation with this particular history, while it also offers them the possibility of adopting a detached and more critical point of view, a perspective that is

impossible to assume from the position of either the victim or perpetrator since the interdependence of these two positions within the context of the history of the Holocaust automatically forecloses the option of a critical investigation of the past.

The concepts of victim and perpetrator exist in a dialectical relationship. Their respective subjectivities are defined by and heavily dependent upon each other. A perpetrator turns other subjects into objects, victimizing them by depriving them of their identity and humanity, while a victim feels helpless and therefore succumbs to passivity thus playing itself out as the object of perpetration. In contrast to the binary of victim and perpetrator, the figure of the bystander exists outside this subject-object dialectic and is therefore a more fluid yet also complex figure. The complexity of the figure of the bystander stems from the fact that this figure incorporates elements of both the perpetrator and the victim and alternates between these two subject positions. On the one hand, unwilling to intervene, a bystander enables or even supports acts of atrocities; in such circumstances, it appears merely fortuitous that bystanders do not become perpetrators themselves. On the other hand, like the figure of the victim, this figure is also put into a position of helplessness and passivity, due to either a lack of choice, or because of the impossibility of intervening. The ambiguous nature of the figure of the bystander is illustrated in the historical bystander of the Second World War, who watched the events unfold in Europe during the 1930s and 1940s. These particular historical bystanders, because of the nature of the events they were surrounded by, not only become part of a discourse of passivity, guilt, complicity, and silence, but are characterized, most importantly, by a moral indifference, "even of apathy, toward all events that did not immediately touch one's personal existence"

(Hilberg, *Perpetrators* 195). This moral indifference, which was intricately connected to the bystanders' preoccupation with their own fate, resulted in denial, in repression and, particularly after the war and the discovery of the extremities of the Holocaust, in forgetting, and therefore in an unwillingness to accept responsibility as witnesses.

The historical bystander is already a complicated figure; yet this complexity is refigured in third-generation Jewish and German writing about the Holocaust, that is, in literature produced by descendants of victims, on the one hand, and perpetrators, on the other. Because of the flexibility of the idea of the bystander as a figure who assumes, depending on the situational context, characteristics of the position of the victim as well as that of the perpetrator, and due to the fact that this figure exists outside the perpetrator-victim dialectic, third generations can relate to the subject position of the bystander more readily than to the position of either the victim or the perpetrator. Victoria Barnett, affirming the ethical responsibility of contemporary generations in keeping alive the memory of the Holocaust, argues that

> The prevention of future Holocausts may depend not upon identifying and protecting potential victims, but upon our learning – as bystanders – to respond differently to the plight of victims everywhere. If the bystander has become a modern archetype, it is because of the considerable evidence, in the final years of the 20th century, that there is really very little that distinguishes most of us from the silent bystanders of the 1930s. (xvii)

By assuming the role of the contemporary bystander who is not indifferent, and who wishes to bear witness, third generations attempt to counter amnesia, forgetting, and

the moral indifference so intricately connected to the notion of the historical bystander. In doing so, third and subsequent generations are able to progress from the idea of mere standing by to the idea of witnessing.

By focussing on Rachel Seiffert's *The Dark Room* and Jonathan Safran Foer's novel, *Everything Is Iluminated*, I will analyze how third-generation descendants of both victims and perpetrators negotiate the historical trauma of the Holocaust in their novels, how they investigate and address the complicated relationship of history and memory, personal and global history, and transgenerational trauma, and how the figure of the bystander is interpreted and refigured in their respective works. Although these two novels approach the ideas of history, memory, and trauma from two opposing angles, Seiffert focussing on the perpetrators, and Foer supposedly on the victims, both authors investigate the complicated positions of victim, perpetrator, and bystander, and, in doing so, come to bear witness to the past in general, and to the Holocaust in particular.

From History to Memory to Imagination

While the historical reality of the Holocaust, the undeniable facts, numbers, and dates, serves as a frame of reference for younger generations in their attempt to address and negotiate the continuing presence of the Holocaust in their lives, these mere facts are not able to convey its impact, the extent of the horror and the atrocities endured. In order to provide a framework to understand the ways in which subsequent generations might negotiate this relationship to history, it is necessary to revisit the idea of history and the idea of memory. Kerwin Lee Klein asserts that the terms history and memory have often been used as synonyms. Yet, as Klein argues, it is

vital to carefully distinguish between these two terms since it is not through history but memory, which has an ability to "[p]roject an immediacy we feel has been lost from history," that the atmosphere of the Holocaust is rendered accessible (129). History, according to Klein, tends to reduce the victims of the Holocaust to a faceless mass, providing information that is potentially abstract, and inapprehensible. Yet history, because of its commitment to facts, is not able to actually convey the atmosphere of the Holocaust, which is comprised of the feelings, emotions, fears, and horrors experienced by individual people. In order to move beyond this limited understanding of the Holocaust, we need to perceive the Holocaust not as a remote historical event, but as a sum of various and differing personal experiences and memories, all of which are connected to the various subject positions of perpetrators, victims, and bystanders.

The earliest accounts of the Holocaust are eyewitness accounts, written by survivors writing from within history, that is, the specific historical period under investigation; indeed, they *are* that history because they lived through the actual atrocities. In her memoir, *Days and Memory* (1990), French Holocaust survivor Charlotte Delbo distinguishes between two kinds of memory: common memory, or the memory of the everyday, memory that is marked by a narrative order and cohesiveness; and, deep memory in which "Auschwitz is there, unalterable, precise, but enveloped in the skin of memory, an impermeable skin that isolates it from my present self" (2). French psychologist Pierre Janet, a contemporary of Freud, had already differentiated between two kinds of memory using the terms "narrative memory" and "traumatic memory" (qtd. in Leys 105). Borrowing terms and concepts from both Delbo and Janet, Holocaust scholar Langer describes common memory as

being coherent, comprehensive, and told in a narrative sequence, and deep memory as being marked by intrusiveness and fragmentation (*Holocaust Testimonies* 6). The distinction between narrative and traumatic memory is of great importance in relation to the way in which victims of the Holocaust bear witness to the atrocities endured, as it gestures towards the complicated nature of memory, its unreliability as well as its inaccessibility, and thus shows that, memory like history, is in itself limited and requires a contextual reconfiguration.

However, in order to perceive the Holocaust not only as a historical event but as an experience, we need to rely on eyewitness accounts that speak from memory. The question of addressing and subsequently remembering the Holocaust thus belongs to the realm of memory, which allows for immediacy that historical facts cannot offer. In order to bridge the gap between history and memory, and in order to overcome the limitations and address the inaccessibility of both these concepts, subsequent generations move to something beyond both history and memory: imagination, which can in fact be seen to already characterize the constructed narrative basis of historiography, albeit subliminally, and which may allow for new ways of remembering the Holocaust by generations removed from this particular history. Explaining this recent turn towards various ways of remembering the event within the realm of Holocaust studies, Langer comments that

> perhaps this means we have finally begun to enter the second stage of Holocaust response, moving from what we know of the event (the province of the historian), to how we remember it, which shifts the

> responsibility to our own imaginations and what we are prepared to admit here. (*Holocaust Testimonies* 13)

Similarly, Gary Weissman notes "how we remember [the Holocaust] seems analogous to how we imagine the Holocaust – for what we imagine, or admit to our imagination, appears to constitute our own memory of the event" (102), foregrounding the permeability of the border seemingly separating memory and imagination. Subsequent generations have no personal memory of the Holocaust, yet their lives are shaped by this event, albeit in varying ways. The imagination can, however, serve as a frame of reference, as a common ground between survivors' written testimonials and the attempt by subsequent generations to create a memory of an event not experienced. In the introduction to *Nothing Makes You Free* (2002), Melvin Jules Bukiet notes that "[f]or anyone who wasn't *there*, on either side of the barbed wire, Jew or German, thinking about the Holocaust is really an act of the imagination" (16). The imagination becomes the sole means to assist subsequent generations in addressing the long-lasting trauma the genocide has inflicted upon those who have grown up and exist in its aftermath.[1] Thus, while the move from history to memory allows subsequent generations to investigate the ongoing impact of the Holocaust on their lives, it is, most of all, the idea of ethical imagination – refraining from creating a master discourse of absolute knowledge about the victims' experiences while simultaneously highlighting the importance of remembering – that transforms the contemporary writer

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[1] Similarly, Norma Rosen, second-generation Jewish-American writer and author of *Touching Evil* (1990), has explained that, for her, the only role that she could assume in her attempt to investigate the traumatic impact of the Holocaust on her life was that of a witness through the imagination, a role that allowed her to both investigate the nature of the historical event and to simultaneously bear witness to the lost voices of the victims. See Rosen, "The Holocaust and the American-Jewish Novelist," *Midstream* (1974): 54-62.

or reader from a bystander to a witness with a moral responsibility for simultaneously mourning and remembering the Holocaust and its victims.

History as Trauma

Cathy Caruth explains that "trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden, or catastrophic events, in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, and uncontrolled repetitive occurrence of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" ("Trauma and the Possibility of History" 181). She draws on Sigmund Freud's concept of *Nachträglichkeit* – deferred action – in which the traumatic event, which has not registered during its occurrence, intrusively returns in the form of nightmares, or compulsive repetitions. Caruth further contends that trauma is

> always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available. This truth, in its delayed appearance and its belated address, cannot be linked only to what is known, but also to what remains unknown in our very actions and our language. (*Trauma* 4)

Trauma, says Marcio Seligman-Silva, constitutes a wound in memory (150).[2] It is essentially a gap or hole in memory, something that cannot be fully grasped or understood and thus put into a narrative order because it represents a non-experience, that paradoxically "simultaneously defies and demands our witness" (Caruth, *Trauma* 5). Geoffrey Hartman also concerns himself with the "relation of words and wounds,"

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[2] In his seminal essay, "Mourning and Melancholia," Freud argues that"[t]he complex of melancholia behaves like an open wound" (589), causing a continuous acting out instead of allowing for the process of working through in the form of mourning to occur.

and argues that "literary verbalization...remains a basis for making the wound perceivable" ("Trauma within the Limits of Literature" 259). For him, literary renditions of traumatic experiences retain the rich potential to counter forgetting and to address the impact of trauma.[3] In doing so, literary renditions of traumatic experiences must, however, negotiate the dichotomy between the concreteness of trauma's constant disturbing literality, on the one hand, and its inaccessibility and the difficulty of dealing with its consequences, on the other.

This discrepancy between trauma's continuous intrusion, which can manifest itself in nightmares, flashbacks, sudden and overwhelming feelings of numbness and utter helplessness, and its inaccessible nature, which precludes the integration and subsequent comprehension of the traumatic event, comes especially to the fore in relation to the Holocaust, which can be regarded as the paradigmatic human trauma in twentieth-century Western history, the effects of which are not limited to the war generation, its victims, perpetrators, and historical bystanders, but shape the lives of all of us who exist in its aftermath. Because of its all-encompassing nature and its ongoing impact, the Holocaust is not only a historical trauma linked to a specific time and place in history, but itself redraws the history of trauma because it dramatically shifts our ways of reasoning and thinking. Jean-François Lyotard compares the Holocaust to an earthquake, explaining that "an earthquake destroys not only lives, buildings, and objects but also the instruments used to measure earthquakes directly and indirectly" (*The Differend* 56). Because of its extremity, and because of the

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[3] Bernard-Donals suggests that such a "language has to be both consistent with what we know of events, and allow for imaginative possibilities beyond what we think of as rational or probable." To him, as for Hartman, "[t]he language of fiction may be just such a language" that can make the wound perceptible (*Introduction to Holocaust Studies* 181).

gruesome reasoning that enabled the genocide in the first place, the industrialized mass murder carried out by what once was a leading country in cultural and philosophical thinking remains to this day inaccessible. Thus the Holocaust represents not only a history of trauma, but also a trauma of history. In becoming a trauma of history, it becomes one of narration and of bearing witness particularly for subsequent generations who are far-removed from the actual atrocities and events, yet have to constantly concern themselves with the gaps that this "earthquake" inflicted upon their lives. Even historical witnesses, including survivors, perpetrators, and bystanders, are not able to fully bear witness to their own experiences. Yet in order to prevent the Holocaust from being, in Maurice Blanchot's words, "an event without witnesses" (82), it is vital to investigate the crucial question as to whether subsequent generations, who did not experience the actual traumatic event themselves, possess the capacity to 'remember' the past, and if, in doing so, they can become witnesses to the event.

In order to negotiate these issues, I wish to re-introduce the notion of the bystander, particularly the idea of the contemporary reader and writer as bystander. The figure of the bystander seems to be crucial to the question as to how subsequent generations imagine, remember, and thus bear witness to the Holocaust, and indeed becomes a central means of providing a framework for an analysis of post-Holocaust Jewish and German fiction. To this end, it is important to revisit all three of the subject positions introduced as being most prevalent during the historical time period of the Holocaust, namely that of the victim, the perpetrator, and the bystander. In an analysis of Claude Lanzmann's film *Shoah* (1985), Felman suggests that all three subject positions can be classified as witnesses to the event: that is, "those who

witnessed the disaster as its *victims* (the surviving Jews); those who witnessed the disaster as its *perpetrators* (the ex-Nazis); those who witnessed the disaster as its *bystanders* (the Poles)" (207). Yet she makes crucial distinctions by drawing on the notion of seeing, arguing that these subject positions illustrate "three different performances of the act of seeing" (208). The act of seeing is intricately connected to the idea of bearing witness, and Felman explains that, while victims, perpetrators, and bystanders are essentially all witnesses to the same event, their perception of it largely depends on what they fail to see, or to understand, and ultimately bear witness to, and can thus be seen to be situated at the intersection of vision and epistemology. The Jewish victims, she writes, "see, but they do not understand the purpose and the destination of what they see: overwhelmed by loss and by deception, they are blind to the significance of what they witness" (208). The perpetrators, "the Nazis, ...see to it that both the Jews and the extermination will remain unseen, invisible," and the Polish bystanders, "unlike the Jews, *do* see but, as bystanders, they do not quite *look*, they avoid looking directly, and thus they *overlook* at once their responsibility and their complicity as witnesses" (208). While Felman moves among all three subject positions, illuminating the complexities of all of them, she tends to focus particularly on the perpetrator; while she specifically analyzes the figure of the bystander as a historical witness, the bystander as a figure that can exist outside a specific historical context remains largely unexplored in her analysis. I therefore wish to broaden the general conception of the bystander as a subject position that is intricately linked to a certain historical time period to that of a figure which can also function if removed from a particular historical context, such as the events of the Holocaust.

In terms of the actual historical context under investigation, the Holocaust, two kinds of behaviour can be attributed to bystanders: active bystanding and passive bystanding. Both are dependent on the proximity to the actual event and connected to the aforementioned historical context. In the present context, an active bystander is perceived as someone who assumes the responsibility for preventing violence from occurring, for instance. In terms of the Holocaust, however, the category of the active bystander was comprised of people who did not prevent the mass murder from happening, but instead actively assisted the Nazis in carrying out their gruesome tasks. This category includes some Polish people, for instance, but even more so applies to ordinary Germans who were members of the Nazi party, and who subscribed to and supported the Nazi ideology. These active German bystanders, in particular, knew about the plans for mass destruction even before these plans were put into action. The active bystander to the Holocaust then was well-informed about the intention of mass murder, but did nothing to prevent it. The behaviour of active bystanders is extremely similar to that of the perpetrators because, while active bystanders remain distinguished from the actual act of perpetration, they enabled the genocide by supporting Nazi politics. Dan Bar-On coins the term "Just World Hypothesis" to describe this particular behaviour that emerges in both the perpetrator and the active bystander. He sees the similarity between these two subject positions as being the dependence on a particular kind of distance, whose "psychological function [it] is to reduce one's own moral responsibility and psychological caring for the victim" (128).[4]

[4] For a detailed analysis of the various forms of bystander behaviour see Dan Bar-On, "The Bystander in Relation to the Victim and the Perpetrator: Today and During the Holocaust." For a more generalized account of Holocaust bystanders, see Raul Hilberg, *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders: The Jewish Catastrophe 1933-1945*, (London: Harper, 1992), 212-16.

This distance is engendered by the very act of mass murder itself, which denies the victims their individuality by turning them into a nameless, uniform crowd, which renders the empathic identification with the victims impossible.

The passive bystander watches violent events unfold but remains unwilling to intervene; instead, the passive bystander watches from a comfortable distance. But in doing so, the passive bystander actually silently complies with the violent behaviour of the perpetrator. The category of the passive Holocaust bystander consists mainly of the majority of the Polish as well as some of the German population, who witnessed only certain aspects of the genocide, such as the deportation of Jewish neighbours, for instance. In contrast to the active bystander, the passive historical bystander did not know about or grasp the full extent of the genocide. Nevertheless, both the active bystander, who gets involved, as well as the passive bystander, who remains largely uninvolved, are, to some extent, responsible for the events they bear witness to because, in both cases, these figures refrain from intervening either in the form of actively helping the victims, or by preventing the perpetrators from carrying out their violent tasks, despite the fact that they do in fact see and are hence aware of the violence that is putting people's lives at risk.

This idea of bystanding can be extended and in turn applied to later generations, who are removed from the actual historical event of the Holocaust, both in terms of time and possibly geography. However, the figure of the contemporary writer or reader as bystander has to be seen in a larger context of moral obligation and responsibility, in which the idea of standing by becomes contextual rather than situational. This means that contemporary writers' bystanding behaviour is not caused

by the sudden occurrence of a situation of such a kind that demands they act impulsively; rather, they are consciously assuming the role of bystanders as witnesses to the national and cultural context, and, most importantly, to the global context and its specific ways of addressing and representing an atrocious historical event such as the Holocaust in the present. In doing so, the contemporary bystander-witness also assumes the moral obligation of keeping alive the memory of the dead. In order to address the inaccessibility of both history and memory, the cultural context in which these concepts originated, and the gaps the Holocaust has left within both history and memory, contemporary generations use both history and memory and their own imagination to fill in the gaps and silences evoked by the ongoing impact of the trauma of the Holocaust. While contemporary generations cannot assume the position of a moral witness as delineated by Margalit (150), which, as a category, seems to be reserved for survivor-witnesses only, members of subsequent generations can, however, become bystanders in an ethical sense. By consciously assuming the responsibility for remembering, and thus ultimately for bearing witness, members of subsequent generations can act as ethical bystanders, a category which seems to have originated in the aftermath of the Shoah as a response to the almost complete absence of humanity during the actual event.

It is the figure of the bystander with whom subsequent generations most frequently align themselves. However, descendants of victims and perpetrators, Jews and Germans, in particular, who wish to act as ethical bystanders in a contemporary context, have to first negotiate the complexities surrounding the position of the historical bystander. These complexities can be seen to stem from the stoic acceptance

of the fate of the Jewish bystander; the lack of resistance, the ensuing moral guilt and silent complicity of the passive Polish and German bystander; and the willing participation of the active German and Polish bystander in the Holocaust. An examination of the difficult position of the historical bystander serves as an important prerequisite for determining the kind of bystanding and the ways in which descendants of victims and perpetrators conceive of the idea of witnessing the trauma of the past from a distance. While both Jewish and German third-generation writers address and investigate the trauma of memory, the ethical imagination of history, and the idea of bearing witness, their responses differ in multiple ways, as an analysis of German-Australian writer Rachel Seiffert's *The Dark Room* and Jewish-American writer Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything Is Illuminated* will indicate.

The Dark Room of History – Rachel Seiffert's *The Dark Room*

The notion of history as a dark room is foregrounded in the title of Seiffert's debut novel, *The Dark Room* (2001). In Germany, the country of the perpetrators, any confrontation with the Nazi past and the involvement of individuals in the mass murder has always been highly controversial, and surrounded by both darkness and silence. Yet particularly after the turn of the century, there has been a proliferation of postwar German literature that concerns itself with exposing and investigating the impact of the idea of German victimhood on cultural memory.

In 2002, Günter Grass published his novella *Im Krebsgang*, which deals with the suffering and expulsion of Germans from the East, as well as the pain and loss endured by those people. That even Grass, one of Germany's most important

contemporary literary voices, and probably the primary moralist of his country, ends up reverting to the trope of German victimhood seems to officially sanction the notion that German suffering and victimization during the war is of primary importance within the country of the former perpetrators because the exclusive focus on German victimhood allows Germans to deflect their responsibility and, possibly, feelings of guilt evoked by their involvement in the Jewish genocide. This idea is exacerbated by the fact that the publication of Grass's autobiography, *Beim Häuten der Zwiebel* (*Peeling the Onion*) in 2006, was accompanied by outrage after Grass mentioned that he had belonged to the *Waffen-SS* at the age of seventeen.[5] The public reaction to Grass, the winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1999 and probably the best-known public figure of postwar German literature, largely stemmed from and was grounded in people's disbelief in and denial of the possibility that even such an outspoken advocate for human rights, and for reconciliation with victims of the Nazi reign, was involved in, or at least affiliated with, mass murder. Yet the reaction of the German public to Grass's autobiography was not only limited to his belated confession of having belonged to the *Waffen-SS*. More offensive was Grass's evasion of responsibility for his actions, an evasion he accomplishes by reverting to a highly metaphorical narrative that grants him the necessary distance from past events and from his own culpability. This distance is furthered by Grass's use of the form of the literary autobiography, a genre which is itself situated at the intersection of fact and fiction.[6] Grass distances himself from his participation in the *Waffen-SS* by reverting

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[5] See Gregor Dotzauer, "Örtlich betäubt," *Tagesspiegel*, 12 Aug. 2006.

[6] In contrast to Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel, who used this particular form, the literary autobiography, as a way of making accessible the trauma he had endured while he was incarcerated in a

to a third-person narrative and by portraying his narrator as an innocent, immature young German boy, who was simply seduced by the propaganda employed by the *Waffen-SS* that promised him the possibility for moving up the echelons of power and prestige by ascribing him an important role in achieving the so-called *Endsieg* (Final Victory). By blurring the boundaries between reality and the author's imaginative, in Grass's case even exculpatory, re-creation of the past, this autobiography highlights the author's refusal to take ownership of his actions and to accept his culpability, which ultimately led to a public controversy.[7]

Grass is a member of the war generation, and Dückers belongs to the third generation after the war, but both write from within the perpetrator culture, that is, from within a climate of denial and forgetting, from within the paradox and apparent discrepancy between official and private memory, surrounded by numerous visible reminders of the past, such as Nazi buildings, which still house governmental institutions, and memorials commemorating the victims of the Holocaust. Germany is still deeply steeped in its recent history, a fact that seems to impede Germans from attaining a critical, self-conscious perspective in approaching German history. In

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concentration camp as a young teenager, Grass uses this particularly literary form in order to distance himself from the mistakes committed by the young adult Grass. By constantly highlighting the untrustworthiness and forgetful nature of his memory, Grass deliberately creates ambiguity and confusion for the reader, for whom it becomes virtually impossible to distinguish between the actual historical reality and Grass's memory thereof (von Thadden and Kaudelka 10-11).

[7] A similar outrage and public controversy was caused in 2004 by the revelation that Walter Jens (born in 1923), another outspoken moralist of the country, renowned author and former professor of rhetoric at Tübingen University, had been a member of the NSDAP. Jens denied ever having signed the necessary paperwork that would have granted him permission to become a member of the Party; instead he claimed that his whole class had–unknowingly–collectively been transferred from the Hitler Youth into Hitler's party. Historians have acknowledged the possibility that such a practice occurred, but the circumstances surrounding Jens's entry into the NSDAP remain obscure. In his 2009 highly controversial autobiography, *Demenz: Abschied von meinem Vater*, Jens's son, Tilman, suggests that the public revelation in the mass media of his father's membership exists in direct and causal relation to the onset, in 2006, of Walter Jens's dementia, which Tilman Jens sees as the primary disease (associated with ideas of repression and forgetting) affecting members of the war generation.

contrast, novelists writing from a distance both in terms of time and geography, are more able to openly address the role of ordinary Germans in the genocide. German-Australian writer Rachel Seiffert was born and raised in Britain, and therefore outside of the often amnesic atmosphere surrounding the Holocaust and the notion of culpability in Germany. At the same time she is very familiar with this particular atmosphere since she also occasionally lives in Germany and is better situated to investigate the psychic structures that led to mass murder as well as to explore the ongoing impact of the Holocaust.

Seiffert's debut novel, *The Dark Room*, is about the children and grandchildren of perpetrators, but Seiffert is particularly interested in investigating the notion of the bystander, both the historical bystander and the contemporary, third-generation German. The novel consists of three parts, each of which addresses the Nazi period from various spatial and geographical locations, and traces the legacy of this particular time on the lives of ordinary Germans during the war, right after it, and some forty years later. Seiffert illustrates and emphasizes the possibilities of addressing and bearing witness to a guilt-infused public and private history, and highlights throughout her narrative, which progresses chronologically, the importance of and possibilities for the act of witnessing evoked by the growing temporal distance from the actual event.

In the first section, Helmut, a young photographer with a disabled arm that prevents him from participating in the war, wanders around Berlin during the last months of World War II, manically taking pictures in an attempt to avoid having to confront the reality of the destruction by which he is surrounded. Born in 1921, to parents who are supporters of Hitler and his regime, Helmut is witness to various

historical events, such as the *Reichskristallnacht* (11), the rise of National Socialism (17), and the deportation of gypsies from Berlin:

> The gypsies are divided and loaded into the trucks. They shout back at the men in uniform, gold teeth bared. Children cry on their mothers' hips and hide beneath their wide, bright skirts. Girls bite the soldiers' hands as they pull the jewels from their ears and hair. Men kick those who kick them and are kicked again. Women push away the hands which push them, and one runs but doesn't get far and is soon unconscious and in the truck with the rest of her family. (28)

Helmut tries to capture the full extent of the horror in the photographs he takes, but soon learns that the pictures are not able to fully convey the extent of the brutality he witnesses. At the same time, his camera allows him to distance himself from the event he witnesses, as it is only "[i]n the viewfinder [that] his eyes meet the eyes of a shouting, pointing gypsy" (28). While, at first glance, the viewfinder seems to separate Helmut from the scene and reality, it brings him in fact closer to the event he is witnessing, and facilitates his status as a bystander who watches the events unfold yet remains passive since he refrains from intervening. Helmut avoids "looking directly" in precisely the manner discussed by Felman (208) and, in doing so, silently complies with the violent acts the perpetrators are performing. Helmut witnesses the deportation of the gypsies, for instance, and even takes photographs of the actions that are happening around him. Yet he fails to understand the far-reaching, traumatic consequences of this incident. His inability yet also unwillingness to understand his environment is illustrated in him frantically disposing of his photographs which could

both serve as testimony to the event he saw unfolding, and as a reminder of his responsibility as a bystander-witness. Moreover, by developing his photographs in the dark room, where seeing is literally impossible, Helmut distances himself from the reality with which he is surrounded. As a passive bystander, Helmut refrains from bearing witness himself and from understanding what the Nazis are doing to the gypsies. His photographs, however, complicate this position. The very fact of their existence indicates that he does to some extent bear witness, as they, unbeknownst to Helmut, paradoxically testify to his inability to understand the nature of the crimes he is documenting.

Lore's story, which comprises the second section, takes place shortly after the war, in the summer of 1945. Together with her four siblings she tries to find her way from Bavaria to her grandmother in Hamburg, after her parents have been imprisoned by the Allies for possible participation in war crimes. Again, Seiffert employs photographs as a means for exploring the figure of the historical bystander. Unlike Helmut, however, Lore does not take pictures herself, but is instead exposed to a variety of photographs put up by the Allies to show the suffering inflicted upon people in the concentration camps. The images seem to be so far removed from her own reality and suffering that merely looking at the pictures leads to her bewilderment and confusion (76-7). Yet these are still only pictures, and she is able to avert her gaze, as an old woman orders her to do: "Go home, child. Quickly now. There is nothing here for you to see" (77). Seiffert employs the perspective of the child – Lore is twelve years old – in order to emphasize the grotesque unveiling of the photographs. Lore is completely unable to understand the full extent of the horror depicted in the pictures

until she meets Tomas who looks exactly like the people in the photographs. Tomas appears to be a former camp inmate yet Seiffert complicates his position by having him steal Jewish papers from a corpse in order to proclaim himself as a survivor of Buchenwald concentration camp. Despite the fact that Tomas is an imposter, Lore's encounter with him is a pivotal moment as she is slowly forced to recognize that the pictures of the emaciated figures are indeed real. Through Lore's narrative Seiffert highlights the ambiguous possibilities of postwar German identity being comprised of both perpetrator and victim. While the absence of Lore's parents and their internment by the Allies imply their position as perpetrators, Seiffert allows Lore to negotiate the position of the victim, yet problematizes that position by having her encounter a supposedly former camp inmate. While Lore regards herself as a victim, Tomas visibly resembles a victim, emphasized by his wearing the clothes of a camp inmate. Tomas serves as literal manifestation of victimhood and Nazi crimes. By having Lore encounter Tomas, Seiffert expands Lore's position to that of the bystander, in particular to that of a bystander with the responsibility of acknowledging reality, of countering forgetting, and of investigating the truth that lies behind the pictures she has been exposed to, pictures which show dead bodies and walking corpses that so closely resemble Tomas. At the same time, the discovery of Tomas's papers that he had left behind which show a different person, forces Lore to confront the immorality, hypocrisy and egotism that developed in the aftermath of the war as these papers suggest that Tomas assumed an actual victim's identity in order to survive; yet it was his survival, based on a false identity, which allowed him to help Lore and her brother. At the same time, however, it is through the circumstances surrounding Tomas's

survival that questions of victimhood, responsibility, and collusion become impossibly blurred.

In contrast to Helmut, Lore does not deliberately distance herself through the use of a viewfinder; rather, she sees the photographs that bear witness to the atrocities committed by the Nazis, and thus becomes a witness herself. While both Helmut and Lore can be regarded as historical bystanders, it is only Lore, though yet unaware of it, until she is confronted again by these images on a bus in Hamburg, who takes on the role and responsibility of the witness.

In the last section of *The Dark Room*, Seiffert focuses on the third generation after the war and expands the figure of the bystander and witness to include those born after the war. The third section takes place in 1997, and tells the story of the teacher Micha Lehner, who is thirty years old when he embarks on a search for the truth about his grandfather, Askan Boell, who once belonged to the Waffen-SS in Belarus.

Lately, Micha has "taken to mapping his family" (159). "Why now? Michael asks himself the question all the time. We learned about the Holocaust in school. We were taken to visit the camp nearest the city, we watched documentaries, wrote essays" (164). What Micha learned at school were the facts, dates, and numbers of the Holocaust, an abstract, remote way of representing history, which precludes any possibility of establishing an empathic relation with the victims and allowing the process of mourning to take place. Micha, now a teacher himself, therefore dismisses German educational policies, precisely because of their overt and exclusive focus on abstract, national history, on the pure facts and numbers, and their tendency to eschew individual culpability by stressing the notion of collective guilt, on the one hand, and

by exclusively incriminating high-ranking Nazis, such as Hitler and Eichmann, on the other. Micha explains: "They are being taught that there are no perpetrators, only victims. They are being taught like it just happened, you know, just out of the blue people came along and did it and then disappeared" (207). Krondorfer highlights the paradoxical and impossible nature of German Holocaust education:

> [to] young Germans, the Holocaust has become a strangely abstract, yet ever terrifying reality, or "unreality." Nobody taught them how to cope with the possibility of their family's involvement in the genocide. And nobody taught them how to grieve the loss of the former Jewish population of Germany and Europe, or to gain a realistic view of Jewish life today. (35)

Instead of encouraging an open confrontation with the past, an exploration which serves as an important prerequisite for negotiating the far-reaching issues of shame and guilt and for addressing the absence of Jewry in Germany, German educational policies tend to foster a climate in which an investigation of the role ordinary Germans and members of one's own family played in the Jewish genocide becomes impossible and undesirable.

The failure of German educational policies in teaching young Germans about the implication of their ancestors in the crimes of the past is further exposed by the highly controversial 1995 *Wehrmacht* exhibition, which, for the first time, showed that people responsible for the Holocaust were in fact ordinary soldiers, grandfathers, fathers, husbands, and brothers, who were laughing, smiling, and posing for the camera in the same way they would pose for photographs taken at family gatherings.

This exhibition highlighted the very idea of collective guilt, and made the involvement of almost every ordinary soldier in the Holocaust painfully visible.

Micha's grandfather, Askan Boell, it turns out, after his grandmother mentions in passing that her husband belonged to the *Waffen-SS* during the war, is in fact one of these ordinary German soldiers, who were involved in the mass killings of Jews in the East. Like the pictures displayed during the *Wehrmacht* exhibition, in Seiffert's novel, for Micha "[p]hotos are difficult, painful, but Micha seeks them out... Micha can't find his Opa's face. *Young Askan Boell.* They all look like him and none of them do, the young Germans with the guns and the Jews" (170-71). And later, when he looks at a wall of photographs taken during the Nazi occupation of the East, he is once again afraid to detect the familiar face of his Opa amongst the killers:

> Micha looks at them all, looks hard into the faces of the soldiers, checks for Opa's cheekbones, his high forehead, his deep-set eyes. A cigarette held in the fingertips, turned in toward the palm. Micha is sweating. He doesn't find him. He goes back along the wall, looks again, but still doesn't find him. (195)

Micha's image of his grandfather and the memories he has of him suggest a truly caring, friendly, and loving grandfather, and he cannot and does not want to fathom the possibility of his grandfather's role in the Holocaust. Yet his grandmother's remarks initiate a search into his grandfather's past where Micha learns that personal narratives within the context of national guilt do not exist; instead the notion of German suffering and victimhood is perpetuated in the private realm, which stands in stark contrast to the public culture of remembrance and its emphasis on the notion of guilt and German

responsibility for the Jewish genocide. This overemphasis on self-portrayal as victim and the subsequent marginalization of the actual victims of the Holocaust is symptomatic of the way in which the Third Reich and the Nazi crimes are remembered in German families to this day (Welzer 344).[8] The obvious discrepancy between public and private wartime memories leads Micha to investigate and negotiate his own position as belonging to the third generation of German heirs to the legacy of mass murder.

Micha asserts about his grandparents and parents that they "didn't talk about the war, the Holocaust; they didn't really talk about the past at all" (164). The all-encompassing silence surrounding one's family history can have a deep impact on subsequent generations of perpetrators and their attempts to find a distinct German identity as this silence implies a lack of history, memory, and narrative. Sammy Speier explains that in Germany, "the transmission of experience from one generation to another has been effectively shattered...[and that] what is erased reappears in the children...as emptiness, identity, confusion, [and] bewilderment" (65, 67). Members of the third generation, like Micha, are faced with an impossible history because it has been suppressed, or even erased. When Micha makes clear that "[e]ven when I cry about [the Holocaust], I'm crying for myself. Not for the people who were killed" (269), Seiffert suggests that third-generation Germans have inherited the psychic structures of their grandparents and parents. On the one hand, these structures include the tendency to consider themselves as surrogate victims of historical circumstances;

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[8] See also Assmann, "Persönliche Erinnerung und kollektives Gedächtnis in Deutschland nach 1945," *Erinnern und Verstehen: Der Völkermord an den Juden im politischen Gedächtnis der Deutschen*, (Frankfurt a.M.: Campus Verlag, 2003), 126-38.

on the other hand, they involve the refusal or inability to mourn the victims of the Holocaust, and the loss of European Jewry.

Seiffert shows how the delayed investigation of a collective national trauma taken up by the third generation of Germans, who are far enough removed from the actual historical events, yet share a deep emotional bond that impedes an unbiased negotiation of the past, with their grandparents who lived through these years, is an almost impossible task. In this sense, the national trauma of guilt and shame continues to affect the descendants of perpetrators' families, and it does so on a very personal level. Precisely because of their grandparents' inability to mourn, which is, according to LaCapra, a necessary prerequisite for working-through such a trauma, grandchildren like Micha are faced with the difficulty of situating and reconciling their family history within the larger context of national guilt. Yet the ending of Seiffert's novel underlines the ambiguous and perhaps even impossible task of acknowledging and coming to terms with a guilt-infused family history. At the end of *The Dark Room*, Micha, who has refused contact with his grandmother since his suspicions about his grandfather were confirmed, stands in front of the nursing home where his grandmother lives, holding his baby girl. His daughter represents the fourth generation in Germany, and her existence highlights Micha's position as being a member of the last generation that can investigate the past in the presence of the actual war generation. This intermediate position that he occupies is characterized, on the one hand, by his responsibility towards history, and, on the other, towards the memories of his grandmother and the truth he uncovered about his grandfather's wartime experiences. Yet the complexities of Micha's position as a grandson of the war

generation also foreground the responsibility he has towards his daughter as it is precisely his way of negotiating a painful, familial history that will inform and determine the way in which his daughter will situate herself within history. Seiffert highlights the complexities surrounding the ambiguous position of third-generation Germans like Micha who are literally situated at the intersection of past and future of Holocaust remembrance in the country of the former perpetrators. In the end, when Micha is waving at a shadow he believes to be his grandmother, it could be interpreted as a sign for possible reconciliation between the two of them. Ultimately, however, Seiffert leaves open whether there will ever be a possibility of him reuniting with his family and their history.

Illuminating Trauma – Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything Is Illuminated*

Ideas about trauma, memory, and the role of the imagination as well as the question of how to remember the Holocaust are essential to Jewish-American writer Jonathan Safran Foer's debut novel *Everything Is Illuminated* (2002). *Everything Is Illuminated* consists of two narrative voices, those of the Ukrainian Alex Perchov and the Jewish-American Jonathan Safran Foer, whom Alex refers to as the "hero of this story" (1). Both narrators were born in 1977, and thus belong to the third generation after the war. The novel is comprised of three narrative strands: Alex's narrative about his attempts to write a novel based on Jonathan's visit to the Ukraine; Jonathan's narrative, which represents a magical and fictitious reinvention of the history of the Ukrainian shtetl, Trachimbrod, where his ancestors supposedly lived; and Alex's letters to Jonathan, in which he foregrounds the unreliability of Jonathan's account.

While the chapters written by Jonathan represent an imaginative recreation of the far-removed past of his ancestors, Alex's account is a more immediate, intimate, and even traumatic recollection of his journey with Jonathan, which is ultimately revealed to be a painful journey into recent history at large and his grandfather's repressed past in particular.

Jonathan travels to the Ukraine in order to find Augustine, the woman who reportedly saved his grandfather during the Holocaust. The only aid he possesses in his search for this woman is a photograph of Augustine. Assisting him in his search are Alex and his grandfather, whose name is also Alexander. Alex explains that this name "[s]upplementally is Father's. We are all the primogenitory children in our families, which brings us tremendous honor" (5). The three men work for a travel agency, which is, in Alex's words,

> denominated Heritage Tours. It is for Jewish people, like the hero, who have cravings to leave that ennobled country America and visit humble towns in Poland and Ukraine. Father's agency scores a translator, guide, and driver for the Jews, who try to unearth places where their families once existed. (3)

Father appoints Alex as the translator for Jonathan and Grandfather as the driver. Even before the three men embark on their journey, Grandfather says, "I do not want to do it. I am retarded, and did not become a retarded person in order to have to perform shit such as this. I am done with it" (6). One of the many reasons that Grandfather is reluctant to serve as the driver is, as Alex explains, because he claims to be blind. Although both Alex and his father know that Grandfather is not blind – he

watches TV constantly – they both collude with his psychosomatic claims. Alex's father even gets Grandfather a seeing-eye dog from the "home of forgetful dogs" (5), who becomes the "Officious Seeing-Eye Bitch of Heritage Touring" (29). Grandfather's reluctance to be the driver, his alleged blindness, his unwillingness to talk to his grandson, because, as Alex puts it, "we have never uttered multitudinous words" (29), his implied forgetfulness, and his melancholic state are all signs of denial and repression, which LaCapra identifies as one way of responding to trauma (*Representing the Holocaust* 192). And indeed, after Grandfather sees the picture of Augustine, Alex writes in a letter to Jonathan, that it is "the melancholy…what makes Grandfather unhealthful," and further explains that "it is what makes him blind, although he is not truly blind, of course" (25). The encounter with Jonathan, the anticipation of their intended trip to Trachimbrod, and the old picture all have a deep impact on Grandfather's psychological state.

Everything Is Illuminated appears at first to be about Jonathan's search for the woman who saved his grandfather; yet the novel yields to another layer of discourse, namely an investigation of Grandfather's past. Through Jonathan's search for answers, Alex starts wondering about his grandfather's past and what he did during the war:

> I heard [Grandfather's] large breathing. I heard his body move. It was like this all night. I knew why he could not repose. It was the same reason that I would not be able to repose. We were both regarding the same question: what did he do during the war? (74)

The trauma, which began as belonging to Jonathan, has shifted onto Alex, who, because of Jonathan's search, is unwillingly drawn into his grandfather's past, which has a deep impact on the relationship with his grandfather, and on his own psyche.

The arrival of Alex, Jonathan, and Grandfather at the shtetl Trachimbrod is a pivotal moment for all three men, albeit in different ways. Trachimbrod was razed to the ground during the war. Only one survivor, an old woman remains; all three men believe her to be Augustine. Her house stores the remnants left behind from the shtetl and its inhabitants: shoes, clothing, and photographs of various families, all of which lead Alex to imagine that "there must have been at least one hundred people living in that room" (147). Her house is a memorial site filled with inanimate objects she has unearthed from the ground. This ground, where Trachimbrod used to be, "is still filled with rings and money, and pictures, and Jewish things" (152), yet she tells the three men that "[t]here is nothing to see. It is only a field. I could exhibit you any field and it would be the same as exhibiting you Trachimbrod" (155). Trachimbrod is "nothing" (184), an inexplicable, vast traumatic void, surrounded by a "mural of darkness" (189), which makes it, as Alex puts it, "almost impossible to witness" (183). It renders history and memory impossible, entirely undermining the idea of remembering across time and generations.

Grandfather is deeply affected by the visit to Trachimbrod, and by the old woman, but he is most affected by one of her photographs, which shows two young men, whom Augustine identifies as Herschel and his best friend Eli. She goes on to explain that Eli was responsible for the death of his friend at the hands of the Nazis. When, at a later point in the novel, Alex looks at another photograph the old woman

has given them of Eli, his wife, baby boy, and friend Herschel, Alex at first believes he is looking at himself, but then realizes that he is in fact looking at his grandfather. He gives Grandfather the photograph to look at, and explains that, after doing so, "to write the rest of this story is the most impossible thing" (226). Finally, Grandfather is forced to acknowledge the part he played in the killing of his best friend, the Jew Herschel. Fearing for the life of his family and his own, Grandfather identifies Herschel as a Jew to the Nazi General, and he is then shot dead. Here it is important to recall LaCapra's explanation of historical trauma. He argues that "with respect to historical trauma...the distinction between victims, perpetrators, and bystanders is crucial" (Writing History 79). Yet he also asserts that "not everyone traumatized by events is a victim. There is the possibility of perpetrator trauma" (79). The complex nature of historical trauma is illustrated in Grandfather's character, whose ambiguity makes it virtually impossible to maintain a clear-cut distinction between victim, perpetrator, and bystander. While Grandfather, throughout the novel, as Alex slowly yet unknowingly reveals, seems to alternate among all three subject positions prevalent during the Holocaust, the category into which he best fits is that of the bystander. Assuming, at first, the position of a passive bystander, watching the events unfolding and witnessing the growing threat of Nazism in his native Ukraine, he transitions, by denouncing his friend Herschel, from a passive to an active bystander, who complies with and assists the perpetrators in carrying out their murder. It is this shift from passive to active bystanding, paired with Grandfather's painful and traumatic revelation, that foregrounds the possibility of a bystander trauma. The very idea that all three subject positions, victim, perpetrator, and bystander, can be seen as being traumatized by

certain events speaks to the fundamental ambiguity of the very notion of historical trauma itself.

Foer introduces the ideas of ambiguity, uncertainty, and even chance already in the second chapter, by invoking the W twins, and Trachim B's double-axle wagon, which may or may not have belonged to Trachim (8). Yet it is most clearly Alex's grandfather whose ambiguous trauma points to the impossibility of his history. It turns out that before and during the war, Grandfather's name used to be Eli. He came from a shtetl named Kolki, which was also the shtetl from which Jonathan's grandmother came. There is a strong implication that Grandfather might have been Jewish. However, after the war, he changes his name to Alexander, and when the old woman, during her narrative, describes to the three men how none of the Gentiles would rescue her sister from the Nazis, Grandfather defends their behaviour by saying that, if you helped, your own family would have been killed (187). Foer's novel dissolves the barriers between victim and perpetrator, allowing for the terrible trauma of both.

Ambiguity is crucial to Foer's text, not only in the character of Alex's grandfather, but also in Alex himself. Ironically, it is in the chapter called "Illumination" that Grandfather confesses that he played a role in the shooting of his best friend. His trauma becomes, albeit in a different way, Alex's trauma, which puts the latter into the precarious and highly ambiguous moral position of loving someone he could hate. As Alex puts it, "once you hear something, you can never return to the time before you heard it" (156). Alex becomes increasingly aware of the complications surrounding his subject position as belonging to the third generation, and in watching this history unfold, he becomes a bystander to this history. He

realizes that it has become his responsibility to take ownership of both the old woman's and his grandfather's memories. By accepting this obligation, Alex becomes a witness whose duty it is to preserve the memory of the war generation and their suffering, as in the case of the old woman from Trachimbrod, yet also to address their complicity, as exemplified in Grandfather's story. Ownership of these memories also suggests that Alex has to address and negotiate his grandfather's trauma in particular, the inaccessibility of which has been passed on to Alex. And although the title tells us that everything has been illuminated, this turns out to be ironic because it is, in fact, only the paradoxical, ambiguous nature of trauma surrounded by an inexplicable darkness that is illuminated and that is passed on to the next generation, whose responsibility it now becomes to negotiate the impossibility and uncertainty of the dark room of history.

For Foer as well as for Seiffert, history is a dark room, which one can never fully inhabit or perhaps gain access to. True illumination is an illusion because the impact of trauma on history and truth shatters every possibility of ever fully understanding the past. As both novels demonstrate, subsequent generations of victims and perpetrators still alternate between acknowledging and repressing traumatic and historical knowledge in their response to the ambiguous nature of trauma, and the impossibility of history. Yet, *Everything is Illuminated* and *The Dark Room* both suggest that it is the third generation after the war who finally tries to shed light on the past, and to leave the dark room, by taking on the responsibility of remembering. As Foer contends, "We must go backward in order to go forward" (37).

Conclusion

The idea of the contemporary reader or writer as bystander comes particularly to the fore in these novels written by third-generation writers. Both Seiffert and Foer highlight the complexities and ambiguities endemic to the figure of the bystander who, unlike the victim or the perpetrator, seems to enjoy a more malleable position, existing outside the dynamics and constraints of the victim-perpetrator dialectic. Even Foer's novel, which seems, at first glance, to be about the trauma of the victim and potentially the perpetrator, uses the characters of the third-generation members Jonathan and Alex to illustrate that everybody born after the war is a bystander. It is through a confrontation and negotiation of the past or the unwillingness to do so that members of subsequent generations can either accept or refuse the responsibility of bearing witness.

In *The Dark Room,* Seiffert explores the interconnection of the notion of distance and the act of bearing witness. She focuses on the growing temporal distance from the event and the way it affects and alters the idea of witnessing. Within this novel distance is essentially temporal since all the protagonists – Helmut, Lore, and Micha – albeit from different points in time, during the war, in its aftermath, and at a time when the war generation will soon pass on, bear witness from within the perpetrator culture. Yet, on an extra-textual level, the author herself illustrates the idea that addressing Germany's traumatic past and ultimately testifying to it seems only to be possible from a distance that encompasses the temporal but also, and even more importantly, the possibilities engendered by a geographical and linguistic distance. In contrast to fellow third-generation author Tanja Dückers, whose novel *Himmelskörper*,

written from within Germany, only marginally touches on the idea of individual German culpability and thus illustrates the notion that the lack of a spatial distance can impede an unbiased investigation of familial implications in the events of the Second World War, Seiffert, writing from the comfort of a geographically distanced perspective can adopt the point of view of a bystander who is not only outside this particular history but also removed from the space where history occurred. The historical, geographical and linguistic distance allows Seiffert to critically investigate, illustrate and represent the ways in which individual Germans participated in the war and the Holocaust, and to explore the often traumatic effects that the uncovering of a painful truth surrounding familial implication in the Jewish genocide can have on subsequent generations and on members of the third generation, like Micha, in particular.

In Foer's novel, the importance of a spatial distance for the act of witnessing to take place is similarly foregrounded through the characters of Alex and Jonathan. Both write from the same temporal distance about the past. Yet writing from within the Ukraine, from within a country whose history is deeply intertwined with the history of the Holocaust as many of the mass shootings of Jews took place on Ukrainian soil, Alex's account reflects the traumatic nature of the men's trip and the truth they uncover at Trachimbrod. Foer expands on the importance of distance in addressing and bearing witness to the Holocaust by asserting the importance of geographical and linguistic distance as vital aspects for witnessing to occur. Writing in America, from both a geographical and linguistic distance, which, as Michael Bernard-Donals contends, "has allowed some writers…to write with a great deal of

aesthetic freedom" (*Introduction to Holocaust Studies* 193), Jonathan's account, in contrast to Alex's narrative, represents a completely fictitious and playful re-invention of a lost history. Foer also highlights the possibilities of bearing witness offered by geographical distance when Alex realizes, at the end of the novel, that he can only begin to address the trauma of his grandfather's past from an outsider perspective. He therefore once again stresses his wish to go to the US, a place which, as he has seen through the specifics of Jonathan's writing and the ways in which he addresses and negotiates the loss of history and the trauma of the past, provides him with the necessary distance to come to terms with the truth he uncovered about Grandfather's past as well as Grandfather's suicide.

One cannot remove oneself from or simply neglect the impact of the Holocaust on later generations, as Foer exemplifies in the character of Alex, who goes through a slow and painful process of becoming aware of the stark and undeniable imprint of the Holocaust on his life. Yet Foer also emphasizes the importance of and possibilities engendered by the notion of distance in a temporal, geographical, linguistic and, most significantly, aesthetic sense, as overtly illustrated in Jonathan's fictitious, magical re-invention of a complete history and culture erased by the Holocaust. It is, most of all, the idea of aesthetic distance, which can make such an address possible, and allows for subsequent generations to assume the position of a distant witness to the traumatic events of the past.

The Dark Room and *Everything Is Illuminated* share the underlying notion that the Holocaust does indeed affect and shape everybody's lives in general and the lives of descendants of victims and perpetrators in particular. At the same time, both novels

demand the third-generation bystanders to the Holocaust, whose moral obligation and ethical responsibility it becomes to bear witness on behalf of those who cannot and thus to continue the vital processes of mourning and remembering.

Chapter 4

A Postmodern Witnessing of the Holocaust – Martin Amis's *Time's Arrow*

Introduction

Addressing the question of the extreme limits and possibilities of representation invoked by an investigation of the Holocaust, LaCapra argues that "postmodernism can...be defined as post-Holocaust; there's an intricate relation between the two" (*Writing History* 179).[1] This relation that LaCapra identifies foregrounds an apparent causal link between the emergence of theories of postmodernism in the aftermath of the Holocaust and the nature of this particular catastrophe, a causal relation that subsequently gestures towards and calls for the necessity of situating an investigation of the catastrophe of the Holocaust within the main precepts of postmodernism. In so doing, the catastrophe of the Holocaust, seen within the larger context of the Nazis' war of annihilation and their attempt to erase history, can be regarded as being intricately connected to theories of postmodernism, which draw attention to the loss of the idea of a single historical master narrative, claiming that "we now get the histories (in the plural)" (Hutcheon, *Politics* 63). In "Historical Emplotment and the Question of Truth" (1978), White claims that the questions surrounding issues of representation of the Holocaust in both historical and fictional narratives are inextricably associated with changing notions of history and

[1] Robert Eaglestone detects the same correlation, arguing that "postmodernism in the West begins with thinking about the Holocaust," and that it is therefore feasible to say that "postmodernism...is a response to the Holocaust" (2).

with the loss of the master discourse of history. In *The Postmodern Condition* (1984), Lyotard argues that it is the question of representation that distinguishes postmodernism from modernism. For Lyotard, postmodernism projects "the unrepresentable in representation itself... [it] searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unrepresentable" (79). All-encompassing, comprehensive modes of explaining historical causalities and interrelations are rendered impossible in the aftermath of the Holocaust because the nature of the event precludes a totalizing perception and understanding of it, and because it continues to question, in the Western world, our belief in fundamental notions such as truth and humanity, which seem to have lost their validity in the face of such evil. Postmodern representational strategies consciously emphasize the impossibility of totalizing modes of explanation and of categorization, as well as on the level of narrative the alleged unrepresentability of the event, and can thus help address and represent the traumatic extremities of the Holocaust. This link between the Holocaust, the unrepresentable, and postmodernism is to be found in even the earliest representations of the Holocaust.

Narrative strategies that have come to be associated with postmodernism, such as intertextuality, self-reflexivity, irony, fragmentation, and generic crossovers, are already present, and in fact ubiquitous, in early eyewitness accounts of the Holocaust. Writing in 1946, Holocaust survivor Charlotte Delbo represents her experiences at Auschwitz in her memoir *None of Us Will Return* by employing a split narrative voice. Her narrative consists, on the one hand, of an authoritative narrative voice that looks backward, and is disassociated from the past, and, on the other, of a first-person

narrative, which positions her as a victim of the camps and provides a sense of utter immediacy to the events. This split narrative voice points to a fragmentation of the self that is inextricably connected to the trauma that Delbo experiences, and foregrounds the difficulties of connecting the past to the present, that is, of accepting and embracing it as an integral part of one's own history.[2] The unconventional representational aspects of Delbo's account, such as the fragmentation of the self and the split between past and present, which, in fact, closely resemble postmodern narrative strategies, have also been discerned and highlighted by Felman and Laub in their analysis of survivor testimonies. In their seminal study, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (1992), Felman and Laub investigate the impact of trauma on written testimonial accounts such as Delbo's memoir and the relationship between narrative and testimony, detecting a causal interrelation between the trauma experienced and its representation in the form of narrative. Felman and Laub point out that "[t]estimony seems to be composed of bits and pieces of a memory ... acts that cannot be constructed as knowledge nor assimilated into full cognition" (5). Felman and Laub's comments highlight the intricate connection between trauma, the fragmentation of the self and, by extension, the fragmented nature of such testimony, which, situated at the intersection of knowing and not knowing, is also at the core of theories of postmodernism. The impossibility of containing a traumatic experience within the form of narrative is paradoxically conveyed and illustrated through the use of innovative, postmodern representational

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[2] Similarly, Levi illustrates the difficulties, delineated by Delbo, in his memoir, *Survival in Auschwitz*. By intertextualizing Dante's *Divine Comedy*, an anterior, exterior source, Levi highlights a similar problematic of coming to terms with a traumatic past, which seems to exist outside of one's own history, and which is completely disassociated and removed from this personal history, in the same way that Dante's text bears no relation to Levi's immediate life, history, and experience.

strategies in survivor testimonies. The utterly inexplicable nature of the event seemingly precludes the possibility of explaining it through the use of conventional narrative strategies, such as realism, or of containing it within conventional generic categories. This is not to say, however, that the Holocaust cannot be contained in the form of a narrative. In fact, even the history of the Holocaust is a narrative constructed in the aftermath of the event. The continued urge, both in historiography and in fiction, to contain the Holocaust within the form of a narrative mirrors the attempt, from an epistemological distance, to prevent the event from being conclusive by imposing a certain order and coherence on the Holocaust that can assist in opening it up to interpretation. While narrative can make the past accessible, it does not necessarily have the capacity to render it understandable. Narrative theorist Ernst van Alphen explains that "[i]f we are to make sense of the Holocaust, the ontological question of the event – did it happen – must be firmly distinguished from the epistemological question of how we gain access to it" (64). The ongoing struggle with comprehending the extreme and unprecedented nature of this particular history is illustrated in the choice of the narrative techniques that are used to make the past accessible. For instance, postmodern narrative techniques are often used in Holocaust testimonies to capture the extent of an event that can never be fully known and understood, not even by those who experienced it.[3]

Even the earliest testimonies by survivors, such as Levi's *Survival in Auschwitz* (1947), Wiesel's *Night* (1958), and Borowski's *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and*

[3] In *Traumatic Realism* (2000), Michael Rothberg examines the importance, limits, and possibilities of modernist and postmodernist representational strategies in fulfilling the specific demands of representing a limit event such as the Holocaust, particularly within the realm of cultural studies, in which the Holocaust seems to have become a universal commodity.

Gentlemen (1959), are situated outside conventional narrative strategies at the intersection of fact and fiction, between history and imagination in ways surprisingly reminiscent of postmodernism.[4] Just as postmodern fiction frequently crosses generic boundaries in an attempt to deconstruct the master discourse of history, so, too, do early Holocaust testimonies blur generic divisions among autobiography, memoir, fiction, and novel.[5] The surprising anticipation of methods that come to be theorized forty years later gestures towards the inherent complexities surrounding the representation of this catastrophe and foregrounds the difficulties of conveying an experience that exists because of its unprecedented nature outside of conventional categories of recognition and representation, and thus places new demands on the idea of representation. None of these aforementioned eyewitnesses works, however, within specified theoretical contexts; the use of these experimental techniques is not self-consciously postmodern. Rather, the use of postmodern representational strategies that are characterized by the subversion of master narratives, by the suspicion of notions such as truth, history or verisimilitude, and by the emphasis on formal and conceptual fragmentation can be considered a direct response to the ongoing trauma of the Holocaust.

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[4] In *The Holocaust and the Literary Imagination* (1975), Langer claims that only a combination of the survivor's memory and the use of a novelistic technique, which he calls "literary imagination" (12), can render horrific experiences accessible to the reader, as is the case in Wiesel's *Night*, which Langer thus labels an "imaginative autobiography" (92). Barbara Foley explains that "[Holocaust memoirists] incorporate aspects of novelistic technique into the manner of representation...to ensure that grounds of communication are established between writer and reader" (342).

[5] For instance, Levi's account of his ten months spent in a concentration camp consists of a poem, bears traces of a memoir, draws on external sources such as Dante's *Divine Comedy*, and ends with a diary.

A Double Post – Postmodern Post-Holocaust Literature

The Second World War and the Holocaust officially ended in 1945 – yet the consequences engendered by the unprecedented and all-encompassing nature of the event have not ended but rather continue to evolve and affect the lives of all those born in its aftermath, albeit to varying degrees. The continuing impact of the Holocaust necessitates and highlights the importance of the act of bearing witness through generations because the impossibility of comprehending the nature of the event preoccupies both survivors and subsequent generations alike.

For survivor witnesses, like Levi, Wiesel, and Kertész, writing about the Holocaust and their horrific experiences is intricately connected to the moral imperative of bearing witness on behalf of those murdered by the Nazis. As Wiesel explains, "for me writing is a *matzeva*, an invisible tombstone, erected to the memory of the dead unburied" (*Legends* 25). Similarly, in an 1984 interview with Marco Vigevani in relation to *Survival in Auschwitz*, Levi highlights the obligation he felt of bearing witness to the true nature of the event and, in doing so, remembering the dead: "I have borne witness, because I kept my eyes and ears open so that I could tell the story of what I saw truthfully… My position would be to remember and to hope" (*Voice of Memory* 255, 257). Levi's understanding of his position as a witness, that is, as someone who is forced by his own survival to situate himself between the past and the present, between memory and hope gestures towards the complexities surrounding the very act of bearing witness. This act is characterized by the impossibility of witnessing an event that succeeded in completely destroying the survivor's subjectivity by forcing him/her to succumb to the demands of a uniform community inside the

camps, illustrated in the prison clothes the inmates had to wear, and the number, tattooed on the forearm, which replaced names and identities. Despite its inherent complexities and seeming impossibility, the act of bearing witness can, however, offer survivors the possibility of regaining a sense of self as they are the only ones who can in fact attest to the Holocaust as a lived reality and, in doing so, reclaim a sense of agency and, ultimately, of their own subjectivity, of which they had been deprived in the Nazi camps. At the same time, however, survivors have to negotiate the paradox of having experienced an event that cannot be described as it stands outside and, in fact, resists conventional representational strategies on the one hand, and, on the other, precipitates the continuing intrusion of emotions and memories of the trauma experienced. The incongruity between traumatic experience and representation, an incongruity which renders the survivor's testimony almost unbearable, becomes even further complicated and inaccessible for those who lack firsthand experience.

It is this lack of knowledge that informs and shapes the ways in which members of the second generation, the sons and daughters of survivors, bear witness to an event not experienced firsthand. Eva Hoffman, herself a child of Holocaust survivors, explains that

> [t]he paradoxes of indirect knowledge haunt many of us who come after. The formative events of the twentieth century have crucially informed our biographies and psyches, threatening sometimes to overshadow and overwhelm our own lives. But we did not see them, suffer through them, experience their impact directly. Our relationship to them has been defined by our very 'post-ness'[...] (25)

Hoffman highlights the paradoxical nature of the children's position as being situated *After Such Knowledge* – as the title of her 2004 book indicates. Children of survivors are separated from their parents' experience by time and space. While the children are removed from the event, it continues to inform and be omnipresent in their parents' lives and thus also has a stark imprint on the children who struggle with comprehending their parents' firsthand experiences. James E. Young writes that members of the second generation "remember long days and nights in the company of survivors, listening to their harrowing tales, until their lives, loves, and losses seem grafted onto their own life" ("The Holocaust as Vicarious Past" 26). The very act of listening to their parents' trauma, coming from a wound the children have never experienced, can lead to a secondary trauma within the children, which may manifest itself as emptiness and confusion. While for the parents the trauma is tied up with the literal experience of a wound, for the children the trauma is caused by the lack or gap in knowledge, a lack which is intricately connected to the difficulties experienced by the survivor parents of transmitting a trauma they had to live through yet which remains, paradoxically, ungraspable.

The complexities engendered by such a trauma, a trauma which is in fact caused by the gap between past and present, are addressed by Marianne Hirsch, who generates the concept of postmemory. Hirsch, herself a second-generation survivor, argues that the lives of children of survivors are characterized by the dominance of an unknown traumatic past. It is the impossibility of establishing a link between the unknowability of the past and its continuing impact on the present that defines the idea of postmemory, which, as a condition, "is shaped by traumatic events that can be

neither understood nor recreated" (22). Hirsch focusses exclusively on members of the second generation, who are intricately linked to the past by a personal and hence emotional proximity. Yet the idea of postmemory can also, in a more general context, offer all of those born after the war who like the children of survivors, lack an understanding of the events of the past, the possibility of addressing the trauma of a past from which one is removed yet by which one continues to be affected. Postmemory, as Hirsch further explains, "is a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation" (22). Hence the use of the imagination becomes the only means by which subsequent generations can investigate a past from which they are epistemologically, temporally, and often also spatially removed. Through the use of the imagination, subsequent generations can consciously create an artificial, imaginary representation of the event, which allows them to assume the position of a witness to the underlying ideological practices and psychological factors that facilitated the implementation of the Holocaust.

It is the idea of the imagination that is also at the core of and informs third-generation attempts to represent the Holocaust. However, the ensuing fictionalization of the Holocaust engendered by the growing temporal distance from the event has also raised questions about the legitimacy of fictional, imaginary Holocaust representations created by generations who lack the firsthand experiences of the survivors. For Berel Lang, for instance, only "documentary and historical writings about the genocide have been...valuable" (140); he completely discards any imaginative and aesthetic renderings of the event whose "[f]igurative discourse 'estranges' the subject of

representation" thus imposing "a process of generalization" (144) and running the risk of denying the Holocaust its uniqueness. Susan Gubar, in contrast, contends that,

> if only the reports of those who personally witnessed the destruction of Jewish people can be judged meaningful, if efforts to make the event consequential by and for those born after it are deemed a profanation of the dead or an exoneration of their murderers, then the Holocaust is doomed to expire. (4)

Here, Gubar highlights the integral role that the imagination, in the form of fiction and fictionalized memoirs of the Holocaust, can and will inevitably occupy at the beginning of the twenty-first century, where the necessity for witnessing the event is irrevocably shifting onto generations who are separated from the Holocaust by a lack of knowledge, but also by a temporal distance of more than sixty years.

The unprecedented nature of the Holocaust paradoxically foregrounds the indispensable part the imagination must play in addressing an event whose technological refinements presented new and hitherto unknown extremes of inhumanity. Hoffman remarks that "[t]he Holocaust is a formidable subject for imaginative writing, not only because of its immensity but because it is so difficult to retrieve from it a framing structure of meanings, and, therefore, of form" (163). Likewise, Lillian Kremer points out that, "[j]ust as the Holocaust was beyond normal experience, so, too, the imaginative recreation of it demands ... a language and literature somehow different from that which expressed pre-Holocaust suffering" (28). Both Hoffman and Kremer affirm the need for generating a new form of representation of the Holocaust that allows for an imaginary investigation of the past, yet also

exposes on a textual, formal level the devastating consequences and irrevocable losses engendered by the Holocaust. Sue Vice posits that the loss of values and once stable notions calls for a different mode of narration. She therefore argues that the representation of the Holocaust inevitably demands new, innovative modes of narration, which are, "in contrast to the poetic option," characterized by "irony, black humour, appropriation, sensationalism" (9). Vice's argument gestures towards the possibilities offered by theories of postmodernism which display a penchant for emphasizing fragmentation and the loss of teleology and causality. Linda Hutcheon argues that "[p]ostmodern fiction suggests that to re-write or to re-present the past in fiction ... is ... to open it up to the present, to prevent it from being conclusive and teleological" (*Poetics* 110). And postmodernism is indeed deeply preoccupied with the question of how the past is rendered accessible and which paradigms we utilize in our attempts to reconstruct and explain the past. Simon Malpas claims that

> postmodern fiction sets out to challenge traditional ideas of narrative construction, verisimilitude, and historical truth through the use of such devices as unreliable narrators, multiple frames for the narrative, [and] stylistic transformations. (101)

Attracted by postmodernism's penchant for playfulness, contemporary writers use postmodern narrative strategies to cross spatial, geographical, and historical borders that separate them from this particular historical event. Embedded within the specifics of postmodern discourse, the unimaginable nature of the Holocaust and the irreducibility of facts concerning the number of its victims, become cognitively and emotionally accessible to both representation and interpretation. The tendency of

postmodernism for ambiguity, engendered by the loss of stability, truth, and meaning, and for a multiplicity of aesthetic, narrative, and representational experimentations can thus provide a framework in which to situate and represent what has been commonly regarded as being unrepresentable.

Paradoxically, though, what renders postmodernism as a suitable ground on which to explore the Holocaust also renders it unsuitable. In postmodernism, historical texts and discourses are no longer considered to be representative of the one and only truth. Instead, postmodernism allows for a multiplicity of equally valid approaches to representing truth and history foregrounding and emphasizing the plural nature of both concepts. Friedländer contends that

> postmodern thought's rejection of the possibility of identifying some stable reality or truth beyond the constant polysemy and self-referentiality of linguistic constructs challenges the need to establish the realities and truths of the Holocaust. (*Probing the Limits* 4-5)

Therefore, he argues that "[i]n the face of these events we feel the need of some stable narration" (4-5). In the absence of an objective historical discourse, Lang warns that postmodernism perpetuates the sense of "history as you like it, not only in the stratosphere, where historians and readers might on any account enjoy free flight, but in the trenches, with the masses of names, dates, and numbers elbowing each other for place" (89). Friedländer, in contrast to Lang, recognizes the possibilities of "postmodern attempts at confronting what escapes, at least in part, established historical and artistic categories of representation" (*Probing the Limits* 20). However, he too perceives postmodernism's tendency to unmask and subvert the objectivity of

what once appeared as history through the use of experimental narrative strategies as being problematic. Friedländer thus contends that "the equivocation of postmodernism concerning 'reality' and 'truth' – ultimately its fundamental relativism – confronts any discourse about Nazism and the Shoah with considerable difficulties" (*Probing the Limits* 20). Without "a stable truth as far as this past is concerned" (Friedländer, *Probing the Limits* 5), postmodernism's questioning of the objectivity of facts and its suspicion of objective discourses of historical texts, as well as its promotion of the constant mutability of history, has created an atmosphere in which Holocaust denial, specifically within the uneducated public, has become an issue of considerable significance. Deborah Lipstadt shares this concern in her study, *Denying the Holocaust* (1994). To her, the temporal distance from the actual historical event occupies a seminal role in the expansion of Holocaust denial because it means that "[f]uture generations will not hear the story from people who can say 'this is what happened to me. This is my story.' For them, it will be part of the distant past and, consequently, more susceptible to revision and denial" (5).[6] The critique raised by Friedländer and Lipstadt concerning postmodernism's complicity in perpetuating Nazi ideology by abetting a climate in which Holocaust denial becomes possible seems to be justified if one considers the idea of postmodernism as a general condition defining life in the aftermath of the Holocaust. Then postmodernism's call for a multiplicity of equally valid perceptions of the past does indeed become rather problematic as it

[6] Upon the publication of Lipstadt's study, British Holocaust denier David Irving sued her for naming and portraying him as such in her book, demanding the blackening of the respective passages within her text as he saw them as defamation of his reputation as a renowned historian. After her refusal to do so, Irving took Lipstadt and her publisher, Penguin, to trial: both Lipstadt and her publisher won the case. For a detailed description of both this and other trials against Holocaust deniers, see Lord Justice Pill, "Holocaust Denial on Trial, Appeal Judgment: Electronic Edition," 27 January 2010, <http://www.holocaustdenialontrial.org/en/trial/appeal/appeal-judgment>.

denies the privileging of one discourse over another, allowing for discourses of both remembrance and denial to co-exist unquestioningly, while simultaneously questioning the truth behind official documents attesting to the Holocaust. However, if postmodernism is perceived as a means or strategy for gaining access to a past whose nature paradoxically defies and forecloses the possibility of comprehension and thus representation, then it can, precisely because of its renunciation of coherent, all-encompassing models of explanation, offer novel possibilities for addressing and representing the catastrophe itself, as well as its traumatic legacy and ongoing impact.

The poetics of postmodernism with its preference for heterogeneous stylistic elements, such as irony, playfulness, and ambiguity, and its tendency for formal and aesthetic language games challenges existing claims about the Holocaust's unsayability by thematizing, on both linguistic and stylistic levels, the search for adequate language and narrative structure for contextualizing and articulating that which exceeds the possibilities and means of language, and which therefore runs the risk of escaping expression. As Patricia Waugh argues, in postmodernism "the simple notion that language passively reflects a coherent, meaningful and 'objective' world is no longer tenable" (3). "Language," she further explains, "is an independent, self-contained system which generates its own meaning" (3). She foregrounds the importance of language in postmodern fiction where authors make conscious and overt use of its qualities in constructing and subsequently emphasizing the artificial nature of their narratives and, by extension, of totalizing systems of explanation that underlie the idea of master discourses. In postmodern fiction, language, because of its discursive, opaque, polysemic, and self-referential nature, as well as its constant mutability,

combined with various innovative stylistic experiments exhibited by the anachronism of a postmodern narratology, becomes the exclusive means of making the past accessible. By constructing an imaginary, artificial framework that is void of definitive answers and absolute certainties, postmodern fiction is able to illuminate the ambiguities of the past and to convey the inaccessibility of the events surrounding the Holocaust, which consequently serves, in a postmodern discursively structured context, simultaneously as both irrevocable reality and universal metaphor.

In the End: the Beginning – Narrative Reversal in *Time's Arrow*

The suspicions voiced by Friedländer about postmodernism's capacity for undermining and subverting the need for a common, stable, ground in which to situate an investigation of the nature of the Holocaust are reflected in the criticism surrounding *Time's Arrow*. Ever since its publication in 1991, Martin Amis's novel has faced often harsh criticism accusing its author of silencing and excluding the actual victims of the Holocaust by focussing almost exclusively on the psyche of a perpetrator responsible for the death of numerous innocent, defenceless people. For instance, Ann Parry, in her analysis of *Time's Arrow*, asserts that "the victims of the crimes [are not] significantly present" (253). Vice cites an anonymous reviewer who posits that "*Time's Arrow* convincingly makes the point that the Holocaust was a tragedy for the human spirit; on the other hand, one finds oneself thinking that it was a damn sight more tragic for its immediate victims" (36). Simon Louvish, an outspoken critic of *Time's Arrow*, regards the stylization of the Holocaust in the novel as a betrayal of the survivor witnesses and their accounts. He is convinced that the "Shoah

can transform what would otherwise be an intriguing but unoriginal science fiction novel into Great Art, best seller-dom and the brink of the Booker" (10), and that this is essentially what Martin Amis, a British writer and a descendant of neither Holocaust survivors nor perpetrators, has done. However, in contrast to Louvish and Parry, I regard precisely the form and linguistic style paired with the main thematic concern of the novel, the Shoah, as an expression of Amis's personal, very ambitious attempt to come to terms with and make sense of a past, so completely lacking from our contemporary perspective both logic and reason. As a writer and as a member of a cultural group not affiliated with the Holocaust and thus spatially, temporally, and culturally removed from the actual historical event, Amis is able to assume a critical perspective which allows him to investigate the ideological practices that characterized Nazism, practices which enabled the idea of medical killing, that is, killing under the cloak of scientific and medical progress during the Third Reich, as well as the psychological motivations that turned ordinary doctors into murderers.

In *Time's Arrow*, which chronicles, albeit in reverse order, the life of Tod Friendly, a former doctor at Auschwitz, Martin Amis purposefully constructs an overtly postmodern narrative as a response to the Holocaust. In illustrating the nature of the mass murder, which, as he writes in an afterword, "was unique, not in its cruelty, nor in its cowardice, but in its style" (168), a style characterized by technological refinements that to this day defy the possibility of comprehension, Amis constructs a bizarre narrative that deliberately precludes the possibility of the reader following the plot and understanding the underlying meaning of the narrative.

Through the unconventional narrative exemplified by its reverse order, its penchant for naming and doubling, and its irony, Amis highlights the impossibility of achieving a totalizing, comprehensive sense of truth regarding the Holocaust. Thematizing the complexities of submitting the extremities of genocide to the constraints of traditional narrative modes of representation, such as the causal realist narrative, Amis employs the reversed narrative order of *Time's Arrow* as a contemporary, post-Holocaust response to the Nazis' perverse reversal of moral values in their frenzied attempt to eliminate an entire ethno-cultural group.

The backwards narration gestures towards the paradoxical reversal of time from destruction to birth, creating a narrative that highlights both the unprecedented nature of the Holocaust, and creating an inverted world in which effect precedes cause. In *Admitting the Holocaust* (1995), Langer, addressing and investigating the "Holocaust experience," contends that "we live it backward in time, and once we arrive there, we find ourselves mired in its atrocities, a kind of historical quicksand that hinders our bid to bring it forward again into a meaningful future" (6). Amis seems to adhere to and illustrate Langer's contention on a contextual, thematic, and narrational level. The whole world in Amis's novel moves backwards. People move backwards: for instance, instead of going to the store for food they take groceries from home back to the store, exchanging them for money. Everyday routines, like eating, are described in minute detail:

> First I stack the clean plates in the dishwasher,...then you select a soiled dish, collect some scraps from the garbage, and settle down for a short wait. Various items get gulped into my mouth, and after skilful

> massage with tongue and teeth I transfer them to the plate for additional sculpture with knife and fork and spoon. (11)

The reversed narrative mode creates the illusion of an order, of a coherence that sets in for both the narrator and the reader at the beginning, that is, the end, of the protagonist's life. At first glance, the narrative reversal appears to be comic in tone, with Tod awakening from death, getting up, eating, and drinking backwards, with love-letters coming "from the trash" (33). The emotional world Tod lives in is similarly reversed, if not topsy-turvy: "[a] child's breathless wailing [is] calmed by the firm slap of the father's hand, a dead ant revived by the careless press of passing sole, a wounded finger healed and sealed by the knife's blade" (26). Tod's whole life runs backward, moving from destruction to creation. Consequently, Amis's narrative overtly exposes and subsequently discards the idea of causality and of chronological progression.

Similarly, Amis also reverses the novel's language, by constructing a system of sounds that generates an estrangement that excludes the reader from the event and engenders a distance or gap between the protagonist of the novel and the reader. Particularly in the beginning of the novel, when the reader is first introduced to the protagonist Tod Friendly who supposedly is an American doctor, the reversal of language, and consequently of its meaning, poses a major obstacle to allowing an identification with and understanding of the protagonist since the reader is forced to extract meaning out of sentences and whole dialogues which are all written in reversed order:

> "Uh, seventy-six. Eighty-six." "What's ninety-three minus seven?" "1914-1918." "What are the dates of the First World War?" "Okay," says the patient, sitting up straight. "I'm now going to ask you some questions." (27)

The protagonist's first of many identities, the telling name Tod Friendly, also gestures toward the inherent complexities surrounding the meaning and use of language. The name "Tod Friendly" foreshadows the possibility of Friendly's heritage: while his first name, "Tod," is pronounced just like the American masculine name "Todd," the discrepancy in spelling suggests, however, the German word for "death." Tod Friendly is thus an oxymoron – friendly death – which signals an early ironic hint at the thematic concern of the novel, the Holocaust. Similarly, the name he assumes after his return to Germany, a name that in fact turns out to be his real name and identity, is Odilo Unverdorben. *Unverdorben* is also a German word, meaning "innocence," and "untainted," and thus is another example of the novel's irony.

Despite the narrator's claim that "words make plain sense" (24), the reader's comprehension of their contextualized meaning is limited. This limitation is already foregrounded in the names that Friendly assumes which actively play with the reader's knowledge of German and which may also therefore elude the English-speaking reader. Thus the backward narration is not only indicative of the reversal engendered by Friendly's life, but also thematizes the integral role played by language in the plot of Friendly's past that the narrator is about to reveal. The language foreshadows the secret, obsolete, and supposedly inconceivable nature of his past deeds.

At the same time, Amis, along with the reversal of time, order, and language in Friendly's world also limits the reader's understanding of the protagonist's profession by turning the fundamental presuppositions surrounding Friendly's work as a physician completely upside down. Amis thereby creates a perverse reality where intellectual structures and frameworks instead of offering explanations and fostering an understanding, paradoxically obstruct the reader's ability to comprehend the life and profession of the protagonist who, following the irrational logic of his own world, perceives his profession as a physician as being founded upon the conviction that patients want to be hurt and need to be killed. Friendly's behaviour and understanding of his profession thus utterly contradicts and, more importantly, undermines the reader's belief in the doctor's obligation to the Hippocratic Oath. For instance, when the narrator reflects upon Friendly's profession as a physician, he correctly cites the first few lines of the Hippocratic Oath:

> I swear by Apollo Physician, by Health, by Panacea, and by all the gods and goddesses, making them my witnesses, that I will carry out, according to my ability and judgment, this oath and this indenture.... I will keep pure and holy both my life and my art. In whatsoever house I enter, I will enter to help the sick, and I will abstain from all intentional wrongdoing and harm [...] (24-25)

However, Amis immediately and deliberately destroys the false sense of security and comprehension engendered by both content and style, that is, the correct order of words, by pointing out that Friendly "always reads them backward" (24). The reversal of the narrative, language and also of morality, as exemplified in Friendly's reversed

reading and subsequent understanding of the Hippocratic Oath, and the perverse idea that Friendly as a doctor in a topsy-turvy world, must kill instead of heal, serve to emphasize and illustrate the doctor's moral stance which allows him to perceive himself as the destroyer of life, as the master of death. It is this perverse moral understanding of his profession as a doctor that enables Friendly to deeply believe in both the importance of and justification for killing people. The reversed order of Friendly's world, a reversal which affects every aspect of the protagonist's life including everyday routines, but, most importantly, his profession as a physician, creates the idea of normalcy for the protagonist. Precisely because Amis strongly adheres to the notion of reversal throughout the narrative, he is able to create a world in which the protagonist seems to live and work according to the rules and regulations prescribed and demanded by this particular world order. Highlighting the perversely logical, illusionary and constructed nature of this normalcy, Amis offers a new way of reading and perceiving, yet not necessarily of understanding the psychological factors and motivations that turned ordinary doctors like Friendly into ruthless murderers during the Nazis' reign of terror.

Paradoxically, though, the illusionary idea of 'normalcy' in which the protagonist seems to live is in fact a postmodern deconstruction of social structures, systems of identification, and modes of explanation. This postmodern deconstruction serves to emphasize the difficulties, in the aftermath of the Holocaust, of finding an adequate language and narrative structure through which to explore the acts that occurred while simultaneously highlighting the impossibility of generating a comprehensive view of the events of the past.

In *Time's Arrow*, Amis not only reverses the narrative style and order of dialogues, but also the notion and function of human language. By even reversing the structure and sound of human language – "'Dug. Dug.' says the lady in the pharmacy.... 'Aid ut oo y'rrah?'" (7) – Amis completely undermines our fundamental perception of language as a means for communication and for generating understanding and meaning. Conversely, verbs are also replaced by their antonyms: for instance, 'giving' becomes 'taking'; 'buying' turns into 'selling'; and, most importantly, 'destruction' is replaced by 'creation.' Maya Slater sees the use of antonyms as intricately connected to the protagonist's past. She comes to the conclusion that the abundant use of antonyms "suggests a subtext of unacknowledged unhappiness and fear, which may be imposed by the language but which is only too appropriate since Friendly is tormented by the memory of the Nazi past" (147-48). In contrast to Slater, I do not see Friendly as being tormented by his past deeds. While I am certainly not refuting the idea that perpetrators can suffer,[7] an idea that seems to underlie Slater's interpretation of Amis's use of language, I do not see the protagonist of *Time's Arrow* as being traumatized by the atrocities he committed in the past since he is able to live a life in peace and happiness in America. Rather, I perceive Amis's deliberate use of 'wrong' verbs as just another aspect of the superficial imposition of a certain, idiosyncratic system of order, particularly since the protagonist continuously and purposefully suppresses his past. Despite the deconstruction of Nazism, and the subsequent loss of his role and position within this perverse world order, Friendly, in a

[7] LaCapra introduces the possibility for perpetrator trauma in *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (2001). He writes that "perpetrator trauma ... must itself be acknowledged and in some sense worked through if perpetrators are to distance themselves from an earlier implication in deadly ideologies and practices" (79). Yet Friendly never achieves this distance from the past, and therefore cannot be seen as being tormented by the acts he performed within the Nazi system.

post-Holocaust era, continues to live in yet another crazy, illogical and perverse system that, like Nazi ideology lacks reason and logic, but allows him to maintain his position as a doctor without having to confront his past crimes or being forced to experience feelings of remorse and guilt.

Reversal in *Time's Arrow* not only occurs through language, but also through human relationships. Sex, usually associated with love and based on mutual consent, is in Friendly's world inextricably connected to power, dominance, and violence. In *Time's Arrow*, sex and militarism thus often run together. Amis employs extremely militaristic expressions in the descriptions of Friendly's love life and of his behaviour towards women, in relation to both his girlfriend Irene and, at a later point in the novel but at an earlier point in Friendly's life, his wife Herta. "[H]ere's the weird thing about these relationships," the narrator explains: "you get everything on the first date. Well, every now and then it's the second date, but generally it's the first. Instant invasion. Instant invasion and lordship" (51). The narrator equates Friendly's sexual behaviour with "invasions...conquests...quiet annexations" (53). Friendly is socially and sexually impotent, yet he continues to conceive of women as inferior objects over whom he longs to have control. More importantly, however, the military component of the language and the overt focus on the protagonist's carnal instincts serve two purposes: first, this connection foregrounds the fact that "[Friendly's] secret had to do with a central mistake about human bodies" (48), and, second, it gestures towards the totalizing nature of Nazi ideology, which has succeeded in invading and overtaking even Friendly's most intimate moments.

Ultimately, the all-encompassing, absolute nature of the reversal of the narrative implicates its readers who "must translate the backward processes, plotlines, and conversations into normal time" (Menke 968). In doing so, the narrative structure of the novel, that is, its self-reflective nature, emphasizes the lack of origin and the constructedness of historical discourse. Furthermore, the peculiarities of the narrative contest claims of objectivity and totality by foregrounding the necessity in a post-Holocaust era of literally re-structuring and re-considering the ways in which history is perceived. Simultaneously, as Richard Menke contends, "this extraordinary act of narrative can itself only reimagine history by conceding its powerlessness before it" (960). *Time's Arrow*, as a postmodern response to the Holocaust, thereby utterly refutes simplistic claims that promote the facile understandability of history in the aftermath of a catastrophe that not only challenges but in fact exceeds the capacity for human understanding.

The Identity of the Narrative Voice

The protagonist's past and its intricate connection to a secret "surrounding human bodies" (40) are at the core of *Time's Arrow*. This secret is profoundly associated with the narrative voice, which is, like the reader, thrust into Friendly's crazed, inexplicable world in which meaning is reversed. Friendly literally gives birth to the narrative voice at the moment of his death, causing the narrative voice to re-live Friendly's life in reversed order while simultaneously foregrounding the idea that the emergence of the narrative voice at the time of Friendly's death foreshadows the return of Friendly's suppressed past. While the protagonist's life is told backwards, that is,

from his death to his birth, the narrator, in contrast, explains, already in the opening words of the novel, that he himself is moving forward and thus into the opposite temporal direction: "I moved forward, out of the blackest sleep" (3). Soon thereafter, the narrative voice inquires into the movements of the body that has given birth to it:

> Why am I walking backward into the house? Wait. Is it dusk coming, or is it dawn? What is the – what is the sequence of the journey I'm on? What are its rules? Why are the birds singing so strangely? Where am I heading? (6)

The narrative voice is trapped in Friendly's body, which will not, however, "take orders from this will of mine" (13). While the narrator has "no access to his thoughts" but is "awash with [Friendly's] emotions" (7), he nevertheless has the "sense of starting out on a terrible journey, towards a terrible secret" (5). The narrative voice further highlights its impossible position of being nurtured by a body which is moving into the opposite temporal direction when the reader learns that the narrative voice is "a passenger or parasite" (8), a notion that emphasizes the narrator's dependence upon and intricate connection to Friendly's body. Like Friendly, the narrative voice assumes various roles throughout the narrative. At first, the narrator appears to be merely a silent observer seemingly completely detached from the protagonist and merely commenting on Friendly's experiences as renowned physician in America. At this early point in the novel, the narrator assumes the position of an ignorant child slowly accustoming itself to the unfamiliarity of its environment and the body that nurtures it. The narrator mirrors the reader in that both struggle to understand Friendly's life. Yet the narrative voice seems to be utterly ignorant about history while

the educated reader is able to extract some kind of meaning out of Friendly's dreams, which frequently feature "the figure in the white coat and the black boots [in] his wake, a blizzard of wind and sleet, like a storm of human souls" (8). The reader recognizes the narrator's observations as in fact offering a description reminiscent of a SS doctor clad in a white coat and black boots, the latter representing violence and evil and serving as a visible reminder of the doctor's diabolic nature and task. Thus the reader is forced to negotiate the idea that the doctor's terrible secret is in fact related to Friendly's profession and his active participation in the Holocaust when he worked as a doctor at Auschwitz where he performed unspeakable atrocities and inhumane experiments on defenceless camp inmates.

As the plot advances backwards in time, however, the narrator, like the reader, gradually gains more knowledge and thus more confidence in the role as Friendly's observer and judge. The paradoxical position of being nurtured by an unpalatable body, which lives in an inexplicable world, serves to explain the critical perspective the narrator slowly but surely assumes. The narrator's increasingly judgemental comments foreground its rising power and the control it gains over Friendly rendering its presence increasingly uncomfortable for the host. However, approaching the nature of the past, which the narrator perceives as key for gaining an understanding of and extracting meaning out of Friendly's life also means, paradoxically, the silencing of the narrative voice which becomes completely absorbed by and integrated into the protagonist the moment when both arrive at Auschwitz.

At Auschwitz, it is no longer necessary as well as no longer possible for the narrative voice to explicate Friendly's world. Friendly's actions and behaviour were

incomprehensible in a post-Auschwitz world where they were removed from the psychotic interpretative categories set up by Nazi ideology. Here at Auschwitz, they are transferred back into the localized sphere where they originated, thus ironically reversing the breakdown evoked by the Holocaust, of certainty, meaning, truth and logic. The chapter entitled, "Here there is no why," a phrase borrowed from *Survival in Auschwitz*,[8] opens with the narrator unconsciously asserting his expendability, stating that "The world is going to start making sense...*Now*" (115). It is here at Auschwitz that the narrative perspective changes from third-person narration, from the position of silent observer and critical voice to the first-person perspective in order to speak of "us." In doing so, the narrator completely identifies itself with the protagonist of the history it is drawn into and investigating: "I, Odilo Unverdorben, arrived at Auschwitz Central...I was one now, fused for a preternatural purpose" (116). And later, the narrator expands upon its uselessness as voice of reason which simply has no place within the confinements of the concentration camp:

> Here there is no why. Here there is no when, no how, no where. Our preternatural purpose? To dream a race. To make people from the weather. From thunder and from lightning. With gas, with electricity, with shit, with fire. (120)

The narrator's words highlight the phantasmal, paradoxical yet strangely and perversely logical nature of the ideological belief system generated by the Nazis, a

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[8] In *Survival in Auschwitz*, Levi reports on a Nazi guard explaining to him that, at Auschwitz, "'*Hier ist kein warum*' (there is no why here)" (29). Interestingly, Amis also uses the German expression, "*Hier ist kein warum*," and, like Levi, he also comments on the language. While Levi referred to German as "the foul language of the barracks" (101), Amis, in contrast, and in line with the ironic nature of his narrative, describes German as a "funny language ... everybody shouts it ... It sounds pushy" (125).

system that refutes, from a contemporary, historically removed perspective, any possibility of comprehension or reason, thereby completely resisting explanation. This once again foregrounds the notion that the narrative voice, which served an explanatory function up to Friendly's arrival at Auschwitz, has simply lost its purpose and thus the reason for its existence. In contrast, once Friendly is at Auschwitz everything seems to make sense for him, who has now reverted back to his pre-war name, Odilo Unverdorben. The doctor has re-entered an entirely crazed world which could never be sustained outside the confinements of what David Rousset has called *l'univers concentrationnaire*.[9] This universe seems to be completely detached from the outside world; it is a universe characterized by the seeming absence of logic, reason, and meaning, an absence which paradoxically affirms this particular universe's existence.

In terms of the logic of his backward world, the narrative voice owes its existence to the events at Auschwitz. At Auschwitz, where there is no why, questioning the meaning behind the Nazis' belief system becomes superfluous. It is here that Friendly, driven by the irrational desire for fame and recognition by becoming an expert in racialized medicine fostered by the Nazi ideology, makes the choice for evil by willingly and enthusiastically serving as an active and successful participant in the dream of creating a superior race. At Auschwitz, Odilo Unverdorben's importance for the creation of a "Nordic superrace" (12) is emphasized by the fact that he assists Uncle Pepi who is perceived as a God-like figure by his fellow physicians like Friendly and regarded as a master over life and death.

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[9] David Rousset's 1946 memoir is entitled *L'univers concentrationnaire*. It was later published in English as *The Other Kingdom* (1947).

Generated by the reversal of the chronological order and the notion of causality, the description of Uncle Pepi's new lab appears to be a place where life is created instead of being destroyed:

> In this new lab of his he can knock together a human being out of the unlikeliest odds and ends. On his desk he had a box full of eyes. It was not uncommon to see him slipping out of his darkroom carrying a head partly wrapped in newspaper: evidently, we now rule Rome. The next thing you knew, there'd be, oh, I don't know, a fifteen-year-old Pole sliding off the table and rubbing his eyes and sauntering back to work accompanied by an orderly and his understanding smile. (133)

The doctor's lab is reminiscent of a morgue where he finds himself surrounded by human eyes and heads, and other innumerable human body parts which he can seemingly and easily bring back to life by assembling them again. The doctor happily and proudly enacts the Nazis' dream of racial superiority by experimenting on humans and thus perceiving himself as the creator of life. In fact, the description of his lab and his work indicate that he creates a race by destroying another. The tone of the language and the perverse, euphemistic descriptions of what were in actuality barbarous acts of murder serve to elucidate the phantasmal, illogical nature of Nazi ideology, which was built on the irrational notion of creating a master race by eliminating others who, like the young Pole, were perceived to be inferior and a threat to the health of the nation's body. The young Pole's gesture of rubbing his eyes almost as in disbelief in the face of the events that he is witnessing illustrates his complete inability to understand the extent of the operation even from within the

concentrationary universe, while it also reminds the reader of the reality of life and death in Auschwitz.

Amis furthermore emphasizes the reality of the Holocaust by creating a fictionalized version of the real-life doctor Josef Mengele, thereby introducing historical reality into his fictionalized narrative. The doctor's name, "Uncle Pepi" (119), is strongly reminiscent of Mengele, since "Pepi" is in fact a a pet name for "Josef." As well, Uncle Pepi's appearance and attire closely resembles the infamous Auschwitz doctor, since he is "[n]ot a tall man, but of the usual dimensions; coldly beautiful, true, with self-delighted eyes; graceful, chasteningly graceful in his athletic authority" (119). More specifically, though, Uncle Pepi is working on human beings at Block 10 at Auschwitz concentration camp (127); Block 10 was in fact where Josef Mengele conducted atrocious inhumane medical experiments, particularly on children and twins (Lifton 271), and here Uncle Pepi uses phenol injections to kill people: "Death was pink but yellowish, and contained in a glass cylinder labeled *Phenol*" (128). In addition, Mengele also liked to present himself as a caring uncle, particularly to the youngest inmates at Auschwitz, in order to gain their trust before he proceeded to experiment upon them and ultimately kill them. And, like Friendly who lives in South America for a short period of time after the war under the false name of Hamilton de Souza, Mengele was also able to escape persecution after the war, and led a sheltered life in Brazil until his accidental death in 1979.[10]

[10] For a detailed description of Mengele's work as a Nazi doctor at Auschwitz, and his subsequent life after the war, see Ulrich Völklein, *Josef Mengele: Der Arzt von Auschwitz* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2003).

The fusing of parasite and body, of narrative voice and protagonist at Auschwitz, the epitome of industrialized mass murder and barbarity, can be regarded as the ironic inverse of what Robert Jay Lifton describes as the psychological process of doubling, which he sees as endemic to the perpetrators' postwar behaviour and their refusal to assume responsibility for their deeds. Lifton states that

> [t]he way in which doubling allowed Nazi doctors to avoid guilt was not by the elimination of conscience but by what can be called *the transfer of conscience*. The requirements of conscience were transferred to the Auschwitz self, which placed it within its own criteria for good (duty, loyalty to group, "improving" Auschwitz conditions, etc.), thereby freeing the original self from responsibility for actions there. (33)[11]

In a postwar world before their arrival at Auschwitz, the narrative voice is split from the body yet, paradoxically, also intricately connected to it. And, while they both seemingly fuse at Auschwitz and become in fact one entity, narrative voice and body seem to be disassociated from each other again during seminal moments in Unverdorben's life and career in a pre-war world.

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[11] Lifton, author of *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide* (1986), the principal inspiration and source for Amis's novel, has written extensively on the psychological processes that are responsible for turning ordinary doctors into murderers who performed, often enthusiastically, heinous and indescribable medical experiments under the cloak of scientific progress. Lifton argues that "[t]he key to understanding how Nazi doctors came to do the work of Auschwitz is the psychological principle I call 'doubling': the division of the self into two functioning wholes, so that a part-self acts as entire self" (30). Lifton's explanation is reminiscent of the literary device of the *Doppelgänger*, which psychologically can be considered as a part or integral aspect of a person's inner self, yet appears to be split from the person's subjectivity. As such, it can emerge as a character of its own, often as the personification of a character's bad conscience.

After the war, and early in the novel, the narrator acts as a critical voice, drawing attention to and slowly uncovering Friendly's suppressed past. However, in a pre-war world, when Friendly is still known as Unverdorben because he does not yet have to hide his true identity, Amis illustrates yet another split between the doctor and the narrative voice, namely when the doctor works at Schloss Hartheim in Austria, a place where the Nazis carried out their euthanasia program. [12] It is here at Schloss Hartheim that Unverdorben first starts to work for Hitler's regime, fully and unquestioningly embracing Nazi ideology and the idea of killing under the cloak of scientific progress. The narrator describes the castle as follows: "Above its archways and gables the evening sky is full of our unmentionable mistakes, hydrocephalic clouds and the wrongly curved palate of the west, and the cinders of our fires" (146). The seemingly peaceful and serene atmosphere is in fact a description of the euthanasia program and the killing of physically and mentally disabled people. Moreover, the narrator's choice of imagery – "clouds" and "fires" – in describing the euthanasia program also serve to foreshadow the Jewish genocide, as it alludes to both the smoke stacks and crematoria in which the victims were burnt after they had been gassed. In a desperate attempt to reverse Unverdorben's pending choice for evil, the narrative voice re-surfaces shortly and for the last time before the doctor is completely consumed by the ideological belief in medical killing. In the end, Unverdorben

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[12] The castle of Hartheim, located near Linz in Austria, housed an institution for the mentally challenged before the Nazis converted the hospital in 1940 into one of the first places where "Aktion T4" – an abbreviation of Tiergartenstraße 4 in Berlin, where the Nazis decided on the euthanasia program, and which subsequently served as a camouflage term to designate the euthanasia program – was put into practice. It was also one of the first places, in which a gas chamber was installed, in which the mentally challenged, the physically disabled, but also opponents of Hitler as well as forced labourers were killed. For a detailed history of Schloss Hartheim during the Nazi reign, see Tom Matzek, *Das Mordschloss. Auf den Spuren von NS-Verbrechen im Schloss Hartheim* (Wien: Kremayr & Scheriau Verlag, 2002).

figuratively extinguishes the narrative voice which closely resembles the notion of a moral conscience and which is therefore forced to part from the body carrying out the murders. The narrative voice states that "I who have no name and no body – I have slipped out from under him and am now scattered above like flakes of ash-blonde human hair" (147), thus ironically aligning itself with the fate of the Jews, whom Unverdorben will similarly extinguish and who will, like the narrator, eventually be burnt to ashes, blackening the sky. Yet in contrast to the victims, the narrative voice affirms its continuing presence in relationship to Unverdorben: "I'll always be here. But he's on his own" (147). Thus it is feasible to argue that the narrator of *Time's Arrow* is the embodiment of the doctor's moral conscience and serves as literal manifestation of Friendly's unwillingness and inability to integrate his horrifying behaviour at Auschwitz into his life and, in so doing, to accept culpability on an individual, personal level for having committed crimes against specific individuals and humanity as a whole.

A Postmodern Witnessing of the Holocaust

The sense of dislocation and displacement purposefully created by the structure and style of *Time's Arrow* causes the reader to experience feelings of powerlessness and helplessness in the face of the overwhelming horror of the protagonist's actions and his complete lack of any feelings of remorse in a post-war world. As Amis demonstrates, due to the psychological process Lifton calls "doubling," the protagonist of *Time's Arrow* is able to suppress his conscience and with it feelings of remorse, guilt, and responsibility for the crimes he committed as a Nazi doctor at Auschwitz

concentration camp. Unverdorben's life and career, when put in chronological order, is exemplary of the numerous physicians who willingly participated in realizing the Nazis' phantasmal dream of creating a superior race in order to achieve Hitler's goal of world dominance. Unverdorben, born in 1916 in Solingen which is also the birthplace of Adolf Eichmann (163), went to medical school, married his wife Herta, worked at Schloss Hartheim where he participated in the euthanasia program, and assisted the SS in forcing the Jews into ghettos before he came to Auschwitz where he actively killed camp inmates by injecting them with phenol, and where he assisted Uncle Pepi in conducting medical experiments on children. Throughout his career, Unverdorben experimented with various methods of killing; for instance, at Hartheim, the mentally challenged were murdered in the "bus with its tinted windows" (145), into which the vehicle's deadly exhaust fumes were induced to kill the passengers. At Auschwitz, the narrator explains that "I've come to the conclusion that Odilo Unverdorben, as a moral being, is absolutely unexceptional, liable to do what everybody else does, good or bad, with no limit, once under the cover of numbers" (157). The narrator is alluding to Unverdorben's participation in mass exterminations, which, in contrast to the medical experiments carried out on individual camp inmates, allows the perpetrator to suppress any psychological effects or repercussions stemming from the actual act of murder. Similarly, the abstract, generalized nature of mass murder, which reduces it victims to mere numbers creates a climate in which individual guilt can be easily suppressed, as Unverdorben's post-Auschwitz life and career exemplify, yet is never fully forgotten or extinguished as the lingering presence of the narrative voice of *Time's Arrow* asserts.

Amis employs the literary device of an innocent, that is, an uninformed yet also ignorant narrative voice, who is, however, intricately connected to the past by being a seminal part of an Auschwitz doctor's suppressed conscience. The birth, or coming-into-existence of the narrative voice at the time of Friendly's death inverts the Christian notion of making peace with oneself before passing away, but also, and more importantly, gestures towards the return of the repressed. While Friendly was working as a renowned physician in America, protected from repercussions arising from his participation in the industrialized mass murder, he successfully repressed his past. The admission of the barbarous acts he committed at Auschwitz would have meant not only experiencing them again, but also evaluating and judging them with the consciousness of the present day. Due to the doctor's unwillingness to confront his past, the task of re-experiencing his history thus falls upon the parasitic narrator, who becomes, in Seymour Chatman's words, "a forced witness to the past as it is unveiled" (41). On the level of reception, the reader of *Time's Arrow* similarly becomes a witness to both Friendly's life, unfolding in reversed order, and to the narrator's desperate attempts to make sense of Friendly's life. Like the narrator, the reader is faced with the incomprehensibility of Friendly's past and similarly struggles to understand the underlying motives that turned him into a willing participant in the Jewish genocide.

Throughout the narrative, the narrative voice serves as a guide to the reader assisting him or her in extrapolating meaning out of the inverted, perverse world in which Friendly lives. As the plot progresses the narrative voice gains more confidence in interpreting the illogical nature of its environment which even seems to be

characterized by a certain normalcy or logic, albeit a perverse one. Similarly, the reader who is reliant upon the narrative voice accustoms him- or herself to the ironically inverted world of the novel, precisely because it seems to offer the illusion of a certain kind of logic based on simple, yet predictable, characteristics. The illusion experienced by the reader of comprehending the backward world of Friendly is, however, completely subverted and undermined when the narrative voice arrives at Auschwitz; the perverse logic, lack of reason and meaning that characterizes the world of Auschwitz and Nazi ideology in general is powerfully conveyed through the complete collapse of the illusionary notion of comprehension deliberately created throughout the early part of the narrative.

The reversed yet logical narration of Amis's novel demonstrates and stresses the inverted and perverse logic and reason behind its main theme, that is, the industrialized mass murder. Without the reversed narration, Vice asserts, "the accumulation of circumstantial detail would form an apparently inevitable chain of cause and effect" (20). She gestures towards the importance of the backwards narration where the orderly and logical system of cause and effect is completely undermined. The reversed narration of Amis's novel thematizes the "systematic derangement of the Nazi moral outlook... [and] the circular relationship that subsists between the acts that occurred and the explanations invoked to make sense of them" (Botwinick 699). *Time's Arrow* is a postmodern deconstruction of our belief in epistemological structures as well as a testimony to the long-lasting effect of the Holocaust on our understanding of history, of truth, and, most importantly, of humanity.

On an extra-textual level, the thematic concerns of Amis's novel gesture towards the importance of paying due attention to the psyche of the perpetrators both during the Holocaust and afterwards, when they adhered to various psychological defense mechanisms that allowed them to dismiss any sense of responsibility for the genocide by denying their implication in it through the suppression of the past. Witnessing for Amis is thus a complex phenomenon of ethical obligation, as it also entails, without running the risk of degrading the actual victims to a mere absence, a detailed negotiation with perpetrator history, a negotiation which seems to be only possible in a postmodern context. It is precisely the postmodern context in which Amis is writing, with its tendency for exposing ambiguities which defy explanation, that creates the possibility of investigating the history of the perpetrators who have in fact willingly and purposefully excluded themselves from the writing of Holocaust history. *Time's Arrow* forces its reader to bear witness to the ways in which a history that lacks meaning and thus resists the possibility of explanation can be incorporated into and negotiated in the present by arguing for the necessity of including perpetrator history in Holocaust historiography and by emphasizing the vital task of subjecting perpetrator histories to a new critical examination from the temporal distance of today's perspective. Ultimately, though, *Time's Arrow* plays with the reader's expectations for comprehension by highlighting the impossibility of finding adequate modes of explanation. By incessantly forcing the reader to extract meaning out of the plot, the novel turns the reader into a witness to an event, whose nature and underlying psychological motivations similarly resist comprehension.

Conclusion

In *Time's Arrow*, there is an intricate connection between the novel's narrative structure and its thematic concerns. As a postmodern response to the Holocaust, Amis's novel is concerned with constructing a discourse (in a post-Holocaust era, characterized by its refusal to accept totalizing perspectives and explanations) for understanding the events of the Holocaust from a distance, both temporally and spatially. Thus, in the beginning of the novel, the narrator seems innocently to believe in the power of knowledge in explaining the world:

> I find I am equipped with a fair amount of value-free information, or general knowledge, if you prefer. $E=mc^2$. The speed of light is 186,000 miles per second.... I have a superb vocabulary...and a nonchalant command of all grammatical rules. (8-9)

However, in the end Amis exposes the incapacity of science, epistemology, and ontology to provide any understanding of the industrialized mass murder. In contrast, Amis's text suggests that only postmodern narrative strategies, which resist offering totalizing explanations, can begin to address an unprecedented event such as the Holocaust and reveal the ways in which it continues to affect the condition of humankind in a post-Holocaust world.

By demanding that the reader on a conceptual level establish a framework in which the reversal of values and the suspicion of notions such as history and truth engendered by the Holocaust can be situated and addressed, *Time's Arrow* in general forces its readers to negotiate and re-evaluate their own position in relation to and understanding of the major catastrophe of the twentieth century in the Western world,

and, in particular, the psyche of perpetrators such as Unverdorben, without whose willingness and help the mass murder could not have been implemented on such a large scale.

Both the content and the postmodern style of *Time's Arrow* explore the complex issue of responsibility for the Holocaust and the ways in which it is addressed and negotiated in the present. *Time's Arrow* thus requires the reader to assume the position of a distant witness to the inexplicable nature of the past, as well as to the lack of reason behind the psychological motivations of the perpetrators. For instance, the fact that Unverdorben/Friendly could continue to work as a physician after the war, emigrate to America, and become a renowned paediatrician, despite his work in the medical section of Auschwitz concentration camp, which involved conducting medical experiments on children, forces the reader to re-consider and question the role of judicial and political systems and their mechanisms which made it possible for Friendly, and the real Mengele, to escape persecution.

In Amis's novel the narrative voice therefore functions to challenge ubiquitous claims about the compulsion to obey orders, that is, the so-called *Befehlsnotstand*, behind which soldiers and doctors like Mengele and the fictional Friendly were hiding after the end of World War II in order to avoid persecution. In contrast to the survivors, "the perpetrators," as Christopher Browning remarks, "did not rush to write their memoirs after the war. They felt no mission to 'never forget.' On the contrary, they hoped to forget and be forgotten as quickly and totally as possible" ("Perpetrator History" 28). This hope of completely detaching oneself from the guilt engendered by

the participation in the Holocaust remains, however – as the narrative voice of *Time's Arrow* elucidates – a false illusion.

On a political level, Amis's novel forces the contemporary reader to assume the responsibility of becoming a witness to the ways in which the murderous legacy of the Holocaust has been negotiated in a postwar world, where the legal systems, for instance, all too often shied away from calling the perpetrators to account by putting them on trial for the mass murder and thus enhanced the mitigation of the perpetrators' responsibility and contributed to both the perpetuation of the forgetting and ensuing silencing of the victims.

Chapter 5

The Future of Memory – Witnessing the Holocaust in John Boyne's *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*

Introduction

Over sixty-five years after the end of the Second World War and the discovery of the extent of the Holocaust, the growing temporal distance from the past as well as the current processes of globalization have evoked a transformation of the Holocaust as the central historical event for those who lived through it, to an event that functions as a marker for the limits of moral, political, and ethical transgression for subsequent generations, at least in the Western world. Levy and Sznaider highlight the importance of the processes of globalization for the de-contextualization and internationalization of Holocaust memory in the twenty-first century, noting that, "[i]n our global age, cultural memory cannot be reduced, conceptually or empirically, to a territorially fixed approach" (26).[1] The loss of the last eyewitnesses, a loss that happens within the context of globalization, engenders an inevitable and irrevocable shift from personal memory, which perceives the Holocaust as a lived reality, to collective memory of nations associated with the Holocaust, predominantly Israel and Germany, to the idea of global memory, which conceives of the Holocaust as the epitome of ultimate evil,

[1] Already in 1992, Friedländer remarked that the Holocaust is an "event of a kind which demands a global approach" (*Probing* 1), highlighting the all-encompassing nature of the event, and foregrounding, based on the event's dimension and enormity, the necessity of a shift in Holocaust remembrance from a national to a broader, global context.

whose nature must be investigated in order to prevent its repetition. Eva Fleischer comments that "the more we come to know about the Holocaust, how it came about, how it was carried out, etc., the greater the possibility that we will become sensitized to inhumanity and suffering whenever they occur" (qtd. in Russell 268). Initiated by the founding of the United Nations in 1945, a federation of 192 countries which aims to preserve world peace and protect human rights,[2] the possibility, importance, and moral imperative of passing on knowledge about the unfathomable extent of the victims' suffering as well as about the reasons and circumstances that made the implementation of the Holocaust possible, has become intricately intertwined with processes of globalization and internationalization. These processes, which evolved in the immediate aftermath of the war, make it possible to disassociate the event from its historical context while they also foster a growing interest in the history of both sides of the victim-perpetrator binary. The creation of an historical awareness about human rights, as outlined in and protected by the United Nations' 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, postulated as a direct response to the violation of fundamental human rights during the Second World War, can serve as an important tool in educating future generations about anti-Semitism, racial prejudice, and persecution based on religious, cultural, social, and ethnic grounds, all major concerns in the contemporary, global context.

It is within this new framework of a global Holocaust memory that Irish writer John Boyne, who is a member of the third generation yet not a descendant of any of the subject positions prevalent during the war – victim, perpetrator, and bystander –

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[2] For a detailed account of the history of the UN, see Peter Opitz, *Die Vereinten Nationen: Geschichte, Struktur, Perspektiven* (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2002), and Christopher O'Sullivan, *The United Nations: A Concise History* (Malabar: Krieger Publishing Company, 2005).

situates his novel *The Boy in The Striped Pajamas* (2006). Boyne, like Foer, Seiffert and Amis, writes from a temporal, spatial, and linguistic distance from the Holocaust and thus fulfills all three criteria that have, up to this point, defined and characterized the idea of witnessing from a distance. Boyne's intended readership, however, differs from that of these other authors, since his text has been classified as a children's novel about the Holocaust.[3] In writing a novel about the Holocaust for today's children, the fourth generation, Boyne, who, as a member of the third generation still witnesses the past in the presence of survivors, foregrounds, by emphasizing the educative function of his narrative, the importance of passing on knowledge about both the Holocaust and the extent to which it has become an inescapable part of cultural memory that children must inevitably inherit.[4]

Writing for today's children requires Boyne to negotiate the possibilities and limitations surrounding children's literature about the Holocaust, where the use of aesthetic distance becomes a vital aspect of representing the events and atmosphere of the past. The use of aesthetic distance is clearly not limited to children's literature about the Holocaust but is in fact present even in early eyewitness accounts, while it also characterizes the various post-Holocaust narratives that have been discussed so

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[3] Boyne, in an interview with his publisher David Fickling, states: "I don't think of it as a children's book or an adult's book. I'm not entirely sure I know what the difference is between a children's book and an adult's book" ("Reader's Guide" 5). Nonetheless, the novel has been classified as a children's novel by its publisher, predominantly based on the fact that the protagonist, from whose perspective the reader witnesses the Holocaust, is a nine-year old boy, and can therefore serve as a figure of identification for children. Additionally, as Naomi Sokoloff remarks, "[t]he child serves as a way to sidestep trying to formulate an interpretation of evil that defies understanding" (262) by avoiding the overt description of brutality, violence, and horror, a description which could harm and even traumatize the child reader.

[4] Bernard-Donals highlights the complexities surrounding the ways in which future generations, including today's children, must negotiate and bear witness to the past, stating that "there will come a time when the children of several generations removed will wonder about the memorials, divorced as they are by distance and time, and ask how they are connected to the events they were designed to call to mind" (*Introduction* 128).

far. In Foer's novel, aesthetic distance is discernible in Jonathan's fictional re-creation of the history of the shtetl Trachimbrod, where it manifests itself in the author's use of magical realism for writing a lost history. In Amis's novel, postmodern narrative strategies, by highlighting the inexplicability of the perpetrators' psychological motivations, create aesthetic distance that forecloses the possibility for an empathic identification with the protagonist. In the novels by Foer and Amis, the use of aesthetic distance creates a stronger sense of the incommunicability of the Holocaust. In children's literature about the Holocaust, in contrast, aesthetic distance can, instead of overtly drawing attention to the ultimately inexplicable nature of the event, in fact engender a framework of identification for the child reader that functions on an emotional or psychological rather than on a cognitive level. Thus, instead of blatantly exposing his readers to atrocities, brutality, and violence, or of self-consciously highlighting the inaccessible nature of the Holocaust, Boyne utilizes an aesthetic distance, which allows him to represent the Holocaust as a "model for 'good' and 'evil'" (Levy and Sznaider 123), that is, as a moral point of reference within his cautionary tale about the ubiquitous dangers of racial hatred and human evil.

Representing the Holocaust from an Aesthetic Distance

Representing the Holocaust, whether in the form of survivor testimonies or fictional re-creations of an unknown yet omnipresent past by subsequent generations, is characterized by a negotiation of the temporal distance between the immediacy and literality of the event and its subsequent encapsulation within the form of a narrative. Diaries and documents that were written from within this moment in history, such as

German-Jewish professor Viktor Klemperer's *Ich will Zeugnis ablegen bis zum letzten (I will bear witness)*, written between 1933 and 1945, and Anne Frank's diary, in which she describes her life in hiding from Nazi persecution until her family's deportation in 1944, as well as the documents chronicling the experiences of the inhabitants of the Warsaw ghetto, which were recorded and subsequently buried by an organization called *Oyneg Shabbes*[5] in 1943 shortly before the ghetto was razed to the ground by the Nazis,[6] are in fact this history. However, except for these examples, eyewitness accounts and testimonials witnessing the Holocaust already do so from a temporal distance, that is, from outside the history to which they are testifying. Moreover, the ensuing proliferation of fictionalized accounts written by postwar generations, who are not only temporally but often also culturally and spatially removed from the Holocaust and the Second World War, indicates that the temporal distance has led to a proliferation of the use of novelistic and aesthetic strategies for representing the genocide. At the same time, this obvious intricate connection between the growing temporal and increasing aesthetic distance from the past gestures towards the notion that the Holocaust is ultimately, as Weissman posits, "*only representable*" (209), particularly at a time when the last members of the experiencing generation are passing on. However, the idea that the Holocaust is nothing but representable also paradoxically renders the idea of representation itself highly

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[5] *Oyneg Shabbes* is Yiddish for "The Joy of the Sabbath" (Kassow 401).

[6] The Jewish historian Emanuel Ringelblum, who was incarcerated in the Warsaw ghetto, initiated the creation of the organization *Oyneg Shabbes*. The purpose of this organization was to record and preserve the ordeal of the inhabitants of the ghetto under Nazi occupation. The recordings were stored in milk cans and tin boxes, and buried shortly before the inhabitants were deported to Treblinka. Some of the members of *Oyneg Shabbes* survived the Holocaust and were able to rescue some of the documents, which have since be stored in the so-called Ringelblum Archive. For a detailed history of *Oyneg Shabbes* and the Ringelblum Archive, see Samuel D. Kassow, *Who will write our history? Rediscovering a Hidden Archive from the Warsaw Ghetto* (New York; Vintage,2007).

problematic since the event in all its extremities and complexities can never be fully encapsulated within a narrative.

The complexities and possibilities surrounding the idea of aestheticizing, that is, narrativizing, the Holocaust, and the inherent paradoxical risk of appropriating the Holocaust within a figurative discourse that serves to entertain rather than to warn about the nature of evil, have been ubiquitous in Holocaust scholarship. Theodor Adorno, for instance, warns that a Holocaust narrative's potential for engagement should not be based on "so-called artistic representations of naked bodily pain, of victims, felled by rifle butts," as such an artistic representation includes "the potentiality of wringing pleasure from it" (qtd. in Langer, *Literary Imagination* 1). In order to avoid the Holocaust functioning as gratuitous entertainment in the manner described by Adorno, Langer demands that, instead of aestheticizing the Holocaust by equating horror with normalcy, one must highlight the incongruity between aesthetics and brutality endemic to representations of the Holocaust by offering "a framework of responding" (*Literary Imagination* 12) that exposes and emphasizes the nature of the Holocaust yet also simultaneously forecloses the possibility of indulgence, pleasure, or delight that would betray the memory of those who perished. Langer further suggests that such a framework becomes possible within the precepts of what he calls a "literature of atrocity," a genre which in itself already foregrounds the paradox yet also the necessity of narrativizing atrocities and their subsequent traumatic impact on the victims, in order to remember the past and educate future generations. To Langer, this "literature of atrocity" is the only acceptable and possible way of making the nature of the Holocaust representable since this particular literature is characterized by a

combination of fact and fiction, or, more precisely, a combination of "historical fact and imaginative truth" (*Literary Imagination* 8). He further explains that

> [t]he literature of atrocity is never wholly invented; the memory of the literal Holocaust seethes endlessly in its subterranean depths. But such literature is never wholly factual either....Without the Holocaust, such literature would not have been possible; with it, by curious inversion, literature has taken as its task making such reality "possible" for the imagination. (*Literary Imagination* 3-8).

Langer contends that the reality of the past manifests itself in both the choice of subject matter, such as

> the displacement of the consciousness of life by the imminence, and pervasiveness of death; the violation of the coherence of childhood; the assault on physical reality; the disintegration of the rational intelligence; and the disruption of chronological time (*Literary Imagination* xii),

as well as in the figurative discourse that is used to describe and represent this subject matter. In Langer's "literature of atrocity" content and form become equally important aspects of representing the Holocaust, since it is the form and narrative technique, in short the representational discourse, that serves to highlight the nature of the event and to elucidate the ultimate inevitability of combining fact and fiction in representations of the Holocaust.[7]

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[7] In his 1990 study, *Act and Idea in the Nazi Genocide*, Lang, in contrast to Langer, critiques the increasing use of figurative discourse in Holocaust representations as it seemingly departs from the event itself by instead focusing on the means of its representation. Thus Lang explains that any imaginative writing about the Holocaust "impinges on the content of that subject [the Holocaust], adding itself and the decisions it presupposes" (143). Lang's critique elucidates the problem of prioritizing the art of narrative over the content, a problem which is endemic to post-Holocaust representations.

The inseparability of fact and fiction in Holocaust narratives, as suggested by Langer, is also shared and further elaborated upon by Margaret Dew. Like Langer, she argues that history and fiction are equally important in Holocaust representations since it is fiction which can make the past accessible, particularly at a time when the experience of the Holocaust as a lived reality and historical truth has irrevocably come to an end. Dew affirms that "[h]istory records the events and compiles the statistics; literature translates the events and statistics into real things happening to real people. Each without the other is inadequate; together, they provide a window into the truth" (qtd. in Deckert-Peaceman 61). Fiction can lend an immediacy to the experience of the past that history cannot. Thus, when fact and fiction are combined as a normative framework for creating a Holocaust narrative, the reader is able to remember "the Holocaust [not] as a historical event, but *what it was like* to experience the Holocaust" (Weissman 104). The role of fiction in re-creating the atmosphere of both the Holocaust and its aftermath becomes even more important in post-Holocaust narratives written by postwar generations.

Postwar authors revert to and appropriate their personal, subjective interpretation of the Holocaust within a figurative discourse which serves to highlight the status of their narratives as literary artefacts while it also eschews pre-formulated answers and explanations that could be seen to represent one single, all-encompassing and, ultimately, finalized interpretation of the event. The use of a figurative discourse, which makes use of tropes such as metaphors and allegories, amongst other figurative devices, produces a hidden, covert layer of discourse that actively demands the

reader's engagement in generating, from a temporal and aesthetic distance, one of many possible interpretations of the past as a lived reality.

A Children's Literature of Atrocity

The complexities of containing the Holocaust within a narrative are exacerbated by the specific challenges endemic to writing children's literature about the Holocaust. Representing the Holocaust for children has to assume a new dimension, because of their age and potential lack of knowledge about the past. At the same time, the importance of introducing children to the Holocaust becomes an even more significant issue in relation to today's children and future generations. "[T]he question of the presentation in children's literature of the consummate evil that was the Holocaust," writes Elizabeth Baer," becomes all the more urgent" (380) at the eve of the passing of the last eyewitnesses. Against this background, Baer, strongly adhering to Langer's concept of a "literature of atrocity," emphasizes the urgency of establishing a "children's literature of atrocity" (384). Baer identifies four prevailing requirements for a children's literature of atrocity: first, it must "grapple directly with the evil of the Holocaust"; second, it should represent "the Holocaust in its proper context of complexity" (384); third, it should include "a warning about the dangers of racism and anti-Semitism"; and fourth, it should enable "the child reader [to develop]...a sense of personal responsibility regarding prejudice, hatred, and racial discrimination" (385). By "[dealing] with a special evil that is at once retrospective and, in the view of some, could happen again" (379), a children's literature of atrocity, according to Baer, must therefore focus exclusively on the instruction of children

about historical causes and effects. Its main objectives are henceforth to allow future generations to bear witness to the past, to preserve the memory of the dead, and, most importantly, to raise awareness about the nature of evil.

In order to fulfill Baer's objectives for a "children's literature of atrocity," Adrienne Kertzer explains that Holocaust literature for children "will need to consider narrative strategies...that give readers a double narrative, one that simultaneously respects our need for hope and happy endings even as it teaches us a very different lesson about history" (253).[8] On the one hand, then, authors of children's literature about the Holocaust are required to thoughtfully consider their readership's limited capacity for reception and comprehension. On the other, texts belonging to a "children's literature of atrocity" should fulfill society's didactic and educational expectations by including a warning of the potential for barbarity as well as by raising the child reader's alertness about various forms of injustice and discrimination within their own environment. Two early manifestations of Baer's children's literature of atrocity are Hans Peter Richter's *Damals war es Friedrich* (1961), a fictional representation of a German childhood during the war, and Judith Kerr's semi-autobiographical novel, *When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit* (1971).

Hans Peter Richter's children's novel, *Damals war es Friedrich*, which has become a canonical work in German high school curricula, portrays the friendship between the non-Jewish narrator and his Jewish friend Friedrich during the Nazi

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[8] In *My Mother's Voice* (2002), Kertzer objects to Langer's contention that "the literature of the Holocaust is not a literature of hope" (*Versions of Survival* 157). Instead she explains, based on her own mother's Holocaust story, that "the hope that figures so largely in her story may indicate a naïve faith in 1944 that hope would protect her, but it may also reflect a later narrative decision that fear would not damage her children" (34). The ambiguity Kertzer foregrounds characterizes the framework in which children are being exposed to the Holocaust, a framework itself characterized by both fear and hope, the latter serving as a safety net for children in their attempt to cope with the notion of fear.

period. Richter shows how the lives of these two boys, both born in 1925, are affected in drastically different ways by Hitler's reign and the growing anti-Semitism and racism within the German population. Friedrich is persecuted by the growing discrimination against the Jewish community in Germany: he is forced to leave his school; his father loses his job; his family is forced to move out of their apartment. Eventually he is visibly stigmatized and excluded from the so-called *Volksgemeinschaft* by being forced to wear the Star of David on his clothes. Richter also vividly depicts both boys' experiences of air raids, fear, and terror until Friedrich dies in 1942 during an air raid because the janitor refuses to allow him, a Jew, into the safety of the air-raid-shelter. By stressing the parallels as well as the differences between the German narrator and his best friend, the Jew Friedrich, Richter is able to draw attention to the fatally unjust nature of Nazi politics. At the same time, he also depicts the struggle experienced by the narrator in coming to terms with the advantages he is granted as a German citizen: he is after all alive to narrate the tale. His narrative is also then a testimony to the lost voice of the Jewish boy who can no longer be a narrator. At the core of this narrative is an innocent childhood friendship which is eventually destroyed by political factors beyond the choice or control of either boy.

Judith Kerr's seminal, semi-autobiographical novel, *When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit*, describes the life of Anna, the nine-year-old protagonist, who lives in Berlin together with her Jewish family. Like Richter, Kerr focusses on the growing danger of harassment and discrimination against Germany's Jews after Hitler's rise to power in 1933 and the subsequent implementation of the Nuremberg laws in 1935. At the core

of Kerr's novel is the ordeal experienced by Anna and her family and their fate under the Third Reich. Anna's father is an outspoken opponent of Hitler and Nazi politics, but, most importantly, he is Jewish.[9] Both his ethnicity and his resistance to Nazism force him and his family to flee from their home in Berlin. The family escapes to Switzerland, France, and, in the end, to Britain. For Anna, the frequent and often forced moves seem to represent a great adventure. At the same time, however, Kerr also describes the difficulties endemic to the life of a refugee such as Anna's lack of knowledge of French, and the hostility the family experiences in foreign countries. Kerr thematizes the difficulties of a refugee's life and the consequences for and impact on a child of the constant danger of deportation. Instead of focussing on abstract politics and the inexplicable nature of Nazism, Kerr vividly depicts Anna's experiences of marginalization and discrimination as well as her feelings of abandonment and loneliness, yet she also describes how Anna's family survives the war and the Holocaust, seemingly losing only material items, such as Anna's pink rabbit, which she had to leave behind in Berlin. The loss of this inanimate yet dear object serves to establish the possibility of an empathic identification for the child reader with the protagonist, while the loss of the rabbit also suggests the forced end of Anna's childhood, an end which the child reader has to reflect upon from his or her own comfortable perspective in the present.

Both Kerr and Richter were children during the Third Reich and the Holocaust and can thus draw on their own personal experiences as a normative framework in which to situate their narratives for children, whether in the form of a semi-

[9] Kerr's father, Alfred Kerr, was a renowned theatre critic and a vehement opponent of Hitler. Because of his outspokeneness and due to the fact that he was Jewish, Kerr and his family were forced to leave Germany in order to avoid reprisals and imminent deportation.

autobiographical novel as in Kerr's case, or as a fictionalized account of a wartime childhood in Hitler's Germany as in Richter's. Both novels are characterized by an aesthetic distance in that their authors eschew the overt depiction of gruesome, traumatizing details or graphic descriptions of violence and brutality, yet, at the same time, implicitly convey the all-encompassing nature of evil, danger, and death omnipresent under Nazism. Richter's novel is more difficult to position within the framework of a children's literature of atrocity than Kerr's, however, because the child reader is invited to identify with the perspective of the narrator, who, because he is German, watches the ensuing discrimination against and marginalization of his friend Friedrich without ever running the risk, as a member of the *Volksgemeinschaft*, of fearing for his own life. He watches and describes his friendship with Friedrich from a comfortable distance, as it were, like the child reader who is far removed from the events of the past, a distance which leaves less room for, and in fact does not necessarily require, a detailed negotiation, undertaken by the reader, of Friedrich's ordeal within its actual historical context. This distance prevents exposing the child reader to the horror of the past, yet it also seems to foreclose the possibility of addressing the traumatic actuality of this past as experienced by Jews. Kerr's novel, in contrast, demands that the child reader identify with the protagonist Anna and actually re-live her ordeal as a Jewish girl living during the Second World War. While the loss experienced by Anna is certainly traumatic and also has a deep emotional impact on the child reader, an aspect which serves to classify it as belonging to a children's literature of atrocity, Kerr's novel also includes, both on an intra- and extra-diegetic level, the potential for hope, which Kertzer perceives to be seminal in a children's

literature of atrocity: Anna survived the war and the Holocaust, and so did the author of this semi-autobiographical novel. In fact, the novel itself serves as testimony to the author's survival.

Both Richter and Kerr employ aesthetic distance within their respective novels: Richter reverts to the distant, detached narrative perspective of a German boy, unaffected by the reprisals experienced by his Jewish friend, yet witness to the consequences of Hitler's racial politics; in Kerr's novel, the symbolic nature of Anna's pink rabbit is indicative of aesthetic distance, as the loss of this object is suggestive of Anna losing her childhood. In both instances, the use of aesthetic distance serves as a safety net for the child reader. At the same time, such a distance also allows for a depiction, albeit in a covert manner, of real events and incidents within their proper historical context, incidents and effects which would otherwise exceed the child's capacity for understanding.

The use of aesthetic distance in children's literature about the Holocaust serves two interconnected purposes: it can introduce children to the reality of history while simultaneously sparing the child reader from having to experience, along with the characters, the full extent of the trauma evoked by the events of this particular past. In doing so, the aesthetic distance is able to fulfil Kertzer's claim that a children's literature of atrocity must consist of a "double narrative" ("Children's Literature" 253), which is both educative yet also allows for the child reader's need for entertainment or enjoyment, and closure.

Irish writer John Boyne, who is, in contrast to either Richter or Kerr, a member of the third generation, lacks the firsthand knowledge of a childhood during the Third

Reich, and, more precisely, during the Holocaust. Boyne truly is a post-Holocaust writer who is separated from the past not only by time and space, but also by experience. He can only revert to the use of his imagination akin to Hirsch's concept of postmemory (discussed in the previous chapter), in order to bridge the temporal, spatial, and epistemological distance that separates him from the Holocaust. Boyne's method of establishing an imaginative bridge between the past and his own present is intricately associated with artistic freedom in a post-Holocaust world; yet Boyne's way of fictionally entering and re-creating a past that is not his own also raises questions about the interconnectedness of ethics and aesthetics in fictional representations of the genocide by authors who are completely detached from this past. Boyne responds to the complexities surrounding the moral and ethical questions and issues of writing a post-Holocaust narrative in his "Author's Note," where he states that "[i]t's presumptuous to assume that from today's perspective one can truly understand the horrors of the concentration camp" (217). Here, he highlights the immorality or insensitivity of assuming the perspective of a victim from within the concentration camp.[10] At the same time, however, Boyne also emphasizes the moral duty of any post-Holocaust writer to renew the memory of the past, positing that "it's the responsibility of the writer to uncover as much emotional truth within that desperate landscape as he possibly can" (217). Instead of accurately depicting the actual historical context in which his tale is situated, Boyne argues for the necessity of establishing an emotional discourse, which can function as a means of making the

[10] Similarly, fellow post-Holocaust novelist Thane Rosenbaum who, in contrast to Boyne, is in fact a son of Holocaust survivors and thus culturally affiliated with the Jewish genocide also argues that "it is immoral to fictionalize and make art out of the camps themselves, to try to transport the readers to the scene of the actual crime, to attempt to re-create all those layers of depravation [sic] and depravity, to express the ineffable, to describe the unimaginable" (491).

atmosphere of the past accessible on an empathic level. He thus prioritizes the notion of generating a psychological response in his reader over the attempt to convey actual historical knowledge. His contention manifests itself in the decontextualized qualities of *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* as well as in his generic categorization of his novel as a fable. Instead of evoking or drawing on real and accurate terms that could serve to place an emphasis on the historical context, Boyne reverts within his tale to a description of the atmosphere and the ways in which the various characters experience their surrounding. While the educated, adult reader recognizes the setting as being reminiscent of the desolate landscape of Auschwitz concentration camp, and is thus in a position to discern the historical context in which Boyne's tale takes place, the child reader, in contrast, lacking historical knowledge, is more likely to follow the invitation to identify with the feelings and emotions experienced by the child protagonist. By emotionally engaging the child reader in his tale, Boyne is able to educate and warn the reader about the constant danger of humanity's capacity for evil, an objective which Baer identifies as "perhaps the greatest motivation for writing about [the Holocaust]" (379). Ultimately, by highlighting and perpetuating the need for human decency, charity, and solidarity in a post-Holocaust world, Boyne's cautionary tale emphasizes the moral imperative that it is the duty of all, including children, to prevent history from repeating itself. [11]

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[11] In his novel *The Jewish Messiah* (2008), Dutch-Jewish author Arnon Grunberg explores the danger inherent in history repeating itself. Illustrating Marx's ironic elaboration of Hegel, that history repeats itself, the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce, Grunberg creates a tale in which Xavier, a sixteen-year old boy whose grandfather served in the SS, seeks to reconcile with the victims of the Holocaust by befriending Awromele, a Jewish boy of the same age. The farcical, absurd, and perverse nature of the novel manifests itself in Xavier proclaiming himself as the saviour of all Jews. In a perverse twist, Grunberg portrays Xavier as leading a life that closely parallels that of Hitler: Xavier is homeless, attempts to go to an art academy but is refused admittance, works on a Yiddish translation of *Mein Kampf*, and is ultimately elected prime minister of Israel, where he re-enacts, under the cloak of

A Contemporary Children's Novel about the Holocaust – John Boyne's *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*

Temporally and spatially removed from the Holocaust, yet drawing on its archive of memory, Irish writer John Boyne, born in 1971, vividly demonstrates in his 2006 novel, *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, the ways in which the Holocaust continuously and insistently forces postwar generations to consider the nature of humanity in the face of such evil. Functioning as an example of Baer's "children's literature of atrocity," Boyne's novel, set in 1943, exposes Nazi ideology as a dangerous fantasy of omnipotence whose enactment in reality turns into a deadly, destructive force. Boyne explores the nature of destruction engendered by such an ideology through the novel's two protagonists, nine-year old boys Bruno and Shmuel, who are hopelessly divided by their origins: Bruno is the son of a high-ranking German SS officer and Commandant of a concentration camp, and Shmuel is a Polish Jew incarcerated in the camp. By investigating evil through the eyes of the child Bruno, and by highlighting the boy's wish and need for friendship in a world surrounded and shaped by a set of incomprehensible values, Boyne exposes and emphasizes the dangerous nature of forcefully imposed divisions based on racial, cultural, or religious grounds, divisions which are at the core of Nazi ideology and which aim at dehumanizing those consequently excluded from this community.

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his belief that he has in fact become the Jewish Messiah, the politics of exclusion and segregation so characteristic of Nazism, and eventually the annihilation of those who have been deemed a threat to the nation of Israel.

Bruno's Family – A Microcosm of German Society During the Third Reich

Boyne's novel explores the dangers inherent in Nazi ideology from multiple perspectives, through the various members of Bruno's family. Bruno's family can be regarded as a microcosm of German society during the Third Reich as it is comprised of a minority of outspoken opponents, and a majority of blind followers and unquestioning admirers, passive bystanders and active executioners of Hitler's ideology. As outlined in *Mein Kampf*, Hitler perceived European Jewry to be a major threat to the health of the nation and demanded their extinction. In *Hitler's Ideology: Embodied Metaphor, Fantasy, and History* (2007), Richard Koenigsberg investigates the ways in which Hitler's use of recurrent images and metaphors, such as "the Jew" meaning disease, vermin and death, in short, a threat to the health of the nation, created a perverse yet seemingly rational logic. The perverse nature of this logic, which appears as the logical inverse of a conventional, reasonable perspective, was perpetuated by Hitler's emotional speeches and rants, which ultimately assisted in convincing the German populace that Nazism and its core beliefs were in fact rational and thus justified. At the same time, Hitler's speeches also stressed the important role of each individual in saving the nation by demanding and allowing the exclusion and extinction of those whom he perceived as a threat for the implementation of his dream of *Weltherrschaft* (world supremacy). Hitler's dream of world supremacy should eventually manifest itself in the creation of an omnipotent "Thousand Year Reich" (Kershaw 256). In fact, the omnipotent and delusive nature of Hitler's dream is conveyed by the idea of immortality and indestructibility that is presupposed by the notion of a thousand-year rule.

The male members of Bruno's family, in particular Father and Grandfather, aim to be part of this collective nationalist dream. Bruno's father demonstrates his devotion to Hitler and Nazism and his deep investment in the creation of a unified, 'pure' German nation and in realizing the collective dream of omnipotence by proudly wearing the uniform of a high-ranking SS officer, for whom someone called "the Fury ha[s] big things in mind" (5). As a result, the Fury, which is Bruno's mispronunciation of the actual term *Führer*, appoints him as Commandant of a concentration camp in remote Poland, a place Bruno believes to be called "Out-With" (24). Driven by a deep, narcissistic desire to move up the echelons of power, Father unquestioningly and proudly accepts orders from any figure in authority, even when those orders entail moving his family to an isolated place in Poland where he partakes in inflicting horror, pain, and death on those who have been deemed to pose a threat to the purity of the Aryan nation and the collective *Volksgemeinschaft*. Supporting Father's position within the Nazi regime is Grandfather, a veteran of the First World War and a nationalist, who colludes with Nazi ideology by re-iterating the stances put forth and perpetuated by its propaganda. Grandfather stresses that Germany needs to break free from the shame and humiliation evoked by the peace treaty of Versailles by regaining her pride, power, and military strength.[12] He says about his son's new position: "It

[12] After the First World War ended with the armistice of Compiègne, signed on November 11, 1918, the victorious Triple Entente, comprised of the United Kingdom, France, and Russia, established the peace treaty of Versailles with defeated Germany. The Versailles treaty, which came into effect on January 10, 1920, demanded that Germany de-militarize the Rhineland and minimize the number of professional soldiers as well as its territorial expansion, by giving certain areas close to the border, such as Alsace, to the neighbouring countries, and that it pay reparations to the victors. The most humiliating article of the Versailles treaty was the so-called 'Kriegsschuldartikel,' which stated that Germany alone had to accept responsibility and guilt for the outbreak of war, and the ensuing enormous number of casualties. For a reprint and further explanation of the Versailles treaty, see Haffner and Bateson, *Der Vertrag von Versailles* (Berlin: Ullstein, 1988).

makes me proud to see you elevated to such a responsible position. Helping your country reclaim her pride after all the great wrongs that were done to her. The punishments above and beyond" (91). The belief in Father's indispensable role in realizing Hitler's dream of Germany's omnipotence is also shared by Bruno's mother, who is supportive of her husband and assumes her part within the collective of the nation by dutifully obeying her husband's orders, as well as by subordinating her own wishes and that of the family to the demands of his career. Her unquestioning subordination is illustrated when she explains to Bruno the reasons for the family's move: "sometimes when someone is very important, ...the man who employs him asks him to go somewhere else because there's a very special job that needs doing here" (4). Like her husband, she supports Hitler's politics, albeit passively and from the comfort of her own home.

Within Bruno's family, his grandmother is the only person who refuses to embrace Nazi ideology. She sees that the collective dream of omnipotence that both her husband and her son adhere to and that her daughter-in-law silently supports is based on unreal, phantasmal, and megalomaniacal assumptions. Grandmother is able to see through the Nazis' penchant for uniforms, which serve according to Nazi ideology as a visible signifier of the literal enactment of the dream of world supremacy. Within the precepts of Nazism, the privilege of wearing a uniform affirms the individual's importance and indispensability within the collective dream of achieving omnipotence. Grandmother, in contrast, is ashamed of her son's insatiable zest for power which drives him to "dress up like a puppet on a string...and do terrible things" (90, 92). On the one hand, the image that she evokes powerfully conveys

Father's loss of autonomy and independence. He has literally turned into a puppet completely consumed by an ideological system of power and hierarchy, controlled by the will of an authoritative, leading figure, the *Führer*. On the other hand, Grandmother also points out the transformative effect the uniform has on Father. The uniform not only empowers him but also grants him permission to be brutal, sadistic, and violent. Grandmother also argues, as Bruno recalls at a later point in the novel, that "you wear the right outfit and you feel like the person you're pretending to be" (205). Her words highlight the obvious, yet false, sense of importance ascribed to every individual. This importance is, however, not dependent upon one's subjectivity, but, paradoxically, only on the uniform one wears, which symbolically grants the individual entrance to the Nazis' performance of world dominance. To Grandmother, however, uniforms represent nothing but mere costumes that allow the individual to perform a role. Ironically, Grandmother used to be an actress, and her love for acting is shared by the children, particularly by Bruno. Because of her acting past, Grandmother knows that costumes can assist in successfully performing a role yet cannot replace the performance itself. For the Nazis, however, the uniform itself becomes the performance. Grandmother's comments therefore serve to expose the phantasmal nature of the play of omnipotence, a play in which soldiers like her son are nothing but puppets. Grandmother represents the voice of reason and common sense and is thus excluded from the family, and, by extension, from the irrational, perverse play enacted by the Nazis, to which her outspokenness could in fact pose a threat. Boyne illustrates her exclusion in the ways in which both Father and Grandfather react to her criticism: instead of arguing with her, they simply silence her and suspend her

from their play. This exclusion manifests itself in the gradual silencing of her voice, which seems to slowly fade out of the family's life until she dies alone far away in Berlin completely separated from her family. Ultimately, Grandmother's gradual exclusion serves to highlight the growing discrepancy between reality and the Nazis' fanatical fantasy, which becomes increasingly totalitarian.

Nazism and Education

The all-encompassing, totalitarian nature of Nazism also determines and shapes the idea of education. By perpetuating the irrational fantasies of such a regime under the cloak of education, the mechanisms of teaching become an indispensable pillar in attempting to transform a collective dream into reality. In order to achieve this transformation, Nazi ideology propagated the notion that the Party and its leader, Hitler, should replace the conventional family structure. For instance, from an early age, children were to be taken care of, not so much by their parents, but by the Party and its numerous youth organizations. It became mandatory for children of a certain age to join these organizations, such as the Hitler Youth and the BDM, that is, the *Bund Deutscher Mädel* (League of German Girls). Richard Bessel writes that

> [t]he Nazi youth organizations were among the most effective means of cementing the allegiance of the people to the regime, while also serving to dilute and undermine established traditional authority (i.e. of the school, the church, the parental home). (58)

These organizations subverted traditional family bonds and, most of all, instilled in the minds of young children the idea and image of Hitler as a father figure, as the overarching leader.

Boyne illustrates the dangers inherent in the Nazi methods of indoctrination in Bruno's sister Gretel. Gretel, born in 1931, behaves like a typical teenager. At first glance, her infatuation with Lieutenant Kotler who "looked very smart, striding around in a uniform...wearing...black boots...[sparkling] with polish and [with] yellow-blond hair...parted at the side" (71) appears to be merely a manifestation of her flirtatious, adolescent behaviour (73). However, an investigation of her infatuation with Kotler within the context of Nazism yields to another layer of discourse. Boyne portrays Kotler as the Aryan prototype propagated by Nazi ideology: tall, blond, good-looking, and strong. At the same time, his uniform not only visibly highlights his allegiance to Nazi ideology, but also legitimizes his brutal and violent behaviour towards those perceived to be a threat, or inferior, or not worthy of participating in the creation and subsequent enactment of world domination. For instance, Lieutenant Kotler frequently displays sadistic, ruthless behaviour towards the camp inmate Pavel, who works in the family's household. Kotler's violent outbursts towards Pavel are initially only verbal (76), but when Pavel accidentally spills some wine onto the Lieutenant's lap, he even attacks him physically: "Lieutenant Kotler grew very angry with Pavel and no one...stepped in to stop him doing what he did next, even though none of them could watch" (148-49). Kotler's frantic violent outburst immediately follows a scene, in which Father inquires into the whereabouts of Kotler's father, who used to be "a professor of literature at the university" (144); Kotler confesses that "[h]e left

Germany some years ago. Nineteen thirty-eight... I haven't seen him since" (145). The Lieutenant's father left Germany before the war broke out, which strongly suggests that the professor not only belonged to the intellectual elite of Germany, the majority of whom emigrated to neutral Switzerland before 1939, but also gestures towards the possibility that his father is Jewish. Boyne implies that the Lieutenant feels the need to compensate for his father's emigration and obvious unwillingness to support the German Reich by taking great pleasure in exerting physical power over those who are, like Pavel, excluded from the goal of achieving world domination. Gretel, completely absorbed by this idea, perceives Kotler's sadistic behaviour, which she in fact witnesses, as a visible manifestation of such power and dominance. Ultimately, Gretel's infatuation with Lieutenant Kotler is motivated by her unquestioning adherence to a phantasmal impression of omnipotence which both he but also, by extension, the leader of the Reich, embody. Like the majority of the German populace during that time, Gretel displays a libidinal investment in a fantasy of omnipotence that manifested itself in a deep love for Hitler (Mitscherlich 288). Thus Gretel's infatuation with the young soldier is, in fact, an infatuation with Hitler and the fantasy structure associated with him.

Her infatuation also visibly manifests itself in the way she dresses. When Hitler and Eva Braun come to dinner at the family's house one night, Gretel proudly wears "a white dress and knee socks and her hair...twisted into corkscrew curls" (118), an outfit which closely resembles the dress worn by the members of the League of German Girls to which Gretel because of her age supposedly belongs. Like her father and Kotler, the privilege of wearing the uniform of a Nazi organization grants Gretel a

sense of power that manifests itself not only on a physical but also on a psychological level. Her sense of power is illustrated in her demeaning, condescending and abusive behaviour towards her younger brother. Empowered by her uniform, Gretel constantly belittles Bruno, calling him an "idiot" (117).[13] Bruno, in contrast to his sister, feels rather uncomfortable in the uniform of the Hitler Youth that he has to wear on the occasion of Hitler's visit (118-19). As he admits to the Fury's companion, Eva: "[My shoes] are a *little* tight" (123), thus unconsciously foregrounding his discomfort with and subsequent exclusion from the fantasy, that is, from the play that the rest of his family dresses up for and performs.

Boyne further develops Bruno's exclusion from his family and the play they are performing through his relationship with the tutor, Herr Liszt. Unlike his sister Gretel, Bruno, with his childlike, inquisitive nature is too eager for knowledge to simply silently accept and thus fall prey to the Nazis' methods of indoctrination which Liszt tries to impose upon the children. Liszt, as Bruno senses, is most "particularly fond of history and geography" over literature (98). However, he further explains to Bruno that it is "not [his] own personal history" that is important but that of "the Fatherland," of the collective nation. Yet Bruno "[is not] entirely sure that Father [has] any land" (98), and it is his innocent, childlike, and rather naïve reaction to Liszt's statement that serves to highlight the inexplicability of Nazi ideology and to foreground the boy's unwillingness to subordinate himself to ideological notions and claims that are imposed upon him yet cannot be explained to those who refuse to believe in them. In contrast to Bruno, the other family members who unquestioningly

[13] Similarly, during a flirtatious conversation with Gretel, which is disturbed by Bruno's presence, Kotler calls the young boy, "little man" (72), thus diminishing the young boy's sense of self.

subscribe to and believe in the ideology by which they are enveloped are able to lead fairly normal and comparatively happy lives at Out-With. For instance, Father works from his office, from which he demands "discipline and efficiency" (43); Mother dutifully supports her husband; and Gretel behaves like a typical teenager, particularly in the presence of Lieutenant Kotler. Yet Bruno feels excluded from this particular familial order in which each member performs an important and indispensable role, except for him. Bruno

> couldn't understand how this had all come about. One day he was playing at home, having three best friends for life, sliding down banisters, trying to stand on his tiptoes to see right across Berlin, and now he was stuck here in this cold, nasty house. (15)

Driven by his need for friendship in this unfamiliar, uncomfortable and inhospitable environment, Bruno creates his own childish fantasy world that provides him with the possibility of finding his own explanations of a reality he cannot otherwise understand.

The impossibility of understanding his environment is powerfully conveyed through Bruno's mispronunciation of words that have become synonymous with and are inseparable from the actual historical context in which he exists, the Third Reich and the Holocaust. As noted above, instead of referring to Adolf Hitler as the *Führer*, Bruno calls him the "Fury" (3), a term which aptly describes the rage and destructiveness of the self-proclaimed leader. Similarly, Auschwitz becomes in Boyne's novel "Out-With" (24) and Gretel's explanation of its meaning: "[o]ut with the people who lived here before us" (25) serves to succinctly describe the enormity of the Holocaust contained within the word 'Auschwitz,' a word which frequently

functions as a metonym for the Jewish genocide. Bruno's inability to properly pronounce names and terms foregrounds the aesthetic distance by which Boyne refrains from describing graphic details. The use of aesthetic distancing serves to draw the child reader in the atmosphere of Bruno's world, and, by extension, in the actual historical context in which the boy's story is set, without overtly introducing or exposing the child reader to the traumatic and atrocious nature of the events of the past, particularly with regard to the ending. Boyne is foremost interested in exploring the reasons for Bruno's exclusion from the play his family perceives to be reality as well as empowerment, and is thus proudly performing. Most child readers will have experienced a similar sense of exclusion in their own lives at some point. Thus while the actual historical context of the Second World War and the Holocaust serves as a loose framework in which Bruno's story takes place, the decontextualized qualities of his narrative allow Boyne to explore the effects of exclusion on a child within the context of childhood rather than within a specific historical discourse. Eventually, it is the fabulated nature of Boyne's narrative, the fact that it is not a historical fiction and hence does not have to follow or stay true to history, that allows for Bruno's exploration of the barbed wire fence and for his growing friendship with Shmuel a Jewish boy who lives in the camp, a friendship that would have been impossible in reality.[14]

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[14] The fabulist nature of Boyne's novel has stirred great controversy amongst Holocaust scholars. In an online review of *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, Rabbi Benjamin Blech, for instance, accuses Boyne of distorting historical facts and creating a fairytale image of the Holocaust. According to Blech, "No one may dare alter the truths of the Holocaust, no matter how noble his motives. The Holocaust is simply too grim a subject for Grimm fairytales." For the full review, see Blech, "This well-meaning book ends up distorting the Holocaust," 29 April 2010, <http://www.aish.com/ci/a/48965671.html>.

The Fence, or the Impossibility of Friendship

Bruno's sense of isolation and exclusion is exacerbated when he looks out of his bedroom window and sees "emerging from a hut in the distance, a group of children huddled together" (37). They appear to be separated from him by a barbed wire fence "that [runs] along the length of the house and [turns] in at the top, extending further along in either direction" with "enormous bales of barbed wire...tangled in spirals" (31, 32). Yet Bruno is rather perplexed by

> the fact that all of them – the small boys, the big boys, the fathers, the grandfathers, the uncles, the people who lived on their own on everybody's road but didn't seem to have any relatives at all – were wearing the same clothes as each other: a pair of grey striped pajamas with a grey striped cap on their heads. (38)

The uniforms worn by the camp inmates remind Bruno of the soldiers at his house, who also "[wear] uniforms of varying quality and decoration and caps and helmets with bright red-and-black armbands and carr[y] guns" (100). Because of this visible uniformity and apparent similarity on both sides of the fence, Bruno wonders why Father said to him that the people in the camp are "not people at all" and that he has "nothing in common" with them (53). Through Bruno's eyes, the eyes of a nine-year-old child, Boyne illustrates the de-humanizing nature of Nazi ideology, which manifests itself in the objectification of the Jews. Forced to wear the striped uniforms, the camp inmates are literally stripped of their individuality. In contrast, the soldiers on Bruno's side of the fence willingly renounce their individuality by dressing up in the uniform of Hitler's army because the uniform empowers them and legitimizes

brutal acts of violence, in which the soldiers at Out-With, foremost Lieutenant Kotler, take great pleasure.

Embarking on an exploration of the perimeter of the barbed wire fence that separates him from the supposed happiness and liveliness that he wishes for and believes exists on the other side of the fence, Bruno sees a boy "sitting on the ground with a forlorn expression" (105). Bruno learns that the boy's name is Shmuel, a name which he has never heard. Shmuel also tells him that he is from Poland, a place with which Bruno is likewise unfamiliar. Innocently repeating the teachings of Nazi doctrines, Bruno says that "Germany is the greatest of all countries" (112). While Bruno's statement highlights the Nazi belief in German superiority and dominance, his ignorance about Poland, the country in which he is currently living, also stresses the totalitarian nature of Nazism's educational system which nullifies the existence of other countries by subsuming them under the cloak of the Thousand Year Reich. Yet the doctrines imposed on him by Nazism fail to assist Bruno in understanding his separation from Shmuel and the other children:

> It's so unfair...I don't see why I have to be stuck over here on this side of the fence where there's no one to talk to and no one to play with and you get to have dozens of friends and are probably playing for hours every day. (110-11)

Bruno naively believes that Shmuel has the privilege of living on the other side of the fence where life appears to be, in contrast to his own home, less lonely and cold. When Bruno learns that he and Shmuel even share the same birthday, "April the fifteenth nineteen thirty-four" (109), the young boy embarks on an exploration of the

supposed differences that he thinks are responsible for his separation from his new friend Shmuel. "What exactly is the difference?" he wonders to himself, "And who decided which people wore the striped pajamas and which people wore the uniform?" (100). Bruno believes his experiences to be remarkably similar to Shmuel's: Bruno's feelings during the family's move to Out-With closely resemble those experienced by Shmuel during his deportation to the camp and, like Shmuel, Bruno had to leave his familiar environment and best friends behind. Bruno turns to Gretel for an explanation of this imposed separation, yet his sister can only reiterate Nazi propaganda, telling Bruno that "the Opposite live on this side of the fence and the Jews live on that" (183), because, as she further explains to her brother, both sides "have to be kept together" and "can't mix" (182). Bruno, dissatisfied with Gretel's hollow answers, innocently asks, "can't someone just get [the Jews and the Opposite] together" (183) thus exposing the artificial nature of binaries based on the idea of difference at the core of Nazi ideology.

Boyne furthermore illustrates the constructed nature of those binaries and of Nazi ideology at large in the fence that separates Bruno and Shmuel. While Boyne seemingly asserts the inner similarities between the two boys based on their experiences and states of mind, he simultaneously visually highlights their differences. When Shmuel is brought to the family's house to polish glasses, he explains to Bruno who is quite surprised to find his new friend in his kitchen, that "they needed someone with small fingers" (167). Upon closer inspection, Bruno realizes that his and Shmuel's hands which he simply perceived to be the same size, are in fact quite different. Seeing the difference, Bruno notices that "his [own] hand [appears] healthy

and full of life" (167). It is only after Father shaves Bruno's head because he has lice and Bruno puts on "a pair of striped pyjama bottoms, a striped pyjama top and a striped cloth exactly like the one [Shmuel is] wearing" (202) that the visible difference carefully highlighted by the text up to this point collapses, and that the two boys look, as Shmuel states, "as if they [are]...exactly the same really" (204). Shmuel's words powerfully convey the illogic and nullity of racial binaries and discursively imposed ideological systems of division. Furthermore, by having Shmuel "[lift] the base of the fence" and Bruno "[roll] under it" (206) to enter the camp to assist Shmuel in his search for his father, Boyne not only draws attention to the constructed nature of separation in the form of the fence, but also suggests that "Out-With" destroys everyone physically as well as psychologically, even those who believe themselves to be on the other side of the fence.

Boyne foregrounds and conveys the destructive, deathly nature of the camp through pathetic fallacy. Once Bruno is inside the camp, the inmates are suddenly forced to gather together and Bruno and Shmuel are, against their will, caught in the middle of the crowd. As they start to march, "there [is...a] loud sound, and just as quickly the sky seemed to grow even darker, almost black, and rain poured down" (211). The weather, the darkness, and the loud sounds serve to vividly illustrate the boys' feelings and overall atmosphere inside the camp. Yet the weather is also indicative of the imminent danger and death that awaits the boys as they are marched into "a long room that was surprisingly warm and must have been very securely built because no rain was getting in anywhere. In fact it felt completely airtight" (212). While this description is reminiscent of a gas chamber, Boyne refrains from naming it

as such. Rather, by eschewing pre-formulated answers or explanations and instead leaving room for personal reflection, Boyne's tale demands that child and adult reader alike experience, along with the protagonists, the deceptive atmosphere of the Holocaust.

Boyne demonstrates the all-encompassing destructive force of Nazi ideology when the two boys are in the gas chamber: "Bruno found that he was still holding Shmuel's hand in his own and nothing in the world would have persuaded him to let go" (213). Paradoxically, it is in death that both Bruno and Shmuel can become friends for life, a notion that powerfully conveys the boys' release from oppressive, totalitarian ideological systems that destroy everyone. In fact, Bruno's death at the hand of the Nazis also destroys the rest of Bruno's family. After Bruno's disappearance, Mother remains in a state of constant lethargy, unable to confront the possibility of her son's death until she returns to Berlin with Gretel who is emotionally destroyed and "spent a lot of time in her room crying...because she missed Bruno so much" (215). Father remains at Out-With, psychologically scarred and physically shattered:

> [a] few months after [Bruno's disappearance] some other soldiers came to Out-With and Father was ordered to go with them, and he went without complaint and he was happy to do so because he didn't really mind what they did to him any more. (216)

Traumatized by his son's disappearance yet unable to entertain the idea that his own devotion to an ideology which openly demanded the extinction of people based on

ethnic and religious grounds, is responsible for his son's death, Bruno's father is completely indifferent to the fate that awaits him.

Ultimately, Boyne's novel vividly highlights the dangers inherent in acting out an all-encompassing, totalitarian ideology such as Nazism, which destroys not only those whom it deems to be a threat to its implementation, but also those who attempt to enact and perform its megalomaniacal convictions in reality. As the ambiguous ending and the lack of closure of *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* suggest, the repercussions of any ideology can turn into a devastating force, gradually destroying those who enacted it once this particular framework and its interpretative categories have been removed.

Conclusion

"After all," Boyne writes in his Author's Note,

> only the victims and survivors can truly comprehend the awfulness of that time and place; the rest of us live on the other side of the fence, staring through from our own comfortable place, trying in our own clumsy ways to make sense of it all. (218)

Boyne's statement succinctly describes the position of a distant witness, a position which includes generations born after the war, who did not live through the Second World War and the Holocaust on either side of the fence, as either victim, perpetrator, or bystander. The fence that separated Germans from Jews and other groups that the Nazis deemed to be inferior to their own Aryan master race continues to exist, less in a literal than in a symbolic way. Contemporary and future generations are separated from the past by such a figurative fence, a fence that can engender a false hope for

closure if the events of the past remain securely stored behind it, far away from our own lives. In order to continue the vital task of remembering those who lost their lives on the other side of the fence, including innocent children like Bruno and Shmuel who function, on a contextual level, as representative cultural figures and readers, we have to continue to address the past, to preserve its memory, and to integrate it into cultural memory for future generations. Of course, as Boyne posits, it is impossible from a contemporary, temporally and geographically distant perspective, to truly understand the horrors of the past whose totality remains incomprehensible even for those who had to live through it. Yet he also contends that we should not perceive the underlying practices, structures, and doctrines propagated by Nazism as an ideological belief system only specific to the historical context in which it originated. Rather, through the use of aesthetic distancing within the specific precepts of the fable, which, as a genre, should both instruct and delight its readers, Boyne's narrative becomes universal and decontextualized. Ultimately, it is both the universal, decontextualized nature of the narrative that is able to suggest that "Fences like this exist all over the world. We hope you never have to encounter one," as the author states on the back cover of the novel.

By establishing the young German boy as the figure of identification with which the child reader can develop an empathic relation, as well as by continuously highlighting Bruno's inquisitive nature which exists in stark contrast to the blindness of the adults and their silent acceptance and active perpetuation of ideological beliefs and practices, the author argues for cultural sensitization. The development of such sensitization should allow for an inclusion of various forms of otherness which,

particularly within the current context of globalization, constitutes an integral part of the process of creating and sustaining a multicultural society, and helps instil and subsequently perpetuate values such as charity, equality, respect and, most importantly, tolerance.

Boyne highlights and simultaneously dissolves the barrier between past and present in the implicit moral imperative at the end of Bruno's tale that: "all this happened a long time ago and nothing like that could ever happen again. Not in this day and age" (216). These last, powerful lines whose ironic undertone serves to highlight the continuing existence of binaries and divisions based on race, ethnicity, culture, and religion, resonate with the child reader, who is asked to carefully negotiate the presence of racial prejudices and discrimination, and the danger inherent in totalizing modes of explanations within his or her own environment. Through such a reflection, the child reader can begin to address the ways in which the past is being incorporated into the present, and thus assume the position of a distanced witness.[15] Ultimately, a children's novel such as *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* constitutes a new way of witnessing from a distance within the context of globalization. Within this particular context, the novel's decontextualized qualities speak to the ensuing internationalization of Holocaust memory, a process which tends to incorporate the memory of the past into processes of the present. While the Holocaust, in the near future, and in the face of the absence of actual eyewitnesses, will become an event of a

[15] Similarly, Boyne also includes a more explicit moral imperative in the Author's Note. This explicit imperative serves to explain his own motivation for writing a novel about the Holocaust, while it simultaneously reminds adult readers of their duty of continuing to remember the events of the past, and of passing on knowledge about the Holocaust in the form of cultural memory. In cultural memory, literature becomes an integral means of transmitting a knowledge, not in a totalizing, abstract discourse specific to historiography, but in the form of individual stories. As Boyne writes, "Their lost voices must continue to be heard; their untold stories must continue to be recounted. For they represent the ones who didn't live to tell their stories themselves" (218).

remote past, the inaccessibility of the psychological motivations and the incomprehensibility of the Nazis' ideological belief system that enabled the mass murder in the first place will persist through fiction to preoccupy the minds of generations to come as they continue to negotiate within their own time instances of discrimination, marginalization, and prejudices and, in so doing, act as distant witnesses to the Holocaust.

Conclusion

In "New Soundings in Holocaust Literature: A Surplus of Memory," Froma Zeitlin asks what happens to the memory of the Holocaust and its victims, "when the last eyewitnesses are gone and when the Holocaust inevitably passes into history" (174). This dissertation can be read as a response to such a question, as it examines the limitations and possibilities of the act of witnessing from a distance. I have focussed throughout this dissertation on the centrality of the idea of distance with regard to the act of witnessing and remembering the victims. In *The Differend*, Jean-François Lyotard highlights the role of temporal distance for witnessing the veracity of a limit event such as Auschwitz, stating that "[r]eality is not a matter of the absolute eyewitnesses, but a matter of the future" (53). His statement foregrounds the impossibility faced by the actual eyewitnesses of bearing witness to an event that is not only unprecedented, but whose enormity exceeds the human capacity for understanding. At the same time, Lyotard gestures towards the importance of temporal distance from the Holocaust in order to make graspable the event in all its extremities. Of course, sixty-five years after the end of the Second World War and the revelation of the Holocaust, distance can simply be understood as the logical temporal distance from the events of the past. While this distance has become and continues to be an integral part of the act of witnessing and allows for a detailed exploration of the extent of the event, it also imposes limitations, which must be addressed and negotiated by postwar generations who wish to fulfill the vital task of remembering the victims of the Holocaust.

As the discussion of German author Tanja Dückers's novel, *Himmelskörper*, has demonstrated, witnessing the Holocaust from merely a temporal distance can in fact impede a critical investigation of the events that led to the implementation of the Jewish genocide. Germany and its literatures are still intricately connected to and associated with the events of the past, revealing an emotional attachment to the event which has to be understood as a consequence of both the lack of spatial distance and proximity to the language that made the bureaucratic planning of the mass murder of European Jewry possible. German, the language of the perpetrators, has remained intricately connected to the Jewish genocide and is still associated with the Nazis' penchant for linguistic manipulations. In his diary, *Ich will Zeugnis ablegen bis zum letzten* (*I will bear witness*), philologist Klemperer refers to the German of the Third Reich as the *Lingua Tertii Imperii*, which is, above all, characterized by its tendency to circumscribe reality. In *"Endlösung": Völkerverschiebung und der Mord an den europäischen Juden*, Götz Aly, discussing the implications of the so-called "Final Solution," describes the language of the protocol of the Wannsee conference as follows:

> The protocol is written using the usual secret code invented by the Nazis, who preferred to employ circumlocutory terms such as "deportation" and "relocation" rather than words that would undeniably foreground their intention of killing... The purpose of this rather technical, abstract language was to integrate the so-called "Final Solution" into the bureaucratic and political daily routine and life of the German state. (363; my translation)

In *Die zweite Schuld oder Von der Last Deutscher zu sein*, Ralph Giordano explains that this tendency to circumscribe reality, instead of openly addressing it, did not vanish with the end of the Third Reich, but has instead become an integral part of the German discourse about Nazism, the Second World War, and the Holocaust (291). Nazi jargon was marked by an abundant usage of euphemisms, such as *Endlösung* (Final Solution) instead of *Völkermord* (genocide), terms which are, to this day, frequently, yet paradoxically also hesitantly, used to refer to the Holocaust. Significantly, the term "Holocaust" itself was only introduced into the German language after the broadcast of the American TV series, "Holocaust," in the late 1970s. Since then the term "Auschwitz," which had been commonly used to refer to the Jewish genocide, has been replaced by the term "Holocaust," whose spelling and pronunciation has lately even been 'germanized' to become *Holokaust*.[1] Yet despite this rather questionable attempt at claiming and subsequently appropriating a word for the Jewish genocide into the German language in order to demonstrate that the language of the perpetrators has undergone a transformation, an adequate language that would allow Germans to critically and openly investigate Germany's past has still not been found. German as a language continues to fail in creating a discursively structured context in which to both investigate the past and commemorate its victims. Instead, monuments, memorials, and museums act as witnesses to the past within a context and atmosphere characterized by this failure of language. Particularly since re-unification, Germany has displayed a strong tendency to continuously and incessantly erect a variety of monuments, memorials, and museums, the latest example being the

[1] German historian Guido Knopp first used this spelling as the title to his 2000 study about the genocide, arguing that German needed its own version of the term "Holocaust."

so-called "Topographie des Terrors" (topography of terror) in Berlin, which houses an exhibition about the terror regime of the *Gestapo*, Hitler's secret German state police.[2] The architecture of places like the Holocaust memorial and the Jewish museum in Berlin, designed by Jewish-American architects Peter Eisenman and Daniel Libeskind, respectively, assume the role of language by visually communicating the enormity and consequences of the event; simultaneously, they draw attention to the all-encompassing speechlessness and silence in Germany regarding the crimes committed by Germans. The failure of the German language to address the Holocaust, the spatial proximity to the place where the Holocaust was implemented and subsequently carried out, and the almost complete absence of Jewry in Germany as a result of the Holocaust, makes it virtually impossible, particularly for postwar generations for whom Jews and Jewish culture remain an unfamiliar and nameless entity, to bear witness to the past from within the nation of the former perpetrators. Yet this is not to say that witnessing the Holocaust and critically investigating the events of the past remains impossible for Germans. Germans can in fact assume the role of witnesses to the past if they do so from outside their own country, free from feelings of guilt and shame, feelings which continue to be evoked in young Germans through German educational policies. And they can bear witness if they revert to a language which offers them the chance for an unbiased examination of the past within a context in which the peaceful co-existence of Jews and non-Jews is the norm, not the exception.

It is precisely this combination of temporal, geographical, and linguistic distance that has made this thesis possible. My own position as a third-generation

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[2] This new museum is, like the Holocaust memorial and the Jewish museum, located in Berlin and built on the ruins of the former Gestapo headquarters. It was opened, after 23 years of planning, by German president Horst Köhler on May 6, 2010.

German, who was born and raised within the country of the former perpetrators, which still struggles to find an adequate means of remembering its victims, would have posed an insurmountable obstacle to address and negotiate the past. However, the possibilities engendered by spatial and linguistic distance that presented itself to me when I came to Canada have allowed me to address from a critical and sober-minded perspective my country's past and the ways in which it is being remembered by victims and perpetrators alike,.

In Germany, Jewish culture is still virtually non-existent. While Jewish communities have slowly been establishing themselves in a reunified Germany since the fall of the iron curtain, particularly in big cities such as Berlin and Munich, which were before the Second World War centres of Jewish life and culture, communication between Jews and Germans is rare. The lack of interaction is due to a number of reasons. First, many Jews come from the former Soviet Union; their mother tongue is Russian and they only have a limited knowledge and command of German. Second, and perhaps more importantly, any Jewish institution in Germany, be it a synagogue, a house for Talmud students, or a museum, is heavily guarded and protected by the German police due to the fear of anti-Semitic assaults, which to this day, still happen. The steady presence of the German police is often intimidating and seems to in effect stand in the way of any interaction between Jews and Germans. A separation between Jews and Germans in Germany continues to exist on various levels and makes any attempt at regaining respectful and peaceful social interactions between Jews and Germans almost impossible. To me, growing up in Germany, Jews only existed in history textbooks, not as individual people or families with personal histories but as

emaciated figures in black-and-white photographs, far removed from my own life and history. In contrast, Jewish life and culture in Canada are not only integrated into but are in fact an important and thriving part of society. The relationship between members of various ethnic groups and backgrounds, which is so painfully missing in Germany, is an intricate part of the multicultural society that characterizes this country. What is absent in Germany is present in Canada, and this presence makes it possible for me to slowly recognize and realize the loss caused by the Holocaust in Europe; accordingly, it also allows me to question the ways in which Germany copes with the absence of Jewry in its midst, an absence which impedes the vital act of working through the past.

This thesis not only originated from my own temporal and geographical distance from the country of the former perpetrators, but also from a linguistic distance. Writing in German would have meant my having to continuously and cautiously weigh every word in an attempt to avoid reiterating Nazi vocabulary, to a point where the right choice of discourse would have become more important than the content. English, in contrast, is a distant language free from these oppressive forces that pose an obstacle for a discursive negotiation of the past. Detached as it is from the Holocaust, it appears to lend itself to a critical investigation of this particular past. Indeed, because of its ostensible neutrality, English has in fact become the primary language of Holocaust literature and scholarship[3] and writing in English has allowed me to also explore my own positionality and responsibility as a third-generation

[3] As mentioned above, German, the language of the perpetrators, remains contaminated by Nazi vocabulary; similarly, Yiddish, the language spoken by the majority of the victims from Eastern Europe, not only continues to be reminiscent of life in the camps, but, most importantly, was virtually extinguished as well. Mendel Mann speaks of the "assassination" of the Yiddish language, since only very few people who spoke Yiddish survived (374).

German. This very thesis itself can thus in this sense be considered a manifestation of the act of witnessing the Holocaust and its aftermath from a distance.

Throughout this dissertation I argue that the act of witnessing the Holocaust from a distance manifests itself in the ensuing proliferation of a so-called post-Holocaust literature written by members of the second and third generation after the war. Moishe Postone and Eric Santner assert that "members of the second and third generation have come to realize that the catastrophe undergone by their elders has left traces in their minds and bodies, traces that call for elaboration and interpretation" (*Catastrophe* 1). Above all, it is the loss of causality evoked by the Holocaust and the arbitrariness of the reasons behind the genocide that continuously force postwar generations to incessantly construct new explanations and, in doing so, to bear witness to the historical event by testifying to its after-effects.

The novels I have chosen to discuss in this thesis display a variety of ways, conceptually and aesthetically, in which the Holocaust continues to be addressed and remembered. These ways range from illustrating the difficulties in finding and subsequently creating a lost history, to negotiating one's own positionality in relation to the past, to investigating perpetrator history. Postwar authors writing from a geographical and linguistic distance from the Holocaust are able to adopt a more critical point of view in their investigation of the legacy of the past, and its impact on the present. It is precisely this multifaceted temporal, spatial, and linguistic distance that allows, for instance, for an investigation of the psychological motivations of the perpetrators in Martin Amis's novel, *Time's Arrow*. However, Amis's fictional examination and his abundant use of postmodern narrative strategies also gesture

towards the helplessness of the human mind in trying to understand the complete lack of reason behind the mass murder. In that regard, the style of Amis's text and its use of narrative reversal can be understood as an act of bearing witness from a distance to the all-encompassing nature of the Holocaust on the one hand; on the other, the author's unbiased, emotionally detached investigation of the past and the present, respectively, represents a critique of the ways in which perpetrators like the protagonist of *Time's Arrow* could escape prosecution. Amis's narrative thus testifies to and critiques the ways in which the trauma and legacy of the past is incorporated into and addressed in the present.

The postmodern narrative strategies utilized by Amis foreground the intricate connection between the growing interest in perpetrator history and the age of postmodernism. In a 2010 issue of *Memory Studies*, Jonathan Dunnage writes in his editorial that "[p]erpetrator memories should be considered in relation to the postmodern age, in which the traditional hegemony of the historian is challenged" (92). And indeed, the ensuing interest in perpetrator history and recent proliferation of perpetrator memories particularly within the realm of fiction seem to emphasize the importance and possibilities in the age of postmodernism of exploring the history and psychological motivations of perpetrators. In fact, coinciding with the rise in academia of theories of postmodernism in the early 1990s, the first fictionalized perpetrator histories were written and published. An early example of such a fictional perpetrator history is South African writer Christopher Hope's 1992 novel, *Serenity House*. It fictionalizes perpetrator history, albeit subliminally, by telling the story of Max Montfalcon who lives peacefully in a retirement residence until it is revealed one

day that he worked as an anthropologist for the Nazis. However, the latest and potentially most controversial example of a fictional account of a perpetrator-collaborator is certainly Jewish-American writer Jonathan Littell's 2006 novel, *Les Bienveillantes* (*The Kindly Ones*), which consists of a fictional monologue of a ruthless and sadistic SS officer who reflects upon his life without feelings of remorse or guilt for his victims, but only for himself. The controversy surrounding the publication of Littell's novel demonstrates that the public is still rather hesitant to focus exclusively on the perpetrator experience, as such a focus can run the risk of marginalizing or even denigrating the victims. However, the growing interest in perpetrator history and memory both in historiography and in fiction suggests that an investigation of the causes and motivations that enabled the Holocaust is crucial to the gaining of deeper insight into the event. Thus the idea of fictionalizing perpetrator history and memory represents an area for further rich research, particularly at a time when the voices of the perpetrators, like those of the victims, will slowly and irrevocably disappear.[4]

As this investigation has demonstrated, a multifaceted distance from the Holocaust can perpetuate the ethical and moral obligation of bearing witness and of keeping alive the memory of those who perished. Postwar authors who actively rely on and play with the possibilities engendered by distance can create, from different perspectives and backgrounds, literary representations of the Holocaust that render possible critical reflection upon the events of the past and its lingering shadow in the present; in doing so, they assume the position of the distant witness and fulfil the

[4] The temporal distance from the event and the pending loss of the last perpetrators may also account for the recent interest in and rush towards putting the last perpetrators, who are still alive, on trial. This judicial interest in persecuting war criminals manifests itself, for instance, in the current Demjanjuk trial in Munich.

ethical and moral obligation of remembering the victims. As the protagonist Henry in Yann Martel's 2010 novel, *Beatrice & Virgil*, explains,

> [w]ith the Holocaust, we have a tree with massive historical roots and only tiny, scattered fictional fruit. But it's the fruit that holds the seed! It's the fruit that people pick. If there is no fruit, the tree will be forgotten. (16)

The growing irreversible temporal distance from the Nazi attempt to eliminate European Jewry, the foreseeable loss of actual witnesses, victims, perpetrators, and bystanders, and with them, the personal memories of atrocities both inflicted and endured, heralds the onset of an irrevocable transition from the interpersonal, communicative transmission of personal memories to transgenerational cultural memory. Fictionalizing the Holocaust will become an important means of drawing attention to individual, personal memories and fates and of transforming and subsequently preserving these personal memories within the realm of cultural memory. Of course, the idea of fictionalizing the Holocaust has been and continues to be surrounded by a heated debate focussing on the question of authority in writing about the past. While Wiesel has argued that a novel about Auschwitz should never be written, Semprun has recognized the potential of fiction in representing the event as the aesthetic distance from the real event allows for a connection between empathy and critical reflection to occur. The concerns surrounding the fictionalization of the Holocaust in the future are far from being resolved. But as long as writers continue to thematize stylistically, conceptually, and contextually the various losses engendered by the Holocaust, and to warn future generations of the nature and persistent threat of

radical evil, they not only fulfil the ethical obligation of bearing witness from a distance but also ascertain that the victims of the Holocaust continue to be remembered.

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