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Holocaust Literature

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THE PLACE OF POETRY

Holocaust literature, which began during wartime as a multilingual corpus of enormous scope, was marked by tremendous generic diversity. It was comprised of minutes, memoranda, calendars, diaries, testimonies, memoirs, last letters, essays, poems, songs, jokes, legends, reportage, novels, stories, plays, libretti, questionnaires, scholarly treatises, sermons, speeches, classroom compositions and battle bulletins, not to speak of musical scores, posters, photographs, charts, drawings, and paintings. Even before its inception, however, poetry played an outsized role. Written in 1936, in response to rising antisemitism in Poland, "S'brent!" ("Fire!") by Mordecai Gebirtig was repurposed as a song of Jewish resistance during the war and has remained a staple of Holocaust commemorations. In April 1938, seven months before Kristallnacht and two years before the first Jews were rounded up into a ghetto, the New York Yiddish poet Jacob Glatstein published "Good Night, World," repudiating Western civilization with its false hopes and false promises, a civilization that had abandoned the Jews to their fate. His poem, which jettisoned his modern habits, diction, and disposition, signaled a new direction in Jewish culture – "back to the ghetto" – in order to reclaim a world of tradition and traditions that seemed to have already almost entirely disappeared. It also signaled Glatstein's own turn from high modernism to a Jewish national poetics.¹

The audience for poetry and song was never more loyal than in the ghettos and labor camps, where the essential modes of communication were either

¹ J. Glatstein, 'Good Night, World', in L. Langer (ed.), *Art from the Ashes: A Holocaust Anthology* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 655.

oral or clandestine.² Virtually everything that Yitshak Katzenelson wrote in the Warsaw ghetto – one-act and full-length plays, epic and lyric poems, literary criticism – he declaimed before a live audience. Private readings of his epic poems, on martyrdom and revenge, he reserved either for such figures as the historian Emanuel Ringelblum and the philosopher-mystic Hillel Zeitlin or for the members of the Zionist underground. Catering to the Polish-speaking segment of the ghetto was Władysław Szlengel, Master of Ceremonies at the popular and prestigious Sztuka (Art) café on 2 ulica Leszno, who both wrote and performed his topical material. The select audience for H. G. Adler's readings from his *Theresienstadt Picture Book*, a set of rhymed and metered quatrains, were the older, German-speaking inmates of the ghetto, to whom he also occasionally lectured on Kafka. Adler's reputation won him the support of fellow inmate Rabbi Leo Baeck, the spiritual leader of German Jewry, who saved his writings and returned them to him after the war. In the Vilna (Vilnius) ghetto, where Yiddish was the lingua franca, Abraham Sutzkever became the voice and pulse of the ghetto, registering its despair and defiance in the equivalent of a poetic diary. His epic poem *The Grave Child*, about a lone escapee from the killing field of Ponar who seeks refuge in the Jewish cemetery, there to give birth in an empty grave, was awarded first prize for poetry in July 1942 by the Union of Artists and Writers.

As masters of compression, poets were well schooled in shearing catastrophes to a manageable size. Henryka Łazowertówna, an important feminist voice in prewar Poland, is remembered today for her poem on "The Little Smuggler," a child full of spunk and street smarts who each day risks his life to feed his starving mother. Translated into Yiddish, set to music, and sung throughout the Warsaw ghetto, the poem is inscribed on the Memorial to the Child Victims of the Holocaust in Warsaw, with translations into English and Hebrew. The lullabies of Leah Rudnitsky and Isaiah Spiegel and the orphan song *My Name's Yisrolik*, by Leyb Rozental, composed and widely sung in the ghettos of Vilna and Łódź, spoke of the severed bond between parents and children. Children, too, were taught the metonymic arts. In Theresienstadt, young people were encouraged to draw, paint, and write poetry. In "Fear," twelve-year-old Eva Picková depicted Death wielding an icy scythe over father, mother, children, and friends, her world in miniature, and twenty-one-year-old Pavel

² See Chapter 10 by Samuel Kassow in Volume III of this series.

Friedman found the last breath of freedom, beauty, and regeneration in "The Butterfly."³

Jewish-language poets used a grammar of remembrance, the ABCs of which were the historical archetypes recorded in Scripture – those one-time events that were understood to recur again and again: the command to Abram to "Go forth" from his native land; the binding of his son Isaac on Mount Moriah (the Akedah); the Exodus from Egypt; the rescue of the Jews on Purim, and the Ḥurban, the Destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. Wartime poets made sense of the unprecedented events through the most distant analogies. In Simkhe-Bunem Shayevitsh's "Lekh-lekho" ("Go Forth"; Gen. 12:1), a father tries to explain the inexplicable to his eight-year-old daughter, Blimele: why, in the dead of winter, a second mass deportation has been decreed, and it was now the turn of this father, mother, and child to pack up the bare essentials and get ready to leave their ghetto tenement, forever. His further analogy is to the Akedah, only this time, the father must make Isaac–Blimele fully conscious of what lies ahead, to prepare her for the sacrifice. In the wake of earlier catastrophes, since the Crusade pogroms, Jewish poet-chroniclers had claimed the right to argue with God; invoking ancient archetypes of martyrdom and destruction, they meant to provoke an immediate response from the Keeper of the Covenant. Eight centuries later, in his dramatic monologue *Kol Nidre*, Sutzkever adopted the voice of a survivor of the terrible *Aktion* of Yom Kippur 1941, who had already kept his side of the covenantal bargain by sacrificing four of his five sons. Accusing God of having gone into partnership with the executioner, as Yom Kippur draws to a close the Jew enacts ritual homicide on the fifth. With Katzenelson and Shayevitsh inside the war zone; with Jacob Glatstein, Chaim Grade, Uri Zvi Greenberg, Itzik Manger, Peretz Markish, Kadia Molodowsky, and Aaron Zeitlin on the outside, Sutzkever belonged to a generation of modern Jewish poets who used Scripture and the liturgy to underscore a fundamental break with the God of Israel, even as they held fast to the broken covenant itself.

Poets became the public – and tragic – voice of the armed resistance. After the Great Deportation in the summer of 1942, Szlengel abruptly switched to writing "poem-documents," chronicling those who had sunk to the bottom with their submarine. The most widely copied and circulated of these poems

³ E. Picková, 'Fear', in H. Volavková (ed.), . . . *I Never Saw Another Butterfly . . . : Children's Drawings and Poems from Terezín Concentration Camp, 1942–1944* (New York, Schocken Books, 1993), p. 33; P. Friedman 'The Butterfly', in H. Volavková (ed.), . . . *I Never Saw Another Butterfly . . . : Children's Drawings and Poems from Terezín Concentration Camp, 1942–1944* (New York, Schocken Books, 1993), p. 45.

was "Counterattack," which detailed the first Jewish military action in the ghetto against the Germans, down to blood-spattered boxes of Junos, the German-army-issue cigarettes. The most famous hymns of the Jewish armed resistance were written in the Vilna ghetto, by Kasriel Broide, Shmerke Kaczerginski, and especially Hirsh Glik. Abrasha Sutzkever (as his comrades called him) joined the United Partisans' Organization (UPO) under the command of Itsik Vittenberg soon after its founding. Backdating his epic poem "The Lead Plates at the Rom Press" to 12 September 1943, the day that Abrasha and his wife, Freydke, left the ghetto to join a Soviet partisan brigade in the Narocz forest, Sutzkever etched the night when a nation of "dreamers" remade themselves into a Jewish fighting force.⁴

Another who kept a meticulous poetic diary was the Hungarian poet of Jewish descent Miklós Radnóti, whose posthumous fame rests on ten poems discovered in the pocket of his raincoat when his grave was exhumed in 1946. The last of these he called ironically *razglednice*, the Serbian word for picture postcards, and formally they are pastoral poems in a strict rhyme scheme. They are, however, neither pleasant nor picturesque, depicting as they do the forced march of his fellow labor camp prisoners towards Germany, the last devoted to the dead body of his friend, the violinist Miklós Lorsi, who was shot three weeks before. "I fell beside him," it begins, "His body rolled over,/ as tight as a string ready to snap." And it ends: "'*Der springt noch auf,*' I heard someone say,/ Blood dried on my ear, and filthy clay." Because he was "still kicking," a German soldier finishes him off with a second shot. No bucolic countryside but a *nature demi-morte*, alive with dialogue and active verbs, the poet and his muse pitted against immanent and imminent death.⁵

What remained of the dead were metonymies of irreparable loss, which formed the basis of a poetry of bereavement. Although Nelly Sachs escaped in May 1940 on the last flight from Berlin to Stockholm, when evidence of the "Final Solution" reached her in 1943, she began composing lyrical poems that focused on objects from everyday life – chimneys, sand, stone, shoes – which she transformed into icons of mass murder. Her first book of poems, *In the Habitations of Death* (1947), took its title from "O the Chimneys" – not of home and hearth, but of the crematoria, "the ingeniously devised habitations

⁴ A. Sutzkever, "The Lead Plates at the Rom Press", in B. Harshav and B. Harshav (eds.), *A. Sutzkever: Selected Poetry and Prose* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1991), pp. 168–70.

⁵ Quoted in C. K. Williams, 'Dark victory', *The New Republic*, 21 December 1992, 32. No source is given for this translation.

of death/ When Israel's body drifted as smoke/ Through the air."⁶ What particularly stood in for the destruction of Europe's Jews were the million-and-a-half murdered children, whose loss fixed a permanent void in the universe. Twenty-three-year-old Paul Antschel, later signing himself Celan, became a poet of the Holocaust with "Black Flakes," written in the form of a letter from his mother informing her son of his father's murder. She writes in a language redolent of the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, and the Jewish literature of destruction, even as the apocalyptic image of the poem's title captures the winter of death, somewhere on "Ukrainian slopes." The letter ends with his mother pleading for "A shawl, just a thin little shawl." Clutching the letter, all that remains of her living presence, the bereaved son bursts into tears, then weaves the shawl – this very poem – out of her memory.⁷ Maternal memory traces became the warp and woof of many poems that followed, such as "Count the almonds," the poem that Celan placed at the end of his first official publication, *Poppy and Memory* (1952), to echo the Yiddish lullaby *Raisins and Almonds*. The poetry of Sutzkever and Celan can be said to represent the two poles of Holocaust literature. Sutzkever the insider is the commanding presence of the continuous, cumulative, and renewable body of writing known as *khurbn-literatur*; that is, literature written in response to the Great Destruction, as great as that of the First and Second Temples in Jerusalem. The journey that Sutzkever himself embarked upon, which took him from the Vilna ghetto to the Narocz forest, to Moscow, Vilnius, Nuremberg, Łódź, Paris, and, finally, the Land of Israel, became the trajectory of his postwar poetry and mythopoetic narratives, peopled by a gallery of the extraordinary dead, who refused to die. The "epic demands" that Sutzkever placed on himself, reserving the amphibrachic meter for his most serious verse, he also placed on his readers, forsaking no opportunity for literary or cultural allusion.⁸

Celan, exquisitely the outsider, is the dominant voice of what the Germans call *Exilliteratur*, the literature of exile, which Celan famously described as "a message in a bottle, sent out in the – not always greatly hopeful – belief that

⁶ N. Sachs, *O the Chimneys: Selected Poems, Including Eli, a Verse Play*, trans. M. Hamburger, C. Holme, R. Mead, M. Mead, and M. Roloff (New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1967), p. 3.

⁷ Felstiner, *Paul Celan*, pp. 18–21.

⁸ H. Pollin-Galay, "The epic demands of postwar Yiddish: Avrom Sutzkever's *Geheymstot* (1948)", *East European Jewish Affairs* 48 (2018), 331–53.

somewhere and sometime it could wash up on land, on heartland perhaps.”⁹ The bottle-poet was a shipwrecked survivor; or, in Celan’s case, someone who chose to live in Paris as “one of the last who must live out to the end the destiny of the Jewish spirit in Europe.”¹⁰ In order to continue writing in his mother tongue, he had to denazify German, purge the language of its murderous legacy, strip it to naked essentials, but never let it off the hook: “Speak you too, / speak as the last, say out your say. // Speak – / But don’t split off No from Yes. Give your say this meaning too: give it the shadow.”¹¹ Everything positive must admit denial; every meaning must carry its shadow; every *Spruch* (saying), every utterance, must also serve as parable, oracle, incantation, scriptural echo, Solomonic verdict. Whatever the heartland on which this poetry washed up, it could not be triangulated by geography, historical particularity, communal experience, or national destiny.

With one exception: Celan’s initial response to the death camps and their perfected coordinates of evil, in a poem that instanced the tyranny of a camp commandant, and prisoners forced to play music as others dug graves. Such was the power of “Todesfuge” (“Death Fugue”), which Celan placed at the center of *Poppy and Memory*, that it has become metonymic of Holocaust poetry as a whole. Throughout its thirty-six lines, its voice is the voice of the Jewish prisoners speaking in the first person plural, then quoting their persecutor, the commandant, a typically sentimental German who writes letters home to his beloved Margareta even as he whistles for his hounds as he whistles for his Jews. By poem’s end he is thrice personified – “Death is a master from Deutschland,” “Death is a master aus Deutschland,” “Death is ein Meister aus Deutschland” in John Felstiner’s inspired translation – the only time that the word Germany appears anywhere in Celan’s verse.¹² Indeed, “Death Fugue” was meant to be read in part as a German lesson, full of literary allusions to *Faust’s* tragic heroine, Margareta, and to the “golden hair” of Heine’s Lorelei, here impossibly twinned with the maiden Shulamith from the Song of Songs. The poem is set to a rising and falling meter that repeats, like a ballad, or a Bach fugue, without punctuation, while readers are left to wonder whether the prisoners are speaking literally or metaphorically when they open their collective monologue with the refrain,

⁹ P. Celan, ‘Speech on the occasion of receiving the Literature Prize of the Free Hanseatic City of Bremen’, in J. Felstiner, *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan* (New York, W. W. Norton, 2001), p. 396.

¹⁰ Felstiner, *Paul Celan*, p. 80.

¹¹ P. Celan, ‘Speak, You Too’, in J. Felstiner, *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan* (New York, W. W. Norton, 2001), p. 77.

¹² Felstiner, *Paul Celan*, pp. 26–41.

"Black milk of daybreak we drink it at evening/ we drink it at midday and morning we drink it at night/ we drink and we drink." Was this some slang used in the camps or does "black milk" refer to the smoke of the crematoria? And the hypnotic effect of Celan's rhythmic, figurative language led the German critical theorist Theodor Adorno to push back with his provocative assertion that writing poetry "after Auschwitz" was barbarous, because the Holocaust was at an absolute remove from poetry. The German playwright Rolf Hochhuth accused Celan in this poem of obfuscating the reality of Auschwitz and conspiring "with our natural strong tendency to treat the matter as a legend, as an incredible apocalyptic fable." Hochhuth therefore resolved to stage Act V of *Der Stellvertreter* (*The Deputy*, 1964), set in Auschwitz, as surrealism-made-real.¹³ While Adorno's challenge and Hochhuth's repudiation placed poetry at the moral center of the debate about eloquence in/and atrocity, many of their contemporaries considered "Death Fugue" as the ultimate arbiter of truth in/of Holocaust poetry.

Other than "Death Fugue," few poems changed the landscape or altered the timeline of Holocaust responses. Thanks to Evgenii Evtushenko's thunderous poem "Babi Yar," first published in 1961, performed live in front of rapturous crowds and set to music by Dmitrii Shostakovich, the mass murder of the Jews of Kyiv on 29–30 September 1941 burst into public and political consciousness in the Soviet Union. Jan Bloński's courageous manifesto of January 1987, "A Poor Christian Looks at the Ghetto," which took its name and inspiration from Czesław Miłosz's wartime poem, initiated a brutally honest Polish–Jewish dialogue; a Christian response to the Holocaust that did not invoke the language of forgiveness, but acknowledged the suffering of the other side, admitted Polish complicity in the crime, and paid tribute to the irreparable loss.

The truth of Holocaust poetry was judged by voices heard from within: the choruses and dramatic monologues in the quasi-liturgical poems of Nelly Sachs; the ironic and laconic voice of Tadeusz Różewicz's "The Survivor" (1947), who spoke for the lost generation of Polish poets ("I am twenty four/ led to slaughter/ I survived"); the elegiac, contemplative voice of Anthony Hecht's *The Hard Hours* (1968), returned from the war; the ferocious, forensic, and feminist voice of *The Auschwitz Poems* (1986) by Lily Brett, a daughter of survivors; and the disorientating voices in the poetry of Dan Pagis, most famously in his six-line poem "Written in Pencil on a Sealed Box-Car" that

¹³ R. Hochhuth, *The Deputy: A Christian Tragedy*, trans. R. and C. Winston (New York, Grove Press, 1964), p. 223.

displaced space into time by ventriloquizing the voice of Eve addressing Cain, her one surviving son, before she is cut off mid-sentence in a cattle car bound for Auschwitz . . . or Treblinka . . . Majdanek . . . Bełżec. (Pagis's poem is inscribed in Hebrew, Polish, and English in the Ramp Monument erected on the site of the Bełżec extermination camp.) "Today I am not sure that what I wrote is true," read the epigraph to *None of Us Will Return*, written in verse and prose in 1946, but not published until 1965; "I am certain it is truthful."¹⁴ Affirming the power of speech, the French poet Charlotte Delbo, Auschwitz number 31569, authorized herself to record, as accurately as possible, if only to describe the process of remembering.

Multilingual, polyvocal, elusive, allusive – neither the rhyme nor the reason of most Holocaust poetry has broken through the bounds of time and place. Essential works still have not been translated into major European languages and many others are long out of print. The largely neglected poetic corpus is itself a measure of what was lost in the Holocaust.

THE INSTITUTION OF HOLOCAUST LITERATURE

The course of Holocaust literature was set in 1947 with the publication of *Het achterhuis* (*The Back of the House*; better known as *The Secret Annex*), the wartime diary of Anne Frank. The politics of postwar publishing; conventions and compulsions of editing; decisions as to cover art and textual apparatus; adaptability for stage and screen; suitability for young readers; and the fierceness of ensuing controversies – these and other seemingly extrinsic factors were decisive in the formation of a literary canon. Published on the fiftieth anniversary of the Liberation in a new English translation, the "definitive edition" re-presented Anne Frank as an assertive, sexually aware young woman bursting with literary ambition. As Anne Frank changed from child victim to self-aware woman in love, so too did the reception of Holocaust literature during this most formative period.

Originally published as a book for young readers, Anne Frank's diary was heavily censored and edited by her father, Otto Frank, who wished to create

¹⁴ C. Delbo, *Auschwitz and After*, trans. R. C. Lamont (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1995), p. 1.

an appropriate memorial to his daughter. To explain the fate of the diary and its author, Otto invited his friend, Albert Cauvern, a Dutch radio dramatist, to pen the anonymous Afterword, thus launching the book for a general Dutch audience, much as Anne would have wanted. With each subsequent translation and edition, however, the added front matter took the book into uncharted postwar waters. For example, the French edition published in 1950 by the Parisian Jewish house of Calmann-Lévy bore a preface by Henri Daniel-Rops, the Gallican historian most widely read by postwar Catholics. He was inclined to read the *Journal de Anne Frank* more as an evocation of Christian martyrdom than as the story of the persecution of a young Jewish girl, and thus Anne Frank was transfigured into a latter-day Joan of Arc. The Introduction to the American *Diary of a Young Girl* (1952), signed by the beloved former First Lady, Eleanor Roosevelt, but probably ghost-written by Barbara Zimmerman, marginalized Anne's Europeaness and elided her Jewishness in order to highlight the "shining nobility" of her spirit as a beacon of human rights, while the British edition with a foreword by the popular novelist and activist Storm Jameson was read throughout the British Commonwealth, including by Nelson Mandela and his fellow inmates during their imprisonment on Robben Island. The front matter and the emotional arc of the drama were fungible because Anne Frank had designed her diary to be a polysemous work from the moment she pasted nineteen different photos of herself into the first notebook, or from the moment she gave it an action-adventure title, *The Secret Annex*, or certainly once she had shifted gears after hearing a Dutch radio broadcast from London on 29 March 1944, announcing plans for the postwar publication of diaries and letters. To the French, she could be a Christian saint; for American audiences, a "funny, hopeful, happy" teenager; among Black political prisoners, a militant activist. Bringing it all home, the Anne Frank House opened on 3 May 1960, making Prinsengracht 263 the single most visited memory site of the Holocaust and the most famous literary address in Europe, after the smoky digs of 221b Baker Street and Proust's cork-lined room at 102 Bd Haussmann.

The path taken by the work of the next most influential figure in Holocaust literature, born a year before Anne Frank, was seemingly more circuitous, but actually more direct. Boarding a ship for Buenos Aires in 1955, the journalist Eliezer Wiesel delivered his Yiddish manuscript to Mark Turkow, editor of *Dos poylishe yidntum*, a series dedicated to the memory of Polish Jewry, of which volume 117 was to be . . . *un di vel't hot geshvign* (*And the World Remained Silent*). As a species of reportage, engaged journalism, the manuscript ended with the author naming names ("Ilse Koch, the loathsome,

sadistic woman of Buchenwald”), assigning blame (“Germans and anti-Semites convince the world that the story of the six million martyrs is only a legend”), and issuing a dire warning (“the naïve world will probably believe them, if not today then the day after tomorrow”).¹⁵ The book’s topical, activist, and communal agenda put Wiesel squarely within the ranks of the journalists-cum-Holocaust-chroniclers who had preceded him, many of them featured among the 116 titles listed at the back of the book.¹⁶ He was, in fact, the youngest author to be published in the series and the only one who hailed from Hungary. Then Wiesel returned to Paris, where he presented the newly edited and translated version to the French Catholic thinker and former Resistance fighter François Mauriac. Mauriac described the encounter as a dark epiphany of the murdered Jewish children, those “lambs torn from their mothers” – “child” and “children” repeated eleven times, like a mantra – and read Wiesel’s manuscript as a source of revelation, “the death of God in the soul of a child who suddenly faces absolute evil.”¹⁷ Mauriac endorsed the work, and much more, transforming its author into one of God’s Chosen, the boy victim as witness to ineffable Holocaust – alongside that girl from Amsterdam.¹⁸ Mauriac’s Foreword became a fixture in all editions and translations of *La Nuit* (*Night*, 1958), as Wiesel’s book came to be titled, because it fulfilled the author’s own wish to be a recognized writer in modes at once literary, theological, and political.¹⁹

Prefaces and afterwords, whether penned by the author or authored by others, play such an outsized role in the making of Holocaust literature because there are multiple broken timelines that needed to be bridged: between the discovery of a wartime document and its delayed publication; between the publication of a work in its original language and its translation into foreign languages and cultures; between a document of a desolate year in a now-desolate place and something of lasting significance. A major step in the institution of Holocaust literature came in 1968, when the Library of Congress adopted the classification of “Holocaust, Jewish (1939–1945)” as an event category separate from the Second World War.²⁰ Both *The Diary of*

¹⁵ E. Viesel, . . . *un di velt hot geshvign* (Buenos Aires, Tsentral-farband fun poylishe yidn in Argentine, 1956), p. 245.

¹⁶ Schwarz, *Survivors and Exiles*.

¹⁷ F. Mauriac, ‘Foreword’ to E. Wiesel, *Night*, trans. M. Wiesel (New York, Hill and Wang, 2006).

¹⁸ See M. M. Anderson, ‘The child victim as witness to the Holocaust: An American story?’, *Jewish Social Studies* 14 (2007), 1–22.

¹⁹ A. Astro, ‘Revisiting Wiesel’s *Night* in Yiddish, French, and English’, *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas* 12:1 (2014), 127–53, esp. 146.

²⁰ Roskies and Diamant, *Holocaust Literature*, pp. 13–16.

a *Young Girl* and *Night* were reclassified, retroactively placing them and other disparate works into a single, unbroken rubric. Less clear-cut was the qualifier "Jewish."

Nothing signified "Jewish" in the original publication of Primo Levi's *Se questo è un uomo* (*If This Is a Man*, 1947); neither the title nor the cover art, nor the content, nor the authorial voice. But, when Levi resubmitted the book to the Einaudi publishing house in Turin in 1958, he included an introductory chapter, "The Journey," which foregrounded his membership in the anti-fascist resistance and his Jewish roots, introduced three-year-old Emilia, daughter of Aldo Levi of Milan, and ended with an idealized portrait of traditional Jews experiencing an archetypal grief.²¹ The British-English translation published in London a year later worked from this edition, and the only significant change made by Collier Books of New York was to capitalize on the Eichmann Trial, then ongoing, by giving the book a new and newsworthy title, *Survival in Auschwitz: The Nazi Assault on Humanity* (1961). In the years to come, Levi completed his self-fashioning from an Italian secular humanist into a survivor of the (Jewish) Holocaust by adding an Author's Preface addressed to readers already acquainted with the literature of the death camps, an Afterword in which the author provided answers to some of His Readers' Questions, and, most revealingly, the poem "Shema." Dated 10 January 1946, from an edition of wartime and postwar poems that Levi had distributed privately, the poem is a sacred parody of Jewish covenantal language in Deut. 11:13–21 – linking him directly to a millennia-old literary response to catastrophe.²²

Ultimately, these three seminal works of Holocaust literature – Anne Frank's *The Diary of a Young Girl*, Elie Wiesel's *Night*, and Primo Levi's *Survival in Auschwitz* – escaped the confines of pedigree, national or linguistic. As the definitive edition of her diary would reveal, Anne Frank wholeheartedly embraced her Dutch identity, reacting viscerally to the German that still lay at the tip of her tongue, whereas some of her compatriots, such as Hans Keilson, would continue to write in German. And, if writer-survivors were divided among those who adopted the language of their place of refuge (Aharon Appelfeld, Jurek Becker, Louis Begley, Yehiel Dinur (Ka-Tzetnik), Ilona Karmel, Uri Orlev, Dan Pagis, Piotr Rawicz) and those who didn't

²¹ J. Woolf, 'From *If This Is a Man* to *The Drowned and the Saved*', in R. S. C. Gordon (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Primo Levi* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 35–50, esp. p. 40.

²² D. G. Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse: Responses to Catastrophe in Modern Jewish Culture* (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1984), pp. 15–52, 79–108.

(H. G. Adler, Paul Celan, Wilhelm Dichter, Ida Fink, Henryk Grynberg, Hans Keilson, Jakov Lind, Arnošt Lustig, Leyb Rochman, Chava Rosenfarb, Nelly Sachs, W. G. Sebald, Abraham Sutzkever), where did that leave Elie Wiesel, who wrote concurrently in Hebrew, Yiddish, French, and, in very short order, American English? Holocaust literature was written in a Babel of tongues by a veritable Noah's Ark of survivors, their progeny, and their disciples. Wherever Celan's bottle-poem washed ashore, its message would have to be transcribed, translated, and decoded – if believed at all.

Some child survivors embraced a new identity as far as possible away from the war and would only circle back at the safe remove of fiction. Uri Orlev, born Jerzy Henryk Orlowski, was just twenty-five and had yet to master modern Hebrew when he published his autobiographical novel *The Lead Soldiers* (1956), which tracked his and his younger brother's survival on the so-called "Aryan side" of Warsaw, no less fantastical a story than the games they invented to while away the time. Other child survivors waited much longer to publish: the international lawyer Louis Begley, born Ludwik Begleiter, until he was fifty-eight (*Wartime Lies*, 1991); the ballistics and image-processing expert Wilhelm Dichter until he was sixty-one (*God's Horse*, 1996, followed by *The Atheists' School*, 2000); and, least predictably, the preeminent Polish philologist, literary historian, and theorist Michał Głowiński, who was sixty-four before he revealed in *The Black Seasons* (1998) that he too had been a child in the Warsaw ghetto.

The passage of time that enabled these child survivors to come of age allowed also for the maturation of Holocaust literature, where two voices were better than one: that of the reimagined child and that of the adult narrator. In addition to writing a factual Prologue and Epilogue to *The Lead Soldiers*, Orlev interrupted the flow of his story ten times to remind readers of his authorial presence. *The Black Seasons* was a collage of traumatic early childhood memories, which the adult narrator deconstructed into memory traces – a word, a color, a knock on the window – to seek a Proustian corroboration, to ponder the vagaries of the human mind, and to penetrate the dark motives of the other actors. It can be read as a primer on Holocaust memory. Prompted by the success of *Wartime Lies* and its enthusiastic reception in Poland, Begley wrote an afterword to the second edition (2004), in which he separated fact from fiction and defended his choice of genre.

"The young are not afraid of telling the truth," First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt had assured her readers, which meant not only that children were authorized to narrate the terrors of war, but also that war stories

were appropriate reading for the young, Jacob Glatstein may have established the template in Jewish children's literature as early as 1940, with his action-adventure of *Emil and Karl*, two nine-year-old boys, one Christian, the other Jewish, in Nazi-occupied Vienna. Young people, Glatstein intuited, would identify most readily with members of their own cohort, and the tragic history just beginning to unfold would yield dramatic tales of last-minute rescue, whether from the German-speaking lands, via the Kindertransport, or from occupied Poland, with the Children of Teheran making their way to Mandatory Palestine. Like Anne Frank, other female protagonists who did not succumb to despair were the autobiographical heroine of Judith Kerr's *When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit* (1971) and the extremely bookish heroine of Markus Zusak's *The Book Thief* (2005), who was not even Jewish. A story about the ordeals of the young had the further potential of adoption as a course text in ever-expanding school curricula on the Holocaust: Orlev's *The Lead Soldiers* in Israel, Dichter's *God's Horse* in Poland, and Wiesel's *Night* in the USA.

Anne Frank, keeping Holocaust Time in a secret annex, was the harbinger of two major shifts in postwar writing, whereby every home or hideout became a battlefield in which gender and generational roles were upended. For the heroism of the Holocaust came to be understood as the heroism of small deeds, of parental sacrifice, bonding, loyalty, and love; its tragedy, contrariwise, as the tragedy of choiceless choices, sudden reversals, silences, and betrayals. But just as it took fifty years for Anne's emerging womanhood to complicate her virginal status, so it was an uphill struggle for the subjective wartime experience of women to be considered a subject worthy of Holocaust literature. Zofia Nałkowska's *Medaliony* (*Medallions*, 1947) and Delbo's *None of Us Will Return* (1946 / 1965) did not qualify as feminist classics, and not until 2003 would women account for fully a third of the 309 authors included in S. Lillian Kremer's *Holocaust Literature: An Encyclopedia of Writers and Their Work*.

Exemplifying this move was the Polish-Israeli writer Ida Fink in her meticulously crafted stories that staged the Holocaust as a series of intimate crises, domestic catastrophes, and individual moments of pathos and loss. From the first line of the Polish original, the narrator of "A Scrap of Time" was identifiable as a woman, and her escape, with her younger sister in hand, would constitute the story's plot line. But there was no escape from time; neither for the protagonists, who were trapped in Holocaust Time, when knowing the difference between a "round-up" of able-bodied men for forced labor and an *Aktion*, a round-up of all Jews for the purpose of killing them,

was a matter of life and death, nor for the survivor-narrator, forced to bear witness by “digging around in the ruins of memory” for that one scrap of time when cousin David emerged from his makeshift hiding place, behind the wall that separated him from the marketplace, and followed the urgings of his impatient heart straight into the abyss.²³ Readers came to expect that a work of Holocaust literature, whether memoir or fiction, written by a woman would inhabit such intimate spaces.

Entering the contested space between history and trauma, men and women, parents and children, neighbor and neighbor, murderer and victim, was the American-born cartoonist Art Spiegelman, whose *Maus I: My Father Bleeds History* appeared as a trade paperback in 1986. *Maus* was the intergenerational story of survival against all odds, marked by physical displacement and deep psychic wounds, chronicled in half a dozen borrowed tongues. How much, asked Spiegelman, could be gleaned of the Holocaust from the tale of a single survivor? Almost too much. Exploiting the latitude of animal fables while hearkening to the stark realism of such writers as Tadeusz Borowski and Levi, Spiegelman confounded art and historical instance, testing the limits of Holocaust literature. He engaged multiple simultaneous calendars, he mixed up traditions visual and literary, he merged comics and underground comix with more conventional iconography. Emboldened by Spiegelman’schutzpah and inspired by the wild success of his thirteen-year project, a second and later third generation of writers found its license and a voice more polyglot.

Vladek Spiegelman was hardly the first survivor to be scarred by his suffering and pursued by demons across a printed page. There had been Hertz Dovid Makover in I. B. Singer’s *Shadows on the Hudson* (1959) and Herman Broder in *Enemies: A Love Story* (1966), whose refugee bubble included survivors of the Gulag. And Sol Nazerman in Edward Lewis Wallant’s *The Pawnbroker* (1961); Raphael Schlemielovitch in Patrick Modiano’s *La Place de l’Étoile* (1968), Adam Stein, the on-again, off-again madman in Yoram Kaniuk’s *Adam Resurrected* (1969); Artur Sammler in Saul Bellow’s *Mr. Sammler’s Planet* (1970), Sophie Zawitowski in William Styron’s *Sophie’s Choice* (1979); and Rosa Lublin in Cynthia Ozick’s *The Shawl* (1983). There was that motley of uprooted Jews cast ashore in the Land of Israel in Aharon Appelfeld’s stories and novellas, from “Bertha,” in his inaugural collection of 1962 to *The Immortal Bartfuss* (1988), and

²³ I. Fink, *A Scrap of Time and Other Stories*, trans. M. Levine and F. Prose (New York, Pantheon, 1987), pp. 3–10; D. Feldman, “Translating oral memory and visual media in Ida Fink’s “Traces”, in B. Hofmann and U. Reuter (eds.), *Translated Memories: Transgenerational Perspectives on the Holocaust* (Lanham, MD, Lexington Books, 2020), pp. 31–4.

beyond. None of them was a moral visionary (Artur Sammler was half-blind); none was an incarnation of the triumph of the self over adversity. Sometimes no more than a shawl – faded to blankness, a palimpsest of grief and loss – bound them to life, or a photograph of their murdered son. But Vladek Spiegelman's résumé was of the Holocaust survivor who lived next door: a successful lover and businessman in prewar Poland; Auschwitz number 175113, still cutting a handsome figure in the photo of him in striped uniform (II:134); and a misanthrope and failed parent living in Rego Park.

In video testimonies, the survivors looked very different, when captured, collected, and preserved by the staff of the Fortunoff, Spielberg, and Yad Vashem video archives in tens of thousands of interviews with surviving victims and compassionate bystanders, often surrounded at interview's end by members of their loving family. The loneliness and ugliness of the Holocaust survivor was only one of the ways in which literature began to push back against the platitudes of public memory, rites of commemoration, and political rhetoric. *Maus*, too, began as an oral history project (interviewing his father, Spiegelman later admitted, gave them something to talk about other than their mutual disappointments²⁴); hence Spiegelman's vehement insistence that *Maus* be classified as non-fiction, even though, in *MetaMaus* (2011), he revealed his profound debt to a long line of writers, historians, and artists and laid bare the meticulous demands of diagramming a narrative through time, panel by panel.

In Spiegelman's bestiary, as in Kafka's, Mouse Folk were a metaphor for the Jewish people. Then came the predatory cats – the Germans – whom Spiegelman endowed with the most human faces; the pigs, or Poles, both victims and active collaborators; and the heroic vanquishers of cats, the (American) dogs. In wartime, allegory had been a clandestine means of resistance, whether in the cabaret theaters of the Terezín and Vilna ghettos or in Sartre's *No Exit* (1944). Now, due in large measure to Kafka, allegory became a staple of Holocaust literature. "Neither Dante nor Dostoevsky could have dreamed up such an unreal Hell," H. G. Adler wrote from Prague to his friend Franz Steiner in London on 9 July 1945, "though Kafka could, for he has become a prophet, a realistic prophet of these horrors."²⁵ To acknowledge Kafka, Adler named the protagonist of *The Journey* (1962), his second novel, Josef Kremer, also related to the Biblical Joseph who was wrongfully imprisoned.²⁶ Josef Roubick

²⁴ A. Spiegelman, *MetaMaus* (New York, Pantheon Books, 2011), p.24.

²⁵ Filkins, *H. G. Adler*, p. 173.

²⁶ H. Finch, 'Prague circles: H. G. Adler's Kafkaesque hope', in J. Creet, S. R. Horowitz, and A. Bojadzija-Dan (eds.), *H. G. Adler: Life, Literature, Legacy* (Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 2016), pp. 251–72, esp. p. 263.

was another stand-in for Josef K., living in a nameless city strikingly similar to Prague in Jiří Weil's *Life with a Star*, as were *Mr. Theodore Mundstock* (1963), Ladislav Fuks's mock-messiah, Jurek Becker's *Jacob the Liar* (1969) of ghetto fame; E.S., undergoing endless interrogations in Danilo Kiš's *Hourglass* (1972), and the Hebrew letter *Shin*, the second of two protagonists wandering *With Blind Steps over the Earth* in Leyb Rochman's sprawling novel (the first being his alter ego, Leybl).

In the company of his protégé, Aharon Appelfeld, Rochman read Kafka in tandem with the allegorical tales of Rabbi Nahman of Braslav. Kafka's example allowed Appelfeld to allegorize his childhood terrors as a nine- to eleven-year-old on the run and in hiding among peasants and prostitutes. Adapting the mystical abstractions and monochromatic timelessness of the Braslav tales, Appelfeld replaced Kabbalist symbolism with a symbolic landscape of his own: a bunker, a forest, a river, a mountain, a chapel, a fog (signifying a defective consciousness or neurosis), and, rarely, camps number 8 and 9 (never described). As in the *Tales* of Reb Nahman, the seekers were alone. Set apart from the bands of refugees and fellow-pilgrims, the female protagonists like *Tzili* (1983) were no less orphaned, abandoned, than the male. Rarely did a quest end with protagonists reaching their destination, either because they had no home left to go back to (*For Every Sin*, 1987) or because the train bound for perdition finally caught up with them (*To the Land of the Cattails*, 1986). Citified Jews, impeccable and well mannered, in such works as *Badenheim 1939* (1975), *Age of Wonders* (1975), and *The Retreat* (1982), remained slavishly loyal to German high culture and blind to the evil that was about to destroy them. They were Josef K.'s next of kin, their fate prejudged by virtue of having been born as Jews. While Spiegelman's mice, cats, pigs, and dogs were near-universal tropes that stood in for the family of humankind, and one family in particular, Appelfeld's cast of characters moved within a closed, claustrophobic, and tribal landscape, their lives divided in three. Between Time Before and Time After lay the Void.

As in Noah's Ark, writer-survivors found makeshift ways to affiliate with one another, often two by two, in a world that had cast them out. Edgar Hilsenrath met Jakov Lind while waiting in a long line of unemployed workers hoping for a day job in construction in Netanya, Israel. Grete Fischer, a co-founder of Club 43 in London for exiled German writers, took H. G. Adler under her wing, and many years later persuaded the Walter Verlag to accept his first novel, *Panorama*, for publication. He dedicated the book to her. Piotr Rawicz hung out with André Schwarz-Bart (and Elie Wiesel) in Paris, where they kibbitzed in both Yiddish and French. Most

famously, there were the two German-language poets-of-exile, Nelly Sachs and Paul Celan, who began to correspond in 1954. These close duets rendered Holocaust literature ever more autonomous, self-referential, and experimental; fiction magnified by such companionship made its way toward metafiction. On a spectrum of fact to fiction, these works were as spectral as they were specific, calling attention to their own devices, parodying their ancestors, eluding the sources to which they generously alluded, confabulating tragedy as comedy, acknowledging national, linguistic, temporal, religious, and social borders only to traduce them. Among the first of such hybrid works was Piotr Rawicz's *Blood from the Sky* (1961), both a fragmented autobiography and a cynical commentary. Among the most ambitious were the Croatian novelist Daša Drndić's *Sonnenschein* (translated as *Trieste*, 2007) and *Belladonna* (2012). Part testimony, part allegory, part novel, *Trieste* so blurred the genres that they were sometimes impossible to separate. Thus the uncategorizability of Holocaust literature became a defining feature of the genre, as if the catastrophe as ineffable experience had thrust the novel back to its points of origin: the Odyssey, Genesis, the Apocalypse.

STUMBLING STONES

Throughout Europe and Russia, from Paris to Ferrara to Minsk, and from Helsinki to Athens (but not in Munich), there are now more than 75,000 10-centimeter cubes, each rising from a brass plate laid in the pavement of more than 1,200 cities and towns. They are aptly called *Stolpersteine*, "stumbling stones," because, while going about their lives, passersby will blunder upon these brutally worded epitaphs, inscribed in the language of the land. Each commemorates victims just outside their last-known residence, before they were deported to their named destination of death. Because such *Stolpersteine* signify the presence of absence; because they represent random or arbitrary appropriations of the past (personal memory can start anywhere, lead anywhere); and because they mark the spatial turn in Holocaust commemoration after the collapse of the Soviet Union, these stumbling stones can also serve as contemporary cairns or guides to Holocaust literature.

Maps themselves come with the territory. The moment that the Frank family moved into the secret annex, Anne drew a triple-tiered sketch of the layout in her diary. In Part I of *Maus*, forty-four years later, Vladek Spiegelman

similarly sketched their coal bunker in the Zawierce ghetto for the benefit of his American-born son (I:110). Artie, in turn, felt obliged to provide a comic-book-scale map of Vladek's tortured odyssey (II: 84), the death march from Auschwitz in Poland to Groß-Rosen in Germany, to orient the reader. So much of second-generation Holocaust writing is a quest narrative that maps are central, be it a prewar map of the Polish shtetl of Konin on the flyleaf of Theo Richmond's *Konin: A Quest* (1995), or two photographs of hand-drawn maps of the shtetl of Belechow (present-day Bolekhiv, Ukraine) in Daniel Mendelsohn's *The Lost: A Search for Six of Six Million* (2006).

Maps have become de rigueur because current Holocaust literature is often the account of a desperate search to unearth half-buried secrets, locate missing persons, or reclaim ancestors or ancestral routes. Patrick Modiano's *Dora Bruder* begins as the author happens upon the notice of a missing girl printed in a Parisian newspaper of December 1941. It will take him eight years to reconstruct the months between the time the fifteen-year-old girl went missing and the time of her arrest, and in the English edition of 1999 (though not the French original), his detective story comes with maps of his 12th and 18th Arrondissements, areas he knows well from his own walks through a Paris townscape that twists into a manifold of terror where one runaway girl will at last speak for the fate of all Jewish children deported to Auschwitz.²⁷ Daša Drndić likewise had no personal connection to Haya Tedeschi, whose genealogy, wartime fate, and sixty-two years of waiting to be reunited with her lost son are about to end on 3 July 2006, when the novel *Trieste* begins. But, in order to situate the reader "in that accursed blot on the three-way border, at the intersection of four languages and invisible pasts, . . . [where] only occasionally does ordinary life gleam forth, like a flash from the sky that sticks to the windowpane and on it, dies,"²⁸ the front matter includes a map of the Adriatic, with names of four death camps squeezed into the top right corner.

The cartography of Holocaust literature takes the reader from ordinary life to the bare, biological life of the labor and death camps and back, just as fifteen-year-old György Köves, the first-person narrator of Imre Kertész's novel *Fatelessness* (1975), goes straight from a regular school day to Auschwitz and Buchenwald – and back home again, only to face a bevy of uncomprehending listeners. Sometimes the journey is dead-ended; no matter how dogged the narrator's pilgrimage through

²⁷ E. H. McGlothlin, *Second-Generation Holocaust Literature: Legacies of Survival and Perpetration* (Rochester, NY, Camden House, 2006), pp. 125–8.

²⁸ D. Drndić, *Trieste*, trans. E. Elias-Bursać and L. Format (Boston and New York, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014), p. 106.

the British countryside in Sebald's *The Emigrants* (1992), he fails to excavate Dr. Henry Selwyn, Paul Bereyter, Ambros Adelwarth, and Max Ferber from a melancholy that has collapsed into the past.

Fred Wander wrote *The Seventh Well* (1971) in Leipzig, East Germany, hardly a hospitable place for a Jewish survivor to revisit his odyssey of internments, multiple escapes, enslavements, and two death marches. Not unusually for Holocaust literature, thirty-four years elapsed before the novel was republished, with an afterword by his Ark companion and fellow Viennese Ruth Kluger, whose provocative Holocaust memoir, *Still Alive*, had recently appeared in English. Wander, unfortunately, did not live to see *The Seventh Well* (2008) in English translation, complete with a chronology of his life, from May 1938 to June 1945, a Translator's Afterword, which mercifully condensed Wander's 400-page autobiography into 6; biographical notes on the translator and author, and a 2-page map of "Fred Wander, Europe 1938–1945."

Although it includes both such notorious place names as Gurs, Drancy, Buchenwald, Auschwitz, and Groß-Rosen and places known only to cartographers of catastrophe, this map is woefully inadequate, because Wander's rich cast of characters who narrate the novel's twelve chapters are not situated therein, and their provenance matters greatly, because Wander gives pride of place to Mendel Teichmann, his alter-ego, to Mordche Rabinowicz, the singer, to the formerly rich farmer Meir Bernstein, and to sixteen-year-old Tadeusz Moll of the Auschwitz Sonderkommando, who, when he talked, was a child and an old man all in one. None of them survived. But their wit and wisdom, their profound sense of home, and their struggle to maintain an inner life added to the vast echo chamber that is Holocaust literature.

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