Third-Generation Holocaust Representation

Cultural Expressions of World War II
Interwar Preludes, Responses, Memory

Phyllis Lassner, Series Editor

Third-Generation Holocaust Representation

trauma, history, and memory

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For Willis Salomon
—V.A.

For Professor Ephraim (Hal) Mizruchi, mentor and mentsch
—A.L.B.

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Third-Generation Holocaust Representation

CHAPTER 1

On the Periphery
The "Tangled Roots" of Holocaust Remembrance for the Third Generation

It seems that the impact of the family legacy continues into the third generation. The grandchildren of survivors are still deeply affected by their elders' experiences, memories, accounts.

—EVA HOFFMAN, *AFTER SUCH KNOWLEDGE*

From the psychoanalytic point of view the Jewish people can be seen not only as a socio-religious group, but also as a group united by a common trauma.

—MARTIN S. BERGMAN AND MILTON E. JUCOVY, *GENERATIONS OF THE HOLOCAUST*

"The origin of a story is always an absence," intones the narrator of third-generation writer Jonathan Safran Foer's novel, *Everything Is Illuminated*, the story of a young man in search of his grandfather's past.[1] This search will take the narrator out of his familiar middle-class American life into the unknown and unstable territory of the Ukraine, but also, more significantly, into the perilous terrain of Holocaust memory, a quest taking him not only out of place, but out of the comforts of proximate, recognizable time as well. He, like others of his generation, follows, to borrow a term from the Canadian poet and novelist Anne Michaels, a "blind guide," steering a tortuous course along the ruins of uncertain and

indistinct memory without the benefit—or burden—of direct escort.[2] While the children of Holocaust survivors—the second generation—grew up as "witnesses to an uncompromising trauma that held the parents hostage," as second-generation writer Thane Rosenbaum suggests, the third generation must navigate with an inexact, approximate map, a broken narrative.[3] Theirs is a "re-created past," a matter of "filling in gaps, of putting scraps together."[4] The American-born storyteller of *Everything Is Illuminated*, like other Holocaust narrators and writers of the third generation, begins his sojourn with an absence, a chasm where a narrative once existed, a hazardous opening into which individual histories have fallen. As Andrea Simon, in her memoir *Bashert: A Granddaughter's Holocaust Quest*, laments, for the grandchild of Holocaust survivors, "The Holocaust is one big empty hole."[5] And it is a hole into which the third generation, with painstakingly unswerving descent, will fall. These are writers, who, as third-generation writer Erika Dreifus puts it, "born in or on the edges of the 1970s . . . have published . . . narratives inspired . . . by their grandparents' encounters with Nazism, and by their own Holocaust-related family histories of war, immigration, and survival," writers for whom stories of the Holocaust have existed on the periphery of their consciousnesses, an outline casting remote shadows around the margins of their lives.[6] It is this periphery upon which the third generation trespasses in an attempt to capture memory and fill the ever-widening gap between those who directly suffered the events of the Holocaust and lived to recount their experiences and those for whom that particular history can only be imaginatively reconstructed from an approximation of that time and place, events excavated from the "shards" of memories, as one of novelist Ehud Havazelet's characters reveals, "refracting no more than their miserable incompleteness."[7]

The Dilemma of the Third Generation

Third-generation stories are more often than not overheard and unevenly pieced together, stories that, like the old photographs of unknown and long deceased relatives in Margot Singer's collection of short fiction, *Pale of Settlement*, "bore no resemblance" to the known world, "as if they'd come from another century, another world."[8] French writer Henri Raczymow here clearly articulates the problem for post-Holocaust generations:

> A parenthesis was formed by the before and after, the prewar and postwar; it was a frame in whose center lay silence . . . Only silence could evoke the horror. . . . I could, though only in my imagination, conjure up life before, claim to remember a Poland unknown and engulfed, whose language I had heard but never spoken. I could also portray what happened afterwards. . . . But what happened between the before and the after, when the drama was played out, when all disappeared, was off limits to me. I had no right to speak of it. . . . My question was not "*how* to speak" but "*by what right* could I speak," I who was not a victim, survivor, or witness. To ask, "By what right could I speak," implies the answer, "I have no right to speak." However, as any psychoanalyst will tell you, the time comes when you have to speak of what is troubling you. (Raczymow, 102)

These are generations that grew up under the watchful if secreted gaze of both the living and the dead—those who, like the granddaughter of Holocaust victims in Thane Rosenbaum's novel, *The Golems of Gotham*, grew up in "A house haunted by abandonment . . . A haunted Holocaust house" (143), filled with ghost stories and whose alliterative reverberation arrests forward movement, reeling us back in history and making emphatic the final sound of the H's aspirated exhalation. The third generation, unlike the preceding generation, the children of Holocaust survivors whose lives, unbuffered, were the direct, unmediated measure of their parents' survival, must reconstruct events from, as Canadian writer Alison Pick discloses, incomplete, oblique, cryptically coded, and elusive knowledge, "only a fraction of the story."[9]

Thus such attempts at knowledge-making are patchwork, weaving together the strands of stories—"so many jumbles of memories," as Andrea Simon puts it—in an attempt to create a unified narrative out of fragments (Simon, 260). The modes of discovery must draw upon a collage of sensations, affects, competing and broken memories, implied and circuitous hints, sideways references and whispered asides, a whiff of knowing, as if the information were bracketed within imaginary dashes, forethought and afterthought, an endnote, a postscript to loss. Attempting to create a coherent narrative from fragments seized haphazardly, the granddaughter of Holocaust survivors in Julie Orringer's novel, *The In-*

visible Bridge, appears as a watcher, an intuitive interpreter of her grandparents' "history":

> They had lived through the war. Every now and then it drifted into their speech: *During the war*, and then a story about how little they'd had to eat, or how they'd survived the cold, or how long they'd gone without seeing each other. She'd learned about that war in school, of course—who had died, who killed whom, how, and why . . . She'd learned other things about the war from watching her grandmother, who saved plastic bags and glass jars, and kept bottles of water in the house in case of disaster . . . and who, at times, would begin to cry for no reason. And she'd learned about it from her father, who'd been hardly more than a baby at the time but who could remember walking with his mother through ruins.[10]

Thus the third generation must gather knowledge piecemeal, from vague references, indirect stories, conversations overheard, oblique observation, and from documents, abstract "histories." Above all else, this is a generation for whom unconscious accommodations and emendations are a requirement for living among or belonging to those who experienced considerable trauma, all the while fearing, as the third-generation narrator of the 2011 Israeli film *The Flat* does, that "the meaningful things were always left unspoken."

The third generation, not unlike the second generation, as Henri Raczymow suggests, is caught in something of a "double bind," caught, that is, "in the abyss between [the] imperious need to speak and the prohibition on speaking" (102–3). And even if this "prohibition" is self-imposed, the tension between the need to bear witness to the past and the anticipated taboo against doing so creates the conditions for fraught self-reckoning and anxious expression among the third generation, an anxiety born from their awareness of their woefully incomplete knowledge and their likely transgression, a fear of intrusion and fraudulent appropriation. But, as we know, that which is taboo is all the more the object of fantasized desire. Thus the literary products of this third generation of Holocaust writers are narratives—memoirs, novels, short stories, quasi-historical accounts—that cast a backward glance over lives and his-

tories lived and lost, family histories that, as the granddaughter of Holocaust survivors in Rosenbaum's *The Golems of Gotham* discovers, "are so big, the future can't overshadow the past" (42). For this grandchild, as well as others in the literature of the third generation, the Holocaust "is always present and real, even though it happened a long time ago" (ibid.). Because of the receding proximity of the events of the Holocaust for a generation moving apace into the clamor and confusions of the twenty-first century, the discovery and transmission of such stories, exacted and extended memories, become all the more urgent, "before you lose the chance" (254), as one of Ehud Havazelet's characters cautions in the novel *Bearing the Body*. These narratives expose an anxious fear of belatedness, of late arrival to an inheritance, of a moral birthright that has bypassed them. "Do you understand what happens . . . when memory fails?" warns one of Margot Singer's characters in the short story collection *Pale of Settlement* ("Deir Yassin," 105). But such foreboding is countered by the rueful acknowledgement of one of Rosenbaum's third-generation characters that "the past does not walk away without a fight."[11]

There is a very distinct sense among the writing of the third generation that time is running out. The truth, as the grandchild in Thane Rosenbaum's novel *The Stranger within Sarah Stein* uneasily comes to recognize, is that "survivors aren't like cats . . . After a while, time and luck run out. Survivors don't have that many lives" (130). In light of the inevitable end of direct testimony, as Jacob Lothe, Susan Suleiman, and James Phelan ask in *After Testimony: The Ethics and Aesthetics of Holocaust Narrative for the Future*, once the last of the witnesses have disappeared, "Will the Holocaust become, perhaps for the first time, truly 'past history'?"[12] What, in other words, comes "after" direct testimony? The award-winning Israeli writer and daughter of survivors, Nava Semel, captures this fraught moment in her novel *And the Rat Laughed*. A granddaughter interviews her nameless Tel Aviv grandmother, who had been a hidden child during the Shoah, about her experience for a school project. This interview sets in motion the novel's central question: "What happens to memory when it depends upon its 'original owner'?"[13] How does one reclaim a memory that is not one's own?

The narratives of third-generation witnesses reveal anxiously motivated patterns of attachment and pursuit, narrative journeys, both imagined and real—both physical and psychic—back to the point of trau-

matic origin. These are fraught journeys largely because of the lack of direct knowledge and the confusions between fact and imagined reality. The more temporally distanced from the events of the Holocaust, the more tenuous the stories become—stories of stories told, second- and third-hand versions of names, places, and the unfolding of events. In such instances, as the late psychologist Dan Bar-On suggests, there are, to be sure, "historical" truths that describe "what happened"—but there are also "narrative truths"—"how someone tells what happened."[14] It is through such "intergenerational transmission" that "one generation's story can influence and shape the stories of the next generations" (Bar-On, 335–36). Furthermore, it is one thing to know the overarching historical narrative, the big picture, and another to find the individuated particulars of personal and distinct family histories. As Andrea Simon admits of her attempts to locate the fate of her grandmother's family in what was once the village of Volchin in Belarus: "I know that these facts are as elusive as the scattered ashes of my massacred relatives—ashes that lined village ditches, ashes that clung to crematoria walls, ashes that blanketed forest floors, ashes that have dissolved into nothingness" (xv). Admittedly, such "after" knowledge, both real and fantasized, takes shape in the stories acquired by the third generation through competing versions, mired accounts, and in the interstices of fantasy. As one of Margot Singer's characters demands of another in the short story "Deir Yassin": "You think you can just go and dig up the truth like some potsherds or Roman coins?" (105). Memory, of course, cannot be reified; memory is not the thing itself, but rather an aftertaste of the event, undercurrents, and impressions that one can only imagine from afar, a flashing series of isolated images. Where does memory end and fantasy begin?

The literature of the third generation might be thought of as a mystery narrative with the writer as the dogged sleuth, "digging around in the ruins of memory," to borrow a phrase from the survivor Ida Fink, but also tunneling backward through time and space, all the while aware that time is running out.[15] And, in some cases, the places themselves, like those who once inhabited them, are lost to obscurity, a kind of vanishing act, as the granddaughter in Rosenbaum's novel *The Stranger within Sarah Stein* suspects of her grandmother, as if hiding were a natural instinct: "She was smart about secrets . . . secrets of her own, and secret hiding places . . . It was like she disappeared" (38). For Rosenbaum's

narrator, this much is certain: "The Chosen People and the People of the Book are also the People Undercover. There were so many reasons to hide" (65). The inheritance of this generation is loss. As one of Singer's narrators acknowledges, "The places her mother talked about had vanished into a pink blotch that spread across the top of the map that pulled down over the blackboard in Susan's classroom like a window shade. Vilna, Lwów, Bessarabia, Belarus. The Pale of Settlement. You couldn't go to those parts of the world any longer. They were gone" (188). How is one to locate people and places that are no longer there?

For Singer's third-generation character, "Of the city her grandparents had known, there was hardly a trace" (35). This acute sense of loss and longing is reflected in third-generation novelist Nicole Krauss's observation that "it has something to do with—or everything to do with—the fact that my grandparents came from these places that we could never go back to because they'd been lost . . . And people were lost. My great-grandparents and lots of great-uncles and aunts died in the Holocaust. I don't know; maybe it's something that's inherited in the blood, a sense of a loss of that thing and a longing for it."[16] As the very title of Alison Pick's novel understatedly suggests, the distance that the third-generation writer must travel—emotionally, imaginatively, and logistically—is, indeed, "far to go."

Despite these complexities and difficulties of both discovery and transmission, there has been an outpouring of writing by yet another generation of writers representing the Holocaust. These works speak to the urgent compulsion to continue the memory of the Shoah, to secure its protected passage into the future. But what kinds of stories will writers with such a tenuous link to the facts of the Shoah tell, and how will these stories be received in the public consciousness? How, as Jakob Lothe and others ask, "will writers and filmmakers who may have no personal connection to the event engage with that history: what kinds of stories will they tell and will they succeed in their effort to keep the public memory of the event from being lost?" (Lothe, 1). These stories are fractured by distance and inaccessibility, hampered by a tentative grip on "knowing." As one of novelist Rachel Kadish's characters acknowledges, there is a kind of sterility in the information they have received: "I dredge lessons learned in Hebrew school: *We will remember the six million, we will preserve the memories, in our hearts we keep them alive*. I shake my head

with confusion. How pallid, how insulting these phrases seem. *Always remember, never forget*, the Hebrew school teachers urged us. I want to ask them, What can that possibly mean?"[17] How might such depleted platitudes and rote formulaic prescriptions cross the affective divide? How, in other words, might a contemporary generation coming of age in the decades following the turn of the twenty-first century engage with that history? What stories will they tell?

Third-Generation Questions

For this third generation, the point of origin is not the war, nor direct devastation. The third generation did not grow up with a ready repository of stories; they were not the generation exposed, to borrow a term from Rosenbaum's novel, to "second hand smoke."[18] At the beginning for the third generation are questions, gaps, openings, and uncertainties. Third-generation Swedish writer Johanna Adorján begins her imperfect and therefore incomplete investigation of her grandmother's survival with a fugue of questions to which there are no clear answers: "How did she manage to hide herself? . . . How did she contrive to escape the ghetto and the concentration camp? . . . Why did she have [forged papers] and my grandfather did not? How did my grandmother survive the war?"[19] Such questions lack an interlocutor who might provide the key to the enigmatic riddle of her grandmother's improbable but fortuitous survival. But the condition of absence here does not deter the litany of questions that plague the granddaughter, adrift, untethered to a lifeline that was so precariously maintained by her grandmother, now severed, as if, in the simple act of asking, the questions will be answered, intuited, or absorbed, a repetition compulsion for which the questions themselves are a sort of mantra or prayer to contain the fear of the unknown, the terror and dread of the unrestrained imagination. We find a similar compulsion to ask questions in an attempt to reconstruct history in Daniel Mendelsohn's memoir, *The Lost: A Search for Six of Six Million*. Of the murdered daughter of the great uncle he never knew, a young woman who, before her capture, fought with the partisans, Mendelsohn will insistently soliloquize: "Which hills? Which partisans? When? How? Had she been hiding, too? Impossible to know."[20] Psychoanalytically, such repetition, even in the face of the obvious knowledge that such

queries will result in still more unanswered questions, is a symptom of the attempt to master the sensation of loss, to control, as it were, the traumatic outcome. Repetition, here, labors to do the work of frustrated remembrance.

Third-Generation Novelists and the Holocaust

Unlike Lot's wife, the third generation runs the risk of turning into pillars of salt if they do *not* look back. They are the new bearers of Shoah representation. But what does it mean to look back from a distance of three score years and ten? How do third-generation authors represent the Shoah when they lack personal memory of the Jewish catastrophe? In short, third-generation works represent the Holocaust through indirect means, as Jessica Lang argues in her insightful article, "*The History of Love*, the Contemporary Reader and the Transmission of Holocaust Memory." Lang notes the common thread in the Holocaust writing of authors born in the 1960s or after, whose "fiction regularly refers to and incorporates events from the Holocaust, but it also balances and counters these references with other narrative strategies or counterpoints."[21] Furthermore, third-generation authors view the Holocaust "as an indirect part of the narrative, one balanced by other, also important histories" (Lang, 46). For example, Michael Chabon's *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay* has three foci: American social-cultural history in the first half of the twentieth century, corruption in the comic book industry, and the Shoah. The third generation makes pilgrimages to what Pierre Nora terms "sites of memory," engaging in extensive archival research, and conducts interviews in its quest for further factual knowledge about the Holocaust.

The recognition of a distinctive third-generation Holocaust representation also extends to cinematic works. Israeli filmmaker Arnon Goldfinger's *The Flat*, for example, articulates a grandson's quest for details concerning his late survivor grandparents' Holocaust experiences. Cleaning out their apartment, he discovers voluminous correspondence between the decedents and a German who had served as Adolph Eichmann's assistant during the Shoah. Responding to an interviewer's query about the response in Israel to the coming end of the generation of survivors, Goldfinger reveals that he was "very much afraid of Yad Vashem's response . . .

because in the film you don't see anyone from the first generation." However, after a showing of *The Flat* in Jerusalem, Goldfinger was told by a Yad Vashem representative: "Arnon, this is the way now. These are the films we're looking for, because you present a new stage of the connection between the current generation and the Holocaust."[22]

The growing body of literature by the third generation includes memoirs and fictional narratives spanning continents and languages and is characteristically shaped by the literary conceit of the quest, a pursuit beginning and ending with the intersection of history and personal stories. Dominick LaCapra notes: "the Shoah and the attendant phenomena constitute a traumatic series of events with which we are still attempting to come to terms."[23] Third-generation writing might be thought of as quest narratives, in which the grandchild of survivors returns to the grandparent's place of residence before the onset of the Holocaust or to the site of the grandparent's displacement and harrowing experience in concentration camps, ghettos, forests, and decimated villages throughout Europe. These are quest plots that attempt to seek out and wrest hold of the unfolding of events with the hope of some disclosure and arbitration. David Roskies and Naomi Diamant, in discussing Mendelsohn's *The Lost*, describe the quest of post-Holocaust writers of the third generation as a "reverse journey—from present to severed past and from New World to Old."[24] Such quests reveal the impulse to return to the scene of the crime and thus put to rest unanswered questions that, as Roskies and Diamant suggest are not interested in revenge fantasies, but rather, "Just the thing itself: who did what to whom, where, when, how, and—possibly—why. This is the place of no return, and it takes years and miles and megabytes to get there" (Roskies, 163). And even then, as Daniel Mendelsohn uneasily suspects, "there might still be other clues" (Mendelsohn, 74).

These are very personal questions that begin and end with individual family members, questions that already assume the "big picture" but that are missing the particularized shape of suffering. Thus personal narratives, individual stories of lost family members, become a way into the enormity of the historical reality of the Shoah. As one of Havazelet's characters concedes, "The past loomed at him, seeped across the walls and floor. It was no longer something to be recalled from a distance—it was there in front of him, to walk into if he dared."[25] These are quests that both originate and conclude with the present and attempt to forge a

connection among generations, a compulsion to reanimate the fractured family by means of the orderliness of historical reconstruction. "All these people," Simon says in her memoir *Bashert*, and "So many stories—mine included—interweave through each other. Our roots may be tangled, but the main branch is far-reaching and strong. It extends from the Old World to the New, from shtetl to metropolitan city, from east to west, from one century to another, and across rivers and seas and oceans" (257). These are travels that often begin in the recognizable security and familiarities of ordinary, unexceptional daily life in the decades surrounding a new millennium. Yet, at the opening of Simon's narrative of her quest to locate her grandmother's past, the icons of familiar industrialized American life inevitably take on the sinister shape of images of another world. Simon's journey begins at home where "Frigid blasts seem to belch from New Jersey smokestacks, catapult like cannonballs across the Hudson, gathering momentum through the narrow branches of barren linden trees, and burst through my poorly sealed Riverside Drive windows" (1). Such images of smokestacks against the barren trees become harbingers of suffering and annihilation and are ominous reminders of another world that evocatively take her back in imagined time.

Such "time travels"—spatial, temporal, linguistic, imaginative—take the shape of "return narratives" that Marianne Hirsch suggests hold "the promise of revelation and recovery," but inevitably "defer any possibility of narrative closure."[26] Works of the third generation include memoirs such as Daniel Mendelsohn's *The Lost: A Search for Six of Six Million*, Andrea Simon's *Bashert: A Granddaughter's Holocaust Quest*, Felice Cohen's *What Papa Told Me*, and Johanna Adorján's *An Exclusive Love*. Short stories such as "A Hat of Glass," by Nava Semel (a second-generation writer who writes of the third and succeeding generations) and "Until the Entire Guard Has Passed" by Leah Aini return to the backdrop of the Shoah, as do collections such as Margot Singer's *The Pale of Settlement* and Erika Dreifus's *Quiet Americans*. Among the novels that have as their subject the Holocaust from a third-generation perspective are Julie Orringer's *The Invisible Bridge*, Alison Pick's *Far To Go*, Nava Semel's *And the Rat Laughed*, Nicole Krauss's *The History of Love* and *Great House*, Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything Is Illuminated*, Michael Chabon's *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Klay*, Rachel Kadish's *From a Sealed Room*, and Sara Houghteling's *Pictures at an Exhibition*.

This third wave of literary representation of the Holocaust is primarily characterized by narratives either written by third-generation Holocaust writers, specifically, that is, the grandchildren of Holocaust survivors, or by those, more broadly defined, who explicitly approach the subject of the Holocaust from a third-generation perspective, that is, narratives that engage the third generation as part of, as Eva Fogelman puts it, this "phenomenal intergenerational dialogue."[27] These are writers who, as Jessica Lang argues, "mark a second transition" in Holocaust representation, "or another remove from the eyewitness: the first transition from eyewitness to a recounting by the witness now becomes, as the Holocaust enters history, an *indirect* relation to the original eyewitness" (46). These are writers who are at a third-generation remove from the Holocaust, who are both subjects of historiography and belated objects of the histories they would uncover.

Writers of the third generation have either an actual or imagined kinship with those direct witnesses of the Holocaust. The reference to "generation," then, in this context is familial as well as cultural. And it might usefully encompass those writers who are not by date of birth in the third generation themselves, but create characters who are third-generation witnesses to horror. Here we might also include such second-generation writers as Anne Raeff and Thane Rosenbaum, both of whom posit third-generation figures who seek to better understand themselves in the context of the burden of the legacy of the Shoah. Raeff's *Clara Mondschein's Melancholia* tells a three-generation story: survivor grandmother, Ruth Mondschein who works with a patient at an AIDS hospice, her daughter Clara who was born in a fictive displaced person's camp, and Deborah Gelb, her bisexual granddaughter.[28] Geographically, the novel is set in both Europe and America. Psychologically, Clara's melancholia transfers onto her daughter who wishes that she, too, had been born in a concentration camp. Rosenbaum, whose more recent work extends to a new generation of Holocaust expression, creates fictional narratives that enjoin three generations and for whom the Holocaust exists as a centrally defining feature of their lives: the survivor, his or her children, and grandchildren. After all, as one of his characters insists, the families of survivors are "morally entitled to a third generation" that carries the story of the Holocaust with them, generations bound together in the recognition of shared suffering and the necessity for accountability and moral and ethi-

cal reckoning (*Golems*, 304). And, even though, as Jessica Lang suggests of third-generation expression, "the representation is less immediately proximate, more abstract," it is no less defining of identity, no less haunting, and equally imperative as the events of the Holocaust recede from public consciousness, displaced by the vagaries and fashions of our time (Lang, 45).

To be sure, the transmission of Holocaust memory does not end with the literature of the survivor or with that of the second generation. As Roskies and Diamant put it, "It did not take a generation for a literary response to the Holocaust to be born. But it took at least two generations for its history to acquire a shape . . . It is a story . . . without an ending" (Roskies and Diamant, 8). The memoirs and works of fiction in response to this developing, open-ended history are the stuff of both anxiously realized fantasies and fraught identity formation for the third generation. Since these are stories wrested from the past, transmitted indirectly and often through the filter of an interceding and mitigating generational focus that stands cautious guard over that history and its narratives of grief and loss, the ensuing generation of voluntary witnesses is compelled, as we suggest, to act as literary detectives. Unlike the second generation, who grew up with the survivors and struggled against another world directly bequeathed to them in the ubiquitous shadow of the Holocaust, the third generation must go in active search of the stories from the past and the challenges to personal agency that they present. If the second generation suffers from, as Raczymow contends, a memory "shot through with holes," then how much more so for the third generation of Holocaust writers attempting to piece together a coherent narrative out of such chasms of memory (Raczymow, 102). This is a generation for whom bearing witness is a conscious, deliberately enacted choice. Members of this generation can be understood as, to use Geoffrey H. Hartman's felicitous phrase, "witnesses by adoption."[29]

Thus, this literature features a careful attention to detail, numbers, places, dates, and identities, as if the recreation and visualizing of the particulars will fill the empty spaces created by time and distance. The college-age American student studying abroad in Israel, in Rachel Kadish's novel *From a Sealed Room*, unpredictably comes upon a newspaper left on her doorstep, dated March 3, 1951. She finds herself unable to decode the significance of the words before her:

> I turn the newspaper over on my bare knees and read the first column of listings. The small, mottled print is difficult to decipher, but with patience I make my way through it. Manya Probman, of Lodz, arrived in Jaffa this month, seeks any family or friends. Itzik Simion, age twelve, of Krakow I. L. Peretz School, lost parents Rachmil and Clara in Birkenau, seeks sister Rosa, last known of in Warsaw. The listings go on and on, giving ages and nicknames, home villages and school graduation dates. At the top of each column the instructions are repeated: Those who find the name of a loved one can contact the Program for Family Reunification in Tel Aviv at the address listed here . . . Near the bottom of one column, a single name is underlined in muddy pencil. Feliks Rotstein. Seeks sister Lilka, last known in Dachau, or any person with information on her whereabouts . . . I stare at the newsprint, waiting for it to reveal more. It doesn't. (Kadish, 182–83)

An outsider to history, born long enough after the war's end that other histories have intervened, this character looks back only to see a vast, cavernous empty space, an absence.

Thus names, places, and details matter. In, for example, her historical novel of the Nazi occupation of Hungary, *The Invisible Bridge*, Julie Orringer shows the intersection of history—the history of the war against the Jews—and personal histories, the lives of individual men and women, lives traumatized by loss but sustained by their deep connections to others. This carefully researched novel is an elegy to those who died, a refusal to let the names of the victims of the Nazi genocide disappear. There is a stunning moment at the novel's close when those Hungarian Jews who survived the war fill the synagogue searching for names of families and friends, and it is in the seemingly endless recitation of names that the author recreates the devastation and enormity of loss that Hungary's Jews—indeed, all of Europe's Jews—experienced:

> Hungarian Jews were being exhumed from graves all over Austria and Germany, Ukraine and Yugoslavia, and, whenever it was possible, identified by their papers or their dog tags. There were thousands of them. Every day, on the wall outside the building,

> endless lists of names. Abraham. Almasy. Arany. Banki. Böhm. Braun. Breuer. Budai. Csato. Czitrom. Dániel. Diamant. Einstein. Eisenberger. Engel. Fischer. Goldman. Goldner. Goldstein. Hart. Hauszmann. Heller. Hirsch. Honig. Horovitz. Idesz. János. Jáskiseri. Kemény. Kepecs. Kertész. Klein. Kovacs. Langer. Lázár. Lindenfeld. Markovitz. Martón. Nussbaum. Ócsai. Paley. Pollák. Róna. Rosenthal. Roth. Rubiczek. Rubin. Schoenfeld. Sebestyen. Sebök. Steiner. Szanto. Toronyi. Ungar. Vadas. Vámos. Vertes. Vida. Weisz. Wolf. Zeller. Zindler. Zucker. An alphabet of loss, a catalogue of grief. Almost every time they went, they witnessed someone learning that a person they loved had died. Sometimes the news would be received in silence . . . Other times there would be screams, protests, weeping. They looked day after day, every day, for so long that they almost forgot what they were looking for; after a while it seemed they were just looking, trying to memorize a new Kaddish composed entirely of names. (Orringer, 582)

Here this list of names is punctuated precisely. Rather than being part of a stream, connected with commas, a long indistinct and uninterrupted sound, each name is followed by a period, a precisely generated caesura, whose weight and space punctuate, resonate, and make emphatic each irreparable, singular, individual loss, a particularity of sorrow. At the same time, the list itself, the strangulated and lengthening alphabet of mourning, speaks to the huge, endless, almost unimaginable numbers murdered, an asyndeton of grief.

In particular, such specificity shows itself to be an urgent preoccupation for those of the third generation whose grandparents are no longer living. The second generation characteristically has direct access to information from survivors, who both tell their stories unsolicited—say, for the child of Holocaust survivors in Rosenbaum's collection of stories *Elijah Visible*—or respond to direct questions—for example, Art Spiegelman's survivor father in *Maus*. The third generation, on the other hand, retrieves information mediated through their parents or other family members or must resort to research, to combing through documents that provide the skeletal blueprint for the logistical outline of events, but leave out what the third-generation sojourners really want to know: the stories of their

families, their own singular loss. Simon writes of her quest to trace her grandmother's vanished life before the Nazi occupation that caused her grandmother to flee Poland: "I try to reconstruct her life. I try to find the school, the well-appointed apartments, the crowded tenements and narrow courtyards . . . I read modern tourist books with little mention of the Jews; I search maps; I question the guides. No one recognizes the street names . . . Have the names, like the houses and streets, been destroyed like all the rest of Jewish Warsaw?" (18). These are very personal narratives, individuated quests. Here the desire for detailed knowledge takes the form of literally retracing the steps of those who lived through or succumbed to the massacre. "I need to know," insists Simon in her memoir. Thus, her quest will take her to the village in which her grandmother lived and beyond, onto the tracks of the death march and mass killings in the forest of Brona Gora, where she imagines her grandmother's family and neighbors to have been murdered, a history covered over in a mass grave: "Little by little," she reveals, "I'm getting a picture of the events concerning the murder and destruction of Jews in the area around Brest. Little by little, I'm getting a picture of events leading up to the transport to Brona Gora, from the Kobrin ghetto to the Bereza Kartuska ghetto" (162). The repetition of "little by little" here, as throughout the narrative, makes emphatic just how "little" the narrator does and can know and thus calls into question the problem of knowing, the disposition and character of such knowledge and the complex motives for possessing it.

The Search for Details

The third generation's fixation on specificity and on unearthing the particular details of absent family members is apparent in the subtitle of Daniel Mendelsohn's memoir, *A Search for Six of Six Million*. Unlike the vast and nameless scale of six million murdered, a referent routinely issued to articulate the annihilation of two-thirds of Eastern European Jews, a number that in its abstraction runs the risk of effacement or of becoming a placeholder for individual lives lost, six, on the other hand, is a number that one can put a "face" on, a number that can, in the third generation's quest for recovery, be "found." Six of six million both suggests the magnitude of the devastation and focuses in on the personal, the individual. The specific reference makes emphatic that names matter.

So, too, it is harder to locate one's own kinship amid millions; it is more tangible, more material and relational, among six. Thus, in order to avoid the Holocaust and its victims from becoming abstractions, representative figures of suffering at an unbridgeable remove, the third-generation quest is a search for specifics, for the particulars of experience. However, as Mendelsohn discovers, the search for details, for specifics, is, in fact, self-contradictory, counter-definitional, since, as Mendelsohn explains, specific means "particular to a given individual," and thus he will never quite grasp the totality of the experience of his unknown relatives because, as he puts it, "their experience was specific to them and not me" (Mendelsohn, 502). Paradoxically and impossibly, Mendelsohn belatedly comes to realize that

> For a long time I had thirsted after *specifics*, after *details* . . . the concrete thing that would make the story come alive. But that . . . was the problem. I had wanted the details and the specifics for the *story*, and had not—as how could I not, I who never knew them, who had never had anything *but* stories?—really understood . . . what it meant to be a *detail*, a specific . . . Precisely because I had never known or seen them I was reminded the more forcefully that they had been specific people with specific deaths, and those lives and deaths belonged to them, not me, no matter how gripping the story that may be told about them. (502)

Here the encounter with the otherness of the lost family members is an encounter with the incompleteness of narrative representation in the face of loss. Such loss is abstract in its scope and searing in the concrete attempt to engage it.

Such quests for the particulars, to locate individuals, however, are compulsory and, in some ways, compensatory attempts to offset the haunting and chronic condition of loss. Thus, like Andrea Simon, Jonathan Safran Foer, Erika Dreifus, and Daniel Mendelsohn, Johanna Adorján will return to the exact location of the crime, the site of suffering and annihilation, as depicted in her memoir *An Exclusive Love*, in order to "get it right." These pilgrimages are motivated by attempts to excavate the relics of the past, to dredge up remembered events, places, and those who inhabited them. Such a pursuit finds a metaphorical kinship

in Freud's discussion of uncovering that which has been forgotten, in which such "reconstruction resembles to a great extent an archaeologist's excavation of some dwelling-place that has been destroyed and buried or of some ancient edifice."[30] The excavation metaphor is at the heart of the pursuit of the past in two senses. On the one hand, the quest is a process of discovery, of uncovering the past, excavation as extraction, just as the geologist Athos, digging for relics in the "acid-steeped ground," will unearth and rescue the orphaned refugee Jakob Beer (Michaels, 5). On the other hand, such excavation becomes a matter of erecting, an attempt to recreate and thus meticulously reconstruct the past, to build it back up, erected laboriously, much like the "architecturally elegant stone synagogue . . . built during the 15th century" in the city of Brest, whose substantial Jewish population was destroyed, but a community that Andrea Simon will attempt to resurrect, as if her stories, like the stone architecture of the synagogue, will rebuild that which was so tragically lost (Simon, 163).

However, such attempts at discovery and reconstruction ultimately are inadequate, partial and incomplete, since they constitute a remote, muted, and muffled knowledge. As Mendelsohn comes to recognize at the seeming close of his search for his lost family, "There is so much that will always be *impossible to know*, but we do know that they were, once, themselves, *specific*, the subjects of their own lives and deaths, and not simply puppets to be manipulated for the purposes of a good story" (Mendelsohn, 502). Mendelsohn's response to the discovery of his grandfather's brother and family suggests an anxious suspicion that the stories, too, are artifacts, presumptuously appropriated by a generation who has made their lives into stories, usurped them for their own purposes.

In the absence of her grandparents, Johanna Adorján will seek knowledge from any available source, but not without a deep-seated fear that she has transgressed some essential and prohibitive boundary, an interloper trespassing on forbidden ground: "I feel like an intruder," she confesses, "a thief trying to take something from the people who have agreed to talk to me about my grandparents. Almost every time I ask a question I feel discourteously inquisitive. As if I were sticking my nose into what's none of my business. Why should I want to know how my grandparents spent their lives? Who am I to try finding out things that they didn't talk about, some of them perhaps very private?" (Adorján, 102). But what is

private here? What is public? What are the parameters of such a distinction? Having uncovered an increasing accumulation of facts and artifacts of his missing relatives' past, Mendelsohn nonetheless admits the inadequacy of such knowledge: "I'm pleased with what I know, but now I think much more about everything I could have known, which was so much more than anything I can learn now and which now is gone forever . . . There's so much you don't really see, preoccupied as you are with the business of living; so much you never notice, until suddenly, for whatever reason . . . you need the information that people you once knew always had to give you, if only you'd asked. But by the time you think to ask, it's too late" (Mendelsohn, 73). The striking sense of loss is accompanied here by remorse, a regret that the trove of discoveries is too little too late, but also a contriteness born of missed opportunities, time squandered in this "business of living." Andrea Simon, in recognizing her belatedness in pursuing her grandmother's life—taken up, as she was, with her own—implores, "Why hadn't I listened more carefully to her stories?" (24).

What remains when acquired memory, memory at two removes, fails, pushed to its limits? Adorján, returning with her father to Mauthausen, the concentration camp where her grandfather was incarcerated and subjected to hard labor, describes the irreconcilable landscape as measured against her imagination. Approaching the site of her grandfather's agonizing internment, she sees, rather, "Gently rolling green hills. And on top of one of the hills, like a toy castle, lies the former concentration camp of Mauthausen, now a museum. It looks harmless, like a miniature model of something much larger. As if the scale had slipped—it's so easy to see the full extent of the place . . . a small door is fitted into the right-hand side of the gate, and stands open. Anyone can go through it—it works both ways, in and out . . . but everyone who goes in will come out again . . . There's something about it that suggests a holiday camp, the place is so peaceful, the birds twittering, the sun shining" (Adorján, 7–8). Indeed, there is something about her perception of the scale that cannot provide an adequate measurement; the extent of suffering is, for the grandchild of this survivor, unattainable. Thus she has difficulty reconciling the evocative landscape of the present, with the rote, indifferent recitation of the camp guide, with the place of horror it once was and which she thought she might be able to capture, to wrest from the cavity of the past and thus, to a certain extent, control. But here, at the contem-

porary site of Mauthausen, present conditions would seem to eclipse the past, a seemingly willful, deliberate, even pastoral erasure of both history and, for the third-generation traveler, a patrimony.

Post-Holocaust generations are mostly guided by stories told by parents and grandparents, cautionary tales with which they might navigate an historically detailed, emotionally explosive past. Thus stories told become inevitably mixed with stories imagined, taking on the defining weight of anxious projection and the uncanny. As Eva Hoffman, the daughter of Holocaust survivors, suggests in *After Such Knowledge*, such stories make up a child's vision of the fantastic and the real. Her parents' stories, as she provocatively puts it, "registered themselves as half awful reality, half wondrous fairy tale. A peasant's hut, holding the riddle of life or death; a snowy forest, which confounds the senses and sense of direction. A hayloft in which one sits, awaiting fate, while a stranger downstairs, who is really a good fairy in disguise, is fending off that fate by muttering invocations under her breath and bringing to the hiding place a bowl of soup . . . These components of horror became part of a whole generation's store of imagery and narration, the icons and sagas of the post-Holocaust world."[31] Here the topoi of the fairy tale of one generation become the nightmare reality of another's. Both are familiar, but a disjunction exists between reality and fantasy. The context for the story diverges as does its interpretive possibilities. The adolescent granddaughter of Holocaust survivors in Rosenbaum's novel *The Stranger within Sarah Stein*, in attempting to piece together those secretive and enigmatic tales from another time, considers the stories of "kids stowed away in convents and in Catholic schools, hiding in haylofts, and buried in holes in the ground. Hide and go seek was not a game during the Holocaust; it was how you lived. Never being found was the endgame" (66). Such "artifacts of a different world"—at times remnants tossed out in chance conversation and fragments of stories often overheard—as one of Havazelet's anguished characters maintains, become part of the language of entry into the world of Holocaust representation, like the Yiddish "words here and there" (*Body*, 288) haphazardly and instinctively spoken by the survivor in Rosenbaum's novel, left behind "like breadcrumbs for the dead" (*Stranger*, 76).

Understood in the context of the Holocaust, the stock figures, emblems, and place settings of the formative narratives of one generation,

here become transformed into the actualities of survival and death, escape and capture. The comforting emblems of childhood fantasy—barns, haylofts, forests, fairy godmothers—morph into duplicitous icons of wrenching fear and disorientation. The disjunction between image and meaning creates an uneasy tension between the known and unknowable worlds. One of Singer's third-generation characters, wandering the grounds of Auschwitz where her grandmother's sister perished, is arrested by the knowledge that "she'd probably died here in this place," which, disjunctively, "felt as unreal as any other family story" (Singer, 29). Similarly, in trying to conjure the fate of the Jews in Brona Gora, Simon, on her quest for her grandmother's interrupted life, is brought up short by the limits of her imagination in the face of such enormity: "the premeditated annihilation of 50,000 people required the complicity of hundreds, if not thousands, of Nazi professionals, German soldiers, local auxiliary police, railroad personnel, church officials, government figures; and farmers, villages, and city residents—average citizens of every type. This is too overwhelming to contemplate" (Simon, 186). In the absence of direct experience, familiar icons, predictable linguistic signifiers, and, in many cases, immediate survivor testimony, the third generation, those "grandchildren of Job," to borrow a term from Alan L. Berger, must rely on competing narratives, on the overlapping unevenness of stories. As Mendelsohn acknowledges in his memoir *The Lost*, "I was rich in keepsakes, but had no memories to go with them" (182). Here one hopes to fill the gaps formed by the retreating threads of memory with imagined, re-created stories, midrashic moments and impulses, since, as one of Ehud Havazelet's characters uncomfortably maintains, "You don't fill an absence by taking more away" (*Body*, 23). But the attempts to fill the absence reinforce it as a dreadful, unthinkable remainder, uncannily real and uncomprehendingly distant.

Such stories then—those pieced together narratives, stories overheard and sought out—become, for the third generation, an invitation to identification, a complicated projection of one's own fears and desires onto another. Third-generation narratives project the trauma of identification, where suffering becomes the object of fantasized desire. Simon's memoir, for example, is interrupted by a very disturbing moment in which she describes a nightmare she has during her compulsive search to unearth her unknown relatives: "What can't be properly expressed finds a way to

insinuate itself . . . I begin to have nightmares . . . In my dreams, I'm running naked through forests, and I awaken right before catastrophe with a palpitating heart and drenching perspiration . . . Certainly the terror I felt was nothing like what the victims felt. I tell myself, over and over, that this is something that must be told—for them" (Simon, 186–87). But the excavation of the past also fulfills an absence in herself, an emptiness that can only hope to be satisfied through her identification with the other, the object of her desire and longing, but dread and fear, as well. There are, indeed, consequences to such discovery. In Orringer's novel *The Invisible Bridge*, we find a similarly conflicted, dream-state transmission of transgenerational trauma. Here the grandchild of survivors is awakened from troubled dreams in which she is witness to her grandparents' abject fear: "A few weeks ago she'd had a dream from which she'd woken shouting in fright. She and her parents had been standing in a cold black-walled room, wearing pajamas made of flour sacks. In a corner her grandmother knelt on the concrete floor, weeping. Her grandfather stood before them, too thin, unshaven. A German guard came out of the shadows and made him climb onto a raised conveyor belt . . . The guard put cuffs around his ankles and wrists, then stepped to a wooden lever beside the conveyor belt and pushed it forward. A meshing of gears, a grinding of iron teeth. The belt began to move. Her grandfather rounded a corner and disappeared into a rectangle of light, from beyond which came a deafening clap that meant he was dead . . . That was when she'd shouted herself awake" (Orringer, 596). Here Orringer's third-generation, internally focalized character absorbs the trauma and unconsciously participates in the translation of its memory, the dream being an unconscious attempt to resolve some of her deeply held fears and anxieties.

Symptomatic of such traumatic displacement is a kind of psychic breakdown of the distinction of self and other, a cathection of the third generation's obsession with knowledge onto the absent grandparent or unknown family members. As one of Singer's third-generation characters imagines when looking at a photograph of her grandmother, "Now she gazes up through time at me and I gaze down at her. What am I looking for . . . I am looking for myself" (Singer, 41). She is looking for herself in the other, a projection of her own fears of loss and abandonment onto another, who becomes the fraught object of her desire. The author perhaps displaces her own apprehensions about abandonment and sorrow

onto the lost or murdered. Such identification is an attempt to control, in part, her fear of the unknown and unknowable, a fear of what was possible. At another moment in Simon's *Bashert*, the author, upon receiving information about one of her grandmother's cousins shot in the Volchin massacre, exposes not only her distress but also her projected anxiety: "This unbearable information comes to me again; again, it cinches a knot around my neck; my breath suddenly stops. And I see her, a dark girl with my eyes, running in a circle, flailing her arms and then gathering them around her, trying to paste the clothes to herself permanently. Ida, the girl with my eyes" (66–67). The author here conjures the dead girl into reality and sees herself in the other, "with my eyes" a metonymic representation of the narrator's own attempts at self-protection. She is swept away by her imagination and her incapacity to control the past, to wrest the traumatic events from history and thus make them her own, in other words, to rewrite the past in order to make it bearable.

Thus we find in this literature a recurring pattern of identity formation, of affectively imagining oneself in others, others in oneself. Symptomatic of this affective transference is the iteration of the stand-in or proxy. Simon, for example, in reference to her presence in the village once home to her murdered relatives, vows, "I have come for them" (130). This replacement takes the form of anguished empathetic projection as she psychically assumes her grandmother's wound, so much so that she conjures her absent grandmother into being and identifies with her, displacing her own anxiety and fear onto her grandmother and, chiastically, attempting to take on her grandmother's certain fear: "We walk a few feet and stop. My head vibrates with noise . . . The sound of my grandmother sobbing" (23). Here, the memoirist is not only a time traveler but in a sharply imagined moment she will share the physical space with her grandmother, who, in her absence, is made present. In a pattern of dissociative moves, those on a quest for the stories of those who have vanished and are lost to them will detach from the immediacy of their own lives. Arnon Goldfinger, the third-generation narrator of *The Flat*, learning of his grandparents' escape in the prewar years and the murder of his grandmother's mother in Theresienstadt explains his complicated relief at such knowledge: "For the first time in my life, I have a past," one invented by the projection of fear and the desire to control it.

The third-generation witness by adoption tries to uncover and expose

the past and, at the same time, rewrite its ending. Thus, when stories are withheld, the response is characteristically one of a sense of deprivation and the fear of rejection. Adorján, in response to her grandfather's reluctance to talk about the past, feels repudiated, cast out: "If I am to be perfectly honest, that makes me not only sad but even a little angry. For he stole a part of my identity as well, deprived me of an essential part of my sense of self, bequeathed me a gap in my identity that seems like a mystery. I lack a piece of myself. Something is missing, and I don't even know exactly what. Such a pity for something to disappear" (75). What is missing is an inarticulable sense of loss, an absence where some indeterminate component ought to be, the examined motive, perhaps, for the ethical comportment and constitution of character.

For the third-generation seeker, adrift without the anchor of firsthand testimony, the stories, however cryptic, limited, and fragmentary, determine the shape of memory. Stories provide an opening into the past and also an affirmation of continuity. Adorján describes her experience traversing her grandfather's passage from concentration camp to death march to liberation as one of bewildered recognition of durability and permanence in the face of projected loss: "my overriding thought is: but my grandfather survived it. He did survive it . . . Thousands died on these marches. I am shaken . . . but also relieved . . . and I am the granddaughter of this man" (11, 17–18). And even though the stories of their grandparents' experiences, often met with resistance and disguise, are hard to retrieve and harder still to hear, the stories are embraced as a means of memorializing the dead, commemorating those who survived, and finding an appropriate response to the atrocities, denying the Nazis a posthumous victory. To this end, the conflicted granddaughter in Singer's collection of stories involving three generations of Jews, *The Pale of Settlement*, will, with reiterative, anxious resolve, beseech her mother, "Tell me a story": "Her mother told her bedtime stories. The stories were about her mother's childhood and they were always sad. Her mother would sit on the edge of the bed and smooth her hand along the quilt. Once upon a time, she would begin, as if the stories might be made-up tales . . . Her mother's stories gave her a hollow feeling behind her ribs, as if there was a trapdoor inside her that dropped open to her mother's pain. But she asked to hear them anyway" (188, 190). She is a child who, frightened by an experience, obsessively talks about it in an attempt to

neutralize the event and thus the fear. The iteration of "Tell me a story" that runs throughout the literature of the third generation suggests the ways in which the retrieval of the past and the anxiety about knowing the events that shaped the lives of parents and grandparents extend well into the third generation, showing itself to be a defining preoccupation and illocutionary ritual that has shaped the psychic worlds of these Holocaust descendants (204). These are stories that, as one of Dreifus's characters says, "weave back through the decades," catching future generations up in "the ancestral tide that swept [them] along a similar stream."[32]

Psychologist Eva Fogelman has argued, however, that the third generation should not be considered a part of the tide swept along in the protracted "intergenerational transmission of trauma." In "Third Generation Descendants of Holocaust Survivors and the Future of Remembering," Fogelman argues that, while "it took two generations—forty years—for the silence to be broken, for psychological denial to erode, and for survivors to have an audience that did not silence them the moment they attempted to share the stories of their horrific experiences . . . what is transmitted to 3Gs [third-generation descendants of Holocaust survivors] are values, worldview, family interaction and love—not trauma." The third generation is not, Fogelman argues, "suffering from 'silent scars.'" Joseph Skibell's *Blessing on the Moon* creates magical realist tropes in introducing Chaim Skibelski, the novel's protagonist who is murdered on the novel's first page. Chaim subsequently embarks on a post-mortem pilgrimage that tells the story of the Shoah. To be sure, there has been a paradigm shift in the literary transmission of trauma from the second to the third generation. And this shift is manifested in the ways that the stories of the past are interpreted by each subsequent generation and the extent to which the second and third generation view the impact of the Holocaust on their own development and comportment. We don't want to make too much of the distinction among post-Holocaust generations. It is not clear—nor can it be—where one generation ends and another begins. And certainly any such forced distinctions end up futilely running in circles.

The Holocaust, however, remains the lens through which post-Holocaust generations view the world. It persists as the defining moment in time. As Alan Mintz puts it, "The Holocaust . . . constituted a 'tremendum,' an event of such awful negative transcendence that it

cleaved history into a before and after. That we view the present through a profoundly altered lens goes without saying, but we also cannot escape viewing the past through the medium of this terrible knowledge."[33] Thus, finally, the second and third and no doubt fourth generation, and so on, are descendants of that defining moment in Jewish history, as they are of other moments in the long history of Jewish survival. All Jews are, in the ongoing post-Holocaust era, part of a transgenerational continuum of witnesses to the Holocaust, if only in vigilant attention to and moral reckoning of memory of the Shoah, its victims and its survivors. As Saul Bellow's character Ravelstein, his stand-in for the philosopher Allan Bloom, says in the novel of the same name: "We, as Jews, now knew what was possible."[34] "Knowing what was possible" consistently emerges as the remainder of dread and moral horror in the transmission of Holocaust knowledge.

That being said, we wish to call attention to some noticeable differences between direct memory and generational memory, between remembered events and those that are transferred onto a subsequent generation by those who directly experienced the events and lived to tell the tales. Such distinctions are useful if only in terms of demonstrating the range and depth of such memories as they are judiciously and justly carried into the future. In the literature of the second generation, for example, we find a deep ambivalence toward the stories bequeathed to them, stories and histories that, by their weight and enormity, have eclipsed their own lives. As the son of Holocaust survivors in Havazelet's novel *Bearing the Body*, protests, "Another history, not his, not one he'd ever know, sifted its weight over him like ash," like the ashes of the dead (133). For this second-generation son of survivors, the past, "insistently hovering" (130), overshadows his own anxiously contrived freedom to live in the world unencumbered by his parents' tragic past, a history from which he wants to sever himself. Semel's short story "A Hat of Glass" stresses the survivors' concern about transmitting their traumatic legacy to the second and third generations. Her protagonist, a nameless Israeli survivor grandmother reflects: "There, a great darkness emerged. They say: it will heal. They say: I will be healed. I am grateful for the sun and for the new light, but on the children's heads, my anguish and torment sit like a hat of glass."[35]

But autonomy and self-invention are largely the stuff of delusion in

any event, and for the child of survivors, in particular, the Holocaust is shown to be the measure of personhood, where all tracks begin and end. As second-generation writer Melvin Jules Bukiet unequivocally affirms, "In the beginning was Auschwitz," the physical and psychic point of origin for all that follows.[36] For Eva Hoffman, too, "In the beginning was the war. That was my childhood theory of origins . . . For me, the world as I knew it and the people in it emerged not from the womb, but from war . . . For I was born in Poland . . . and so soon after the cataclysm as to conflate it with the causes of my own birth" (3). We find in the literature of the second generation characteristically a fraught confusion between self and other, resulting, in large part, from, as Bukiet suggests, a defining condition in which "the most important events of your life occurred before you were born" (Bukiet, 18). For the second generation, the Holocaust is, as one of Thane Rosenbaum's characters insists, elemental to the very fabric of his felt composition, his DNA, "forever coded with the filmy stuff of damaged offspring, the handicap of an unwanted inheritance."[37] For the second generation, caught in an anxious state of seductive resistance, a push and pull between the twin impulses to fulfill their obligations to their parents and to fashion their own lives free from the strangling tentacles of the Holocaust, the past in the shape of the Holocaust has been indelibly grafted upon them, defining and controlling the very shape of the psychic and physical space they inhabit.

Thus, while for the second generation, the beginning was the fact of Auschwitz, whose gates opened into a world of reinvented time that held a monopoly over the fabric of the past and the shape of the future, for the third generation the beginning was set in motion, as the title of Hoffman's memoir suggests, "after such knowledge." As Gerd Bayer attests, "As time moves away from World War II, memory takes on a different quality as it becomes transformed from direct witnessing and the resulting testimonials to archival and mediated forms of remembering that carry the responsibility of firmly embedding the Holocaust in the cultural memory of later generations."[38] "Memory" defines the paradigm shift and the generational move from survivor writing to second-generation witnessing to the transmission of memory by the third generation. For the survivor, the past exists in the immediacy of the present, since it's a lived past, whose memories are an ineradicable part of the ongoing texture of the survivors' lives. Survivor testimony—in whatever form it takes—is the

most direct and unswerving path to the originating trauma of the Shoah. Even survivor memory is, at times, imperfect, mediated by time, intervening, restorative events, as well as the powers of sublimation and the defenses of forgetting and deflection. For example, Primo Levi observes the greater part of the witnesses, for the defense and the prosecution, have by now disappeared, and those who remain, and who (overcoming their remorse or, alternately, their wounds) still agree to testify, have even more blurred and stylized memories, often, unbeknownst to them, influenced by information gained from later readings or the stories of others. That being said, survivor memory locates us in the midst of the experience and carries with it not only a detailed chronological unfolding, but an emotive, affective response.

What comes after direct memory is that which Marianne Hirsch has notably characterized as "postmemory," the source of which "is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation . . . the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood nor recreated."[39] These are stories, both surreptitiously and explicitly imposed upon a second generation, that have, to a significant extent, usurped the unfolding, linear narratives of that generation's making. The beginning of time stands as sentry, admonition, and portent to those born in its aftermath. As Nadine Fresco suggests in "Remembering the Unknown," the second generation "feel a vertigo when confronted by the 'time before,' the lost object of a nameless desire, in which suffering takes the place of inheritance," a "phantom pain," about which "one remembers only that one remembers nothing."[40] Thus an indirect pain has been transferred onto the second generation, who, conflicted by ambivalent feelings toward an unwanted legacy that seems to eclipse their own lives, proceed into the future with the weight of the Holocaust and their parents' suffering as guide, a most sufficient Charon to that other world.

One of the central, distinguishing features of second- and third-generation responses to the legacy of the Holocaust is exactly this ambivalence. Second-generation literature reveals both anger toward what is portrayed as an interrupted life, a life beholden to the past, and fear, fear of failure and inadequacy in response to their parents' trauma. To

this end, Bukiet refers to the "cosmic responsibility" of the offspring of survivors, those children born in the 1950s and who came of age in the rebellious 1960s, but whose mutiny—defiance against authority, social and political institutions—like everything else, was overshadowed, shown to be an unforgivable transgression, because, as Bukiet rhetorically asks, "how could you rebel against these people who endured such loss? Compared to them, what did you have to complain about?" (Bukiet, 14). What is there to battle against in the process of character formation, when the battles are so inconsequential, the spoils so insignificant? The corrosive influence of the Holocaust casts upon them an unwieldy burden of responsibility from which they cannot escape. Bukiet acknowledges: "Other kids' parents loved them, but never gazed at their offspring as miracles in the flesh . . . Other kids weren't considered a retroactive victory over tyranny and genocide" (14). So the past is either railed against, which poses difficulties since there is no one in the proximate vicinity to rail against and thus get some kind of satisfaction, however negligible. Or the specter of the past is shown to be the source of phobic, obsessive, and dissociative panic and discomfort, as we find in so many of the characters who emerge in second-generation literature. Rosenbaum's Adam Posner, for example, trapped in the elevator-turned-cattle car in the short story "Cattle Car Complex," has a traumatic episode, through an extreme identification with his parents, in which he directly experiences an ordinary elevator as a cattle car, prompted by his unconscious to feel the claustrophobic terror his parents felt.

We suggest that, in the space between the second and third generation, the debilitating anger at a life usurped and eclipsed by the past has diminished, if not disappeared, replaced by an immense sense of loss and absence, a void where family narratives once existed, "family trees . . . axed away," as one of Dreifus's characters laments (Dreifus, 138). To be sure, anger continues to erupt, though it is far less encumbering, and loss and absence are not the only stuff of discomfort. Perhaps the arrival of another, fourth, post-Holocaust generation not only joins in the dialogue but shares the burden of carrying the weight of the past. There is surely something to be said about the advantage of further custodians, additional guardians of historical truth. But this much is certain: the literature that emerges as part of an ongoing dialogue with the second generation reveals a pressing desire to reclaim an inheritance from which it feels

severed. If the "beginning" for the second generation was Auschwitz, the chronic and uncontainable awareness of the atrocities of the Holocaust, then the point of departure for the third generation is loss, a bewildered loss that comes, paradoxically, "after such knowledge," to borrow Hoffman's term. Instead of the un-detoured transfer of stories from those who experienced the traumatic events to a captive generation of direct descendants, the third generation seems to be grasping at "strands of darker stories," as one of Orringer's characters in *The Invisible Bridge* reveals: "She didn't know how she'd heard them; she thought she must have absorbed them through her skin, like medicine or poison. Something about labor camps. Something about being made to eat newspapers. Something about a disease that came from lice . . . half stories" (Orringer, 596). "Something," of course, suggests in its imprecision, its antithesis, its oppositional antagonist. These are memories, as Henri Raczymow acknowledges, "handed down . . . precisely as something *not* handed down" (Raczymow, 103). Memory looks different for this generation; it takes a changed shape: an indistinct rather than an indirect memory, diluted, yet surreptitiously "absorbed." And, despite the desperately figured wish of one of Ehud Havazelet's characters that you "can't lose what you never had," loss and the anxieties that derive in large part from a sense of being untethered from the past, a feeling complicated by the fear that the Holocaust will become a mere abstraction, thus slipping from this generational grasp into obscurity, become anxiously-figured preoccupations for a new generation of Holocaust representation (*Body*, 132).

Part of the psychic and genre problems in post-Holocaust discourse resides in locating and articulating an appropriate response to the horror, a representation that does not transgress and distort the actualities of history and family narratives. If, for the second generation the pressing concern was how to navigate one's life with such knowledge, the question for the third generation is what comes "after such knowledge"? In making a distinction between Hirsch's "postmemory" and Hoffman's "after such knowledge," Gerd Bayer, in his provocative study of third-generation Holocaust cinema, interestingly proposes that "the 'after' in this phrase has a significantly different relationship to the past from the 'post' in postmemory. The latter defines itself through a sense of belatedness that puts the zero degree of memory at the moment of the trauma. The former phrase firmly holds on to the present and looks for a place of

memory within everyday life. The memory of trauma after such knowledge thus places the past alongside other aspects of life . . . in order to guarantee its place in the cultural memory" (Bayer, 132). We think that Bayer makes an important distinction here in the way that both memory and trauma are transferred to the third generation, "a new attitude toward memory that moves beyond the notion of postmemory while remaining committed to the project of remembering the past and creating an ethical response" to atrocity (116). This is not to say, however, that Hirsch's identification and definition of postmemory are obsolete in the case of third-generation transmission of memory. Surely Hirsch's initial proposition, that postmemory captures the way in which "memories of cultural or collective traumatic events and experiences" traverse both temporal and spatial boundaries, applies to continuing post-Holocaust generations. Such "memory," does not erode with time, but rather, gathering momentum, as Lisa Appignanesi suggests, "cascades through the generations."[41] As Jonathan Safran Foer's narrator puts it in *Everything Is Illuminated*, "memory begat memory begat memory" (258). Postmemory's "often obsessive and relentless" though "indirect and fragmentary nature" offers a focus of imagination for generations well beyond the direct descendants of Holocaust survivors (*Family Frames*, 22–3). Indeed, "postmemory" and "after such knowledge" coalesce in the continuing transmission of the traumatic legacy of the Holocaust, both "post" and "after," as Hirsch suggests, providing useful "qualifying adjectives and alternative formulations that try to define both a specifically inter- and transgenerational act of transfer, and the resonant aftereffects of trauma . . . These events happened in the past, but their effects continue into the present" (*The Generation of Postmemory*, 4–5).

That being said, postmemory, always unstable and unreliable, takes on increasingly capricious and variable shapes as we move further from the events of the Holocaust, as we lose the privilege of eyewitness testimony, and as the stories become even further mediated by an intervening generational filter. In other words, as Bayer notes, "postmemory changes as additional generations come to be exposed to its remembered content" (Bayer, 117). Indeed, we argue that "postmemory" is reconfigured and refashioned "after such knowledge." The response to stories of atrocity by a contemporary generation of Holocaust writers and memoirists, while bearing the imprint of many of the previous generation's anxieties and

preoccupations, moves beyond the intergenerational transmission of a singular trauma that controlled the appropriation of such knowledge to an answering form of representation less immediate, less proximate. If, as Hirsch suggests, "'postmemory' reflects an uneasy oscillation between continuity and rupture . . . a *structure* of inter-and transgenerational return of traumatic knowledge and embodied experience . . . a *consequence* of traumatic recall but . . . at a generational remove," how much more so for a generation not once but twice removed from the point of traumatic origin?[42] As Jessica Lang points out, the third generation comprises the "logical successors to the second generation of Holocaust writers. As such, these writers mark a second transition, or another remove from the eyewitness: the first transition from eyewitness to a recounting by the witness now becomes, as the Holocaust enters history, an indirect relation to the original eyewitness" (Lang, 46). To this end, the third generation finds itself engaging in a tenuous balance between identification and distance. On the one hand, there is the compelling impulse to understand the particulars of the events as experienced as familial, that is, to identify affectively with the suffering of members of one's family, however remote. This is a kind of ancestral identification and affective reach. On the other hand, there is a very clear, if regrettable, sense of the vast abyss between "then" and "now," a spatial, temporal, and emotive distance that must be traversed, a journey, as one of Dreifus's characters comes to realize, to "the upside-down world of that time" (Dreifus, 89). What's lacking for this generation in the "knowledge" that comes "after such knowledge" is the emotional fabric of lives, the affective response that invites them inside the lives of those who came before but slipped away, an affective escort that allows them to witness these lives alongside their own histories.

The third generation struggles to find the representational means of closing the distance between the "time before," the "time after," and the immediacy of the present. Thus, unlike the second generation, for whom the Holocaust tended to overshadow their own histories—lives, as Hirsch suggests, that were in large part "shaped by the attempt to represent the long-term effects of living in close proximity to the pain, depression, and dissociation of persons who have witnessed and survived massive historical trauma," and histories that "'bleed' from one generation to the next" (*Postmemory*, 34)—we note that Spiegelman subtitles vol-

ume one of *Maus* "My father bleeds history." Thus the literature of the third generation reveals an almost obsessive pattern of contemporizing the Holocaust, of negotiating the Holocaust as a parallel event to other, more contemporary, tragedies. As Lothe, et al. remark, "We are nearing an age 'after testimony,' an age where first-person accounts by Holocaust survivors will no longer be forthcoming . . . But to come 'after' also implies an obligation to the future," to *turn* the history of the Holocaust into a measure of the world we live in now (2).

Thus, in this literature, the Holocaust is viewed alongside events that are more familiar to the third-generation writer, more decipherable and contiguous. In Nicole Krauss's novel *The History of Love*, a Holocaust survivor's grief intersects with an American child's tragic loss of her father to cancer. Here the one narrative becomes a conduit to the other. The Holocaust in this novel becomes the lens through which we understand and articulate suffering. In Havazelet's novel *Bearing the Body*, the drug-related death of an American-born son of Holocaust survivors in 1995 takes us back in time to the devastation in Europe; the violence in contemporary society memorializes the shattered families and the enormity of loss wrought by the Holocaust. Here the one event happening in real time is an opening to step into the moral abyss of the Holocaust. Dreifus's story "Homecomings," contextualizes the Holocaust in more proximate events, the 1972 terrorist attack on Israeli athletes in Munich, where, as one of her characters despairingly affirms, "the Jews are again the targets" (Dreifus, 93). Rachel Kadish, in her novel *From a Sealed Room*, locates the Holocaust against the backdrop of other, more contemporary moments: the Gulf War, racial tensions and poverty in America, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Holocaust, we suggest, is less positioned in relation to these other events, but rather, the point seems to be that the Holocaust is simply always present, always there, as a fearful measure of what was possible. For these writers, the one more immediately recognizable and familiar tragedy evokes the other. The Shoah becomes the final measure of tragedy. As Gerd Bayer suggests, an approach to navigating the Holocaust attempts to "bridge the gap to the present, thereby making traumatic events of the past relevant for the present," thus wresting the Holocaust from oblivion as part of a continuum of memory and representation (120). There is, however, a danger in any attempt to make the Holocaust relevant, if by relevant we mean accessible to a distant

audience of spectators for whom the events of the Holocaust recede into another pattern of horrors, just one more example of atrocity. As Bayer acknowledges in his discussion of contemporary Holocaust images in cinema, "Finding the right balance between presenting traumatic memories and connecting them to the reality of later generations without turning them into nostalgic commodities remains an ethical challenge" (130). The care required to avoid making the Holocaust just one more in a list of tragedies, of making it a metonymy of atrocity, risks flattening the representational demands of bearing witness. To this end, Mintz distinguishes between exceptionalist and constructivist models of Holocaust representation. The exceptionalist model, as Mintz proposes, "is rooted in a conviction of the Holocaust as a radical rupture in human history," one that "discovers in the Holocaust a dark truth that inheres in the event . . . [a] vision . . . not open to being coopted and constructed for other needs and purposes" (39, 40). The constructivist model, on the other hand, "stresses the cultural lens through which the Holocaust is perceived" (39). From a constructivist perspective, as Mintz suggests, "The Holocaust may in fact be an unprecedented event in human history, yet it is in the nature of individuals and institutions to perceive even unprecedented events through categories that already exist," and thus, "the point of departure is the assumption that beyond their factual core, historical events, even the Holocaust, possess no inscribed meanings; meaning is constructed by communities of interpretation—differently by different communities—out of their own motives and needs" (39–40). The positing of these two divergent perspectives speaks to the necessity of creating a balance between remaining faithful to history and to the uniqueness of the Holocaust as it occurred and conceptualizing it within a proximate cultural context as a means of keeping Holocaust memory alive.

In the literature of the third generation, while the Holocaust is often depicted in relation to or alongside of more proximate events, the effect, we think, is less to match or to join recent historical events with the brutalities and atrocities of the Holocaust, but rather to create fitting conditions to return to the moral baseline, both the point of departure and the final measure of suffering. Such parallel stories are not for the purposes of comparison, but rather for affective access, as Bayer suggests, "situating it in a space of emotional proximity that allows and even demands ethical

responses" (131). The more proximate events provide an available and reachable language of pain. The "spectator" to horror is given an authorized entry into the past. In this regard, the Holocaust becomes a point of measurement for other tragedies, creating a kind of perspectival reach.

Despite Eva Fogelman's protestation that it is time for the term "intergenerational transmission of trauma . . . to be retired," the literature of the third generation insists on picking at the threads of trauma, especially the trauma of severed or fractured identification and consanguinity. As Alan L. Berger suggests, "Third-generation writings embrace a variety of genres, each of which portrays a distinctive angle of vision as respective authors work through their traumatic legacy . . . The shape-shifting shadows of the Holocaust continue to impact the identity of this generation. Their Holocaust-related writings are simultaneously a way of mourning relatives they never knew and an attempt to understand their Jewish identity."[43] This attempt to refurbish identity, we add, is prodded by the fear of its loss, at the same time creating the added burden of being vigilant about turning its obsession into pathos.

What happens at the end of the quest for discovery in these narratives? What is one to do with the story once imperfectly pieced together? What is the relation between teller and the story he or she tells? Dan Bar-On, in staged conversations with Holocaust survivors and their children and grandchildren living in Israel, identifies five stages of working through their response to the events that preceded them. Bar-On itemizes them as follows: "Knowledge: an awareness of what happened during the Holocaust, and, if their family was involved, what happened to them during that time"; "Understanding: the ability to place a knowledge of the facts within a meaningful human, historical, social, or moral frame of reference"; "Emotional response: the emotional reaction to this knowledge and understanding"; "Attitude: the attitude toward what happened based on this knowledge, understanding, and emotional response and their implications for the present and the future"; and, finally, "Behavior: the effect of knowledge, understanding, emotional response, and attitude on specific behavior patterns in relation to the past, the present, and the future" (17–18).[44] What strikes us as particularly germane to our discussion of what the third generation makes of such knowledge is the move beyond an awareness of the general outline of events and even the involvement of one's direct or extended family in the Holocaust to

the effect of such knowledge, how one responds to and acts upon such discoveries. At the close of Mendelsohn's painstaking journey to recover his lost relatives, the author stands at the physical site of the place of death of the uncle and cousin he never knew:

> It is one thing to stand before a spot you have long thought about, a building or shrine or monument that you've seen in paintings or books or magazines, a place where, you think, you are expected to have certain kinds of feelings that, when the time comes to stand there, you either will or will not have: awe, rapture, terror, sorrow. It is another thing to be standing in a place of a different sort, a place that for a long time you thought was hypothetical, a place of which you might say *the place where it happened* and think, it was in a field, it was in a house, it was in a gas chamber, against a wall or on the street, but when you said those words to yourself it was not so much the *place* that seemed to matter as the *it*, the terrible thing that had been done, because you weren't really thinking of the place as anything but a kind of envelope, disposable, unimportant. Now I was standing in the place itself, and I had had no time to prepare. I confronted the place itself, the thing and not the idea of it. (Mendelsohn, 501)

Here, once again, we find a kind of surrogacy. The writer stands, literally and figuratively, in the place of his murdered relatives. But he, unlike those who came before him, can walk away. The memoirist is confronted with the shock of recognition, yet he cannot possibly recognize a place he has never been. The place and his presence there are both uncannily recognizable and foreign, what is familiar and what is concealed. As Freud proposed, "*Heimlich* exhibits one which is identical with its opposite, *unheimlich*. What is *heimlich* thus comes to be *unheimlich*."[45] In encountering the place, "and not the idea of it," Mendelsohn confronts his own fears. Any stable resolution to these quest narratives is neither possible nor, we suspect, desirable. Rather these third-generation quests are marred by paradoxes, incongruities, the implausible, and the all-too-real. Their open-endedness confirms their aims as ethical acts meant to project into a future.

"Are these my grandmother's footsteps or my own?" one of Margot

Singer's characters uneasily asks (39). In concluding both her journey and her narrative, Simon reflects on the motives for her persistence in her quest: "I think of why this search has preoccupied me, why it has transported me across geographical and time barriers. I think of my obsession with my grandmother's life—how and why she survived, what she inherited from her mother, what she transferred to my mother, what my mother transferred to me, and what I have transferred to my daughter" (232). As Simon comes to discover, "What began as a search for missing facts, for missing relatives, ultimately became a search for myself . . . The branch was long and tangled, but I found my end," an "end" that she will hand off to the next generation with caution and vigilance (258). This search, thus, carries her back in time. But it also establishes ethical constraints and guidelines for future generations. In looking back, we inevitably pave the way for the future. As Mendelsohn puts it, "We always turn around to stare at what lies behind us, which is to make an impossible wish, a wish that nothing will be left behind, that we will carry the imprint of what is over and done with into the present and future" (503). Thus, bearing witness is always an incomplete project. The memory of the Holocaust cannot be generationally contained—neither can its accompanying trauma.

CHAPTER 2

The Intergenerational Transmission of Memory and Trauma

From Survivor Writing to Post-Holocaust Representation

The struggle of memory against forgetting.
—MILAN KUNDERA, *THE BOOK OF LAUGHTER AND FORGETTING*

Remembering is an ethical act, has ethical value in and of itself.
—SUSAN SONTAG, *REGARDING THE PAIN OF OTHERS*

Memory is the simplest form of prayer.
—MARGE PIERCY, "BLACK MOUNTAIN"

The movement from survivor writing to second- and third-generation accounts of the Nazi genocide marks an important shift in the intergenerational transmission and expression of Holocaust memory, trauma, and representation. The passage from firsthand, eyewitness testimony to second- and thirdhand, indirect witnessing marks not only a temporal and experiential change in the modes of representation, but also a perceptible shift in perspective, narrative voicing, and the disposition of memory. Memory is the structural and foundational link among those who write about the Holocaust from direct experience as well as from the haunting legacy that takes the shape of imaginative return. With the lat-

ter, the character and texture of memory are reconfigured in ongoing attempts to bear witness to the events of the Shoah as those events and their accompanying memories recede increasingly into the past, the Shoah—as Gulie Ne'eman Arad suggests—"transformed from memory into history."[1] The movement from memory into history suggests passage from the immediacy and proximity of a subjective retention of and reencounter with memories of the past to the opacity of absent or indeterminate memory. What happens when memory becomes history, when, that is, the texture, the sensation, and the presence of memory in the convergence of past and present become contained within the fixed boundaries and inertness of temporality, that is, into a story? Here memory is apart from the teller rather than a part of, intrinsic to, the teller and thus can only be made accessible through an imaginative refocusing.

The intervening decades since the end of the war and the liberation of the concentration camps have seen an inevitable movement away from the immediacy of eyewitness accounts to the inexactness of indirect, approximate, secondary witnessing, a borrowed memory. From the direct testimony of those who, like Job's messengers, experienced and lived to tell of the events they witnessed—"I did see this, with my own eyes," Elie Wiesel writes in *Night*—to the distanced but no less pressing obligation to bear witness to the enormity of a past summoned by absence, memory remains the metonymic trope, the figured calculation of loss and the receptacle of the magnitude and duration of such loss.[2] As Eva Hoffman suggests, the transmitted memory of the Shoah for post-survivor generations is "an example of an internalized past, of the way in which atrocity literally reverberates through the minds and lives of subsequent generations."[3] The transition from and juxtaposition of survivor writing to accounts by "nonwitnesses," to borrow a term from Gary Weissman, brings into sharp scrutiny the ways in which memory and the intergenerational transmission of trauma make demands on the imagination but also on the nature of telling, the conditions in which language and forms of narration embody and extend the collective experience of memory, both a lived and living memory.[4] As psychologists Nanette C. Auerhahn and Ernst Prelinger, in their analytic work with Holocaust survivors, propose, for both the survivor and subsequent generations, "Re-telling an experience like the Holocaust cannot comment on that experience so much as demonstrate, exhibit, and continue itself."[5] Those generations of wit-

nesses who follow the survivors in their attempts to extend the traumatic history of the Shoah into the present are custodians of the past. Their continued testimony constitutes a resistance to encroaching anonymity and obscurity, their language a defense against forgetting, guardians of memory in an attempt, as one grandchild of survivors insists, "to make a place for history and ensure that historical realities are transmitted to future generations."[6] And even though, as the poet Paul Celan insists, "No one bears witness for the witness," those descendants of Holocaust victims and survivors step into the widening void of absent memory in an attempt to prevent erasure and to carry forth the burden of testimony.[7]

Not insignificantly, all the literature we discuss in this book might be thought of as post-Holocaust attempts to shape and narrate the experience of the Shoah, although, for our purposes, post-Holocaust narrative typologies differentiate survivor accounts from those writing outside of direct experience. For even those who write from direct experience have narrated their accounts retrospectively, reaching back, as the narrator of Ida Fink's short story "A Scrap of Time" puts it, "digging around in the ruins of memory," memory "buried," but "untouched by forgetfulness."[8] And narrative is, by its own temporality, a necessarily screened disposition. The narrative is never the event itself but the trailing, mediated articulation of experience filtered through the constraints of language and consciousness, thus turning "life history into life story."[9] Thus for the survivor, as Auerhahn and Prelinger suggest, articulating the events of the traumatic past represents efforts "at fashioning that experience into an internally consistent, coherent, and communicable form" (38). Despite the assurances of Primo Levi in the opening pages of *Survival in Auschwitz* that "none of the facts are invented," the "facts" are inevitably arbitrated by and filtered through the ambushes, reflections, and calculations of memory as well as its defenses and instincts for deflection, repression, and survival.[10] And memory's inherent shortcomings—its fixations, lapses, and protective impulses—are viewed against the inadequacies of the written word. Giving language to any experience is, although provisional, armor against the experience itself, as well as the sure knowledge that the reality, the final measure of the loss is loss itself, an absence of what once existed. Thus, as Primo Levi admits, the truth, the actual "history of the Lagers . . . has been written almost exclusively by those who, like myself, never fathomed them to the bottom," since, to be sure,

"those who did so did not return, or their capacity for observation was paralyzed by suffering and incomprehension."[11] This is not to say that the defenses and filters of memory and narrative design diminish the certainty of events, only that memory is fractured, hesitant, clouded by time and grief, subject to correction, and woefully inadequate to the task of transmission. Survivor memory is both constitutively relative to mediating consciousness and psychically undeniable as the self-presenting truth of trauma. As Nobel Laureate and survivor Imre Kertész reflects, "I could not give orders to my memory."[12]

Such stipulations about perspective are measured against and anxiously figured by fears that the survivors, in articulating their accounts of the heinous execution of atrocities, would not be believed, as Levi cautions, "indeed were not even listened to," and thus denied the legitimacy of not only their claims but their experiences, their lives (*Drowned*, 12). Despite the unembellished fact that, as Kertész explains, "nothing has happened since Auschwitz that could reverse or refute Auschwitz," the written testimony by survivors is characterized by anxious fears that the limits of expression will fail to create the contiguity necessary to extend the experience into the present, to engage the reader or listener in its reenactment.[13] As Auerhahn and Prelinger in their study of survivors and their children find, relating the experience of the Holocaust is "an appeal to participation transmitted to the listener through the medium of the narrator's consciousness which, through empathy and temporary identification, comes to constitute that of the listener," or is an attempt to impart meaning through its associative participation in the traumatic reenactment (40–41). As Kertész and others make very clear, for the survivor, Auschwitz is not over, nor "overcome," and thus, "The problem of Auschwitz is not whether to draw a line under it, as it were; whether to preserve its memory or slip it into the appropriate pigeonhole of history . . . The real problem with Auschwitz is that it happened, and this cannot be altered—not with the best, or worst, will in the world" ("Heureka").

Firsthand accounts of the Shoah, therefore, are structured by trauma, by traumatic recall, and thus, as Auerhahn and Prelinger explain, "in some sense there is no post-Holocaust present . . . other than what can be interpreted in light of the Holocaust" (39). In other words, the Holocaust is the lens through which the present is interpreted and experience structured, "a model of trauma constructed from two moments—a later

event which causes a reinterpretation backwards and re-vivification of an original event which only now becomes traumatic and thereby restructures all subsequent events" (ibid.). As survivor Charlotte Delbo explains, "Auschwitz is so deeply etched in my memory that I cannot forget one moment of it.—So you are living with Auschwitz?—No, I live next to it. Auschwitz is there, unalterable, precise, but enveloped in the skin of memory, an impermeable skin that isolates it from my present self," a parallel consciousness running alongside of the mediated present.[14] If, for the survivor, discovering an adequate frame of reference for structuring memory into articulable, shared understanding is unstable, subject to fragmentation, to the amendments of time and assemblage—"For so long I have wanted to talk about this time," Ida Fink writes, "and not in the way I will talk about it now . . . I wanted to, but I couldn't, I didn't know how" ("Scrap of Time," 3)—then how much more is it so destabilized when fashioning a narrative from an imperfect memory that is not one's own? What then might it mean—might it require—to participate in such memory?

Subsequent generations of writers who carry the burden of Holocaust history write from a memory vacuum, from the liminal space constituted by the conscious awareness of a history from which one has been materially but not culturally excluded. Such nonwitnesses, as Gary Weissman suggests, might be thought of as being "haunted not by the traumatic impact of the Holocaust, but by its absence" (22). Here the trauma extends not in the reenactment and refiguring of the event, but in the absence of conscious or unconscious perception of the reality of the experience; it is "in the utter 'lack' of . . . history, that trauma is transmitted" (Pisano, 144). Such "absent memory," as Ellen Fine puts it, "is filled with blanks, silence, a sense of void, and a sense of regret for not being there."[15] Post-survivor generations thus extend the legacy of the Shoah not from memory's structuring embrace, but, barred from memory's authorizing structures, from "a perception of memory as *loss*."[16]

In pushing through this liminal space, those writing outside of direct experience and memory—not the memory of loss, but memory lost to history—as Fine proposes, "continue to 'remember' an event not lived through. Haunted by history, they feel obliged to accept the burden of collective memory that has been passed to them and to assume the task of sustaining it" (126). Collective memory in this context might be thought

of as an act of defiance in the face of absent memory, in its transmission creating a collage of individual, collective, and historical memory, linking personal and collective identities within moments of traumatic history. Memory thus becomes in some ways synonymous with history, with histories, with stories of trauma. Here we find a redefinition of memory as mediating, fluid, a pivot or axis around which generations intersect and impart not so much knowledge itself as what it means to know and what the requirements are for such knowledge. As Sarah Wildman, whose grandfather fled Vienna after the 1938 Nazi annexation of Austria, asks: once the past has been at least provisionally uprooted, "What, now, do we do with that knowledge?"[17] Such uncertainty speaks in part to the way in which past knowledge impinges upon and redefines established notions of identity and place. So, too, knowledge carries with it the obligation to participate in the narratives of the past, to reckon with the moral weight of such knowledge. As Auerhahn and Prelinger provocatively suggest, "To understand the implications of the Holocaust is to be traumatized by them, while to achieve understanding it is necessary to traumatize oneself with them" (41). If narrative is memory's spokesperson, then, as the biblical injunction commands, "impress these . . . words upon your very heart . . . teach them to your children . . . reciting them when you stay at home and when you are away" (Deuteronomy 11:18–20). The obligation of the transmission of memory is that which Wiesel refers to as our "supreme duty towards memory."[18] Collective memory is thus memory transferred, undertaken, and performed. As Susan Sontag proposes, collective memory is "not a remembering but a stipulating: that *this* is important, and this is the story about how it happened."[19] That is, the recovery of Holocaust memory takes on the voice of moral injunction. However, as Lewis A. Coser, in his introduction to the influential work of Maurice Halbwachs—who perished in Buchenwald—*On Collective Memory*, reminds us, "It is, of course individuals who remember, not groups or institutions, but these individuals, being located in a specific group context, draw on that context to remember or recreate the past."[20] As Wildman, in her quest to reconstruct her grandfather's past, comes to appreciate, "It's not possible to remember alone" (368).

For post-Holocaust generations, identity formation and the making of personhood exist within a continuum of trauma and thus of memory that both diminishes and gains momentum as time moves farther from

the point of traumatic origin. Here collective memory might be more usefully conceived as the expression of a collective, prosopopoeic voice that enlivens and reanimates the past, both the living and the dead. On the borders of memory, such writers enter the fragile space of a memory not their own. As Fine suggests, they "cannot retrieve memory but can present it only as absent" (195). Thus, in navigating the lacunae created by absent memory, post-Holocaust generations attempt to recreate the past in response to absence. That is, with loss as both companion and adversary, those who write from an ever-increasing temporal, geographical, and experiential distance both write memory and write *into* memory, assuming the project of bearing witness within and as partners in a collective framework for both the expression and working-through of trauma. To this end, Fine proposes:

> Linking the collective memory with the absent memory is the central image of the shadow that recurs throughout the texts, both in psychological profiles dealing with the post-Holocaust generation, and in memoirs and literary works by them. If survivors such as Elie Wiesel bear witness to their descent into Holocaust darkness, their legacy of night has surely cast a long shadow upon the succeeding generations. On one hand, the shadow is a hovering presence that will not go away, binding those who were not there to those who were, both dead and alive. On the other hand, the shadow is absence, a reflection of the reality that took place but not the reality itself. (127)

It is the acutely felt recognition of the space between "the reality that took place but not the reality itself" that outlines the writing of both the second and third generations of Holocaust narratives. After all, as Ruth Franklin, in *A Thousand Darknesses*, suggests: "Every act of memory is also an act of narrative. Total recall is beyond human capabilities, and so our minds distill and pound the chaos of life into something resembling a coherent shape. From the very moment we begin the activity of remembering, we place some kind of editorial framework, some principle of selection—no matter how simple, how neutral, or how unconscious—around the events of the past . . . a faithful and yet inevitably incomplete representation of actual events."[21] Franklin's argument, however, makes

allowance neither for the accuracy of witness testimony nor for the adherence to such testimony on the part of the postmemory generation. Thus despite the decades of writing and volumes of materials exposing the precise details of the succession of events that contributed to the Shoah, as Julia Chaitin, in "Living with the Past," suggests, "As the years go by, understanding the significance the Holocaust has for the survivors and their descendants often appeared to become a more complex, rather than an easier undertaking."[22]

Survivor Writing and the Landscape of Memory

Survivor writing might be said to draw upon both midrash and lamentation, two defining traditions in Jewish literary expression. Midrash consists of stories that interpret and extend narratives and events in Jewish history. Midrash reanimates the events of these stories through their retelling, demonstrating their persistent relevance and resonance in the present, "an imaginative narrative commentary," as Sarah R. Horowitz proposes, "composed after the initial narrative of experience" to comment on and offer a "reading" that explains the significance of the event in Jewish intellectual and cultural thought.[23] Midrashic stories are openings for moments of continuity and amplification, an invitation to carry the weight of memory and history into the present, thus extending interpretively Jewish history, identity, and collective memory. Such narratives hope to fill in the gaps created by time, distance, and understanding. But, so too, midrashic narratives must, in their retelling, recreate those gaps, those breaks and absences that are evoked and provoked by the experience and narratives they interpret. Midrash might be thought of as an enactment of analysis. That is, midrashic modes of expression must perform those very moments of rupture they invoke. Horowitz puts it this way: midrash "intercedes to fill in cognitive and psychological absences in history and memory while also reproducing gaps . . . that require of readers not distance but moral and emotional engagement" (290). Thus we find in such narratives characteristic patterns and tropes that enact rupture, disjunction, incoherence, confusion, ellipsis, and disintegration as a means of filling in the gaps in perception. As such, Holocaust literature, engaged in the reenactment of trauma, as Berel Lang suggests, "pushes certain features of writing to their limits."[24]

Such midrashic occasions for engagement and recognition and the strategic discordances they create take place alongside of lamentation, an "elegiac response to catastrophe."[25] The literary convention of moral lament originates in the Hebrew Book of Lamentations, the prophet Jeremiah's mourning the destruction of the First Jerusalem Temple in 586 B.C.E. Here the prophet assumes the voice of the messenger and transmits memory in a speech act of elegiac reckoning and condemnation. The figure of the messenger is a recurring presence in first-generation Holocaust narratives, that is, stories, memoirs, and semiautobiographical accounts written by survivors. We find such a figure—the unheard messenger—an often dismissed harbinger of disaster and warning, in the opening chapter of Wiesel's *Night*, for example, in the character of Moshe the Beadle, who brings news of annihilation to the disbelieving Jews of Sighet. So, too, we come across a weary messenger in Fink's "A Scrap of Time," in the guise of the peasant who lives to tell the tale of calamity. Isaiah Spiegel presents an enigmatic herald in the character of a loyal canine companion in the short story "A Ghetto Dog," who in his attempts to warn his mistress, "seemed to wear the twisted grimace of a dog in lament."[26] The messenger in these narratives functions as the reluctant but persistent Charon to, as Wiesel noted, "the universe of the damned."[27] Here the envoy is the source of both a midrashic invitation to understanding and an injunction to lament. In evoking the two ancient paradigms of lamentation and midrash, Holocaust narratives turn to these longstanding and defining literary and cultural conventions in response to the devastation of the Shoah as well as its aftermath. Both midrash and lamentation, through their literary invocation of trauma, invite the reader to participate in an act of consanguineous understanding and ethical engagement. Here midrash and lamentation give voice to memory, breathing life into absence, excavating memory from beneath the eroding "layer of years," as Ida Fink puts it ("Scrap of Time," 3).

Fink's "A Scrap of Time" paradigmatically enacts the complexities for the survivor in reigning in and capturing memory and wresting it into the coherence of narrative. In doing so, she portrays the difficulties in containing and restraining the shape-shifting nature of memory so characteristic of survivor writing. As Auerhahn and Prelinger reveal, "The ability to narrativize is dependent on the capacity to impose a plot or structure on a story whereby the end is made immanent throughout the work;

constructing a narrative depends on the perception of continuity in experience" (40). Disruptions or interruptions in the narrative transmission—like the dropped baton of relay—threaten the necessary momentum of resolve, of, in the case of Holocaust memory, the survival of memory and the continuum of moral reckoning. Because the work of memory, in the case of the traumatized survivor, resists sequential coherence and authorial constraint—as Kertész acknowledges, "I couldn't command my memory to follow orders" (*Fatelessness*, 186)—those narratives that attempt to resurrect memory in order to transmit experience must navigate the gaps and derailments caused by the erosions of time and the absence of all moorings and precedents within which to contextualize both the experience and the emotional response it evokes. For those who lived through the concentration camp experience, as Auerhahn and Prelinger note, "One sought in vain for temporal precedents or causal explanations to link the experience to, for one was totally cut off from a past or a future that in any way seemed relevant to, preparatory for, or ensuing from the present" (39). Thus there were no organizing principles or structures upon which to draw in contextualizing and producing such memories.

Such excavation, as Kertész describes the haphazard process of memory work, is a matter of "rummaging through your memory," sifting through the pieces and fragments of a severed past (*Fatelessness*, 147). How, in other words, might the survivor go back in time and approximate the immediacy of fear and distress, returning to a condition, as Fink describes it, of an "infantile state" of innocence, caused by what was then the "poverty of our imaginations" ("Scrap of Time," 5)? How does the survivor return to a condition directly preceding awareness, those moments before being assaulted by cognition? That is, narratives by survivors attempt to create simultaneously conditions of unawareness and awareness. Such narratives yield double-voicing or double-vision in which we are presented with events as yet unanticipated and unimagined, where, as one of Fink's characters forewarns, "every threshold led to the unknown, or rather to some disaster of an as-yet-unknown nature."[28] Such tension emerges from the sure knowledge of the imminent unfolding of events to come. As the survivor-psychiatrist treating the distraught Art Spiegelman in the second volume of *Maus* proposes in response to the writer-narrator, infantilized and blocked by his inability to "visualize" and "imagine" the experience of the concentration camps: "BOO! It felt

a little like that. But ALWAYS!"[29] Spiegelman attempts to recreate the unforeseen suddenness of shock but also the consistency, the prolonged "always" of fright. Acknowledging the fragmented, alarming, and unruly disguises of memory, firsthand accounts of the Shoah navigate through, as they reflect upon, the "the ruins of memory" that participate in the reenactment of trauma ("Scrap of Time," 3). In such narratives, the past eclipses the present and puts no purchase on a future that, as the protagonist in Wiesel's novel *The Gates of the Forest* all too lamentably discovers, will be forever "mortgaged from the first day, from the first cry," to the past.[30] In summoning those "scraps of time," as Fink describes the traumatized and broken shape of memory, survivor narratives give voice to memory as the master trope of Holocaust testimony ("Scrap of Time," 3).

The undisciplined and uncontainable condition of memory is symptomatically enacted through aporia, in its focusing of doubt, the fitting trope for literary attempts to access and to control memory, to turn it into the coherent, unfolding design of narrative. In the meditations on the difficulties of finding an organizing principle around which to "talk about" that fractured, isolated particle of "time" that forever reconfigured the contours of long-entrenched codes of conduct and moral agency, Fink expresses the doubt and uncertainty that are a measure of the fractured memory she attempts to reconstruct. "I want to talk about a certain time," Fink's narrator begins "A Scrap of Time," a narrative that culminates in a secondhand account of the roundup and murder of a community of Jews "in a dense, overgrown forest, eight kilometers outside of town," an "execution" that "itself did not take long; more time was spent on the preparatory digging of the grave" (10). Among those systematically, barbarically murdered was the narrator's cousin David, whose rumored death, with his arms "wrapped . . . around the trunk" of a tree, "like a child hugging his mother," was unremarked and unmarked, since no eyewitnesses remained to tell the tale (ibid.). The absent narrator will take up, as Wiesel once put it, "the call of memory, the call *to* memory" ("Hope"), but only after painstaking, guarded, and qualified consideration of the task she approaches with such cautious restraint. The narrator's confession that such disclosure was "so long" in coming, motivated by the fear of "forgetfulness" and indecisiveness, is contextualized against a cautionary, speculative backdrop: "I didn't know how" ("Scrap of Time," 3). The narrator's plaintive and apologetic tentativeness about getting the details

right arises from her fear of memory's lapses, but also is a fitting response to the corruption not only of time—"measured not in months nor by the rising and setting of the sun, but by a word"—but also of language, words that "became devalued," corrupted, distorted, and fractured, their meaning contaminated (4). Such uncertainty and apprehension about how to "talk about [that] certain time" suggest the narrator's reluctance in confronting the imprecision of memory and language. Thus Fink's narrator will circle around memory, fearful of being consumed by it, but also of getting it wrong and thus participating in the very misrepresentation, distortion, and fraudulence for which she has contempt.

So, too, the narrator's hesitancy as well as the crafted repetition that slows the movement of the prose represents those guarded attempts to acknowledge the events to come. The repetitions of word and phrase that govern the story's opening pages reveal a wary reluctance to tell the story, at the same time that this repetition exposes the urgency to bear witness to the events that the narrator, though absent, heard. Time, through repetitive verbal motion, stands still, is arrested by circling back on itself. "I *want to talk*," the narrator implores us; "For so long *I have wanted to talk*," "not in the way *I will talk* about it now" (italics added). The repetition serves here to hold the narrative in place in an attempt to contain the trauma. Moreover, the shifting verb tense of the repeated phrase signals the narrator's surrender to memory: "I *will*" speak of the traumatic events that took place and that take place, still, in memory's return. The troping of syntax here, the repeated phrase as well as the polyptotonic repetition of a word in varying grammatical forms—"want," "wanted"—reenacts the traumatic moment of rupture; such repetition prevents egress and represents the insistence of memory, its undeniability. The characteristic figures of repetition here are not only reiterative patterns of emphasis—although surely that—but are additive as well.[31] That is, the reiteration stops the narrative in its tracks, but also moves the narrative inside the experience, that is, inside memory. In a characteristic move, the narrator makes emphatic the historical antecedents and conditions in which she and others were—and are—enmeshed still: "We had different measures of time, we different ones, always different, always with that mark of difference . . . We who because of our difference were condemned once again, as we had before in our history, we were condemned once again" ("Scrap of Time," 3). Here the repetition of "different"—different from

other ones—in its adjectival form contrastive but relational, gives way to "difference," a singularly distilled noun that signals complete transformation, an experience of identifying separation and isolation that creates the conditions for "condemned . . . condemned once again" (3).

The cautionary restraint with which Fink begins "A Scrap of Time," her uncertainty, her verbal self-corrections, and the doubt, and sense of inadequacy she expresses—"I wanted to . . . I couldn't . . . I didn't know how," "I should not have written," "I forgot to say" (3, 4, 6)—create the conditions for the understated yet emphatic precision of memory that, once summoned, takes the narrator back to the specifics of time and place. Her initial aporia becomes, as the narrative progresses, less of an impasse to a particular time and place and more a way of grasping and realigning traumatic experience. As Wiesel has said, "I write to understand as much as to be understood" ("Why I Write," 13). So, too, Fink's reimagined narratives, the "I" that guides the reader into memory, attempt to capture the immediacy of time and the contours of space. Like visual representations, her short stories become arrested in the moment of traumatic impact, but also in those moments leading up to the trauma. Thus Fink locates memory in place; everything moves aside for the stark reenactment of events. With painstakingly controlled precision, Fink recreates in sharp detail the events leading up to the death of her cousin, shot with others on his transport in the woods not far from their village.

Entering the space of memory, Fink returns to a time before the devastation, slowing the gradually emerging "picture" of the world in which she finds herself, that "beautiful, clear morning . . . still fresh; its colors and aromas have not faded" ("Scrap of Time," 5). As in a dream's scrim against reality, the narrator "wanted to delay that moment," to stave off the plummeting into horror that we anticipate (5). Just as in a dream's hiatus, that moment when one is "not yet afraid" (6), the senses are sharped, one's perception is heightened, and the surrounding sights, and sounds, and colors become exaggeratedly acute. Fink's narrator "sees" again "the bright blue dress that I was wearing when I left the house," the "grainy golden mist with red spheres of apples hanging" in the orchard, "the shadows above the river damp with the sharp odor of burdock" (5). Here the language simulates the experience of awakening from a reverie.

At the moment of such awakening, like the sudden burst of a drowning person through the scrim of water's thick canopy, Fink's narrator emerges

into the exposed space of trauma. The reflective, unhurried pace of the narrative abruptly gives way, and buckles, moving faster, gaining momentum as the reverie turns into nightmare, into the trauma that the narrator can hold off no longer, the moment shattered, the immediacy of memory's traumatic rupture capsizing those prolonged moments in anticipation. The narrative ends abruptly, unframed by a return to the time before or after: "and that was the way he died" (10). At its close, the narrative pace accelerates; the earlier repetition and hesitancy are cast off, making the experience of being out of control emphatically felt, and the narrative is cut off abruptly at the moment of death. The sudden, understated close to the story precludes any consoling narrative frame, the language itself ruptured. The narrator breaks out of her reverie, like a glass shattering. And thus the shards, the fragments, and sharp pieces of memory, "scraps" turned brittle, cut through the defenses of time and concealment. The stylistic renting of the fabric of the narrative becomes a metaphor for loss, for mourning, and for grief. Ultimately unprotected by repression, the quietly insinuating ambush of memory shows itself symptomatically. We, in the company of Fink's narrator, are there, suspended in the moment of horror that hangs over the narrative, at once preventing closure all the while rendering cessation, life and voice interrupted.

Thus, for the survivor, the past exists in the immediacy of the present; memory warps and bends to suggest the ways in which time, as Fink shows, like the blocks of sidewalk in her childhood village, becomes "fractured and broken," a time no longer "measured in months and years . . . but by a word" (3). In survivor narratives, as Wiesel's young protagonist in the novel *The Gates of the Forest* reveals, "The past became present" (58). Here the past is not viewed by the survivor in relation to the present, but rather "becomes present," erupts through the language of trauma and occupies the space of the moment. Such traumatic rupture thus changes the shape of memory, and memory participates in the collapse of time and discrete space. Memory assaults the survivor palpably, transporting him or her back to a place from which there is no escape, and time, no longer linearly unfolding, following the course of nature and creed—"months and years . . . the rising and setting of the sun" ("Scrap of Time," 4)—stops at those moments of reawakened traumatic memory. In such moments, past and present coalesce. Thus the disas-

sociated narrator of Wiesel's story "An Old Acquaintance" will, with the understated certainty born of direct experience, pose the conditions for the survivor: "Can one die in Auschwitz, after Auschwitz?"[32]

The dissolution of discrete boundaries and demarcations of time is a recurring representation of present anxiety in survivor writing. In *Days and Memory*, Charlotte Delbo, imprisoned in Auschwitz for her work with the French resistance, asks, "How does one rid oneself of something buried far within: memory and the skin of memory. It clings to me yet. . . . I have no control over it" (1). What lies underneath the "skin of memory"? Skin cleaves, providing a protective covering, but, as Delbo admits, such a casing "gives way at times, revealing all it contains" (3). Skin ruptures, splits open, and although it "mends again," it always threatens to give way, exposing, as Delbo suggests, "a twofold being. The Auschwitz double" (3). The disfiguring condition of the divided self shows itself to be a recurrent pattern in survivor writing. The insistently hovering double, like an uninvited but familiar companion, an "old acquaintance," as Wiesel confesses, becomes, in the literature of the survivor, a metaphor for the dislocated, rearranged, and "black and buried" ("An Old Acquaintance," 113). As the Egyptian-Jewish writer Edmond Jabès has suggested, "One has to write out of that break, out of that unceasingly revived wound."[33]

The Second Generation: A Witness to Memory

> "The steady drone of memory always present."
>
> —THANE ROSENBAUM, "CATTLE CAR COMPLEX"

If, as we have suggested, writing about the Holocaust from direct experience poses difficulties in accessing and representing traumatic memory in coherent, transmittable narratives, then how much more labyrinthine must it be to wrest imagined memory from absence, from a lack of firsthand knowledge of the events one hopes to shape into a story by which to understand the suffering of others? Those who grew up under the shadow of the Holocaust, that is, those whose parents survived the ghettoes, concentration camps, or lived in hiding during the Nazi genocide, perceive their identities as fashioned largely by events that predated their existence. As one of second-generation novelist Thane Rosenbaum's

characters suggests, his parents' "reminiscences had become the genetic material that was to be passed on by survivors to their children."[34] While not exposed to the direct trauma of the Holocaust, the children of survivors, in many instances, carry on the legacy of that traumatic rupture in their parents' lives, either with a willful, deliberate embrace or through the patterns and underlying strains of their upbringing. Their embrace of their parents' Holocaust legacy is a response to their having grown up under those whose watchful gaze was itself shaped by experiences that were ineradicably defining of self. Art Spiegelman, for example, in the opening pages of *Maus I*, the biographical memoir of his father's experience in Auschwitz, sets the stage for the events in Europe that will unfurl by a brief but unshakable account of a seemingly insignificant incident that marks his own, far less remarkable, childhood.

When heedlessly left behind by some friends with whom he has been roller-skating, Artie, the young narrator, seeks the solace of his father: "My friends," he wails, "skated away without me" (Spiegelman, *Maus I*, 5). His father's response to his young son's typical childhood mishap and distress measures his own traumatic past and the subsequent knowledge gleaned of human motives and the limitless capability for betrayal and treachery: "Friends? Your friends? . . . If you lock them together in a room with no food for a week . . . Then you could see what it is, Friends!" (ibid.). These lessons, as yet enigmatic to the young narrator, eclipse the young Artie's commonplace childhood sense of outrage and dejection. Such cautionary, preemptive lessons—the hidden dangers of the father's past kept in only provisional abeyance—create the conditions for Artie's developing sense of the world.

The son's own emotions are necessarily minimized, trivialized, by his father's trauma-driven response, which becomes all-defining by its very force. His father's admonition about baseline human treachery harbors an as yet undefined but ominous portent of the influence of his own dark history on his son's view of the world. Vladek's cryptic and final edict on Artie's puerile—though entirely predictable and expected—reaction to his friends' childish unkindness exposes the ways in which Vladek's specific past is the lens through which all subsequent actions are perceived and mediated. This childhood incident, trivial and common enough though it may be, is emblematic of something else: a secretive knowledge

that only the initiated can fully appreciate. There is no space for childish feelings. Thus, the father's pronouncement on the motives of others and of the conditions of the post-Shoah world into which Artie has been born is the standard against which all actions, failed expectations, and fears are measured. Such knowledge—a hard-gleaned knowledge of suffering and survival—learned by Vladek in the unfolding course of his forced hiding, the ruthless pursuit of his family and friends, his incarceration in Auschwitz, and the magnitude of losses he suffered becomes the anxious legacy that his son inherits. It is a legacy that, as one of Thane Rosenbaum's narrators admits, "flowed through his veins" ("Cattle Car," 5).

As therapists Pierre Fossion, Mari-Carmen Rejas, et al., in their study of the family dynamics among Holocaust survivors and their descendants, argue: "In our family cases, CHSs [children of Holocaust survivors] were born after their parents' liberation from concentration camps and so were not directly exposed to Nazi persecution. They experienced the effects of trauma indirectly, through their parents' references . . . From birth on, they absorbed their parents' distress."[35] Nadine Fresco, writing about the French second generation, notes: "These latter day Jews are like people who have had *a hand amputated that they never had*. It is a phantom pain, in which amnesia takes the place of memory."[36] The indirect experience of trauma, the absorption of and preoccupation with suffering, is shown to be one of the most characteristic and repetitive tableaus in the literature of second-generation Holocaust writers. The oblique and often tangled and ambivalent ways in which the children of survivors take on their parents' prolonged trauma is transferred generally in one of two ways: through open and constant discourse about the past, specific stories of what the survivor experienced, or—and in many ways, more insidiously—through silence, a weighed silence that becomes solidified as felt anguish on the part of the survivor parent and dread on the part of his or her offspring. The child of Holocaust survivors, as psychologists Auerhahn and Prelinger argue, "may assimilate the parent's trauma both by what is said and done and by what is left unsaid" (33). This duality between silence on the part of the survivor and direct exposure to the past through the parents' candid stories shows itself to be the entwined nature of the transmission of the Holocaust to the children of survivors. One of Thane Rosenbaum's second-generation narrators puts it this way:

"Some family histories are forever silent, transmitting no echoes of discord into the future. Others are like seashells, those curved volutes of the mind—the steady drone of memory always present" ("Cattle Car," 5).

In terms of the former, the exposure to a heavy, fraught silence, Fossion and others describe the survivor parents' reticence as measures intended both to protect and cope: "Silence is their only means of expression, and this silence resulted in a discontinuity in the historical legacy of the family" (521). But in cases where the offspring of survivors feel themselves to have been shut out, the Holocaust, even in its narrative absence, becomes their legacy. In either case, as Fine suggests, "Whether indirectly or directly, whether through a curtain of silence or an avalanche of words, the Holocaust seeped into the collective consciousness of those born in its aftermath" (129). In defining the conditions of the legacy bequeathed to him, Rosenbaum's Adam Posner, a recurring character who appears in a variety of guises in each of the stories in the collection *Elijah Visible*, maintains the essentializing identity of the child of survivors. After his parents' death, he becomes their surrogate in grief: "Their own terrible visions from a haunted past became his. He had inherited their perceptions of space, and the knowledge of how much one needs to live, to hide, how to breathe where there is no air. He carried on their ancient sufferings . . . forever acknowledging—with himself as living proof—the umbilical connection between the unmurdered and the long buried" ("Cattle Car," 5–6). So, too, Spiegelman will frame himself within the metaphorical bars of his own grief in response to his mother's suicide in the episode "Prisoner on the Hell Planet" in the first volume of *Maus*: he can only see his own trauma as derivative of that of his survivor parents (Spiegelman, *Maus I*, 100–103).

Austrian-American psychoanalyst Judith Kestenberg has argued that, symptomatically, "The need to discover, to re-enact, or to live the parents' past was a major issue in the lives of survivors' children. This need is different from the usual curiosity of children about their parents. These children feel they have a mission to live in the past and to change it so that their parents' humiliation, disgrace, and guilt can be converted into victory over the oppressors, and the threat of genocide undone with a restitution of life and worth."[37] For those of the second generation who found themselves the subsequent child of parents who had lost children to the Holocaust, the replacement fantasies further complicate the trau-

matic engagement and surrogacy. The second volume of Spiegelman's graphic novel *Maus, A Survivor's Tale: And Here My Troubles Began* is dedicated to the novelist's "ghost brother" Richieu, who, separated from his parents, perished during the war years (Spiegelman, *Maus II*, 15). Spiegelman's autobiographical narrator expresses his anxieties and fears regarding his relationship to a brother he never knew, a brother who "got killed," the narrator tells his wife, "before I was born. He was only five or six" (15). Art's fantasies about his unknown brother whose presence existed as "mainly a large, blurry photograph hanging in my parents' bedroom," takes on magical and magnified properties over the years of the narrator's upbringing (ibid.). The fantasy, "ghost brother," looming larger-than-life in the shadowy image on the wall, becomes the measure for the narrator of all he is not, of all he could never be: a replacement for the lost child. A constant reminder of his inadequacies, the photograph gazes down from the wall of his parents' most private space as a "reproach" (ibid.). As Art admits: "The photo never threw tantrums or got in any kind of trouble . . . It was an ideal kid, and **I** was a pain in the ass. I couldn't compete" (ibid., boldface in original). The narrator's aggravating sense of inadequacy and disappointment accentuates the impossibility of competing with a dead child, a child who never grew into adolescence, but rather, fixed in innocence and in incorruptible time in the frame of the photograph, becomes the iconized reminder of the magnitude of his parents' loss and his own inadequacy under the gaze of that loss.

His parents' loss is a measure of Art's miserable failure to live up to his fantasized notions of the ideal child—the dead child—that he can never replace. In a disturbing assessment of the intuited and largely self-imposed sense of responsibility foisted upon the child of survivors, Bukiet, the son of survivors, in his introductory remarks to the collection *Nothing Makes You Free*, proposes that the children born of survivors came to embody "a retroactive victory over tyranny and genocide."[38] As the grandchild of survivors Darren Sush suggests in reflecting on his own family dynamics: "For Holocaust survivors, their children were a representation of survival. The second generation reassured survivors that their conflict was ending and their life would continue."[39] Such a behest—however fabricated from guilt and a need to make amends both on the part of parent and child—imposes an impossible standard of measurement.

Such imagined feats of herculean and prodigious power, "this cosmic responsibility," as Bukiet calls it, always fall short of one's expectations, as they must (14). "Actualities," as one of Delmore Schwartz's youthful characters says in a different but no less apprehensive context, "always fall short."[40] In these fraught ways, the second generation, those children of survivors, who, as Bukiet insists, "wouldn't have stood a chance one single decade earlier," assume with anxious agency the continuing burden of testimony (13).

Awash with insecurities and anxieties about their own motives and about the limits of imaginative reinvention, the second-generation witnesses to the Shoah, characteristically and self-reflexively call attention to their own failings and shortcomings in drawing upon a memory not their own. As Bukiet suggests, the essential and not-insignificant distinction between survivor writing and second-generation narratives is one of proprietary rights and authorial legitimacy: "even when the First Generation claim they're writing fiction, their pages usually bestride memoir. They have no need to imagine; we have no option but to imagine" (21). While any act of narrative invention is an act of the imagination, if only in finding the right language, structures, and images for expression, the second generation writes nonetheless with the corrective, cautioning voice of the real witness surreptitiously looking over a collective shoulder—that "witness who wouldn't go away, this author of all that silent testimony," as one of Rosenbaum's narrators ruefully acknowledges.[41]

Thus, although such second-generation memories are borrowed, tentatively secured, such a "tainted inheritance, secondhand knowledge of the worst event in history," as Bukiet suggests, becomes the source of anxious expression in the narratives of the second generation, narratives constantly aware of their own inadequate appropriation of a trauma that is and is not their own (18). The greatly discomfited Spiegelman, as he draws it, perched at his drawing board metaphorically atop a pile of dead bodies, self-consciously exposes his deeply felt sense of fraudulence and inadequacy in attempting to capture his father's suffering: "Just thinking about my book," he reveals to his wife, "it's so *presumptuous* of me. . . . How am I supposed to make any sense out of Auschwitz? . . . Of the Holocaust?" (14).

The commercial success of his enterprise compounds his pronounced sense of indiscretion in thinking that he could take on the task of trans-

mission. He exhibits anxiety, not only about capitalizing on the suffering of others, but also about the trajectory of his own life: "No matter what I accomplish," Art tells Pavel, his survivor psychiatrist, "it doesn't seem like much compared to surviving Auschwitz," which is the final measure of character for this second-generation child of survivors (44). This realization is infantilizing for him, as we see his figure illustrated in increasingly diminishing dimensions, until rendered childlike, exposed, undefended, and in need of protection and succor: "I want . . . absolution," Artie, regressed to his infantile state, swallowed by the adult-size chair, cries: "No . . . No . . . I want . . . I want . . . my MOMMY! . . . WAH!" (42). This regressive and largely exaggerated reaction suggests in the lives of the second generation a fear of the loss of autonomy, the impossibility of self-determination against the backdrop of the looming presence of the Holocaust.

Thus second-generation writers such as Spiegelman, Rosenbaum, Bukiet, and others might be thought to experience, as Miri Scharf suggests, "secondary traumatization," an "indirect psychological impact" that allows for empathetic identification.[42] Such identification often becomes the source of self-conscious hyperbole, as we find in Spiegelman's ironic self-analysis: "Don't get me wrong. I wasn't *obsessed* with this stuff . . . It's just that sometimes I'd fantasize Zyklon B coming out of our shower instead of water . . . I know this is insane, but I somehow wish I had been in Auschwitz with my parents so I could really know what they lived through" (16). Despite the capacity for self-parody, to be sure, as Ruth Franklin suggests, "If there can be said to be a defining characteristic of the second-generation writers, it is that the Holocaust lies at the very foundation of their consciousness" (233).

Second-generation narratives thus reveal patterns of anxious, fraught witnessing in an attempt, as Bukiet writes, to "cope when the most important events of your life occurred before you were born" (18), but also to be faithful to the testimony and memory of those whose experiences came to define the generation that emerged under the constricting shadow of that particular past. Franklin has argued that the second generation, in their fixation on their parents' experiences and on their own "place" in that history, has "appropriated the rhetoric of the survivors" (225). "In their efforts to establish themselves among the initiated," Franklin argues, far too many second-generation writers show themselves to be im-

posters; they "construct their identity—at least their literary identity—in a way that displaces the actual survivors" (225). Such a gratuitous and largely self-serving appropriation, Franklin implies, constitutes a form of "identity theft" that undermines the very task of responsible and judicious representation (215). What Franklin seems to misunderstand is that the second generation is precisely not writing about the Holocaust. Rather, they write of the inheritance of trauma. They are not interested in displacing actual survivors or their testimonies. Instead they are invested in revealing how the survivors' experiences have splashed their descendants with psychological, sociological, and theological detritus. Taken to its logical conclusion, Franklin's position leads one to a reductio ad absurdum.

While, to be sure, the second generation occupies a precarious place—at once the direct heirs to a legacy of traumatic rupture and the indirect recipients of an inheritance existing only in their imperfect imaginations—the recognition of their tenuous connections to such knowledge creates the duality that maintains their uneasy suspension between knowing and not knowing. As Hoffman writes, "I suppose the Holocaust for me, as for every child of survivors, is, if not an embodied internal presence, then at least a deeply embedded one" (181). Second-generation narratives both allow themselves authority in their proximity to survivors and bow to its absence, acknowledging their tenuous place in the transmission of a memory not their own. The second generation thus finds itself unceremoniously poised, both banned and initiated: not there but *there* in the imagination, an uneasy place to find oneself suspended. Auerhahn and Prelinger describe this uncomfortable position, the dichotomy between the survivor's perspective and that of his or her child, as "The difference between a scene *before* [one's] eyes and a scene *in* the mind's eye . . . the difference between a visual experience and a visualized experience, between metaphor actualized . . . and reality imagined, between trauma in reality and trauma in fantasy, between horror imposed and terror self-imposed" (33). The second generation might be considered thus the "in-between generation," as Litvak-Hirsch and Bar-On have suggested, the initial conduit through which memory is bequeathed—however messily and ambivalently transmitted and appropriated—and passed on to the next generation, a generation who did not grow up under the di-

rect gaze of the past and who enter that history voluntarily but without direct escort.

The Third Generation: A Call to Memory

The third generation, a genre still in formation, thus arises from the tension between knowing and not knowing, direct and indirect witnessing, in the tenuous transfer of memory and trauma. If the second generation found the past imposed on them—either by consanguinity or propinquity—then the third generation, the generation of grandchildren of survivors, comes to the past through a far more circuitous passage. At the same time, because the past of the Holocaust has not been directly levied on them, standing as sentry in the direct path of their own ethical comportment and responsibility, the third generation comes to the knowledge of the realities of the past unprompted and unguided. Because the third generation has not been directly implicated in the aftereffects of the trauma nor the restitution for loss, the generation of grandchildren—adoptive witnesses—take their place on the stage of history and enter the landscape of memory in pursuit of the tapestry of familial connections and continuity, of "unlocking family history and reactivating family roots" (Fossion, 523). In active pursuit of a legacy of which they are only half-aware, at best, the third generation pursues the tracks of the past alongside their own lives, lives less circumscribed by the events of the Holocaust than those of their parents, the second generation who, as Litvak-Hirsch and Bar-On uncovered, "served as a 'buffer' between their parents and their children, with no opportunity to process their own experiences."[43] Less encumbered than their parents—the second generation who grew up with survivors—and with more "psychological freedom" to develop their own ethical measures and to pursue the past as well as the future, the third generation must contend with the vast lacunae created by the erosion of time and memory (Litvak-Hirsch, 775). They enter the stage of history on the sidelines, initially as observers, and then as interpreters of the past. No longer there in front of them, the past must be searched for, summoned from afar, stories wrested from obscurity, "no longer something to be recalled from a distance," but "there . . . to walk into if [one] dared."[44]

The third generation invariably meets the challenge to confront the past with the unpracticed, yet insistent resolve of the uninitiated. Such persistent pursuit is characteristically received with resistance from parents who tried to protect their children from the knowledge of the realities of the Shoah and also by grandparents who, although generally more prone to narrate their past lives to their grandchildren, are resistant to the efforts to uncover that which was secreted in their own attempts to repress and compensate for both individual and collective grief. One of Molly Antopol's characters admonishes her inquisitive granddaughter in the short story "My Grandmother Tells Me This Story": "I don't understand you. All your life you've been like this, pulling someone into a corner at every family party, asking so many questions . . . Why don't you go out in the sun and enjoy yourself for once, rather than sitting inside, scratching at ugly things that have nothing to do with you? These horrible things that happened before you were born."[45] The third generation, however, finds its place among those "things" that stealthily have come to have everything to do with them. The retrieval of the past for the third generation becomes central to identity formation; such stories—continuing memories—provide a framework for identity within which one might, as Efraim Sicher suggests, "give meaning to the future."[46] As Sarah Wildman admits of her quest to unearth her grandfather's past and her generation's uncertain, inexact, and indefinite search: "Part of it . . . was an endless foray into my own identity. It felt so arbitrary to be American. If I could better understand my grandfather's story . . . as I spent month after month in Europe, I might discover why I could never feel settled, or fully happy, at home, why I felt most alive in transit, moving. A wandering Jew!" (11). Thus, as Pisano argues, the Shoah "becomes not merely a part of . . . collective and individual identity, but the basic infrastructure through which [the] world is shaped" (80). The call to memory for the grandchildren of survivors shows itself in the construction of narratives that generate an understanding of events at least as much as they attempt to transmit knowledge. These writers attempt to evoke the presence of the past, to view it alongside their own histories in the making. Such imaginative returns, for the third generation, take the form of both literal and metaphorical journeys to reenact and reclaim the past. In such narratives—fiction and memoirs—absence emerges as a marker of place, but also as a trope for those who perished or who no longer exist to tell

their own stories. The third generation locates itself within and in defiance of such absence. The narratives that emerge find their place among "the art of atrocity," as Lawrence Langer suggests, and thus create a contemporary "framework for responding" to the "horror" of the Shoah, "for making it *imaginatively* (if not literally) accessible."[47]

The third generation's intervention in the charged dyad between the survivors' generation and the second generation complicates the ongoing transmission of Holocaust memory. As Darren Sush puts it: "Growing up as the grandson of Holocaust survivors, I've heard countless stories about the atrocities that took place during the Holocaust. My mind was bombarded with images and visions that I could not possibly fathom as truth. My family told these stories to me not to scare me into being a 'good Jewish boy,' or even to teach me about the possibilities of being a man, but so that I would learn of the struggle of those who came before me, and therefore could better appreciate what may lie ahead" (Sush). Inherent in this triangularity, despite its complications and incompletions, is an extended lineage of generations invested in negotiating and preserving the memory of the Shoah, all conservators of a shared intergenerational inheritance. What forms will such representation take in the future? As one grandchild of survivors asks: "I wonder how my children will feel . . . I wonder how much connected they're going to be to that notion of utter loss. I can only fathom it to a certain extent because I know what my grandmother went through. They won't know my grandparents. They won't know what it's like to have lost . . . How do you pass that on?" (Pisano, 152). Such anxieties about the future of memory haunt contemporary narratives. As Wildman uneasily acknowledges of the narrative histories unearthed through indirect yet tenacious resolve: "The stories were tactile and yet dusty, faded; they were real, and yet totally unfathomable. And if they felt this way to us, what would they feel like to those who came after?" (12). How, in other words, does one responsibly transmit absence and loss? How does one render visible an ellipsis? What kinds of contemporary midrash will continue to be told?

Third-generation literary representation of the Holocaust at this point in time negotiates the elusive terrain existing between proximity and distance. Engaging a variety of tropes, these writers display both *familial* and *affiliative* characteristics of postmemory. Consequently, they demonstrate the possibility of having both a Jewish and a universal impact. In

addition, living "after such knowledge" enables these writers to live in the present by permitting them to work through their Holocaust inheritance therapeutically. As such, the generations of post-Holocaust writers engage in an ongoing dialogue that carries memory into the future, mediating loss and acknowledging at once the weight and the relief of a shared inheritance. As novelist David Grossman suggests, "lost stories" must "be told again and again because that is the only way to assemble the traces of identity and fuse the fragments of a crumbled world."[48]

CHAPTER 3

Third-Generation Memoirs
Metonymy and Representation in Daniel Mendelsohn's The Lost

We always turn around to stare at what lies behind us, which is to make an impossible wish, a wish that nothing will be left behind, that we will carry the imprint of what is over and done with into the present and future.

—DANIEL MENDELSOHN, *THE LOST*

It's strange how people are remembered.

—JOHANNA ADORJÁN, *AN EXCLUSIVE LOVE*

What is the truth of someone's life?

—SARAH WILDMAN, *PAPER LOVE*

Forget what's behind you, or behind your family, what use is it? But still there remains that stubborn nudging part of him. The part that keeps on wanting to know.

—KENNETH BONERT, *THE LION SEEKER*

The geographic center of this story is the remote Ukrainian village of Bolechow, the village of Mendelsohn's grandfather Abraham Jäger's birth. While his grandfather fled to America before the war, his grandfather's brother Shmiel, of whom he never spoke, along with his wife Ester and their four daughters, Bronia, Frydka, Lorka, and Ruchele,

were murdered by the Nazis. The family's tragedy was compounded by the fact that Shmiel had joined his brother in America before the outbreak of World War II. However, unable to adjust to the New World, he returned to Bolechow where he lived in relative comfort before the invasion of the Nazis ruptured the lives of Shmiel and his immediate family. Mendelsohn sets himself to excavate their memory in order to fill in the blanks in his family's Holocaust history. As he proceeds on his quest, his own cultural Jewish identity emerges with great clarity. Although his grandfather stoically maintained his silence concerning his murdered brother, Mendelsohn knew—from unarticulated cues—about the fate of his great-uncle, to whom he bore a striking physical resemblance, a fact brought to bear on the young Mendelsohn when, visiting his Yiddish-speaking Bolechow aunts in Miami, the women would weep when he walked into the room. Although his name was never mentioned, Shmiel's presence is accentuated by his absence. Following his grandfather's death, Mendelsohn discovers a packet of Shmiel's letters that his grandfather always kept in his jacket breast pocket, even when he went out for a neighborhood walk. These letters and some old family photographs impel Mendelsohn's quest, an anxious, arduous journey leading him to Israel, Australia, Eastern Europe, Denmark, and Sweden. As novelist Rebecca Goldstein proposes, it is through Mendelsohn's detailed narrative that "the tone of fraught significance is earned, finally carrying the tale of one man—obsessed in his particular way with his own life and family—beyond the bounds of the memoir."[1]

In linking his project to the ongoing imperative to bear witness to the tragic events of the Nazi genocide, Mendelsohn situates himself in a third-generation, post-Holocaust perspective:

> I am a fervent believer in the necessity of carrying over the testimony to future generations. In a way, the central obsession of the book is: How do you become responsible for other people's narratives? . . . I go to great lengths, I think, to articulate this notion that my generation—the "generation of the grandchildren," as I call it; the grandchildren of those who were adults during the Holocaust—is the last on earth who will have had the opportunity to know people who were survivors . . . I keep referring to my generation, therefore, as the "hinge" generation, because we are

> the last ones who'll have been living receptacles for the stories of those who were in the event itself; and I'm acutely conscious, obviously, of what it means to be someone who becomes the "transmitter" of another's stories, another's past.[2]

Mendelsohn sees his own generation, the third generation since the Shoah, as probably the last generation to have heard the stories of survivors. Such a link to or "hinge" of memory reflects the subtle shift from the remembered past to a future that must reevaluate its relation to a history that can no longer be spoken of with the authority of first-person witness, a history, as Efraim Sicher suggests, "not within living memory."[3] Thus the metaphor of the "hinge" both connects generations and structures memory and expression. Nancy Miller, in *What They Saved: Pieces of a Jewish Past*, draws upon a similarly constructed metaphor of the "spline," the connecting piece that holds the corners of frames together, to explain her navigation through the bits of information, fragments she gathers in her attempt to shape or frame the past into a coherent whole. Splines, as Miller suggests, form an apt metaphor for intergenerational transference because splines "fill in the blanks between isolated points" and thus "construct a complete object from limited information."[4] Like a hinge, a spline, as Miller suggests, "works in two directions: as a way to navigate unknown spaces and as a way to frame the fragmentary map of . . . discoveries" (5). Thus we might understand Mendelsohn's description of the "hinge generation" in one of two interlocking ways: as a generation whose search for knowledge connects the outgoing and incoming generations in the ongoing transmission of memory—just as a door opens inward and outward on its hinges, providing for the passage of memory; and also as a generation for whom memory of the Shoah hinges on the responsible articulation of narratives of the past. The hinge is the axis upon which memory moves; indeed, the future depends on it.[5]

For the hinge generation, memories of the Shoah more often than not are mediated through an intervening emissary, the second generation, who heard stories directly from the survivors. Instead of receiving direct testimony, the third generation is forced to fill in the gaps in the lost recollection of firsthand narratives, however arbitrated such memories always are in their transmission. And so, this generation must intuit, overhear, and distill fragments, "confused quasi-knowledge," as Rebecca Goldstein

calls it, all the while measuring the facticity of transferred information against the artifices of retelling (Goldstein). This anxiety about speaking as the last of the indirect witnesses to the experiences of survivors characterizes third-generation Holocaust representation. Equally fraught is the anxiety regarding the form of that transmission, the insistent reminder that these stories do not belong to them and can only be conceived from the imaginative reworking of piecemeal information, often no more than interpretively fraught clues. Interviews with grandchildren of Holocaust survivors conducted by Nirit Gradwohl Pisano reveal a characteristic pattern of attempts to gather together the fleeing pieces of memory. One interviewee, the granddaughter of Holocaust survivors, recollects of her grandmother's belatedly passed on accounts, "I only started getting these little snippets of stories as she was . . . preparing for her departure from this world . . . 'There are things I need to tell you. I didn't tell you these things before; here is what you need to know.'"[6] "These 'snippets,' however," as the interviewer suggests, cannot, for the grandchildren of Holocaust survivors, "fill the void of history" (Pisano, 145). Another interviewee laments, "It's just gone. That whole generation . . . There's nobody. There's nobody at all. There's not . . . a descendent of someone that can figure out how to piecemeal it together. There's no one . . . The kind of sadness and grief and trauma that's carried on is that there's simply no one. There's no one to carry on the legacy. There's no one to even know it happened . . . It's just gone" (144). As Pisano concludes on the basis of her interviews, "the grandchildren of survivors are continually motivated to confront their parents' and grandparents' experiences, to articulate multifaceted narratives, and to pursue an intergenerational perspective at once removed from and connected to the Holocaust" (46).

Thus, one of the pressing issues for the third generation is how to navigate the space between what Mendelsohn refers to as the poles of proximity and distance. Such tertiary witnessing makes emphatic the complex relation among memory, its staged enactment, and its interpretation, a complexity calling into question the reliability of such narration. As Mendelsohn explains, "Obviously the great problem with the Holocaust, at least as a literary subject, is representation. How do you represent this? There are times where you should feel that language is being stretched to the absolute limit, because one is faced with the problem of representing the unknowable, the unimaginable . . . When I was

writing . . . I felt the exhaustion of the ability of any given sentence to talk about this experience."[7] What Mendelsohn is speaking to is, as Ellen Fine puts it, "the difference between the lived experience . . . and the account about the experience."[8] The narrative "exhaustion" comes, in large part, from the nagging sense that one is not getting it quite "right," that, in other words, the language of literary expression lacks not only authority and substance, but also the subjective, individualized experience of its victims. As Mendelsohn puts it, "sometimes you just come up against the dead brick wall of the unknown and unknowable" (O'Hehir). For Mendelsohn, as for others of his generation, the "big picture," the general outline of actions and measures taken—the collective enterprise of the war against the Jews—is known. What remains a mystery is the particular fate of individuals like his specific relatives: the place, the date, the means of execution, the experience concretized, for, as Mendelsohn fears, "If you get the small details wrong, the big picture will be wrong, too" (17).

In his dogged pursuit of the discovery and transmission of information about his family members before it's too late, these specific six members of his family cast their shadows over the lacuna in what might otherwise be the unfolding, continuous narrative of his family's past. Instead of storied lives, taking their rightful place in the permanence of interlocking generations, his great-uncle Shmiel Jäger, Shmiel's wife Ester, and their four daughters, Lorka, Frydka, Ruchele, and Bronia, disappeared not only from history but from his family's histories; their omission is an interruption, a severing and discontinuity in the family saga, a disconnection that breaks the ethical, familial, and characterological bonds of lineal descent, as the larger history of the Holocaust does to Jewish cultural descent. The family of Shmiel become a metonymy of the Holocaust as a history. At the outset of Mendelsohn's journey, all that remains of his absent great-uncle is a name—Shmiel—and a resonant visage in the face of the young Daniel who, "at six or seven or eight years old . . . would . . . walk into a room and certain people . . . would begin to cry" (3), "old Jewish people," transported back in time, "at the mere sight of me" (5). Of the few remaining fragments, the single, definitive marker of personhood, the "one salient fact, the awful thing that had happened . . . was summed up by the one identifying tag," the final, "unwritten caption on the few photographs that we had of him and his family," the refrain: "Killed by the Nazis" (26). This single known fact made abstruse by the

lack of amplifying details, creates an uneasy aperture in Mendelsohn's imagination. Thus, as Rebecca Goldstein conjectures, "A large portion of [Mendelsohn's] edgily attentive psyche is haunted by nightmare events that transpired long before his birth, so that his memory struggles to impossibly reverse itself, to gather up the details of seemingly irrecoverable lives and tragic ends" (Goldstein). In what is either a deliberate or unconscious embrace of intergenerational trauma, Mendelsohn, like others of his generation, will come to recognize his generational place in the ongoing narrative of the past, as Mendelsohn puts it, "the nature of narrative itself as it moves between the remembered past and the real past."[9] *The Lost* is, among a blurring of other genres and modes of representation, a coming-of-age narrative and thus acknowledges, to borrow a phrase from one of Grace Paley's short stories, what it means to "grow up in the shadow of another person's sorrow."[10] This is, to be sure, an appropriated, borrowed sorrow, but one that is, nonetheless, motivating, catalyzing, and imperative.

For Mendelsohn, the loss of the remote but persistent six—persistent in their absence—takes on mythic yet palpable proportions exactly because of their absence. As Mendelsohn says, "It was the thought of all that we didn't have that . . . made me want to retrieve something from the abyss, to 'fill in the blanks'" (Zisquit, 347–48). Indeed, the exclusion of these particular six from his otherwise "loquacious" grandfather's bountiful stories of family lore only calls attention to a presence that once was, as Mendelsohn puts it, "specific," "specific people with specific deaths," whose "lives and deaths belonged to them . . . the subjects of their own lives and deaths," their aborted stories an allure made all the more seductive because of their omission not only from the family narrative, but from history (Mendelsohn, 502). As Dan Bar-On notes, "Untold stories often pass more powerfully from generation to generation than stories that are discussable."[11] And so, Mendelsohn tells us, "out of all this history, all these people" that hover on the fringes of his family, "the ones I knew the least about were the six who were murdered, who had . . . the most stunning story of all, the one most worthy to be told" (15). The family's silence enshrouding their six murdered relatives creates a dissonance and an uneasy incompletion, a narrative cut short, like the "blackened tendrils" and "decimated strands," metaphorically described by Simon, of her partially severed family tree, whose branches have been broken,

charred, "snipped," eradicated, leaving in their wake a longing to reassemble the dismembered past.[12] For, as Nancy Miller suggests, "the lure of the puzzle . . . is not so easily resisted" (Miller, 225). There is a kind of insistence to such incompletion, a calling forth of memory's haunts, a summoning of that which is unspoken, "the fantasy of the recovery of the past" (O'Hehir). Such recovery is hastened by time constraints. As Mendelsohn explains of the urgency in writing *The Lost*, in the face of such haunting obscurity, "Suddenly, there they are: all your ghosts, stretching out their hands, and offering you these things if you're smart enough to hear that they're offering them to you. And there's a moment after which that offer is going to be withdrawn, when you're no longer going to be able to remember the past. So it's a moment you have to strike. And a lot of this book is very self-conscious about time as an element in the search."[13] As Emily Miller Budick proposes, "At the same time that it has seemed impossible to speak or write about so unknowable and representable a phenomenon as the Holocaust, it has also seemed imperative not to remain silent about it. This pressure to speak, despite all the hazards of speaking, has intensified as increasing temporal distance has made speaking or writing about the Holocaust that much more precarious and forgetting it all that much easier."[14] Thus from the ghosts of a former presence, Mendelsohn goes in search of the existence of prior life. In Primo Levi's words, the victims "crowd [one's] memory with their faceless presences."[15] The stories Mendelsohn both unearths and spins do not replace the lost, but rather, give substance to the departed. As he puts it, "I had begun to think of my travels in search of Shmiel's family as a kind of rescue mission, to salvage from the past some shards of their lives" (Mendelsohn, 178).

The "unmentionable" constraints outlining the ghostly shadows of Mendelsohn's lost relatives cast a beckoning yet paradoxically impenetrable scrim separating the past from the present (Mendelsohn, 15). Sacrosanct in their "unmentionability," the lost are rendered "unknowable," obliterated twice: once by the Nazis and again by way of their absence from the family narrative. As Mendelsohn makes very clear, "The people who killed them wanted to erase them. That was the agenda. Not just to kill them. But that nothing would be left. No memories. No stories . . . That's the tragedy of these people . . . That's the essential tragedy of life and history that most everything gets lost" (Naves). As one

third-generation interviewee plaintively asks, "What happens if not a single person can explain or at least assemble some missing pieces of [their] history?" (Pisano, 144). And, for Mendelsohn, the loss is manifold: once in their deliberate extinction, again from his family's stories, and thrice in Mendelsohn's implicit sense of his own loss, the unfathomable loss of something he never knew was his to lose. As Ron Rosenbaum, in "Giving Death a Face," proposes, Mendelsohn "seems to suggest that we can't look forward until we look back, until we know how we came to be who we are—until we know what we have lost."[16] Such deliberately executed obliteration and the anguished silence in their wake thus become an insistent challenge from which this grandchild of victims of the Holocaust cannot turn. And so to wrest his lost family from oblivion, Mendelsohn will "leapfrog back in time" (Mendelsohn, 287) and give them material form; he will attempt to resurrect them, as it were, in their particularity, in their ordinariness, those "who had disappeared from history" (171). Mendelsohn's journey, his travels across the globe in search of his great-uncle Shmiel and his family, will take him on something of, as Ron Rosenbaum puts it, an "Odysseyan wandering and spiraling" to a great many places, but most centrally to the small Ukrainian town of Bolechow, the point of origin and of endings (Rosenbaum). Wiesel writes in response to Mendelsohn's epic narrative of "a man haunted by six losses," that the chronicle of his search for the particular "six of six million" reflects a preoccupation among third-generation writers, "an irrepressible need among grandchildren of survivors to make their ancestors speak."[17] "Is it," Wiesel asks, "because they fear that with their deaths, something precious, special, irreplaceable will be lost forever? Is this a last opportunity to take possession of a truth that weighs not only on individual histories but on History itself?" ("Why Memory"). For, to be sure, Mendelsohn's quest to locate the truth of the six missing from his family's stories, his family's lives, and his own absent memory, leads him to larger truths, not only about the small constellation of his own family—exceptional only to those who share an ancestry if not a history—but also about the reaches of the Shoah, the dangers in the backward glance (as in the case of Lot's wife), and about himself, his motivations, and the limitations and the possibilities of empathetic identification. The "search for six of six million," the few and the many, becomes in Mendelsohn's detailed narrative, both metonymic and individual, his personal six stand-

ing for something larger than themselves, but also standing for only, tragically, themselves. The unrelenting search for the truth of the lost six, those who were, as Mendelsohn puts it, "erased consciously, purposefully from memory and history," reveals both the single, individual loss and the magnitude of all those millions of individual deaths (Naves). For, as Wiesel affirms, in Mendelsohn's pursuit of his own dead, "this writer's true accomplishment emerges . . . he comes face-to-face with the others" ("Why Memory").

But this is Mendelsohn's conundrum: up against the faceless anonymity of the historically documented fact of six million Jews murdered in the Holocaust, he will attempt to extricate the six for whom he can give a face, the six whose lives are given meaning, not through their collective dying, but through their having lived, the "concrete" details and actualities that would, as Mendelsohn puts it in his necessarily complex, tangled narrative, "make the story come alive" (Mendelsohn, 502). "Humbled," as Mendelsohn admits in an interview, by "the unknowability of their subjective experience," he sets out to reanimate the six members of his extended family (Naves). One of the difficulties, however, for Mendelsohn as well as for others of a generation more increasingly distanced from these events, is how not to abandon the individuals whose lives were lost in the morass and magnitude of the genocide, whose reach extends well beyond spatial and temporal constraints. How is it possible, in other words, to extract and memorialize the individual without losing sight of the scope of such loss? Mendelsohn has suggested that "The project of this book is to rescue particularity from generality . . . What I wanted to do was not to write a history about what happened to millions of people . . . My book is about six people, not six million people. My book is about trying to find out exactly, specifically, what happened to those people" (O'Hehir). This attempt to grasp the particularity of experience is characteristic of third-generation narratives and understandably so. For as we move farther and farther away from the events, the Shoah risks becoming increasingly academic, unexceptional in its place in the lineup of other atrocities, ironically and horribly sanitized by its documented archival lists of statistics, reports, chronicles, memorials, and encomia to the totality of destruction: the Holocaust as abstraction, the Holocaust in principle, the collective at the expense of the individual.

But particularity leads inexorably to the felt necessity to generalize.

Mendelsohn addresses the problematic nature of negotiating the sheer scope of the Holocaust, the events that set into motion and guaranteed the murder of his small band of family members as well as millions of others, all—in both their particularity and their collectivity—victims of the Nazi genocide. One of the many hazards in steering one's way through the accumulation of facts, numbers, statistics, and occupations, mass graves, concentration camps, and crematoria, is the effect of coming up against the unimaginable in all its shapeless overexposure. Alvin Rosenfeld addresses the paradox for the post-Holocaust generation writing at this particular moment in history:

> The very success of the Holocaust's wide dissemination in the public sphere can work to undermine its gravity and render it a more familiar thing. The more successfully it enters the cultural mainstream, the more commonplace it becomes. A less taxing version of a tragic history begins to emerge—still full of suffering, to be sure, but a suffering relieved of many of its weightiest moral and intellectual demands and, consequently, easier to bear. Made increasingly familiar through repetition, it becomes normalized.[18]

The proliferation of diverse modes of representation and artistic mediation made available to a contemporary popular audience both casts light on the events and casts aside the particular, tragic specificity of those events, their moral weight reduced by their iterative representation in multiplying forms of popular media. Thus, as Rosenfeld suggests, "It is not that we know all that we need and want to know about the catastrophe itself. Far from it. Rather, because we have become acutely aware that knowledge of this past is transmitted to us by such a large and diverse body of materials, it is necessary to think about the nature and function of these forms of mediation as well as about the kinds of historical information and interpretation they convey" (Rosenfeld, 2–3). Representation itself, in other words, becomes part of the story needing to be told, a reception story that defines third-generation writing in the very choice of the memoir as a search for facts.

Regarding his attempt to navigate and to control the proliferation of information, Mendelsohn candidly explains: "It was so important to me

to focus scrupulously on just six people, as if one didn't know any of the rest, and in that way to recover a sense of what was done—done to people, as opposed to done to the Jews" (Birnbaum). What Mendelsohn and others of his generation seem to want to avoid is representation that effaces identification, a direct, face-to-face interaction with the sequence of events as they happened to an identifiable someone. As Mendelsohn admits, he was initially stymied by "the limits of the mind. Six million is an unimaginable number . . . you don't grasp it. The mind needs contours that it can imagine" (O'Hehir). The danger in the backward glance, in attempting through the limited projection of the imagination to reenter the past from the receding vantage point of the immediacy of the present is that one ends up looking through the wrong end of the telescope. Events recede rather than magnify, becoming hazier, more indistinct. The scope eclipses the distinct shape and visage of the actual experience of an individual life and, correspondingly, an individual death, both given meaning by their living and by their dying.

In visiting Auschwitz as part of his journey to get at the particularity of the experience of those who witnessed the events he so painstakingly attempts to describe, Mendelsohn will concede "the dreadful irony of Auschwitz": "the extent of what it shows you is so gigantic that the corporate and anonymous, the sheer scope of the crime, are constantly paradoxically asserted at the expense of any sense of individual life . . . the vastness, the scope, the size, was an impediment to, rather than vehicle for, illumination of the very narrow scrap of the story in which I was interested" (Mendelsohn, 112). Mendelsohn, wandering the grounds of Auschwitz, loses his relatives once again, subsumed by the utter impossibility and weight of such knowledge. Amid the "rooms full of human hair, of artificial limbs, of spectacles, of luggage destined to go nowhere . . . the enormous, vertiginously broad plain where the barracks once stood . . . where the crematoria were . . . to the place where the many, many memorial stones wait for you, representing the countless dead of scores of countries," all the artifacts of history on show, Mendelsohn's dead are no longer recognizable to him, their fates awash in the collective fate of so many (ibid.). Mendelsohn's project, therefore, is to imagine the specific six into being out of this terrifying wash of collectivity. As part of his intention in writing *The Lost* to "fill in the blanks" of his own family history, Mendelsohn contrives, through his fraught journey to locate six lost

individuals, to open up that disorienting, chaotic landscape upon which so many millions were murdered (Zisquit, 348). Thus for Mendelsohn, "finding a small thing to think about," becomes "a symbol of the big thing" (O'Hehir). Indeed, Mendelsohn seems to have learned something through the process of locating the particular six individual victims of the Holocaust: "It's not that you don't think about the other 5,999,994. It's that you can think about six people" (O'Hehir). In locating and imagining into narrative life the six murdered family members, Mendelsohn ends up recreating the "big picture." The focus on the individual, or in this instance the six individuals, inevitably lays bare the rupture in the fabric of life during and in the aftermath of the Shoah. As Goldstein suggests, "the sense with which he'd started—that his six, being his, would turn out to be more fabulous than the other 5,999,994—is subtly discarded for something far more humane and universal" (Goldstein).

However, the universal, for Mendelsohn, presents something of a problem, as it does for the third-generation nonwitness. The trend we see in third-generational literary representations of the Shoah is the focus on the specific, on suffering that has an individual name and face, a preoccupation primarily, but not exclusively, among the third-generation memoirists. Memoir's generic proximity to fiction complicates the representational issue of particularizing the universal. On one hand, the memoirist wants to remain in the register of fact, and in Mendelsohn's case, the search that structures the memoir is to give renewed life through the search for facts about his lost family members. On the other hand, the memoir is narrative, and it strives to give weight and meaning to particulars, to generalize them. Indeed, among the novelists who draw upon historical documents of the Holocaust to create the landscapes of their characters' fates amid the horrors of Nazi genocide, this tension between the languages of fact and story reveals itself persistently. In, for example, Julie Orringer's novel *The Invisible Bridge*, which spans two continents and four generations of Jews touched either immediately or from afar by the Holocaust, one individual family shapes the writer's unveiling of the Nazi plan to eradicate European Jewry as its legislated enclosures spread through France and Hungary. In Orringer's novel, the individual experiences of the young Hungarian Jew Andras Lévi as he embarks upon his studies at the École Spéciale d'Architecture in Paris—his desires and tragedies—are the pivot around which history spins its irresistible mo-

mentum. And even when Orringer, in great detail, describes the growing pattern of attacks, prohibitions, and policies aimed at conquering territories and collectively exterminating entire Jewish communities, we never escape the metonymic reminder that each discrete, irreplaceable life matters, the representation of which becomes, as Mendelsohn puts it in terms of his own book, "the armature on which to hang a narrative that was complicated and rich . . . a certain interwar European culture that has vanished; the world of people like my grandfather, European immigrants . . . a certain kind of Jewishness represented by those people . . . the survivors" (Birnbaum).

We see this emphasis on and foregrounding of the particular, idiosyncratic, and distinct lives of individuals—whether imaginatively contrived or based on actual family members—in other works of fiction as well. Some of these novels are epic in their design, spanning wars, decades, landscapes, and generations, include Sara Houghteling's *Pictures at an Exhibition*, Natasha Solomons's *The House at Tyneford*, and Kenneth Bonert's *The Lion Seeker*. These are all large, sweeping novels that traverse their way through the interstices of individual lives as they navigate the panorama of Jewish history. Although the novel and the memoir are distinct genres, here they exhibit a shared impulse to discover, uncover, and retrieve that which was lost. So, too, this body of literature, either implicitly or explicitly, is weighted by the intergenerational transmission of memory that draws the past into the future, a future mortgaged to the past. As Pisano suggests, the grandchildren of survivors paradoxically "never forget what they didn't experience" (18). All assume the burden of memory, a post-Holocaust generation that, as Fine suggests, both bears and endures "the psychic imprint of the trauma" that is not their own. This is a generation, as she proposes,

> marked by images of an experience that reverberate throughout their lives. They continue to "remember" an event not lived through . . . This non-memory or lack of memory comes from the feeling of exclusion both from the experience, and from knowledge about the experience . . . filled with blanks, silence, a sense of void, and a sense of regret . . . If survivors such as Elie Wiesel bear witness to their descent into Holocaust darkness, their legacy of night has surely cast a long shadow upon the succeeding

> generations. On one hand, the shadow is a hovering presence that will not go away, binding those who were not there to those who were, both dead and alive. On the other hand, the shadow is absence, a reflection of the reality that took place but not the reality itself. (127)

Such indirect forms of third-generation representation—the novel and the memoir—show the narrated attempts to recreate, to reflect "the reality that took place but not the reality itself." And both forms navigate such unknown terrain from a different perspectival reach as they embark on journeys imagined and real, fictive and literal time travels, going back to the point of origin as a prelude to writing. As Rosenfeld suggests, "While there is still much that we do not understand about the Holocaust in its time, there is no escaping its imaginative afterlife, or rhetorical presence, in our time" (8).

While the third-generation novelist, such as Orringer, moves toward history in the details of her narrative, the memoirist, Mendelsohn, moves toward fiction, that is, toward imagining a whole out of its fragmented parts. For both, the tropes of fiction—metaphor, characterization, ventriloquism, and the like—shape the telling. The novelist, of course, might be said to assume more freedom with the facts, yet such distinctions are, we think, finally specious and have more to do with perceptions of proximity and distance, the place of the writer in the temporal, logistical, and spatial unfolding of events. As Mendelsohn suggests:

> The interest in and freedom with and exploration of narrativity and storytelling are things I can fool around with because I'm a little bit distant from this tragedy. They weren't my grandparents. It was a great uncle . . . So I can come at this from a totally different angle, with more spaciousness in my positioning. And part of what the book has the luxury to explore, and even weep a little about, is distance. And so, honestly, when I experience these terrible moments, it's probably not as loaded as it would have been if it was my grandfather I had been trying to find out about. So I'm aware of the fact that I'm two steps down, but I'm one step horizontal from the epicenter of this trauma. It's part of the theme of displacement in the book, about not being close

> enough . . . The book is as much about distance as it is about proximity. Another thing I want to avoid is falsely claiming a trauma that isn't mine . . . I'm not an heir to the Holocaust, but I am heir to a great storyteller. (Naves)

Such disclaimers aside, Mendelsohn's preoccupation with his familial connection to the murdered six and his inheritance of trauma are central to the unfolding of the narrative about his particular six of six million. While both novelist and memoirist might be said to share, in Gary Weissman's terms, similar "fantasies of witnessing," the memoirist, in particular, goes in search of a "self" in the absence of others (Weissman, 4). The memoirist always runs the potentially narcissistic risk of becoming his own most favorite character. To "heroize yourself" is a tendency Mendelsohn, by his own admission, consciously tries to avoid (Naves). To this end, Mendelsohn is quick to discredit, in his particular case, the generic categorization: "I don't think this is a memoir . . . This is a book about how to use everything in my life . . . my family history and my own relationship with my parents and siblings—how to use all of that to find out about Shmiel and his family and what happened to them" (O'Hehir). Despite such objections, however, Mendelsohn's part in the unfolding of events is crucial to the outcome and is central at the outset of the narrative, as he admits: "You could even say the absolute question it starts out with is, 'Who am I, if I am him? If I'm a reincarnation of [my great uncle], who am I?' My whole book is an attempt to fill in his blanks so I can finally be myself" (Naves). Thus, the third-generational project becomes both self-construction and discovery of the lost past, a tenacious and precarious stalking of the past that unavoidably involves the revision of the present.

Not surprisingly, the quest for the past begins with artifacts, with tangible evidence of the existence of lives lived before the more proximate moment of one's own place in history. Sarah Wildman's search for the woman her grandfather left behind when he fled the Nazi invasion of Vienna begins with a hidden cache of letters found by his granddaughter after his death, the "story of a single person plucked from the enormity."[19] Such artifacts become, for the third generation, the impetus for shaping the narratives of the lives of others. And they hold such magical and fantasied storytelling properties for this generation in particular, be-

cause, in the absence of or the calculated silence of those whose lives might have touched on the lives of the missing, the artifact is all that remains, a touchstone to the past. As Nancy Miller admits in her memoir *What They Saved: Pieces of a Jewish Past*, "I've conjured stories from my objects about the people to whom they once belonged. They've become evidence, telling details from a family history that was until now lost to me" (5). Thus artifacts—letters, postcards, photographs, family heirlooms—are, as Miller suggests, "like signposts to a journey" whose beginnings are initially mapped by way of these telling objects (5). Although Miller's memoir is a third-generation account not of those lost to the Shoah, but rather a chronicle of an earlier history, the turn of the twentieth-century pogroms, the narrative not only reveals characteristic patterns that we find in third-generation Holocaust memoirs, but gets us there. That is, although Miller sets out to locate her family's history in prewar Europe, she inevitably finds herself at that defining moment that reshaped Jewish history. In her attempts to locate the "shadowy status" of her Kishinev relatives, the paternal branch of the Kipnis family, Miller will come up against the "unexpected" (8). Traveling to Moldova and Ukraine in search of "something that would make the lost lives feel real . . . and somehow mine" (158), Miller's quest for the specific members of the Kipnis family who fled the pogroms to come to America well before the outbreak of war will take her, inevitably, to the Holocaust, where all tracks lead. In search of the place of their origins, "the places my ancestors had lived in and left," Miller encounters "everything that by definition I could not have calculated. Above all, I had not expected . . . I had not reckoned on . . . the Holocaust. I had not heard about camps in Ukraine and I had not known that a camp had existed only miles from Bratslav, the ancestral village I had only recently located on a map . . . I realized for the first time how close my own ancestors, starting with my great-grandfather Chaim, could have come to elimination in the Holocaust, had they remained. And so, in a way, the Holocaust finally caught up with me" (173). Hers is a journey motivated in large part by her uncertainty and set against the "vague sense of gloom attached to their lives" (8). This journey begins with narratives derived from fortuitously found artifacts, stories "conjured" from "objects about the people to whom they once belonged," objects from which she contrived "evidence, telling details from a family history that was until now lost to me" (5).

Not unlike the origins of Mendelsohn's journey, the "mute" photographs of his great-uncle Shmiel and his family, Miller's search is prompted by the unanticipated discovery of cryptic objects, exhumed from the past, secreted in the family archives without accompanying, illuminating narratives (Mendelsohn, 7). After the death of her father, Miller, sifting through the accumulated cache of unfamiliar relics, happens upon, as she explains, previously unknown and seductively curious family heirlooms, "baffling items from a Jewish legacy I knew almost nothing about: a formal family portrait glued to crumbling brown cardboard, with a fully bearded, fedora-toped patriarch . . . a receipt for the upkeep of a cemetery grave . . . directions to an unveiling; copies of handwritten letters that appeared to be in Hebrew; an embroidered blue-velvet tallis bag (complete with tefillin); a folder mysteriously labeled 'property in Israel' (including a map); and tightly curled locks of dark-blonde hair packed into a cardboard box that once held fancy French soap" (Miller, 3–4). This treasure trove of icons from the past becomes for Miller the discovery of memory in the form of things, objects and artifacts from which narratives of discovery emerge, "objects that offered hints about the missing narrative" (4). For Miller such artifacts—photographs, maps, the stuff of ritual and belonging—become substantive, their tangible weight and design the shape of memory reified and confirmed, objects that, as Miller finds, "once embodied a living tradition . . . a symbolic thread to that inherited past of untold stories" (224–25).

Artifacts thus become, in this calculus, clues; here the object is the signifier of what is lost but also the container of found knowledge. The object of discovery—like an offering—becomes the motivating impetus for the beginning of the encounter with the past. As such, the object becomes tangible evidence of the means of detection; it gives license to proceed on the quest for knowledge. Third-generation Guatemalan novelist Eduardo Halfon, in the short story "Monastery," describes the motivating force behind his autobiographical narrator's resolve to return to the Poland of his grandfather's origins as an unremarkable "little sheet of yellow paper" upon which his grandfather, at the end of his life, wrote his address.[20] For the narrator, this scrap of paper carries the weight of history and heritage, "a little yellow testament . . . a little clue to the family treasure . . . a little inheritance left to a grandson" (Halfon, "Monastery," 144). The materiality of this legacy gives substance to the

grandson's claims to his patrimony but also license to proceed on his quest to uncover and resurrect his grandfather's life. This scrap of paper, a material fragment of the past, is more than a pass or a passport to another place and time. It is, as the narrator perceives it, "a mandate. An order. A dictate" (145), a behest to trespass upon the geography of his grandfather's guarded history. And although his grandfather, a survivor of Sachsenhausen, Neuengamme, Buna Werke, and Auschwitz "refused to ever return" to the land of his birth, "refused ever to pronounce another word in Polish . . . deeply offended by his countrymen, and his native land, and his native tongue," and all that betrayed him, the narrator will find in this testament "an itinerary. A travel guide. A few coordinates on the mysterious and uneven map of our family" ("Monastery," 144–45). Here, in the artifact, place and identity—consanguinity—intersect. And thus, the grandson, motivated by an unarticulated and inexplicable impulse will find himself "standing in the Warsaw airport" with this unremarkable scrap of paper in his hand, "clinging to [it] like a talisman" ("Monastery," 145). As the narrator, nonplussed but curiously consoled, recognizes, the piece of paper holding "the last scrawl of his [grandfather's] own hand" was testament to a life lived before the cataclysmic rupture that irrevocably changed the direction of an unpredictable future (ibid). As the narrator allows, this brief directive "was, in short, a prayer" (ibid.). And it's a prayer not only for the past, for that which was lost, but also for the future, enjoining the generations to follow. After all, as this third-generation sojourner perceives, their lives are intertwined, his grandfather's history, "a history that in a way was also mine" (ibid.). For, as Halfon acknowledges, "In the end, our history is our only patrimony," and thus to be guarded (ibid.).

As with Halfon and Miller, Mendelsohn's "search begins with our little family archive—old photographs, letters, postcards," all occasions for narrative possibilities, signposts to the past (Zisquit, 347). These artifacts provide something tangible to focus on and to grasp in the absence of memory and the living voice of those who were lost, or, as Mendelsohn amends, "not so much lost as waiting," waiting, that is, to be wrested from the abstractions of history (Mendelsohn, 43). Such objects—pieces of and from past lives—are stand-ins for those who are absent. So too, such artifacts are surrogates for and thus take the shape of memory. As Mendelsohn explains in contrast to those in possession of memories, "I was

so rich in the keepsakes but had no memories to go with them" (182). In some ways the very presence of extant artifacts suggests what is so obviously missing. In this way, such objects are readily seized upon and transformed by the third-generation memoirist into stories. The objects become narratives. As Mendelsohn explains, finding among his deceased grandfather's belongings a cache of letters written in his great-uncle's hand, becomes a moment of discovery and possibility. The letters, like the photographs, become the frame, the scaffolding upon which he erects the lost narrative of his great-uncle's life: "So this is what my grandfather had been carrying with him, all those years. The letters Shmiel had been writing, in the last desperate year while he could still write, when he thought he could find a way to get out. It had been there, right in front of my eyes, all that time, those summers when I'd idly look at the odd wallet, impatient to go outside and hear my grandfather's stories, never dreaming of the story that he was carrying in his left breast pocket. It had been there, right in front of me, and I hadn't seen a thing" (61). Mendelsohn's grandfather carried in his breast pocket, evocatively close to his heart, the letters from his murdered brother much in the same way that he carries his memories to his grave.

Such a discovery is accompanied by Mendelsohn's nagging sense of belatedness and his own unwitting participation in the family's silence. What he fears, of course, is his own inattentive deflection from others, his abdication of responsibility for his own self-serving interests, taken up, as we all are, "preoccupied . . . with the business of living" (73). Coming upon the timeworn letters, for Mendelsohn, becomes "a way of connecting the remote past, in which my relatives seemed to be hopelessly, irretrievably frozen, to the limpid present" (47). Ironically, of course, the present is never entirely pellucid, our motives, intentions, and ambitions never entirely unambiguous even as—or because—we are in the midst of negotiating and maneuvering them. So, too, the present is never as compelling as is the mysterious past. "Limpid," not surprisingly, resonates with "limp," suggesting the way in which the present up against the past seems, in contrast, flattened, lacking the gravitas of history and thus more significant, more compelling, than one's own time. As Mendelsohn says of the "allure" of the faces in the photographs of his dead relatives, "because we knew almost nothing about . . . them; their unsmiling, unspeaking faces seemed, as a result, more beguiling" (7). Finding the let-

ters and photographs becomes the motivating impulse for Mendelsohn, as Paule Lévy suggests, "à combler les ellipses, éclarer les obscuritiés [to fill in ellipses, illuminate dark spots]" and thus "de soulever la chape de silence, de briser les résistances familiales et d'explorer les non-dits pour arracher les disparus à l'anonymat et l'oubli [to lift the layer of silence, to break the family's resistance, and to explore things left unsaid in order to wrest the lost from the anonymity and forgetfulness]," but also to direct and sanction his quest.[21] For such artifacts of memory are also objects of desire signifying, as Mendelsohn suggests, "the strange proximity of the dead," bridging the gap between the clouded past and the "limpid" present and giving figurative voice to—since in the actual words of—the dead (47). Here the characteristic Holocaust trope of prosopopoeia, reanimating the dead, allows Mendelsohn to conjure imagined, fantasized worlds. Thus, much like transferred memory, the found objects, the "detritus of a world upended," passed along generationally are pointers, providing him with clues to the desired point of traumatic origin (Wildman, 311). Such a possibility emphasizes the recurring importance of returning to the place, the site of catastrophe as well as the events leading up to the traumatic end.

Objects thus represent an individual path to memory. This impulse to create the surrogacy of physical objects as a testimonial to memory might be further elucidated when we consider the placement of such objects in the Holocaust memorial located in Portland, Oregon.[22] Dedicated in 2004 to the victims of the Holocaust, the memorial in Washington Park is in many ways a physical manifestation of the way in which objects become sites of memory and imagined lives, not unlike the attention to artifacts in the writing of the third-generation memoirist. Bronze objects, scattered along a cobblestone path that resembles train tracks and leads to a semicircular stone panel, are representations of life before its destruction: a suitcase, a doll, a book, a broken violin, eyeglasses, shoes. (See figures 1 through 4.)[23]

These representations of discarded, worn objects represent the flotsam and residue of people who departed in a hurry, their belongings torn from them, or haphazardly abandoned. Such items, scattered seemingly at random, forsaken, are suggestive of individual traces that might form a path to memory. In the midst of collective rupture—the slaughter of families, the shattering of entire communities, the deportation of

Figure 1. Portland, Oregon Holocaust Memorial. Photograph by Hannah June Choi.

Figure 2. Portland, Oregon Holocaust Memorial. Photograph by Hannah June Choi.

Figure 3. Portland, Oregon Holocaust Memorial. Photograph by Hannah June Choi.

Figure 4. Portland, Oregon Holocaust Memorial. Photograph by Hannah June Choi.

thousands of Jews—the individual items strewn along the pathway suggest the interruption and renting of individual lives, items that once held a specific function and meaning left in abandon, never to be retrieved. Such artifacts, however, have a life in their thingness, as these sculptures suggest, while those who might have once owned them do not. These are objects without their carriers; they exist independently of those to whom they once belonged. The otherwise tranquil, sylvan grounds of the wooded area in which this scene appears are disrupted by the presence of such objects. The landscape is threatening, unsettling, and disorienting for the spectator who trespasses upon such hidden, forested quietude. For the objects lead one to the central clearing in which stands a curved wall upon which are inscribed the names of the dead and words from those who survived. There is an effect of a very real sense of danger in these immovable, fixed objects. James Young, in describing Berlin's Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe provocatively captures this sense of disquietude: "Its *Unheimlichkeit*, or uncanniness derives precisely from the sense of danger generated in such a field, the demand that we now find our own way into and out of such memory, alone and together . . . It also demands that visitors actually enter and experience the memorial space . . . the danger implied . . . feels like something closer to an actual, rather than only metaphorical, threat."[24] So, too, this threat, this uncanny, familiar yet strange experience of walking among the out-of-place and anachronistic artifacts of memory and rupture that exist out of time creates a spatial and physical barrier, an invisible field, separating the spectator—both participant and interloper—from the safe passage to the outside world. The experience is simultaneously remote and proximate, the navigator both insider and outsider. As Mendelsohn suggests of his own family's meager archive of artifacts and images, there was an "awful discrepancy between what certain images and stories meant for me, who was not there and for whom, therefore, the images and stories could never be more than interesting or edifying or fiercely 'moving' . . . and what they meant for the people . . . for whom those images and stories were, really, their *lives*" (Mendelsohn, 183).

Nevertheless, in the void created by absence and silence, such artifacts come to represent a physical relationship to memory and thus are the beginning of the journey of reconstruction and revision for the memoirist, just as the presence of such objects of memory heralds the end of

the journey for those who were forced to leave such artifacts behind. As Hirsch suggests, such "objects, lost and again found, structure plots of return: they can embody memory and thus trigger affect shared across generations."[25] These representative images in the imagination of the third-generation memoirist exist as evidence of lives once lived, providing, in Mendelsohn's case, confirmation that "traces of those six might still remain in the world, somewhere" (Mendelsohn, 73). And so, Mendelsohn, like other memoirists of his generation, a "witness to traces," to borrow a phrase from Simone Gigliotti, will follow the trail of these objects to their defining place of simultaneous origin and rupture.[26]

Finally, the objects are only of substance because of the stories of return they promise. Vessels of the stuff of undiscovered lives, such artifacts become confused with the stories themselves in a similar way that memory becomes confused with its object container. This confusion might be likened to trauma and its repetitive return: the iteration is not the traumatic experience itself, but rather, the image or impression of trauma, trauma's constant double. Such doubling, again, blurs time and space, confounding that which is proximate and remote. Here the representative artifact becomes a rhetorical trope, a metonymic substitution of one noun for a totality of anguish. Contained in the simple artifact—a photograph, a letter, a wallet, a map, and the like—is a chronicle of horrors, a history of misery. In the substitution of the container for the thing contained, we experience a dismantling of the conventional meaning of such common terms. They become signifiers, traumatic referents, and as such, bring about a convergence of individual, collective, and historical memory. These and other Holocaust markers function both conceptually and perceptually; language and its associations are reconceived to specify and expand experience, opening up the possibility of interpretation of, that is, the story behind memory's artifact, the "missing narrative," contained, preserved in its material shell (Miller, 4). So it is not the object itself, the container, that holds value, but rather the fantasized narrative it contains in the memoirist's imaginative appropriation of it. As Mendelsohn readily admits, however, "one thing that we always know is that the story that we tell about a person is never the story that they will tell about themselves" (Naves). And so the distance between object and story widens in the process of trying to close it.

Thus such artifacts not only invite the memoirist to go back in time,

but arrest and contain time, if only for the moment of conjuring the narrative suggested within. So too, then, the object is not only a signifier of memory but also of the memoirist's imagination, which might be thought of as the vessel that holds and protects the absent memory of those who were lost. Michael Rothberg, in describing "the traumatic realist project" in memoirs by Ruth Klüger and Charlotte Delbo, eyewitnesses to the accounts they narrate, suggests that such narratives fashion "traumatic realism out of the haunting memories of the past. Such memoirs seek to bring forth traces of trauma, to preserve and even expose the abyss between everyday reality and real extremity."[27] While Rothberg's reading of firsthand testimonies explores the project of direct witnessing and the transformation of trauma onto the page, his remarks are useful in suggesting the way in which such representation, rather than "an attempt to reflect the traumatic event mimetically," hopes to "produce it as an object of knowledge, and to transform its readers so that they are forced to acknowledge their relationship to post-traumatic culture . . . It seems both to construct access to a previously unknowable object and to instruct an audience in how to approach that object" (Rothberg, 67). Thus the trauma itself becomes an object, an artifact that bridges the perceptual and affective gap between remote history and proximity, thus conflating spatial and temporal distinctions. The reenactment of trauma conflates real and imagined worlds, moving aside the temporal constraints preventing access. Thus the object of trauma is pushed into the foreground; spatially and perceptually, all other impediments move aside for the moment of realized objectification. For the writer of literary representation of the Holocaust, especially for the memoirist whose testimony is indirect, fashioned from the information and memories of others, the traumatic real must be reified, a made object. In its reenactment, two seemingly disparate modes of recognition must happen simultaneously: the apperception of the reality of the events and the awareness of the absence of such immediacy. As Rothberg suggests, "The abyss at the heart of trauma not only entails the exile of the real but also its insistence. Traumatic realism is marked by the survival of extremity into the everyday world and is dedicated to mapping the complex temporal and spatial patterns by which the absence of the real, a real absence, makes itself felt in the familiar plenitude of reality . . . only because it knows it cannot revive the dead" (67).

In an attempt to navigate the chasm between the real and the unfathomable, the recognizable and the extraordinary, the third-generation memoirists will attempt to make familiar the unrecognizable landscape of the past by physically traveling to the place of origin, figuratively walking in the footsteps of those who came before them, thus laying claim to that unchartered, unmapped terrain. These are, to be sure, narratives of return. Yet, the third-generation memoirists who travel in an attempt, as Simon puts it in *Bashert: A Granddaughter's Holocaust Quest*, "to reconstruct her [grandmother's] life," will "return" to a place they have never before seen (18). Their journeys to unearth the past and reconstruct the lives of the victims of the Shoah, both those who perished and those who survived, represent less of a return than an unanticipated and uneasy expedition of initiates, recruits to memory. They are less going back than they are setting forth, an incongruous forward march into the past. Kestenberg has proposed that such "rescue missions" create a "time tunnel," "a double reality, one current and the other transposed into the era of the Holocaust."[28] Part of the complexity of such navigation is, indeed, the conflation of not only space but time. As Mendelsohn suggests, in proceeding on this ambivalent journey of discovery, the novice must "get used to counting backward—to measuring increasing closeness to your own position in time by means of decreasing numeric values. Of course, this seems only natural when you spend time studying what happened in eastern Poland between 1941 and 1944, since the higher the numeric value of a given year, the lower the quantity of living human beings in a given town: in Bolechow, say. Or, to put it spatially, the closer the year is to the present, the farther away are the moments, the seconds and hours and afternoons, in which certain people . . . were actually alive. In this way, by an ironic machination of history, time and space, distance and proximity, become confounded" (Mendelsohn, 88). To this end, the return might be better conceived figuratively, a metonymic return, as Simon suggests of her trip to the small villages of Brest and Volchin where her relatives perished: "I have come for them" (13). Such calculated maneuverings are, figuratively, a return, to be sure, to a lost time and unfamiliar place, but one that is narrated after the journey to the site of origin or catastrophe, thus a retrospective return through narrative recollection and the ordering and assessment of more proximate memory, competing spaces, and temporalities.

Hirsch speaks to the problem inherent in the notion of return: "The impossibility and implausibility of return is intensified if descendants who were never there earlier return to the sites of trauma. Can they even attempt to put the pieces together . . . or is the point of connection, including the physical contact with objects, lost with the survivor generation? What if several generations pass? What if traces are *deliberately* erased . . . ?" (Hirsch, 206). Such a return by proxy is an attempt on the part of the memoirist to compensate for the gap that exists between distant knowledge and knowing. Motivated thus by "a desire to know what had really happened . . . in whatever detail still remained to be known" Mendelsohn will, as he puts it, be impelled "to leave my computer, to leave the safety of books and documents, their descriptions of events so clipped that you'd never guess that the events were happening to real people . . . to forego the coziness of the records office and the comfort of the Internet, and to go out into the world, to make whatever effort I could, however slight the results might be, to see what and who might still remain, and instead of reading the books and learning that way, *to talk to them all* . . . . To discover if, even at this impossible late date, there might still be other clues, other facts and details" (Mendelsohn, 73). In doing so, Mendelsohn will move from the security and familiarity of intellectual distance into the space of memory, the tangible physicality of place, of envisioning place not from afar, but navigating the terrain of that otherwise foreign place, motivated by the desire "simply to go there, as if the air and soil of the place could somehow tell us something concrete and true" (81). Such an attempt to visualize and concretize place and the environs in which one's relatives dwelled is a persistent preoccupation and fixation in third-generation memoirs. As Simon reconstructs her path to the village in which her grandmother was raised, a village whose borders have shifted over time—Poland, Russia, Belarus—she emphasizes her preoccupation and concern with precision, with identifying the exact location, the streets, buildings, and neighborhoods that delimited her grandmother's experience, the configuration of her grandmother's life as mediated and filtered through her mother's partial memory: "I try to find the school, the well-appointed apartments, the crowded tenements and narrow courtyards of my mother's memory. I read modern tourist books with little mention of the Jews; I search maps; I question the guides. No one recognizes the street names. Have they been distorted by years of

living?" (18). Time, in this context, might thus be measured, as Hirsch suggests, in terms of its "incommensurability of return—a measure of the time that had passed and the life lived by other people and other bodies in the same space and among the same objects" (Hirsch, 202).

Such regrettable if inevitable distortions of time, memory, and geography, the traces of the past, though cobbled together inexpertly and hesitatingly, compel the memoirist to follow in their tracks, for, finally, as Simon pleadingly insists of her own family's shattered history, "Fifty thousand Jewish citizens can't be buried in a forest without a trace. As with Volchin, sooner or later, a bone pokes out from the spring thaw. Sooner or later, a voice croaks from the phlegm of repressed memory. Sooner or later, a strangulated wail hisses between the brain's synapses. Sooner or later, something emerges of the lives that were once lived" (152). Thus as Simone Gigliotti suggests, "Although the Holocaust took place in the 1930s and 1940s in Europe, its memory routes remain open and continue to guide passengers to the dark places of compulsive return and witness" (203). To this precarious and uncertain end, Mendelsohn's narrative, like other memoirs written by the third generation, is, as he suggests, "a tale of returning" (Mendelsohn, 493). And they will go far to reach the object of their desire. Mendelsohn's quest will take him on an odyssey across the globe to the small Ukrainian town of Bolechow, but also to Poland, to Australia, to Israel, following the traces of those who knew or might have known his lost relatives. Simon's journey will take her from New York to the village of Volchin, now a part of Belarus, a trip that will wind its way to the forest of Brona Gora, to Brest, and to Minsk, a passage that, as she says, "extends from the Old World to the New, from shtetl to metropolitan city, from east to west, from one century to another, and across rivers and seas and oceans" (Simon, 256). For Miller, "the roots of adventure began with a photograph . . . taken in Kishinev circa 1903" (Miller, 175) and took her to Moldova and to Ukraine only to find that "*You only think you know what you are looking for*. The corollary to that early lesson of the roots quest is this: *what most often proves valuable is almost never what you were expecting*" (158, italics in original text). Adorján's quest to understand not only her grandparents' perilous history but their suicides decades later takes her to Budapest, Israel, Paris, Copenhagen, and to the site of Mauthausen, the concentration camp where her grandfather was interred in 1944, about which "we know nothing.

He never talked about it, and if you asked him . . . he replied, 'We don't talk about that,'" an "extermination through labor camp," incongruently "now a museum . . . something about it that suggests a holiday camp, the place is so peaceful, the birds twittering, the sun shining."[29] And although Jérémie Dres will circumvent the site of the death camps in the graphic memoir *We Won't See Auschwitz*, his illustrated journey to reconstruct his grandmother's life, "to find her again," will take him on the trail from Paris to Poland, to Warsaw's historic district and its "once-thriving Jewish community," to his grandfather's birthplace in the village of Zelechów, and to Kraków, "50 km from Auschwitz," and the site of Europe's biggest festival of Jewish culture.[30]

For all its promise, then, the return to the places once inhabited by the third generation's ancestors is, ultimately, destabilizing. Unsure of what they will find there and, indeed, uncertain of whether such places even exist anymore, the location nonetheless takes the shape of memory, or, as Hirsch describes it, "the act of returning to place and . . . the objects found there inflect the process of affective transmission that so profoundly shapes the postmemory" of those who return long after the events of the past have transpired (Hirsch, 204). Place becomes a replacement for and finally a simulacrum of memory. As Miller suggests, in arriving at the birthplace of her grandfather and great-grandfather, "Here at least is something I can claim to know" (Miller, 168). Of course, the place found is not the place once inhabited. Yet the place is at once unrecognizable and familiar. Like the photographs, maps, letters, and other relics from the past, place becomes a visual, tangible signifier for absence, the physical site, like the photographs, produces an uncanny recognition and, at the same time, a reminder of difference, a startled and startling simultaneous familiarity and alterity in such manifestations of the uncanny. Such belated recognition is achieved through the obsessive preoccupation with such objects as they are zeroed in by the desire to know. For such objects poured over and internalized prior to departure become internalized and made into a recognized feature of one's own remembered origins. The perceptual presence of artifacts and place, as well as the location of others who were there at the time and who might still remember, become part of the project of integrating and also mediating loss, providing a relation to what is no longer visible. Indeed, as Mendelsohn admits, "I was . . . interested in the life of the Old Country, not merely its

death, and I wanted to see what Galicia looked like, what the topography was, what kinds of trees and animals and people lived there. What kind of place my family had come from" (Mendelsohn, 110). Thus, returning to place produces a kind of double vision, like double voicing, the layering of different perspectives, different positions, times, and histories simultaneously.

Such a return, then, provides the grounds for an imagined reality. For one can return to the place of origins, the place of life, or of catastrophe, or of death, but one can neither relive nor reenact the events or the feelings of those who actually experienced them, even less then, of course, than one could relive one's own uncanny experience. And no amount of factual data and information or being in situ can produce uncontestable knowledge, since, as Mendelsohn discovers, "there is simply no way of reconstructing their subjective experiences" (Mendelsohn, 226). In other words, one can go there, but not be there. As Mendelsohn admits, such knowledge is always gleaned from a distance, from an emotional and affective divide. Such knowledge is always approximate, "something like this" as Mendelsohn observes (237). In trying to reconstruct, for example, his great-uncle Shmiel's final moments before entering the gas chambers, Mendelsohn reveals, "at that point the gas comes on, and I will not try to imagine it, because he is in there alone, and neither I nor anyone else (except the nineteen-hundred and ninety-nine or so others who did go with him) can go there with him" (240). It is one thing to be there, to see where a particular, documented event occurred, to witness in sanitized retrospect the site of event. It's another to be there, in this particular case, at the moment of dying, and this is a place to which no one can accompany the person who was actually there experiencing the event: "So we cannot go there with them. All I think I can say, now, with any degree of certainty, is that in one of those rooms, on a particular moment of a particular day in September 1942, although the moment and the day will never be known, the lives of my uncle Shmiel and his family . . . came to an end" (240–41).

Thus no end of iteration, no tangibility of a found or remembered object, will get them there, so that finally standing in the same place or even in a proximate place is at best a weak and ineffectual substitute for direct, unmediated witnessing and experience. As Mendelsohn acknowledges, "whatever we see in museums, the artifact and the evidence, can

give us only the dimmest comprehension of what the event itself was like; why we must be careful when we try to envision 'what it was like' . . . not the same as being in that space" (237). Place is not a replica of space, of the affective, visceral, immediate and unambiguous experience of being there. Such an experiential and affective vacuum initiates, not only a return, but a re-return, a return once again to project oneself onto the screen of the experience missed. For Mendelsohn will return once again despite his mother's objections, "one last time . . . to bring an end to the search . . . to walk again the confusingly twisting streets of the town once more, but armed this time with so much more information than we had the first time we went . . . when we had known nothing at all except six names" (450). Such a return to the place of return is an attempt to master the anxiety catalyzed by loss. The double return is a form of repetition compulsion, to confront not only what we are missing, but what we both fear and desire. The initial journey becomes a kind of rehearsal, practice for the impossible mastery over both the garnering and ordering of information, since the piecing together the onslaught of such knowledge is cumulative, piecemeal. As Simon acknowledges, it's only "Little by little," that one begins to form a picture of the events as they transpired (Simon, 162). The reiterative need to return is a symptom of the attempt to master the fear of how little one can ever know. As Miller says of her unconscious motivation in "making a second trip" to the village in which her grandfather lived, she was "enacting a gesture. . . . I could not shake the feeling that I was still missing something, and that I would somehow suffer from that failure, as would my book, unless I returned" (Miller, 206). Returning again is, as she suggests, an attempt "to master the terror of loss . . . returning to the scene of where something was lost . . . fooling ourselves with time travel; if we cannot retrieve the past, we can go back to its places in the present. Playing with loss becomes a way to confront, often not fully consciously, what we are missing, to admit that we are missing something. Sometimes this is something literal: a document, the name of someone in an unidentified photograph, a scrap of paper, pieces of the past that we might have overlooked. But in the end, by returning to the place of loss, we acknowledge our true sadness, which is that we miss what's missing" (207). Such repetition is an attempt to conquer the fear that one will never know, that the past is irretrievably lost. This repetition is a kind of obsession, a way of both resisting and

succumbing to desire, as if through multiple iterations one will finally get it right and will bring the obsession to a close, a release of the anxiety and longing that holds one captive to the repetition. As Auerhahn and Prelinger provocatively have suggested, "repetition is an *intra*personal phenomenon occurring in two stages: One involves an event, the second its reproduction (which includes a reworking in fantasy)."[31] Of course, such iterations can only occur in fantasy and thus cannot fully reclaim and integrate—make intelligible—the actual experience.

Eduardo Halfon's short story "The Polish Boxer," from the short story collection of the same name, captures the tension between proximity and distance articulated by Mendelsohn.[32] "The Polish Boxer" begins with something of a joke. Eduardo's grandfather, a survivor of both Sachsenhausen and Auschwitz, initially tells his grandson that the number tattooed on his left forearm was his telephone number, placed there so he would not forget it. Soon enough, however, the grandson comes to comprehend the "psychological importance of that joke, and . . . the historical origin of that number" ("The Polish Boxer," 78–79). As a youngster the grandson had imagined various, more often than not ludicrous and hyperbolized scenarios of how his grandfather had received the tattoo, but nothing in the grandson's vivid imagination could match the stuff of the real story. Indeed, all the fantasizing, the "game of inventing secret scenes of how he might have gotten [the numbers]," produces complicated scenarios involving German officers in black leather, hot irons, clowns on unicycles, and the like, caricatures and cartoon exaggerations suggesting the grandson's incomprehension of his grandfather's past ("The Polish Boxer," 79). The reality of the tattoo, its now-fading digits, is, in its stark, monotonous and routinized simplicity, as the grandson comes to realize, much more horrifying, those "five mysterious green digits that, much more than on his forearm, seemed . . . tattooed on some part of his soul" (79). While the younger narrator—in all his adolescent imaginings—wants to turn the possible scenarios into horror shows, the older narrator comes to realize that, ironically, the real horror is in the routinized, familiar face of horror. The reality is much worse in its simplicity; no exaggeration is needed.

Despite the distance, both chronological and experiential, between grandfather and grandson, they do share certain bonds beyond the relational. They call each other "oitze," a variant of the Yiddish word "trea-

sure." In addition, the grandson shares a few drops of the grandfather's whisky, which the old man drank daily since he had begun having heart problems. Such tangential markers of kinship only suggest the deeply felt but unarticulated connection between grandfather and grandson. While the grandson here is curiously unmoved by the one family photo, "only one," that hung on the wall by his grandfather's bed, what he really wants are the stories of the family members the grandson never knew. The faces in the photograph appeared to him not to reflect "real people," but, rather, "gray and anonymous faces of characters torn from some history textbook" (82). The narrator comes to learn about the Shoah through his grandfather's cryptic stories, illustrating Wiesel's contention that "anyone who listens to a witness becomes a witness."[33] But the third generation remains an incomplete witness, as the world of the Shoah is at a two-generation remove. Moreover, the grandfather himself is, as Halfon recounts, a reluctant witness, only speaking "after almost sixty years of silence . . . something truthful about the origin of that number . . . releasing . . . words stored up for so long" (80).

Secrets and silences underscore the distance between the survivor and his grandson who asks many unanswered questions about the Holocaust. Although the narrator reveals no little ambivalence about the stories to which he is hesitatingly drawn, "fearing something, perhaps the intense transcendence of the moment, perhaps that he might not tell me anything more" (81). Throughout their discussion the grandfather covers his tattooed Auschwitz number with his right hand as if to signify that what happened in the camps will never be understood by those not present. Asked why he was chosen as the "stubendienst" of the block of Jewish prisoners, assistant to the one in charge, the grandfather considers the narrator as if they "suddenly spoke different languages" and then simply "smiled, shrugging his shoulders" (83–84). But in the old man's face the narrator sees the "disguised question inside that question: What did you have to do for them to put you in charge? I saw the question that is never asked: What did you have to do to survive?" (84).

Perhaps the most enigmatic of the secrets associated with the grandfather's Holocaust experience involves his fortuitous encounter with the Polish boxer with whom the grandfather spoke all night on the eve of his scheduled execution. The boxer, more well schooled in the operations of the camp, informed the narrator's grandfather that he would be put

on trial the next day. He told the grandfather what to say and what he should not say, thus saving him with words rather than fists. During the trial the grandfather told his interrogator "everything the Polish boxer had told [him] to say and not telling . . . everything the Polish boxer told [him] not to say" (90). The grandson, eager to discover the Polish boxer's saving words was foiled, ultimately, by the ellipsis in the narrative, as he puts it, "if my grandfather didn't remember the Polish boxer's words, or if he chose not to tell them to me, or if they simply didn't matter anymore, if they had now served their purpose as words and so had disappeared forever, along with the Polish boxer who spoke them one night" (ibid.).

Halfon's Polish boxer reminds us of the relationship between the grandmother and her granddaughter in Semel's *And the Rat Laughed*. There, the older woman's tale of being raped as a five-year-old when she was a hidden child during the Holocaust was completely misunderstood by her Israeli granddaughter. In Semel's narrative such confusion begs the question: Did the grandmother actually tell her story? Or did she mentally recount it to herself? In Halfon's story, we are made to wonder whether there was, in fact, a Polish boxer or whether the writer's grandfather created that figure as a way of reenforcing the fact that survival in Auschwitz was an arbitrary phenomenon. Like the grandson, we "tried to imagine . . . imagine . . . imagine . . . imagine . . . but all I could imagine . . ." was the ellipsis, "absolute silence" ("The Polish Boxer," 91). Through the cryptic gaps in the narrative, the narrator remains both distanced from and intimately impacted by the Shoah.

The unresolved and unresolvable conclusion to the quest is the inevitable outcome of the return narratives of the third-generation witness. As Miller puts it, those who have vanished, like the places they once inhabited, will be "forever suspended between lost and found" (Miller, 229). As will those who go in search of them. For finally there can be no resolution to loss, particularly for those murdered in the Shoah, now, over half a century later, as Simon laments, "victims of disappearing memory" (102). The third-generation memoirists, regardless of the number of return visits to the actual and approximate sites, still find themselves lost in the fragments of memories, and the accumulation of artifacts and names and dates, and of the places they have traveled. Finally there is no way to bridge the epistemological gap between distance and proximity, and no

amount of reiterations or desire will outwit time's tenacity and, appositionally, memory's diminution. As Mendelsohn writes:

> A unique problem faces my generation . . . those who had been . . . seven or eight years old during the mid-1960s . . . a problem that will face no other generation in history. We are just close enough to those who were there that we feel an obligation to the facts as we know them; but we are also just far enough away . . . to worry about our own role in the transmission of those facts, now that the people to whom those facts happened have mostly slipped away. (Mendelsohn, 433)

But beyond the inevitable impasse that by necessity exists between experience and indirect, hazy, and inexact understanding, an experiential innocence—those born in a different time and place—the third-generation memoirist who sets forth on the journey to discover the lost has no adequate frame of reference in which to conceptualize and dispose of the facts he or she uncovers. Finally the limitations of knowing—of imagining rather than fictionalizing—thwart the kind of comprehension and perception that the third-generation memoirist seeks exactly because such limitations prevent identification. In trying to pin down the specific, verifiable certainties surrounding the death of his cousin, Mendelsohn admits partial, if aggravating defeat:

> I have often tried to imagine what might have happened to her. Although every time I do, I realize how limited my resources are. How much can we know about the past, and those who disappeared from it? We can read the books and talk to those who were there. We can look at photographs. We can go to the places where these people lived, where these things happened. Someone can tell us, it happened on such-and-such a day. (204)

But finally this is why the belated return fails: one cannot be there at the time in which the events occurred and those long since dead were alive. In resigned response to the inadequacy of being there in that place of hijacked desire, Mendelsohn admits being foiled by the exigencies of

time and otherness, and no amount of information or exertion or return or magical thinking can make up for the lack of interiority that ensures the fixed impasse.

Trumped and ultimately outmaneuvered by time and contingency, Mendelsohn will concede the fixed margins of imperfect knowledge:

> All this is, inevitably, approximate. I have been to Bolechow, but the town is not so physically transformed . . . that the Bolechow I visited in 2001 bears only an imperfect resemblance to the place [cousin] Ruchele had to walk through in the house before her death. And even if . . . a photograph of the town existed today that had been taken on October 28, 1941, the day Ruchele was seized, could such a photo give me a precise sense of what she saw . . . So there is the problem of visualization. And what about the other senses? Bolechow, we know, had a particular smell, because of the chemicals used at the many tanneries . . . Ruchele walked to her death that day, did she smell the tangy smell of Bolechow? What is the smell of a thousand terrified people being herded to their deaths? What is the smell of a room in which a thousand terrified people have been kept for a day and a half, deprived of toilets, a room in which the stove has been lighted, a room in which perhaps a few dozen people have been shot to death, a woman has gone into labor? I will never know. (204–5)

In this asyndeton of the textures of fear and anguish, Mendelsohn points to the failure, not only of the imagination, but more importantly of affective transference, a projection of one's senses—the condition of being that person—the ambient sensations and apperceptions of self onto another. Here the ordinary experiences of living in America in the twenty-first century—despite its own capacities for unhappiness, innumerable offenses, and assaults—cannot hope to be compared with the extraordinary experience of the ruptured dismantling performed by the Shoah on the lives of those who experienced it firsthand. As Mendelsohn cautions, "it is important to avoid the temptation to ventriloquize, to 'imagine' and then 'describe' something for which there is simply no parallel in our experience of life" (226). Yet, throughout *The Lost*, Mendelsohn will attempt to imagine the events as they must have taken place, only to yield

to the persistent refrain, "it is impossible to know," a haunting melody that accompanies everything that is found. In, for example, his attempt to picture, to imagine his cousin's death, Mendelsohn writes:

> bursts of gunfire, the cold, the shivering. . . . Then another burst of fire. Did she hear it? Was the fervent activity of her mind at this moment such that she didn't really hear; or, by contrast, were her ears exquisitely attuned, waiting? We cannot know. We know only that her soft, sixteen-year-old body—which with any luck was lifeless at this point, although we know that some were still alive when they fell with a wet thud onto the warm and bleeding, excrement-smeared bodies of their fellow townsfolk—fell into the grave, and that is the last we see of her; although we have, of course, not really seen her at all. (211)

At such moments in the memoir, Mendelsohn will blur the generic divide by drawing upon the language of fiction. That is, at moments of imaginative creation—his attempts to bring the dead back to life, Mendelsohn creates characters from the limited knowledge he has gleaned, filling in the gaps in their narratives. Standing behind the screen of fiction, more novelist on such occasions than historian or memoirist, Mendelsohn gives himself license, at least momentarily, to create whole, unfolding, and coherent narratives out of the mere outlines of discovered facts.

The result of such vacillation between discourse and the lacing or layering of fantasy and reality, as Anna Richardson suggests, establishes in those "Historian-As-Detective" narratives "a dialectic between knowing and not-knowing" that creates the ongoing tension throughout such attempts at literary representation.[34] As Mendelsohn admits, "I've tried many times to imagine, to envision the experience of Uncle Shmiel and Ester and Bronia . . . But these memories, and those sounds, are impossible for me to imagine since I have never heard the sound that is made by two thousand people being marched to their deaths" (Mendelsohn, 226). Thus the third-generation memoirist must attempt to navigate and, in some ways, circumnavigate two kinds of knowledge, two ways of ordering and constructing knowledge, and both are responses to, as Hoffman suggests, the approach taken to literary representation

of the Holocaust "after such knowledge," that is, "from an ever-growing distance—temporal, geographical, cultural—with all the risks of simplification implicit in such remoteness" (ix). The third-generation memoirist, even in the face of the profusion of Holocaust artifacts, memorabilia, and modes of representation that have emerged in intellectual and popular cultures in the past two decades—novels, short stories, graphic novels, films, documentaries, photographs, memorials, museums—never knows quite enough. Such prolific access to statistical data, maps, archives, reports, and oral and written testimonies, notwithstanding, one who contemplates the Holocaust from the distance of some seventy years or more only knows so much.

There is no stable shape to memory, no measurement of suffering, no comparisons adequate to the task of bridging the gap between distance and proximity. Tropes of quantity, dimension, and breadth are, finally, feeble, unconvincing, and insufficient. As Mendelsohn suggests, what one is left to draw upon "after such knowledge" is largely desultory and misses the mark: "images and sounds you've acquired from films or television, which is to say images and sounds produced by people who have been paid to reconstruct, to the best of their ability—based on whatever reading, visiting, and looking they have done, extrapolated from whatever experiences they may have had—what such events might have looked or sounded like, although that, too, is just an approximation, ultimately" (Mendelsohn, 205). At a remove of three generations or more, one's own limited, ordinary experiences can't carry one to the other side, the remote side of knowledge. As Wiesel cautions, "You, who never lived under a sky of blood, will never know what it was like. Even if you read all the books ever written, even if you listen to all the testimonies ever given, you will remain on this side of the wall, you will view the agony and death of a people from afar, through the screen of a memory that is not your own."[35] Ever since Wiesel's 1985 contention that the one not there "will never know," Mendelsohn and other post-Holocaust writers have been struggling with the limitations of knowing and the transmission of such knowledge. And, although Mendelsohn will admit defeat—"useless to pretend that I can imagine the suffering . . . even if I have some idea of what happened . . . there is no way to reconstruct" the particularity of this experience—he will continue to write and rewrite, to calculate an

approximation of the experience over the course of some five hundred pages of epic narrative (Mendelsohn, 206).

What is lost in this calculation are not only the six members of Mendelsohn's family, but the means of articulating, not the aftermath of the loss itself and what such loss means to others, but the untarnished, unmediated portrait of their lives at that particular moment in history. While, as Mendelsohn says, it might be "possible to learn some of what transpired . . . These descriptions will of course never allow us to 'know what Shmiel, Ester, and Bronia experienced' . . . but it does permit us to construct a mental picture—a blurry one, to be sure—of certain things that were *done to them*, or rather were *likely* done to them, since we know that these things were done to others like them during the same event. I can look through the available sources and compare them, collage them, and from that arrive at a likely version of what probably happened . . . but of course I will never know" (Mendelsohn, 226; italics in original text). Of course, such qualifiers as "probably" and "likely" are conditional, as is the practice of description and representation, inevitably at a remove. Without a stable and recognizable frame of reference, the closest Mendelsohn can come is to create the "backdrop for this suffering" against which imagined scenarios can be rehearsed (Mendelsohn, 235). Each scenario—"Maybe what happened to them . . . Or maybe . . . But maybe not " (234–35)—is interrupted by the reiterative refrain of its antagonistic other and recalcitrant double: "Impossible to know . . . Impossible to know . . . Impossible to know" (54). Thus, despite Mendelsohn's intention to bridge the gap between distance and proximity, it is, as he ruefully suggests, not only "impossible to know," but "impossible to know *now*," after the passage of so much time and history and memory (206, italics ours). But in an odd way there is some comfort to be taken in not being able to imagine with felt certainty the deaths of the victims of the Shoah since none of the imagined options can ever be acceptable. Thus Mendelsohn, like others of his generation, asks us to consider the ethical obligations of such inquiry, such re-turning, into the past as well as its concomitant forms of expression. For finally the ground he stands upon is not the same ground that gave way under his unknown and fundamentally unknowable relatives. Thus Mendelsohn, as other cartographers of the imagination, in mapping out the territory of absent

memory, demonstrate the ways in which impossible knowledge becomes approximately possible.

In paying homage to the subjectivity of memory, such third-generation memoirs map a course through three essentially different but interlocking kinds or shapes of time. Such narratives, to be sure, call upon (1) *historical* time: what happened when, where, and to whom. But historical time is reshaped through (2) *imaginative*—willed—time: a bending, blending, and reshaping of time, time's return through its reinvention. So, too, there is (3) *narrative* time: time in the telling; narrative that is its own time, thus eroding temporal relations of past and present. These three dispositions of time create in these memoirs a triad but also a triptych, tablets of memory hinged together in such a way that the two outer panels, when folded inward, hide the center. When opened, they expose the absent core. When viewed together as the unfolding texture of memory, time's triptych reshapes the experience of one's vision. Here time (1) stands still, (2) goes back, and (3) extends, is ongoing, both beginning anew and continuing into the future, inviting and invoking. Finally, however, the three shapes of time are measured against *unconscious* time, which is timelessness, extending and unbending them all.

CHAPTER 4

Trauma and Tradition
Changing Classical Paradigms in Third-Generation Novelists

One job of history is to "work through a past that has not passed away."

—DOMINICK LaCAPRA, *HISTORY AND MEMORY AFTER AUSCHWITZ*

If you don't tell that story, it disappears, and even if you do tell it, it might just disappear anyway.

—JOSEPH SKIBELL, "TEN FACES"

The Jewish tradition assigns great theological weight to historical events. The covenant between God and the Jewish people invests history with a transcendent meaning and holds the people to account for any deviation from the covenantal path. From the biblically based assertion, "we are punished for our sins" (*mipenei hataeinu*), to the rabbinic contention that suffering is a "reproof of love" (*yessurin shel ahavah*), Jewish thought instantiates the linking of human action and divine judgment. Consequently, there are no historical accidents in Jewish history. Moreover, Jewish tradition has a highly evolved historical consciousness that responds to the eternal validity of archetypes of redemption, as in the Talmudic saying, "On the day the Temple was destroyed, the Messiah was born" (*Berakhot* 2:4). The post-Holocaust question is: Does this archetype still resonate in terms of confronting the Holocaust's traumatic legacy?

This chapter analyzes how selected third-generation novelists revisit, engage, and revise classical archetypes for understanding evil and suffering in the wake of the Shoah. Rituals such as the blessing of the moon and figures such as the golem and the *lamed vov zaddik* (the hidden righteous for whose sake the world exists), and fictive shtetlach are frequently incorporated as elements of third-generation literary responses. Simultaneously, these novelists rely upon tropes of magical realism, Jewish myth, mysticism, and folktales in seeking to confront the effects of Holocaust-induced trauma. Collectively, works by Joseph Skibell, Michael Chabon, and Jonathan Safran Foer, to name but a few, reveal the third generation's testing of traditional assertions in relation to their burden of Shoah inheritance. Their novels problematize these assertions. Nevertheless, like the title of Julie Orringer's novel *The Invisible Bridge* implies, these writers attest that this "bridge," after Auschwitz, leads both away from and toward the classical Jewish tradition.

A Blessing on the Moon

Joseph Skibell, a professor of creative writing at Emory University, published his debut novel *A Blessing on the Moon* in 1997.[1] The book was dedicated to Skibell's great-grandparents and to their children. The dedication also includes the Hebrew expression preceeding the recitation of the Sh'ma Yisrael prayer: "Gather us in peace from the four corners of the earth." One scholar, Marita Grimwood, somewhat misleadingly considers the book "a particularly original addition to the Holocaust canon."[2] Skibell's novel received both the Richard and Hinda Rosenthal Foundation Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters and the Turner Prize for First Fiction from the Texas Institute of Letters. Additionally, Skibell's novel was a Book of the Month Club selection and was named one of the year's best by *Publishers Weekly*, *Le Monde*, and Amazon.com. *A Blessing on the Moon* has been translated into half a dozen languages including Dutch, French, and German. It has also been produced as an opera, *A Blessing on the Moon: The Color of Poison Berries*. Skibell is the coauthor of the libretto.

Skibell's novel is his "attempt . . . to recover from the silence a family history that, except for a clutch of photos and whatever is encoded genetically, has all but disappeared."[3] Eighteen members of his great-

grandfather's immediate family were murdered in the Shoah. In a later nonfiction piece, Skibell speaks to the imperative to give imaginary voice to those who perished: "Though these people were my grandfather's parents and his siblings, I never knew much about them when I was growing up. Nobody ever spoke about them or mentioned their names, and I felt that by making them characters in this novel, I was somehow *remembering* them back into the family, remembering them in the normal sense of the word, of course, but also *re-membering* them: making them members of our family again" ("Ten Faces," 208). In reflecting on the absence of stories that might have included them in the family narrative, Skibell writes that in his childhood he sometimes "mistook the silence for shame [while] at other times I heard in it an accusation and a threat: You are next" ("Notes from Adolf the Plumber," 6–7). Elsewhere Skibell discusses this problem of shame and silence surrounding the deaths of those who perished, reflecting on a childhood in which "That silence was very palpable for me. As a child, I assumed that there was some sort of shame in it. Instead, I realized later that it was just horrible, horrible grief."[4] Skibell asks a question directly related to the intergenerational transmission of trauma: "Who knows how long the spooks of the Holocaust will haunt us?" ("Notes from Adolf the Plumber," 7).

The novel, which Grimwood helpfully suggests should be read allegorically and as an example of *merveilleux* (the supernatural), contains eighty chapters and is divided into three sections of unequal length (Grimwood, 91). The novel's conceit centers on the protagonist, Chaim Skibelski, a pious Jew living in a small Polish village, who, on the novel's opening page, is murdered by a Nazi. He and the other Jewish villagers are "rounded . . . up" and taken into the forest, where they "stood . . . shivering, like trees in uneven rows, and one by one we fell" (Skibell, 3). Here the all too real gives way to the surreal, for the dead Chaim "climbed out of the grave" and, in a kind of wishful reinvention on the part of the writer, is reanimated (Skibell, 4). His ghostly self undertakes a postmortem pilgrimage in which he juxtaposes the orientation of traditional Judaism with its emphasis on the World to Come and the world-shattering event of the Holocaust. His traumatic experience leaves him feeling disoriented and abandoned. In an equally fantastical moment in the novel, the town's rabbi transforms into a wisdom-dispensing crow who guides Chaim. With understated simplicity, Chaim acknowledges, "The Rebbe

is not his usual self, that much is clear" (8). The moon is pulled from the sky, thereby making the reckoning of time impossible. Here the natural world as well as the customary measurement of time's passage is ruptured by the cataclysmic events of the Shoah. Restoring the moon to its proper place only occurs after the Shoah. Chaim at the novel's end appears to regress to a point just after his physical birth.

A Blessing on the Moon's three sections move gradually from theological despair to the possibility of at least a partial *tikkun* (repair) of the world. Significantly and directly related to the book's title, there are two epigraphs fronting the novel: one from the Book of Job (37:21)—"And now they do not see light, it is brilliant in the skies, when the wind has passed and cleared them"—and the second from Maimonides's "Sanctification of the New Moon" (2:6)—"For there existed suspicion that at first something that looked to them like the moon had appeared in the gathering clouds, but that the clouds subsequently disappeared and that they had seen nothing." Raising the moon that has fallen to earth is the novel's central metaphor and theological fulcrum. The fact that the moon has fallen from the sky is repeatedly referenced, with different versions accounting for the fall, and serves as a parable for the physical, psychological, and theological havoc wreaked by the Holocaust.

Emphasing the collapse of the ethical, Skibell opens his novel with a section titled the Mayseh Book or Maaseh Books, referencing "collections of folklore, in Yiddish, which are concerned exclusively with ethics." These collections emerged in the fifteenth century. Their teachings are based on Talmudic and Midrashic Aggadoth combining "Jewish and non-Jewish sources [with] a religious application."[5] On the first page of the opening section, the mortally wounded Chaim Skibelski, whose first name in Hebrew means "life," falls into a pit containing the bodies of his fellow Jews. Although Chaim escapes the pit, his wounds continue to bleed, suggesting thereby the continuing trauma of the Holocaust. As Cathy Caruth writes: "The traumatized . . . carry an impossible history within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess."[6] In this context, it is worth noting that both Johanna Adorján's memoir *An Exclusive Love*[7] and Thane Rosenbaum's novel *The Golems of Gotham* begin with suicides of Holocaust survivors, thus illustrating the continuing trauma of the Shoah or what Primo Levi termed "the survivor's disease." Alvin Rosenfeld succinctly describes what

Levi meant by this phrase: "The psychological and spiritual components of what Levi called 'the survivor's disease'—the diminution of energy, a wearing away of vitality, the heavy burdens of guilt and shame, a slow but certain collapse of the will to live."[8]

In Skibell's novel, Chaim is a Job-like figure who, unlike his biblical namesake, neither fully repents nor has an auditory experience of the deity. He questions both God's existence and the deity's justice. Chaim conducts a *din Torah* (trial of God) in which the deity is found absent from, and evidently indifferent to, the plight of the chosen people. Skibelski's experience instantiates Caruth's observation that, "trauma unsettles and forces us to rethink our notions of experience, and of communication" (Caruth, *Trauma*, 4). Chaim's journey through the Holocaust landscape is a postmortem version of the return to sites of memory, which, as this book demonstrates, many in the third generation undertake. Chaim's experience, however, is significantly different from many of the return narratives, for he carries "an impossible history *within*" himself (ibid.). He bears witness to and interprets his traumatic history.

Skibelski is a figure who experiences both "individual trauma" and "collective trauma."[9] On the individual level he still mourns Ida, his first wife who died in childbirth along with their newborn baby. He himself is, as noted, in the novel's opening scene, shot in the head. On the collective level, the Shoah problematizes traditional Jewish theological responses to catastrophe, such as the promise of a World to Come and the belief that God intervenes in history, casting grave doubt on the continued existence of the Jewish people. Seeking to account for Chaim's post-mortem wandering and suffering, Kirsten Renders notes that such a condition "can be considered a metaphor for the time-consuming process of working through [his] trauma."[10] Moreover, significantly, as the novel progresses, Chaim clings to a form of Jewish mystical-magical—if not a distinctively religious—perspective in his attempt to work through his trauma.

Chaim undertakes a series of postmortem journeys. Visiting his former home, he makes two observations: "workers were lifting all the memories into carts and driving off," and "In front of every house were piles of vows and promises, all in broken pieces" (Skibell, 4). The town's rabbi, speaking through his guise as a black crow, suggests to Chaim that perhaps "this [death-world] is the World to Come [*Olam Habaah*]" (Skibell, 5).

The World to Come is a central metaphor in Jewish thought, suggesting one of two possibilities: a spiritual reward for the pious, or the advent of the messianic age. Clearly, the rabbi's statement questions this notion: Is death the Messiah and does the end of the Jewish people signify the coming of the messianic age?

A spectral presence in what once was his home—inhabited now by a Polish family—Chaim is visible only to Ola, the couple's fatally ill thirteen-year-old daughter. The young girl is anguished by Polish complicity in the murder of the Jewish people, and thus it is only she who can see Chaim's ghost. Ola can witness Chaim because she recognizes suffering, which is reflected in "the sorrow in her gray-green eyes" (33). She, unlike her family, is not indifferent to the suffering of others. Among her few possessions are a telescope with a cracked lens and a compass, items that figure in the novel's final section dealing with raising the moon. Upon her death Ola is carried to heaven by Jesus and Mary. Commenting on the appearance of the former, Chaim muses: "That fat mama's boy with the scraggly beard and the blotchy face? This nebbish is their god?" (56). Chaim refers to Jesus as a "failed rabbinical student" (61). He contrasts these "false gods" to the Jewish God, "our God, the One True God, [who] has left me neglected here below, answering my pleas with His stony, implacable silence" (62). God's silence is a characteristic trope of Holocaust narratives in many survivor writings as well as in post-Holocaust literary representation.

While haunting the house Chaim leaves trails of blood on the walls and, in an ironic inversion of the Deuteronomic injunction to remember God's saving acts and the Ten Commandments, he insists: "I mark a slanted vermillion slash across every lintel and on the doorposts of their house, and upon their gates" (19–20). The descendants of the criminals are thereby enjoined to remember the crimes of their forbearers. In addition, blood is one of the ten plagues God visited upon the Egyptians. Moreover, the protagonist wreaks havoc inside the house, breaking glassware, stealing family photos, and seeking to generate dis-ease among the Polish usurpers who speak derisively about the murdered "Yids." Chaim will, in defiance of the Poles' indifference and brutality, leave traces of his blood, proof of his prior existence in the world and evidence of their guilt. In a version of the third generation's return motif, Skibell has his protagonist return to the site of his own death, drawn "to the mound

the soldiers made when they covered our pit" (24). There, he finds his friends and neighbors, those whose bodies at the time of his transcendence "lay twisted in great heaps like so many pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, unassembled, on a parlor table," now living and talking below the desecrated ground (24). His "ear to the ground," Chaim can hear "faintly at first, but then more and more distinctly . . . the sounds of Yiddish being spoken" (25). Of course, the living voices of his "Landsmen," like the animated presence of Chaim himself, are fantastical resurrections of a destroyed life, only reconstructed in the imagination (ibid.). For even their "memories" along with their belongings, were piled "into carts and dri[ven] off" (4). The fear, extended from generation to generation, is that even the "ghosts"—the memories—of the dead will "pass among them unnoticed, unfelt, possibly unremembered . . . Gone. Simply. No one cares where" (17).

The opening section of Skibell's novel has three references to the moon falling from the sky. The first comes as Chaim seeks to decipher a scrawled note that the Rebbe as crow leaves for him. Unable to read the message—later the crow informs him that the note is written in Yiddish—he looks out of an open window and watches in astonishment as the moon "sinks and disappears behind the trees" (15) a rupture of the natural world and its processes. Next, Chaim listens as one of the Poles exclaims: "If the Yids want the moon . . . then what's it to us? Let them keep it. They're the only ones who ever used it. It's not as if they took the sun" (26). This utterance distinguishes Jews from Christians in terms of how time itself is reckoned. For Christians time depends on the solar calendar alone. For Jews time is determined according to the lunar calendar, although certain elements of the solar calendar are also included in this equation. Moreover, theologically, there is also a major distinction between Christian and Jewish calculations of time. The moon waxes and wanes, indicating the fortunes of the Jewish people who periodically face great danger and survive the crisis. Furthermore, Jewish rituals are reckoned according to the moon. The third moon reference to the moon is contained in a tale Chaim relates to Ola prior to her death. Echoing the Dutch fairy tale "Wynken, Blinken, and Nod," Chaim speaks of two Hasidim who find a boat that takes them to heaven. Arriving at the moon, they discover pots of silver that they load onto the boat that they have tethered to the celestial body. The silver is so heavy it causes the boat to

sink. The sinking vessel pulls the moon out of the sky, plunging the earth into darkness. The fate of the Jewish people is, intimately tied to the fate of the moon. If the fallen moon can be elevated, then Judaism itself may survive the Holocaust and its traumatic inheritance.

"The Color of Poison Berries," the novel's second section, references blood-covered snowdrifts that appear "salmon pink, the color of poison berries" (71). This section of the novel pivots on the trope of fairy tales. Skibell acknowledges, "For years I have been a great lover of fairy tales and folk tales. Yiddish folk tales, especially, speak to me" ("Skibell, self-interview," 2). Moreover, Skibell told an interviewer that "the Holocaust (. . . the invisible backdrop to my childhood) seemed foreshadowed in the tales of the Brothers Grimm: the oven in Hansel and Gretel becomes the ovens of Auschwitz; the Pied Piper leading away first the rats and then the children of Hamelin is, to me, the story of World War II. Hitler as the mesmerizing entrancer seducing the 'rats'—which is how the Nazis characterized European Jewry—to their doom; the bad faith of the German people; the loss of their children, the next generation, who suffer the consequence of their bad faith: what is that if not the story of the Holocaust?" (ibid.).[11]

This section of the novel is replete with postmortem conversations: between Chaim and his murdered Jewish neighbors, between Chaim and the severed head of the German soldier who killed him, between Chaim and the virulently antisemitic kitchen staff of the mysterious and deadly Hotel Amfortas, and between Chaim and the the Rebbinic crow who serves as his guide on this part of his postmortem journey. The protagonist journeys to the mass grave containing the corpses of his murdered community. One of the victims, a childhood friend, raises the moral question in reproving Chaim for not having pulled him out of the pit. Chaim replies that he has been shot in the head and cannot think clearly. Despite his trauma and feelings of abandonment, Chaim still clings, perhaps instinctively, to a Jewish frame of reference. Seated at the edge of the pit housing his dead friends, Chaim and his transformed Rebbinic mentor muse that the day feels like *Tashlich*, the symbolic casting away of sins during the Jewish New Year (*Rosh Hashanah*). Only here, the Jewish people are sinless in the face of the Holocaust onslaught and the natural order of time eroded: "The day feels like Tashlich, when, at the new year, we'd walk, the entire town, to the river to cast our sins

into its accepting waters. Of course, today, we'd only find it frozen" (Skibell, 80). The protagonist remarks that it is nearing the time of the month of *chesvan*, which is known as *marchesvan*—the bitter month.

Chaim and his fellow victims wander over the Holocaust landscape, "each one trailing his own thin trickle of blood" (81). On route, his colleague Reb Elimelech asks if what they have heard about the moon falling is true. Chaim responds, evoking a version of the "we are punished for our sins" paradigm. He says that while none of the Jews has the moon, "we're all thieves! We're all to blame" (ibid.). He is also accompanied by the head of the German soldier who murdered him, the soldier having been beheaded by a Ukrainian peasant. In a surreal moment, the disembodied head tells Chaim a variant of the story he himself had told Ola about two Hasidim who sail to the moon and end by pulling it from the sky. The German head attests that he witnessed the two traditional believers arguing about whether the Laws of Moses permit them to take a boat they had come across. The boat is tied to a tree near a river and is full of holes. Miraculously the boat, lightened by the holes, and carrying the two pious Jews, sank upward into the sky on route to the moon (106–9). Such a paradox—"sank upward"—makes emphatic the rupture of language and the fractured experience of living in a Holocaust world.

After blaming Chaim and, by implication, all Jews for having caused him to interrupt his conservatory studies, the head begs Chaim's forgiveness, thereby raising a moral question for members of the third generation: is there a moral imperative regarding forgiveness? Chaim replies: "Little head when, you killed me you took everything. My home, my wife, my children. Must you now have my forgiveness as well?" (112). This postmortem dialogue is revealing on at least two counts. In the first place, it confirms the accuracy of LaCapra's observation that "The traumatic event . . . affects everyone who comes into contact with it (including) perpetrator and collaborator" (LaCapra, 8–9). It reveals, we would add, that being a murderer is not predicated by one's culture and learning; there is no contradiction between culture and murder. Second, by raising the issue of forgiveness, Skibell points to strategies for working through the Shoah. Chaim does not forgive the head. Nevertheless, he carries it with him in a burlap bag. But Skibell, in asking the question, "Can one forgive on behalf of the dead?"—an impossibility according to normative Jewish teachings—challenges third-generation writers to

articulate a position on the problem of forgiveness and clemency.[12] The novelist differentiates himself from his great-grandfather by postulating the hope that his novel "is a book of blessing" ("Interview," 3). Writing emerges as a possible way of working through the traumatic legacy of the Shoah, a therapeutic encounter, so to speak, which enables one to live in the present, project into the future, and not forget the past.

Chaim and his dead companions travel to the mysterious Hotel Amfortas that caters to dead Jews, although first they must avoid a pack of dangerous wolves.[13] Sighting the animals through his broken spyglass, Chaim recites the Viddui, a prayer one must say on one's deathbed. Moreover, as if to underscore the presence of the absent God, Chaim twice wonders, "What can God be thinking?" (Skibell, 10). The dead Jews must forge a raging but somehow healing river to get to the hotel. Once there they change into evening clothes, Skibelski is seated with his family for dinner. Initially he fails to recognize them. Then he realizes the totality of the destruction, uttering: "You are telling me that not one of you survived?" Chaim then muses on a central Holocaust question: "How is it possible for men to make laws against another man's life, so that by merely living, he [a Jew] is guilty of a crime?" "And," he continues, "what kind of men enforce such laws?" (149–50).

Chaim listens to his two sons-in-law argue about the existence of Paradise. The cynical one believes it's been "cooked up" by the rabbis to enslave the Jews. He concludes his diatribe by enquiring, "If there is a Paradise, do you actually think they'd let Jews into it?"(158). Chaim himself has doubts that he is really in the World to Come, musing, "Wouldn't all the dead be here and not just the recently murdered?"(159). Moreover, biblical figures such as Adam, Abraham, and Elijah are absent from the ghostly gathering, thus reinforcing Chaim's doubt about the character of the World to Come. In a twist on the return journey conceit of the third generation, here it is the dead wanderer who makes the return as he travels through the World to Come. Ironically, Chaim's misgivings implicitly ask the unanswered question, "If this is the World to Come, then what is left after the Holocaust for the Jews?"

A Blessing on the Moon highlights both the euphemistic language the Nazis employed and their virulent antisemitism. Frantically searching for his wife in the now deserted hotel, Chaim finds himself in the kitchen. The head baker orders his assistants to bring in the next batch of Jewish

corpses. Reverting to the fairy-tale trope, one of the middle bakers calls out amidst much laughter, "Hansel, stick your finger out so I can see if you are fat enough!" (181–82). One of the other bakers reports that Chaim's family "have taken the steam" (183). Another baker says with pride, "We have baked them" (ibid.). A third baker speaks up with equal enthusiasm, "They have been in our ovens" (ibid.). National Socialism sought to make the world *judenrein*. The head baker addresses this goal in speaking to Chaim: "Herr Jude . . . I must bake. Do you understand? Surely you don't wish to be the only Jew left in God's blue world?" (ibid.). The baker continues, "There will again be sweetness in the world"—when all the Jews have been murdered (182). Here the realities of the methods of annihilation become contextualized in the distorted fairy-tale language of legend, both taking the events out of time and making all the more emphatic the extended traumatic time.

"The Smaller to Rule by Night," the novel's third section, is a bold attempt at seeking a "repair" or "restoration" of the world (*tikkun ha-olam*) in so far as this is possible after the Shoah. Here, the reference to such repair is both metaphorical and physical. Consequently, while on the one hand, the novel looks unblinkingly at the destruction of the Jewish people during the Holocaust and attests to the fact that traditional piety and belief in the World to Come have come under radical assault by the catastrophe, the blessing of the new moon (*Kiddush Levanah*), on the other hand, evokes significant and potentially restorative symbolic meaning. This concluding section introduces the characters Kalman and Zalman, the two Hasidim who inadvertently pulled the moon from the sky. In terms of time, the action takes place in the post-Shoah world—Kalman and Zalman have waited fifty years for Chaim to arrive. This fifty-year period may also be seen as referring to the length of time Skibell himself believes necessary for a working through of the traumatic inheritance. This section freely evokes the tropes of fairy tales and folklore. Significantly, Skibell skillfully integrates the tragedy of the Shoah with a sense of hope, however improbable this seems, and concludes by suggesting a working through process that enlists both the dead and the living.

"The Smaller to Rule by Night" begins with Chaim adopting a theological posture resembling that of Job, interrogating the deity. The protagonist muses that if he had been informed as a child of what awaited him, he would have preferred death. Chaim also considers the propriety

of saying Kaddish, the prayer for the dead, for himself: "Why can't a soul recite the prayer for the dead over himself and somehow, on his own, effect his way into the World to Come?" (195). This question evokes a scene described by Elie Wiesel in his classic memoir *Night* where he witnesses a group of Jews in Auschwitz reciting Kaddish for themselves. Wiesel rhetorically queries if the recitation of the prayer for one's own death has ever before occurred in Jewish history. Chaim, for his part, wonders if, by saying Kaddish, it is possible to pray oneself into the World to Come. Classical rabbinic practice enjoins the saying of the prayer for the dead for eleven months. But, Chaim muses, "Without the moon, who can keep track of the time?" (196).

Leaving the forest in which he wanders, Skibell's protagonist stumbles across his former town, which is now part of Russia. There are paved roads, television sets, traffic lights, and more cars than ever before. He spies a stone glowing "with a pale green light" (200). Soon additional glowing stones appear. These glowing objects, an updated version of Hansel and Gretel's bread crumbs, are moon rocks that form a trail leading back into the forest and, eventually, to a small hut in the middle of the woods. There Chaim discovers Zalman and Kalman, the two Hasidim responsible for the moon's descent to earth. Food and drink have been magically supplied them, suggesting the intervention of either Elijah or perhaps the metamorphized Rebbe. Chaim's arrival—on Shabbat (Saturday), the day Jews are commanded to rest in honor of God who, after creating the world in six days, rested on the seventh—initiates the process of redeeming the moon, but not before Chaim, plagued by his ongoing traumatic experience, confesses that he hates the two for being alive when "I and my family are not" (210). Zalman and Kalman tell Chaim that the Rebbe had predicted his resistance and, further, had given explicit instruction to the two to wait for the protagonist.

Redeeming the moon requires both mystical calculations and hard physical labor. Zalman confides that he has "perhaps found a way to return the moon to the sky" (209). He retrieves a book from his shelf. It is, possibly, the *Sefer Yetzirah* (*Book of Creation*) composed between the third and sixth centuries C.E. The volume speaks of thirty-two secret paths of wisdom composed of the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet plus ten primordial numbers called sefiroth, and was influential in

the subsequent development of Jewish mysticism. Zalman, who engages in ascetic and mystical purification rituals, has drawn diagrams in the volume's margins, and has created a secret map—indicating where the moon is buried. Chaim has never seen a map like this before.

Moreover, Zalman has written below the images of horrible demons, "*Beware*! *Beyond this boundary—madness*!" (213). Such a warning recalls the dangers associated with esoteric and mystical activity as presented in the legend of the "Four who enter PaRDeS" (Paradise or mystical experience) found in the *Mishnah Hagigah*. The acronym represents different interpretive modes. The P (Peshat) stands for literal or plain meaning. The R (Remez) refers to allegoric or symbolic meaning. The D (Derash) indicates Midrashic meaning whereas the S (Sod) refers to secret or mystical interpretations. Of the four, one loses his faith, one loses his mind, and one loses his life. Only one, Rabbi Akiva, "entered in peace and came out in peace."[14] The two Hasidim have no idea where they themselves are and in what direction the imprisoned moon lies. They need the compass that Ola has given Chaim to guide them.

Prior to setting out to rescue the moon, Zalman and Kalman tell their own version of how the moon fell to earth. After loading pots of silver from the moon onto their boat, the craft sank to earth dragging the moon with it. Cutting the rope tethering the moon to their boat, they are astonished when the silver-laden vessel sank up to the sky leaving the moon earthbound. Zalman admits to his own personal trauma in reporting that his and Kalman's hearts "grew heavy, knowing the trouble we were causing, pulling the moon from the sky" (Skibell, 224). Kalman and Chaim, following Zalman's ethereal map, discover the moon's burial place in a cemetery in the forest. Seeking to free the celestial body, the three labor with shovels, picks, and push brooms. They discover the moon amidst the bones of Jews murdered in the Shoah. Chaim observes: "Skulls stare at me with darkened sockets, grimacing through gnashed or broken teeth. With each of my blind steps, bones rattle and crunch, shifting to make room" (240). It is the sound of death. The trio's eventual success in accomplishing their mission calls to mind Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones and his question of whether the bones can yet live (Ez. 37:1–14). While it is too late for the victims of the Shoah, the Jewish people will be resurrected, as it were, in the State of Israel. Kalman reinforces this notion

when addressing the moon, still earthbound but slowly emerging from its chthonic prison, when he exclaims, "Look who's risen from the dead, so to speak" (Skibell, 232).

Raising the moon metaphorically carries with it the weight of memory and survival. It brings relief to a vanishing world where even notions of time and nature have been corrupted. The moon is, as previously noted, crucial for the notion of time, in both its sacred and secular dimensions. Moreover, the waning and waxing of the moon is a visible and eternal symbol of the Jewish people: no matter how their enemies seek to destroy them, the people endure. Furthermore, blessing the new moon is a ritual linking the Jewish people with the deity. "To bless the new moon at the proper time is," attests the Talmud, "like greeting the Divine Presence" (*Sanhedrin* 42a). Therefore, the novel's title provides cause for hope. The ritual of blessing the moon that occurs on the first Shabbat after each new month (*Rosh Hodesh*) provides an opportunity for the Jewish people both to extol God and remind themselves that, in spite of the vicissitudes of history, their eternal presence is not in doubt. The prayer itself reads:

> Blessed art thou, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who didst create the
> Heavens by thy command, and all their host by thy mere word. Thou hast
> Subjected them to fixed laws and time, so that they might not deviate from their
> Set function. They are glad and happy to do the will of their Creator, the true
> Author, whose achievement is truth. He ordered the moon to renew itself as a
> Glorious crown over those he sustained from birth, who likewise will be
> Regenerated in the future, and will worship their Creator for his glorious majesty.
> Blessed art thou, O Lord, who renewest the months.[15]

The waning and waxing of the moon is, thus, allegorically related to the history of the Jewish people, particularly during times of persecution and oppression. As the moon is "restored to its pristine brightness . . .

Israel, too, will achieve its final redemption" (Skibell, 97). Moreover, the moon symbolizes the feminine. Linguistically, the Hebrew word for moon (*levanah*) has a feminine ending. The moon's monthly rhythm suggests an affinity with a woman's menstrual cycle. Further, the moon has the characteristic of receptiveness, receiving light from the sun. The Kabbalah, in its sixteenth-century manifestation, attested that the moon represents the Shekinah or feminine aspect of the divine. Chaim, addressing the moon, refers to the celestial body as "her." The moon, of course, has universal resonance as well. "It is," writes Pamela Stadden, "a symbol that unites us all."[16]

There is, however, heavenly competition between the sun and the moon, as is seen in the section Hullin 60b (Babylonian Talmud):

> R. Simeon b. Pazzi pointed out a contradiction (between verses). One verse says, And God made the two great lights (Genesis 1:16), and immediately the Verse continues, The greater light . . . and the lesser light. The moon said unto the Holy One, blessed be He, 'Sovereign of the Universe! Is it possible for two kings To wear one crown?' He answered, 'Go then and make thyself smaller.' 'Sovereign of the Universe!' cried the moon, 'Because I have suggested that Which is proper must I then make myself smaller?' He replied, 'Go and thou wilt Rule by day and by night.' 'But what is the value of this? Cried the moon; 'Of What use is a lamp in broad daylight?' He replied, 'Go. Israel shall reckon by thee The days and the years.' 'But it is impossible,' said the moon, 'to do without the Sun for the reckoning of the seasons, as it is written, And let them be for signs, And for seasons, and for days and years (Genesis 1:14. 'Go. The righteous shall Be named after thee as we find, Jacob the Small (cf. Amos 7:2, Samuel the Small, David the Small (cf. 1 Samuel 17:14).' On seeing that it would not be consoled The Holy One, blessed be He, said, 'Bring an atonement for Me for making the Moon smaller.'[17]

Yehuda Liebes writes: "Even at the literal level, the connection between the moon and Israel in this myth is already clear. To compensate the moon for its waning, God rules that Israel shall reckon their days by it

instead of by the sun as do the gentiles, and lunar eclipses are therefore considered a bad omen for Israel in the Talmud."[18]

Faith still retains a modicum of efficacy even after the Shoah. Although the moon is raised from its earthly imprisonment, it no longer appears as before. It is transformed. Its surface is mottled and uneven, reflecting the hideous wounding of the Jewish people during the Shoah. Chaim observes: "Forever now, the moon will appear this way, no longer the smooth and gleaming pearl I remember from my youth" (Skibell, 244). The natural world, its rhythms and measures, are forever changed. Nevertheless, Chaim himself suggests that he and the two Hasidim recite the sanctification over the moon. The Rebbe, simulating a biblical prophet, intervenes: "In the name of God," he exclaims, "and with the merit of my righteous ancestors, I command you, O fallen luminary, to return to your place in the Heavens above" (251). The moon complies, but Zalman and Kalman need Ola's telescope to locate the risen moon. Yet the passage ends on an ominous note. Kalman wonders how we can be sure "that [the moon] won't wax and wane and disappear again?" (252). No one responds. This *tikkun* is only partial, provisional. The Rebbe, acting as the spokesperson for normative Judaism attests, "We don't always understand God's ways . . . But that is our failing, not His" (254). The novel ends with two transformations. The Rebbe reappears as an elderly figure who works one final miracle: disappearing and being replaced by a young woman who is ostensibly Chaim's mother. Chaim, whom the mysterious woman calls by the affectionate diminutive Chaimka, begins to forget everything including why he died. He is reborn. His "history falls away, like the sacks of grain from a careless farmer's wagon." Furthermore, he begins "to forget everything" (256). Chaim sees the light of the moon as he did when a child prior to the cosmic rupture caused by the Holocaust period.

Skibell's novel suggests two possibilities concerning traumatic inheritance. On the one hand, this inheritance must be worked through, detoxified, in a manner of speaking, so that an individual is able to function in the present and face the future with some degree of hope. Writing this novel is the author's own attempt at working through his Holocaust legacy, "an act of commemoration" (Beierle). On the other hand, Chaim does not "work through." He reverts to infancy—the time before the Shoah when Judaism functioned as what Professor Peter Berger terms

a "sacred canopy" under whose protective cover life was lived with a purpose, and death had a transcendent meaning. The pre-Shoah Jewish world into which Chaim was born was inhabited by worshippers of God and believers in the World to Come. Here Skibell makes clear that the Shoah cannot be undone. Reversion to a pre-Holocaust world is impossible. Traumatic inheritance threatens to overwhelm traditional—pre-Holocaust—Jewish thought.

Skibell continues and deepens his pursuit of an acceptable theological response to the Shoah in his 2010 novel *A Curable Romantic*, a richly imagined work, combining history, magical realism, and a complexity of plot all undergirded by immense theological erudition. Divided into three books, the work follows Viennese-born Dr. Jacob Josef Sammelsohn, a secularist, and his relationship with three father-figures: Sigmund Freud; Ludwik Lejer Zamenhof, the founder of Esperanto; and Rabbi Kalonymous Kalman Szapira, Grand Rabbi of Piaseczno, Poland. Part three of the novel—the Warsaw ghetto—is an indictment of the failure of rationalism and Esperanto, which envisions a "useless utopia." In their stead, Sammelsohn teams with Rabbi Szapira in seeking a religious explanation for the persecution of the Jewish people. Rabbi Szapira is best known for his book *Esh Kodesh* (*Holy Fire*), a collection of inspirational speeches given to his followers during the Holocaust. The rabbi exemplified faith under tremendous stress and did not shy away from the complexities of belief during the Holocaust. Like Chaim Kaplan and Immanuel Ringelblum—two other martyrs of the Warsaw Ghetto—Rabbi Szapira buried his book in a canister that was discovered after the war.

Skibell combines the teachings of Merkabah mysticism, Jewish gnosticism, and rabbinic thought in portraying a heavenly ascent by Rabbi Szapira and Dr. Sammelsohn. The pair—accompanied by two angels—ascend a symbolic Jacob's ladder toward the celestial realm. In a version of *Midrash Rabbah*, which portrays the patriarchs ascending to heaven to plead the case for the Jewish people, Szapira and Sammelsohn literally storm the gates of heaven seeking to interrogate the deity about the persecution of His people. But they do not see God. Instead, they discover that the Holy One is a weeping God, who is a *nistar*, a concealed one. As God is infinite, so is His pain infinite. Concerning the suffering of God, Wiesel notes that the Book of Jeremiah portrays God as saying, "I shall weep in secret." A midrash, suggests Wiesel, "remarks that there is a place

called 'secret' and that when God is sad He takes refuge there to weep" (*All Rivers Run to the Sea*, 105, I). In Skibell's retelling of the *Midrash* there is a failure to see God; the deity does not hear them and does not respond. The rabbi and the secularist return to earth.

Having exhausted the possibility of a meaningful theological response, and despairing of Jewish life in Europe, Sammelsohn advocates for a Zionist response on the novel's last page: "The farther I got from the ghetto," he asserts, "the harder it was to believe" (*A Curable Romantic*, 593). Finished with myths and dreams, Samuelsohn was "walking into history" (ibid.). He was "heading towards Palestine, towards the Promised Land, and it was only there . . . that a man could live as a Jew, and a Jew could live in peace" (ibid.). Unlike *A Blessing on the Moon*, resolution of the dilemma of how to respond to the Shoah is less theological than political. Here Skibell is advocating that support for the State of Israel is a characteristic of third-generation response to one's Holocaust inheritance. Yet faith is not banished. It remains an option for believers and those who wish to believe in spite of the Shoah. Here Skibell also suggests the tenuous and precarious condition of memory: What happens when memory is erased?

The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay

Michael Chabon's Pulitzer-Prize-winning novel *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay* is marked by intricacy of plot structure and sophisticated use of language.[19] Critics unanimously praised the work: *Kirkus Review* described the novel as "A stroke of sheer conceptual genius," and the *Denver Post* described the author as a "literary Houdini." (These blurbs appear in the inside cover of the novel.) Chabon's novel tells the story of Prague-born Joseph Kavalier, who escapes from Europe on the eve of the Shoah, and his New York cousin Sammy Clay, né Klayman. Sammy has a crippled leg and is traumatized by being abandoned by his father. Chabon's plot plays out against the background of America's isolationist policy that advocated an escape from moral responsibility. The novel in fact employs the metaphor of escape as a governing principle. Kavalier studies with an escape artist before fleeing his natal city and the Shoah; Sammy overcomes or escapes the limitations of his physical handicap; the Holocaust emerges as a backstory.

Kavalier and Clay explores the tension between escape and engagement. Moreover, as Joseph Dewey notes: "in his portrayal of Jewish immigrant life in mid-century New York City [Chabon reveals a] deep investment in his own religious roots, a reclamation, even rediscovery, of the dimensions of Jewish identity and its meaning in a contemporary and often hostile world."[20] Moreover, Chabon explores American culture and the history of the comic book industry and its oppression of creative artists between 1939 and 1955. In this layering of narrative landscapes, Chabon treats responses to the Holocaust in a distinctive yet ambivalent manner. However, very few critics have analyzed the novel in terms of Holocaust representation in the third-, non-direct-witnessing, generation of American-born novelists. As Hillary Chute notes, Chabon's work is an "historical fiction that asks how one responds to or registers history—especially traumatic history—in a popular medium."[21] In this respect, Chabon's novel resembles Art Spiegelman's *Maus* volumes I and II.

Third-Generation Novelists and the Holocaust

As the most recent bearers of Shoah representation, third-generation novelists reveal a moral responsibility to serve as witnesses. But what does it mean to look back from a distance of three score years and ten? How do third-generation authors inherit traumatic experience when they lack personal memory of the Jewish catastrophe? Daniel Mendelsohn describes this position as revealing the tension between proximity and distance, which we discussed in chapter 3 of the present study. In short, third-generation works represent the Holocaust through indirect means. Jessica Lang notes that the common thread in the Holocaust writing of authors born in the 1960s or after is that their writing, while referring to the Holocaust, also employs other narratives.[22] These authors view the Shoah as one of several important events in their novels. We add that these works tend to be inflected by the use of magical realism and motifs from Jewish myth, folklore, and mysticism, as demonstrated by Skibell, all in an attempt to underscore the rupture instantiated by the catastrophe.

Chabon's novel, *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay*, focuses the trauma of the Shoah on European Jewry while distancing the Holocaust from major American concerns. His "survivor," Joseph Kava-

lier, is a refugee who does not have first-hand experience of the camps. Unlike Julie Orringer's and Nicole Krauss's protagonists, Kavalier does not write a book. Rather, he draws over two thousand pages of the adventures of the Escapist, an action hero based on Superman. Consequently, rather than directly confronting the trauma of the Holocaust, Chabon's protagonist seeks to escape it. Lee Behlman perceptively writes: "Chabon is most surprising [in that] his novel guardedly presents the idea that . . . distraction may be itself a valid response. *Kavalier and Clay* is an extended meditation, with comic books as its central subject, on the value of fantasy as a deflective resource rather than a reflective one."[23] Behlman's critique, while well reasoned, understates the significance of the central and symbolic role of the golem—a crucial symbol in the novel—in dealing with Holocaust trauma. Chabon employs a revised version of the golem in order to work through the psychic pain caused by the Shoah. The novel pivots on Will Eisner's comment that provides the book's epigraph: "We have this history of impossible solutions for insoluble problems."

Holocaust Representation in Chabon's Novel

Chabon's Holocaust representation is noteworthy for navigating the tension between distance from the catastrophe and the moral obligation to write about its impact. On the one hand, as Chabon told an interviewer, "I think it's obvious from the way I have treated the subject, that I don't think I feel right about approaching it in any but the most indirect way."[24] Such indirection has a long history in Jewish-American letters, beginning with Edward Lewis Wallant's *The Pawnbroker*, and including Saul Bellow's *The Victim* and Philip Roth's most recent novel *Nemesis*. On the other hand, however, Chabon notes that "The Holocaust itself, in its overall scope and its particulars, just defies credulity, which makes it somewhat fertile territory for deniers" (Maliszewski, 5). The novelist provides warrant for his own literary treatment of the Shoah by contending: "But I think we expect the incredible from the Holocaust" (Maliszewski, 5).

Kavalier and Clay can be read as a *künstlerroman* and as a Jewish-American immigrant novel that contrasts the naïveté and optimism of America with the ominous events in Europe. Furthermore, Chabon's

novel explores the role of comics as a serious contribution to American culture and as a means of fighting back against the grim reality of the Holocaust. The author steadfastly focuses on the major contribution of Jewish artists to comic books. Kavalier and Clay are loosely based on Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, the Jewish creators of Superman. Moreover, as Behlman notes, the novel also is an expression of social realism in describing the unscrupulous ways of corporate culture, in the person of Sheldon Anapol, and his exploitive treatment of Kavalier and Clay.[25] Chabon also intersects his trademark concern about gay life and homophobia in writing about Sammy's coming out of the closet and his abuse by the police department. Chabon also paints a vivid portrayal of Greenwich Village bohemian life in the person of Rosa Sax Luxembourg who falls in love with Joseph. In addition, Chabon includes cameo appearances by Salvador Dali and Orson Welles, as well as pivotal references to Harry Houdini, a master escape artist.

Following a circuitous route, Joseph arrives in America where he joins forces with his cousin Sammy, who fantasizes about writing the great American novel. The cousins produce a series of comic book heroes who vicariously defeat Nazism. Chief among these heroes is The Escapist, a prototype of the Superman comic, who singlehandedly knocks out Hitler and his armies. Joseph also seeks to rescue his young brother Tommy, who is trapped in Europe. Using the money he has made from his art he charters a ship—*Ark of Miriam*—to bring Tommy and several hundred other children to America. The biblical Miriam, Moses's sister who watched over him in the bulrushes, thereby ensured his life and the Jewish people's future. However, Joseph's rescue attempt met with a different fate: the *Ark of Miriam* is sunk by a German torpedo. All aboard perish. The escapist's comic book feats are no match for the brutality of the Holocaust.

Neither is the kind of wishful thinking that attempts to conjure Jewish heroes who defeat the Nazis that we find in another third-generation novel, *The Last Flight of Poxl West*, by Daniel Torday. Characteristic of third-generation narratives, the central character in Torday's novel attempts to reconstruct a revisionist history, an alternative, victorious, and ameliorative version of the events of that history he hopes to confront and rewrite. For this third-generation narrator, the Shoah remains the unflagging reminder of defeat and defenselessness, powerlessness in the

face of imperious forces of evil up against which no hero or superhero can contend:

> On Monday and Wednesday afternoons I suffered two hours of Hebrew school, where our aging teachers would ply us with tales of woe, melancholy stories of the survivors of death camps and ghettoization. I remember seeing for the first time, when I was only ten, the black numbers tattooed on a classmate's grandmother's wrist. I can see even now my young brain being tattooed with anxiety and pensive fear. My grandfather had survived that period and reached the States—only to die before I'd gotten to know him. It compounded my sense then that history was some untrammeled force acting upon us. Leveling any hope of heroism like some insuperable glacier flattening mountains to plains.[26]

The overarching text of the Holocaust inevitably brings with it a "leveling" of "any hope of heroism" (4). Such resignation—as Eli, the tale's narrator, fears—is why his surrogate grandfather's tales of heroism in the face of the Nazis are so seductive to him, why he is so ready to believe his Uncle Poxl's stories not only of "survival, but of action" (Torday, 6). And this is why Eli's discovery of the fictitious shape of Poxl's stories, the embellishment of his war years, leaves him unsettled and, inexorably bereaved. "Thinking of it now," the older narrator admits, "I'd lost a grandfather before I knew what it meant to have one, but in his place I had what every Ashkenazi kid in America needed without knowing he needed it: a Jewish war hero, at my side" (140–41). Poxl's surrogacy and his stories of bravery and valor provided, as Eli admits, "an antidote" to the authorized version of events that suggest to the adolescent Jewish narrator, "*It will happen again*. Beware. Be always aware" (4). Finally, of course, what this third-generation narrator in search of a reconstructed history discovers is that "We can't undo the past" (144).

In addition to *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay*, the Holocaust plays a role, although ambiguous and even deceptive, in Chabon's *The Final Solution: A Story of Detection* (2005) and in *The Yiddish Policemen's Union* (2008). The title of Chabon's *The Final Solution* is a liter-

ary tease, a misdirection suggesting only one thing—the Holocaust—but treats quite another, a detective story. The work has three protagonists: a mute German boy—who is a survivor of the Holocaust; a talking parrot who repeats a series of numbers that may be a secret Nazi code; and Sherlock Holmes, who comes out of retirement to solve the mystery of who killed the bird. Muteness here, on the one hand, suggests that the reader learns nothing of the Shoah and thus is unable to participate in bearing witness to the event. But, on the other hand, and more significantly, Chabon implies that the youngster's mute state is in fact a response to his traumatization by the Shoah. Muteness also invokes the occasion for a reconsideration of the initial twenty-year period of silence surrounding the subject of the Holocaust, following the end of World War II. Furthermore, such silence calls into question the epistemological problem of knowing and articulating such knowledge that is characteristic of third-generation Holocaust narratives.

The landscape of *The Yiddish Policemen's Union* is the Alaskan wilderness and its openness to oppressed European Jews. Then, in 1948, the nascent state of Israel was overwhelmed by invading Arab armies. The Jewish remnant settled in Sitka, Alaska, becoming "the frozen chosen." *The Yiddish Policemen's Union* thus emerges as one of a growing number of counterfactual books about the period of Holocaust and American history written by both novelists and historians, such as Philip Roth's *The Plot against America* and Jeffrey S. Gurock's *The Holocaust Averted: An Alternative History of American Jewry, 1938–1967*. The Jews are once again facing exile as the deadline of "reversion"—a decree announcing that they must leave Alaska—is fast approaching. The novel's protagonist, Meyer Landsman, whose last name conjures the Yiddish "compatriot," is a down-on-his-luck detective called in to solve a murder. He is separated from his wife Binah, whose name translates as "understanding," one of the ten *sefirot* or divine emanations in kabbalistic thought. At the novel's end, the couple reunites. The complex and richly imaginative plot deals with a clandestine agreement between the anti-Islamist American government and the Verbovers, a radical right-wing Hasidic group. They plan to blow up the Dome of the Rock, igniting a holy war in which the Jews would claim all of Palestine and rebuild the Temple.

Messianism plays a large role in the *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*.

Mendel Shpilman, the murder victim, was the son of the Verbover rebbe. Followers hailed him as the Messiah. Intellectually and spiritually gifted, he was also a chess master who had become a drug addict. Prior to his murder, Shpilman was playing chess. He had left the pieces in the so-called Zugzwang Dilemma, a strategy that inevitably leads to checkmate. Landsman is the son of a Holocaust survivor who was a chess master. The detective's knowledge of the game enables him to solve the mystery of Mendel's murder. As was the case during the Holocaust, messianic longing both continues and continues to go unfulfilled. Shpilman is a false messiah. Landsman accepts exile—his homeland, so to speak, is anywhere that enables him to interact with Jews. He remains in Sitka to solve the mystery and, on the symbolic level, embody the messianic hope articulated by Maimonides's statement: "I believe in the coming of the Messiah even though he tarries" (chapter 10, commentary on *Mishneh Sanhedrin*). Significantly, a large portion of Sitka's Jews are Holocaust survivors who remain traumatized by their experience. Ex-partisans dig tunnels in case they have to fight again. *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*, like *The Final Solution*, engages the detective trope of seeking hidden information, which is characteristic of the third generation's search for the missing pieces of their family's pre-Holocaust and Holocaust histories.

The Golem in Jewish Folklore

Returning to Michael Chabon's *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay*, the novelist draws upon Jewish legend in what he refers to as the "thinly fictionalized role [the Golem of Prague] plays" in his novel.[27] Golem legends abound in the Jewish magical and mystical tradition. Gershom Scholem notes, "the special fascination exerted by [the golem], in which so many authors found a symbol of the struggles and conflicts that were nearest their hearts."[28] The best-known golem legend is that attributed to the sixteenth-century scholar, Rabbi Judah Loew of Prague, known as the Maharal (*Moreinu ha-Rav Rabbi Liva*). Although nothing in Loew's vast writings concerns or even mentions the golem, his name is indissolubly linked with the creature. Perhaps, speculates Byron Sherwin, it is because of his stature as a "scholar, community leader, and national Bohemian hero."[29] Additionally, Judah Loew had achieved "fame as a wonder-worker" (Sherwin, 19) in Prague, and was invited by

the emperor, Rudolph II, who had a personal interest in the kabbalah, to meet with him in his castle.

According to legend, Rabbi Loew and two disciples went to the banks of the Moldau River at 4:00 in the morning where they fashioned a golem on the river's clay bank. Following a prescribed ritual, the rabbi placed a piece of paper containing the words "Adonai Emet"—"the Lord is Truth"—under the creature's tongue. Thus animated, the creature stood. Loew named the golem Joseph (Yossele) because "he had implanted in him the spirit of Joseph Shida who was half-man and half-demon and had saved the sages of the Talmud from many trials and dangers."[30] Yet, as Hillel Kieval writes, it is important to note that the "golem legend as far back as the seventeenth-century Polish rendition [viewed] the source of danger [as] residing within the confines of the community; in the very process of the creation of artificial life."[31] Kieval further argues that the tale is misremembered in the twentieth century, "as if it had always been concerned with the danger posed by the outside world" (Kieval, 16). That is to say, the golem was believed to protect the Jewish people from Christian mobs who, inflamed by the notorious blood libel, posed a mortal danger to Jewish life. Rabbi Loew's golem embodies three features. First, it is created to serve practical purposes such as drawing water from a well and carrying wood. Second, the golem poses potential dangers by having the capacity to run amok. Third, the golem can turn on its creator and either wound or destroy him. One of the versions of the Prague golem portrays the creature as flooding the Maharal's house. The rabbi is summoned, overpowers the creature—removing the name of God from under its tongue—and carries the body to the attic of the Altneuschul on the eve of Shabbat. He then decrees that only his successors be permitted entrance to the attic.

In Chabon's reworking of the Golem of Rabbi Loew tale, Joseph Kavalier, son of two secular Prague physicians, is a talented artist who studies techniques of escape with his mentor Bernard Kornblum, an eastern European *Ausbrecher* (escape artist). With the German army occupying Prague, the Jewish secret society responsible for the golem's safety enlists the aid of Kornblum in rescuing the slumbering giant by sending it to Vilna before the German army can ship its remains to Berlin. The creature's remains had previously been spirited out of the Altneuschul and hidden in an apartment house.

Michael Chabon's Golem

Chabon analogously parallels the novelist to the maker of a golem: "the relationship between a golem and its creator is usually viewed as a metaphor for that between the work of art—in my case, a novel—and its creator" (*Maps and Legends*, 183). Chabon's *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay*, however, links the themes of physical escape with the escapism found in comic books, magic, and Jewish folklore tinged with mysticism. He refers to the "bitter truth" of golems, writing that "A golem, like a lie, is the expression of a wish: a wish for peace and security; a wish for strength and control; a wish to know, in a tiny human way, a thousandth of a millionth of the joy and power of the Greater Creation" (*Maps and Legends*, 187). Literature, attests Chabon, "like magic, has always been about the handling of secrets, about the pain, the destruction, and the marvelous liberation that can result when they are revealed" (*Maps and Legends*, 155). However, literature representing the Holocaust typically eschews the possibility of truly revealing secrets. Is it possible to experience "marvelous liberation" when writing of the trauma inflicted by the Shoah? Certainly his own creation, Joseph Kavalier, feels no such emotion. Chabon's advocacy of even the possibility of escaping the Shoah is, of course, conditioned by time and space. He refers to himself as "a lucky man living in a lucky time in the luckiest country in the world" (*Maps and Legends*, 154). Chabon writes as an American whose worldview is not drenched in the blood of Europe.

Kavalier encounters bureaucratic difficulties when he seeks to leave Prague. Therefore, he joins forces with Kornblum to discover in which apartment house the golem is hidden. Disguising themselves as workers, they tell the building superintendent that the Jewish council sent them to survey the building in order to monitor the movement of Jews within Prague. By means of a ruse requiring all the building's Jewish inhabitants to put a blue Star of David in the window, the pair discovers the golem's hiding place—it is the window without a star. As an aside, it is worth noting that Kornblum utters the word "contemptible." But Joseph was unclear whether his mentor referred to the ruse, the Nazis who made their story plausible, Kornblum himself for having perpetrated, it or the Jews who willingly complied. Chabon here implicitly brings to mind

the criticism raised by scholars such as Hannah Arendt, Raul Hilberg, and Richard Rubenstein that alleges the Jews' complicity in their own destruction.

Disguising the golem as a "dead goyishe giant," dressed in an oversize man's suit and secreting Joseph in the casket's concealed compartment, the *Ausbrecher* has the casket loaded on a train headed to Lithuania where the golem and Kavalier subsequently arrive. At this point in the story, Chabon turns his attention from the liberated pair to focus on the subsequent adventures of Joseph. The physical remains of the golem do not reappear until the end of the novel, although symbolically the golem is present both as comic book, inspiration, representative of traumatic history, and therapeutic healer.

The novel's story takes place primarily in America. Joseph meets and falls in love with Rosa Sax Luxemburg who, unbeknownst to him, becomes pregnant with their child. But he left to join the navy, which sends him to a listening post in Alaska. There, he discovers and murders his German counterpart, although this makes him feel miserable. During Joseph's extended disappearance and silence, Sammy lives with Rosa. Together they raise Joseph's son Tommy. Joseph reappears in their lives. Rosa and Joseph reunite while Sammy seeks fulfillment of his gay lifestyle in Los Angeles. The casket of the golem, bearing Lithuanian shipping labels, mysteriously arrives at the end of the novel. Whereas the casket had been nearly weightless in Prague, in New York it is heavy, prompting Joseph to speculate that the dust that once had been the mud of the Moldau contains the souls of the murdered Jews of Europe.

Chabon's use of the golem has given rise to various interpretations. Behlman contends that the figure "represents both the dead hope of Jewish life in Europe and the ever-living promise of Jewish creativity, which can be transferred to the new world" (63). Hillary Chute views the golem in Chabon's literature as "an embodiment of trauma (and yet hope)" (286). Moreover, Chute observes, "*The Golem* registers on a formal level both the urgency of representing trauma, and trauma's seeming unspeakability" (287). Nicola Morris suggests that the golem is a "metaphor for power and powerlessness."[32] The creature was powerless to save the Jews of Europe, but it did save Joseph both physically and later, in America, psychologically. We will return to this idea shortly.

Chabon himself combines the dimension of renewal and power in having Joseph contrast the golem's use in literature and folklore, from Rabbi Loew to Victor von Frankenstein, with his own use of the figure:

> The shaping of a golem, to him, was a gesture of hope, offered against hope, in a time of desperation. It was the expression of a yearning that a few magic words and an artful hand might produce something—one poor, dumb, powerful thing—exempt from the crushing strictures, from the ills, cruelties, and inevitable failures of the greater Creation. It was the voicing of a vain wish, when you got down to it, to escape. To slip, like the Escapist, free of the entangling chain of reality and the straightjacket of physical laws. (*Adventures*, 582)

It is instructive at this point to contrast Chabon's golem with traditional understandings of the creature noting several ironic reversals. The sixteenth- and seventeenth-century versions of the golem posit the creature as saving the Jewish people. In Chabon's reworking of the myth, the golem is saved by Joseph and Kornblum. Furthermore, in being smuggled out of Prague in a casket, Joseph replicates the act of Yohanan ben Zakkai who, Jewish folklore attests, fled Jerusalem, which was besieged by the Romans in the year 70 C.E. The vital difference is, of course, that whereas Yohanan ben Zakkai founded the first rabbinic academy in Yavneh, thereby birthing a transition from temple religion to rabbinic Judaism enabling Judaism to survive, Chabon's protagonist saves only himself, while Jewish life in Europe was systematically exterminated.

Perhaps the most problematic aspect of Chabon's golem is that his creature flees the enemy, whereas traditional assertions contend that the golem's fearsomeness causes the enemy to flee. But in 1945, a Holocaust survivor from Prague, who was not religious, told a story about the golem, which confirms the tale's power even in the face of Nazi evil:

> The Golem did not disappear and even in the time of war it went out of its hiding place in order to safeguard the synagogue. When the Germans occupied Prague, they decided to destroy the Altneuschul. They came to do it; suddenly, in the silence of the synagogue, the steps of a giant walking on the roof, began

> to be heard. They saw a shadow of a giant hand falling from the window onto the floor . . . The Germans were terrified and they threw away their tools and fleed [*sic*] away in panic. I know that there is a rational explanation for everything; the synagogue is ancient and each and every slight knock generates an echo that reverberates many times like steps or thunder. Also the glasses of the windows are old, the window-panes are crooked and they distort the shadows, forming strange shades on the floor. A bird's leg generates a shade of a giant hand on the floor . . . and nevertheless . . . there is something.[33]

The survivor's story, unlike Chabon's novel, affirms the golem's traditional task of scattering the enemies of the Jewish people. The golem is neither powerless nor inert. Moreover, the golem's act concerned not an individual Jew, as is the case with Joseph Kavalier; rather, the creature saves the Jewish house of worship. This version may be a fantasy, but it is not a lie. Nor does it embrace the concept of escape from the Shoah.

The golem as a gesture of hope serves a therapeutic purpose in Chabon's novel via the medium of comic books. Kavalier muses first on the escapist role played by comics:

> Having lost his mother, father, brother, and grandfather, the friends and foes of his youth, his beloved teacher Bernard Kornblum, his city, his history—his home—the usual charge leveled against comic books, that they offered *merely an easy escape from reality*, seemed to Joe actually to be a powerful argument on their behalf. (*Adventures*, 575)

Escape from reality seemed "a worthy challenge, especially right after the war" (*Adventures*, 575). Drawing *The Golem* occupied all of Joseph's time and helped heal him psychically so that he might bear the burden of his familial and communal losses:

> And as he dreamed, night after night at his drawing table, the long and hallucinatory tale of a wayward, unnatural child, Josef Golem, that sacrificed itself to save and redeem the little lamplit

> world whose safety had been entrusted to it, Joe came to feel that the work—telling this story—was helping to heal him. (*Adventures*, 577)

The *Golem* thus functions as nothing less than Joseph's "writing therapy," a "secret record of his mourning, of his guilt and retribution" (ibid.).

Chabon also reworks the myth of the *lamed vov zaddikim*, which contends that the world exists owing to the presence of thirty-six hidden righteous men. These individuals, hidden because their generation is unworthy, are tasked with fighting evil. The "zaddikim," or "just men," frequently need to descend into evil's depths in order to extricate Jews who have fallen into its clutches. The kabbalah terms this the "descent in behalf of the ascent." Moreover, the Zaddik is one who puts things in their proper place thereby restoring a notion of cosmic order which enables humanity to live in spite of the trauma induced by apparent injustice or disorder.

Chabon's retelling of the myth involves inventing the League of the Golden Key, a secret society whose members "roamed the world acting, always anonymously, to procure the freedom of others, whether physical or metaphysical, emotional or economic" (*Adventures*, 133). The Golden Key's foes were agents of the Iron Chain, whose aim was the enslavement of humanity. Tom Mayflower, the crippled apprentice to his magician uncle Max, is cured of his affliction upon receiving the golden key from the mortally wounded Max. Tom raises the key and swears "a sacred oath to devote himself to secretly fighting the evil forces of the Iron Chain, in Germany or wherever they raise their ugly heads, and to working for the liberation of all who toil in chains—as the Escapist" (134).

So, too, Chabon offers readers "Luna Moth," a feminist tale of the transformation of Miss Judy Dark, the Under-Assistant Cataloguer of Decommissioned Volumes whose office is deep underground in the Empire City Public Library. Interrupting the theft of an important artifact, the Book of Lo, Judy is electrocuted by a live wire, becoming Luna Moth, a creature who receives instructions from the Cimmerian moth goddess Lo. Lo tells her that Cimmeria, once ruled by women, was a peaceful queendom overthrown by men who "have been making a hash of things" (272). Lo tells her new disciple that "she has only to imagine something to make it so" (272). Henceforth, Judy in her guise as Luna will "haunt

the night"—a time when evil often occurs—and defeat the evil ones. The fantasy scene culminates with Luna Moth rescuing the Book of Lo and freeing the kidnapped library guard. In Chabon's telling, these various myths each offer an angle of vision on the possibility of trauma being combated when the imagination confronts physical death and suffering.

The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay illustrates both the possibilities and challenges of third-generation Holocaust representation. On the one hand, Chabon seeks to acknowledge both the bond and the barrier existing between Jews on the American and European side of the Atlantic. He recognizes that American innocence must yield before the traumatic enormity of the Holocaust. And he skillfully portrays the isolationist sentiment in America and the reluctance to antagonize Germany prior to America's eventual entry into World War II. Moreover, escaping the nightmare of Auschwitz, at least temporarily, may enable one to continue one's existence. It is, after all, the case, that apart from a very few survivor memoirs, American novelists did not begin responding to the Holocaust for approximately fifteen years after the War. On the other hand, the novel appears to endorse a typically American embrace of the happy ending. Joe is reunited with Rosa and their son. The protagonist is at peace psychologically and emotionally. He has, with the "help" of the golem, worked through the trauma of having lost his entire family, thereby enabling him to achieve at least a temporary *tikkun* (healing or repair). But this *tikkun* is of the self (*aztmi*). It does not address the broader and classically Jewish notion of *tikkun ha-olam* (repair of the world), a motif which Skibell's novel embraces.

Chabon's novel consequently creates an ambiguity on the issue of escaping as opposed to confronting reality. The reader sees this uncertainty in the scene where Joseph visits the grave of Harry Houdini. Chute observes that "instead of instigating an escape from history, [Houdini] instead conjures history for Joe, demanding a reengagement with painful memories . . . It is under the auspices of Houdini that the ghost of Kornblum appears telling Joe to 'go home'—that is, to engage with history instead of running from it" (282). Nonetheless still at the gravesite, Joseph muses on the distinction between hope and belief: "No; he could be ruined again and again by hope, but he would never be capable of belief" (*Adventures*, 607). This distinction is important but ultimately misleading. While it is certainly true that the Shoah destroyed the pos-

sibility of belief for some survivors, for others it was a reaffirmation of their faith. The faith and doubt of Holocaust survivors is a complex issue and, while Chabon's novel emphasizes the destruction of belief, it, like Skibell's novel, also admits to the complex possibility of continued faith after Auschwitz.

A further word needs to be said about the ambiguity inherited in Chabon's Holocaust representation. On the one hand, he clearly draws upon magic and mysticism as they coalesce in the golem figure. Consequently, the Shoah is transformed into a metaphor, and there is little if any distinction between the mysticism of hope and the Nazi mysticism of death. As John Podhoretz writes:

> The Jews of Central Europe, both those who were murdered and those who escaped murder, were ordinary people. In attempting to memorialize them and pay tribute to their suffering, Chabon descends into a false mysticism. It is true that their tradition featured a certain mystical strain, but it is also horrifically true that mysticism was among the forces that led to their extermination—an evil mysticism that promised the world would be purified by their removal.[34]

The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay may, thus, be read as a novel that threatens to generalize the Shoah so that Europe's murdered Jews are a nameless and anonymous group whose memory lacks specificity.

Such a concern raises issues about the moral responsibility of the novelist. Obviously, embedding the Holocaust in a broader narrative is one way to ensure that contemporary readers are reminded of the Jewish catastrophe. In the postmodern and multicultural world, novelists need to determine ways in which to navigate the shape-shifting contours between the particular and the universal in a new and challenging environment. However, we cannot avoid the uneasy feeling that it is one thing for Wiesel to write that "The ghetto was ruled by neither German nor Jew; it was ruled by delusion,"[35] implying that at that time the Jews of Hungary did not understand that they were on the verge of extermination. It is quite another thing for Chabon to imply a type of escapism at a time when everything is known, at least about whom the Holocaust

was designed to eliminate and why. There are two unhappy results of escapism. The first is that one cannot escape the Holocaust any more than one can escape the impact of Rome's destruction of the Jerusalem Temple. Second, escapism leads to forgetting. And forgetting is the ultimate threat to enduring Holocaust testimony. There is an equally clear call to engage in the "day to dayness," as it were, of life. In addition to Houdini's admonition not to escape from history, it is crucial psychologically to re-engage painful memories as a precursor to working through one's Holocaust inheritance. Moreover, as Dewey notes, in commenting specifically on *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*, two choices are familiar to veteran readers of Chabon—"Surrender or engagement" (107). Joseph Kavalier clearly participates in both types of behavior. He exiles himself for a multi-year period in the Empire State Building while drawing 2000 pages of his Golem comic books. However, his re-engagement with life is portrayed when he rejoins his wife and son at the novel's end.

Everything Is Illuminated

Jonathan Safran Foer's novel *Everything Is Illuminated* originated as the author's senior thesis at Princeton University and was directed by Joyce Carol Oates. The novel achieved both critical and commercial success, being awarded the National Jewish Book Award (2001) and a Guardian First Book Award (2002). It was also listed as a *New York Times* Bestseller, and was co-winner of the PEN/Robert W. Bingham Prize (2004). A film version appeared in 2005. Foer's debut novel creates both pathos and humor in telling of two third-generation characters and their attempt to come to grips with their traumatic post-Holocaust identity.[36] Foer's novel is part of the return narrative structure characteristic of third-generation Holocaust representation.

Eva Hoffman, the Polish-born daughter of survivors, attests that the era of memory precipitates "the era of return."[37] Hoffman proposes that "'The Return' is accumulating a literature of its own," including, as she suggests, "such brilliant bouts of fictional invention as Jonathan Foer's *Everything Is Illuminated*" (203). Foer's novel is based on a 1999 trip that he took to Ukraine in search of his grandfather's past. He insists that he "never intended to write [the book]."[38] What he did intend was to chronicle his trip "in strictly nonfictional terms" (conversation with

Jeffrey Goldberg). His journey began with a photograph of the woman who was presumed to have saved his grandfather from the Nazis.[39] Foer intended to visit Trachimbrod, the shtetl of his family's origins in order to gain knowledge otherwise unavailable to him, as if setting foot on the geography of his grandfather's origins could take him back in time. Referring to his trip as a "comedy of errors," Foer writes, "I found nothing but nothing, and in that nothing—a landscape of completely realized absence—nothing was to be found. Because I didn't tell my grandmother about the trip—she would never had let me go—I didn't know what questions to ask, or whom to ask, or the necessary names of people, places, and things" (ibid). Here the third-generation traveler, once again, sets forth with incomplete information, following as Anne Michaels puts it, a "blind guide," navigating the landscape of the past with only fragments of a history not his own (Michaels, 5).

Foer tells two distinct yet interrelated return tales narrated by the novel's protagonists. One describes the author's fictional doppelganger and his ill fated search for Augustine, the mysterious woman who reputedly saved his grandfather's life during the Shoah. The other relates the story of Alexander Perchov, a Ukrainian tour guide who works for Heritage Touring, a company catering to Jews seeking their Ukrainian ancestral heritage. Alex speaks a fractured and syntactically hilarious English. Both narrators are the same age, each has a silent grandparent, and each is on a quest for identity, although initially it appears that only Jonathan's character is doing so intentionally. The book, divided into chapters, contains or implies letters written by both protagonists; readers only get to see those of Alex.

Alex's own unintended pilgrimage of self-discovery, in fact, eclipses that of the fictional Foer. Alex, his allegedly blind grandfather of the same name, and a flatulent dog named Sammy Davis, Jr., Jr. accompany Foer on his quest for Augustine. Unexpectedly, it is—at least in our reading—Alex's family dynamic, including his grandfather's terrible secret, that illuminates the psychodynamic operating in the third generation of non-Jewish victims of National Socialism and their burden of traumatic inheritance. Furthermore, the novel implicitly raises the question of the relation between Holocaust history and authorial imaginative authority in combining a rich (re)creation of the history of the shtetl Trachimbrod and the real Trochenbrod shtetl. Foer presents a 150-year history

of the imaginary Trachimbrod, beginning in the 1790s and ending with its destruction by the Nazis. Trachimbrod is a Chelm-like shtetl whose inhabitants "gathered to debate that about which they knew nothing" (Foer, 12). The author's imagined shtetl has two sections: The Jewish quarter and the "Human" three-quarters. All sacred activity occurs in the former, whereas "the humdrum activities of daily existence transpire in the latter" (Foer, 10). Moreover, there are two synagogues: The Upright Synagogue and the Slouching Synagogue. Their adherents are, respectively, known as Uprighters—those who are strict adherents of Jewish law—and Slouchers who are lax in their observance.

Trachimbrod's history begins with the drowning death of Trachim, a wealthy businessman, whose carriage overturns and sinks in the Brod River. The sole survivor of this tragedy is a baby girl who is the fictional Foer's great-great-great-great-great-grandmother. Although the shtetl sponsored an annual competition for the purpose of finding Trachim's body, it remained lost. Foer links Trachimbrod's pre-Shoah history to a more contemporary moment by identifying it as the place of Augustine's birth. The real shtetl of Trochenbrod, however, was at one time a completely Jewish enclave. All but thirty-three of its nearly 5000 inhabitants were murdered by the Nazis. The Soviets obliterated the remains of the shtetl. Today there is a memorial at the former site of Trochenbrod, a fact that Foer incorporates by referring to a memorial stone in Trochenbrod, dedicated by the Israeli prime minister.[40]

Everything Is Illuminated derives its raison d'être from the presence of an absence. The author underscores this point by having one of his fictional characters observe that stories are always initiated by a sense of absence. Neither Foer nor Alex has an entirely uncomplicated relationship with his grandparent. Jonathan's grandfather died before Jonathan was born. He tells Alex that as a young child he sat under his grandmother's skirt and looked at her varicose veins. Moreover, although the two would shout words to each other, he spoke in English, she in Yiddish; the boy never asked his grandmother the meaning of her words. Symbolically, he remains a child in the womb—under his grandmother's skirt—and, like the simple child in the Passover Seder, he is unable to ask the meaning of his grandmother's Yiddish. In a similar manner Jonathan, fearing his grandmother would not permit him to go to the Ukraine, does not tell her of his plans. Consequently, he has no details that could aid him in

finding Augustine or in discovering more information about his family history. All he knows is that his grandmother has shown him a photograph of Augustine,[41] but provided no details ("Conversation"). Once in the Ukraine, Foer discovers that his grandfather's shtetl has been obliterated, "both from the landscape," writes Erin McGlothlin, "and Ukrainian memory."[42]

The Holocaust continues to elude comprehension among members of the third generation, although it continues to inflect the identity of this chronologically removed cohort. Foer, responding to an interviewer's question regarding Holocaust representation, muses whether the Holocaust can or cannot be engaged artistically: "Can historical accuracy be replaced with imaginative accuracy? The eye with the mind's eye" ("Conversation"). Moreover, he raises the central novelistic questions for writers who treat the Shoah: What are one's responsibilities to "the truth" of a story, and what is "the truth"? How can the imagination be shaped to enact the rupture of lives and the complexities of memory?

Holocaust-inflected trauma continues long after the historical event has passed. Jonathan shares with Alex that he recalls spending most Friday nights at his grandmother's house. On the way in to the house she would "lift me from the ground with one of her wonderful terrifying hugs" (Foer, 158). The following afternoon, when leaving her house, his grandmother would again lift him in the air: "I was again taken into the air with her love" (Foer, 158). Only much later did Foer understand that she was weighing him. He explains what he means to the uncomprehending Alex: "When she was our age," he tells Alex, "she was feeding from waste while walking across Europe barefoot. It was important to her—more important than that I had a good time—that I gained weight whenever I visited" (ibid). This experience greatly impacted Foer the novelist. He told an interviewer that "[My grandmother] has always been [concerned] with measuring the distances between what is felt and said, the lightness of love, the heft of showing love—that I have related with her. My writing, I have begun to understand—I am learning anew with each newly written word—springs from the same need to measure."[43]

The novel's great ironic twist concerns three Ukrainian generations: Alex's grandfather, his father, and himself, each of whom bear the same name. Alex may be at home, but he is very much a stranger in a strange land. Guiding the fictional Jonathan, Alex discovers his own identity.

His grandfather, who may in fact be at least partly Jewish—he is sometimes called Eli—feels overwhelming guilt and trauma resulting from the murder of his friend Herschel during a Nazi action in the town of Kolki, located not too far from Trochenbrod. Under pain of death he had revealed to the Nazis that Herschel is Jewish.

After much fruitless searching, Jonathan, Alex, and the grandfather finally encounter an aged woman whom they believe to be Augustine. She shows them many small boxes, which contain the remnants of possessions once owned by Kolki's murdered Jews, again revealing the third generation's preoccupation with objects of memory. Moreover, Augustine attests—much in the manner of Derrida's notion of "trace"—that the "ground is still filled with rings, and money, and pictures, and Jewish things" (Foer, 152). This trace reveals the presence of the Jewish absence. The meeting with Augustine results in a development of crucial psychological importance: the return of what the grandfather had repressed for so many years and which accounts for his persistent melancholy behavior. That which is repressed, as the work of LaCapra reminds us, returns with a vengeance. Alex, in one of his letters to Jonathan, reports that he has seen his grandfather weeping three nights in one week. The first night his grandfather was looking at an aged leather bag containing many photos. Holocaust photographs, as Hirsch observes, contain "ghostly remenants," an opening for stories (*The Generation of Post Memory*, *Poetics Today*, 29:1, Spring 2008, 115). The second night he held the photograph of Augustine. The third night he held a photograph of Jonathan. The novel concludes with the grandfather's unfinished suicide note. Trauma has no statute of limitations.

Everything Is Illuminated illustrates several key psychological points pertinent to our discussion of third-generation narratives. The legacy of trauma extends to the third, non-Jewish, generation. The maturing of Alex's own identity occurs over time and in stages. He confronts his own alcoholic and abusive father, throwing him out of the house. He accepts the responsibility for raising Iggy, his little brother, and his letters and advice to Jonathan become increasingly sophisticated and insightful as he develops respect both for himself and for the Jewish tradition. The racial insensitivity displayed by the dog's name is matched by Alex's initial ignorance of and hostility towards Jews coming to the Ukraine to search for traces of family murdered in the Shoah. Early in the novel, Alex opines

that before his journey with Foer, he thought that "Jewish people were having shit between their brains" (3).

The illumination in the novel's title refers to a number of complexities in addition to Alex's emotional maturation. Discovering the grandfather's true identity is one form of revelatory illumination. The villagers of Kolki watching the burning of the town's synagogue are illuminated by the flames of destruction and murder. Lovers coupling in the imaginary shtetl of Trachimbrod, according to Foer's fictional recreation, emit light that can be seen from outer space. Augustine, in telling stories about the shtetl and Foer's grandfather, is also a character who illuminates matters. Moreover, the murderous flames of the Shoah itself cast light on the depth of National Socialism's psychotic fantasy of making the world *judenrein* and on the utter devastation wrought by the Holocaust. Foer told an interviewer that he is fascinated by illuminated manuscripts (*Jewish Life*). Furthermore, writing itself is, as we have noted, a crucial dimension in each of the three authors' attempts at working through their traumatic inheritance. So, too, the inhabitants of the fictional Trachimbrod are continually writing. The novel contains two pages on which is written simply and repetitively, "We are writing . . ." (Foer, 212–13).

Conclusion

The novels of the third-generation writers we have discussed in this chapter are engaged with postmodernist concerns. Nevertheless, the shape-shifting shadows of the Holocaust continue to impact the identity of this generation. Their Holocaust-related writings are simultaneously a way of mourning relatives they never knew and an attempt to understand their own Jewish identity. Foer reports that when he went to the Ukraine at age twenty he was "an unobservant Jew . . . skeptical of anything described as 'Jewish.'" Nevertheless, his writing "began to take on a Jewish sensibility" ("Conversation"). All three writers—Skibell, Chabon, and Foer—although ostensibly secular, have written deeply Jewish books which draw upon folkloric as well as historical materials, and magical realism; they share a picaresque motif, and bear witness to the Shoah's intergenerational reverberations.

These works, each of which was a critical and commercial success, also bear witness to the impetus for renewal and identity within both a

particular and a universal framework. *A Blessing on the Moon* broadens the impact of traumatic legacy by seeking to respond to catastrophe. The volume represents the inheritance of traumatic legacy in terms of a mission, not despite but because of Auschwitz. Skibell's work attests that Jewish myth and ritual retain their deep hold on the Jewish imagination and continue to provide spiritual succor. *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay* also imagines the possibility of a partial repair of individual lives deeply traumatized by the Shoah. *Everything Is Illuminated* represents the universal dimension of intergenerational transmission of trauma. Jews were the killers' obsession, but the lives of others were deeply impacted by Nazism's evil. In this regard, Foer's novel may in fact be read as a warning to humanity.

Reading these works reveals traumatic traces of the Holocaust past. The Shoah continues to be a part of Jewish identity. While treating highly personal and individualized experiences, these authors also transmit a sense of communal trauma, thereby illustrating the complexity and necessity of memory in the postmodern context. Moreover, their emphasis on storytelling itself is a fundamental Jewish motif. Their respective works provide important clues to how literary representation of the Holocaust has a history and a future. Memory for survivors comes unbidden. Second-generation writers speak not of the Shoah directly; rather, they reflect on the impact of the trauma on their parent's child-rearing practices. Holocaust markers and imagery—showers and trains, for example—appear in these works, as they do throughout post-Holocaust writing. Yet the second generation has much more control over Holocaust memory than does the third. The third generation is far less restrained than its predecessors. They search for identity and memory even while giving free rein to artistic imagination that informs a variety of innovative narrative techniques. Collectively, the third generation reveals the truth that trauma, even—or especially—in the face of silence, forms an ineluctable part of the human experience, and that the attempt to transform the legacy of Holocaust trauma into history will, no matter the format, likely continue in an as yet to be determined manner in the future.

CHAPTER 5

Nicole Krauss
Inheriting the Burden of Holocaust Trauma

The deep effects of catastrophe, the kind that are passed on from psyche to psyche and mind to mind, continue to reverberate unto the third generation.

—EVA HOFFMAN, *AFTER SUCH KNOWLEDGE*

I inherited a suffering to which I had not been subjected.

—ALAIN FINKIELKRAUT, *THE IMAGINARY JEW*

Remembering is a noble and necessary act.

—ELIE WIESEL, "HOPE, DESPAIR AND MEMORY," NOBEL LECTURE

A grandchild of Holocaust survivors and the author of three novels, *Man Walks into a Room* (2002), *The History of Love* (2005), and *Great House* (2010), Nicole Krauss admits that while the Holocaust is a manifest presence in her work, she cannot write her ancestors' stories the way survivors or their children have written about the Shoah. In a recent interview, she takes issue with being labeled a Holocaust writer and maintains that she has "written very little about the Holocaust in terms of actual events."[1] Chronologically separated and shielded from the horrors of the historical realities of the Holocaust by her grandparents and parents, this third-generation artist points out that in treating her Holocaust inheritance she is mostly interested in "the response to catastrophic loss" and in a

survivor's ability to deal with the trauma of dispossession and "starting a second life" (Gritz).

These pivotal concerns, while already present in her first novel, *Man Walks into a Room*, assume existential urgency in her two recent novels, *The History of Love* and *Great House*, extending their field of inquiry to include treatment of the Shoah's impact on the second generation and the quest of the third-generation artist to find means to reimagine the traumatic history of Jews marked by exile and genocide. This chapter focuses on the tropes and symbols Krauss employs within a post-memorial context in order to come to terms with the intergenerational transmission of trauma. Her literary oeuvre utilizes the tropes of nostalgia and displacement in charting a course for responding to catastrophic events that occurred long before the author's birth. We maintain that Krauss's work amply substantiates Cathy Caruth's observation that "History is not only the passing on of a crisis but also the passing on of a survival that can only be possessed within a history larger than any single individual or any single generation."[2]

Unlike the works of first-generation writers, Krauss's novels avoid the realities of concentration camps with crematoria chimneys belching out human ashes; or ghettos encircled by barbed wire and high walls to reinstate and reinforce the millennia-old practice of separating Jews from the rest of humanity; or forests where young girls are forced to come of age surrounded by beastly villagers rather than by the welcoming embrace of a mother, a grandmother, or sister. Likewise, the chaotic and often surreal milieu of a displaced persons camp teeming with orphaned, widowed, emotionally and physically maimed survivors searching for loved ones and for a country to call their own—another preoccupation of first-generation authors—remains off-limits to Krauss's novels. Neither do the mundane and epic tensions in survivor Jewish households, with their so-called replacement children in Jerusalem, New York, Kiev, or Buenos Aires, fall under Krauss's scrutiny, as they do in the writings of second-generation authors, the "survivors of survivors," as described by Thane Rosenbaum, himself a son of survivors.[3]

Krauss's protagonists refer to what are considered archetypal events and persons in the history of the Holocaust: Kristallnacht (the Night of Broken Glass), which foreshadowed the soon-to-unfold genocide; the Nazi gold train, a convoy loaded with stolen Jewish art and treasures,

symbolizing the dispossession of the Jewish people; Emanuel Ringelblum and his Oneg Shabbat team's heroic effort to create an archive of witness testimonies in the Warsaw Ghetto, an act that transformed a historian's duty to write a factual account of observable reality into a sacred mission to bear witness.

Krauss is right to insist that she could not write the story of survivors or their direct offspring for whom the Holocaust as a lived experience holds an immediacy she cannot recreate. Nonetheless, Krauss realizes that the impact of the Holocaust continues to resound, even though its historicity is under continuing assault,[4] and that she must therefore find ways to comprehend and articulate the plight of contemporary Jews who have inherited the traumatic legacy of the Shoah, in all of its many varied, but sharply felt manifestations. In this desire she follows the pattern of third-generation writers.

The Holocaust was always "humming away at the edges"[5] of Krauss's own existence, notwithstanding a life of comfort and privilege she enjoyed growing up in Long Island in the finely designed Bauhaus home of the family of a successful orthopedic surgeon. A sensitive and curious teenager, she read widely and thoughtfully. When, at age thirteen, she studied Gabriel García Márquez's novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, her teacher told her that the book was about nostalgia, a concept that provoked her and stimulated her imagination. As Milan Kundera points out in his novel *Ignorance*, the word "nostalgia" is derived from the Greek words "nostos" and "algos," a "suffering caused by an unappeased yearning to return"[6] to one's homeland, to a world of familiarity and roots. Kundera goes on to point out that, embedded in this concept, is an acute sense of loss and an unbearable "pain of absence" (Kundera, 6).

Investigating nostalgia in Márquez's novel led Krauss to an epiphany: subconsciously this feeling of loss and an ever-present sense of a painful absence had been resonating deeply within her since adolescence. Moreover, as she discovered later, "It [had] something—or everything to do with—the fact that my grandparents came from these places that we could never go back to, because they'd been lost. And people were lost.[7] My great-grandparents and lots of great-uncles and aunts died in the Holocaust. Maybe it is something inherited in the blood, a sense of a loss of a thing and a longing for it."[8]

Filling the absence and countering the loss became major artistic

preoccupations governing her entire oeuvre. At the onset of her literary career Krauss composed a record of her four grandparents' lives. Her maternal grandparents were born in Germany and Ukraine and later found refuge in London, while her paternal grandparents, who met in Israel and then moved to New York, were born in Hungary and Slonim, in what is now Belarus. Their histories of displacement, as well as the memory of many of her relatives who perished in the Holocaust, helped her create credible characters, who, as she puts it, "survived the Holocaust or have been affected by it" (Gritz). Leopold Gursky, a native of Slonim, a Holocaust survivor, and the protagonist of *The History of Love*, is in love with his childhood sweetheart, Alma Mereminski, whose surname is identical to that of Krauss's paternal grandmother, Sasha Mereminski. Sasha Mereminski also inspired the creation of one of the most movingly tragic characters in *Great House*, Lotte Berg, who like Krauss's grandmother was forced to leave Germany after Kristallnacht for a transit camp in Poland. One year later she evaded death in Auschwitz by becoming a chaperone on one of the last Kindertransports to London.[9] The parents of both Sasha Mereminski and those of her fictional counterpart were murdered in the Shoah. Their tragic fate casts a long shadow over Krauss's literary landscape, which spans from Israel to America, from Germany to England, from Belarus to Argentina, from Russia to Chile. In the process, Krauss's novels engender the unbearable "pain of absence," the sense of nostalgia, indeed, that make her readers fully aware of the horrors of the Holocaust without coming into direct contact with the kingdom of night. As a third-generation writer, Krauss cannot help but follow the necessity of bearing witness to her Holocaust inheritance; she does it, however, by celebrating and asserting life, just like her grandparents did who are "people who love life" and who taught her to "always emphasize life over the loss of it" (Marsh). "Every conversation I remember having with them as a child," she tells Alden Mudge in an interview, "was about life—not about tragedy, not about history, not about what had happened to their families—but simply about living."[10] Krauss's point of view bears comparison with that of Margot Singer, discussed in chapter 6.

The History of Love is dedicated both to her four grandparents who "taught me," she writes, "the opposite of disappearance" and to the celebrated novelist Jonathan Safran Foer, her husband at the time. Foer's family has also been touched by the Shoah. Consquently, Krauss "intu-

ited a lot of the same things in the silences of [their] childhoods" (Wood). Her grandparents' legacy is also reflected in the dedication of her latest novel, *Great House*, "For Sasha and Cy," her two sons named after their great-grandparents. The three tributes constitute a text of far reaching consequences that help answer the question Krauss poses after defining the subject matter of *Great House* as "the burden of inheritance." The question, as she puts it, "that was of great concern to her . . . What do we pass down to our children, knowingly or unknowingly?"[11]

This question is central to the explicitly Jewish imperative of passing the tradition from generation to generation (*l'dor ve-dor*) and goes to the heart of Krauss's fiction. It identifies two imperatives: first, to pass on or pass down an inheritance, in this case an intergenerational trauma that transcends generational and chronological boundaries and requires attesting to the inheritance of the Holocaust's postmemory and second, to ensure the existence of yet another post-memorial generation—children who live "after such knowledge" and transmit—even as they shape—testimony, as in the admonition "Tell your children of it, and let your children tell their children, and their children another generation" (Book of Joel 1:3). This issue of postmemory and propagating children appears as early as Krauss's first novel, *Man Walks into a Room*. The protagonist, Samson Green, an English professor at Columbia University, who lost his memory as a result of a brain tumor, bemoans his inability to recall events that happened during the last twenty years of his life, including the death of his mother. In desperation, he muses: "What is life, Samson wondered now, without a witness?"[12] Moreover, he "wondered now whether he and Anna [his wife of many years] had spoken about children, whether a child of their own with Anna's eyes and his countenance had been waiting up the road in the future that was now lost to them. The thought of it made his heart quake with sorrow and love" (*Man Walks*, 208). The issues of writing and parenthood are intertwined, as are those of bearing post-memorial witness and intergenerational transmission of trauma. Both are cornerstone concerns in *The History of Love* and *Great House*, and serve to link the writings of the third generation.

The burden of emotional inheritance Krauss so acutely experiences is expressed in a variety of different ways. Her writing repeatedly returns to the post-Holocaust lives of survivors, their children, and grandchildren. She is obsessed by the consequences of this most recent manifestation of

the archetypal brutalization and destruction that has recurred repeatedly throughout Jewish history. Moreover, in July 2010, she and Johnathan Safran Foer toured Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Museum and archive located on Jerusalem's Mount of Remembrance, where they reviewed documents relating to members of her family. For Krauss, this experience was both compelling and traumatic, in the sense of the term that Cathy Caruth describes in her trauma theory: "to be traumatized is to be precisely possessed by an image or an event."[13]

As this volume reveals, other third-generation writers feel compelled to confront the Holocaust and its continuing impact on survivors and their progeny. Erika Dreifus, for instance, describes her own characters as having been "chased from their original 'living space' . . . [They] still search for psychic and physical territory, still don't feel safe."[14] Dreifus, a Harvard educated historian, writer, and professor, insists that, as a grandchild of refugee survivors, she finds a need to work through the burdens of her own inheritance and takes to task those who question the credibility and authenticity of Holocaust writings of third-generation artists. To substantiate her argument, she enlists the help of Thane Rosenbaum who, anticipating the emergence of third-generation writers, observes: "The enormity of Auschwitz was so great . . . it can't be canceled out in one generation" (Shai Oster, "Holocaust Humor," *Moment*, September/October 1999). Dreifus invokes a pointed statement made by Ariel Levin, a third-generation teenager in Rosenbaum's *The Golems of Gotham* who attests that her role in life is to "redeem and liberate the ghosts of her grandparents' generation—effectively giving them space to live again . . . while freeing her father from the prison of the present" (Dreifus, 526). As Dan Bar-On attests, "The third generation (is important) in evaluating intergenerational transmission of the Holocaust."[15]

Rosenbaum's insistence on the intergenerational nature of tramatic inheritance and Dreifus's acceptance of her responsibility as a third-generation witness to attest not only to the past but also to the effects of the Holocaust on post-Holocaust generations sharpen the focus of Krauss's central question: "What do we pass down to our children, knowingly or unknowingly?" *The History of Love* and *Great House* are responses to this query; they contain, in fact, two major images that thread through her respective novels and help bind their highly complicated and tightly structured narrative designs into a coherent rhetorical whole: a book-within-

a-book in *The History of Love* and a multi-drawer writing desk in *Great House*. These images are intimately associated with writing—in Krauss's words "they stand for Literature" (Gritz, *The Atlantic*, October 21, 2010) and are passed on or passed down from one character to another. These objects become "like a needle and thread" that help stitch "some of the stories of the [characters'] lives together" (Bar-On, 113).

Their passage from one character to another implies both loss and inheritance. Exploring their journey allows Krauss to closely probe how the survivors' and their offspring "respond to catastrophic losses and suggest ways to transcend these losses while beginning a second life, albeit in the shadows of the Holocaust" (Gritz, *The Atlantic*, October 21, 2010). Given the close association the book-within-a-book and the desk have with the creative process, it is no coincidence that most of her major characters are, in fact, writers or are closely associated with the written word, and all are driven "to describe the world, because," as Leo Gursky, the eighty-year-old survivor and author of the book-within-a-book asserts, "to live in an undescribed world is too lonely."[16]

Krauss's literary method seeks to reconstruct and reassemble fragmented lives, giving her characters a renewed sense of meaning and purpose. To describe the fragmented, chaotic, and anomic world of a century of genocide, dispossession, uprooting, and exile is not an easy task for a writer.[17] Neither is it easy to give shape to lives of characters whose personal histories are marked by an understanding that to be born Jewish is to live in a state of uncertainty and doubt. But rendering these sensibilities and states of being is Krauss's primary artistic goal and is a shared third-generation characteristic.

Krauss conveys the fragmented nature of her characters' lives in *The History of Love* in part by having multiple narrators tell the story: Leopold Gursky, a Holocaust survivor and writer; Zvi Litvinoff, Gursky's childhood friend and an aspiring author; Alma Singer, a young girl in search of her past; and Emanuel Chaim, Alma's brother and wannabe *lamed vovnik*, one of the thirty-six hidden righteous whose presence helps to ensure the continued existence of the world. Their narratives are complemented and cross-referenced by diaries, journal entries, and letters that offer both deeper insight into the characters' experiences and sensibilities and simultaneously make their lives seem more problematic, contradictory, and fragmented. Imprints of visual images of a heart, a book, a com-

pass, and an ark precede each narrative, signifying the innermost desires of each narrator: Leopold Gursky yearns to mend his broken heart; Zvi Litvinoff aspires to write a book of testimonies; Alma Singer needs a compass to keep her search on track, and Emanuel Chaim covets spiritual renewal.

The story centers on traumatic personal and literary loss and rediscovery. Leopold Gursky is the author of three books, including the-novel-within-the-novel, *The History of Love*, a namesake of Krauss's book, which he dedicated to his childhood sweetheart, Alma Mereminski. Unlike him, she escaped the ravages of the Holocaust because her father had the foresight to send her to America two years before the Nazis invaded Slonim. Brokenhearted, Leopold Gursky periodically sent her installments of his manuscript, hoping that this rhetorical thread might reconnect them in the future and in the interim help mend his heart. His friend, Zvi Litvinoff, also in love with Alma Mereminski and also an aspiring writer and poet, is a Holocaust refugee whose arduous wanderings finally land him in Chile along with Leopold Gursky's manuscript, which its author had passed on to him for safekeeping. Zvi Litvinoff's marries a Yiddish-speaking Chilean woman, Roza, who nurtures him back to life after he has suffered the loss of nearly his entire family. Convinced that Gursky is dead, Litvinoff publishes a Spanish translation of the book under his own name. At the time of his death, he is plagued by guilt and self-recrimination for his literary theft.

Alma Singer, the teenage protagonist, is named after Leopold Gursky's prewar sweetheart, Alma Mereminski, by her deceased father David Singer, who had stumbled on a rare copy of Zvi Litvinoff's plagiarized novel in a Buenos Aires secondhand bookstore. Alma Singer is consumed by her desire to find a husband for her widowed mother, Charlotte, a translator. Jacob Marcus, who asked Charlotte to translate Leopold Gursky's *The History of Love* into English, sends her a copy. Unbeknownst to her mother, Alma Singer reads some of the translated chapters and contacts Jacob Marcus as a possible suitor for her mother. The girl subsequently discovers that Jacob Marcus is, in fact, Isaac Moritz, a New York writer. Moreover, he is the son of Leopold Gursky and Alma Mereminski, conceived before Alma Mereminski left Slonim. Jacob Marcus, ignorant of his real origins, was raised by Alma Mereminski and the man she married in America. The young girl further learns that her namesake

had secretly maintained her contacts with Leopold Gursky and had read chapters of his manuscript to her son.

Krauss realizes her artistic goal of providing her characters a renewed sense of meaning and purpose through Alma Singer's search for Jacob and her namesake. Alma Singer's identity-forming and life-altering journey leads her to an encounter with a Holocaust survivor whose main fears in life are that he will "die on a day when [he] went unseen" (*Love*, 4) and that his memoir, *Words for Everything*, will go unread. "The truth was," he cries out, "I wanted someone to read it" (17). The convergence of the two journeys undertaken by a survivor in search of a reader and a teenage girl in search of her namesake has allayed Gursky's dread of invisibility and also made Alma Singer aware of her people's past, of her roots, of the importance of family, of the need to memorialize the victims of the Shoah. Moreover, it shed light on both her mother's belief of the oneness of the Jewish people as reflected in her pie chart, which shows the interconnectedness of the Jewish people and the intergenerational responsibility for balancing inherited burdens of the past with the realities of the present and anticipation of the future.

Alma Singer's encounter with the survivor leads her to discover a life-sustaining legacy that impels her to pass on *The History of Love* to future generations. Moreover, Krauss suggests another aspect of this legacy through Alma Singer's eleven-year-old brother. Mourning the loss of his father and desiring to become a *lamed vovnik*, Emanuel Chaim represents messianic yearning, in spite of the Holocaust. And even if such yearning often produces frustration and doubt, it nonetheless contains within it even stronger elements of faith and hope. Furthermore, Emanuel Chaim, desires to be repatriated to Israel where their mother and father met in Yavneh. He plays a pivotal, quasi-mystical, role that enriches Leopold Gursky and Alma Singer by allowing them both to bear witness—he as a survivor, and she as a third-generation member—and transmit the legacy of the Holocaust to future generations.

In Krauss's worldview the burdens of inheritance and intergenerational transmission of traumas can be turned into joys of a rich and a reciprocally nourishing relationship between parents and children, one deeply anchored within a family unit and based on a tradition developed out of stories of loss, survival, and redemption. In *The History of Love* she employs memorialization and storytelling or writing to facilitate her

characters' redemptive transformations. While in America, Leopold Gursky writes a memoir, *Words for Everything*, and sends it to his son. Charlotte Singer, a member of the second generation, translates—literally and figuratively—Leopold Gursky's novel of loss and exile. Alma Singer, of the third generation, reads the translation and becomes aware of her roots. This rite of passage will help redeem and liberate her grandparents' generation from oblivion while freeing her mother from the burdens of her own losses. Given Alma Singer's successful search for the woman whose name she inherited, it is not far-fetched to assume that she will be able to restore the wholeness of her own family, perhaps helping her mother find a husband, perhaps in Yavneh, again. She will thereby live up to the meaning of the name "Alma"—one who nourishes the soul.

Great House

Great House, Nicole Krauss's exquisitely wrought novel, defies easy categorization. The author herself terms it a "very difficult book to describe" (YouTube, "Conversation: Nicole Krauss' *Great House*," 11/8/2010). The work, nonetheless, is vital in helping readers understand the emergence of a third generation of writers, grandchildren of Holocaust survivors, who, while living in the present, shoulder the elusive burden of their Holocaust inheritance. The fate of an enormous multi-drawer writing desk, once, allegedly, used by the assassinated Chilean poet Lorca links the novel's protagonists. The desk, variously described as "overshadow[ing] everything else like some sort of grotesque, threatening monster"[18] or as "an enormous, foreboding thing that bore down on the occupants of the room it inherited, pretending to be inanimate but, like a Venus flytrap, ready to pounce on them and digest them via one of its many little terrible drawers" (*Great House*, 248), assumes the role of a silent yet palpable protagonist and acts as a symbol of the inescapable burden of a writer.

Acknowledging the continuing trauma of Holocaust survivors, *Great House* concerns itself primarily with how this trauma imprints itself in the lives of two second-generation witnesses, children of one of the four major protagonists who also serve as narrators in the novel. Their Holocaust inheritance manifests itself in a variety of ways: a fear of intimacy, being raised in silence concerning the Shoah, and feelings of unease

with the social world. The novel employs the trope of traumatic postmemory in dealing with the second generation. As Hirsch attests, postmemory "describes as well the relationship of the second generation to the experiences of the first—their curiosity and desire, as well as their ambivalences about wanting to own their parents' knowledge."[19] This reminds us of Art Spiegelman's *Maus* volumes in which Art reflects his own burden of being raised in a survivor household.

Like *The History of Love*, *Great House* is a richly textured multithemed novel. The volume, however, differs in two important ways from its immediate predecessor. First, Krauss seeks to imagine what a second-generation Holocaust witness feels and experiences. Second, *Great House*'s themes—memory of trauma and its ineluctable relationship to identity, the near-impossible task of nourishing the souls of Holocaust survivors, and its bleak emotional tone—set this work apart. Moreover, it reflects the fragmented nature of postmodern writing itself. Specifically, Krauss speaks of the psychic burden of inheritance in the lives of individuals both in and out of the State of Israel whose existence is inextricably bound to the Shoah. As part of an emerging body of third-generation writings, *Great House* offers a distinctive angle of vision for reading the literary map guiding readers wishing to negotiate the terrain of this generation's traumatic Holocaust burden.

Great House is composed of two books, each having four chapters, which tell the intersecting story of four people, three of whose lives have been touched by the mysterious and enormous writing desk which is passed on as either an inheritance or a gift. The narratives in each section of the novel are simultaneously a story of the early and later lives of the protagonists. Moreover, these narratives are reminiscent of the Viddui, a confession or reckoning of the soul (*Hesbon Hanefesh*), which is a prominent feature of the ritual of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, during which one seeks reconciliation between oneself and the deity and between oneself and others against whom one may have sinned.

Although God plays no overt role in *Great House*, the deity's place and function in Jewish history, especially following great upheavals in which the continued existence of Judaism is in grave peril, is a constant in the Jewish experience, defined as a cycle of catastrophes and redemptions. Krauss invites the reader to contemplate this issue following the Holocaust. This point is given credence by a chapter titled "All Rise" which

purports to be testimony given before a judge. In the case of *Great House*, the "judge" may be God whose post-Holocaust existence is, for many, in extreme jeopardy. While it is true that skepticism about God, the deity's acting in history, and the entire notion of the sacred came under intense scrutiny in modernity, especially beginning with the work of Spinoza, the Holocaust intensified this scrutiny in an unparalleled manner. The late historian Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi notes, "Jews are not prepared to confront [history] directly, but seem to await a new, metahistorical myth, for which the novel provides at least a temporary modern surrogate."[20]

Viewed from this angle, *Great House* may be understood as a novel in which God's evident absence—both during the Shoah and in the novel itself—is less a statement of fact than an implicit twofold question: What is God's role in the Shoah, and in the post-Holocaust world, an enquiry universally pursued with great urgency by artists, philosophers, poets, theologians, and writers. The writing desk links the stories of three of the novel's four principal protagonists and narrators. Nadia, a divorced, childless, mid-list American novelist, has written at the desk given her twenty-five years earlier by Daniel Varsky, a Chilean poet martyred by General Gustav Pinochet's dictatorial regime. Lotte Berg, mentioned previously, is a writer who owned the desk for many years and is ultimately, a victim of Alzheimer's. A refugee, she had come to England on one of the last Kindertransports. Lotte had given away her infant son and concealed this fact from her husband Arthur whom she had married after the event. Arthur, a professor of English, ruminates on the nature of romantic love after the Shoah; these ruminations led him to discover his wife's traumatic secret. George Weisz is a Hungarian-born survivor whose father—murdered in the Shoah—was the original owner of the desk. Leah and Yoav, Israeli-born brother and sister, are George's children. Leah retrieves the desk from Nadia. Yoav eventually marries Isabel (Izzy) an American student whom he meets in Oxford.

The fourth protagonist-narrator, Aaron, is an aging Israeli lawyer and widower who has a deeply troubled and ambiguous relationship with Dov, one of his two adult sons and a former judge. Their story, while not related to the burden of traumatic history associated with the desk, conveys another dimension of Holocaust trauma: the complex relationship between the Shoah and the establishment of the modern State of Israel.

Krauss compels her readers to reflect on this relationship in telling Dov's story. We will return to this later.

George Weisz's father, a great scholar of Jewish history, "carried two thousand years with him wherever he went the way other men carry a pocket watch" (*Great House*, 286). Weisz himself retrieves or produces pre-Shoah memorabilia for surviving victims, concretizing survivor memories by retrieving physical objects stolen during the Holocaust. While described as "a person partially erased," Wiesz nonetheless typifies the resourcefulness of many survivors and brings a measure of comfort to his peers (284). He is self-described as having "certain talents; I developed an expertise," he states, "Out of the ruins of history I produced a chair, a table, a chest of drawers. I made a name for myself" (285). Although he never owned a store, George Weisz's fame as an antiques expert was legendary; clients "always knew where to find him" (118).

A widower, Weisz wandered from city to city with his children, Leah and Yoav, whose lives are deeply affected by their father's Holocaust trauma. "They were," writes Krauss, "prisoners of their father's, locked within the walls of their own family, and in the end it wasn't possible for them to belong to anyone else" (113). Krauss's description comports with Caruth's assertion that "One's own trauma is tied up with the trauma of another, the way in which trauma may lead, therefore, to the encounter with another, through the very possibility and surprise of listening to another's wound" (*Unclaimed Experience*, 8). Leah observes that her father "was burdened with a sense of duty that commanded his whole life, and later ours" (*Great House*, 115). Silence was the familiar form of communication between the father and his children. Here Krauss deftly makes several points: the Shoah's continuing trauma in the lives of its survivors, the intergenerational transmission of that trauma to their daughters and sons, and the impossibility of escaping the consequences of the Shoah despite the survivors' determination to rebuild shattered lives.

Great House is a meditation on post-Holocaust memory, the meaning of Jewish history after Auschwitz, and the impact of the catastrophe on Jewish identity. These issues find resonance in the novel's title which is invested with at least two meanings. On the one hand, it refers to a passage in the biblical book of Kings: "He burned the house of God, the king's house, and all the houses of Jerusalem; every great house he

burned with fire" (2 Kings 25:9). On the other hand, after this manifestation of divine judgment provoked by the faithless Israelite kings, an exilic remnant returns to begin the task of rebuilding Jerusalem. In classical Jewish thought destruction is never complete and is always followed by a "saving remnant" that enables the search for redemption. It is this paradigm that the Shoah threatens to topple.

Moreover, Krauss references Yohanan ben Zakkai, a second-century C.E. figure who also lived in the aftermath of a great destruction—the Jerusalem Temple destroyed by the Romans in 70 C.E. Ben Zakkai renews Judaism even as he transforms it from biblical religion to rabbinic Judaism after the Temple's fall, establishing a rabbinic academy in Yavneh—the place where *The History of Love*'s David and Alma Singer met. George Weisz's father used to tell his son tales of ben Zakkai that linked subsequent Jewish memory and the rebuilding of the Great House (the Jerusalem Temple) to the meaning of messiah. The elder Weisz speculates, "If every Jewish memory were put together . . . as one, the House would be rebuilt again . . . or rather a memory of the House so perfect that it would be, in essence, the original itself" (*Great House*, 279). This, according to Weisz's father, might convey what is meant by the term "messiah": "a perfect assemblage of the finite parts of the Jewish memory. In the next world, we will all dwell together in the memory of our memories" (ibid.). But Weisz's father cautioned his son that this will not be for us, "Not for you or me. We live, each of us, to preserve our fragment in a state of perpetual regret and longing for a place we only know existed because we remember a keyhole, a tile, the way the threshold was worn under an open door" (ibid.). Jewish memory is thus seen as eternal and eternally incomplete in the face of historical traumas visited on the Jewish people.

Furthermore, George Weisz muses on the meaning of the action of ben Zakkai's disciples, a story that his father had related to him when he was growing up. After their master's death, the disciples sought a response to ben Zakkai's question: "What is a Jew without Jerusalem?" Finally they were able to comprehend ben Zakkai's response: "Turn Jerusalem into an idea. Turn the Temple into a book, a book as vast and holy and intricate as the city itself." The Jewish people themselves, observed the elder Weisz, could then be bent "around the shape of what they lost, and let everything mirror its absent form" (279). In this manner, Weisz offered the key understanding of how Jewish history can integrate even great

destructions into its memory that continues to be shaped by changing historical events.

Weisz's implicit philosophy of Jewish history calls to mind Heinrich Heine's observation that the Bible was the Jews' "portable fatherland" (*The Enclyopedia of the Jewish Religion*, 1968). Here exile becomes a state of mind even more than a description of the wanderings of the Jews. For Heine, wherever the Jewish people were physically situated, they bore their homeland with them in the form of the Hebrew Bible. In fact, Heine's observation flies in the face of Ahad Ha'Am's insight that every Jew needs two messiahs—one to take the Jews out of exile and the second to take the exile out of the Jews. Krauss mediates between both views. On the one hand, she writes of Jews exiled to different parts of the world in the aftermath of the Shoah; they are literally exiled. However, on the other hand, she assigns great symbolic and literary weight to Israel, especially to Yavneh which, as we have seen, is the location of a great transition from biblical to rabbinic Judaism, and to Jerusalem, which is where George Weisz maintains a home on Ha'Oren Street, and where he eventually commits suicide. Jerusalem is also where Yoav and Liz will marry and reside.

In addition to the biblical resonance of the novel's title, "the great house" can, observes Liz, who frequently visited Freud's recreated study in London, refer to the mind as a metaphorical house (*Great House*, 111). Here it is significant to contrast the positions of Freud and Wiesel concerning the role of memory. For Freud, memory was a crippling burden which one must learn to work through in order to free oneself psychologically. For Wiesel, the Holocaust survivor, memory has vital ontological significance. "If we stop remembering," he attests, "we stop being."[21] *Great House* seeks to ineluctably link memory and being. *Great House* has a more somber tone than the *History of Love*, which can be attributed at least in part to the fact that Krauss's third novel deals primarily—although not exclusively—with the survivor and second generations. Two of the most important characters in *The History of Love*, Alma Singer and her brother Bird, represent the hope embodied in the third generation and its further historical remove from the Shoah.

Krauss observes in an interview that her characters are filled with doubt, both self-doubt and moral doubt. The protagonists in *Great House*, each in her or his own way, respond to their traumatic legacy of loss, to

contemporary genocide, and to the torture of political prisoners. As we have noted, the massive writing desk had at one time belonged to the martyred Daniel Varsky. The poet's fate brings to mind not only the murder of countless young Jewish writers and intellectuals in the Holocaust whose untimely and horrific deaths deprived the world of undreamed of possibilities, but also underscores the fact that genocide and its perpetrators are very much a part of the contemporary landscape.

Krauss thereby invites her readers to contemplate the meaning of the Holocaust-inspired phrase "Never Again." The "Never Again" reference brings to mind the observation of Rachel Kadish's protagonist in *From a Sealed Room*: "In the Hebrew afterschool program that my mother insisted I attend twice a week, we spent that spring learning about the Holocaust. The teacher sang songs of mourning, recited stories meant to keep the lost ones alive. And she taught us that remembering was what would keep this thing from happening again. *Never Again* and *Never Forget*; we could keep disaster from reoccurring if only we were watchful."[22] For certain third-generation writers "Never Again," at best, means "Never Again, at least on our watch." Moreover, Krauss's novel reports both the capricious nature of death and the intentional act of murder. Death is of course a fact of life. It can occur accidentally as is the case when *Great House* reports that a female victim of a fire in a national park lodge was the sole casualty among the guests. Murder, however, differs from death. *Great House* tells of a mother who, after giving her children sleeping pills, incinerates them and herself in a car. The book also refers to Palestinian suicide bombings of Israelis in Jerusalem, and to Israeli soldiers who fell in battle. In Krauss's third novel, images of death and what Robert J. Lifton terms "the death imprint" stalk the lives of Holocaust survivors and their descendants.

Great House also recounts episodes from the seemingly endless Arab-Israeli conflict that indicate the omnipresence of evil and suffering, as well as the third generation's search to reconcile the evidently irreconcilable Jewish and Palestinian narratives of exile and return. Weisz, who proves himself a successful entrepreneur, in time buys a house formerly owned by an Arab in Ein Karem, a fashionable section of Jerusalem. The current owner, from whom Weizs buys the house, reports that the Arab had fled with his wife and children. The Arab's daughter left behind her doll.

The man tells Weisz that at first he kept the doll, but "one day the [doll's] glass eyes began to look at me in a strange way" (*Great House*, 285).

Returning to the story of Aaron and Dov, the reader learns that while serving in the tank corps in the 1973 Yom Kippur War, Dov is forced to confront an impossible moral dilemma: Should he stay with his badly wounded commander and face the reality that they both would die? Or should he seek help, which meant abandoning his comrade knowing that he might die? Dov leaves. The soldier's body was never found. Honoring the commander's request, Dov delivers his watch to the soldier's now sonless father. The father, a survivor of Birkenau, writes Dov a devastating letter accusing him of stealing his son's watch and letting him die. Moreover, he asks "*How do you live with yourself*?" (185). The survivor's letter "summoned the courage of Jewish inmates at the hands of the SS," and called Dov a coward. The letter ends starkly: *It should have been you* (ibid.).

Aaron remarks that the letter "destroyed" his son (188). In the months following receipt of the letter, the father describes his son in terms reminiscent of the figure of the *Muselmanner*—death camp slang for those who, in the words of Primo Levi, "are non-men . . . the divine spark dead within them . . . One hesitates to call them living."[23] Aaron attests that Dov is catatonic. He refuses to eat and withdraws from life. At this point the reader recalls that Eve, Dov's doting mother, who desperately wished to leave Israel when Dov was a youngster because of the country's constant struggle to survive amidst a sea of hostility, had told Aaron—who himself had fought in two of Israel's wars—that she would willingly sacrifice a thousand people in order for her son to live. Aaron himself had thought the same thing during the time of Dov's psychic pain.

Dov's suffering is real and unmistakably links the Shoah and Israeli identity. Even as a young child he is withdrawn and behaves antithetically to his brother Uri's gregariousness and zest for living. An aspiring writer, "already," remembers Aaron, "at 12 or 13 you [Dov] keep growing inward" (*Great House*, 67). The youth constantly casts judgment on his surroundings and on the people with whom he comes in contact. He is secretly engaged in writing a book, the chapters of which he sends home in self-addressed packages during his military service. His book tells a bizarre story in which several people, lying in different rooms are

joined by electrodes to a great white shark, transferring their nightmares to the giant fish. The sea creature "everyday grew sicker and sicker from absorbing the pain of so many" (66). Consequently, Dov, like the novel's other writers, Lotte Berg and Nadia, composes strange and uncanny tales which seek to confront and alleviate evil and suffering. Responding to his war trauma, Dov literally flees the burden of his Holocaust legacy by leaving the Jewish state. He goes to London and embarks on a successful legal career, eventually becoming a judge. Twenty years later, upon the death of his mother, however, he resigns his position and returns to Israel. The fact that he ceases to become a judge, a position based on reason and justice, indicates his reluctant acceptance of the fact that the world is not guided solely by reason and that might frequently trumps right. He cannot escape his legacy.

Third-generation authors writing about the Shoah's legacy, as noted earlier, refrain from describing Shoah related events. To do otherwise would be inauthentic. They live "after such knowledge." This is the generation that, as Daniel Mendelsohn observes, has "keepsakes" but "no memories to go with them."[24] Krauss shares Mendelsohn's point of view. Consequently, she utilizes various words that in the aftermath of the Holocaust have assumed very different associations. Words such as "fire," "burning," and "broken glass" invoke images that go beyond the original meaning they carry in standard usage. In Krauss's works they indicate the psychic imprint of the Shoah on its descendants. Further, the third generation—lacking direct experience of the Holocaust—needs to do research on the catastrophe. Allusions to historical events are then artfully incorporated into the fabric of their novels. In *Great House*, Liz recalls writing a college paper on Emmanuel Ringelblum, the famous archivist of the Warsaw ghetto. The horror of Kristallnacht is invoked when vandals throw a rock through the window of Arthur and Lotte's home, leaving the living room full of shattered glass. In the context of Weisz's vocation of retrieving items belonging to victims of the Shoah, Krauss implies the Nazi gold train loaded with items Nazis looted from their murdered Jewish owners.

Hirsch, as we have seen, has written extensively about postmemory in the second and—by implication—the third generation. The psychic imprint of the Shoah on survivor families—especially as it manifests itself in flawed parenting skills—is also revealed in Krauss's *Great House*.

This is not really surprising since at the time of their lives when survivors would otherwise be observing how to act as parents, they were instead suffering from torture, starvation, and other extreme privations.[25] George Weisz was "paranoid that something might happen to his children" (*Great House*, 120). In addition, Krauss writes of the great tension existing whenever Mr. Weisz visited his children. Informed by a telephone call when their father would be arriving that night, "Immediately a tense mood swept through the house, and Yoav and Leah became restless and agitated, coming and going in and out of rooms and up the stairs" (159). Weisz had taught his children to trust no one but each other.

His loss of trust in the world reflects Jean Améry's observation that this loss of trust is a hallmark of the psychic life of many survivors. Moreover, in seeking to exercise control over his children Weisz reveals the lack of respect for boundaries that exists in many survivor households. In an ironic twist, however, family enmeshment—as exhibited by the Weiszs'—reveals a closeness that eludes many non-witnessing families. *Great House*'s portrayal of the nature of intergenerational transmission of trauma that often characterize relationships between Holocaust survivors and their offspring are firmly anchored in many accounts produced by children of survivors who, contra the norm among children of non-witnesses, report feeling a sense of great loyalty to their family of origin and who in large numbers are members of the healing and helping professions.[26]

Krauss's novel searches for a usable past. In the process she utilizes traditional images even while subverting them.[27] Passover is for example, the celebration of freedom from slavery and the promise of redemption. Each participant in the Pesach Seder is enjoined to feel as if he or she personally experienced escape from Egyptian bondage. There are several instances in the novel where Aaron ritually intones the phrase "pass over it." He cannot believe that he has reached the age of seventy as he wonders, "How many ways are there to fear for your child's life" (*Great House*, 188–89). "To me," he muses, "my mother was first and foremost a smell. Indescribable" (193). The instances of "passing over it" indicate the silence, which characterizes many in the survivor community, as well as their descendants when reflecting on the myriad moral, psychological, and theological questions engendered by the Shoah. It is fitting that Aaron's final reflection, "There is a pressure mounting in my chest. I

can't pass over it" (195), indicates that with his life ebbing there is a realization that the inheritance of Holocaust trauma will now become the burden of the second generation.

At the same time, Aaron's inability any longer to "pass over"—an apparent reference to Pesach, one of the central motifs of which is to "pass on" the story of Jewish deliverance from bondage and journey to redemption—suggests that he as a non-witness can no longer retain his faith or his commitment to transmitting the legacy of the Holocaust to future generations. Earlier, when Dov was a young boy and having a tantrum because his bathwater was the wrong temperature, Aaron, who had come to Israel as a five-year-old refugee, grabbed the youth, shook him and screamed: "When I was your age . . . there was nothing to eat, no money for toys, the house was always cold, but we went outside and played and made games out of nothing and lived because we had our lives, while the others were being murdered in the pogroms we could go out and feel the sun and run around and kick a ball" (73). This type of admonishment that invalidates or diminishes a child's concern by comparing it to the experience of a far more serious trauma is frequently reported in literature dealing with children of Holocaust survivors. We think here of the opening scene in volume one of Spiegelman's *Maus* where Vladek responds to young Artie's weeping because his friends had skated away without him. Vladek admonishes Artie, saying that the test of true friendship is depriving people from food for one week in a sealed room. Then you can tell who is a friend. The possibility of such an alternate reading produces an ambiguity in our ability to comprehend Aaron's life that further underscores the fragmented and contradictory nature of reality for survivors, their children, and all those whose lives have been touched by the dark legacy of the Holocaust, thereby instantiating Hirsch's familial and affiliative forms of postmemory.[28]

While Krauss's earlier novel is imbued by a sense of guarded optimism, *Great House* presents a view of post-Holocaust Jewish life that is bereft of the metaphysical comfort provided by the spiritual remedies of classical Judaism. Nevertheless, *Great House* does contain elements of hope. Arthur's description of the reason Lotte kept writing addresses both the hope and the necessity of bearing witness through the act of writing. "No matter how bleak or tragic her stories were," Arthur observes, "their effort, their creation, could only ever be a form of hope, a denial of death

or a howl of life in the face of it" (*Great House*, 256). Krauss's appeal to her readers is that writing itself is a form of protest against despair. Furthermore, Liz and Yoav will have a son, thereby attesting to their faith in a Jewish post-Holocaust future. Moreover, they will live in Jerusalem *the* city of messianic longing par excellence in the Jewish tradition. This association is buttressed by the fact that the yet to be born son will be named David. Tradition asserts that the Messiah will come from the house of David. In addition, Krauss, like Wiesel, frequently employs the phrase "and yet," further alerting the reader that despite the hideous wounding of the Shoah, Jewish history is not over. Like Jacob of old, the third generation bears the mark of wrestling if not with God, then with the burden of traumatic memory.

The presence of children also connotes an element of hope after Auschwitz, although the tragic fate of a million and a half Jewish children in the Shoah casts a dark shadow over the future. In the Jewish tradition children bear great theological valence. The Talmud attests that all of creation is sustained by the breath of little school children (*Shabbat* 119b). Similarly, "Who is it that upholds the world and causes the patriarchs to appear? It is the voice of tender children studying the Torah; and for their sake the world is saved" (*Zohar* I, 1b). Children ask the four questions during the Passover ritual. There is the simple son, the wicked one, the one unable to ask, and the wise one. A post-Holocaust version introduces a fifth son, one who cannot ask because he has been murdered in the Shoah. Krauss's second- and third-generation protagonists may themselves be understood as children who wonder about the content of their identity and the meaning of their history.

Moreover, her literary children represent various fates experienced by Jewish children during the kingdom of night. Many were immolated and a relative few were given by their parents to a tiny minority of caring Christians in order to hide and save the young ones. In addition, Krauss provides cases where children seek to rescue their parents as in the case of *The History of Love*'s Alma Singer. There is also, however, *Great House*'s Dina, the daughter of an Israeli waiter—a survivor—who wants nothing to do with her father. Arthur, seeking to connect with the son whom Lotte had given up for adoption at birth, brings the *Book of Glass*—Lotte's first published book whose title conjures Kristallnacht—to present to the son. Alas, Arthur was too late. The child had grown but died in

an accident. Moreover, both *The History of Love* and *Great House* refer to adoptive parents. *The History of Love*'s American-born man who marries Alma Mereminski becomes the father of Alma and Gursky's son. *Great House*'s Mr. and Mrs. Fiske adopt Lotte's infant son. Hiding parents during the Holocaust, although few in number, did save the lives of the Jewish children in their care. Krauss's literary oeuvre emphasizes the fact that having children means having a future. Having a future means inheriting and embracing the traumatic burden of the Shoah.

There is, however, no gainsaying that *Great House*'s portrayal of the burden of inheritance Holocaust survivors and their children experience is psychically wounding. George Weisz acknowledges that he cannot bring back the dead. "But," he attests, "I can bring back the chair they once sat in, the bed where they slept" (*Great House*, 275). Wiesz's existence reveals a divided self: "memory is more real than the life he lives, which becomes more and more vague to him" (276). The flip side of his dedication to his survivor mission is that life in the present has no meaning. It took Weisz forty years, a biblical generation, to reassemble in his Jerusalem study the contents of his father's Budapest study. Leah, in a letter to Izzy, writes: "as if by putting all the pieces back together he might collapse time and erase regret" (116). The one missing piece is his father's desk.

Krauss, however, is too subtle and insightful a novelist to entirely close the door on hope. In one of the closing scenes of the novel, Krauss portrays George Weisz meditating before his father's enormous desk, which now rests in a New York storage warehouse where Leah had it transported from Nadia's apartment. Weisz, doubtless inspired by the desk's presence, speaks as a seer. He predicts three things: Leah will never have children of her own; Yoav will become a father; and, one day after the birth of his child, his mother will discover an envelope with the child's name. Inside the envelope that Leah will have unobtrusively left in Yoav and Izzy's Jerusalem house will be a key to the New York City storage room housing the desk. In this way, the desk and its inherent burden will be transmitted to George Weisz's grandson, the third generation.

Krauss's work also reflects the ethos of the postmodern world, one in which reality is incompletely knowable, paradoxical, relativistic, and governed by rules of probability rather than logic or causation. Consequently, she conveys both the disjointedness of her characters' existence

and the possibility of cohesion even within this disjointedness, thus paralleling chaos theory in which the predictability of future behavior is not an inevitable outcome even in systems that are apparently deterministic. Her occasional use of first initials rather than spelling out of certain names has a Kafkaesque quality, reminding the reader of the fragmented and anonymous nature of the post-Holocaust world. Moreover, the picaresque quality of the novel underscores postmodernism's fragmentation and feelings of exile.

Great House like *The History of Love* is a novel of hope and not solely of despair. Their author has at once achieved an exquisite literary accomplishment and a way of working through her Holocaust inheritance. Krauss's literary encounter with trauma is a refutation of the argument that enough has been said and written about the Holocaust. Against those who urge forgetting, her novels posit the importance remembering has for the post-memorial generation. Krauss's insightful novels reveal to her readers how writing becomes a way of coping with the past while investing the future with a measure of hope. *Great House* and *The History of Love* are markers of postmemory transmission and transformation. In addition, they signify the complexities of a postmodern Jewish identity and the ineluctable role played by books and writing in articulating the contours of this identity. Krauss provides her readers with a map of the future outlines of Holocaust literary representation.

CHAPTER 6

Refugee Writers and Holocaust Trauma

> As I see it, the connection to the past that I define as postmemory is mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation.
>
> —MARIANNE HIRSCH, INTERVIEW

Judith M. Gerson points to the fact that "there is no universal understanding of the terms *refugee*, *survivor*, and *immigrant*." Nevertheless, the distinctions are important for several reasons: "First . . . [they] indicate the comparison that immigrants make when referring to themselves in contrast to refugees or survivors." Consequently, she adds, "it offers a meaningful distinction for them." "This distinction," she continues, "helps mark survivors' suffering as the real suffering." Moreover, "the contrast immigrants draw between themselves and refugees suggests that scholars and the lay public alike need to rethink their more common assumptions that lump immigrants, refugees, and survivors together into a single category of Holocaust survivor . . . erasing potentially important differences among them."[1] Nevertheless, there is fluidity to the distinction between survivor and refugee. Refugees are survivors of a certain type. This point is illustrated by the narrator in Margot Singer's "Lila's Story" who remarks—concerning her grandparents, pre-Shoah immigrants who spent the war years in pre-state Israel: "So you could say that they survived, but they were not *survivors*, not . . . in the new sense of the word."[2]

Nevertheless, third-generation refugee writers share similarities with third-generation grandchildren of survivors: we think here especially of their concerns for the inflection of traumatic memory in their lives, their search for a useable past, their relationship to the Shoah, the function of their inheritance in shaping their identity. Moreover, the trope of photographs plays a vital role in this generations' archival research. Marianne Hirsch underscores the role of photographs: "For me, the key role of the photographic image—and of family photographs in particular—as a medium of postmemory clarifies the connection between familial and affiliative postmemory."[3] Hirsch's distinction between familial and affiliative postmemory emphasizes the difference between an intergenerational vertical identification of child and parent occurring within the family and the intra-generational horizontal identification that makes that child's position more broadly available to other contemporaries" (Hirsch, *Poetics Today*, 29:1, Spring 2008, 114–15). Affiliative postmemory has great applicability to the third generation who receive their "memories" mediated by the second generation, by their own archival research, by pilgrimages to sites of memory, and by the proliferation of Holocaust museums. They do not have the experience of growing up in survivor households.

In this context, however, it is important to note that the third generation does *not* seek to appropriate survivor memories, which is an important point raised against the second generation by both Gary Weissman and Ruth Franklin.[4] Weissman critiques what he discerns as a type of envy amongst those who seek to appropriate survivor memory as their own. Franklin's critique deals with what she feels are inappropriate claims to be a "second-generation witness." Their critique is perhaps best tested by the writings of descendants of refugees. On the one hand, the stories these granddaughters and grandsons hear deal both with the approaching fury of the storm, the storm itself, and its aftermath. On the other hand, the third generation of those who survived the Shoah, as this study shows, treat the Holocaust as both a subject of archival research and a highly personal matter, or in Mendelsohn's felicitous phrasing, the relationship is one of "proximity and distance."[5]

This chapter discusses the writing of three granddaughters: Johanna Adorján—born in Stockholm—whose paternal grandparents were both survivors *and* immigrants; Erika Dreifus—American-born—whose pa-

ternal grandparents were German Jews who immigrated to the United States in the late 1930's; and Margot Singer—also born in America—whose paternal grandparents were German Jews who fled Europe and came to Israel as immigrants when the country was called the Yishuv. Singer's maternal grandparents were rooted in Eastern Europe in what was called the Pale of Settlement. We are fully aware that Adorján has written an autobiographical, nonfictional memoir and that Dreifus and Singer have written works of fiction. Nevertheless, both of these distinct genres are united by a search for more knowledge about the Shoah. Furthermore, each treats the shape-shifting inheritance of trauma and personal identity in the third generation subjected both to the claims of the past and the pressures of the postmodern moment while seeking a way forward and, as noted, the trope of photographs plays a significant role especially in Singer's work.

Johanna Adorján

Johanna Adorján is a Berlin-based journalist who writes about cultural affairs for the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. Her Hungarian-born survivor grandparents committed suicide in 1991. *An Exclusive Love: A Memoir* (2010) is a debut work that was a bestseller in Germany. It was written in German, and has been sold in eighteen countries.[6] Adorján imaginatively recreates the last day of her grandparents' lives. Her memoir concludes with the police report of their suicide. The majority of her book, however, is a quest to connect with the Jewish dimension of her ancestry and to better understand the continuing impact of the Shoah on her own identity three generations after the Shoah. Adorján's memoir is a multifaceted quest for detailed knowledge of the Shoah, about which her grandparents were largely silent. It seeks a better understanding of the "mysterious" Jewish half of her identity and a firmer grasp of her relationship to her grandparents, especially her grandmother. She describes her work as "imagination based in facts."[7]

Adorján's own third-generation and postmodern identity is a complex phenomenon. Her father is a baptized Protestant who married a non-Jewish Danish woman. The author was raised without formal religious affiliation. She has two younger brothers who evinced little interest in their family's history. Istvan, "Pista," Adorján's paternal grandfather, sur-

vived two Nazi camps: Mauthausen, an "extermination through labor camp" and Gunskirchen, one of Mauthausen's sub-camps. Vera, his wife whose parents were murdered by the Nazis, lived on forged identification papers in Budapest and gave birth during the war to Adorján's father in a hospital there. Following the war, the couple lived under communist oppression in Hungary, fleeing the country after the 1956 revolution to settle in Denmark where they abandoned any Jewish affiliation, "Jews above Judaism" as one reviewer terms them (Botton).

The author remembers that as a child she visited her grandparents and, although she was twenty-one at the time of their death, had never asked about their wartime experience. The memoirist utilizes her reportorial skills seeking to fill in the blanks about their lives. Since, as noted, her grandparents never spoke about the Holocaust, neither their son, Adorján's father, nor his sister, was able to provide many details. Consequently, Adorján's archival research consists primarily of interviewing her grandparents' friends in Hungary and in Sweden. In the process of doing this she deepens her self-knowledge thereby broadening her understanding of history in general and of the Shoah in particular. In this sense her journey resembles the one taken by Daniel Mendelsohn in the course of his research and writing of *The Lost*.[8] Interestingly, however, Adorján attests that she would not have written her memoir without the approval of her father, who was the manuscript's first reader and to whom she dedicates her book. Her aunt was also instrumental in her writing the book and was the second reader.

Her memoir is a story of several intergeneration and interpersonal relationships: that between her grandparents, those between her grandparents and the people who knew them during—and after—the Holocaust, and the author's own relationship to her Jewish identity and to the Shoah. Her grandparents were intelligent and attractive people; he was an orthopedic surgeon and she a multilingual physiotherapist, interpreter, and opera connoisseur. Adorján discovers through her interviews that Vera thought no one aside from Pista loved her and that she had initially threatened to kill herself if her husband did not return from Mauthausen. Years later in Denmark, with Pista suffering from a fatal disease, they implemented the suicide pact they had first made much earlier in Hungary. The couple read *Final Exit*, a volume providing detailed instructions on how to commit suicide.[9]

Writing as an astute observer of everyday life, Adorján provides a plethora of imagined domestic details: the recipe for the cake Vera might have baked as she prepared for her and Pista's last day, her grandmother's feelings about her flower garden which she would never see again, the sorting of clothes to be given to relatives, Vera's saying goodbye to the family dog, her insistence on cleaning the house, and the last discussions between Vera and Pista. Adorján's literary nonfiction has neither chapter titles nor numbers. This reenforces the reader's impression of the psychically disjointed nature of the author's continually moving between interviews and geographical locations. Moreover, Adorján's personal reflections are significantly informed by relaying snippets of Holocaust history, which she hears from Vera's good friend Illi.

Adorján typifies the third-generation literary nonfictional representation of the Shoah, assuming responsibility for transmitting a story that is both very personal and yet remote. Moreover, and intimately connected to the Holocaust, her search, like that of Jonathan Safran Foer, Nicole Krauss, Julie Orringer, Daniel Mendelsohn, and others in this generation, involves discovering and exploring her own Jewish roots; in the context of an interfaith marriage her father is Jewish, although by definition rather than practice, her mother is not. Hers is a variation of Hirsch's postmemory. It manifests itself as a nagging feeling of incompleteness that makes her both "sad and angry" when she discovers that her grandfather excluded his own children from knowledge of their Jewish heritage (Adorján, 75). Similar to the feeling of most German Jews in the interwar period who felt primary allegiance to Germany, Adorján's grandfather wrote a brief memoir in which he observes that "he comes from a family who felt they were Hungarians of Jewish origin" (Adjorján, 74). Seeking to find out details of her grandparents' Holocaust experiences, she muses: "I lack a piece of myself. Something is missing, and I don't even know exactly what" (Adorján, 75). This leaves the author with the trauma of a perpetual fear of rejection and deprivation. "The deepest feeling known to me," she writes, "is the sense of not belonging." (50).

Adorján's interviews provide a composite, and ambiguous, portrait of her grandparents. The interviewees, themselves in their nineties, rely on memories which have begun to fade. It is worth noting that Adorján's father accompanied her to some of the interviews, and her aunt came along on at least one such occasion. Erzsi, Vera's Hungarian friend

and Adorján's primary informant, reveals that Vera, despite her apparent warmth and social graces, was in reality a woman with two personalities: "One was very formal. The traditional feminine image" (49). Erzsi was the only person who saw her other side. "Then," reports Erzsi, "she was silly. We laughed a lot, and she acted like a teenager" (49). But Vera was not a happy woman. She was "very insecure," thinking that no one in the world, except Pista, liked her. Only Erzsi and Knud, the grandparents' Danish physician, "saw behind the façade her grandparents had erected" (161). Vera, although she avoided the death camps, suffered from depression, which Primo Levi long ago identified as the "survivors disease."[10] Consequently, her love for Pista was "exclusive." Erzsi correctly observes that Vera, like Etty Hillesum, had her life interrupted by the war and never fully recovered from the trauma.[11]

Johanna Adorján has ostensibly inherited, so to speak, her grandmother's identity trauma. While it is not literally possible to inherit someone else's memory, this does not prevent Johanna from musing, "No one loves me, no one can love me. That is my deepest conviction and . . . my greatest fear" (Adorján, 50). Hearing Erzsi's report, Adorján thinks that she would like to call everyone she knows and tell them: "I'm not crazy after all. I'm only my grandmother's granddaughter. She had it too. She was like me. I am like her" (ibid.). This identification with the grandmother is also pronounced in Margot Singer's "Lila's Story." In Johanna Adorján's case, however, her feelings of insecurity concerning her identity may also be linked to her parents' lack of formal religious observance. In addition, since her family of origin rarely spoke about the Shoah, Adorján inherited silence. She told an interviewer that she believes "silence is inherited." And "if one generation doesn't ask questions, the next will."[12] In this sense, she confirms sociologist Marcus L. Hansen's law of the third-generation return: What the son wishes to forget, the grandson wants to remember.[13] While the second generation, the offspring of Holocaust survivors, does not forsake their Shoah legacy, Adorján—as a non-Jewish member of the third generation—strives to carve out a memory.

Adorján's memoir interjects accounts of the history of Hungarian Jewry before and during the Shoah, reminding the reader that such bits and pieces of history intrude on the everyday lives of the third generation: it consists of fragments stitched together to form a fragile whole. Hungary's Jews were the last to be deported, the military war was es-

sentially over but the fanatical drive to exterminate the Jews continued undeterred. The cattle cars kept rolling to Auschwitz. Reflecting on the surreal situation, Illi, another survivor friend of Vera, whom Adorján interviews, muses: "That's how history unfolds. The Holocaust was raging, Jews are transported to Auschwitz in their hundreds and thousands to be gassed—and others know someone who can get them false passports, and they quarrel with their parents about the totally normal aspects of life"(Adorján, 61). Adorján discovers that the commonly received Holocaust narrative needs adjusting. Concerning her own family's survival, she has a myriad of questions. Vera had given birth to Adorján's father in September 1944 and had initially hidden him in a drawer: "But how did she manage to hide herself? Where was that drawer? How did she contrive to get the false papers allowing her to avoid arrest and deportation? Why did she have (forged papers) and my grandfather did not? How did my grandmother survive the war" (27–28). Complete answers to these questions may, as Mendelsohn, Foer, and other third-generation witnesses discover, never be known.

Adorján and her father go on a pilgrimage to Mauthausen, the site of memory and consequent trauma where Pista had been imprisoned. The occasion brings up a host of unresolved, and perhaps unresolvable, issues notably the stark contrast between the mundane everydayness of the present, nearly idyllic setting and the grotesque extermination that occurred there in the past. She notes that there are occasional traffic jams when too many visitors arrive, and muses ironically that contemporary visitors to the camp, unlike those interned there during the Shoah, are free to walk out. The horrors that were perpetrated on prisoners are ancient history to many contemporary visitors. Adorján and her father view a documentary about the camp. During the film, her father experiences deeply personal emotions. He "[puts] a finger under his glasses a couple of times. I don't dare to turn to look at him" (10).

Later, Adorján displays the sense of responsibility for, and protection of, memory of the Shoah that characterizes the third generation. She is angered by the bored indifference of "ugly teenagers" (Adorján, 10) on a class trip to the camp who are inappropriately dressed, noisy, and busy texting. The Shoah may be chronologically remote, but it is an event that remains intensely personal. Without personal memory but with individual responsibility, Adorján is determined to remember. Looking at

the "hospital" where prisoners died in agony during needless operations without anesthesia, her overriding thought is: "but my grandfather survived it. He did survive it" (11). Again, questions present themselves: "What was it like for him in Mauthausen? Did he work in the [infamous] stone quarry? Or as a doctor? What did Jewish doctors do in a concentration camp? Which patients could they have treated for what?"(12). Pista took the answers to these and other questions with him to his grave.

Further details emerge about her grandparents when Adorján's father tells her about a box of her grandfather's papers he has in his possession. They discover that Pista had been liberated from Gunskirchen and not Mauthausen. But the father, who had taken some papers from his parents' home after their death, never looked at them. In contrast, the author is vitally interested in discovering all that she possibly can about her grandparents. This situation recalls in principle the relationship to Holocaust history portrayed in the previously cited Israeli film "The Flat" (*Hadira*) by Arnon Goldfinger. Here the daughter of deceased survivors wants to throw all of her parents' papers in the garbage, whereas her son is obsessed with tracing his grandparents' Holocaust history, which includes their bizarre relationship both before *and after* the Shoah with a German Nazi who had served on Adolf Eichmann's staff. The grandson travels to Germany to meet the daughter of the Nazi. Initially she is cordial and forthcoming. However, she is unable to own the fact of her father's murderous past. Adorján discovers through her interviews that Pista and Vera think of themselves as thrice-born: their biological birth was followed by a second birth in 1945—the end of WWII—which, in turn, was superseded by their emigration to Denmark—their third birth.

Adorján is consumed by the issue of her personal and cultural identity. She feels confused and incomplete because her grandparents were ambivalent about their own Jewish identity; on the one hand they downplayed that identity, while, on the other hand, they were interested in the Jewish identities of other people. Moreover, they had wondered about, and were deeply troubled by the possibility that their son's future father-in-law had been a Nazi. The grandparents remain Jews but with no connection to the religious or ritual dimension of the tradition. Johanna acknowledges to a friend that she has never dated a Jewish man. Her friend prods her to go on J-Date. She does so but is disappointed because many

of those who respond to her posting have not told the truth about themselves, being especially evasive or downright deceitful about their age. Although she does eventually meet someone acceptable on J-Date, the relationship does not work for some unspecified reason.

An Exclusive Love references two photographs in Adorján's possession that record her grandparents' final visit to Budapest, five months prior to their suicide. One photograph portrays her grandparents sitting at a table with Adorján's mother and "a few old people whom I don't know" (Adorján, 136). Her grandmother appears less glamorous than the author remembers her. Although Vera is laughing in the photo, her body language tells a different tale. She holds her handbag firmly on her lap "in what looks a slightly anxious or tense way." Her grandfather sits behind the table and looks "with a sad smile" at two laughing women whom Adorján does not know. The second photograph shows only her grandfather. It was taken on a café terrace and Pista is looking at the table in front of him, although it is outside the frame. He "looks troubled" (Adorján, 137). While photographs do not play a major role in Adorján's memoir, their depiction—not of the Shoah itself—but of two of its victims after the war, whose body language and facial expression reveal anxiety, sadness, and tension serve an important function. Hirsch, as noted earlier, describes photographs depicting pre-Shoah Europe and lost family members as "ghostly revenants from an irretrievably lost past world" (Hirsch, 115). While Adorján's grandparents did survive, they nonetheless bear the psychic cost of that survival. They embody Hirsch's concept of "ghostly revenants."

Adorján is, however, unwilling to abandon her search for a cultural home. Her subsequent journey to Israel is psychologically enriching and comforting. She feels at home, musing: "Ah, here you all are!" (Adorján, 83). This feeling of at-home-ness brings to mind what the sociologist Maurice Halbwachs describes as collective memory, a phenomenon referring to the cultural reinforcement experienced by being in the presence of one's own people. The issue for Adorján is, however, complicated; the Jews both are and are not her own people. Adorján is not the daughter of a Jewish woman and therefore is not halakhically considered Jewish. However, her paternal grandparents were Jewish survivors of the Shoah. Moreover, on the return flight she is surrounded by elderly Israeli

married couples. The women talked to their husbands nonstop "in a tone of slight annoyance, which did not seem to bother the men" (84). This reminds Adorján of her grandparents. The author wonders if that eternal discussion is typically Jewish. Furthermore, she wonders if it is typically Jewish "to kill yourself when you have survived the Holocaust" (86). Here she reflects the fact that many survivor writers did take their own lives. The list includes Primo Levi, Paul Celan, Arthur Koestler and his wife, Piotr Rawicz, and the Polish, non-Jewish Tadeusz Borowski. Moreover, she questions whether or not the phrase itself—"typically Jewish"—is legitimate or is merely a cultural stereotype?

The memoirist is conflicted about the motive of her grandparents' double suicide. On the one hand, it may reflect fear. Vera's act may be seen as "A woman's fear of being unloved, alone, a burden on others" (146). On the other hand, it may also be interpreted as an act of aggression toward her own children, "behaving . . . as if she were entirely alone in the world" (ibid.). These questions will remain unanswered. No one ever really knows fully what is at work in the mind of a suicide. Adorján also wonders if survivor post-war suicide is "typically Hungarian" (86). She notes that although Hungary has one of Europe's highest suicide rates, most Hungarians do not kill themselves. Her musings reflect her uncertainty over her own identity. Although she is not Jewish according to Jewish law, she feels psychologically comfortable with Judaism and at ease while visiting the Jewish state.

Adorján's father and aunt had prevailed upon Pista to write a memoir for the family. He responds at age seventy-seven with a seven page document written, ironically, in a flawed German. His testament is a "Jewish family history through and through" (74). Although he himself came from a family of assimilated Jews, he notes that several relatives were gassed in Auschwitz. But for his children's sake he explains the meaning of the Passover Seder. This calls to mind Orringer's bridge metaphor: Jewish ritual may continue to address Jews who ostensibly have little connection to Judaism. Adorján feels both sad and a "little angry" (75) when reading the document. Her grandfather had in effect stolen a part of her identity. "Something is missing, and I don't even know exactly what" (75). Although Adorján's Jewish identity remains elusive, she nevertheless feels a sense of responsibility for transmitting her traumatic Holocaust legacy.

Erika Dreifus

Erika Dreifus's debut short-story collection *Quiet Americans: Stories*[14] was named a Sophie Brody Medal Honor Title by the American Library Association and recognized as a "Notable Book" by *The Jewish Journal* and "Top Book" by *Shelf Unbound*. Dreifus, who has a master's and a doctoral degree from Harvard, blogs at "Practicing Writing," and has an e-newsletter "Practicing Writer." She is also the Media Editor of Fig Tree Books. *Quiet Americans* is an extended and exquisite meditation on how the Shoah continues to inflect the identity and perceptions of third-generation writers. Although Dreifus's title brings to mind Graham Greene's classic novel, she attests there is no "intended direct connection between the two titles" (Anne Stameshkin "Mishpocha and Beyond: An Interview with Erika Dreifus," *Fiction Writers Review*, May 30, 2011, 8). The trope of silence, however, plays a significant role in several of her stories as well as serving as the collection's title. The volume's seven stories, which the author—echoing Adorján—describes as "fact-based fiction[s]" (Dreifus, "Everafter? History, Healing, and 'Holocaust Fiction' in the Third Generation," 524) are united by the tropes of anxiety and insecurity. The stories utilize various angles of vision to explore the Holocaust's ongoing traumatic ripples on the descendants of those who fled prior to the full onslaught of the maelstrom. Dreifus confides:

> The more I write, the more I discern the ways in which so many of my characters (or their parents and grandparents), having been chased from their original "living space," still search for psychic and physical territory, still don't feel safe, still cannot fully "live" their lives. The shadows of Nazi persecution remain, whether the main characters are refugee-survivors, people who managed to survive the extermination camps, or children *and grandchildren* of either of those first two groups.[15]

Moreover, Dreifus boldly problematizes the terminological discussion. Unlike Gerson, she conflates "refugee" and "survivor," assigning the term survivor to both survivors and refugees. Although this leads to terminological inexactness, Dreifus addresses the issue head on. She rhetorically enquires: "If my grandparents were not 'survivors,' then how can I have

remained so affected? So tied to this territory? Has there been something toxic, wrong, inauthentic about my obsession? Have I, too, in the words of Alain Finkielkraut, become an 'imaginary Jew'?" ("Ever After," 527–28).

Responding to her own query, Dreifus attests "I don't think so. And not only because not everything I write is about 'me'" (528). She attests: "All of the stories in *Quiet Americans* reveal a deeper understanding of what it means to be Jewish and an American and a survivor" (Christi Craig, "An Interview with Erika Dreifus," posted May 23, 2012). This begs the question, precisely what has she survived? Dreifus writes that her book is dually inspired. On the one hand, there is the impact of "the experiences and stories of my paternal grandparents, German Jews who immigrated to the United States in the late 1930s" (Bio, Chatty long version, Dreifus website, 2). A second source of her inspiration is her "own identity as a member of the 'third generation'" (ibid., 2–3). We believe that Dreifus is an inheritor of the postmemory instilled in her by listening to her grandparents' stories.

In a candid self-assessment of her book, Dreifus writes: "Lots of flashbacks. Lots of pain. Freud might identify quite a bit of 'remembering and repeating' in my pages" (525). He might also, we believe, recognize Dreifus's attempt at "working through" her traumatic legacy. More specifically, the author writes that only after reading the late Israeli scholar Dan Bar-On's 1995 book, *Fear and Hope: Three Generations of the Holocaust*, was she able to "reflect seriously on the possibility of a heritage handed to the third generation that required healing. Working through" (525–26). Furthermore, attests Dreifus, writing itself is "the best way to explain the Holocaust—and its after-effects—for myself and for the world" ("Ever After?" 527). Writing for oneself connects to Hirsch's notion of familial post-memory. Writing for the world is akin to Hirsch's afflicative post-memory.

Chronologically, the volume's first three stories "For Services Rendered," "Matrilineal Descent," and "*Lebensraum*," occur either before or during the Second World War. The final three tales "Floating," "The Quiet American, Or How to Be a Good Guest," and "*Mishpocha*," happen in the first decade of the twenty-first century. "Homecomings," set in 1972, is literally in the middle of the collection. Josef and Nelly are continuing characters in the second, third, and fourth stories. All of the stories, as noted earlier, reflect the burden of a traumatic inheritance

while exploring various ways of seeking to work through this troubled legacy. Dreifus emphasizes the omnipresence of the Shoah's shadow by prefacing her volume with two epigraphs, one from Gunter Grass: "It doesn't end. Never will it end." The second references the survivor and Nobel Laureate Imre Kertész: "Which writer today is not a writer of the Holocaust?"

Three stories in the volume—"Floating," "Homecomings," and "The Quiet American"—deal with the ugly persistence of post-Shoah antisemitism. "Floating" juxtaposes the immanent birth of Mia and Jerry's grandchild—his parents had fled Hitler in the 1930's—and the Jew-hating poetry of Amiri Baraka (born Everett LeRoi Jones), New Jersey's African-American poet laureate. Writing in the wake of 9/11, the delusional Baraka claimed that Jews were responsible for the Islamic terror attacks on America, which killed 3000 people, Jews and Muslims among them. In contrast to his hate-filled work, Mia recalls her own pregnancy experience, which was infused with love. She "floated out of the [obstetrician's] office" after discovering she was pregnant with her first child. The embryo itself is described as floating inside her. Finally, she and Jerry floated through the entire pregnancy. Now the parents of Allison and Andrew, they anxiously await the birth of their daughter's baby, their first grandchild.

Mia, heart regulated by a pacemaker, head assaulted by migraines, is portrayed as phobic and anxiety-ridden. Both her mother and Jerry's parents have died, as has her brother's wife from breast cancer. Her brother himself has prostate cancer. Times have changed; it has become more difficult to "float." Conjuring the role played by science, or pseudoscience, in the Shoah the author observes that contemporary fetal testing—a sonogram, which is a different type of photography, has revealed that the fetus has a potential defect—served only to heighten anxieties. "Floating," Mia muses, "is so much more elusive in this life, with the holes of loss and absence, the demands of replacement, the trials and terrors tearing through the hours and days and years" ("Floating," 108). Furthermore, her own children argue about Baraka's right to free speech. Allison is vehement in her denunciation of his blatant antisemitism. Andrew, her brother, believes that the man deserves the right of free speech. Allison contends that Baraka may be entitled to express himself, but "not quite in this way. And not on taxpayer money" (110). Dreifus invites her readers to

contemplate the split in third-generation responses to antisemitism and the impact of the Shoah, and to speculate how the fourth generation—in the form of Allison's about-to-be-born child—will react to the Holocaust and to continuing expressions of anti-Jewish bigotry.

"The Quiet American" focuses on *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, a German word that translates roughly as "coming to terms with the past." Written from a second-person point of view, Dreifus tells the story of Rebecca, a third-generation American, who reluctantly travels to Germany. She is a passenger on a tour bus in Stuttgart, birthplace of her paternal grandparents. Greta, the German tour guide repeatedly exclaims: "This building had to be rebuilt after the war. The original was destroyed by the bombings" ("Quiet," 116). Her preoccupation with buildings comes at the expense of any stated concern about either Jewish or other civilian lives lost. Rebecca's dread at the prospect of going to Germany had been emphasized earlier in the story when she tells her American Jewish friend, also the granddaughter of European-born grandparents: "I don't know which is worse, at this point. To be an American in Europe—or to be a Jew" (114). She, like Maria in "Floating," is fearful, worried about terrorism in both America and in Israel. Her unease intensifies during the bus tour.

Most of the others on the bus are German. This prompts Rebecca to wonder what they did during the war. Seven passengers are not German. In addition to Rebecca, there is an American family of four from Chicago and a middle-aged British couple. The Americans remain quiet in the face of Greta's constant refrain about the allies who bombed Stuttgart. But the British man, who had been in the RAF during the war, exclaimed that while he may not have been responsible for the Stuttgart bombings, if he had been he would "hardly be ashamed" (121). Everyone stares at the man. After improbably giving Greta a tip—"it's the polite thing to do" (ibid.)—and as she remembers that twenty years earlier on a trip to Paris her father had tipped their guide, she runs after the British couple. She profusely thanks the former bombardier for speaking up. Rebecca has been rescued from her silence. Moreover, Dreifus symbolically delivers her message that Jewish refugees in America remained largely silent, speaking only to each other in their native languages about the Shoah-wrought devastation. In addition, she reinforces Wiesel's contention that silence in the face of assaults on the facts of the Shoah serves

to kill the victims a second time. Two generations removed from the Holocaust, Rebecca's identity and perception of the world remain inflected by its traumatic legacy.

"Homecomings" treats the issue of "working through," as well as the significant role played by photographs in linking generations affected by the Shoah. In a 2011 interview, "Manheim in Pictures and Prose," Dreifus attests that the story derives its raison d'être from her paternal grandparents' 1930s immigration, and her grandmother's traumatic 1972 return to her natal city.[16] The story begins with Nelly Freiburg collecting the belongings of her recently deceased mother Sophie Kahn. Sophie, a refugee from Manheim who escaped to Brazil and died in Brooklyn, has left very little, except for photographs. Nelly looks at and removes the photos: she is struck by the one of her parents' wedding in Germany. Moreover, she recalls that Nazis had beaten her father during Kristallnacht before sending him to his death in Dachau. Three other photos command her attention: that of her husband Josef and herself surrounded by other refugee friends and relatives in New York; their son Mickey, his wife Paula, and their three-year-old daughter Rebecca. The earlier photos are in black and white, emphasizing their distance from the present, while Rebecca's photo is in color.

The trip to Mannheim is a wedding anniversary gift from Mickey and Paula to Nelly and Josef. It coincides with the 1972 Munich Olympic Games during which eleven Israeli athletes were murdered by Black September terrorists. Intensifying the hovering shadow of the Shoah is the fact that Dachau is only six miles from Munich's Olympic Stadium. Although staring at the "grainy newspaper photos" (88–89) of the camp with some fascination, the thought of going anywhere near there "made [Nelly] retch" (89). Furthermore, she refuses to sleep in Germany. Instead, she and Josef stay with cousins in Strasbourg and take a day trip to Mannheim. Returning to America, Nelly reflects the ambivalence of many European-born Jews expelled from their homeland. She muses that in the future she might return to Mannheim with her son and daughter-in-law and their two young girls—Paula is soon to give birth to a second daughter—when the children are old enough to understand. Maybe she would be ready then to visit her house and her father's grave. Or maybe not. The story begs the question: Which country, Germany or America, does Nelly consider home? "Emigration," writes Eva Hoffman, "is an

enormous psychic upheaval under any circumstances. It involves great, wholesale losses: of one's familiar landscapes, friends, professional affiliations; but also of those less palpable but salient substances that constitute . . . one's psychic home—of language, a web of cultural habits, ties with the past. Perhaps even ties with the dead."[17]

"Homecomings" reveals the power of photos in helping shape narrative. Dreifus confides that "visiting a location isn't necessarily essential for every writing project. But I believe that for 'Homecomings,' it mattered very much" ("Mannheim," 5). Elsewhere, in an interview Dreifus emphasizes that all the things mentioned in her short story, including the descriptions of the city itself ". . . are based on these real places and what I saw."[18] Dreifus shares several photos including a flower shop; Mannheim's central railroad station, Ifflenstrasse—the street where her grandmother had lived. Unlike the fictionalized grandmother, Dreifus's real life grandmother never got out of the car to visit her apartment. On the contrary, she just sat in the car and wept. The final photograph shows the location of her father's prewar office. All the photos are in black and white; only one of them has a barely visible person. These photographs concretize Dreifus's imagining the city where her parents lived prior to fleeing Europe. Furthermore, they reinforce Hirsch's attestation: "Historical photographs from a traumatic past authenticate the past's existence, what Roland Barthes calls its *ça a été* or 'having-been-there,' and, in their flat two-dimensionality, they also signal its insurmountable distance and 'derealization'" (Hirsch, 116).

"For Services Rendered" is the tale of Dr. Ernst Weldmann, a German-Jewish refugee pediatrician, who, along with his family, is permitted to immigrate to America in the spring of 1939, several months after Kristallnacht. The conceit of the story pivots on the fact that Weldmann is spared owing to the direct intervention of Emma Göring, the wife of Reichsmarschall Herman Göring. Weldmann had treated the couple's young daughter Edda. Emma is grateful for his skill and compassion, not caring that he is Jewish. Bidding Weldmann farewell, she tells him that she and Emma will miss him. Summoning the physician to Carinhall, the Görings' official residence, the Reichsmarschall confides that this was not the first time Emma had intervened. His fellow Nazis were displeased by her actions.

At the conclusion of the war, American newspapers carry accounts of the Nuremberg Trials of high-ranking Nazis. Göring's photo is prominent among them. Unlike photos of victim families, this one elicits neither empathy, compassion, sadness, nor a desire to identify. Nor is the photo a screen protecting Weldmann, the refugee viewer. Instead, Weldmann views the photo through a physician's eyes musing about how much weight the beefy Nazi has lost. Furthermore, the photo prompts him to wonder about the fates of Emma and Edda. Consequently, Dreifus implicitly and explicitly raises the question of the relationship between justice and compassion. Should Weldmann follow the norm of the pediatrician and seek to ensure the safety of Edda by writing a letter to the court on behalf of Emma urging leniency? Or should he be faithful to the memory of the Jews, including his extended family, who perished in the Shoah? The top Nazis deserved punishment, although Göring had committed suicide in prison while awaiting execution. The doctor worries that Edda Göring will lose both of her parents.

"For Services Rendered" reveals a deep divide in the refugee community. Some, like Klara, Weldmann's wife, want justice to prevail. Nazis are murderers and deserve to die. Others, like Weldmann, advocate compassion—not for Nazis but for their relatives, some few of whom were among the helpers of the Jewish people. Although Klara thinks him crazy, Weldmann writes a letter on Emma's behalf to the judge presiding over her trial for war profiteering. Emma responds, thanking him. Moreover, she reports how grateful she is for the Jewish letters of support she has received. Dreifus told an interviewer that the complexity of the story fascinated her. Dreifus' tale is based on a bit of truth. Her grandmother had been a nanny for the family of an affluent Jewish physician whose daughter was the patient of a German refugee pediatrician who had been told by his Nazi employer in Germany, "You should get out of here" (Stameshkin, 4). Refusing her father's suggestion to "look this guy up," she wanted to explore the story as a work of fiction rather than nonfiction. Like many in the third generation, she utilizes both testimony and imagination in seeking to articulate the manifest questions associated with the hovering shadows of their Holocaust inheritance.

Dreifus's short story "*Mishpocha*" ("Family") constructs the tropes of anxiety and the internet, "The electronic Tree of Knowledge," in telling

of David Kaufman's—a second-generation member—quest for learning more about his parents' pre-Holocaust history and better understanding his Shoah-related legacy. An only child, David was raised in silence about his parents' Holocaust experience. Consequently, he muses: "When most of your family has been . . . *exterminated*; when to the question, 'how did your parents meet?' you must reply . . . that their fingers had quite literally entwined over a soup kettle at a European DP camp in 1945 . . . when you've had no true aunts or uncles or cousins, you're bound to have questions" ("*Mishpocha*," 131). Moreover, these questions leave him prone to phobic assumptions including fears of terrorism—a common thread among Dreifus's protagonists—although he is married and has two children.

Following his mother's death, David laments that there were still "so many questions" (127). Issues of intergenerational communication between survivors and their children are a key focus of many second-generation writings. Collectively, the second generation has been termed the "Children of Job."[19] Their parents' difficulties in communication were frequently based on the false assumption that if they remained silent they would spare their children any anguish. The absence of pre-Holocaust family photos from his parents' side contrasts sharply with an abundance of such photos from his wife Barbara's side of the family. Her German ancestors settled in Philadelphia in the first third of the nineteenth century. Many vital records "testified to their place in the world, their role in history" ("*Mishpocha*," 132). Moreover, they had left an abundance of photographs, which documented their presence. David, on the other hand, yearned "to know who [his parents] were before he knew them, before they were his parents" (134).

Although initially overwhelmed by the sheer number of online Jewish genealogy groups, and dubious about the accuracy of DNA tracing, David is persuaded by a friend—a daughter of survivors—and ultimately submits a DNA specimen during the "Days of Awe" (*Yamim nora'im*), the time between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur when, according to traditional beliefs, one's fate for the coming year is decided. Much to his surprise and initial disbelief, he discovered he was related to five other men who shared a surname "McMahon. Or MacMahon" (148). David speaks to his father, now in a nursing home and the walls of whose room are covered with photos of his two grandchildren, and discovers that his

parents had adopted him, as his mother was unable to bear children because of what had happened in the camps. His biological mother was Catholic and unmarried. Therefore, like Adorján, David is not Jewish by birth. However, the identity of each is tied to the Shoah.

Dreifus, the granddaughter of refugees, seeks to imagine the psychic life of a son of survivors. Queried about her choice, the novelist attests that "at this point, I'm not sure that I remember deciding to write a story with a 2G protagonist" (email message to Berger, October 2014). This is not, however, an uncommon phenomenon: Anne Raeff, a daughter of refugees, imagines the complex relationship between a survivor, her daughter, and her granddaughter in *Clara Mondschein's Melancholia*; Thane Rosenbaum, a second-generation novelist, turns his attention to the third generation in two novels, *The Golems of Gotham* and *The Stranger within Sarah Stein*; and Nicole Krauss, a third-generation writer, portrays the psychic sequelae of the Shoah in the lives of a brother and sister in the second generation in her novel *Great House*. Dreifus's character differs however in that while he vigorously affirms his Jewish identity, he also reaches out to the non-Jewish people to whom he is linked by his DNA. Consequently, Dreifus implies that after the Shoah the catastrophe may help understanding between Jews and Christians. Moreover, her conflation of survivor and refugee is sure to spark intense and continuing debate over the precise meaning of the two terms as well as what they share and where they diverge. In addition, the term "quiet" itself raises questions. Is this silence meant to reflect awe, fear, respect? Each of these possibilities, in turn, raises additional queries.

Margot Singer

Margot Singer's *The Pale of Settlement*, winner of the 2008 Flannery O'Connor Award for short fiction, is a collection of nine interlinked short stories. She utilizes the tropes of photography and identity in illuminating the complexity of third-generation post-Holocaust literary representation among descendants of immigrants and refugees. A professor of English at Dennison University, Margot Singer, who "does not consider herself the recipient of trauma in any way,"[20] is named after her grandmother's sister who perished in Auschwitz. Jewish by birth, she disdains formal religious practice and is married out of the faith. Her stories, how-

ever, deal persistently with Jewish family history, the vagaries of Jewish memory, and the complexity of Jewish history. Like Dreifus, her paternal grandparents were German-Jewish refugees; however, they moved, not to America, but to Israel prior to the formation of the Jewish state. Her maternal grandparents had their roots in Eastern Europe in what was designated as the "Pale of Settlement," an area in Western Russia where most Russian Jews were forced to live from the late eighteenth to the early twentieth century. The protagonist of the nine stories is Susan Stern, a journalist and the American-born daughter of Israeli parents. She visits Israel every summer to spend time with her grandparents and other relatives who remain in the Jewish state.

Singer consciously titled her collection. She told an interviewer that "The Pale of Settlement is a place of historic memory, yet its shadow still hangs over both Israeli and diaspora Jews . . . It seems that the Pale—a vanished place where Jews were forced to live, and later one of the sites of the Holocaust—is the dark mirror image of Israel."[21] In the same interview, Singer comments, "So many of [my] stories have to do with boundaries and border crossings, with that liminal place where history, memory, and myth meet" (*RJ* Interview). Susan Stern is herself portrayed as living on the border between young woman and adult, Israeli familiar roots and an American life, the tug of tradition and the allure of secularism. Singer also implies that history is cyclical and that humans have a propensity for evil. Her protagonists inhabit both a pre- and post-Shoah world in which issues of identity and meaning loom large. Moreover, Israel itself is viewed as a place of post-Holocaust Jewish refuge, the stage, so to speak, on which issues of contemporary identity are enmeshed with stories of biblical origins.

Unlike those of Dreifus, Singer's characters for the most part are not wracked by anxiety over personal security and safety. Rather, they reflect Singer's concern for questions of memory and identity. "These queries," Singer continues, "are unique to the Holocaust but also probably quite common among [grand]children of refugees and immigrants of all kinds. If your family left the place they're 'from,' where are you from? How can you imagine/know what your grandparents' life was like? How can you 'read between the lines' of the stories and photographs handed down over time? What has been lost in transmission or translation? To what extent can you distinguish between memory and imagination two generations

on?" (Singer e-mail to Berger, May 2014). Singer's stories raise these issues in a variety of geographical settings: Israel, Jerusalem, Deir Yassin, Hazor, the Gaza Crossing, Manhattan, and Nepal.

Three of the stories in the collection, "Hazor," "Deir Yassin," and "Helicopter Days," have to do with the impact on identity of wars—ancient and modern—and the tales people tell about them. In "Hazor," which encapsulates many of Singer's concerns, Avraham, a retired Israeli archaeologist, confronts the vagaries of memory: revisionists question Israel's founding myths; his own wife has lost her memory to Alzheimer's disease; he discards his eldest daughter's long-lost diary—"No text could escape the distortions of its own mythology. The truth erased itself as you wrote it down" ("Hazor," 134); a reporter asks about the relationship between the Hebrew Bible and historical facts, and if archeology can illuminate the true narrative of Jewish history. Avraham is also the protagonist in "Deir Yassin," a story in which Susan is bringing the ashes of her uncle Zalman, who died an expatriate in America, to his brother Avraham in Israel. Avraham decides where the ashes are to be scattered. The story explores the themes of exile and contested memory. Palestinians associate Deir Yassin with the site of an Israeli massacre. For Israelis the village is the place where advance warnings of an imminent battle were unheard. Today a mental institution is situated on the site. Singer attests that as a fiction writer she is not interested in taking sides. Rather, her interest lay in "exposing the layers—the archeological strata, if you will—of memory and history and propaganda and myth" (*RJ* Interview).

"Expatriate" is the story of Susan's mother who finally accepts the fact that after years of living in Manhattan she is never going to return to Israel. "Borderland" treats literal as well as metaphorical borders. Hiking in Nepal, Susan encounters an Israeli who is traumatized by his duty as a guard in the Gaza Strip. The title story deals with Susan's affair with an Australian man whose tales of the Aborigine myths reveal the danger and power of stories. It also touches on Arab terrorism. "Reunification" speaks of the implications of Susan's advice to a former lover living in Germany and his pregnant girlfriend. It happens against the backdrop of the fall of the Berlin Wall. "Body Count" addresses the issue of false reporting about the alleged massacre of Arabs in the village of Jenin. Susan reflects: "How easily the Israelis were cast as Nazis, the Palestinians as martyred Jews" ("Body Count," 177). All of the linked stories in Singer's collection

treat characters who are in exile from the histories of their biological or national families.

"Lila's Story" is Singer's most direct engagement with the problematic of the Holocaust's legacy in the third generation. Told in two voices, that of Lila the immigrant grandmother and that of Susan, her granddaughter, the story concerns Susan's visit to Haifa, her first since Lila's death, and occasions her retracing of Lila's life. Complicating the history of Susan's Holocaust inheritance is the fact that she is more than thrice removed from the Shoah. Lila and her husband Josef were pre-Shoah immigrants; they themselves witnessed nothing. Their war years were spent in Palestine. Moreover, the tale raises the issue of who precisely is a survivor. More in-line with Gerson's distinction between survivor and refugee, and more nuanced than Dreifus's conflation of the two terms, Singer's narrator pays attention to linguistic accuracy and conceptual precision. The narrator observes, "So you could say that they [Lila and Joseph] survived, but they were not *survivors*, not exactly, not in the new sense of the word." ("Lila," 41) "They were immigrants," notes the narrator, "among the lucky ones" (41). Yet they share at least one characteristic of those who were trapped in Europe: Josef is grateful to God—*Gott sei Danke*—that his parents had died before the Holocaust. This recalls the biblical warning that there will come a time when the living will envy the dead.

Susan shares the family narrative that she had heard so many times growing up. Lila soon discovers that she had crossed more than an ocean. Haifa, Palestine in 1939 was far removed from the alleged civility of Europe. "Here in Haifa, it is primitive, dusty, dirty, hot . . . The difference lay in every dimension of existence, from the type of clothes that one wears to the food that one eats. Wiener schnitzel, potato salad, and chocolate roulade are too heavy for the climate," Lila writes to her sister trapped in Europe. She continues, Palestine "is just so *uncivilized*" (37). Lila and Josef were truly strangers in a strange land. Neither was a Zionist; they were instead Europeans but, as the narrator observes: "there was no escaping being Jews" (40). Moreover, as the situation in Europe grew increasingly ominous, letters from relatives ceased. After the war Lila discovers that her parents had been deported to Theresienstadt—the so-called model camp—in 1942. Her father died there; her mother perished in Auschwitz. The fate of her sister was unknown.

Singer, like Dreifus, utilizes photographs as a frame of reference. Looking through a pile of old photographs of Lila, she muses: "What am I looking for? Something tiny in the background—a half-glimpsed face, an out-of-focus sign. A fingerprint, a trace of scent, a follicle of hair." "No," she concludes. Like Adorján, looking at photos of her paternal grandmother, Singer is "looking for [her]self" (41). The story then cuts back and forth between the grandmother's life and that of Susan. Viewing an old photograph of Lila with her back to the sea and smiling into the camera, Susan notices a faint shadow at her grandmother's feet. She wonders if the person who took the photo was Josef or perhaps Lila's lover. Susan herself had had an affair with a married man. She imagines that Lila at age forty had also had an affair. Lev, her lover, took her picture with his "nice new Leica" (52) saying the same words to her that Susan's lover had uttered: "Smile," [he said,] "I want you to see how beautiful you are" (53). This episode reveals two important points about the third generation: the need to identify with an immigrant and the fact that photographs can never fully reveal what is captured in the camera's lens. Photographs can, attests Hirsch, "tell us as much about our own needs and desires (as readers and spectators) as they can about the past world they presumably depict" (Hirsch, *Poetics Today*, 29:1, 117).

The author is sensitive to the ambiguous role played by photographs in linking the lives of Lila and Susan. The photographs both unite and distance the two protagonists. They also give rise to the writer's imagination. Susan had gone on holiday with a married man. The man had taken her picture because he wanted her to see how beautiful she was. Susan muses over the fact that no one had ever asked who had taken the photos of her. This made her wonder about the photograph of her grandmother with her back turned toward the sea. A faint shadow appears at her feet along with the curved outline of a head. Susan imagines that her grandmother "wasn't necessarily looking at my grandfather when she smiled that way" ("Lila," 48). Susan does archival research in the form of interviewing her aunt. She, like Dreifus's David in "*Mishpocha*," wants to know what her grandmother was like "*before*—before our memory of her, before the compounded effects of age and time" ("Lila," 51). Susan has a photo of her grandmother as a young girl of ten or twelve and realizes that she "know[s] nothing about her at all" (52). The photo serves as a screen, concealing more than it reveals. "My grandparents," attests

Singer "had this box of old photographs and often they would go through the images and say 'Oh, I don't remember who that person is' or 'I don't remember what that was all about.' It was a mysterious and wonderful box of clues about unknown aspects of the past. Consequently, looking at a photograph becomes much more than a simple fact. In 'Lila's Story,' a photograph of Susan's grandmother changes subtly each time Susan comes back to look at it. If Susan is looking for the truth about the past, she leaves feeling somewhat frustrated with the realization that even a fixed image can be illusory" (*RJ* Interview).

The authors in this chapter offer three different angles of vision concerning memory of the Shoah in the third generation. They, of course, have no direct memory of the Holocaust, which occurred before they were born. Nor is it possible to have a memory transfusion. Rather, as Hirsch notes of the second generation—the generation of postmemory—"they 'remember' only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up" (Hirsch, 106). The third-generation writers exhibit both connections and discontinuities between themselves and what preceded them. This generation partakes in both familial and affiliative dimensions of postmemory. Johanna Adorján seeks to identify with her survivor and immigrant grandparents—especially her grandmother born in Hungary and postwar immigrants to Denmark; the stories of Erika Dreifus, granddaughter of German-born refugees who came to America, issue a warning about the persistence of antisemitism; Margot Singer, grandchild of immigrants to pre-state Israel, explores the relationship between myth, memory, and imagination. All of these writers share a concern to illuminate the role that the shadows of the Holocaust continue to play. Collectively, their work instantiates a further refinement of Hirsch's notion of postmemory.

In terms of Gerson's distinction between survivor, refugee, and immigrant, the stories discussed in this chapter reveal at least two things. First and foremost, there is an abyss between the experiences of a survivor and those of a refugee and immigrant. Survivors are like the messengers in the biblical book of Job who report "I alone have escaped to tell you" (Job 1:15, 17, 19). Refugees and immigrants fled before the full onslaught of the Holocaust. However, it needs to be stressed that Adorján's grandparents were both survivors and immigrants. In the second place, there is a marked difference between the characters in the stories of Dreifus

and those of Singer. Dreifus's protagonists are anxiety-ridden, some to the point of phobia. Singer's protagonists deal with identity through the prism of memory and myth while seeking to link their families past and present. The authors whose work we have considered in this chapter help flesh out Gerson's typology while revealing how Holocaust representation shifts in the third generation.

CHAPTER 7

"There Were Times When It Was Possible to Weigh Suffering"
Julie Orringer's The Invisible Bridge *and the Extended Trauma of the Holocaust*

> There's so much you don't really see, preoccupied as you are with the business of living; so much you never notice, until suddenly, for whatever reason . . . you need the information that people you once knew always had to give you, if only you'd asked.
>
> —DANIEL MENDELSOHN, *THE LOST*

At the close of Julie Orringer's novel *The Invisible Bridge*, the American-born granddaughter of Holocaust survivors Andras and Klara Lévi recognizes not only her family's fortuitous gains, but also their immeasurable loss. For all those who, like her grandparents, survived the war and succeeded in reassembling their lives, there were those who did not, those whose fortunes were extinguished, their fate prescribed, as one of Orringer's characters laments, by a "crazed Führer dreaming of a Jew-Free Europe."[1] Unlike her grandparents, whose good fortune brought them to America, allowing them to "cross an ocean and live in a city" where they might raise their children "without the gravity . . . without the . . . tragedy that seemed to hang in the air like the brown dust of bituminous coal" in Europe's aftermath of war, there were others for whom such opportunities were made impossible, "tied as they were," as one of the

novel's central characters sadly recognizes, "to a continent intent upon erasing its Jews from the earth" (Orringer 593, 511). For this grandchild of survivors, this third-generation witness to history who comes only belatedly to such a calculation of loss, such understanding not only involves an acknowledgment of the remote facts of history—"she'd learned about that war in school" (596)—but, even more crucially, an awareness of the immediacy of that history, the imprint and scope of her family's loss on her own, as yet unformed, life. In *The Invisible Bridge*, Orringer, like her fictionalized character, the granddaughter of Holocaust survivors, speaks to the transference of loss and the ways in which the traumatic rupture of the Holocaust does not conclude with those who survived the events, nor with the children of survivors born in the direct aftermath of the war, but rather spills over into subsequent generations, carrying the weight of history into the future. As Orringer, in discussing the impetus for writing the novel, states: "I come from a family of Holocaust survivors, which is to say that I come from a family irrevocably changed by the war. The losses are irremediable, the scars are permanent, and the effects can be felt acutely three generations down the line."[2] *The Invisible Bridge*, characteristic of third-generation literary representation of the Holocaust, is a novel framed and bound by generations, generations shaped by the ongoing traumatic history of the Holocaust. Here the Holocaust is an inheritance bequeathed to and readily embraced by the third generation in an attempt, not only to keep alive the memory of the Shoah, but to assert the continuity of generations in the face of the pathological attempts to eradicate the world of Jewish life. As Orringer insists, "It was a tale that demanded telling."[3]

The Invisible Bridge is, as noted, a characteristically third-generation narrative. It reaches into the past to extend the memory of the Shoah and to give weight and presence to those otherwise lost to history. Orringer, like other Holocaust writers of her generation, writes from a deeply personal connection to the past and from an urgently felt compulsion to carry on the obligatory task of transmission. As Orringer reveals in an interview: "I feel really lucky to have been able to write this novel . . . I think one of the transformations that occurred was I started out thinking this is a story that would be fascinating to tell. But I realized, my God, this is a story that has to be told, and it took on that feeling of necessity."[4] For Orringer and others of the third generation, the necessary exigencies that motivate

such telling emerge from the obligation to bear witness to a memory not their own, but a memory nonetheless that, like an invisible bridge, connects the past to the present, linking generations and traversing the chasm, the gulf made by time, place, and the contingencies of birth and chance. These are indelible stories unchanged by time or distance, for, as one of the survivor's in Orringer's novels admits, "Nothing would change what had happened—not grief, not time, not memory" (Orringer, 593). The bridge may be invisible, but in Orringer's novel, which insists on the viability and persistence of generations and of transferred memory, its scaffolding is held in place by narrated lives, as the third-generation character in *The Invisible Bridge* reveals, that emerge as the half-lived "strands of darker stories . . . absorbed through her skin, like medicine or poison. Even when she wasn't thinking about those half stories, they did their work in her mind" (596). Third-generation writer Dreifus, in ready accord, speaks to the seductive hold of such memories on later generations, stories, like memories, that hold no geographic, temporal, or experiential bounds: "I'll go so far as to suggest that for all of us, even two generations later, in the United States or Canada or Great Britain or wherever our grandparents were able to raise our parents and, eventually, watch us grow up, the stories—fragmented or not—have done their work in our minds. If they hadn't, it's unlikely that these books would have been written."[5] These are stories that become for the third generation the impetus for and the motivating factor in imagining the novel into being. Although, as the narrator at the close of third-generation Canadian writer Alison Pick's novel *Far To Go* guardedly admits, "What I'm telling you—haltingly, I realize—is that this is just one way it might have happened."[6] For what is lost in transmission reasserts itself as a haunting preoccupation among writers of the third generation.

The Invisible Bridge is a novel of the fate of Hungary's Jews under Nazi occupation. It is based on the experiences of Orringer's grandparents, Hungarian Jews who survived the Holocaust and who, at the end of the war, left the rupture of Europe, and, like the central characters in the novel, immigrated to America where they raised their family. There remained, as one of Orringer's characters concedes, "no future for them in Hungary" (Orringer, 591). Orringer, in constructing the plot of the novel, draws, in particular, upon the life of her maternal grandfather, a Hungarian Jew born in the small town of Konyár in eastern Hungary,

who in 1937 arrived in Paris to study architecture only to be forced to return when scholarships were revoked for Jewish students. Like the novel's central character, Andras Lévi, a young Jewish scholarship student who falls in love with and eventually marries a Hungarian Jewish woman living in Paris, Orringer's grandfather, upon his compulsory return to Hungary, was conscripted into the forced labor service in the Hungarian army. For Orringer, who had only known the broad outline of her grandparents' history, her grandfather's direct testimony was the impetus for the novel that would emerge: "Being able to talk to him about his experiences in forced-labor camps was the only thing that made it seem possible for me to write about it . . . I don't think I could have imagined this as fully as I wanted to had it not been for the fact that there are still people alive who can give first-hand accounts" (Behe). Like other third-generation narratives, *The Invisible Bridge* is the product of both family stories and extensive research into what Orringer refers to as the little known and "often overlooked" story of Hungary's Jews during the Shoah (Behe). Part of the impetus for this novel stems from the lack of public knowledge about the specifics of Hungarian Jewish history. As Orringer suggests:

> Not many people know about the Hungarian Jews' conscription into forced labor battalion, whose work was to support armies intent upon eradicating the Jews and their allies. And not many people know that Hungary wasn't occupied until March of 1944, when Hitler's defeat was all but certain, and that its Jewish population survived largely intact until that point, despite strict anti-Semitic laws and widespread anti-Jewish practices; the horribly efficient deportations that followed brought more than half of Hungary's Jews to their deaths in a matter of a few months. (Simons)

This gap in the story of the fate of Hungarian Jewry under the Nazi occupation, a fate that included the roundup and deportation to Auschwitz of over 400,000 Hungarian Jews, becomes an opening into history for Orringer's novel, an opening into the collective experience of all those who suffered as the individuals of her extended family did. And so, like other writers of her generation—Alison Pick, Daniel Mendelsohn, Andrea

Simon, for example—Orringer memorializes those members of her family who survived as well as those lost. In the words of Alison Pick's narrator, "And so I inscribe them here, the family I never knew" (Pick, 308).

In modeling the central characters and staging the novel's main events on the fate of her grandfather's family, Orringer both memorializes individual lives and recounts the historical conditions to which Hungary's Jews were subjected. With careful attention to detail, Orringer's novel chronicles the escalating antisemitic fervor, the systematized enactment of anti-Jewish laws and decrees, the closing in and preying upon Hungary's vulnerable Jewish population, the deportation and forced labor in Hungarian work camps, and the destruction of lives, conditions that before conducting extensive research and listening to survivor stories Orringer understatedly admits, "I underestimated just how awful it was" (Behe). Hearing her grandparents' stories of their experiences both before and during the war seems to have provided Orringer with transformative and catalyzing moments of discovery. She explains the decisive impetus for writing the novel in this way:

> What drew me to the story was hearing about my grandfather's experiences when he was younger. Despite the fact that I grew up in a Hungarian family, I just didn't know much about what had happened to Hungarian Jews during the war. Like a lot of families with Holocaust survivors, those years just weren't discussed in my family. My grandparents certainly alluded to them and I heard bits and pieces about their survival, but I didn't really have a sense of the whole picture because my grandparents didn't talk about it. Once I started asking them questions about what had happened, they really wanted to tell their story. They wanted the novel to be written.[7]

Here Orringer speaks to the fragmented and belated ways in which the grandchildren of Holocaust survivors come to the details of their grandparents' experiences. Unlike the second generation, who grew up under the direct shadow of the Holocaust, the third generation must consciously choose to wrest such information, not only from the defenses of memory and the unpredictable masks and obscurities of time, but from the fading cultural memory of and preoccupation with the events of the

Holocaust. To be sure, the second generation was often met with silence, survivor parents who wanted to protect their offspring from the horrors of the past and raise them unimpeded by that history and its painful memories. However, for the second generation, there was no intervening filter between the direct witness of events and those who followed. As Melvin Jules Bukiet affirms, "For the Second Generation there is no Before"; the Holocaust is the defining point of origin.[8] And although it may be, as Bukiet suggests, "a tainted inheritance, secondhand knowledge of the worst event in history," the legacy of the Holocaust by all accounts shaped an indelible part of their identity (Bukiet, 18). As second-generation novelist Thane Rosenbaum writes of one of his characters, the anguished child of survivors, "the entire experience [was] coded in his brain, forever."[9] This may be a generation born after the war, but, as Rosenbaum suggests, "secondhand is enough."[10]

For the third generation, contrastively, the memories of the Holocaust are less direct, increasingly filtered through and by time, distance, and by the imprint of those more proximate, immediate tensions involved in navigating the competing demands of contemporary life. As the general cultural impact of the Holocaust recedes, the imperative to keep telling its stories in all their aspects and with an eye on particularity of person and place becomes increasingly compelling for third-generation writers. In distinguishing among the generations affected both directly and indirectly by the Holocaust, Bar-On proposes, "The Holocaust charged survivors with two basic responsibilities: the first, explicitly expressed as an obligatory act, to remember, preserve, and transmit this terrible experience from one generation to the next; the second, to overcome what happened and serve as living evidence that the Nazi attempt at annihilation had ultimately failed."[11] And the third? The third generation must either bypass the filtered narratives passed on to them by their parents, who shape those events through their own traumatic identification, or attempt to measure the stories of their parents against the waning memories of their grandparents. In either event, the third generation comes to such stories through a kind of traumatic interference, events filtered, more often than not, piecemeal, through the events and blockades of the intervening decades. The third generation, then, must turn from one life and deliberately walk into another. After all, as Judith M. Gerson and Diane Wolf, in their introduction to their sociological study of collective

memory, propose, "not every generation has the same memory of the Holocaust because of its respective historical positions and life experiences."[12] Dreifus, in distinguishing the second generation's approach to this history from that of the third, proposes, "rather than focusing on the sequelae of this family experience on their own lives and psyches . . . they have spun stories grounded in their grandparents' prewar and wartime European worlds" ("Looking Backward"). While the focus of such narratives may end, as does *The Invisible Bridge*, with the grandchild's emergence and identification with the events and personalities he or she uncovers, such a coming of age begins with the lives of those whose fortuitous survival brought one generation to the point of departure and another to the point of self-conscious origin. Such indebtedness is not lost on the grandchildren of survivors. As Orringer puts it, "Any American Jew descended from Holocaust survivors is here because of great and good fortune and of course the fortitude of the men and women who managed to survive those times of great uncertainty" (Rom-Rymer).

The impulse to reconstruct a coherent narrative from the fragmented, niggling pieces of stories and observations is both a process and product of coming of age for the third generation. Pick's narrator in the novel *Far To Go* steers a course into the past with "only a fraction of the story" (85), and Orringer's third-generation character in *The Invisible Bridge*, having contended for most of her young life with only portions of stories, cryptic references reluctantly alluded to by her grandparents "in lowered voices" (597) will try to take up the burden of transferred memory. Orringer's own desire for "a sense of the whole picture" and her conviction of the insufficiency of the "bits and pieces" of her grandparents' stories echo the certitude of her third-generation character at the close of *The Invisible Bridge*, a character who, coming of both imaginative and intellectual age, "wanted to hear the whole story . . . She would ask . . . She was old enough now to know" (Orringer, 597). Instead of fragments, random pieces of stories, this character, like others of the third generation, wants to enter into the contours of memory, to identify with her grandparents' lives, if only for the space of a coherent, unfolding narrative. Speaking in the voice of her author, the grandchild of survivors, at the end of the novel, will insist that "it was time"; in defiance of a history that would obliterate her family, she will not be silenced. Their story will not die with them.

Such insistence is born of the anxious certainty that the generation of survivors is itself coming to an end. As one of Pick's characters ruefully acknowledges, time is running out, and "too late" is irrevocable: "People disappear. Despite all the information available to us . . . We can guess what happened but we cannot say for certain. And there is nothing to be done about it now anyway, so late in time" (Pick, 85). While the second generation—the children of survivors—grew up under the watchful gaze of those who experienced the events of the Shoah directly, the third generation is faced with the imminent end of such direct testimony and also direct access. "Soon," Pick's character will conclude, "there'll be nobody left to remember" (308). And, inevitably, "nobody left to remember" carries with it the risk of silence, nobody left to tell. Caught up in the contingencies of one's own time and circumstance, there is, as Mendelsohn admits, "so much you don't really see, preoccupied as you are with the business of living; so much you never notice, until suddenly, for whatever reason . . . you need the information that people you once knew always had to give you, if only you'd asked."[13] This sense of belatedness and its accompanying disease is born of an awareness of history's imprint on others as well as on one's own identity. It takes shape as the dawning apprehension that one may have inadvertently deflected important knowledge that defensively precludes what Hirsch refers to as an "affective link," a "living connection" to the past,[14] "information" that, as Mendelsohn concedes, "you need" (Mendelsohn, 73). For a contemporary generation of American Jews, those approaching the Holocaust from an increasingly distanced vantage point, as Debra Kaufman suggests, "memory is fast becoming history."[15] And so the generations trailing behind in an urgent sense of obligation take up memory and its transmission.

Second-generation writer Bukiet argues that "memory" is the wrong word in this context: "'Memory' is the mantra of all the institutions that reckon with the Holocaust, but memory is an inaccurate term. For anyone who wasn't there, on either side of the barbed wire . . . thinking about the Holocaust is really an act of the imagination. All we know is how little we know" (Bukiet, 16). In agreement, second-generation memoirist Hoffman suggests that "It has become routine to speak of the 'memory' of the Holocaust and to give this putative faculty privileged status; but most of us, of course, do not have memories of the Shoah, nor, often,

sufficient means for apprehending that event."[16] To be sure, those who were not present for the unfolding of events of the Holocaust cannot in any literal measure of the term "remember" such incidents. One cannot, after all, remember that which he or she did not witness. Indeed, as Hirsch affirms, "We do not have literal 'memories' of others' experiences, and certainly, one person's lived memories cannot be transformed into another's" (Hirsch, 31). Given the inevitable constraints of language and perception, "memory" is an inexact term to describe the way in which post-Holocaust generations absorb and transmit the events that they do not, in fact, remember. That being said, the term "memory" has a useful place in these discussions, especially when conceived of differently, as more fluid and as a way of talking about the ways in which the transferential process of identity formation is carried out through internalizing certain essential and defining aspects of the generational past. Holocaust representation is not a fixed script; in order to insist on the conscientious articulation of the Holocaust into the present, discursive boundaries must be more fluid. The generic boundaries between history and fiction must especially be fluid and are so for third-generation Holocaust writers. The ideal of remembrance becomes, not just a matter of the known facts, the institutional history of the Holocaust, but of histories still needing to be revealed, both personal and general. These histories are built from a combination of discovered historical data, often from personal sources and the recollection of such, but also from visits to places and archives. Because we lack the precise vocabulary to identify the unique relationship that post-Holocaust generations have to the event, we require a metaphor that will approximate the way in which post-Holocaust generations identify themselves with the collective and individual traumatic imprint of the Holocaust. We need a way of talking about the motivated connection post-Holocaust generations have to the Holocaust, both for the purposes of identifying and shaping that relationship as well as to identify their means of representing those events, of bearing witness to both the transformation of history and the ways contemporary generations envision themselves as Jews in a post-Holocaust world. That metaphor is "memory," but understood generically as the mixing of memoir and fiction.

Thus memory as a central critical metaphor operates in the same way that we "remember" the more quotidian events of our more proximate

familial pasts, those moments we transferentially identify, occasions in which we may not have been literally present, but we are made affectively present through iterations of stories, photographs, artifacts that have been handed down throughout the generations. Memory as a trope becomes a means of mediating loss and arbitrating distance and temporality. Here the trope of memory intercedes between remembering and forgetting, both personal and collective, willed and unconscious. Memory is thus a trope of mediation, an intervention into traumatic rupture and the intergenerational extension of trauma. Constructed memory is thus a means of keeping the past alive in the present, a means by which awareness is transferred to a dimly known, compellingly arresting part of one's imagined identity. Post-Holocaust narratives written by the third generation, a generation twice-removed from the events it imaginatively evokes, are authorial constructions of the process of memory and discovery. For this generation of Holocaust writers, as Diane Wolf proposes, "notions of the Holocaust are mediated through the memories of others and through the production of Jewish collective memory."[17] Thus the trope of memory allows those with a generational and historical distance from the Holocaust to speak posthumously about and through the memories of others. To this end, adjectival modifiers appended to memory such as "post" or "after" help in making those relationships clearer, as Hirsch suggests, "qualifying adjectives and alternative formulations that try to define both a specifically inter- and transgenerational act of transfer, and the resonant aftereffects of trauma" (Hirsch, 4). Here Hirsch's construction of the term "postmemory" effectively approaches what remains after memory and is a useful placeholder for the process of intergenerational and transgenerational participation in the prolonged identification of shared trauma. "Postmemory," as distinguished from memory, accordingly:

> describes the relationship that the "generation after" bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before—to experiences they "remember" only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to *seem* to constitute memories in their own right. Postmemory's connection to the past is thus actually mediated

> not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation . . . These events happened in the past, but their effects continue into the present. (Hirsch, 5)

Thus the troping of memory comes as close to an indirect, affective memory as one can. Troping creates the shape of memory, as Hirsch says, "an uneasy oscillation between continuity and rupture" (5). Such a structure opens itself up to the possibility for the articulated emphatic relation to others, as an act of *rachmones*, acts of compassion fundamental to Jewish ethics, and also as a response to fear. Such is part of the process of midrash and lamentation, a process of mourning "for what could never be returned" (Orringer, 535) and constitutes the rhetorical motivation for the midrashic mixing of history and fiction in third-generation writing.

Propelled by such an imperative, the third generation—the generation that will see an end of survivor testimony—in an attempt to prevent the kind of historical amnesia and absence that might otherwise result from an acquiescence to silence, a surrendering to the convenient and seductive immediacy present, will, with anxious agency, compile whatever resources it has at hand—as Dreifus catalogues, a matter of reading "histories and testimonies," collecting stories ("Looking Backward")—in an attempt to create a narrative out of the fragments of memories related, stories told.

This urgently felt obligation to participate in shared memory leads Orringer to *The Invisible Bridge*, a novel of classical realism drawing on the conventions of the Victorian novel, with its attention to realism, its particularizing of a character's maturation, and its depiction of large historical moments. The intersection of detailed historical accounts and imagined lives is set within the framework of the conventions of the bildungsroman of the nineteenth century, its epic proportions beginning before the outbreak of the war against the Jews in Europe and ending on another continent in the aftermath of that war, its consequences having been accessed. Orringer, in an interview, explains the design for the novel in this way:

> I wanted to write a 19th century novel: a big sprawling book in which we follow a character through a *bildungsroman*-like transformation. On the other hand, I also wanted to write a very

> contemporary novel . . . sprawling and lush like the 19th century novel, but that also brings a contemporary sensibility to the characterization and the language. In adopting that form, I also had to think about ways I could subvert it or break it open. Part of that happens through the language, part of it through the subject matter and part of it is through the fact that there's no moral explanation or reason for what happened. (Rom-Rymer)

Thus, in *The Invisible Bridge*, we find the comfortably recognizable generic and subjective structures of classic realism subverted by the ruptures of genocide. For all the while that Orringer's characters are building their lives, we know that they are plummeting toward a war that will destroy those lives. As is characteristic bildungsroman, *The Invisible Bridge* patterns itself on a central character's education and self-formation, in this particular case, the psychological and moral maturation of the central surviving Lévi brother, Andras. In fact, the novel begins with Andras Lévi setting forth from home on a journey to begin his formal education in Paris and, by happenstance, his less formal but no less seminal informal education in the ways of the world: his burgeoning friendships with other students at the school of architecture, his tutelage in appropriate conduct and comportment, his exposure to political ideologies, his introduction to the backstage practices of the theatre, and his first and sustaining love affair. The early chapters of the novel establish the conditions and encounters for the psychological, sexual, political, and cultural awakening that in many ways transforms Andras Lévi. However, Orringer disrupts conventions long before the central character is able to benefit from his education, for abruptly the novel's plot will shift. The possibilities for a narrative arc of fulfillment are aborted. Andras's developing maturation comes to a sudden halt by the escalation of fascism and the encroachment of a war that directly targets him, his family, and the other Jews in his company. Thus the novel will shift direction; instead of an ascending evolution toward self-recognition and an acceptance of stable values and social structures, the novel descends into chaos. Andras is thrust out rather than initiated. Individual lives are eclipsed by the strangulations of fascism and war. In many ways *The Invisible Bridge* is an anti-bildungsroman, a reverse coming of age for an entire civilization, an era foregrounding the most heinous capabilities of humankind. If this

is a novel about a gradual dawning of human motive and potential, then it is so as an awakening to those all-too-human counter-elements, oppositional impulses that subvert its design, civilization's death drive. As Orringer puts it, "*The Invisible Bridge* moves forward through time like a nineteenth-century novel, but what it's pulling its characters toward is the horrific disaster of the Second World War . . . a kind of contemporary tension in that juxtaposition of linear narrative structure with the illogic and madness of that war" (Rom-Rymer). Orringer thus destabilizes the conventions of the nineteenth-century bildungsroman and surrenders her characters to those historical conditions that would subsume them. In collapsing the genre, Orringer thematizes the collapse of a world through the dissonant elements that control the unfolding of the novel.

Orringer's attention to realism, to the vivid and detailed descriptions of the prewar landscape of her grandparents' lives, accentuates this thematically charged, generic dissonance. Orringer's reproduction of the history, culture, and ethos of the prewar era all contribute to the dismantling of that world that she will never know but that she reimagines: the researched details and descriptions of Paris's art deco and art nouveau architecture, its cultural arts—ballet, tap dance, theatre—the bohemian life in Paris's Quartier Latin, the École Spéciale d'Architecture where her grandfather briefly attended school on a scholarship, Budapest's rich urban and rural settings, all are set against the encroaching fascism that will subvert all of it. This attention to detail characterizes the impulse of third-generation writers, whose narratives are motivated by twin impulses: to present with as much accuracy as possible the historical facts of the Holocaust and to particularize the experience, that is, to recreate the individual lives of their families. Thus this literature intersects the compass of history—its project and scope—and the individual histories of those who lived those events. As Orringer suggests of her approach to the novel: "The details were important to me. I wanted to learn the names of the birds in the trees and the small side streets—all the things my grandparents would have taken note of in their world . . . I wanted to learn the history on the large scale but I also wanted to learn a little bit about the smaller news events that came to my characters' attention as they were going about their lives" (Rom-Rymer). In this way, *The Invisible Bridge* engages both the personal and the collective experience of the Holocaust, drawing upon those elements that would have possibly

framed her grandparents' daily lives and those facts of the larger history that impinged upon them. In researching the conditions of those Jews, like her grandfather, conscripted into the labor camps, Orringer uncovered newspapers that had been written by members of the forced labor battalions. She describes her "find" in this way:

> When I went to the National Jewish Hungarian Archives in Budapest, I asked the archivist to pull anything out of her files that might give me insight into life in the camps. She pulled down this very dusty box from one of the shelves and inside it were hand-typed or hand-written newspapers that the men had made while in the labor camps. The most surprising thing was not the existence of the papers but the darkly comedic tone of the papers . . . I knew when I came across those papers that I wanted them to be part of the narrative development of the novel, not just window dressing. (Rom-Rymer)

The wider, more encompassing scope of history in the making of individual histories—stories of personal anguish and loss—collide in Orringer's novel. The overlay of the imagined lives of individuals upon catastrophic history prevents Orringer from romanticizing the lives of those who witnessed the events she so closely and attentively describes. And the third-generation novelist here participates in what is a collaborative effort to get it right, that is, to confront the past by imaginatively reconstructing her grandparents' lives. Their lives become transformed into fragments of narratives, "So many stories," as third-generation memoirist Andrea Simon will acknowledge in her attempt to piece together her grandmother's history.[18] The intervening years since the end of the war has amassed "so many stories," testimonies, both oral and written accounts, documentaries, cinematic productions, memorials, and the like, all part of a vast project of truth gathering, of representation and transmission, aimed at grappling with the ethical, moral, political, and cultural implications of the Shoah. Because a contemporary generation lacks specific memories of the events it wants to disclose, it must rely on an imagination, as Gerson and Wolf suggest, "filtered through a variety of sources including records and documents, memoirs and narratives of the destruction written and compiled by survivors, perpetrators, and bystand-

ers, and contemporary research, textual accounts, and artistic portrayals of the Holocaust" (Gerson and Wolf, 6). Thus, for each new generation, the tasks of sorting through the sheer volume of information and finding new forms of expression are made increasingly difficult. And it is, for the third generation, often an uneasy acquisition of such knowledge, its transmission complicated by how much one cannot know. Orringer speaks to the deficiencies in representation, to the limits of the imagination for not only those who were not direct witnesses but those removed by the vastness of yet another generation. Her grandmother's response to an early draft of the novel exposes the fundamental inadequacies in imagining that which, despite years of accumulated research at hand, cannot be known by any measure of found knowledge: "She took me through all the ways things were worse than I was even able to imagine . . . It was pretty awful" (Behe). How, then, does one come close to approaching "worse"? How, that is, does one represent suffering and atrocity at the historical and cultural remove of yet another generation?

The intersection of imagined stories and personalities of individual characters and the recreation of historical events provides *The Invisible Bridge* with its real force, its rich and compelling intensity. Orringer constructs the lives of her characters, as she puts it, with "the weight of history behind the . . . story" (Rom-Rymer). Characteristic of survivor writing and post-Holocaust narratives, her novel is a blending of generic alternatives—classic realist characterization, the chronicle, thematized settings—characteristic of historical fiction. In an attempt to confront the realities of the historical events and, at the same time, create characters who might draw the reader into an empathetic engagement with individual lives and thus individual loss, Holocaust and post-Holocaust writers characteristically merge otherwise disparate genres in an attempt to bridge the gap for the more distanced reader, distanced temporally, spatially, and experientially, all the while trying to remain faithful to history. As Holocaust scholar Berel Lang suggests, "The pressures exerted by [the subject of the Holocaust] are such that the associations of the traditional forms—the developmental order of the novel, the predictability of prosody, the comforting representations of landscape or portrait in painting—are quite inadequate for the images of a subject with the moral dimensions and impersonal will of the Holocaust. Thus the constant turning in Holocaust images . . . to the blurring of traditional genres

not just for the sake of undoing them but in the interests of combining certain of their elements that otherwise had been held apart."[19] Such a "blurring" or merging of genres in Holocaust literary representation allows both reader and writer to see history through the lens of recreated individual stories and, chiastically, to access individual stories and thus reanimate individual lives within the constraints of history. The ethical demands of both representation and reckoning required of both writer and reader when contending with the subject of the Holocaust are such that a means must be located, as Wiesel has suggested, to bring the reader "to the other side."[20] That is, Holocaust literary representation must enact the very conditions it evokes. Holocaust narratives, in other words, must create the conditions of trauma, of uneasy and disrupted anticipation. In response to a question regarding her choice of a novelistic representation of Hungary's Jews under Nazi rule rather than a nonfiction account, Orringer suggests that "Fiction has the ability more than any other art form to really place the reader inside the character's experience . . . When we read a piece of historical nonfiction, there's a sense of foreknowledge of what comes later. In this case, even though the reader knows what comes later, the character doesn't know and he's able to inhabit a more innocent space then I would have been able to communicate otherwise" (Rom-Rymer). In other words, the blending of the facts of history and fictional characterization and the conventions of plot design set the conditions for the kind of dramatic irony that directly involves the reader in an act of transference, in, that is, the anxious anticipation of events that he or she knows will arrive—indeed, have already been dreadfully played out—but also in an act of witnessing them anew, alongside the character. Thus, while the fictional invention of character, motive, and possibility shape the novel's unfolding, as Lang insists, "history," as it must "has the last word" (Lang, 39).

Thus *The Invisible Bridge* chronicles the situation confronting Hungary's Jewish population from 1937 to the end of the war: the meticulously researched and documented depictions of the dire conditions for Jewish prisoners in forced labor battalions, the Hungarian Labor Service; the Jewish work units clearing minefields for the fighting units marching behind them; the murderous actions of the Hungarian Arrow Cross; the expropriation of Jewish property; Hungary's *Numerus Clausus* (Closed Numbers) legislation restricting the access of Jews to universities; the

First Jewish Law of 1938, introduced by János Makkai; the bombing of the bridges over the Danube; the underground satiric newspapers written by the Jewish prisoners in the work camps; the efforts of Miklós Horthy, Regent of Hungary, to resist Hitler's pronouncements, as well as other historical details that bring to life the realities of that epic in Hungarian-Jewish life. Clearly Orringer, like others in her generation, wanted to get it right, to depict the ethos of both prewar and war years with as much accuracy as possible. We see this same impulse, too, in third-generation Sara Houghteling's novel of the Nazi looting and appropriation of Jewish art, *Pictures at an Exhibition*. In an epic sweep, Houghteling offers a blending of history and fiction, the Holocaust viewed simultaneously through the wider lens of history and through the individualized loss and grief of characters whose lives are shaped by that history as it unfolds. Like Orringer, Houghteling relied on her grandparents' postwar descriptions of France, the stories of survivors, documentaries, and also on extensive archival research in Paris in order to preserve the accuracy of detail. Here the plundering of art from museums and galleries and the attempts by biographical people such as Rose Valland, the French curator of the Jeu de Paume Modern Art Museum, a woman upon whose life Houghteling's character Rose Clément is based, to protect such art from the Nazis speaks metonymically to that greater loss, the loss of Jewish life and culture. Within these historical moments—Houghteling's pre and postwar Paris years and the escalation of antisemitism in Hungary—individual lives emerge, lives that were transformed by the events of war. As Orringer says of the role of her grandparents' lives in conceiving of *The Invisible Bridge*, "The details . . . were important to me . . . The same is true of the history" (Rom-Rymer).

The unfolding history of antisemitic legislation and the occupation of Hungary by the Nazis provide the theatrical landscape for Orringer's novel. Against this backdrop, the lives of characters drawn from her grandparents' lives and the lives of their family and friends take shape. It was through the writing of the novel, as Orringer suggests, that she was able to appreciate more fully the intersection of the personal and the collective:

> My family's experiences became real to me in a way they hadn't before. Part of what I found so difficult was not only sorrow for

> the characters I had created—in the end they are just figments of my imagination—but much more importantly, I experienced the real misery of understanding, finally, what happened to my grandparents and that whole side of my family. It's one thing to hear bits and pieces but it's another thing to be living the life of the characters for a couple of years and begin to see those lives break down. You really start to see that it wasn't just this large scale tragedy, but an infinite series of tiny tragedies that added up to something completely beyond our imagining. (Rom-Rymer)

Here the imagination is contained within the depiction of actual events, and the world in which her grandparents and other Hungarian Jews found themselves ensnared becomes in the novel the stage against which the dramatic action is set. In doing so, Orringer creates a balance between identification and distance; the wider view of history sets the parameters for the microcosmic view of individual lives and loss.

As *The Invisible Bridge* opens amid the landscape of prewar Hungary in 1937, with the three Lévy brothers, Tibor, Andras, and Mátyás optimistically preparing to launch themselves into the future, we know that future will be aborted, for the stage is set long before the novel opens, the war waiting for them to walk into, the inexorable opening to catastrophe. Already Europe is on the precipice of war, the rise of fascism, the seeds of antisemitism, and the systematic stages of regulations against Jews closing in. Even as Orringer's characters embark on their futures, the events have already occurred that will arrest them. Indeed, the novel's opening line suggests what will unavoidably follow: "Later he would tell" (Orringer, 3). From the novel's very beginning, then, both characters and readers are on the edge, anticipatory of the impending doom that will gain momentum throughout the novel. And although the opening chapter will find Andras Lévy boarding a train for Paris in pursuit of his great fortune in having been admitted to the École Spéciale d'Architecture with a scholarship, his early departure by train is a harbinger of things to come. In fact, this initial scene bodes ill, not only for the Lévy family, but for all of Hungary's—indeed Europe's—Jews. Rather than signifying escape and mobility, boarding the train early on in the novel presages the rupture of families and the chaos and destruction that will soon follow. Andras, bidding goodbye to his brother Tibor at the train's platform, is

momentarily made uneasy: "The idea of boarding a train to be taken away from him seemed as wrong as ceasing to breathe" (15). Transportation by trains will become a pattern in the novel, from its early promise of flight to forced containment, from beginnings to endings, since ultimately the trains become boxcars that, leaving "daily for the west, returned empty," only to be "filled again," a mass deportation, "so many departures," destined for concentration camps, hard labor, death (554). And this time there would be "no way, no time, to say goodbye" (ibid.). Trains run through this novel, from the initial flight from Hungary to France, to those deportees fleeing Paris, and finally to entrapment and death. Indeed, such a corrupted symbol of mobility in post-Holocaust literature can only be seen through its antithetical other: not safe passage, freedom, mobility, and escape, but rather, captivity, containment, extinction.

Like other recurring Holocaust topoi, such modes of transport have lost their normative meaning, the referent indelibly changed, making this trope a measure of just how transformative, how mutating such an experience was and continues to be. Here the reference to trains becomes a metonymic substitution of one word for a totality of anguish. Contained in the simple noun "train" is a roster of horrors, a history of misery, a dismantling of the conventional meaning of the word in which individual, collective, and historical memory converge. Characteristic of post-Holocaust narratives, language and its associations are reconceived to identify the uniqueness of this particular experience. Trains, as other signifiers of the Shoah, become implicated in language and in history. Thus, in beginning with movement outward, Orringer sets the stage early in the novel for the kind of closing in that the reader knows will follow. Although Andras's father assures him, "'It's a blessing you're going to Paris . . . better to get out of this country where Jewish men have to feel second-class . . . I can promise you that's not going to improve while you're gone, though let's hope it won't get worse'" (18), we know from the start that these tracks lead only to the destruction of millions. Orringer thus establishes the basic structure of fear that unhinges the characters from their domestic and cultural moorings and sets the stage for the psychic estrangement and dislocation so characteristic of third-generation narratives. As Bar-On suggests, "Even though the impact of this rupture may have diminished over time, the residue of fear can still be felt in most

of the third generation's life stories" (Bar-On, 329). Here, in the opening chapters of *The Invisible Bridge*, Orringer thus provides us with a retrospective account of something that has already occurred, yet we must go back to a time and place before, as Hoffman puts it, "such knowledge," that is, a landscape before its corruption. This return to prewar Europe characterizes third-generation narratives, part of a genre of Holocaust writing that, as Roskies suggests, "unfolds both backward and forward."[21] In doing so, this literature achieves the classical realism of historical fiction and, in dramatizing the escalation of retrospective anticipation, erodes the boundary between the past and the present, the living and the dead, creating a felt authenticity that shows the impact of memory's hold on the imagination. It both speaks to the distance between the events and our memory of them and collapses such distance.

The collapse of time and time's distinct associations and configurations are a recurring preoccupation among third-generation writers, who attempt to navigate the layered striations of the past within the contours of the present. That is, third-generation narratives pay distinct attention to structures and dispositions of time. In some ways, time is seen to be clearly demarcated, separated in discrete stages characterized by a distinct "before" and "after." While, as Bar-On proposes, "survivors and many of their children find it impossible to move back and forth between the past and the future, between remembering and forgetting, between life and death," (329) the third generation, from its telescopic spyhole of distance, views the past as discrete narratives. It does so, we think, in order to insist on a "before" and "after," that is, a world that did not begin and end with the Holocaust. Contrastively, as we see in survivor narratives, both pre and postwar conditions tend to be overshadowed by the dismantling of war and the dissociative, psychic repercussions that follow, "the present," as Wiesel's semiautobiographical narrator in "An Old Acquaintance" uncomfortably finds, forever caught "in the grip of all the years black and buried."[22] Here, as elsewhere in survivor narratives, there is no stable shape to memory; rather, memory arrests time, creating conditions in which, as Wiesel's character Gregor in the novel *The Gates of the Forest* attests, "The past became present, everything became confused with everything else: beings lost their identity, objects their proper weight."[23] Here the past does not become *the* present, but rather "becomes present," is evoked and reanimated through the return of trauma.

Time can only occupy the space and immediacy of the moment. The future is forever "mortgaged" to the past (*Gates*, 221).

For the second generation, the past, too, for the most part, lacks distinct properties; instead its traumatic imprint spills over into the lives of the children of survivors. Characteristic of second-generation reckoning, the point of anxious origin is constituted by references to the Holocaust. As Hoffman, in *After Such Knowledge*, makes very clear, "In the beginning was the war. That was my childhood theory of origins . . . The world as I knew it and the people in it emerged not from the womb, but from war" (3). Thus we find with the second generation a conflation of their own identity formation with the effects of the Holocaust on their parents, lives permanently shaped from the very beginning by events that preceded them.

The point of origin for the third generation, however, is not the war, its influence, as we have suggested, only belatedly acknowledged. Perhaps because there seems to have been, at least in the developing consciousness of those separated from the survivors by a generation, a geography, and a "history," a period in their own lives, to borrow Hoffman's term, "before such knowledge," they project such discrete entities of time onto their understanding of the past. Moreover, such temporal distinctions purport to help in understanding their own separation from their grandparents' past all the while making claims to their indebtedness and generational inheritance of this legacy. Thus British writer Natasha Solomons, in the novel *Mr. Rosenblum Dreams in English*, will describe her survivor-refugee character's life as "divided into two—a neat line severed each half. There was the old life in Germany that was *before*. Then, there was the new life in England, which was *after*. Sadie thought of her existence purely in these terms of *before* and *after* but this left no room for *right now*. Her life was a blur of other times."[24] It is, however, never a "neat line," as this character wishes, since the weight of the Holocaust is the measure against which the new lives of the characters in this as in other Holocaust narratives are evaluated. In their quests for a reconstruction of the past and a hoped-for established link to their families and their legacies, the third generation will reiteratively reference a life before the Holocaust, as if in the iteration that life might be invoked, might, in other words, militate against the experience of the Holocaust. Such attempts, as one of Dreifus's characters, in the short story "*Mishpocha*,"

knows all too well are not without their complications: "whenever David tried to go back, even to a time after the Worst, to the years between his parents' departure from Europe and his birth Over Here, [his mother] closed up . . . Eventually, David had stopped asking. Now, he'd no longer have the chance."[25]

But the third generation characteristically will attempt to return to a time "before," to an imagined time before "the worst," but, true to its compulsion for historical accuracy, not a golden age, but one marked by growing fear and the tightening grip of fascism. Such attempts to trace the survivors' journey back to a time before the onset of war is motivated, in large part, by the felt obligation of the third generation not to lose their extended family members to history, but rather, to bring them back, if only for the moment of narrative discovery. Rachel Kadish's third-generation character in the novel *From a Sealed Room*, upon her accidental encounters with an unknown Holocaust survivor in her building, comes to realize that "Survivors aren't proof of anything. She wasn't just some symbol . . . She was a *person*."[26] Thus, in an attempt to wrest individuals from the void of history, from a history that would otherwise eclipse them, the third-generation writer typically begins his or her journey to uncover that which was lost by returning imaginatively to a time before the "worst."

Thus Orringer's novel of Hungary's lost Jewish population begins not with Germany's march into the Sudetenland, nor with France "fallen . . . under the Nazi flag" (Orringer, 327), nor with the Tripartite Pact establishing the Axis powers, nor with her grandfather's compulsory separation from his family and conscription into forced labor in the Hungarian army, nor with the trench digging project of the *munkaszolgálat* company (labor service) where Tibor Lévy and other conscripted men were commanded to dig ditches in front of which, as reported by Tibor, civilians were "'lined up . . . Hungarians. Jews, all of them. They made them strip naked and stand there in the freezing cold for half an hour. And they shot them . . . Even the children . . . Then we had to bury them. Some of them weren't dead yet. The soldiers turned their guns on us while we did it'" (418–19). Instead *The Invisible Bridge* begins in 1937, where Andras Lévy, beginning his architectural studies, meets his future wife Klara Morgenstern, before the fall of France, the occupation of Hungary, and the systematic murder of Europe's vulnerable Jews. But

even as Andras leaves Budapest to embark on his journey to Paris, with his father's blessing and assurances of a future of opportunity, his enthusiasm is tainted with disquieting and anxious misgivings of seemingly isolated but disturbing reports of antisemitic scapegoating. Riding "westward in the darkened railway carriage," Andras is assaulted by a lurking apprehension: "He found himself thinking of a newspaper story he'd read recently about a horrible thing that had happened a few weeks earlier in the Polish town of Sandomierz: In the middle of the night the windows of shops in the Jewish quarter had been broken, and small paper-wrapped projectiles had been thrown inside. When the shop owners unwrapped the projectiles, they saw that they were the sawn-off hooves of goats. *Jews' Feet*, the paper wrappings read" (18). Such incidents, Andras fears, are not as contained as they might at first appear; nor can such acts be dismissed as the crude antics of provincial and unsophisticated ignorance. Indeed, the novel will move from this and other seemingly negligible acts of cowardice and rancor to extreme and pathological fanaticism. These initial murmurings and rumors of scapegoating will soon escalate, the cultural moment on the precipice of encroaching tyranny. "The seeds," as Andras rightly suspects, "were there" (18). Indeed, Andras's journey will take him into the locus of the oncoming terror, through "Germany, into the source of the growing dread that radiated across Europe" (20).

The Invisible Bridge presents a portrait of an era, a period of prolonged and worsening fear and tyranny. The novel both takes its time in laying out the escalating dread and widening encroachment of restrictions placed upon Europe's Jews and catapults us there. Orringer achieves this seemingly paradoxical tension between a deliberate unraveling of life and a hastening of disaster through the detailed itemization of laws and measures against Jews by fascistic layering of the malevolence experienced by her characters. Orringer shows palpably the shrinking world of Andras and Klara and their respective families. Their options and movements become increasingly circumscribed against the backdrop of cities and towns preparing for war. Even though Hungary avoids the actual war until late, 1944, there is a sense of disaster impinging on the daily lives of Orringer's characters, one made all the more dramatic by the abiding sense that Hungary's Jews, though persecuted both legally and in the encounters of daily life, might be spared. But the reader knows what the

characters fear, and Andras's attempt at safe passage is viewed against a country preparing for war:

> He tried to enter a café near the station to buy a sandwich, but on the door there was a small sign, hand-lettered in Gothic characters, that read *Jews Not Wanted* . . . From the platform of every small-town German station, Nazi flags fluttered in the slipstream of the train. The red flag spilled from the topmost story of buildings, decorated the awnings of houses, appeared in miniature in the hands of a group of children marching in the courtyard of a school beside the tracks. (20–21)

Here Orringer illustrates the tightening noose of Nazi control, from vague rumors of vandalism and prohibitions, to antisemitic propaganda, to quotas, and to proscribed anti-Jewish legislation: "One by one they read that Jews must be removed from positions of influence . . . and that they should cease to exercise authority . . . that Jewish organizations . . . must be dissolved . . . that the rights of . . . citizenship must be taken away from all Jews, who must henceforth be regarded as foreigners . . . and that all Jewish goods and belongings should become the property of the state" (99). Orringer shows the systematic, step by step targeting of Europe's Jews, the closing in of their worlds until "that elusive ghost, safety" disappeared entirely (234).

Orringer makes it very clear that such activities are the culmination of long-standing bigotry and deep suspicion directed against Jews, the "seeds" that have now begun to show the extent of their spoilage: "He, Andras, had been born a Jew, and had carried the mantle of that identity for twenty-two years . . . In the schoolyard he'd withstood the taunts of Christian children, and in the classroom his teachers' disapproval when he'd had to miss school on Shabbos" (371). Schoolyard taunts aside, the derision and scorn that accompanied Andras throughout his childhood is ill preparation for the kind of antisemitic abomination underway: "People . . . starved and crowded to death in ghettoes. People . . . shot by the thousands," people rounded up and deported to hard labor and to death camps (427). And here Orringer shows Hungary's Jews to be defenseless in the face of such pathological fanaticism and fascism. In peopling

the history that she chronicles with characters based on her family, Orringer makes all the more emphatic the vulnerability of Hungary's Jews who, like Andras Lévy, "wanted to believe that Hungary might remain a refuge at the center of the firestorm" (371). Such wishful thinking, however, is shown to be a perilous fantasy born of the naïve hope that decency and intervention will prevail. Thus Orringer, primarily through the character of Andras Lévy, shows this to be, mercilessly, "a dangerous time for illusions" (429).

From the dawning apprehension of the spread of fascism throughout Europe and the late but inevitable fall of Hungary to the Nazis, to the confinement and incarceration of the central characters, the second half of the novel erupts into a maelstrom of violence, terror, and despair. Orringer's novel shows the accidental and fortuitous possibilities of the continued existence of her characters, not all of who will survive the massacre. So much of survival, as Orringer discovered, depended on the contingencies of fortune, chance, inadvertent timing, and accidental encounters. As she acknowledges:

> The more I talk to people who survived those years, the clearer it is to me is that so much of existence hinged on tiny things. Anybody who survived did so because of a series of fortunate coincidences. A lot of the stories that my family told while I was growing up had to do with these amazing coincidences of geography or accidental connections . . . Part of the mechanism of survival during the war was that you had to rely to a certain extent on felicity and the unexpected because so much was out of your control. While to contemporary readers it might seem miraculous, but survival during those years was often due to those felicities and coincidences. (Rom-Rymer)

Orringer situates such a reckoning from the point of view of Andras Lévy, who, unlike the unhappy fate of his brother Tibor, will survive, will reunite with his wife and children, and will enter into a future whose "aperture . . . beyond the war seemed to contract by the day" (Orringer, 574). But Andras's survival in the novel is testament to survival's own tenuousness. Orringer writes:

> A hundred times it might have been the end. It might have been the end when the wagon arrived at the work camp . . . It might have been the end, again, on the day their group of a hundred men failed to meet its work quota . . . It might have been the end when the food at the camp ran out . . . It might have been the end if the men at the camp had had time to finish their project, a vast crematorium in which their bodies would be burned after they had been gassed or shot. But it was not the end. (566)

The repetition in this catalogue of horrors might be understood as both mantra and prayer. "It might have been" posits the conditional, "might," in relation to that which was certain, "the end," certain, that is, for others, for those whose luck ran out. The reiteration of "it might have been the end" paradoxically poses both possibilities simultaneously. "It might have been the end" for Andras Lévy, as it was for others, but fortuitously, against all the odds, it was not. The repetition of "it might have been" picks up momentum in this passage, concluding not with its probable conclusion, but rather with the simple, exhausted statement, "But it was not the end." The rhythmic yet numbing, dulling repetition of "it might have been" incongruously establishes the conditions for finality, yet the passage turns on itself, ironically at its close, thus both giving and taking away. What "might have been" thus speaks to the reality of the peril and fortuitous survival, lives made conditional by war.

Thus *The Invisible Bridge* draws to a close with an assessment of loss and grief by those who survived; the result is an astonished reckoning of the vastness of such devastation both on a collective and individual scale. Yet for Andras, "In the end, what astonished him most was not the vastness of it all—that was impossible to take in, the hundreds of thousands of dead from Hungary alone, and the millions from all over Europe—but the excruciating smallness, the pinpoint upon which every life was balanced. The scale might be tipped by the tiniest of things: the lice that carried typhus, the few thimblefuls of water that remained in a canteen, the dust of breadcrumbs in a pocket" (558). The "excruciating smallness" of individual lives stands in this novel as a metonymy of the sheer scale of the catastrophe. The Nazis had become for millions of Jews the arbiter of fate, but that fate was played out in individualized, quotidian ways, ways that become the preoccupation of the personalized focus of third-

generation Holocaust writers like Orringer. As the staggering numbers of dead are tallied,

> It began to seem as though no one could be exempt from mourning, as though no period of mourning would ever be long enough . . . How was anyone to understand a number like that? Andras knew it took three thousand to fill the seats of the Dohány Street Synagogue. To accommodate a million and a half, one would have had to replicate that building, its arches and domes, its Moorish interior, its balcony, its dark wooden pews and gilded ark, *five hundred times*. And then to envision each of those five hundred synagogues filled to capacity, to envision each man and woman and child inside as a unique and irreplaceable human being . . . each of them with desires and fears, a mother and a father, a birthplace, a bed, a first love, a web of memories, a cache of secrets, a skin, a heart, an infinitely complicated brain—to imagine them that way and then to imagine them dead, extinguished for all time—how could anyone begin to grasp it? The idea could drive a person mad. (536)

And here, the magnitude of loss, its attendant grief and despair, and the traumatic rupture in the lives of those who carry with them the memory of these events are passed along intergenerationally as the story of the lives of individuals, lives lost and lives arbitrarily spared.

For this is also an American novel, a novel of generations spilling over onto a new continent, a new world that, as Klara Lévy insists "was their place now. They would use it in their fashion, live or die by their own actions" (432). The novel's brief epilogue concludes with the granddaughter's story, an American-born child conceived without the fear, dread, and uncertainty that hung over Europe during the war years. Finally, this is a novel that insists on generational continuity. Characteristic of third-generation Holocaust narratives, *The Invisible Bridge* speaks to the endurance of generations, part of a long tradition of Jewish ethics and survival. Orringer's connection to the past, to a traumatic history, like other third-generation writers, is relational; she situates herself in the ongoing continuity of generations. Thus Orringer's novel concludes with the grandchild's awakening, her dawning recognition of her grandpar-

ents' felicitous survival and the implication of their history on her own life. Their very resolve in continuing the generations is viewed by this grandchild of survivors as nothing less than courageous. As Orringer says of her own grandparents: "It became even more incredible to me to think about what my grandparents went through knowing that they were going to bring children into this incredibly uncertain world. In fact my grandmother gave birth in October of 1944 while Hungary was under Nazi occupation. She remembers being in utter terror as she was in labor in the hospital giving birth to her baby and pleading with her Nazi doctor not to hurt her baby . . . The horror of that is just unimaginable to me" (Rom-Rymer). Moreover, her grandparents' survival, their staying power and fortitude in the face of extinction, evokes, for her third-generation character at the novel's close, as it must have for Orringer, by her own admission, its frightening antithesis. Aware of the tenuousness and precariousness of her birthright and that of her newborn child, the beginning of a fourth generation, Orringer speaks to the historically uncertain likelihood of her family's ongoing lineage: "It was even more unbelievable to me after I had given birth. I looked at my new baby after he was born and thought, 'my God. The set of circumstances that resulted in your being here are so unbelievably fortuitous.' It was one of the greatest pleasures of my life to be able to bring him to Miami Beach where my grandmother lives and introduce him to my grandmother and say 'this baby is here because you managed to survive'" (Rom-Rymer).

Bar-On asks, "What are the aftereffects of the Holocaust on the descendants of survivors? Which aspects of the Holocaust experience . . . were transmitted" to the third generation? (Bar-On, 331). The vestiges of fear and loss preoccupy the narratives of the third generation who write against the backdrop of the threat of generations discontinued, extinguished. Loss is the motivating force impelling these narratives, "identity," or "memory narratives," as Debra Kaufman explains, that "reflect a past still alive and still invested with emotional connection and value" through the "ongoing process of imagining and continuing the Holocaust" (Kaufman, 40). Such narratives are haunted by a palpably felt absence of those lost and irrevocably mourned. This absence creates a gap in the narratives of family histories, an emptiness where there once was presence, where a presence is longed for. The third-generation quest to uncover and resurrect the past and those who peopled this tragic history

leads to a discovery that acknowledges absence, acknowledges, that is, what cannot be known for certain but is felt nonetheless. The presence of those who survived calls attention to those who disappeared. The discovery that the granddaughter of survivors at the close of Orringer's *The Invisible Bridge*, makes, for example, while alerting her to an important understanding of her grandparents' past and thus her own identity, results in a necessary correction, an adjustment to her conscious assessment of what is missing from this picture of her life. The felt presence of her grandparents summons a conspicuous absence:

> But then there was the other great-uncle, the one who had died. He'd had a wife, and his son would have been her father's age now. They had all died in the war . . . All that was left of that uncle was a photograph taken when he was twenty years old . . . He didn't look like someone who expected to die. He looked like he was supposed to live to be a white-haired old man like his brothers . . . Instead there was just that photograph. And their last name, a memorial. (Orringer, 597)

In this absence all that remains for the third-generation witness beyond the reach of direct memory is a photograph, an image that stands in for her missing relative and for all the affective traces that his absence calls forth in the possible but maimed futurity of the family.

In the literature of third-generation writers, found objects representing the past—as elsewhere in Holocaust narratives—take on the weight of memory, embodying, as Hirsch suggests, the "ghostly remnants from an irretrievable lost past world" (Hirsch, 37). Such images, photographs, artifacts, and objects from the past, as Hirsch proposes "enable us, in the present, not only to see and to touch that past, but also to try to reanimate it," thus creating a continuing presence where there might otherwise be absence (Hirsch, 37). Such objects are tangible evidence of a world and lives that once existed; as Hirsch notes, they "authenticate the past; they trigger memories and connect them indexically to a particular place and time" (186). Discovered objects function as memorials, but also as mnemonic focal points, sites of entry and discovery. Objects become found legacies for those generations who attempt to uncover the past in order to make sense of and identify with the experiences of those

who lived through that time, as Hirsch proposes, those "still . . . trying to scrutinize the objects, images and stories that have been bequeathed to them—directly or indirectly—for clues to an opaque and haunting past" (178).

Objects as sites of discovery and recognition recur throughout post-Holocaust narratives. Artifacts such as maps, photographs, diaries, letters, and other objects exist as material substance in the place of absence, providing clues to the past. They are, of course, as Hirsch maintains, "fragmentary remnants" of a past otherwise obliterated, incomplete but valuable portions of the story (37). While such artifacts function in part as testimonials to the dead, they are not static; rather, they take on a life of their own as each embodies a story, a narrative or narratives that unfold from the found object. As Hirsch suggests, "testimonial objects" become vehicles of imaginative historical transmission (Hirsch, 178). They speak of and to the lives in which they were embedded and carry with them the hermeneutic potential of reconstructing those lives, or at least of carrying them, and all that they represent, into the present and thus the future. Such artifacts provide an indirect, oblique path to a reconstructed past and thus to the issues of moral reckoning that past raises.

Such fragments of lives, these shards and broken pieces of the past, come to constitute a beginning place for discovery and can locate sites of traumatic rupture. Evocatively, in the prose poem "Erika," William Heyen, the American-born nephew of two uncles who were members of the Nazi party, makes a pilgrimage to what was once the location of the concentration camp at Bergen-Belsen where thirty thousand Jews were exterminated and where, years later, the poetic speaker, walking the grounds past the site of what were once mass graves, comes upon the groundskeeper. Caring for the grounds where he "tills the soil or replaces a brick along a walk or transplants a tree or rakes through the Erika," the heath plant that blooms among the graves, the caretaker unearths found objects:

> a rusty spoon,
> or a tin cup,
> or a fragment of bone,
> or a strand of barbed wire,
> or a piece of rotten board,

or the casing of a bullet,
or the heel of a shoe,
    or a coin,
        or a button,
or a bit of leather
    that crumbles to the touch,
or a pin,
or the twisted frames of someone's glasses,
    or a key,
or a wedding band. . . .[27]

This list of objects, each itemized separately in a single line, gives each item its singular weight and representative moment in both poetic and real fictive time, objects that, as Hirsch suggests, "survive the ravages of time and the destruction wrought by violent histories" (Hirsch, 247). Rather than a list separated by "and," each item is introduced with the conjunction "or," offering a choice. But, of course, this list both offers a choice and, through its repetitive utterance, suggests a random scattering of arbitrary things, insignificant in the value of each singularly, but in their collectivity, their repetitive accumulation, represent the stuff of history, both individual and collective. Together they create a narrative of destruction and loss, the artifact, like the photographic image, as Hirsch suggests, signifying a "disembodied wound" (174). Here such artifacts, objects of mourning, stand in for those who once inhabited the space of the camp, those who once lived among the Erika, the "bell-heather" (Heyen, 62), and the murderous implementation of the Nazi execution of the Final Solution. Objects thus provide points of departure, but also points of return; they represent points of origin, especially for those who have come in search of some manifestation of the past.

The narrator in Binnie Kirshenbaum's short story "Who Knows Kaddish" inadvertently comes upon a remote Jewish cemetery in southwestern Germany, where she is a visitor. Walking among the graves, reading the names and dates of those who died, the narrator realizes that the year 1939 marks the end of the line for those interred in the cemetery. Coming upon the last grave, the narrator is brought up short by the implication of the last date of entry. "Then, there in 1939," Kirshenbaum's narrator realizes, "the Jews stopped."[28] The absence in the cemetery speaks

more emphatically than the presence of those named graves. The implication of the date is not lost on her:

> Clearly, they hadn't planned to stop. This cemetery, far more empty than not, is evidence that they planned to be born, to love, to marry, bear children, and they planned for their children's children; they planned to live and to grow old and die here because they got themselves plenty of cemetery plots for generations to come. Only there weren't any generations to come . . . Poof. Gone and never to return. (Kirshenbaum, 181)

Here the grave stones and, by extension, the absence of such markers are recovered objects that, in their materiality, their presence to sight and emotion, ironically and disturbingly bespeak loss. Fixating on such material items allows the writer of post-Holocaust literature to speak posthumously through the artifacts of others, even if such artifacts are unnamed and unidentified. "All these orphaned objects," as Mendelsohn describes them, give voice to loss but also, paradoxically, to durability and to a kind of staying power of memory (Mendelsohn, 38). For the third generation, confronting such artifacts reiteratively is both a reaction to and a working through of the extended trauma of this particular history. In the 2011 Israeli film *The Flat*, directed by Arnon Goldfinger, the grandson of Holocaust survivors now deceased is preoccupied with his grandparents' belongings he discovers in going through their now vacant apartment. Items he has lived among, items that until now escaped his attention, are given meaning by the stories they, pieced together, reveal. Such stories provide not only an opening, moments of discovery, into his grandparents' lives before and during the Holocaust, but in doing so, create for the third-generation witness an identity and a past.

Unearthing such finds, figuratively and literally, is part of the third generation's quest for return, both forensically and affectively, to the site of an extended family's past. From that return they will stake claims to their own history and generational endurance. Artifacts and stories become receptacles of memory and meaning, part of the lineage of historical trauma and personal cathexis to it bequeathed to them. Through this historical and affective inheritance they will, with persistent resolve, pursue in order, as one of Dreifus's characters puts it, "to recover all those

that had been lost" ("*Mishpocha*," 159). In doing so, as Alison Pick's narrator in the third-generation novel *Far To Go*—like Daniel Mendelsohn, Andrea Simons, Margot Singer, Erika Dreifus, Julie Orringer, and other writers of the third generation—reverently acknowledges, "I inscribe them here, the family I never knew" (Pick, 308).

NOTES

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University, for his assistance in translating Lévy's essay. Paule Lévy, "'And how do you get over loss that has no concrete shape or face?': *The Lost* de Daniel Mendelsohn, ou l'expérience dérobée," in *L'experience 1*, ed. Françoise Bort et al. (Paris: Michel Houdiard, 2012), 10, 6.

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