

**GHOST IMAGES: REPRESENTATIONS OF SECOND-GENERATION  
MEMORY IN CONTEMPORARY CHILDREN'S LITERATURE**

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*Ghost Images: Representations of Second-Generation Memory in Contemporary Children's Literature*, studies how texts produced for and about children represent the child's unique capacity to remember events that preceded her/his birth in order to address questions of how traumatic historical events should be remembered and mourned. Drawing on such theorists and critics as Augustine, Maurice Halbwachs, Henri Bergson, Walter Benjamin, Paul Ricoeur, and Marianne Hirsch, I argue that second-generation memory may be defined, first, by its position at the critical intersection between collective and individually-experienced memory, and second, by its reliance upon the mimetic faculty. Insofar as such an order of memory depends heavily on intergenerational relationships between witnesses and their children, and insofar as it depends upon a capacity for mimetic thought and action (which, according to Benjamin, is most dramatically evidenced in the figure of the child) I elaborate of this definition and its implications by performing close readings of recently published texts produced for and/or about children, such as Helen Epstein's *Children of the Holocaust*, Zlata Filipovic's *Zlata's Diary*, Marsha Forchuk Skrypuch's *The Hunger*, Judy Blume's *Starring Sally J. Freedman as Herself*, and M. Night Shyamalan's feature film, *The Sixth Sense*. In my analyses of these respective texts, I elaborate on how second-generation memory is shaped by the political discourses of diasporic and national communities, the relationship between the intergenerational and intertextuality, and dominant cultural notions of childhood. Moreover, I consider how the proliferation of texts such as these during the last quarter of the twentieth century may be indicative of a general cultural inclination to memorialize – often without romanticizing – past traumatic events, an inclination that has been

largely influenced by the development of the new media, multicultural discourse, and the effects of globalization.

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## **I. Ghost Images: An Introduction**

In Lois Lowry's Newbery-award-winning fantasy novel, *The Giver* (1993), a young boy named Jonas is chosen by his community to receive its collectively repressed memories. Everyday after school, Jonas must report to an old man known simply as The Giver, who confers upon the boy one of the community's memories that he himself received as a child. The process by which The Giver transfers "his" memories to Jonas is radically physical in character: it requires the old man to lay his hands on Jonas, who in turn viscerally experiences a stream of memory-images as his body remains in a catatonic state. Initially, the memories Jonas experiences are pleasant ones that give him the sensation of sledding down a snowy hill, basking in the sunlight, and sitting by the fireplace on a cheerful family holiday – phenomena that are conspicuously absent in the protagonist's own climate-controlled and highly regimented society. However, as Jonas progresses in his tutelage under The Giver, the memories he receives become increasingly disturbing, as he begins to experience the death-throes of soldiers on the battlefield and the starvation of animals struggling to survive in their polluted habitats. Despite the tremendous toll that these vicarious experiences begin to take on Jonas, however, he comes to recognize the importance of each of the memories – both those that are pleasant and those that are distressing – that he has begun to carry within him; consequently, he endeavors to return them to the community that has repressed them for so long.

Lowry's novel is only one of a great many children's novels published in the last quarter of the twentieth century that features a child protagonist who takes on the memory of events that preceded his birth – and it is one of a still greater number of

children's books that strives to impress upon its readers the importance of remembering historical events, no matter how catastrophic they might have been. Some of these novels, such as Lowry's other Newbery-award winning text, *Number the Stars* (1989), as well as Esther Hautzig's *The Endless Steppe* (1987) and Adam Bagdasarian's *Forgotten Fire* (2000) rely on the conventions of historical realism to transport their readers to more distant moments of the twentieth century – the Holocaust, Stalinist efforts at “dekulakization,” and the Armenian genocide, respectively – in order to make present to young people events that they certainly did not live through, and of whose occurrence they might otherwise have been ignorant. Other novels, such as Marsha Forchuk Skrypuch's *The Hunger* (1999), Han Nolan's *If I Should Die Before I Wake* (1994), and Jane Yolen's *The Devil's Arithmetic* (1988), feature protagonists who are literally sent back in time in order to witness first-hand genocidal events experienced by their grandparents or elderly neighbors. Moreover, non-fictional texts that confront events existing within many of their young reader's living memories, such as Zlata Filipovic's Bosnian wartime-diary, *Zlata's Diary* (1993), seek to make more vivid and convincing their descriptions of contemporary events by alluding to earlier instances of historical trauma that even their own authors did not directly experience.

Admittedly, the past has long been a rich source of material for children's novels, a fact that is evidenced in the abundance of such texts as Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House on the Prairie* (1935), Esther Forbes's *Johnny Tremain* (1943), and Harold Keith's Newbery-award winning Civil War novel, *Rifles for Watie* (1957). Moreover, the time-travel narrative is equally prevalent in children's books such as Philippa Pearce's widely-acclaimed *Tom's Midnight Garden* (1958). However, the images of the past these earlier

novels conjure are comparatively optimistic and bright when compared to many of the historical and time-travel novels published roughly after 1970. If the past, as L.P. Hartley writes in *The Go-Between*, is a “foreign country,” then the lands in these earlier novels are places that one might wish to travel to on holiday, set as they are amidst golden-hued vistas and moonlit ice-skating ponds, and populated as they tend to be with earnest soldiers, hard-working fathers, and delightfully mischievous children. By contrast, a great number of children’s texts published in the last quarter of the twentieth century tend toward a more dystopic image of the past in which innocents are killed without reason and earnestness and nobility go unrewarded – and they spare the reader no small detail of the ravages of the past. Moreover – and perhaps most significantly – these more contemporary texts contain within them a severe admonition against forgetting: they insist, in other words, that no matter how painful a confrontation with the events they recreate may be, such events must be remembered at all costs, even to the point that they are incorporated into the reader’s own archive of directly experienced events.

This relatively new tendency in children’s literature to dwell on horrific or otherwise unsettling aspects of the past invites several questions, all of which I intend to address in this dissertation. What, for example, are the various historical, material conditions that underlie the sudden disengagement in children’s literature from idyllic or nostalgic visions of the past and its newly-focused attention on history’s darker and more regrettable episodes? Why, in other words, has children’s literature come to insist – as, for example, Lowry’s novel clearly does – that memories of past atrocities are as worthy of being remembered as those of more pleasant or glorious events? Initially, it may be readily replied that these texts appear against the backdrop of some of the most horrific

and decidedly inglorious events of the century, if not of recorded history – Auschwitz, the gulag, the threat of nuclear annihilation precipitated by the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki – and thus that, in the wake of these events and the gradual dying off of their survivors, works of children’s literature must take it upon themselves to capture and transmit their afterimages, as it were, so as to ensure that the future generations they address may finally actualize the by-now tired slogan, “Never Again.” Certainly, this explanation is a credible one – indeed, it is one I will address later in this chapter – but it is ultimately an insufficient argument. After all, pre-twentieth century history is certainly not lacking in instances of massive bloodshed and trauma: no one should doubt the suffering and destruction wrought, for example, by the Crusades or the Inquisition or the extermination of the indigenous people of the Americas, just as no one should fail to recognize that the various revolutions and civil wars otherwise celebrated by literature were in fact quite bloody affairs. Why, then, have works of children’s literature only recently begun to admit to the tremendous violence of the past (not to mention the violence inherent in the present) and why, moreover, do they tend to confine such recognition to the relatively recent events of the twentieth century – the Holocaust especially, but also other inglorious hallmarks of what Samantha Power calls the “age of genocide”?<sup>i</sup> On what changing visions of childhood are these representations predicated and on what deeply entrenched notions of childhood do they still nevertheless rely – and what constitutes the relationship between these inherent concepts of childhood and the increasingly graphic historical content of texts written for and about children? Moreover, how might a study of radical innovations in technology made possible in the latter part of the twentieth century illuminate both the changes in received notions of childhood and

the arguably coincident shift in historical representations deemed acceptable – or even necessary – in books written for and about children?

The question that is perhaps most crucial to this dissertation, however, pertains to the particular concept of memory that underlies the content and structure of the children's books in question. A text such as Lowry's *The Giver*, for example, relies on the notion that a child is not only capable of remembering events that preceded his birth, but that he can remember such events as though they constituted the repertoire of his own, deeply personal and directly experienced memory, so long as he is placed into contact with another bearer – or, as it were, “giver” – of memory, and so long as he is situated in a particular orientation to the society whose collective memories he absorbs. In turn, *The Giver*, structured as it is as a contemporary fable of memory and repression, calls its own readers to adopt its protagonist's position and to excavate and incorporate within their own index of experience those memories of the past their own given community would just as soon forget. The charge given to both Lowry's Jonas and to the reader who follows his adventures is a formidable one indeed, and while it finds particularly brilliant expression in Lowry's novel, it is one that is rearticulated in any number of contemporary children's texts. How, then, have these texts begun to reconceptualize memory in such a way that it might be understood without predicating the category of experience? In other words, do prevailing theories of memory allow for the possibility that recollection extends beyond the constricting boundaries of individual experience, and do children's books that might otherwise be dismissed as simply exercises in fantasy intuitively grasp at this possibility? If so, what then prompts these texts' correlation between a non-experientially-based memory and its particular manifestation in children? What potential

do these texts recognize in children to incorporate others' memories as their own, and what, moreover, impels them to suggest that children are equally capable of facilitating the work of mourning that such memory demands?

In order to address and elaborate on these questions throughout the course of this dissertation, I propose the term “second-generation memory” as a guiding concept which might frame this discussion. Second-generation memory, as I will argue later in this chapter, is a form of cultural memory that is dependent upon its bearer's recognition of the ways in which the discourses and habits that have interpellated her as a subject situate her within a particular orientation to the past that allows her to consider this past, in effect, as her proper inheritance. Such a form of memory, I argue, is characterized by its bearer's particular negotiation of the difference that lies between the past's absence and its loss – or, to put it differently, its paradoxical status of “being no longer” and nevertheless “once having been.” This negotiation, which is certainly one that preoccupies the historian who seeks to discover, quantify, and qualify empirically-verifiable traces of the past in light of its ultimate eclipse by the present, is of particular significance to the bearer of second-generation memory, who endeavors to understand how traces of the past resonate within, and ultimately structure, her own perceptions. Moreover, and perhaps most significantly, second-generation memory is characterized by a mimetic inclination to observe correspondences between images of the past and images perceived within the present and thus to redeem the past by first recognizing its survival within the present.

This phenomenon of “second-generation memory,” is a relatively new object of inquiry and representation in texts written for and about children, and it is one that is

intimately tied to a vision of the past that is dark rather than consoling – a past that looms ominously over the present just as a nightmare skirts the edges of waking consciousness. It is this haunting quality of second-generation memory that impels me to entitle this dissertation *Ghost Images*. The ghost – a figure that is most feared and revered by children and by those adults whose superstitions often prompt their dismissal as “naïve” and “childlike” – marks an absent presence, or, inversely, a present absence; that is, the liminal figure of the ghost signals a disturbing gap that exists between the recognition of an event’s “having been” and its “being no longer.” It is precisely this gap, I argue, that most concerns the bearer of second-generation memory. Even as the apparent differences between the historical context in which she lives and that which preceded her birth, as well as her recognition that her elders’ suffering and dispossession can never fully be “made right,” force her to confront the fact that the past will never be recovered, she nevertheless recognizes that it *did once exist*, and that, moreover, traces of its prior existence occasionally flicker, ghost-like, in her own use of language, her relationships with those around her, and her orientation to her present material circumstances. Additionally, the figure of the ghost brings with it a troubling imperative: it demands to be seen, and it likewise demands that the burden of unresolved suffering it carried in a former life be shouldered by those still living. In effect, the dead King Hamlet’s command to his surviving son is crystallized in his final words – “remember me” – and it is precisely this injunction that is internalized by the bearer of second-generation memory, and then externalized once more in works of children’s literature (*Hamlet* 1.5.91).



The title *Ghost Images* refers as well to a term used in photography to designate two or more photographic images that are superimposed onto one another (more often than not, accidentally) and whose coincidence on photographic paper produces an eerie effect on the viewer. The photographic ghost image is thus an appropriate metaphor for second-generation memory insofar as such memory involves the merging of images of the past with those of the present. The ghost image carries even greater metaphorical weight, moreover, in its obvious connection to the mechanical reproduction of aesthetic images. As I will argue later in this chapter – and in the entirety of the dissertation more generally – the second generation memory that the children’s texts in question seek to represent (and at times instantiate) is a particular effect of the circulation of the mass-reproduced images that reach the innermost confines of quotidian Western life. It is perhaps not coincidental that children’s texts that address second-generation memory begin to emerge at precisely a moment in history when images of atrocity – for example, those of the Vietnam war, the Cambodian genocide, revolution and repression in the Middle East and Latin America, and, most recently, the events of September 11 – find their way directly into households by way of television (and, more recently, the Internet) to such an extent that they become, as it were, domesticated. The sheer quantity of such images of disaster and their capacity to reach any number of spectators, regardless of age or level of comprehension, speaks dramatically to their potential of being grafted onto an individual’s present perception. It speaks, moreover, to a particular mode of perception that is enabled by the rich and complex intertextuality inherent within the new media which, in turn, prompts us to consider the interpenetration of intertextuality and the intergenerational.

Finally, the title *Ghost Images* speaks to works of children's literature themselves and to the especially intimate connection such works have to memory. In a 1929 essay entitled, simply, "Children's Literature," Walter Benjamin writes that we tend to remember our childhoods through the stories we read and the games we played as children:

You've all heard people say, "Lord! In my childhood, we weren't so well off! We were all afraid of getting poor marks. We weren't even allowed to walk on the beach barefoot!" But have you ever heard anyone say, "Lord! When I was young, we didn't have such nice games to play!" Or, "When I was little, there weren't such wonderful story books!" No. Whatever people read or played with in their childhood not only seems in memory to have been the most beautiful and best thing possible; it often, wrongly, seems unique. (250)

Benjamin's remarks succinctly address two crucial aspects of the relationship between children's literature and memory. The first – which he elaborates on extensively in his *Arcades Project*<sup>ii</sup> – is that memory (here, specifically childhood memory) is structured through an interaction with material objects and narratives: we remember our childhoods, in part, through the books we once read and still cherish. The second – also an object of inquiry in the *Arcades* – is that individual memories of such interactions are not at all "unique," but rather place us into relation to others whose childhood memories are inflected by the same objects and narratives. This critical intersection of individual and cultural memory, made possible through children's books, is analogous to the

intersection between the individual and the cultural at work in second-generation memory, and it is for this reason that children's books offer a particularly critical juncture for the investigation of second-generation memory. Moreover, if, as Benjamin's statement makes clear, the images we once encountered in our most cherished children's books have become superimposed onto, and inseparable from, our memories of childhood, then it seems appropriate to investigate the "ghost-image-like" character of second-generation memory through one of the forms which dramatically generates its effects. Finally, children's books tend to occupy a key place within intergenerational relationships: for example, parents hand down their beloved books to their own children and select and read new books to their children – and, inversely, children often contest their parents' desires by reading books that might not win their parents' approval (as one might observe in the incredible popularity of Judy Blume's often critically-dismissed children's novels). In this way, then, children's literature lends itself to the study of a form of memory that is shaped, in part, by the interaction of one generation and the next and that makes visible the interpenetration of the intergenerational and intertextuality.

### **Second Generation Memory and Post Memory**

By constructing the term "second generation memory" as a guiding concept for this study, I must first situate it in relationship with, but at a critical distance from, other formulations of non-experientially-based memory. While other scholars have suggested terms for non-experientially-based memory – including "absent memory,"<sup>iii</sup> "afterimages of history,"<sup>iv</sup> and "prosthetic memory"<sup>v</sup> – the term that has achieved the greatest currency in academic circles – including, significantly, the field of children's literature<sup>vi</sup> – has been

Marianne Hirsch's concept of "postmemory," an order of memory that "is distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection" (22). In her preface to her study of photography and narrative, Hirsch questions why old family photographs taken before her birth evince in her a strong affective response even as they appear to others to be, at best, simply curious relics. Relating an anecdote about the radically different reactions she and her cousin had to the same photograph of Hirsch's grandmother (the cousin's great-aunt) before the second world war, Hirsch writes that she "needed to explain why images that to my cousin were anonymous, meaningless, and even funny, because she could not identify them, to me would have been integral pieces to a life story, full of meaning and resonance" (xii). In the discussion that follows, Hirsch qualifies this affective relationship to an unexperienced past as "postmemory," which, she argues, "characterizes the experience of those who grew up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood nor recreated" (22). Postmemory, she argues further, is a "powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation" (22). Photography, according to Hirsch, is the privileged medium of postmemory insofar as individual photographs preserve an "enduring 'umbilical' connection" between a generation that directly experienced the events appearing within them and a later generation that looks upon them with a certain amount of personal investment but nevertheless without that immediate recognition effected by direct experience. The bearer of postmemory, she argues, "fills in what the picture leaves out:

the horror of looking is not necessarily in the image but in the story the viewer provides to fill in what has been omitted” (21). It is the potential of the photograph simultaneously to invite a creative investment in the past and to deny full access to it – thus placing its viewer in that state of in-between-ness that Hirsch qualifies as postmemory – that Hirsch sees dramatized, for example, in Art Spiegelman’s Holocaust comic book *Maus*, in which black and white photographs of the author’s survivor parents and murdered older brother “break the frame” of the illustrated text, at once dramatically calling attention to the past’s material “having been” and to its “unbearable” absence (32).

Initially, Hirsch’s account of postmemory appears to be a satisfactory one with which to evaluate the specific representations of non-experientially-based memory with which this dissertation is concerned – especially insofar as Hirsch’s concept calls attention to the paradox, perhaps most palpably felt by children of trauma survivors, of the past’s simultaneous “having been” and its “being no longer.” However, while Hirsch’s concept of postmemory resonates to a certain extent with the non-experientially-based memory that I interrogate and elaborate on in this dissertation – and thus, while it may seem that my own neologism, “second-generation memory,” appears redundant in light of Hirsch’s already established one – I wish to distance my conceptualization of memory from her own for several reasons.

The immediate difficulty with the term “post-memory” lies precisely in the prefix, “post.” Not only does this prefix situate Hirsch’s term within a troubling proliferation of “posts” (e.g., post-feminism, post-Marxism, and post-modernism<sup>vii</sup>), but it implies a distance, if not a separation, of the kind of memory she explores from memory itself. While Hirsch insists that post-memory “has certainly not taken us beyond

memory,” the latter part of her qualification suggests otherwise. That is, by distinguishing post-memory “from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection,” Hirsch’s concept depends upon a binary between, on the one hand, memory as a strictly individual, experience-based phenomenon, and, on the other hand, history as a detached and impersonal engagement with the past. What this formulation neglects – or overrides – is first, the inextricable relationship between individual memory and collective or cultural memory, and second, the necessary intersection between memory and history.

By insisting that post-memory is distinguished from memory-proper by “generational distance,” Hirsch’s statement implies an understanding of “memory” (as opposed to post-memory) as a phenomenon that originates strictly from *individual* experience; hence, “generational distance” from an event somehow makes it less pure, because, rather than arising from individual perception, it has become socially mediated. While Hirsch admits that memory of direct experience is itself subject to mediation – most clearly when she writes that postmemory is “as full and as empty, certainly as constructed as memory itself” – her distancing of postmemory from that of individual recollection (concretized here in the prefix “post) implies a certain hierarchy: despite her insistence that postmemory is “as” constructed as memory, memory still has the distinction of direct contact with the past that postmemory does not and thus, mediated though it might be, memory-proper (for lack of a better term) has a deeply individual and intimate relationship with the past that postmemory decidedly lacks. In this way, postmemory cannot be considered as memory in the full sense of the term.

Hirsch's qualification of memory-proper as a phenomenon that is both individualized and predicated on direct experience of the past places her formulation squarely within the tradition that Paul Ricouer, following Charles Taylor, terms the "school of inwardness,"<sup>viii</sup> whose genealogy he traces through Augustine to Locke to Husserl. If, according to Ricouer, the Greek tradition articulated a concept of selfhood only insofar as it involved an individual's membership in the *polis*, Augustine's first-person-narrated and profoundly self-reflexive *Confessions* marked a significant rupture in this orientation to identity. Not only, Ricouer argues, does Augustine put forth a startlingly new image of an "inner man," but he does so through the category of memory: in the *Confessions*, one finds the "inner man remembering himself" by exploring his "self-contained storehouse" of memory that is inseparable from his own essence (98). While Augustine "does not know the *equating* of identity, self, and identity" – an equation Ricouer attributes to Locke – he nevertheless recognizes, as his Greek predecessors did not, an essential relationship between memory and being: memory, for Augustine, is a "faculty of my soul" and a "part of my nature" (Ricouer, 97, 98, emphasis mine). For Ricouer, then, Augustine is the "initiator" of a tradition in which individuals attribute memories to themselves – a tradition that is still immanent in contemporary linguistic practices, as in *se souvenir de*, French verb form for "to remember" whose literal translation into English, "I remember to myself," makes clear the (originally Augustinian) act of attribution of memories to oneself that is inherent within this contemporary speech act (96-97). Clearly, it is this tradition of attribution that is inherent within Hirsch's formulation of memory-proper, which is distinguished from postmemory by its claim on, or attribution of, individual memories.

However, as Ricouer later argues, it is precisely the act of self-attribution that ultimately leads to an understanding of memory that is as collectively shared as it is personal. According to Ricouer, “it is the capacity to designate oneself as the possessor of one’s own memories that leads to attributing to others the same mnemonic phenomena as to oneself” (128). In turn, the act of attributing memories to others as well as to oneself makes way for the recognition that memories of experienced events are never completely individual but are rather woven thickly within the tapestry of others’ memories, which complement, confirm, and fulfill one’s own. This is especially evident, Ricouer writes, in one’s interaction with close relations, who “approve of my existence and whose existence I approve of in reciprocity and equality of esteem” (132). One’s circle of close relations, he posits, marks an “intermediate level of reference between the poles of individual memory and collective memory, where concrete exchanges operate between the living memory of individual persons and the public memory of the communities to which we belong” (131). That is, memory is neither completely personal – as the “school of inwardness” would have it – nor fundamentally collective – as sociologists as Maurice Halbwachs insist<sup>ix</sup> – but rather is formed in the space of interpenetration of these two spheres, where attribution of memories to oneself implies an equal attribution of memories to others.

It is precisely this “intermediate level” in which personal memories are exchanged and confirmed that Hirsch, in her study of the “umbilical” quality of family photographs and family memory, is most concerned. However, unlike Ricouer, Hirsch stops short of recognizing that this intimate space of exchange is a necessary dimension of memory-proper and that personal memories only achieve their shape and vitality once articulated



in the company of others. Instead, she consigns this particular space of confirmation and disputation to a *secondary* order of memory (that is, postmemory) that is necessarily at a remove from – indeed, separated from – memory-proper. In doing so, she affirms the capacity of individuals to attribute memories to themselves without, however, admitting that such self-attribution necessarily leads to the mutual attribution of such a capacity to others and thus that individual recollection is as collectively shared as it is personal. Indeed, Hirsch does not at all account for the phenomenon of collective memory more generally, which lies between the twin poles she establishes between personal memory and history; rather, she insists that this space is solely the domain of postmemory. Thus, her term, postmemory, appears to be just another idiom for collective memory. That is, she fails to explain how postmemory – which she characterizes as an order of memory that is not based on personal recollection but is rather shaped and informed by the shared memory of others – is any different from what others have called collective memory. Moreover, in neglecting to distinguish postmemory from collective memory (or even the “intermediary” space of personal and collective memory elaborated on by Ricoeur), she does not account for how postmemory *operates in relation to* collective memory.

If Hirsch’s formulation does not consider the relationship between personal and collective memory and postmemory’s orientation to and operation within such a relationship, it neglects entirely to consider postmemory’s relationship with another form of memory – that is, habit memory, or what Henri Bergson calls “pure memory.” While Hirsch’s formulation draws explicitly on a view of memory as recollection – or as an intellectual, contemplative operation – it does not take into account those aspects of memory that are radically physical and spontaneous in character, and thus it further

postpones questions of the yet other ways in which memory transcends the domain of the personal. According to Bergson, the body, which is “placed between the objects which act upon it and those which it influences, is only a conductor, the office of which it is to receive movements and to transmit them (when it does not arrest them) to certain motor mechanisms, determined if the action is reflex, chosen if the action is voluntary” (77). In other words, the physical body can “store up the action of the past” in its own acquired motor responses to its environment (77). This form of memory is as tactile as it is visual. For example, if a piece of furniture were to be removed from a person’s living room, that individual, upon walking across the room, might reflexively swerve out of the way as he encounters the place where that couch or table once was positioned, so accustomed he has become to doing so when the piece of furniture was once an obstacle in his path. That is, the person’s ability to remember a proscribed path has become so ingrained that one might “believe it innate”; such memory, Bergson writes, is “lived and acted, rather than represented” (81).

Bergson’s characterization of habit-memory would seem to render it an essentially individual form of memory; however, habit memory – like recollection, in Halbwachs’s formulation – more than frequently occurs within and in response to the social. The extent to which habit-memory – or what Bergson calls “pure” memory – is socially and politically mediated is demonstrated in Michel Foucault’s discussion of “docile bodies” in *Discipline and Punish*. “Good handwriting,” Foucault writes, for example, “presupposes a gymnastics – a whole routine whose rigorous code invests the body in its entirety, from the points of the feet to the tip of the index finger” (152). No doubt, a person is generally not conscious that, when he produces a particularly well-

scripted sentence or signature, his “left leg must be somewhat more forward under the table than the right” or that a “distance of two fingers must be left between the body and the table” or that the “right arm must be at a distance from the body of about three fingers and must be about five fingers from the table, on which it must rest lightly” (152). And yet, this is precisely the posture one is taught to assume, at a very young age, in order to produce “correct” handwriting – and it is one that is repeatedly assumed until it appears to become “second nature.” Despite the apparently innate quality of the act of handwriting, however, it is ultimately the result of a precise mode of discipline. An individual “writes well” because he has first been taught to do so – that is, he has first given over his body to the manipulation of his teachers, who have taught him how to hold it in a manner which might best produce a specific result. In this way, his particular bearing makes legible – quite literally – the structures of power that have formed him as a subject: if the product of his labors is successful, it testifies to his internalization of socially “correct” gestures and codes him variously as “conscientious,” “educated,” “refined,” or otherwise “of good breeding.” Thus, even the most minute embodied gesture speaks to the social mediation of habit and, consequently, to the indelible impression left by one generation on the next.

By situating her formulation of memory and postmemory solely in terms of recollection – and thus, by neglecting to account for the role that habit memory may have in this relationship – Hirsch evades considering the ways in which habit memory challenges the clear distinction she envisions between memory and postmemory. For example, if an individual unconsciously develops certain regimes, tics, and compulsions in the aftermath of a traumatic event (for instance, eating his meals quickly even when

there is no danger that his food will be taken away from him, or compulsively turning off light switches even when there is no threat of an air-raid or shortage of resources) such habits may in turn be imitated and internalized by his children. In this sense, it may be possible to say that *both* the father and his children have physically (but not necessarily consciously or intellectually) embodied the memory of the original traumatic event. Considered from this perspective, it becomes increasingly difficult to determine who, in effect, “owns” the embodied memory of the original event: rather, it is collectively shared, and exists somewhere in the nebulous grey area between the personal and the public. What then, one might ask, is the place of postmemory within this context? If postmemory, according to Hirsch, occurs after the fact of the original trauma within an individual who has not directly experienced it, how then does one account for the ways in which she might replicate the habit memory of her parent who *has* experienced the event? Where, in this case, does one draw the line between memory-proper and postmemory?

While I do not wish to belabor a critique of Hirsch’s formulation of postmemory, I nevertheless find it necessary to engage with her account on one final point – that is, the position she assigns history within her analysis. In addition to distinguishing postmemory from memory-proper by virtue of postmemory’s “generational distance” from the originally experienced event (but nevertheless overlooking the ways in which mutual attribution, collective memory, and habit complicate such a distinction), Hirsch further differentiates postmemory from *history*, which, in her account, lacks an intimate relationship to the past that is inherent within both memory-proper and postmemory. In doing so, Hirsch founds her argument on a problematic opposition between memory and history. In his discussion of Holocaust memory, Dominick LaCapra argues that while

memory cannot be directly equated by history, it nevertheless cannot be posited as “history’s opposite” (20). There is a tendency in academic circles, LaCapra notes, to polarize history and memory in ways that privilege one term over another. On one hand, memory is, according to a certain perspective, a fictionalized, mythologized, and excessively affective perception of the past that is rationalized and objectively studied by “history as a demythologized form of secular enlightenment” (17). On the other hand, memory is often considered as a “more authentic, real, living” orientation to the past that is subsequently destroyed by the coldly-detached, quantifying efforts of history – a bias LaCapra especially observes in his study of Pierre Nora’s concept of *lieux de memoire*<sup>x</sup> (17). Such critical orientations to the relationship between memory and history are, according to LaCapra, opposite sides of the same coin: they depend – as Hirsch’s own formulation does – on a binary opposition of memory and history. Clearly, memory *can* mythologize the past. For example, the commonly-held notion that Nazis made their Jewish victims into soap is empirically unfounded. However, such memory nevertheless holds some “figurative value”: it speaks, for example, to the Nazis’ tendency to reduce Jews to objects, as well as to a certain “homeopathic” orientation to Jews that involved an assimilation or internalization of those qualities deemed “Jewish” as a manner of “inoculation” against perceived Jewish “contamination” (19). The duty of history, LaCapra writes, is thus to test memory’s affective orientation to the past – to account, for example, for the empirically-guaranteed ways that Nazis *did* objectify their Jewish victims. Once history – an intellectual and abstract discipline – “loses its contact with” memory – a personal and affective phenomenon – it tends, according to LaCapra, “to

address dead issues that no longer elicit evaluative and emotional interest and investment” (20).

Thus, one might infer that, in LaCapra’s view, history and memory based on original experience (e.g., witness narrative) meet and engage with one another on the terrain of cultural or collective memory, in which individual memories are disseminated and incorporated into a collectively-shared image of the past and subsequently inform, and are tested by, history. Yet, in Hirsch’s view, it is postmemory, and not cultural or collective memory, that constitutes the intersection of individual memory and history. Thus, once again, one is prompted to consider what differentiates postmemory from cultural memory.

In putting forth a critique of Hirsch’s concept of postmemory, it has not been my intention to set up her argument as a proverbial straw-man vulnerable to gratuitous burning – in fact, I find several aspects of Hirsch’s study of photography and memory quite valuable and, no doubt, her discussion of Holocaust photographs of children has especially informed the case studies contained within this dissertation.<sup>xi</sup> Rather, I call attention to the theoretical gaps inherent within her formulation in order to place into relief the questions that, up to this point, studies of traumatic memory and their representation – including those that draw on Hirsch’s concept of postmemory – have yet to consider, and that in turn motivate my own study. That is, if Hirsch’s articulation of postmemory – decidedly the most well-known study of non-experientially-based memory within the general field of cultural studies – does not adequately account for the operation of such an order of memory in relation to collective memory, habit, and history, then this absence marks the new theoretical terrain in which my own study should be situated.

## **Toward a Formulation of Second Generation Memory**

Helen Epstein's *Children of the Holocaust* (1979) provides a non-fictional account – a journalistic survey, as it were – of the order of memory this dissertation seeks to theorize. In this text, Epstein narrativizes the accounts of various individuals she interviews in the United States, Israel, and South America who grew up in the shadow of their parents' traumatic experiences in Nazi concentration camps. Her reason for performing this study, she states, is to “find a group of people who, like me, were possessed by a history they had never lived” (14). In other words, her work is the result of a “secret quest” for self-discovery: as a child of Holocaust survivors herself, she believes that in discovering and writing about an “invisible, silent family scattered about the world” – that is, the children of survivors who may or may not share Epstein's reactions to her own parents' ordeals – she may “reach the most elusive part” of herself (14).

Thus, Epstein weaves her own story into her account of others' experiences. As a child growing up in New York, she is fully aware that her parents endured unspeakable horrors: her mother admits that she and her family suffered at the hands of “Germans who were very bad” and her father – who, before the second world war, was a robust Olympic athlete – intimates that he was brutalized and humiliated in a concentration camp (47). However, besides these facts, she knows very little about the extent of her parents' experiences. Her mother generally meets Epstein's questions with consternation and even fear:

My mother did not know how to answer me. How did other

parents explain? Why did this child never stop asking questions?

One after the other: Who put the number on your arm? Why do you keep it? Why won't it come off? Did it hurt when they put it on? Why doesn't Daddy have one? (47)

Exhausted by her daughter's questions, Epstein's mother begins to respond to them only with silence: her eyes, the author writes, were "so deep with secrets that they seemed to have no bottom when you looked into them" (47). Once confronted with her parents' mutual silence, Epstein begins to probe it, marking the behaviors that rise up from the silence and that afford some evidence of the traumatic events that made her parents the people that they are. She notes, for example, that her father is obsessively attentive to his children's dietary habits and that he eats his dinner as though, at any minute, it might be forcibly taken away from him; she observes as well that her mother is prone to nervous attacks for which she must take a cocktail of prescription medicines. The most mundane features of domestic life are colored by conflicts that cannot be ameliorated by even the most careful acts of negotiation and seem to Epstein to be radically opposed to the quotidian practices of "other mothers" and "other fathers" (63). Moreover, her parents' constitution – her father's "rage" and her mother's "intentness" – seem to her to be markedly different from the behaviors of "other parents"; her recognition of such difference thus impels her to judge them relative to others.

Epstein's observations of her family's peculiar habits in turn prompts her to appeal to extra-familial sources that might explain what events and circumstances in the past might have led them to behave in the way that they do. In the course of her text, Epstein notes that her family, although it is not particularly religious, nevertheless has



strong ties to the Jewish community in New York and that they are acquainted with other Holocaust survivors. She knows, for example, that her father's boss is a survivor of the Warsaw Ghetto and she observes the way in which this man accommodates her father's workplace eccentricities with a certain tacit understanding. She delves into family albums and pieces together her family genealogy, referring to books and films on the Holocaust in order to identify the camps to which they were probably deported and to understand the conditions that they met upon their arrival. Epstein's investigation is so extensive that she becomes an independent Holocaust scholar of sorts. And yet, her research is not enough to satisfy her insatiable need to know what exactly happened to her family. Epstein confesses to needing the "company" of other children of survivors ("other people like me") who might tell the stories of their own families' travails, which might in turn confirm her own – a need, of course, that she finds fulfilled (although only in part) by the interview project that results in her publication of *Children of the Holocaust* (13). As Epstein's narrative makes clear, her confrontation with the past is multiply mediated by artifacts of cultural memory – books, films, personal observations of others' behaviors, and oral testimonies, and other material and immaterial sources that originate from her interaction with her social environment.

It is also plausible to suggest that Epstein's relation to the past is facilitated not only by her confrontation with directly perceived traces of cultural memory, but also by her situation within a cultural and religious tradition that places particular emphasis on the duty to remember the past. In order to make this case, it may be helpful to consider how different cultural groups whose members were victims of the Nazi genocide remember this event, and how the Jewish diaspora of which Epstein is a part remembers

the event in a way that is dramatically different from its memorialization by other cultural and religious groups. While the Holocaust has been memorialized by the Jewish diaspora, by non-Jewish political prisoners (for example, the writer/witness Charlotte Delbo) and by gay-rights groups, who use the inverted pink triangle worn by homosexuals in the Nazi camps to attest to the ultimate effects of homophobia, the one group that least upholds an active remembering of the Holocaust is the European Gypsy population. In her anthropological history of the Gypsies, Isabel Fonseca writes that members of this group – which, with the exception of the Jewish population, was the only group to be “slated for extermination on the grounds of race” and which suffered heavily not only in the gas chambers but at the hands of the notorious “doctor” Mengele – prefer, on the whole, not to speak of the Holocaust, or what they term the “devouring” (243). Such hesitation to remember, Fonseca writes, is influenced in part by the Gypsies’ traditional willingness to forget the tragic events of the past (and certainly, their history is riddled with such events) in order to embrace a more hopeful future; such forgetting is influenced, moreover, by a sense of fatalism. For example, in response to Fonseca’s questions regarding the “devouring,” many of the Gypsies she interviewed for her study accounted for twentieth-century genocidal events by positing them as the result of *baxt* – that is, “luck” or “fate” – and seemed generally uninterested in pursuing the subject further (242). Fonseca concludes that the values and specific worldview of the European Gypsies therefore have influenced the ways in which they choose to remember (or not to remember, as the case might be) the Holocaust: the Gypsies, she writes, “with their peculiar mixture of fatalism and the spirit, or wit, to seize the day – have made an art of forgetting” (276). Of course, this does not imply a determinism: Fonseca does find, for

example, individuals who are willing to talk about the “devouring” and she further notes individuals, such as a board-member of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, who are dedicated to the memorialization of the Gypsies’ fate. Nevertheless, she concludes that while a “significant representation of the Gypsies would become part of the community of remembrance ... most would remain apart, preoccupied, and vivid to themselves only in the present” as a result of their (perhaps unconscious) commitment to the cultural values of forgetting (277). Consequently, relatively few representations of the Gypsy experience of the Holocaust exist.

By contrast, there exist thousands upon thousands of books, films, archives, and monuments devoted to the Jewish experience of the Holocaust, a fact that is due, perhaps, not only to the tremendous number of Jews who died at the hands of the Nazis (by an uncontested degree, the Jewish population made up the largest number of concentration camp victims) but also to the imperative to remember that structures Jewish cultural and religious identity. In her discussion of representations of children in Holocaust art and literature, Ellen Handler-Spitz argues that, “for Jews, history has always been a reenacting as well as a retelling” (42). In the course of the traditional Pesach (Passover) seder, for example, four children (traditionally sons) ask questions concerning the Exodus from Egypt. With the exception of the child who plays the “wicked” son – who distances himself from those present by addressing them as “you” instead of as “we” or “us” – the children, through the ritual, identify themselves and those around them with those who had originally gone forth from Egypt. Similarly, they learn, through the ritual tasting of bitter herbs and salt water, for example, to reenact the experiences of their ancestors. In this way, Handler-Spitz argues, “Jewish children are taught, year after year, that the story

of the Exodus is a part of their own personal story”; she adds, moreover, that a “continuous autobiographical self emerges in childhood that blends with the history of a people and provides a framework for an interpretation of one’s acts” (42). One might add, furthermore, that even in secular Jewish experience, a recognition of oneself as a member of the diaspora allows for an implicit recognition of oneself as a part of – and a participant in – a larger history.

Thus, it can be argued that, unlike the Gypsy community, which contains within it an implicit cultural imperative to forget, the (American) Jewish community of which Epstein is a part is shaped by an imperative not only to remember the past, but to remember it in relation to one’s own present circumstances. Thus, the structures of memory in which Epstein has been inducted have served as a foundational framework for the emergence of her desire to remember her family’s past and her place within it.

What is particularly interesting about Epstein’s narrative, however, is her admission that her brothers are comparatively unaffected by her family’s memory; it is only as adults learning of their sister’s interest and extensive research that they begin “for the first time to ask my mother questions about our grandparents, the relatives we never knew, and exactly where and how our parents survived the war” (345). Obviously, Epstein’s brothers have grown up in the same household as she has, and have been exposed as much as she has to her parents’ perplexing and sometimes violent behaviors. Moreover, they have grown up in the same diasporic community as Epstein, in which they have ostensibly met the same Holocaust survivors and have been exposed to witness testimonies. Finally, they too are part of a cultural, if not religious, tradition that values the preservation and reenactment of the past and that encourages the development of an

“autobiographical self” that “blends with the history of a people and provides a framework for the interpretation of one’s acts.” In short, Epstein’s brothers share with her the *same cultural memory*. And yet, for most of their lives, they are not overly concerned with the traumatic memories that haunt their family. Epstein herself, however, is comparatively obsessed with the past, to the point that the Holocaust images to which she has been exposed begin to superimpose themselves upon her everyday perceptions. A New York subway becomes for her a “train of cattle cars on its way to Poland” and a quiet classroom becomes the site of a Nazi invasion:

In school, when I had finished a test before time was up  
or was daydreaming on my way home, the safe world fell away  
and I saw things I knew no other little girl should see.  
Blood and shattered glass. Piles of skeletons and blackened  
barbed wire with bits of flesh stuck to it the way flies stick  
to walls after they are swatted dead. Hills of suitcases,  
mountains of children’s shoes. Whips, pistols, boots,  
knives, and needles. (9)

Not unlike a ghost image, in which photographic images blend eerily into each other to the point that it is difficult to discern where one image begins and the other one ends, Epstein’s perception of the past, gleaned from photographs and film archives, merges nightmarishly with her perception of the present in visions that her brothers, who have been privy to the same images, do not share.

How, then, might one account for Epstein’s particular orientation to the past and its critical difference from that of her brothers? Certainly, as I have argued above, it has

a necessary foundation in cultural memory – and yet, it involves a deeply personal dimension that her brothers’ implication in cultural memory decisively lacks. The critical difference, I argue, is that Epstein, unlike her brothers, has been *interpellated* by the silence that structures her domestic situation and links it, moreover, to the communities in which it is situated. In other words, she consciously recognizes the ways in which she has been situated within a certain subject position by the actions, discourses, and silences that constitute her domestic life and thus acknowledges that her own practices and language implicitly bear the traces of the elusive past that itself has made possible her family’s specific set of relations. Just as the first question asked at the Passover seder – “Why is this night unlike any other night?” – calls those assembled to recognize themselves as heirs to a specific tradition centered around a specific event, Epstein’s own question – “Why is my family unlike other families?” – prompts her to acknowledge herself as a direct heir to the event that has bound her family to their own, unspoken but tacitly recognized, traditions. However, what makes Epstein’s particular experience of memory especially significant is that, while it necessarily draws upon the cultural memory on which it is predicated, it occurs outside of the preordained ritual space of, say, a Passover seder – it involves, instead, a certain epiphanic awareness of the structures and images that constitute her cultural memory.

Thus, I posit the term “second-generation memory” in order to refer to that form of cultural memory that *recognizes itself as such*. That is to say, the bearer of second-generation memory – as we have seen in Epstein’s narrative – is critically aware of the ways in which the discourses and practices that structure her social environment reveal its particular orientation to the past and thus give evidence to the past’s continuing hold over

the present. Such a critical awareness of the past's presence within her own cultural memory thus allows the bearer of second-generation memory to *claim* the images transmitted across generations as her own proper inheritance – to such an extent that, as in Epstein's childhood quasi-hallucinations, images of the past become grafted onto her perceptions of her present surroundings. The term “second-generation,” then, refers in part to the deeply intergenerational aspect of such memory – its bearer's ability, for example, to posit herself as a direct heir memories of events originally experienced by others – and also to the capacity of such memory to reflect, retrospectively, upon itself.

This latter qualification points to another crucial aspect of second-generation which may be expressed as a preoccupation with what Ricoeur calls an “ontology of historical being” (280). In his study of memory, history, and forgetting, Ricoeur argues that the historian is caught by a certain paradox with which his study of the past presents him – a paradox that is immanent within the very language he uses to represent this past. On one hand, Ricoeur writes, the historian recognizes that the past “has been” (*avoir été*); on the other hand, he is conscious that it “is no longer” (*n'être plus*). The first expression involves a “positivity,” or an affirmation of the past: the “past thing” the historian studies and seeks to narrativize once existed, and “no one can make it be that [it] should not have been” (280). The second expression, however, acknowledges a negativity, or the past's necessary absence. The charge given to the historian, then, is to fill in the gap left empty by absence through representation – or the “present image of an absent thing” – an act Ricoeur argues is facilitated by memory, which insists upon the past's “having been” (280).

The recognition of the divide that lies between the past's "having been" and its "being no longer" is one, I argue, that particularly characterizes second-generation memory. It is telling, for example, that Epstein's personal narrative (not to mention those of other "second-generation survivors" whom she interviews) is structured in part along the twin figures of absence and loss. The first lines of her text address her awareness of absence:

For years it lay in an iron box so deep inside me that I was never sure just what it was. I knew I carried slippery, combustible things more secret than sex and more dangerous than any shadow or ghost. Ghosts had shape and name. What lay inside my iron box had none. Whatever lived inside me was so potent that words crumbled before they could describe. (9)

If, as Epstein later elaborates, her orientation to the past is one which she embodies – most obviously, in her incorporation of her parents' own tics and eccentricities – then a part of the past that she embodies is necessarily its *absence*. Epstein never specifies what this "it" is that "lived inside" her: ultimately, it can only be expressed as a chasm that swallows up any language that seeks to describe it. The narrator can never fully "know" the events that make up parents' past (and her own), not only because she was not alive during their occurrence, but because, having been eclipsed by time, they can never be revisited. Not unlike Benjamin's angel of history, she cannot help but be hurtled forward in time even as the past grows increasingly dimmer and forever out of her reach; she cannot "make whole what has been smashed" because it is simply no longer there



(Benjamin, "Theses," 257-258). The past exists for her (or rather, in her) only, paradoxically, as a void that cannot be filled.

At the same time, however, Epstein's narrative is marked by allusions to ghosts and other phantom-like presences that seem to confirm that while the past may be no longer, it nevertheless once had been. Recounting a journey to Prague, the native city from which her parents were deported by the Nazis, Epstein notes that she "had felt the presence of ghosts" – a sensation that is confirmed by one of her interviewees who confesses that during his own trip to Hungary, he could "feel the events that had been so remote before" (31, 30). At times, her mother's tattoo – the remaining trace of her imprisonment in a concentration camp – "almost seemed to blaze" ghost-like in Epstein's sight; at other times, she perceives the tattoo as a "mysterious flag" that serves as the surviving emblem of a country with no place or name (53). Perhaps most significantly, the narrator registers an "extra presence" in her home that is palpably missing in the households of non-survivors – a "presence" that marks precisely the tension and anxiety generated in her parents in the aftermath of their ordeal and that thus attests to its very having been.

If, for Ricouer, the past's "being no longer" serves as a charge to the historian to collect and narrativize traces of its "having been," this charge is internalized as well by the bearer of second-generation memory. Epstein, for example, senses that she has a duty to collect the photographs and fragments that attest to her murdered family members' prior existence, to interpret her parents' eccentricities so that she might gain further insight into their experiences, and, ultimately, to find a "silent family" of other children of survivors with whom she may continue to bear witness to the past's having been.

However, her commitment to accounting for the past's once-existence is not confined to retrieving evidence and finding connections between the artifacts and testimonies she discovers – as, one might say, the historian's is. Rather, her particular orientation to the past involves just as much her insistence upon seeing the correspondences between the images of the past that she has collected and the daily images that she perceives within the present. Recall, for example, Epstein's childhood visions in which rush-hour subway cars that become "a train of cattle cars on its way to Poland" and in which a schoolyard becomes a camp skirted round with "blackened barbed wire with bits of flesh stuck to it." Here, it is as though, by marking the correspondences between two or more otherwise disparate images, Epstein might make more approximate the past that has been in ways that she as yet cannot by merely handling inert artifacts or abstracting her relationship to her parents' acting-out of the past. To put it differently – and to cite Benjamin once more – Epstein's second-generation memory can be qualified as an attempt to "get hold of an object at very close range by way of its likeness, its reproduction" ("Work of Art," 223).

Thus, if there is one central, defining aspect of second-generation memory, it is its radically mimetic quality. The mimetic faculty, writes Benjamin, involves the "gift for producing similarities ... and therefore also the gift of recognizing them" ("Mimetic Faculty," 333). This "gift" is especially crucial to Benjamin's study of film, in which he observes the interrelationship of the mimetic copy and contact. According to Benjamin, film – a work of art that depends upon its mechanical reproduction and which therefore serves as a copy or imitation of perceived reality – has the potential to expand space and extend movement so that it may "extend ... our comprehension of the necessities which rule our lives" and "assure us of an immense and unexpected field of action" ("Work of

Art,” 236). Moreover – and most crucial to this present discussion – the mimetic quality of film has a deeply visceral potential: “people whom nothing moves or touches any longer are taught to cry again by films” (“One-Way Street” 86). Film’s mimetic power thus lies as much in its tactile quality as it does in its much-celebrated visual aspect: it can literally reach the spectator – by, for example, pricking the hairs on the back of his neck, seizing him with laughter, or doubling him over with nausea – in ways that palpably suggest that its status as a copy is intimately connected with its ability to facilitate visceral contact with that which it imitates. This is precisely the potential, I argue, inherent within the mimetic capacity of second-generation memory. The bearer of second-generation memory sees correspondences between images of the past and her perceptions of the present – in other words, she sees the present as a *copy* of the past – in order to facilitate some degree of *contact* with an elusive past.<sup>xii</sup> As I will argue in the final chapter of this dissertation, this mimetic capacity of second-generation memory is no less than revolutionary, insofar as it invites a renewed perception of social relations and structures that ordinarily slip under the radar, as it were, of everyday interactions with perceived reality.

### **Children’s Literature and Second-Generation Memory**

The mimetic faculty, Benjamin writes, is most dramatically evidenced in children, who are capable not only of recognizing correspondences in otherwise disparate things in ways that adults (or, at least, adults raised within Western capitalist society) are no longer able to do, but of imitating their environs. “The child,” writes Benjamin, “plays at being

not only a shopkeeper or teacher but also a windmill and a train” (“On the Mimetic Faculty,” 333). Thus, it should not be surprising that narratives of second-generation memory such as those contained within Epstein’s text should focus so heavily on subjects’ childhood memories of games and quasi-hallucinations aimed at bringing some trace of the past into the present. Second-generation memory, it seems, has a close affinity with a mode of perception particular to childhood, and thus it will be the work of this dissertation to investigate what this relationship may be and in what various ways it is manifested. What immediately concerns this present chapter, however, is how second-generation memory becomes the object of attention not only of books clearly written for adult audiences – such as Epstein’s *Children of the Holocaust* – but of books intended explicitly for children. How, for example, might one account for the emergence of a children’s novel such as Judy Blume’s *Starring Sally J. Freedman as Herself*, in which a young girl re-stages her cousin’s death in Dachau in a game played in her backyard? How might such a scenario – which bears a significant resemblance to games Epstein admits to having played as a child – resonate differently once it is placed in the context of “children’s fiction” rather than in the realm of “journalistic non-fiction”? What, moreover, accounts for the increased proliferation of representations of second-generation memory in children’s literature, and how might an account of the increased attention this form of memory has received reveal surprising connections to the conditions which make its present form possible in the first place?

In order to address these questions, however, it is important first to reiterate that these texts for the most part began to emerge during the 1970’s and continued to proliferate throughout the last quarter of the twentieth century. Bearing this development

in mind, it becomes important to ask what concerns and events – social, political, technological, and religious – may have distinguished this period of the twentieth century and rendered it particularly fertile ground for the publication of children’s books on second-generation memory of traumatic historical events.

According to LaCapra, the relatively recent preoccupation with memory on the part of scholars and public intellectuals is connected, in part, to the particular processes inherent in trauma – specifically, the trauma that was Auschwitz. Insofar as trauma always involves a “rupture in memory” and thus “breaks continuity with the past” (for example, it “breaks narcissistic investments and desired self-images, such as the myth of Western progress), attempts to remember traumatic events emerge belatedly after a period of latency (9). Moreover, according to LaCapra, “memory lapses of trauma are conjoined with a tendency to repeat, relive, be possessed by, or act out traumatic events of the past,” often in sublimated or otherwise disguised manners. LaCapra’s arguments concerning the latency and sublimated reemergence of memory – on which he elaborates throughout *History, Memory, and Auschwitz* – speaks, in part, to the sudden proliferation of Holocaust texts – as well as other texts centered on the atrocities of the twentieth century – in the 1970’s and after. It is as though, after having been shaken to its very core by arguably the most devastating instance of human atrocity in recorded history – or, at least, one that most relied on the finely-orchestrated management of time, space, and technological innovation otherwise considered to be the hallmarks of Western progress – Western society was finally feeling the “aftershocks” of this event, “aftereffects” that were manifested in the increased outpouring of witness narratives, novels, and historical accounts.

Of course, it is necessary to recognize that the resurgence of memory of catastrophe (and the academic, historical interest therein) was manifested differently within different socio-political and state formations. In Germany, for example, the belief that 1945, the year marking the end of the war in Europe, could be conceived as a “zero-year” (*das Jahr null*) or a new beginning as it were in German history – coupled with the “economic miracle” of its post-war recovery – led to what LaCapra calls a “postponement” of any critical attempt to come to terms with its harrowing war-era past (69). Moreover, LaCapra argues, there existed a tendency on the part of Germans to shrug off a sense of complicity in the genocidal events of the second world-war era by placing blame squarely on the shoulders of Hitler himself or on the “diabolical elite” placed on trial in Nuremberg (69). In this way, German texts that sought to represent Germany’s war-era past, such as Edgar Reitz’s film, *Heimat* (1984), succeeded only in presenting a sentimental, nostalgic and – as Reitz’s title suggests – “homey” sense of “locality” that was “preserved by preventing disturbing forces from impinging on consciousness” (26). It was not until the “Historians’ Debate” of 1986 – a discussion engaged in by public intellectuals from various academic fields and transmitted through the popular press – that Germans began publicly to raise questions pertaining to the memory of German complicity in the Holocaust and the relation of such an awareness to German identity and “historical self-understanding.” According to Hamida Bosmajian, the reunification of Germany in 1989 brought about further reevaluation of the ways in which the Holocaust had been discussed (or, as it were, not discussed) in East and West Germany: “If East Germany forgot the Holocaust in favor of the Soviet Union,” she writes, “West Germany chose to follow the Western alliance’s suppression of memory

regarding the Soviet Union's role in winning the war" (20). Thus, according to Bosmajian – whose particular interest in German memory involves the role that children's books played in the promotion and later critique of Nazi ideology – German interest in what she calls "acquired or post-memory" was relatively late in coming.

By contrast, the reemerging interest in catastrophic memory, and the consequent interest in second-generation memory, took quite a different path in the United States – a trend that speaks dramatically to the foundations of memory in particular social frameworks and its inflection relative to such frameworks. If, in the wake of the second world war, German near-purgation of Jews and other "undesired others" left a relatively homogenous population to grapple with the heavy burden of the memory of mass complicity, the post-war influx of immigrant genocide survivors to North America from Central and Eastern Europe (and, much earlier, from Armenia) effected a particular orientation to past historical traumas that was based on more on the an active witnessing to past injustices and instances of victimization than it was on the (often repressed) memory of collusion or complicity.<sup>xiii</sup> As I argue in the following chapter, diasporic communities in both the United States and Canada have been able to preserve a sense of community and continuity paradoxically by keeping ever before them the memory of their near *death* in earlier historical contexts – as an inoculation, as it were, against the dangers of future disintegration. From this perspective, the proliferation of texts written about traumatic historical events – many of them, like Yolen's *The Devil's Arithmetic*, written by and originally intended for members of specific American diasporic communities – may be considered as material instantiations of the effort to contain and preserve diasporic memory and thus to ensure the continuation of immigrant

communities' continued relation to the past. The proliferation of these texts – and the high literary quality of some of them, like Yolen's, which caused them to be recommended to readers outside of their intended audiences – may help to explain how such texts prompted an active American interest in accounts of persecution and survival and how, in turn, such interest made possible the further publication of such texts.

If second-generation accounts reached beyond their originally intended and relatively limited diasporic audiences and began to gain readerships within larger, more encompassing North American society, this may also be due, in part, to the particular American climate of the 1970's and 80's that heightened these texts' welcome reception. It is perhaps not coincidental that American narratives of second-generation memory arose on the heels of the African-American-led civil rights movement of the 1960's and the seizure of Alcatraz by Native American activists in 1969, and that it emerged concurrently with the mobilization of the women's rights movement and widespread protests of the Vietnam War. That is, such representation of memory began to emerge precisely at a moment of United States history in which Americans were beginning to recognize that the memory of decidedly more atrocious moments of the United States's past – the enslavement of Africans, the Trail of Tears, the refusal of equal rights to women, and U.S. imperialist tactics dating back to the Monroe Doctrine – simply could not be repressed any longer precisely because they were (and, one might add, still are) deeply embedded in still-existing social, economic, and political structures of injustice. That is, there seems to be a crucial connection between the relatively widespread commitment, on the part of activists of the 1960's and 70's, to come to terms with and redress the bitter memories of the United States's past and the increased proliferation of



texts that suggest that individual persons may become aware of the structures that tie them intimately to their families' past. From this perspective, the impetus to remember that finds its way into children's literature – which, as Bosmajian reiterates, is greatly concerned, for better or worse, with the ethical formation of the youngest and presumably most impressionable members of a society – is founded upon a more general and politically-charged movement to recognize the persistence of the past within present-day social structures.

However, if the revolutionary spirit of the 1960's and 70's gave way to the "Me Generation" and the renewed imperialist efforts of the Reagan era, children's narratives of second-generation memory involve a similar – yet more subtly expressed – conservative turn, manifested not so much in the explicit content of individual texts than in the overall orientation of these texts, taken as a whole, toward certain historical traumas and away from others. For example, relatively few American children's texts address the aftermath of the U.S. atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and, until very recently, virtually none took on the topic of the internment of Japanese-Americans during the second world war<sup>xiv</sup>; by contrast, there are hundreds, if not thousands, of children's books concerning the Holocaust, a decidedly European ("foreign") event toward which Americans tend to orient themselves as liberators rather than perpetrators. Similarly, while a great many children's books address American racial injustice – Mildred D. Taylor's brilliantly-written *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (1976) is simply one example – fictional texts concerning race have often been considered "sensitive" (especially at the height of the "culture wars" of the early 1990's<sup>xv</sup>) while novels such as Hautzig's *The Endless Steppe* escaped charges of "topical sensitivity," presumably

because they reinforced American Cold War-era charges against Soviet injustices. This is certainly not to deny the significance of Auschwitz and the gulag, nor is it a suggestion that such events have been, in effect, “overexposed” – indeed, as I have argued above, Auschwitz especially is in many respects a singular example of the devastation wrought by credence in Western myths of progress, and thus it demands recognition. Rather, I wish to point out that there nevertheless exists a tendency in American children’s literature to evade the graphic depiction of events in which the United States was obviously complicit even as they direct readers’ attention to events in which Americans generally believe themselves to be “innocent.” Thus, it may be argued that American children’s narratives of second-generation memory are in a certain sense extent selective and that, therefore, they reveal as much about an American sense of national identity as the considerable dearth of Holocaust texts published in Germany points to crises inherent in that own country’s historical self-understanding.<sup>xvi</sup>

While it may be argued, then, that representations of second-generation memory in children’s literature are inflected by particularly diasporic and national investments in the past, it may be posited as well that such narratives (and ultimately second-generation memory itself) are equally determined by an intersection of the transnational and the domestic. At the risk of seeming too repetitive, it is important to reiterate that such narratives emerged in the 1970’s – at precisely the point at which images of atrocity reached households not only in daily newspapers but through more-or-less “live coverage” enabled by television. This point is crucial on several counts. First, the proliferation of visual images of atrocity in the media – in, for example, newspapers, popular magazines, network news broadcasts, and, most recently, Internet sites – allow

for a kind of domestication of atrocity: graphic images of historical violence have circulated to such an extent that they have the potential of being grafted onto the everyday consciousness of, say, a housewife watching the six-o'clock news in Iowa or a weary traveler bombarded by canned CNN reports blaring in an airport terminal. While, as Susan Sontag argues<sup>xvii</sup>, such a constant deluge of violent images may certainly lead to a desensitization to the pain of others, it may also make possible the conditions under which individuals may claim to remember events they did not directly experience, and by which their present perceptions may be structured.

Second, the media dissemination of atrocity images allows for a new – and certainly problematic – orientation to history. Photographs accompanied only by vague captions, or film or video footage supplemented with an anchorman's two-minute narration, lend their interpretation to an all-too-easy universalization of human suffering; consequently otherwise distinct historical events, such as “ethnic cleansing” in Bosnia or the massacres in Rwanda, become casually compared without careful attention to the specific circumstances in which they occurred. As Barbie Zelizer argues, this leads to the depoliticization – and ultimately, to the forgetting – of the very events these images represent:

Boasted by a lingering belief that “extreme situations are somehow more revealing of the human condition,” the resonance of the past generates numerous second-generation titles related to atrocity: the Vietnamese village of My Lai earned comparison with Lidice, the Czech village destroyed by the Germans in 1942; atrocities in Cambodia of the 70's merited the title “Auschwitz of Asia,”

while mass slaughter in East Timor became “another Cambodia”; El Salvadorean guerillas were called the “Pol Pot Left”; and brutality in Burundi earned the nation the nickname of “the next Rwanda.” The continuum of terror is ongoing, and it sometimes even works backwards, as when the *New York Times* proclaimed that Cambodia offered terror “Before Rwanda, Before Bosnia” or Pol Pot was called “Cambodia’s Sadaam.” (204-205)

If an insufficient contextualization of images of atrocity allow for their depoliticization and for an easy slippage between images of the past and those generated within the present, then so too does the very structure of television and the new media. According to Neil Postman, television – and especially broadcast news – allows for a “now ... this” mode of consciousness in which information is disseminated in small, discreet fragments followed by other, quite unrelated fragments, so that “events stand alone, stripped of any connection to the past, or to the future, or to other events” and “all assumptions of coherence have vanished” (*Amusing Ourselves* 110). Context, he argues, “simply disappears.” Moreover, the relative free flow of different kinds of television programs – from day-time talk shows to cooking lessons to sitcom reruns to the six-o’clock news – allows for a condition in which no single image is either more or less important than another, and thus in which images of atrocity are blurred into a *mélange* of images of the quotidian. Similarly, as Lev Manovich argues, the new media – for example, hypertext, video games, and the Internet – make possible a kind of “spatial wandering” in which the reader is like “Robinson Crusoe, walking across the sand, picking up a navigation journal, a rotten fruit, an instrument whose purpose he does not know; leaving imprints

that, like computer hyperlinks, follow from one found object to another”; here, too, the specific context of images one encounters – for instance, in an Internet search – are no more or less privileged than others, freed of any solid connection to history or lived memory (78).

It is not surprising, then, that the ghost-image-like form of second-generation memory should develop within a society grown increasingly dependent upon often incongruously juxtaposed visual images and whose exposure to images of atrocity leads to both their domestication and to a tendency to conflate the past with the present. Indeed, it can be argued that second-generation memory’s particularly visual quality – as is evidenced in Epstein’s childhood visions – is founded upon conditions that make possible the dissemination of the images it adapts.

It is important to take account of the effect that the (re)circulation of images of atrocity have had on the formation of second-generation memory, I argue, because this phenomenon plays a crucial role as well in the significant rise of children’s books that represent the second-generation memory of historical catastrophe. The critical connection between mass-mediated images and childhood is perhaps best elaborated by Neil Postman in his admittedly polemic but nonetheless useful text, *The Disappearance of Childhood* (1982). Postman’s thesis, which is obviously indebted to Marshall McLuhan’s *Understanding Media*,<sup>xviii</sup> is that Western concepts of childhood are radically shaped by the dominant modes of (re)production which make possible certain processes by which information is disseminated. Greatly influenced by Philippe Aries’s own thesis that childhood did not exist until well after the Middle Ages,<sup>xix</sup> Postman credits the invention of the printing press for heralding the “birth of childhood” (19). The print

media made possible by this invention, he argues, assisted significantly in shoring up the “idea of selfhood”: it made possible – among other developments such as vernacularization and the swifter transmission of information beyond otherwise confined boundaries – the idea of ownership of intellectual property and the Protestant value of individual (rather than clerical) interpretation of sacred scripture. In turn, he continues, the creation of “Literate Man” became predicated upon his distinction from those who continued to be illiterate and thus comparatively incomplete in their individuality – specifically, in Postman’s formulation, children (36). In the medieval world, he claims, “neither the young nor the old could read, and their business was in the here and now, in the ‘immediate and local’ ... That is why there had been no need for the idea of childhood, for everyone shared the same information environment and therefore lived in the same social and intellectual world” (36). The emergence of the print media, however, instituted a rift between literate adults and illiterate children that rendered adulthood a “symbolic, not a biological, achievement” that would have to be earned through the gradual and moderated attainment of literacy.

If, in Postman’s view, the emergence of the print media signaled childhood’s “birth,” then the electronic media has in turn figured as its death knell. According to Postman, the electronic media – specifically, television – imposes significantly fewer obstacles to the acquisition of information and thus collapses the boundaries that had once existed between adult knowledge and childhood ignorance. One need only to have recourse to a television – if not in one’s own living room, then in the innumerable public places in which televisions are ubiquitous – to be exposed to a continuous stream of visual information. Moreover, one need not have any special training – as one does to

read a book or newspaper – in order to process such imagery: if, for Postman, the “great paradox of literacy was that as it made secrets accessible, it simultaneously created an obstacle to their availability” by requiring a certain rigorous training needed for their comprehension and interpretation, television makes secrets accessible without as it were any formal prerequisites. Recalling his own (print-mediated and thus gradual) induction into secret adult knowledge, Postman writes:

I vividly remember being told as a thirteen-year-old of the existence of a book, Henry Miller’s *Tropic of Cancer*, that, I was assured, was required reading for all who wanted to know sexual secrets. But the problems that needed to be solved to have access to it were formidable. For one, it was hard to find. For another, it cost money. For still another, it had to be read. Much of it, therefore, was not understandable to me, and even the special passages to which my attention was drawn by a thoughtful previous reader who underlined them required acts of imagination that my experience could not always generate. (84)

By contrast, Postman insists, television promiscuously – and relatively artlessly – divulges all secrets that works of literature subtly obscure: not only is it easily accessible (even despite parents’ efforts at restriction or prohibition) but it tends to make visually explicit those “secret” acts (for example, sexual intimacy) that once had to be abstracted from the reading and interpretation of the written word. In this way, Postman argues, children have come to possess the same information as do their elders, and thus the former distinctions between adult and child begin to crumble. According to such a

formulation, then, the concept of childhood has come round full circle, so that, just as in the Middle Ages, children come to be considered once again as “small adults,” privy to the same kinds of information and discourse as their elders.

Admittedly, Postman’s argument is a problematic one: not only does it communicate a certain thinly-disguised nostalgia for an era in which children “knew their place,” but it reduces the divide between literacy and illiteracy merely to a power differential between children and adults, thus overlooking the ways in which barriers to literacy ensured the enslavement of African-Americans in the American antebellum South and, similarly, the ways the confinement of literacy to the ruling classes in Europe and the Americas allowed them to maintain power over workers and colonial subjects.<sup>xx</sup>

Moreover, as I will demonstrate in my reading of Judy Blume’s *Starring Sally J.*

*Freedman as Herself*, the visual media has not made adult “secrets” (say, of sexuality and violence) as transparent as Postman would like to insist: his comments tend to devalue, even as they propose to discuss, the education everyone receives from the visual, which is itself a profoundly sophisticated code to be learned. However, despite its polemical and reductive tendencies, Postman’s argument is nevertheless helpful in identifying the likely causes of a significant trend in contemporary children’s literature to become more attentive to topics of historical catastrophe it had once avoided. If, for example, it is already granted that children have become exposed, through the electronic media, to images of atrocity, then the impulse on the part of children’s literature to “spare the child” such knowledge (as Bosmajian puts it) is significantly diminished. Rather, it must meet a different demand. Contrary to Postman’s occasionally shrill warnings, children’s literature is still a thriving form – even in the wake of the ever-expanding visual media –



and its task is, as ever, to train its young audience in the act of reading and, in so doing, to predispose them to a particular ideological orientation toward perceived reality. Thus, it should come as no surprise that children's literature has come to adopt material to which children are exposed on an almost daily basis as its own, so as to structure it in such a way that it conforms to and confirms the wishes adults most desire to see embodied in child readers. If, in the past two generations, children living in otherwise sheltered communities in developed nations have become regularly exposed to images depicting the casualties of war and human atrocity – ranging from the Vietnam War and the Cambodian genocide to the self-perpetuating “war on terror” – then the increased tendency on the part of children's literature to address the causes and consequences of human violence may be read as an intervention of sorts – that is, as an attempt to structure otherwise disparate and perplexing imagery into controlled narratives that grant them coherent (and socially and politically favorable) meaning. Moreover, if the circulation of images of atrocity and their resonance in collective memory have made it possible for children to posit them as grafted onto their own, individual memories, then children's literature plays yet another role in mediating how such second-generation memory should be represented and what significance it should have within the social-political context from which these texts emerge.

### **Overview**

The following chapter, on Marsha Forchuk Skrypuch's *The Hunger*, takes up precisely the tendency of children's texts to intervene in the representation of historical trauma and the second-generation memory thereof in order to render imagery of the past

in direct service to the interests of the present. Skrypuch's novel – whose protagonist, Paula, struggles simultaneously with a debilitating eating disorder and the disturbing discovery of her maternal grandmother's near-death by forced starvation during the Armenian genocide – can be best qualified as a young adult (YA) problem novel, a specific form of children's literature whose ultimate aim, not unlike that of the morality tale, is to introduce readers to "social ills" (e.g., eating disorders) faced by their contemporaries and subsequently to pose "solutions" to such problems, thus reinforcing collectively-sanctioned modes of behavior. Both the "problem" and its "solution" explicitly articulated in Skrypuch's problem novel are rendered with painful simplicity: the novel seeks to warn its presumably adolescent female readers against the dangers of eating disorders not only by providing them with graphic imagery of the medical consequences of anorexia-bulimia but by exposing them to an historical instance of "real" (forced) hunger in 1915 Armenia. However, I argue that, despite its explicit intentions, *The Hunger*'s ultimate goal does not so much involve its proposal of a "solution" to the contemporary problem of adolescent eating disorders as it does its reiteration of an idealized vision of diasporic cultural memory and its orientation to national identity. Paula's emaciated body, I argue, can be read as a metaphor for, or a metonymical expression of, the diasporic Armenian community of which she is a part – which, in its efforts to assimilate into dominant Canadian culture and thus starve itself of any lived relation to the past, threatens to collapse altogether; the "cure" the novel proposes to this problem is precisely second-generation memory, which ties individuals intimately to their past and thus allows for the reinvigoration of an otherwise loosely-connected and disinterested collective. Moreover, on yet another level, Paula's wasted physical state

may be read as a metaphor for the self-perceived crisis of Canadian culture, which, according to Stanley Fogel, remains in an “anorectic” state; in response to this problem, Skrypuch’s novel suggests – through its account of Paula’s simultaneous physical recovery and her “recovery” of her grandmother’s pre-immigration memories – that Canadian national identity might be strengthened by its citizens’ willingness to balance an active (“healthy”) participation in civic life with a similarly active commitment to its multicultural foundations. By proposing such “solutions,” *The Hunger* draws on what might be called “homeopathic myths” prevalent in both diasporic and national communities – that is, it implicitly represents the ways in which communities conjure up crises, or otherwise call attention to their own failings, in order to call attention to the need for cohesion and continuity. That such “homeopathic myths” should find expression in Skrypuch’s novel is significant, I argue, because the YA problem novel itself can be read as a “homeopathic” form which imagines that a proper “dosage” of images of socially-unacceptable behavior might inure its young readers against partaking of these activities.

In my third chapter, I move from a discussion of Skrypuch’s Canadian problem novel to Zlata Filipovic’s Bosnian wartime-diary, *Zlata’s Diary*. Writing during the apex of hostilities and “ethnic cleansing” in the former Yugoslavia, *Zlata’s Diary* bears a clear resemblance to an earlier child’s wartime diary, Anne Frank’s celebrated *Diary of a Young Girl* (1947). Such a resemblance, I argue, is not at all coincidental, I argue, but is rather clearly intended by the diarist. Traumatized by the violence that takes place literally at her doorstep, Zlata does not have the time, space, and presence of mind to render a fully-developed account of the events that constantly overwhelm her; thus, she

employs the structure, style, and rhetoric of her literary predecessor's diary in order to give her own, considerably more fragmentary, text better coherence. Moreover, Zlata's fear that she might lose not her life but her childhood – a stage of life she describes in decidedly Romantic terms – strengthens her desire to style herself in the image of Anne Frank, who, since the early performances of a play based on her posthumously published diary, has become something of a cultural icon of childhood innocence. *Zlata's Diary* is a particularly intriguing account of second-generation memory, I argue, because while Zlata has no ties of kinship to Anne Frank – a specific relationship that the term “second generation memory” would seem to imply – she nevertheless posits herself as her literary predecessor's heir, as it were, by virtue of the parallels she perceives between Anne Frank's literary persona and her own, as well as those between Frank's historical context and her own. Thus, *Zlata's Diary* may be studied as a particular instantiation of the intersection between intertextuality and the intergenerational as well as a dramatization of the mimetic capacity of second-generation memory.

I take up the questions of mimesis and intertextuality in further detail in my following chapter on Judy Blume's novel, *Starring Sally J. Freedman as Herself* (1977), whose young protagonist seeks to understand her European cousin's death in Dachau by imitating it in a series of games and fantasies based on generic Hollywood formulas. Categorically dismissed by its critics, who preferred historical realist accounts of the Holocaust and deplored what they believed to be Blume's “trivialization” of the Nazi genocide, *Sally* may be read otherwise, I argue, as a particularly brilliant exposition of the child's ability to identify traces of the past in the structures of the present. Sally's obsession with the twin mysteries of sex and death – which her parents refuse to explain

to her but which she nevertheless sees materialized in a handsome pre-war photograph of her cousin – impel her to enact sexually and violently explicit games and fantasies that she compulsively repeats in an effort to gain some understanding of the “facts of life” that most perplex her. In performing close readings of a number of these fantasy sequences, I argue that their foundation on various sources – e.g., photographs, newsreels, and Hollywood narratives – demonstrates how second-generation memory draws on cultural memory and the collective imaginary in order to posit a deeply personal connection to the past. Such a dependence upon the collective imaginary, I argue, in turn makes possible an inherently collective mourning of events whose memory is otherwise repressed or consigned to melancholy: the ultimate effect of Sally’s games and fantasies – which I identify as a manner of “acting out” and “working through” characteristic of the mourning process – is her recognition that the past must be reckoned with publicly, just as the death of a loved one is collectively mourned in the Jewish tradition of sitting shivah.

If, as I argue in my fourth chapter, Blume’s novel depicts the ways in which a child is especially capable of cobbling together collectively-shared imagery in order to generate an image of the past that ultimately can be collectively mourned, M. Night Shyamalan’s film, *The Sixth Sense* (1999) – which I discuss in my fifth and final chapter – positions its largely adult audience in such a way that it might be able to recuperate this capacity. Framing my study of Shyamalan’s film around key passages of Walter Benjamin’s most well-known essays – notably, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” and “Berlin Childhood” – I argue that the film’s use of structured deception allows the viewer to see anew relationships between objects whose

significance she might otherwise have overlooked; thus, it allows its viewers to “try on” (as one tries on a pair of spectacles) the particular mode of perception of its child-protagonist, who sees traces of the past within the present. While the film’s narrative initially appears to characterize its protagonist according to a Romantic view of childhood – a view that qualifies childhood as an original state of innocence that can never be fully recovered – its ultimately structure ultimately subverts such a characterization, demonstrating the ways in which the intuitive and mimetic perception of childhood – inherent within second-generation memory – *can* be recovered by adults to potentially revolutionary ends.

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<sup>i</sup> In her text, “*A Problem From Hell*”: *America in the Age of Genocide*, (HarperCollins, 2002) Samantha Power uses the term “age of genocide” to characterize the twentieth century, which she deems exceptional not only insofar as it has the ignoble distinction of being an historical era in which a preponderance of genocidal events took place (most notably, in Armenia, Nazi Germany, Bosnia, and Rwanda), but because it was one in which such events were greeted by the international community – specifically, the United States – with a great deal of apathy. Power’s text is an analysis and critique of twentieth century American foreign policy (or considerable lack thereof) regarding international instances of genocide. Her argument is of particular interest insofar as it challenges the myth that the United States granted importance to the liberation of Jews persecuted by the Nazis; rather, she argues, the United States had little interest in such liberatory efforts – as is evidenced in its strict imposition of immigration quotas and its infamous refusal to grant safe harbor to the *Saint Louis*, a ship carrying exiled European Jewish children in danger of deportation – and only reluctantly took on the role of liberator after the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor prompted its entrance into the second world war.

<sup>ii</sup> “What the child (and, through faint reminiscence, the man) discovers in the pleats of the old material to which it clings while trailing at its mother’s skirts – that’s what these pages should contain” (Benjamin, *Arcades*, 391 K2).

<sup>iii</sup> The term is Nadine Fresco’s, which Hirsch cites in contradistinction to her own formulation of postmemory: Hirsch writes, “I prefer the term ‘postmemory’ to ‘absent memory’ or ‘hole of memory,’ also derived in Nadine Fresco’s illuminating work with children of survivors. Postmemory – often obsessive and relentless – need not be absent or evacuated: it is as full and as empty, certainly as constructed, as memory itself” (22).

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<sup>iv</sup> James Young uses the phrase, “afterimages of history,” to characterize Art Spiegelman’s orientation to the past in *Maus*. (“The Holocaust as Vicarious Past: Art Spiegelman’s *Maus* and the Afterimages of History,” in *Witnessing the Disaster: Essays on Representation and the Holocaust* [2003]).

<sup>v</sup> Alison Landsberg uses the term “prosthetic memory” to theorize the “production and dissemination of memories that have no direct connection to a person’s lived past and yet are essential to the production and articulation of subjectivity” (20). I return to Landsberg’s formulation in the following chapter.

<sup>vi</sup> Two especially well-known studies of Holocaust representation in children’s literature, Hamida Bosmajian’s *Sparing the Child* and Adrienne Kertzer’s *My Mother’s Voice*, employ Hirsch’s term, “postmemory” in their discussion of literary and visual texts produced for young people. Bosmajian cites Hirsch’s term, approving of the ways in which it privileges immediate recollection, in her study of fictional narratives of the Holocaust; she argues “[w]e can expand the concept of post-memory and claim that master narratives of Holocaust survivors, be they oral or written, can have an authoritative ethos that a historical or fictional post-memory narrative cannot equal” (185). Kertzer cites Hirsch’s definition in her discussion of the uses of Holocaust photographs in children’s non-fictional texts and their various (intended) effects on their audience (258-259). Both authors use the term “postmemory” only briefly and with general approbation – a fact that may attest to its relatively secure status within academic language.

<sup>vii</sup> The latter term, “postmodernism” may be an example of the ways in which terms involving the prefix “post” have been uncritically adopted and otherwise reified. For example, anyone coming of age in the 80’s might well remember the late-night MTV “block,” “Post-Modern Videos” – how, one might ask, are videos explicitly labeled “postmodern” any different from any other videos, which arguably are themselves effects of postmodernity? Moreover, even in his elaboration of the concept of postmodernism, Frederic Jameson questions its essential “post-ness”: when considered in terms of globalization, he writes, the postmodern “may well in that sense be little more than a transitional period between two stages of capitalism, in which the earlier forms of the economic are in the process of being restructured on a global scale, including the older forms of labor and its traditional organizational institutions and concepts” (421).

<sup>viii</sup> The term “inwardness” is a significant one in Charles Taylor’s *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (1989). In the course of this text, Taylor constructs a genealogy of philosophical notions of the self by tracing the relationship between shifting notions of the self and shifting notions of the good. According to Taylor, the shift toward interiority – which found its ultimate expression in Descartes – began with Augustine. While Augustine’s notion of selfhood is clearly derived, in part, from Platonic thought, insofar as it is based on a concept of the good (or, in Augustine’s terms, God) which is independent of the self, Augustine’s concept of selfhood nevertheless marks a departure from Greek thought in its articulation of first-person self-reflexivity (130). In other words, while, according to Platonic thought, “the moral sources we accede to by reason are not within us” but rather “outside us, in the Good” and thus connect us “up to the larger order [i.e., the *polis*] in which we are placed,” an Augustinian notion of the self’s relation to the Good (God) allows for a “principal route to God ... not through the object domain but ‘in’ ourselves... [through] an ‘inner light’” (123, 129). It is this orientation both to the good and to selfhood that allows for Augustine’s self-remembrance in the *Confessions* – and it is this relationship that Ricouer takes up in his study of inwardness and memory.

<sup>ix</sup> According to Ricouer, Halbwachs’s *On Collective Memory* (1925) draws on a problematic binary between, on the one hand, a view of memory as “primordially personal,” and on the other hand, a view of memory as fundamentally collective; it is in response to this troubling opposition (in which, as the title of his work clearly states, Halbwachs takes the latter part) that Ricouer theorizes the intermediate ground discussed above. Nevertheless, Halbwachs’s work is worth noting. According to Halbwachs, memory cannot exist outside of social frameworks because its articulation and retention depends upon language, narrative, and its communication to an interlocutor (if only an imagined one) – all necessary components of the social. Halbwachs’s argument is perhaps most dramatically expressed in his relation of an anecdote – which he admits may be apocryphal, but nevertheless insists is useful – that he discovered while “thumbing through an old volume of *Magazin Pittoresque*” (37). According to this anecdote, a “young girl nine or ten years old who was found in Chalons in 1731” was discovered to have absolutely no memory of her place of

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origin or the circumstances that had led her to France; it was only when her interviewers showed her pictures of various geographical locales that she was able to piece together some narrative about her origins (37). This particular story concretizes Halbwachs's central argument concerning the fundamental collective character of memory: once removed from the language, customs, family members, and familiar surroundings of the society in which she was raised, the child will find it increasingly difficult to remember her past because it is precisely on these phenomena that her memory of the past depends.

<sup>x</sup> Nora's articulation of *lieux de memoire* – or sites of memory – depends on an opposition between memory as a lived, sensual phenomenon and history as an objective and quantifying discipline necessarily removed from any intimate connection to the past. According to Nora, memory is a dying form, always endangered by the “acceleration of history” within modern society, which threatens to wash it away completely within its persistent tide. Cognizant of the failure of memory, collectives establish material objects, or sites of memory – e.g., war memorials, archives, written memoirs – which they imagine might contain or anchor what little intimate connection to the past they believe is left to them.

<sup>xi</sup> For example, my discussion of Anne Frank's iconic photograph in Chapter Three, as well as my discussion of Lila's photograph in Blume's *Starring Sally J. Freedman as Herself* in Chapter Four.

<sup>xii</sup> Regarding the relationship between copy and contact, Michael Taussig's reading of Benjamin (in *Mimesis and Alterity*, 1993) is worth noting: “To ponder mimesis is to become sooner or later caught, like the police and the modern State with their fingerprinting devices, in sticky webs of copy *and* contact, image *and* bodily involvement of the perceiver in the image, a complexity we too easily elide as nonmysterious, with our facile use of terms such as identification, representation, expression, and so forth – terms which simultaneously depend upon and erase all that is powerful and obscure in the network of associations conjured by the notion of the mimetic” (21).

<sup>xiii</sup> See, for example, Alan Berger's *Children of Job: American Second-Generation Witnesses to the Holocaust* (1997) which provides an account of the various ways in which post-Holocaust American Jewish communities have oriented themselves in relation to the memory of persecution and how well-known literary representations of such orientations, such as the works of Art Spiegelman and Elie Wiesel, have been disseminated within mainstream American culture.

<sup>xiv</sup> Children's books written on the topic of the internment of Japanese-Americans include Harry Mazer's *Boy No More* (2006), Elizabeth Kikuchi Yamada's *Dear Miss Breed: True Stories of the Japanese-American Incarceration During World War II and a Librarian Who Made a Difference* (2006), Virginia Euwer Wolff's *Bat 6* (2000), and Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston's *Farewell to Manzanar* (1983). As their publication dates make clear, most of these books were written and published only quite recently, and none of them has yet to sustain the kind of popularity enjoyed by recent novels written on the topics of regrettable moments in *non*-American history. This may be due less to the literary quality of these works – in any case, that may be a topic for an entirely new study – than to the relative dearth of American knowledge of (and thus interest in) this moment of United States history.

At the risk of relating a personal anecdote, I might note an exchange I observed while touring the Puyallup fairgrounds near Tacoma, Washington in 1999. During the tour, one of my fellow visitors asked the tour-guide whether she might speak to the manner in which the grounds were used as an internment camp during the second world war. “I'm sorry,” the guide replied, rather sheepishly, “but I'm not allowed to talk about that.” This incident speaks, I believe, to the institutionalized forgetting inherent in American culture vis-à-vis its treatment of Japanese-Americans. While it would certainly be irresponsible – indeed, severely misguided – to posit a direct correlation between the American internment camps and Auschwitz or the gulag – the ultimate aim of the American camps involved neither hard labor nor extermination, as in the Soviet Union and Germany, respectively – this incident nevertheless may illustrate the willingness of Americans to repress – in a manner not unlike that of their German and former Soviet counterparts – the memory of institutionalized racism and potential (if not actual) mass violence. In turn, such cultural forgetting may account, on the one hand, for the scarcity of children's books written on the topic of the internment camps and, on the other hand, for the abundance of books written about “foreign” events which Americans generally acknowledge with a sense of clear conscience.



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<sup>xv</sup> Perhaps the most well-known artifact of the 1990's –era “culture wars” is Dinesh D'Souza's *Illiberal Education: The Politics of Race and Sex on Campus* (1991), which takes on “political correctness” in the university classroom, college admissions policies (which, according to D'Souza, favor minorities at the expense of non-minority students) and – most crucial to this study – the instruction of “multicultural” literature in university classes. While D'Souza's critique is limited to the university, his views find favor with conservatives such as Lynne Cheney (former head of the National Endowment of the Humanities and wife of current vice-president Dick Cheney), who lambasts what she considers post-modern “relativism” and the instruction of “multiculturalism” in primary and secondary education: tellingly, her preface to *Telling the Truth: Why Our Culture and Our Country Have Stopped Making Sense – And What We Can Do About It* (1995) begins with an alarmist response to post-colonial critiques of *Babar*. Cheney's commitment to what she considers “true” education – as opposed to what she perceives to be a negative and relativistic education offered by “liberal” American public education – has prompted her to write several patriotic children's books, all of which sing the praises of American “heroes” and “ideals” but significantly overlook the more inglorious moments of America's past. For example, in her chronology of American history, *A Time For Freedom: What Happened When In America* (2005), Cheney offers a breezy and sanitized account of the Vietnam war, giving no report whatsoever of the mass protests and revolutionary movements generated in response to it (though she repeatedly reiterates the “malaise” generated during the Carter administration); similarly, she ends her chronology with an account of the swelling patriotism in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, but makes no mention at all of the Iraq War. Her picture book, *America: A Patriotic Primer* (2002), is similarly celebratory: United States history, she writes, is a “tale” that is variously “wondrous,” “thrilling,” and “heartening” (1).

Certainly, the vision of America put forth by Cheney and others bears little relation to the account of bigotry, humiliation, violence, and institutionalized racism depicted in Taylor's *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*.

<sup>xvi</sup> Soon after the opening of the United States Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., Philip Gourevitch, in an article written for *Harper's*, criticized its “Americanization of the Holocaust” (56). According to Gourevitch, the museum's directors unproblematically celebrate its mission to “present visitors with an object lesson in the ethical ideals of American political culture by presenting the negation of those ideals” – a mission which, Gourevitch argues, betrays its greater interest in the national interests of the present than in the mourning of the past (55). “America's problems and America's faults, however extreme,” he writes, “have been and remain different from those of fascist Germany. To suggest that there are meaningful comparisons can only distort our already feeble understanding of European history and – worse – obscure our perception of current American reality” (56).

<sup>xvii</sup> As Sontag argues in *On Photography* (1977), Western society's saturation in “‘concerned’ photography has done at least as much to deaden conscience as to arouse it” (21). Sontag takes up this point once again when, in *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003), she argues that such saturation threatens to render violent imagery merely another form of entertainment. “The war America waged in Vietnam,” she writes, “the first to be witnessed day after day by television cameras, introduced the home front to new tele-intimacy with death and destruction. Ever since, battles and massacres filmed as they unfold have been a routine ingredient of the ceaseless flow of domestic, small-screen entertainment” (21). For this reason, she continues, the “attack on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, was described as ‘unreal,’ ‘surreal,’ ‘like a movie,’ in many of the first accounts of those who escaped from the towers or watched from nearby” (21-22).

<sup>xviii</sup> In *Understanding Media*, McLuhan makes the famous proclamation that “the medium is the message” – that is, that the medium of communication “shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action” (24).

<sup>xix</sup> The much disputed thesis of Aries's *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (1962) is that the concept of childhood did not exist prior to the Renaissance, and that, rather, children were regarded merely as miniature adults. While his argument has generated much controversy, especially among

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medievalists, it nevertheless has made the way for a view of childhood as a culturally-contingent, rather than as a “natural,” category.

<sup>xx</sup> See, for example, John Beverley’s study of the Latin American Baroque in *Against Literature* (1993) which demonstrates how literature “not only had a central role in the self-representation of the upper and upper-middle strata of Latin American society; it was one of the social practices by which such strata constituted themselves as dominant” (ix). In this same text, Beverley critiques Richard Rodriguez’s *Hunger for Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez* (1983), a memoir celebrated by political conservatives for its advocacy of assimilation and English literacy and its consequent disapproval of bilingual education: “Richard Rodriguez can speak (write) eloquently in English to an Anglo, college-educated reading public of the need for the assimilation of Latinos like himself into what he regards as the dominant culture of a country that, with a Spanish-surnamed (and largely Spanish-speaking) population of some twenty-five million, is today the fourth or fifth largest in the Hispanic world. Rodriguez can speak, in other words, but not as a subaltern, not as Ricardo Rodríguez, and not in Spanish” (16).

## II. A Homeopathic Little Pill: The Problem Novel, Cultural Memory, and National Identity in Marsha Forchuk Skrypuch's *The Hunger*

Children's literature, as Jacqueline Rose famously argues, is ultimately an impossibility. As Rose demonstrates in *The Case of Peter Pan, Or, The Impossibility of Children's Fiction* (1984) children's literature is an "impossible" form not because it cannot be written – clearly, it *is*, and to suggest otherwise would be, in Rose's words, "nonsense"(1) – but rather because it is predicated "on an acknowledged difference, a rupture almost, between writer and addressee" (2). That is, children's literature as a whole imagines that the child is necessarily different from the adult – and yet, even as it presumes the child's essential "otherness," it nevertheless endeavors to "take the child *in*" and construe her as "the object of its speech" (2). In effect, children's fiction *colonizes* the child, building "an image of the child inside the book ... in order to secure the child who is outside the book, the one who does not come so easily within its grasp" (2).

Considered thus, works of children's literature actively create, rather than passively "reflect," the "reality" of childhood they seek to "capture." That the most beloved and critically-acclaimed works of children's literature, such as L.M. Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* or Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows*, present to us children (or child-figures) who seem to emerge, as it were, *ex nihilo*, without the intervention or design of adult agents, speaks to the masterful artistry with which their producers obscure the desires that propel their construction. Children's fiction, as Jacqueline Rose argues, is heavily indebted to the conventions of realism, which claims to pull back the weighty curtain of artifice and reveal the world, simply, "as

it is,” without “questioning how that world has been constituted, or where, or who, it comes from” (62).

However, there are children’s books – more often than not, badly-written ones, featuring insufficiently developed characters and labored dialogue – that, despite their best intentions, betray the heavy hands of their creators. This is perhaps no more evident than in the young adult “problem novel,” in which the text’s principal objective of proposing solutions to contemporary adolescent crises (for example, teen pregnancy or drug abuse) takes precedence over its attention to literary style. Not unlike a morality tale, the problem novel involves a protagonist – only sufficiently developed to enhance reader-identification – who suffers dramatically upon her deviance from socially-prescribed norms and ultimately triumphs upon her reintegration into the social whole; into this carefully prepared formula, the novel injects concentrated doses of “information” (say, about the casualties of premarital sex, or the effects of marijuana on athletic performance) which might better “educate” the reader not only on the condition of the novel’s protagonist, but regarding those “real-life issues” she might apprehend in her own life.<sup>i</sup> Ultimately, the objectives of the problem novel are not so removed from that of the “classical” children’s novel, which, as Rose argues, aims to constitute not only its child-characters but its reader as well. However, the problem novel’s missionary zeal is such that it forgoes the time-consuming business of literary crafting, and thus makes transparent its didactic desires in ways that the more conventional children’s novel, or young adult novel, obscures. As Charles Frey and Lucy Rollin note in their introduction to an anthology of young adult “classics” (in which, significantly, no readily identifiable problem novel is included), the YA problem novel occupies what might be called a

“second tier” of YA fiction and is characterized by a general dearth of humor and an undistinguished, formulaic style that betrays its creator’s chief aim of tackling a social issue and resolving it once and for all (6).

Of course, the problem novel need not necessarily be a young adult novel – and, conversely, a young adult novel need not necessarily be a problem novel. The problem novel enjoyed wide popularity in the late nineteenth century, when proto-feminist New Woman writers such as Sarah Grand, Mona Caird, Iota, and George Egerton extended their protest against Victorian sexual double standards from pamphlets and public epistolary exchanges in newspapers to the realm of fiction, generating novels that took on such subjects as the Contagious Diseases Acts of 1864-1884, the institution of marriage (which Egerton dubbed a “legal prostitution”), constraints upon women’s freedom of movement, and the lack of sexual education of marriage. For instance, Sarah Grand’s *The Heavenly Twins* (1893)– perhaps the most popular and critically contested of the New Woman novels – involves a protagonist, Evadne, who withholds sexual favors from her officer-husband after having witnessed the sufferings of her close friend Edith, who has contracted syphilis from her rakish husband. While Evadne is probably the most well-developed and memorable character emerging from the not inconsiderable outpouring of New Woman novels, her development as a character is merely secondary to the cause she represents: that is, her primary purpose is to serve as a polemic example of the moral and ethical choices an independent “modern” woman might make in response to sexual double standards. Grand herself was not ashamed of the didacticism of her text: her plan, she readily admitted, “was to compound an allopathic pill for [the reader] and gild it so that it would be mistaken for a bonbon and swallowed without

suspicion of its medicinal properties” (xii). While Grand’s professed sugar-coated medicine was immensely popular and earned praise by the likes of George Bernard Shaw and Mark Twain, its literary value was nevertheless lambasted by reviewers who regarded its three main characters as mere conduits for polemic and dismissed the novel as a “three-volume tract” and its author as a “she-prophet” (Bird, 640,637). Apparently, the general consensus then – as now – was that the problem novel was merely “second tier literature.”<sup>ii</sup>

However, while the nineteenth century problem novel was intended primarily for adult audiences, it has since become associated with literature written for and about adolescents: indeed, as Frey and Rollin note, the term “problem novel” was “for a time ... applied to almost any YA novel despite the complexity of, for example, Robert Cormier’s work”<sup>iii</sup> (6). While it is Frey’s and Rollin’s objective, in part, to rescue the more sophisticated young adult novel from its messy entanglement with its dubious “second tier” cousin – an act they attempt to execute by anthologizing such “quality” works as Horatio Alger’s *Ragged Dick*, S.E. Hinton’s *The Outsiders*, and Robert Cormier’s *The Chocolate War* – such an attempt is only partially successful. By the editors’ own admission, there still exists a tendency in academic and literary circles – despite efforts to the contrary – to conceive of the YA novel as merely a “therapeutic tool for young people becoming adults, read not so much for pleasure as for psychological first aid” (1). Such an obstinate association between the YA novel and the problem novel is a compelling one that invites further inquiry. How, for example, might one account for the ways in which the problem novel has shifted from a form intended for adult audiences (as in its nineteenth century incarnation) to a form written primarily for young people?

Indeed, how does one account for a literature that is written exclusively for “young adults” – rather than for young children under the age of twelve or for people who might otherwise be regarded as “properly” adult – and why is this audience so readily identified as one that is especially burdened with problems in need of solving?

One way of responding to these questions involves the recognition that the concept of adolescence is a relatively new one – younger still than the nineteenth century image of the innocent child that still endures today. Before the mid-twentieth century, Frey and Rollin write, “children were children until they became adults”:

Since we have no formal rite of passage as some cultures do, leaving school was probably the most significant marker of maturity, and of those few who went to school at all, many left shortly after their first decade of life, went to work, and took on the full responsibilities of adults soon thereafter. But as our society became less agrarian and more affluent and literate, school time lengthened; the child’s financial dependence on the family correspondingly lengthened, and that sheltered yet increasingly liberated period we call adolescence took shape. (2-3)

Afforded with such disposable time, Western middle-class adolescents have become privy to a relative autonomy which preceding generations could not afford: while they are more or less still under their parents’ care, they have relative freedom of movement (thanks to car culture), wide-ranging access to information (thanks to TV and Internet culture), disposable income with which to purchase not only new products but the “experiences” such products promise, and relative privacy with which to experiment

liberally with the proverbial unholy trinity of sex, drugs, and rock and roll. Certainly, these are not aspects of life to which older generations are unexposed, but teenagers generally have the luxury of time that their adult counterparts do not to become immersed in, and thus shaped by, startlingly rapid new trends and developments. As John Rowe Townsend observes, young people living in post-1950's Western society "might well have entered fields of experience that their parents did not know at their age and perhaps never knew at all" (273). According to Townsend, adolescents' intrepid entry into new realms of possibility thus calls for was a specific literary genre that might "reflect[...] these trends": hence, the development of a separate genre whose subject matter "in its purest form is 'being a teenager'" (273, 272).

However, even as "young adults" emerge as a substantial audience for novelists who seek to hold up a mirror, as it were, to their unique experiences, they simultaneously figure as a source of consternation to those same authors. As YA author Richard Peck readily confesses, "We [YA authors] write for the people we never were ... I write in awe of what being young is today, of the choices I never had to make" (Frey and Rollin, 6). Underlying Peck's statement is a palpable anxiety: despite his professed awe for young people faced with difficult new choices, his statement subtly communicates a fear that his adolescent audience has wandered so far into the shadowy territory of a future yet unclaimed by adults that they now exist somehow beyond the pale of erstwhile adult authority and knowledge. In other words, it appears as though adolescents – who, since the 1960's, perhaps have been more intrepid than their older counterparts in embracing the changes wrought by technological innovation, globalization, multiculturalism, and the redefinition of sexual mores – constitute a *problem* for adult authors, who scramble to



“catch up” with the younger generation in some effort to understand it and reflect it back to itself. This problem is primarily an aesthetic one: how, after all, does one convincingly represent a group of people whose experiences and worldview are so dramatically different from those of one’s own – and how, moreover, does one go about transmitting such a representation to an audience whose tastes seem so mercurial, and whose credence in, or tolerance for, anything bearing the suspicious fingerprints of adults is ostensibly so tenuous? However, the difficulties faced by YA novelists are not merely aesthetic, but deeply psychological and political as well. If teenagers have come to figure as that cross-section of society that is most likely to adapt to change and to the vogue of the “new” – that is most likely to break with tradition or, in effect, to rebel without a cause – then it may not be implausible to suggest that this volatile audience might arouse a certain degree of fear in adults akin to that which was once inspired, in ages past, by yawling unbaptized infants still stained by original sin.<sup>iv</sup> In other words, adolescents – who collectively comprise the vanguard of a nebulous future – may well represent those aspects of a swiftly changing society that appear threatening to adults, or otherwise beyond their control. Teenagers, who have become most immediately exposed to what might otherwise be called “social ills” – drug abuse, sexually transmitted disease, outrageous demands for physical perfection – may well have become sublimated expressions of those ills themselves.<sup>v</sup>

Bearing such an argument in mind, it may not be so surprising that the problem novel has become so readily associated with young adult fiction. While the ostensible purpose of the YA problem novel is to render “psychological first aid” to readers who struggle with “issues” (to borrow a characteristically teenage term), it may as well serve

as much of a balm for its adult creators as well. The problem novel tackles a single predicament and, in the span of 200 pages or less, neatly resolves it, guaranteeing a happy future for both the once-burdened protagonist and all those she has troubled along the way. That is, the problem novel promises the consolation that expedient solutions to troubling social ills *are* possible, and that the unruly behavior of adolescents – so intimately connected with such social ills – *can* be brought into line. Moreover, the especially well-packaged YA problem narrative, peppered with choice references to popular culture and tucked neatly under a glossy, eye-catching cover design, guarantees an impressive readership, and thus the possibility that, in Grand’s words, audiences might swallow a proffered bonbon and, in doing so, unwittingly imbibe its medicinal properties. However, if Grand and her fellow New Woman writers constructed problem novels as “allopathic pills” whose double function was to warn their readers of injustice and to galvanize progressive social change, YA novels – with a few notable exceptions<sup>vi</sup> – are comparatively conservative, inasmuch as they seek to exposit the dangers of new developments and behaviors associated with or embraced by teenagers, and thus confirm the virtues of maintaining the status quo.

In order to test this argument, I propose a reading of Marsha Forchuk Skrypuch’s YA novel, *The Hunger* (1999) which is immediately recognizable as a problem novel. Its protagonist is a fifteen-year-old Canadian girl whose obsession with becoming the “perfect” scholar and athlete leads her to develop anorexia-bulimia. Paula’s condition becomes so intense that she suffers from cardiac arrest and slips into a coma, during which she is transported back in time to experience the “real hunger” faced by Armenians at the hands of the Turks during the 1915 Armenian Massacre. Paula subsequently

emerges from her coma and into the present with a newly-inspired resolve to combat her eating disorder and the perfectionist impulses which precipitated it.

Even a brief summary of Skrypuch's text reveals how contrived and heavy-handed it is. The novel is unabashedly clear in its educational objective: it aims, at once, to exposit the dangers of unhealthy adolescent preoccupations with body-image, and to reveal – admirably, perhaps – an atrocity that has been all too often overlooked by history. In attempting to correlate these otherwise disparate topics, the novel tries to salvage a moral lesson on self-imposed hunger from an historical instance of imposed starvation: according to the summary on the book jacket, Paula learns from her adventures in Armenia that “there are many things worse than imperfection.” In effect, the lesson of the novel can be boiled down to the bootstraps wisdom of “get on with it – others have had it worse than you do” – or, similarly, it might be read as a 184-page elaboration of the dictum once given to baby-boomer children in North America to “eat your peas because there are starving children in China.”

However, despite its immediately noticeable – and problematically simplistic – preoccupation with eating disorders and the recognition of “real hunger,” Skrypuch's novel expresses a more subtle, and far more provocative, interest in the relationship between cultural memory and nationhood. Written in an era when both the topics of multiculturalism and Canadian national identity had gained currency in popular discourse, the novel suggests that “hunger” is not merely a physiological phenomenon, but also a useful expression for both the poverty-stricken state of diasporic memory within a larger, more encompassing pluralistic society, and the self-perceived condition of a nation that – by the admission of some of its own citizens – lacks a certain sense of

national distinctiveness. In other words, the problem of Skrypuch's problem novel is not so much the medical affliction that plagues individual adolescents as it is the affliction of a nation which is itself commonly perceived as "adolescent" – and whose future determination rests squarely on the shoulders of members of its youngest generation, many of whom are only recent citizens. Paula's emaciated body, I argue, functions doubly as a metaphor for both the precarious state of immigrant communities that are tempted to starve themselves, as it were, from any connection to the pre-immigration past in an effort to assimilate, and for the equally uncertain state of a nation which longs hungrily for some sense of identity that transcends its current image as a loose confederation of diasporic collectives.

Since such a reading of Skrypuch's novel involves an examination of three overlapping layers – that is, of the novel's literal, manifest content that treats adolescent eating disorders; its representation of collective memory; and its problematization of national identity – I propose a close reading of specific passages of the novel in which I observe a convergence of these successive concerns. Such close reading may illuminate the explicit and implicit interests inherent in the narrative, and the ways in which such interests become intertwined. Moreover, close analyses of the language and rhetoric employed in specific passages may contribute to a better understanding of how the typical problem novel – of which, I argue, *The Hunger* is representative – is constructed, and how it lends itself to readings that extend beyond its intended, didactic content and reveal its more latent interest in drawing its readers into its particular ideological perspective. Finally, such a reading may provide insight into how a specific work of children's/young adult literature makes use of a representation of second-generation

memory – or the memory inherited and claimed by a child – in order to articulate its own, presentist concerns.

### **The Hunger as a Problem Novel**

*The Hunger* begins with a scene that, since the release of Brian DePalma's *Carrie* (1976), has become a conventional marker of adolescent anxiety: the veritable gauntlet that is the high school gym class. In the course of the novel's exposition, Paula becomes increasingly despondent as she watches her classmates, whom she imagines to be considerably smaller and more agile than herself, gracefully scale a balance beam. Paula's own attempt at the exercise predictably results in a humiliating fall, and prompts her insensitive phys-ed instructor to remark, "... it's a good thing you've got so much padding, otherwise you could have hurt yourself" (11). The first chapter thus swiftly and unambiguously sets up the central problem of this YA problem novel: Paula is overweight (or at least she is convinced she is, after having been told so by certain unsympathetic individuals) and for this reason feels inadequate to others' expectations. Rather than allowing this dilemma to unfold gradually and subtly throughout the course of the narrative, the novel forefronts it immediately, relying on a battery of exclamations (e.g., "It's so effortless for [the other girls]!") to explicitly dramatize her situation. Moreover, the chapter includes an equal amount of rhetorical questions (e.g., "Why did she have to be so big and awkward?") which signal, in no uncertain terms, that the rest of the novel will document the process by which Paula comes to terms with both her body-image and her scruples about "fitting in" (9).

The chapters which follow this one elaborate on the ways in which Paula pursues her quest for both physical and academic “perfection.” Smarting from the callous remarks of her phys-ed teacher and those made by her equally authoritative father, Paula soon adopts a rigorous exercise regime and imposes upon herself a starvation diet, with the hope that her efforts will help her achieve a body to rival those of her supermodel idols. Paula extends her spartan regimen to her schoolwork as well: for example, she begins a class assignment on the Armenian genocide months before it is due. Her preoccupation with this project, and with securing a top grade for the work she has put into it, is as obsessive as her fixation on her other “project” of physical flawlessness. After having received this assignment, she feverishly scours through the library and the Internet to find sources on the little-known massacre, and in this way, the reader is more closely exposed to Paula’s particularly single-minded and compulsive assumption of the tasks she sets before herself. Significantly, Paula is driven to complete a “perfect” project not only because she wishes to be a top scholar, but because she wants to bridge the distance between herself and her emotionally remote family: her grandmother, she soon discovers, was herself a child-survivor of the Armenian genocide, and while Gramma Pauline claims to remember little of her experiences of this event, Paula is sure that her thorough research will fill in the narrative gaps left by her unforthcoming grandmother.

Paula becomes so zealous in her pursuit of physical and academic “perfection” that she becomes physically and mentally exhausted, and ultimately suffers from cardiac arrest. While her body lies in a coma, Paula is transported back in time – ostensibly as a result of a near-death experience – to 1915 Armenia, where she assumes the body of a

teenaged girl named Marta. As Marta, Paula struggles to survive under the newly-imposed Turkish rule, enduring a grueling death march, hiding in a Turkish farmer's cart under the protection of his young son, and literally taking cover in a Turkish harem until she is eventually saved by a pair of German missionaries. During her entire ordeal, Paula/Marta learns that her most powerful tool for survival is neither the set of coins she hides in her sleeve nor the sickle she wears for protection, but her ability to nourish herself with whatever scraps of food come her way. When, for example, the Turkish soldiers assigned to guard the Armenian deportation distribute food rations, Paula/Marta consumes her allotted portion with a sensuous resolve:

Marta marveled at the oily bread and was amazed at how hungry the sight of it made her feel. She took a huge bite and relished in the sensation of olive oil dripping down her chin. She ate every last crumb and every bit of cheese with a vague sense of triumph. The Turks may wish us to die, she thought, but I'm not about to cooperate. (115)

After Paula leaves the body of Marta and re-enters her own, she draws on the lessons of resistance she has learned during her adventures in Armenia, and begins to consider food as “medicine” rather than as the “enemy” (160). During her steady recovery, she becomes closer to her once-neglectful parents and her maternal grandmother, whose adoptive mother, she later learns, was precisely the Marta whose struggles Paula experienced while in her coma.

On its own, the Armenian-based portion of *The Hunger* – which, as Skrypuch notes in her foreword, was based on the testimonies of actual genocide survivors – has

the potential to be a compelling narrative, equal in power and scope to such critically-acclaimed novels on the same historical topic as David Kherdian's *The Road from Home*. However, insofar as the ostensible primary objective of Skrypuch's Armenian sequence is to impart a useful object lesson to what it imagines are impressionable female readers with potentially unhealthy body image and eating habits, it becomes dramatically pared down to what seems like a mere sequential listing of actions and facts, and thus loses its potential narrative force. Character development is sparse: the Turks are cartoonish in their malevolence, and offer no motive for their persecution save a sadistic thirst for blood. Likewise, their victims are barely developed enough to elicit any substantial sympathy from the reader – they merely parade in and out of the narrative without any significant introduction or account for their eventual disappearance. Clearly, the Armenian sequence is developed only so much as to give its protagonist (and its reader) a brief glimpse of what “real” hunger and suffering look like, so that she (and the reader) may discover what the novel's book jacket proclaims are “eerie parallels between [Paula's] struggles and what she learns of the past.” However, the novel itself makes no attempt to demonstrate just what – outside the obvious common denominator of physical hunger – it imagines such parallels to be. Even if one argues – as many feminist scholars have – that adolescent eating disorders are the symptoms of an oppressive patriarchal order that imposes untenable demands on the ways in which women (and men) regulate their bodies,<sup>vii</sup> it seems problematic, at the very least, to suggest that this phenomenon is directly equivalent with the premeditated, finely-orchestrated elimination of an entire population through forced starvation. The novel stubbornly ignores cultural differences between the protagonist's North American, late-twentieth-century context and that of



turn-of-the-century Armenia, preferring instead to regard hunger (whether self-imposed or strategically-implemented by a ruling government) as a universal condition, rather than as an effect of specific historical and political formations. Instead, it easily elides questions of history in order to satisfy its primary goal, which involves disseminating large chunks of information within a consumable narrative – a didactic aim that is underscored by its appendage of a bibliographic “resource list” on the topics of eating disorders, the Armenian genocide, and near-death experiences.

The subordination of the Armenian sequence to the central problem of contemporary adolescent anorexia places into relief the degree to which *every* aspect of the text is developed only enough as to render service to the exposition and ultimate solution of the central “issue” with which it is most concerned. While Skrypuch’s novel certainly does not lack for a plot (summarized briefly: a young girl struggles to overcome debilitating personal habits) it nevertheless does not tell much of a story.

Paula’s physical emaciation within the novel speaks to another kind of impoverishment: as a character, she is, in effect, merely a stick figure, developed only so much as to illustrate how any given teenager might negotiate the demands placed upon her by societal desire for “perfection” and learn from her mistakes to make “healthy” choices over “unhealthy” ones. Paula is merely a representative type, an “Anygirl”: she embodies her problem, and not much else.

In his elaboration of character, E.M. Forster distinguishes the task of the historian with that of the novelist: while the historian describes “all that is observable in a man – that is to say his actions and such of his spiritual existence that can be deduced from his actions,” the novelist takes the reader into a character’s interior life, exposing the

passions and insecurities which lie beneath and motivate the character's observable actions (73). The end result, Forster argues, is that "people in a novel can be understood completely by the reader, if the novelist wishes; their inner as well as their outer life can be exposed" – so much so, indeed, that a reader might walk away from a novel feeling as though she knows more about its protagonist than she does her own neighbor (74, 87). The strength of a good characterization, he continues, relies on the author's ability to make visible the character's "secret life" and the ways in which such a character's hidden desires motivate her actions (97).

*The Hunger*'s protagonist is remarkably lacking in any secret, interior life that Forster sees as a pre-requisite for a rounded, well-developed character. True, the reader sees certain of Paula's actions that the protagonist's family and friends do not: the audience is led, for example, to Paula's bathroom, where she triumphantly throws up her dinner, and it is given certain graphic descriptions of Paula's desperate longing for forbidden food. However, the reader is never given any convincing impression of what motivates Paula to act in the way that she does. The novel hints at some possible explanations for the protagonist's behavior : Paula looks up to waifish supermodels, she wants her classmates to think she is agile and pretty, she is impressed by her mother's ability to stick to a diet, and she wants to earn the respect of her demanding father. However, the novel fails to demonstrate how these factors influence her in the way that they do: it fails to exposit *why* Paula admires supermodels and finds them so attractive (rather than, for example, regarding them as merely privileged girls with debilitating cocaine habits); it barely ever shows her interactions with her classmates (save for the sparse introductory gym-class sequence); and it fails to develop the history of Paula's

relationship with her parents, preferring instead to usher them in and out of the narrative only long enough to pop a Lean Cuisine meal into the microwave or to deliver a stern lecture on the importance of strong athletic and academic performance. It is as though the author has researched all of the psychological and social causes of anorexia and inserted examples of each into convenient points of the narrative with the assumption that the reader will consider these brief sketches reason enough to believe Paula's driving obsession. In doing so, the author forecloses the possibility of exposing any peculiar eccentricities or preferences on the protagonist's part that might render her a uniquely defined character, and it forbids, moreover, any flashbacks which might illuminate specific events in Paula's life that might have precipitated her current condition. Rather, it rests content with rendering Paula merely a "textbook case."

Neither is Paula given any more depth through her interaction with other characters or through her confrontation with the obstacles she encounters. Key narrative events, writes Forster, have the potential to transform – if only momentarily – an otherwise two-dimensional character into one endowed with proverbial flesh and blood. In Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, for example, the kindly but indifferent Lady Bertram is momentarily roused from her general state of ambivalence by the marital misadventures of Julia and Maria and – to the surprise of the reader – considers, quite independently of the advice of Sir Thomas and Fanny, the moral problems of "guilt and infamy" (Forster, 113). It is at this moment, Forster argues, that Lady Bertram, usually a flat "disk" of a character "has suddenly extended and become a little globe" (114). However, in a problem novel such as *The Hunger*, no surprising blossoming of character occurs, most

likely because such a sudden incandescence might well serve as a distraction from the plodding but insistent exposition of the problem and its solution.

For example, a moment in the novel's Armenian sequence has the potential to elucidate Paula's particular orientation and mode of reaction to events in which she is embroiled, and thus to establish her as a singular and memorable character; moreover, this moment has the potential to establish why it is precisely a "visit" to 1915 Armenia that prompts Paula's resolution to overcome her eating disorder. In this episode, the Turkish gendarmes who are leading Armenian deportees in a death march across the Turkish desert order their charges to split into two groups, one of them comprised of married couples and one of them made of single individuals. While Paula has the option of pairing up with her friend Kevork and posing as one half of a married couple, she ultimately elects instead to stand as a single woman. The passage that follows confirms that Paula has made the right choice, and documents what happens in the aftermath:

The gendarmes came over and ordered the married group to march over a huge sand dune to the left and the singles were ordered to keep marching along the side of the road to the right. Moments later, Marta [Paula's Armenian counterpart, whose body she inhabits] heard muffled screams. All in the married group were bludgeoned with hatchets and clubs. No need to waste bullets. (118)

This moment of the narrative opens up a great many opportunities to explore the inner state of its protagonist. Why, for example, does Paula/Marta decide to stand as a single person, when she might have otherwise posed as the wife of her friend? Does she logically conclude that her guards have particular designs on married people – for

example, that they want to eliminate couples who might potential procreate or help each other to survive – or is her decision rather based on a fleeting intuition? Is any possible relief she experiences upon having remained with the “right” group tinged with a sense of guilt at surviving while others were merely condemned to death? What is the reaction of the other survivors to this event, and how is Paula’s/Marta’s own response similar to or different from their reaction? And, finally, why is this moment so important – why is it even worth mentioning? Will Paula remember it later, once she has returned to the present, and meditate on the insights on the precariousness of life and the suddenness of death that she has extracted from it – and thus is it her memory of this moment of decision that inspires her to decide, later on, to save her life once more?

However, instead of pausing to expand upon Paula’s reaction to this event, the narrative moves stubbornly onward. In the paragraph that immediately follows the one quoted above, a substantial amount of unaccounted time has already passed:

As the days passed, the sun beat down and the air was unbearably hot. Water and food were scarce. The bedraggled column of deportees was being marched into the heart of the desert. (188)

The incident of the slain married couples is never alluded to again, and nor are any of the other atrocious scenes Paula/Marta witnesses during her time-travel. Rather, the steady heaping of successive moments of violence and suffering throughout the Armenia sequence is ostensibly intended to speak for itself: collectively, all of the tragic events Paula/Marta sees – and the term “sees” is important, because even as the protagonist is supposed to be a participant in these events, she is little more than a casual observer – are

supposed to be reason enough to convince the audience that things in Armenia were pretty terrible, and that, consequently, the present-day Paula determines to change her dangerous habits so that her own life is not so awful. If this seems a rather glib and superficial reading of Skrypuch's text, it is only because its character development and narrative emplotment leave the reader with little else with which to work.

"The test of a round character," writes Forster, "is whether it is capable of surprising in a convincing way. If it never surprises, it is flat. If it does not convince, it is flat pretending to be round" (118). Even if Paula can be recognized as a convincing "textbook case" of an adolescent afflicted with anorexia-bulimia, she is certainly never a surprising character: even when she is peremptorily dropped into a setting that is both miles and years away from her familiar dreary surroundings, she continues to muddle her way through the narrative in the same desultory fashion as she does when she undertakes her daily regimen of weighing, binging, and purging. Unlike a round character, who is both surprising and convincing, the flat character "can be expressed in one sentence" (104). Indeed, in the final analysis, all one really needs to know about Paula is that she has an eating disorder and needs to find some way to get over it. The rest is taken up by a rather dry formula.

If *The Hunger* is taken to be representative of contemporary problem novels, then it can be concluded that – as might be expected – the problem novel is distinguished by the centrality of the problem within the narrative, and the subordination of all other aspects of the novel, chiefly character, to the problem's exposition and solution. Skrypuch's novel neglects the possibility that the "parallels" between self-imposed hunger and politically engineered mass starvation are grossly uneven and ultimately

ahistorical, because to expound upon their differences would be to complicate the simple solution the novel sets up for itself, and to distract the reader from easily imbibing such a solution. Similarly, dialogue, narrative exposition, and moments of conflict between various characters are kept to a minimum, for all the problem novel really requires is that the story is sufficiently developed enough as to couch requisite information: for example, Paula's home life is given only enough attention as is needed to convey the fact that adolescents who suffer from anorexia-bulimia often come from dysfunctional households. Most notably, the protagonist *has* to be flat: she cannot possess any particular idiosyncracies or experiences that make her especially distinctive or unique, because otherwise she could not be representative of, as it were, a "universal" problem in need of solution; moreover, she could not as easily invite the identification of the reader, who is expected to associate the protagonist's textbook symptoms with her own, and thus adopt the character's solution as her own.<sup>viii</sup> If all of these elements were allowed greater expression and development, then the problem novel would not be a problem novel at all – it would simply be a novel, with a requisite conflict (or set of conflicts).<sup>ix</sup>

The problem novel expresses at once a naïve sincerity and a spirited confidence: it thinks it knows what it is up to, and it is certain that, if only it reaches its intended readership, it will work its remedying didactic effects. It has no qualms about being an unadorned confection because it imagines that its simplicity is such that its message will be swiftly and easily imbibed. Yet it is precisely such simplicity that betrays its more subtle, underlying motivations, which it does not explicitly acknowledge, or of which it may even be unaware. This is most clearly evident in the problem novel's insistent use of a flat, two-dimensional protagonist. A typical problem novel protagonist such as Paula

is doubly a cipher: she is at once a vacuous, insignificant figure and, in effect, a key to a code. That is, if Paula is developed only as much as she might represent a typical teenager afflicted with the typical symptoms of a specific disorder, then her character lends itself as a metaphor for any number of phenomena and concepts with which the figures of adolescence and illness have been associated. It remains to be seen, then, how the particular conditions underlying the moment of *The Hunger*'s production, and the uses of the figures of adolescence and anorexia that prevailed in this historical context, might inform a reading of this novel that goes beyond its intended problematization of anorexia-bulimia.

### **The Preservation of Cultural Memory**

Perhaps the most outstanding – and puzzling – feature of *The Hunger* is its protagonist's time-travel to 1915 Armenia. Why, one might wonder, does Paula's recovery from anorexia-bulimia depend on her transportation to *Armenia*? After all, Paula very well could have overcome her dilemma by conferring with an older individual who had once suffered from the condition her/himself, and who could thus lend her the wisdom and support she requires: this, after all, is the pattern of solution that Frey and Rollin observe is most frequently used in YA problem novels (6). Or, if the novel wished to preserve a fantastical and attention-garnering time-travel sequence as part of its alleged exposition of "real hunger"(and as a catalyst to Paula's recovery) it very well could have transported its protagonist to Depression-era United States, or even present-day Sudan. Yet it insists upon sending Paula to Armenia – and thus it is important to explore the significance of this narrative choice.



Armenian diasporic communities comprise a significant portion of the Canadian population – especially in Ontario, where Skrypuch’s novel is set.<sup>x</sup> Significantly, a great number of these communities, both in Canada and in the United States, have at their respective centers monuments to the Armenian genocide.<sup>xi</sup> That is, alongside the institutions one might expect to encounter in any immigrant community – establishments such as community centers, credit unions, dance groups, literary circles, and other associations which might promote the continuation of a national traditions – are those sites that commemorate the *near death* of this same tradition, and which therefore sanction the necessity of its reanimation within a new context. Likewise, Internet sites, such as ArmenianDiaspora.com, which are devoted to keeping members of the diaspora “connected,” not only feature updates on current political events in Armenia, information on affordable direct flights to Yerevan, and conference postings for young Armenian writers, but also include “genocide news pages” which document newly-discovered historical records of the 1915 massacre, provide updates on international recognition of the genocide, and advise young Armenians on how to confront the problem of genocide denial. The implication here is that the memory of death is as important in sustaining and binding together the body of the present community as is, say, an awareness of the current Armenian economy or the celebration of the recent successes of an Armenian boxer.

Of course, this phenomenon of building a community around memories of its near-death is not at all specifically “Armenian” in character. To name only a few examples, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, though it receives federal funding from the American government, is largely supported by members of the Jewish-

American diaspora, and is a cousin to the smaller Holocaust museums, memorials, and libraries located in Jewish communities in North America and abroad; likewise the American Black Holocaust Museum in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, which, in addition to its exhibits on the Middle Passage and the American enslavement of Africans, includes a permanent exhibit on African-American judges in Wisconsin.<sup>xii</sup> What these memorial institutions, and others like them, have in common is the conviction that the preservation of cultural memories of historical atrocity should play a key role in the life of the present-day diasporic community – indeed, that the memory of these events should function as a reminder to member of the community of their need to survive and thrive in light of (or despite) tremendous past losses. This conviction, I argue, gains expression in Skrypuch’s novel. That is, Paula’s body, which sustains physical nourishment only after her comatose “memory” of the Armenian genocide, can be read as a metaphorical expression of a diasporic community, which is paradoxically nourished by memories of its own near-demise.

In order to consider Skrypuch’s novel thus, it may be well to begin by considering how it intermittently reminds its readers that one of the causes of Paula’s disorders is her anxiety that she is not fully “fitting in” with her peers. This anxiety is explicitly forefronted, of course, in the novel’s first chapter, in which Paula worries that her sturdy build (or what her gym teacher derisively calls her “padding”) has caused her the derision of her phys-ed classmates; it is present, too, in her desire to look “almost as good” as her supermodel heroines and in her more delusional moments when, convinced that her starvation diet has rendered her fabulous (when she is, in fact, “dead skinny”) she roams through her school hallways relishing the “stares of the guys and covert looks of jealousy

from the girls” (51). Yet despite her moments of delusion – which become more frequent as the novel progresses – Paula is aware enough to realize that her plan for attaining “perfection,” (and thus the acceptance she craves) comes at a considerable cost. As her condition worsens, she becomes increasingly vexed by the “heady aroma of bacon,” the “fresh aroma of coffee,” heaping plates of “steak, potato salad, and creamed corn” and other dishes that she considers tempting but forbidden – so much so that, in moments of frustration, she binges, only to vomit guiltily soon thereafter (72). Her sense of smell heightened by lack of food, she passes by her neighbors’ homes only to detect the scent of “what each of them had for breakfast” (51). Paula’s desire for nourishment becomes so overwhelming that she becomes distracted at the thought of it when she should be concentrating on schoolwork, and eventually begins to hallucinate about food. Intuitively, Paula knows what is good for her – her own body tells her as much – but her quest for perfection is such that she stubbornly ignores her health to the point of wasting away to oblivion.

The theme of “fitting in” – so prized by YA problem novels, and especially by Skrypuch’s novel – is consonant here with a more subtle theme of assimilation: Paula’s problem-riddled attempt to win the acceptance of her peers – or at least to obviate their disapprobation – resonates with the challenges and sacrifices faced by immigrants as they confront the expectation that they swiftly adopt the language and practices of their new home. Immigrants’ efforts to assimilate – and thus to counter the xenophobic tendencies of their new neighbors, participate in the civic life of the nation, and pursue economic affluence – often comes at the cost of a painful separation not only from the ties that bind them to their native homes but to their relationship to other members of the present

immigrant diaspora.<sup>xiii</sup> Like Paula's emaciated body, the remnants of the pre-immigration past, preserved within the diasporic community, threaten to wither away into forgetting, as faint and inaccessible as the tempting smells Skrypuch's protagonist senses wafting from strangers' windows.

If Paula's problem of anorexia can be read doubly as a metaphor for the problem of assimilation, then the "solution" *The Hunger* proposes – that is, Paula's commitment to maintain a healthy diet after having witnessed "real hunger" in 1915 Armenia – may be read as an agenda of sorts for the reclamation of diasporic communities' survival and health. Here, a brief summary of the novel's conclusion may be helpful. After Paula awakens from her coma in a hospital bed, her chest puckered by plastic heart-monitor disks and her arms coiled round with tubing, she quickly surmises the cause of her near-death and finally acknowledges that her future survival depends on her will to eat. Of course, her new resolve is fraught with difficulty: presented with a first meal of applesauce, she involuntarily reverts to her conditioned resistance to nourishment and "stifle[s] an urge to gag" (160). However, upon recalling how eating was her only means of survival during her time in Armenia, Paula wills herself to regard this dish as "medicine" and resigns herself to tasting both the applesauce and an equally unappetizing bowl of Jell-O. As the narrative speedily moves toward its conclusion, Paula's progressively regained health is measured not only by physical descriptions of her blossoming body and allusions to her new-found confidence in her appearance, but by instances in which Paula achieves a gradually strengthening bond with her Armenian grandmother.

When Paula's Gramma Pauline first greets her granddaughter upon her reawakening, she is astonished to hear Paula's startlingly detailed recitation of events that took place in her own Armenian past. Eager to encourage in her granddaughter a "new obsession" that does not involve calorie-counting, Gramma Pauline agrees to help Paula connect the events of her "dream" to her own family lineage (164). Significantly, the degree to which Gramma Pauline becomes increasingly forthcoming in her divulgence of her past parallels the measure of physical and psychological health her granddaughter has attained. For example, when the protagonist admits her problem and elects to commit herself to a recovery clinic, her grandmother takes her to the cemetery where Paula's great-grandparents are buried and explains – for the first time – the complicated details of her adoption by her aunt, Marta, the same woman whose body Paula assumed in her comatose time-travel. Yet Gramma Pauline is still reluctant to divulge the more harrowing memories of her past, and thus waits until her granddaughter is sounder in body and mind to extend her narrative. Later, when Paula's steady recovery earns her an away-day from the clinic, she and her grandmother walk to a secluded park, where Gramma Pauline surprises even herself by freely responding to Paula's questions regarding her "dream" and unraveling the early memories of deportation, deprivation, and immigration that she had once so closely guarded (179). Ultimately, the bond between the two generations is sealed when, after Paula is released from the clinic with a clean bill of health, her grandmother gives her a small sickle worn by her adoptive mother Marta – the same sickle Paula wore as a talisman during her adventure in Armenia. Here, the past finally converges with the present, as Paula becomes the rightful heir to the memory her grandmother now fully possesses and is free to give away.

However, as the novel's last sentence implies, this exchange marks only the beginning of a new opportunity for growth. When Gramma Pauline finally accounts for the circumstances under which she, as a child, left Armenia for Canada, she concludes, "That part of my life had ended, but a new one had just begun" (184). The reader is expected, of course, to recognize that this statement pertains not only to the grandmother's "new life" in North America, but to Paula's post-anorexic existence, no longer marked by both want of food and want of memory, but now mutually enriched by physical nourishment and a sense of place within history.

Thus, I argue that Paula's "new body" – and the "new beginning" it implies – functions metaphorically as an expression of what the novel envisions as the newly-formed body of the immigrant diasporic community, whose relative health is measured by the degree it draws sustenance from the past, and which articulates its present strength and survival in light of its past near-demise. In the course of Skrypuch's novel, Paula cannot recognize the emaciation of her body, to whose health she has neglected to attend, until she becomes aware of its near death. Likewise, if Paula – or rather, Paula's body – is regarded as an expression of the diasporic collective body, then the solution that Skrypuch's novel proposes to the gradual withering away – wrought by assimilation – of diasporic communities: in order to preserve some sense of coherence and continuity, such endangered communities must turn to memories of their own past near-demise in order to guard against being threatened with oblivion once more.

Such a sentiment is not at all unique: rather, it is a rearticulation of a *myth* that circulates in many of the diasporic communities I have mentioned above. While the term "myth" is conventionally used to designate something that is "not true" or otherwise

“made up,” I employ the term here to designate (as Roland Barthes does in *Mythologies* [1972]) a type of speech or mode of signification that is posed from within specific historical limits in order to grant a certain socially shared meaning to an event, object, or other type of cultural phenomenon. Myth, writes Barthes, is an ideological proposition whose aim it is to make historically contingent objects and social relations seem self-evident and “natural”: it “transforms the reality of the world into an image of the world, History into Nature” (141). Myths, he continues, “immobilize the world: they suggest a universal order which has fixated once and for all the hierarchy of possessions” (155). By functioning as a sort of “depoliticized speech” which re-describes (or “distorts”) socially and economically contingent conditions as simply “normal” or “as things should be,” myth binds together otherwise disparate individuals and solidifies a common perception of the world. In his consideration of specifically French national bourgeois myths, Barthes writes:

... our press, our films, our theatre, our pulp literature, our rituals, our Justice, our diplomacy, our conversations, our remarks about the weather, a murder trial, a touching wedding, the cooking we dream of, the garments we wear, everything, in everyday life, is dependent upon the representation which the bourgeoisie *has and makes us have* of the relations between man and the world. (140).

In other words, myths are those discrete discourses and representations that grant meaning to and thus perpetuate quotidian practices, so much so that they appear self-evident.

If, for Barthes, the most *ordinary* objects and events – wrestling matches, the new Citroen, soap powders and detergents – may be considered myths, insofar as the discourse that surrounds them tends toward the naturalization of a certain French bourgeois worldview (the sudden and well-hailed intervention of Justice, or an exquisite “foamy” exuberance) then it might be equally posited that the most *extraordinary* phenomenon – in this present study, instances of historical trauma – may be seized upon by everyday discourses that work to render a certain set of relations “natural” or otherwise self-evident. In the examples of genocide memorials given above, there is a certain reflexive impulse with which groups of individuals posit the memory of historical traumas as “reason enough” to justify their assurance of a given diasporic community’s cohesion and survival. For instance – to return to the previously given example of the website ArmenianDiaspora.com – the placement of “genocide updates” alongside news of Armenian economic conditions, literary offerings, and athletic triumphs speaks to the way in which the memory of the massacre is utilized in order to facilitate a sense of a shared cultural bond. To a non-Armenian who might happen upon this website, the seemingly casual juxtaposition of the current weather in Yerevan with “genocide news” might seem perplexing indeed, and this places into relief the extent to which the memory of the massacre has become naturalized, as it were, as a significant and necessary aspect of diasporic life, as crucial as any other in ensuring a connection to both a place of origin and the present immigrant community. The seemingly matter-of-fact insertion of genocide updates alongside other news of the diaspora implies a tacit conviction that it “should go without saying” that the memory of historical loss should govern one’s allegiance to a social group. Such an earnest and spontaneously articulated conviction,



however, implies a certain ability to overlook the tremendous role played by film, literature, monuments, speeches, historical studies, oral testimonies, and other artifacts in suturing the memory of the past to the lived experience of the present – to such an extent that the imperative such cultural products issue to guard against forgetting becomes mistaken as a matter of spontaneous choice.<sup>xiv</sup>

If it might be argued that instances of historical trauma can be elevated to the status of myth – at least, inasmuch as they may be employed by everyday discourse to substantiate and safeguard the survival of diasporic communities – then it might be argued, moreover, that the mythologizing discourse surrounding such events might be qualified as what Barthes calls myths of “inoculation.” Writing specifically of the discourses surrounding such French social institutions as the Army and the Church, Barthes argues that such entities are preserved, paradoxically, by their own admission of weakness or failing:

To instill into the Established Order the complacent portrayal of its drawbacks has nowadays become a paradoxical but incontrovertible means of exalting it. Here is the pattern of this new-style demonstration: take the established value which you wish to restore or develop, and first lavishly display its pettiness, the injustice it produces, the vexations to which it gives rise, and plunge it into its natural imperfection; then, at the last moment, save it in spite of or rather by the heavy curse of its blemishes. (41)

Such self-deprecating discourse, Barthes writes, functions as a “kind of homeopathy” in which a “little ‘confessed’ evil” – for example, about the fanaticism of the Army or the

self-righteousness and bigotry of the Church – “saves one from acknowledging a lot of hidden evil” and instead posits certain advantages that might be gleaned from such institutions “in spite of” their willingly professed imperfections (42).

To a certain extent, the means by which diasporic communities articulate a commitment to their survival and cohesion by harkening back to the memory of their catastrophic near-demise follows the logic Barthes observes in myths of “inoculation.” That is, the sense of pride and dignity that unites a diasporic community – which is precariously surrounded on all sides by a larger, dominant culture that threatens to subsume it – is upheld by its conviction that it has survived “in spite of” larger dangers and evils, and thus must keep the memory of its past vulnerability perpetually in sight in order to safeguard against imminent threats in the present. Like a vaccine that temporarily incapacitates a patient, only to protect her from a much more grave and perilous illness, the unsettling memory of past traumatic events, once absorbed by the diasporic body, serves to ward off the imminent danger of disintegration.

Clearly, it is this particular myth of inoculation that guides the narrative of Skrypuch’s novel, both in regard to its content and its intended effect upon the reader. Just as it is Paula’s acknowledgement of her emaciation and near-death that spurs on her commitment to future health, it is her recognition of the near-demise of her Armenian ancestors which serves as the “vaccine” that strengthens her resolve to sustain her bond with her grandmother, and, by extension, the Armenian-Canadian community. In turn, the novel gives its audience just as much of an image of anorexia – and the dangers of assimilation such anorexia represents – as it thinks it requires to convince such an audience of the virtues of nourishing both the individual and collective body. In this

way, a YA problem novel such as *The Hunger* can be understood less as an “allopathic pill” – as Grand imagined her New Woman novel and others like it to be – than as a *homeopathic* response to a problem. An allopathic cure involves the prescription of drugs whose effects are opposite to their symptoms; a homeopathic cure, however, involves a small dosage of substances that would otherwise cause illness in order to heal an afflicted system. The former metaphor appropriately characterizes a novel such as *The Heavenly Twins*. Grand’s heroine, Evadne, does not so much directly suffer from the effects of a sexual double standard as she actively works to combat it by insisting upon a sexually-equitable marriage; her example is one which the novel intends its audience will imitate as it, too, actively battles sexual injustices. However, the latter metaphor of homeopathy appropriately describes the strategy employed in a YA problem novel such as *The Hunger*: its own heroine actually suffers directly the problem(s) at hand, and its audience, which ostensibly suffers along with her as it is exposed to brief but graphic images of her affliction, is thus prompted to recognize, as though by proxy, the inadvisability of her more problematic actions and the virtues of her solutions. Thus, in both its thematic content and its structure, *The Hunger* insists that a brief but well-packaged exposure to a social problem – whether it be anorexia suffered by individual adolescents or the figurative anorexic condition of diasporic communities – will be enough to inoculate the reader against these same ills.

### **The Problem of National Identity**

If, as I have argued above, Skrypuch’s novel subtly targets complete assimilation as a problem in need of correction, then it can be argued that, by extension, it also puts to

question the status of the larger, encompassing national community into which diasporic groups are tempted to assimilate, and which ostensibly threatens their autonomy. Thus, it becomes important to study the ways in which *The Hunger*'s exposition of the problem of teenaged anorexia may be read as much as a problematization of Canadian nationhood as it is an evaluation of the general health of diasporic communities living within the nation. Paula's body might just as well be read as an expression of anxiety concerning the Canadian body politic, which, while valiantly attempting to deprive itself of perniciously tempting American-brand consumer culture – literalized by the omnipresence of Coco-Puffs, Hershey bars, and Cream of Wheat with brown sugar on top – ends up starving itself for want of any “healthy” domestic culture. Just so, Paula's “solution” of nourishing herself, as it were, through a connection with her Armenian past, even as she cultivates a functional and productive physical body, expresses a popular image of Canada as a loosely organized collection of various ethnic groups that are nevertheless bonded together by common civic participation. Such a reading, I argue, confirms the contention that the YA problem novel is more concerned with upholding conventionally accepted notions of the individual's status within existing social structures than it is with questioning or changing such structures.

To an American reader, there does not seem, at first glance, to be anything particularly “Canadian” about Skrypuch's novel, save for a few differences in spelling and the occasional mention of place-names such as Toronto or Guelph. The turns of phrase employed in the novel's dialogue are immediately recognizable to those familiar with American lingo; the consumer items mentioned within the narrative, such as Coco Puffs and Hershey bars, are American in origin; and the problem of eating disorders with

which the novel is partially concerned is one to which American magazines and other artifacts of popular culture continually return. This, perhaps, is precisely the problem. Generally, Canada is viewed – by Americans and Canadians alike – as a simple extension of the United States, with Canadians separated from their southern neighbors only by the degree of their politeness, their affinity for ice hockey, and their general tolerance for American draft dodgers. In turn, literary and film critics often lament that they are hard-pressed to identify anything particularly “Canadian” within Canadian aesthetic objects, and tend to focus instead on either American influences on Canadian culture or on disparate “ethnic” literatures that cannot be as easily subsumed – as American “multicultural” artifacts allegedly can be – into a larger “melting pot” of national culture. For example, when, in her text, *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*, Atwood poses the question, “What’s Canadian about Canadian literature, and why should we be bothered?” she responds, somewhat glibly, that such a question “shouldn’t have to be answered at all because, in any self-respecting nation, it would never even be asked. But that’s one of the problems: Canada *isn’t* a self-respecting nation and the question does get asked” (14).

Significantly, when the question of a particular Canadian culture or aesthetic does get asked, the response is often articulated through medical analogies. Atwood herself admits that “Canadians are forever taking the national pulse like doctors at a sickbed: the aim is not to see whether the patient will live well but simply whether he will live at all” (33). Unlike the American aesthetic, whose optimistic vision is focused squarely on the “Frontier,” – on the “imagined ideal Golden West or City Upon a Hill” (“in that case Heaven is a Hilton hotel with a coke machine in it”) – and unlike the British aesthetic,

whose vision is directed inwardly on the “Island” or body politic, the Canadian aesthetic, according to Atwood, is reflective of its own self-perceived poverty: it involves, quite simply, “Survival” (32). Threatened variously with American cultural takeover, Quebecois secession, the remnants of British colonialism, and the natural adversity of its own harsh climactic elements, Canadian culture is, for Atwood, one that is perpetually on the brink of death, and thus one that finds expression in successive accounts of snowstorms, shipwrecks, and otherwise failed expeditions. The Canadian, she writes, emerges in the figure of the survivor who “has no triumph but the fact of his survival; he has little after his ordeal that he did not have before, except for gratitude for having escaped with his life” (33).

If Atwood’s image of Canadian culture is one of an inert, barely enduring body forever monitored by the dubious gaze of cultural critics, Stanley Fogel’s image of his native country is equally grim: Canadian culture, according to Fogel, is quite simply “anorectic” (9). In his comparative study of Canadian and American literature, Fogel questions why deconstruction, and what he calls deconstruction’s “essential weapon,” metafiction,<sup>xv</sup> has thrived in the United States, while “Canadian writers, on the other hand, create character as if the metafictionist and/or poststructuralist theories do not exist or at least as if they do not impinge on their own theories of fiction, specifically, and of society, generally” (32, 21). While Fogel recites certain predictable explanations for such a trend – including the glut of American doctoral students searching for new and exciting tickets to publication and academic appointment – he concludes that the divergence of interest in poststructuralism and metafiction is due greatly to ideological differences between the United States and Canada. The United States, he argues, has an excess of

grand narratives to subvert. Populated with “larger than life” characters such as John Wayne, Davy Crockett, and Daniel Boone – not to mention an assortment of colorful presidents and founding fathers – American literature, according to Fogel, has no need to develop new characters or to resort to the plodding work of the Bildungsroman – it need only revisit its already existing stock of characters in new, and often parodic, ways. Moreover, Fogel argues, utopian myths of rugged individualism and endless exploitable opportunity have become so instilled in the American popular imagination that they allow for their own subversion and deconstruction: indeed, he maintains that even pre-post-modern works of American literature, such as those by Dreiser and Ginsberg, “challenge, in various ways, all facile assumptions that in America the ideal has been embodied in the real, that ... Pittsburgh is indeed Utopia” (15). However, Canadian literature, writes Fogel, has no heroic figures or foundational myths to begin with, and thus, it has no need for theories and literary practices that might disrupt them. What Fogel calls an “anorectic Canada” is a “country which has not yet, in the minds and works of its most pre-eminent writers of fiction (as well as most of its government officials and citizens), formed and sustained those same entities, both concrete and abstract, that give a country its definitive and distinctive character” (9). Hence, what Fogel characterizes as a characteristically Canadian stubborn adherence to verisimilitude, realism, and the Bildungsroman (rather than, as for Americans, metafiction and postmodern fiction): Canadian writers are still in the process of “nurturing what is thought to be a malnourished Canadian identity” by conjuring up a “realistic” portrayal of a country and its people<sup>xvi</sup> (32).

In a contemporary North American culture saturated with images of waifish young women, the metaphor of anorexia has certain loose associations with the metaphor

of adolescence, and while Fogel claims to distance his study from any attempts to characterize Canadian literature as an adolescent one, the figure of adolescence nevertheless pervades his diagnosis. For example, when he problematizes the recurrence of nature imagery in Canadian fiction, Fogel likens these works of fiction to those of early nineteenth century American works, written before a clear sense of American identity was firmly in place. “Just as nature and the battle with it obsessed many nineteenth-century American novelists, Cooper for one,” he writes, “it remains important because the climate and land have not been subdued and supplanted by a strong, anthropomorphic, distinctively Canadian entity” (23). Fogel’s equivalence of twentieth century Canadian fiction to nineteenth century American fiction implies Canadian literature’s junior status to its American counterpart’s presumably more mature and developed tradition. Such an equivalence is implied, moreover, in Fogel’s account of American literature’s response to its complicity in such twentieth century crises and injustices as the Dresden bombings, the execution of the Rosenbergs, the Vietnam War, and the mid-seventies oil embargo – events that have caused it to question the “naturalness” of sunnily optimistic American myths (14). It is almost as though, in Fogel’s formulation, the United States is figured as a middle-aged man who looks back on his youthful indiscretions and perceives how ultimately at odds they were with his childish ideals; Canada, however, is still mired in an identity crisis, struggling to figure out what its ideals are in the first place.

Whatever their merits, Fogel’s twin figures of anorexia and adolescence, as well as Atwood’s theme of physical survival, resonate all too clearly in *The Hunger*: the parallels between Fogel’s and Atwood’s respective narrativizations of a Canadian cultural



crisis of identity and Skrypuch's own account of adolescent anorexia and near-death seem too strong to pass without comment. Not insignificantly, when Paula's grandmother first recounts her childhood impressions of her new Canadian home, she immediately describes the adjustment she must make to a bland and unappetizing diet: "Canadian bread back then was all white store-bought stuff. It had no taste" (30).

Ultimately, *The Hunger* just as much addresses the conflicts and possibilities of drawing sustenance from a dull and barely nourishing national culture as it does the problem of literal (self) starvation.

The solution Skrypuch's novel implicitly proposes to the problem of the "anorexic" civil body resonates with that which it suggests in response to the question of the emaciated diasporic community – a response that depends on the sustenance provided to the present by the past. That is, the novel proposes that a Canadian sense of identity might achieve some degree of health through its self-articulation as a civil body joined loosely by several different ethnic and diasporic communities, each bound by their own traditions, languages, and collective memories, but each mutually invested in the general welfare of the greater social whole. This conception of national identity – which is markedly different from an American national imaginary, marked as it is by a notion of a singular, unified whole into which ethnic differences are subsumed – is expressed in *The Hunger* through the gradual convergence of the novel's dual narratives.

When she first awakens from her coma, Paula immediately requests a notebook so that she may record the details of her recent time-travel to Armenia. As she gains strength, however, she begins to devote her journal-writing as much to documenting her physical recuperation as she does to piecing together the elements of her comatose dream.

“Every chance she got,” the narrative informs, “Paula would curl up on her bed by the window and write in her journal. There were two parts to it now: one about her past life experiences and one about the regimented life she was now living [in the eating-disorders treatment clinic]” (175). Here, one of the central dilemmas of the novel becomes clarified: Paula, it is implied, has lived two separate lives – or has inhabited two separate “selves” – that, up until this point, have remained at odds with one another, and thus need to be reconciled in order for her to achieve some sense of “wholeness.” As “Paula,” the late-twentieth century North American high school student, the protagonist is so insecure about her tenuous position within her academic and social community that she literally becomes in danger of wasting away to nothing. As “Marta,” Paula’s early-twentieth century Armenian counterpart, the protagonist is faced with the double threat of being forcibly starved to death and becoming all but forgotten to history. However, once the protagonist is safely enclosed in the neutral confines of a place of convalescence, where she is ostensibly secluded from both of the contexts in which she was once endangered, she has the opportunity to weave these once-separate narratives together so that, eventually, they might appear as complementary, though liberally-connected, halves of a single text. Significantly, just as Paula’s renewed relationship with her grandmother and her Armenian past is mirrored by her blossoming physical health, Paula’s increased interest in reconciling the “two parts” of her life through her journal writing occurs in the midst of her physical recovery. Thus, according to the logic implied within the novel’s structure, her body becomes situated as the measure of a more subtle recuperation – that of two aspects of civic identity that, while relatively weak and insubstantial on their own,

contribute to a stronger, or otherwise more considerable, sense of selfhood once they are retrieved and brought together.

As a Canadian raised in a sheltered and essentially bland suburban neighborhood that is generally evacuated of any strong sense of history, Paula, the novel implies, is starved, as it were, of any family or ancestral memory, and thus of any sense of place or belonging. The novel does little to describe the ostensibly middle-class area in which she lives, save for mentioning the community center where she takes aerobics classes, the health clinic where she fastidiously weighs herself, and the neatly-tended lawns she passes on her way to school. Given this dearth of detail, Paula could live anywhere : she could be from either Ontario or Alberta, or for that matter, from Ohio or Oregon. In other words, there is nothing in the novel that either confirms or negates any outstanding national quality or character in her way of life or surroundings. However, Paula – or Marta, as it were – enjoys a strong sense of belonging and rootedness in history while she is in Armenia. However, this sense of identity is equally precarious, insofar as her rights as a citizen are categorically erased. The implication, then, is that the two separate “parts” of the national body cannot exist healthily while independent of one another: the Americanized, suburbanized Canadian landscape becomes dull and “anorectic” without the flavorful sustenance of rich, lived memories that thriving immigrant communities might infuse into it – but it is similarly implied, through Paula’s grandmother’s immigration narrative, that such diasporic communities would not be able to exist in the first place if it were not for the protection of the Canadian state. It would seem, therefore, that some kind of reciprocal relationship is demanded, whereby Paula’s “civic” and “ethnic” identities remain distinct but complementary aspects of her identity.

*The Hunger*'s solution to the problem of Canadian nationhood is markedly different from the "melting pot" scenario that is so prevalent in immigrant narratives emerging from the United States. In her elaboration of what she calls "prosthetic memory,"<sup>xvii</sup> Alison Landsberg studies the ways in which early twentieth century immigrants to the United States adopted mass-produced "memories" of American history as they strove to assimilate into greater American society (or, more often than not, as they were coerced into assimilating). Landsberg cites a particularly provocative example in which the Ford Motor Company attempted to literalize the myth of the "American melting pot" by enacting an elaborate ritual performance in which immigrant employees – each "dressed in foreign costume" and bearing the flag of his native country – descended into a giant "melting pot" set in the middle of a stage, only to emerge later dressed in "American clothes" and waving the American stars and stripes (49, 50). According to Landsberg, this pageant – which adopted the "logic of the assembly line" – is evocative of the more implicit processes by which immigrants to the United States have been encouraged to "escape from stigmatized 'otherness'" and to adopt instead the "fantasy of becoming a 'typical American'" (51, 50). This is a process she sees dramatized in immigrant narratives such as Henry Roth's *Call it Sleep* and Mary Antin's *The Promised Land*, in which immigrants engage in "kinds of creative editing [...] that were continually used to imagine oneself as American and to make the future tense inhabitable" (51). Of course, as Landsberg observes, the proverbial leap into the melting pot is a costly action, for "while many immigrants might have longed to assimilate, the prosthetic memories they took on in that process were coercive and homogenizing. Instead of producing difference and thereby enabling empathy and perhaps even

counterhegemonic politics, in this case prosthetic memories produced only sameness and the ‘typical American’” (51).

The vision of national identity that *The Hunger* proposes is considerably different from the one Landsberg sees enacted in United States narratives, insofar as it envisions an organically synthesized image of national identity instead of, as it were, a prosthetically-enhanced one. In the case of American narratives, memories of an individual’s pre-immigration past are, in effect, amputated and replaced with prosthetic memories (that is, new myths, practices, and symbols) that produce a body whose degree of “wholeness” is measured against the solid prototype of the “typical American.” Skrypuch’s novel, however, implies that such “surgery” (to continue the logic of Landsberg’s analogy) is insufficient – that the assimilation achieved by the amputation of pre-immigration memory can only result in a bloodless, emaciated body. What the novel proposes instead, then, is a reattachment and reintegration of the original, organic limb – pre-immigration memory – that supports and completes the greater whole.

However, Skrypuch’s novel does concede to the fact that the solution it proposes is not one that can somehow be spontaneously achieved, but rather that it requires the mediation of social institutions. After all, Paula’s final reconciliation significantly takes place in a *treatment center* – that is, within the confines of a correctional institution whose purpose is to instill within its charges those habits and behaviors that render her most likely to become a productive member of the society in which she lives. Moreover, the novel concedes to the fact that Paula’s enrollment in this program – impressively called a “collaborative weight normalization treatment program consisting of ten phases” – demands a certain degree of sacrifice of personal independence. Her admission to the

program depends upon her signature of a contract which specifies that “she would eat the food they gave her, and participate in the counseling sessions, the weighing sessions, the leisure sessions, and everything else that they suggested” (170). Consequently, Paula feels, on various occasions, “humiliation,” an “invasion of privacy,” and a certain loss of “control” (173, 174, 178). At one point, for example, Paula reacts when a nurse who is weighing her refuses to disclose the results, asking Paula instead to turn around so that she cannot see the scale. “Why should you know something about me that I don’t?” Paula asks “incredulously” – to which the nurse replies, tersely and definitively, “It’s the rules, Paula. You signed the contract” (172). This moment points to a certain irony inherent in the treatment program: while its primary objective is to instill in the patient a certain sense of independence from her debilitating problem, it must accomplish this aim by first depriving her of any personal agency, and making her instead dependent upon the strict regime it imposes, until such a regime becomes, in effect, “second nature.”

The treatment center can thus be read as a metonymic expression of the ideological state apparatus, or what Althusser defines as the range of cultural institutions which reproduce ideology – or the “imaginary relationship of individuals to the real conditions of their existence,” and their consequent lived practices within such an imagined relationship – and thus ensure the domination of the ruling class, or State (109). Ideological state apparatuses (or ISA’s) – such as the school, church, family, system of political parties, and, one might add, the health care system – work to interpellate persons as individual subjects, fostering within each individual a sense of uniqueness and free consciousness, and consequently a sense that she exists in the company of other subjects whom she recognizes and who in turn recognize her (96-98). Such a sense of subjectivity

– such a sense of exerting free agency within the world – is crucial to the operation of ideology, insofar as it allows an individual to adopt a requisite orientation to society, and the practices which structure such an orientation, as if it were her own making. While a society may just as well function through explicit coercion – through the workings of such “repressive state apparatuses” as the police and the prison system – it functions just as smoothly, and certainly less demonstrably, when it relies on the tacit consent of its constituent members who mistake its desires for their own<sup>xviii</sup> – just as, significantly, Paula comes to adopt the habits prescribed by the treatment center as her own. (115-116).

Thus, while *The Hunger*’s proposed solution of ideal citizenship initially seems less coercive than the American melting pot scenario described by Landsberg – after all, it suggests an equitable balance between duty to a national civil body and the preservation of diasporic cultural memory, rather than demanding that one be sacrificed to another – it nevertheless concedes to the fact that the formation of the ideal citizen still involves a certain degree of external compulsion and discipline: Paula cannot recognize and reconcile her two “selves” without entering into a (both explicit and implicit) “contract” with a regimented and regimenting institution.

However, it is significant to note that Skrypuch’s novel does not critique this process, but rather confirms its virtues. While Paula initially resists the demands placed upon her by the “regimented life she was now living,” she ultimately recognizes that her enrollment in the program is “for her own good” (165). If it were not for her stay in the treatment program, the novel implies, Paula would not be able to achieve a certain degree of “wholeness” or health – virtues that are demanded for the creation of an able-bodied and able-minded citizen whose ability to balance her allegiances to both her local

community and to the state render her a productive member of society. Here, once again, the problem novel's homeopathic aims are exposed: by giving the reader a glimpse into the various moments of discomfort and humiliation Paula experiences at the treatment center but insisting in turn that such moments of distress work toward "her own good," the novel beckons its reader to recognize that "healthy" discipline, and the submission to authority such discipline requires, makes her, like its own protagonist, a "better person." Thus, while at certain moments the novel seems to critique prevalent social dilemmas – such as, for example, untenable body-image demands placed on North American women or the costs of assimilation – it ultimately falls back on conventional and conservative solutions, inviting its readers to put their faith in "responsible" adult institutions, rather than challenging them to work against the misogynistic structures which make possible women's eating disorders in the first place, or prompting them to question why it is necessary at all that their allegiance to a particular community should be concomitant with an active identification with national ideology.

*The Hunger* is by no means a "good" book: certainly, it does not promise a pleasurable and fulfilling read as might, for example, Patterson's *Jacob Have I Loved*. Moreover, its actual effect on its teenaged readership is questionable – in any case, it is beyond the scope of this present study to determine how it is actually received. Yet I argue that Skrypuch's novel is in any case an *important* novel, insofar as it is representative of the problem novel and the anxieties and desires inherent in such a genre. While a problem novel such as *The Hunger* may well express an earnest and well-intended concern for the well-being of both its protagonist and the readers whose struggles may be not unlike those faced by such a protagonist, such concerns may



ultimately not be as simple and straight-forward as the novel assumes they may be. *The Hunger*'s preoccupation with adolescent anorexia – a pervasive social problem that has lent itself to various other discourses as a metaphor for other pressing concerns, such as those of assimilation and national identity – opens it up to the examination of the anxieties prevalent in its moment of production. Moreover, the novel's ultimate insistence upon validating the disciplinary function of social institutions as a means of confronting or solving a certain problem, rather than prompting its readers to question or change such hegemonic institutions, betrays the YA novel's ultimate interest in reigning in, as it were, its potentially unruly adolescent readership and ensuring that future generations inflect the desires of the present. Thus, if the project of literary and cultural inquiry is, in part, to determine how literary works contain within themselves the conflicting desires of a given culture, then the YA problem novel, though its literary merits may be dubious, is as good a genre as any with which to start.

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<sup>i</sup> In the first edition of *The Pleasures of Children's Literature* (1992), Perry Nodelman likens the problem novel to a "fable" and emphasizes that its most significant feature is the moral it proposes to its readers: problem novels, he writes, are "really about how their readers will think and act after reading the book" (200).

<sup>ii</sup> Ann Ardis's *New Women, New Novels: Feminism and Early Modernism* (1990) provides a particularly detailed and illuminating account of the figure of the New Woman and the late-nineteenth century discourses of sexuality and gender that led to the development of this figure. Ardis pays particularly close attention to the function of the New Woman both as author and as literary pro/antagonist; among the novels she studies is Grand's *The Heavenly Twins*. See also Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (1977) which includes a chapter on the "feminist novelists" of the nineteenth century.

<sup>iii</sup> Robert Cormier's *The Chocolate War* (1974) is one of the best-known and most widely-celebrated works of American young adult fiction. Cormier's hero, Jerry is a student at a New England Catholic boys' school, where he unwittingly finds himself caught up in a complex power struggle waged between a teacher and an elite group of students. Jerry chooses to defy both his classmates and his teacher by refusing to take part in a school-wide chocolate sale, in which both parties have considerable interest.

While the hero of Cormier's novel is Jerry, the narrative moves from his perspective to those of multiple characters, thus adding to the moral complexity of the text. Moreover, according to Frey and Rollin, Cormier's "command of pacing, of scenic variety, contrast, compression, and tension, of crackling dialogue and emotive extremes, of withering irony [...] of escalating shocks, and broken taboos is remarkable" (637).

<sup>iv</sup> While this statement may seem exaggerated, consider an advertising campaign undertaken by a Pittsburgh addiction treatment clinic in 2003. Various billboards posted around the city featured a teenaged girl in full prom regalia – decked in evening wear, holding a lavish bouquet, and wearing a sparkling crown. To the side of the photographed image was the caption, "Prom Queen – Or Heroin Addict?" The advertisement clearly implies that teenagers – no matter how wholesome they appear – may have a secret dark side which must be detected and exorcized; it implies, moreover, a certain lack of control adults feel in fully knowing and reining in the younger generation ("It's 11p.m. – Do You Know Where Your Children Are?") and promises an expedient solution to such an anxiety.

While this advertisement campaign is so serious and earnest in its intentions that it tips toward the farcical, other cultural artifacts are more playful in their examination of the fear provoked by adolescents. For example, the plot of Joel Schumacher's *The Lost Boys* (1987), involves two "All American" brothers who, by night, consort with a group of motorcycle-riding, leather-jacket-wearing vampiries.

<sup>v</sup> In a recent issue of *Time*, dated 24 April 2006, a reader responding to a feature story on global warming writes, "We can't halt global warming if we act like parents waiting up for a teenager out past curfew. We have to be proactive." The reader's personification of an unsteady climate as an unruly adolescent suggests an interesting correlation: both global warming and teenagers are portents of an ominous future which must be disciplined and brought under wisely-enforced adult control.

<sup>vi</sup> In his introduction to his guest-edited issue of *Children's Literature Quarterly* (23:3 Fall 1998) on the topic of lesbian/gay literature for children and young adults, Kenneth Kidd suggests that YA problem novels written on the theme of sexual identity appear to be socially and politically progressive. "Not only has homophobia replaced homosexuality as the designated social problem addressed in such novels," he writes, "but some of the more recent titles also explore sexual identity in unconventional ways" (114). Kidd cites, for example, South African writer Toeckey Jones's YA problem novel *Skin Deep*, which "likens homophobia to racism, situating itself in a tradition of resistance literature" (114). Even so, such problem novels may not be as progressive or liberatory as they might initially appear. In an article appearing in the same issue of the *Quarterly*, Roberta Seelinger Trites argues that, while YA problem novels written on the topic of sexual identity "superficially seem to promise the reader freedom from past constraints, freedom

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from continued repression, freedom from narrow-minded discourse” these same novels “often undermine that alleged liberation ; she maintains, moreover that “in gay young adult literature, homosexuality seems at once enunciated and repressed” (143). Likewise, in a later issue of the *Quarterly* (30:3, Fall 2005) Benjamin Lefebvre argues that Canadian YA problem novels that deal with the theme of sexual identity tend more to reconfirm compulsory heterosexuality than they question or critique it. Such novels, he writes, feature the first-person perspective of hyper-masculine boys whose sexuality is put to question by their homosexual friends, whose sexual orientations are only significant insofar as they help solidify the protagonists’ own, heterosexual, subject position.

<sup>vii</sup> For example, in *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (1993), Susan Bordo – heavily influenced by Foucault – argues that the body can be read as a text, insofar as it is indelibly marked by its position within an ideological complex of power relations. Bordo goes on to “read” the body of the anorectic, which, she argues, is shaped not only by her (the anorectic’s) internalization of cultural standards of femininity but also – paradoxically – by her rejection of such values.

<sup>viii</sup> The way in which the YA problem novel limits character development in order to court reader identification invites a comparison of the problem novel to the fairy tale. In his study of the fairy tale, Bruno Bettelheim argues that this form is best suited to allowing the child to “bring his inner house into order”; it provides, in other words, a “moral education which subtly and by implication only conveys to him the advantages of moral behavior, not through ethical concepts but through that which seems tangible right and morally meaningful to him” (5). According to Bettelheim, the fairy tale is able to grant such a “moral education” through its use of a relatively undeveloped protagonist who might represent any child living in any place or time. The child reader “suffers with the hero his trials and tribulations and triumphs with him as virtue is victorious”; thus, the child who identifies with the hero unconsciously comes to identify the hero’s conflicts with her own and to absorb certain strategies by which she might work through such conflicts (9). In this way, the relatively undeveloped fairy tale hero and the equally undeveloped protagonist of the YA problem novel appear to serve similar functions. However, the crucial difference between the fairy tale and the problem novel is that the fairy tale – set “once upon a time” and in “a land far away” – is broad and flexible enough to facilitate the “working through” of any number of dilemmas; the problem novel, however, addresses one specific problem which is bound by the historical moment of the novel’s production. A hundred years from now, “Hansel and Gretel” or “Snow White” may lend themselves to dozens of new readings and adaptations, while a problem novel such as *The Hunger* – if it is read at all – will simply be regarded as an artifact that addresses one specific, socially-contingent, dilemma.

<sup>ix</sup> For example, Katherine Patterson’s *Jacob Have I Loved* (1980) very well has the potential to be a problem novel. Louise, not unlike the Biblical Esau, is jealous of her younger twin Caroline, whom Louise believes has stolen the love and attention that she herself rightly deserves. Patterson’s novel could just as well have focused its attention solely on the sibling rivalry that exists between Louise and Caroline, spinning its way to a neat and easy solution that validates the cohesion of the nuclear family. Instead, the novel chooses not to subordinate its other elements to the primacy of Louise’s problem. For example, Louise is rendered as a complex and memorable character. She exhibits a light-hearted sense of humor that is nevertheless occasionally overtaken by jealousy, self-righteousness, and moral rigidity; a tomboy, she wants to be a waterman like her father, but is consumed by sexual attraction to an older man; and her relationship with her younger twin, which variously exhibits itself as both bitter and amicable, is placed into relief by her similarly complex relationships with other characters in the novel. Thus, Louise is not a “walking problem” like Paula, but a singular and unique character. Moreover, she acts within a well-defined and memorable setting, which is established through detailed descriptions of the cultural and ecological life of her Chesapeake Bay island home, the World War II-era anxieties that invade this otherwise distant haven, and Biblical allusions which both characterize the traditional life of Louise’s home and provide commentary on her various conflicts. Finally, Patterson’s novel does not insist upon an easy solution to her domestic struggles: while Louise ultimately leaves the island – and by extension, her troubled relationship with her sister – she does so only at the cost of forsaking a home for which she admittedly had great affection.

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<sup>x</sup> Presumably. The narrative does not specify where Paula's suburban hometown is located, but it does mention other cities – e.g., Toronto, Ottawa, and Guelph – that are all located in Ontario.

<sup>xi</sup> In *Armenia: A Historical Atlas*, Robert Hewsen includes a map of the United States and Canada which contains information regarding Armenian Apostolic and Uniate parishes, Armenian outreach centers, and populations of Armenian-Americans/Canadians Armenian by state/province. For example, according to Hewsen's map, California has the highest (U.S.) population of Armenian-Americans (151,340 in 1990). According to a listing of Armenian genocide monuments in [www.armeniapedia.org](http://www.armeniapedia.org), California also has at least three major monuments to the massacre.

<sup>xii</sup> America's Black Holocaust Museum was founded in 1988 by Dr. James Cameron, the only known survivor of lynching. Among its other exhibits are those that address the life of civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.; the formal Senate apology, made in 2005, for the lynching of African-Americans; and the "cultural landscape of the plantation." The museum has published a mission statement ("... to educate the public of the injustices suffered by people of African American heritage") and descriptions of its exhibits on its website, [www.blackholocaustmuseum.org](http://www.blackholocaustmuseum.org).

<sup>xiii</sup> As Margaret Atwood notes, the immigration plot in both Canadian and American immigration novels generally involves some "tension between the cultural values of the 'old' society and that of the new one, with members of the first generation often electing to stick with the old values and members of the second wishing to abandon them in favour of the new; and, sometimes, members of the third generation functioning as symbols of integration" (149). Clearly, as I argue below, this plot-structure is evident in Skrypuch's novel.

<sup>xiv</sup> I focus primarily on artifacts emerging from the Armenian diaspora not because I believe they are entirely unique (although, certainly, they are the products of a specific discourse) but because they most clearly resonate with the particular form of cultural memory taken up by Skrypuch's novel. Without a doubt, the tendency to mythologize, as it were, instances of historical trauma are evident in other diasporic communities. For example, in Pearl Gluck's documentary/film essay *Divan*, in which the filmmaker interviews members of the American Jewish diaspora who find themselves torn by what she calls "Hasidic love and secular possibilities," one interviewee, Pessy Sloan, explains why she has remained faithful to strict Orthodox practices. Referencing Gluck, who is comparatively more secular, Sloan remarks:

I think that, because you identify so strongly as a Jew, your children will probably understand that they're Jewish – they will have a connection to Judaism – but their children will have less, and their grandchildren will have less, and [...] generations from now, Judaism is lost. Then really, the Holocaust ... [pause] ... then they *did* win, then they did win..."

The "they" to whom Sloan refers are, of course, the perpetrators of the Holocaust, and the implication of her statement is clear: if the centuries-old practices of Judaism are abandoned by the diaspora, then Hitler's grim vision of a "final solution" will have been realized after all. It is significant to note, however, that Sloan does not find it necessary to clarify that the "they" to whom she refers are the Nazis: rather, she assumes that, in effect, it "goes without saying" that she is referring to this particular set of individuals. Moreover, Sloan does not seem compelled to elaborate on how, exactly, the Nazis would "win" if future generations of Jews stray from Orthodox practice: for her, the connection between the memory of the genocide and the future survival of the diasporic community is simply understood. Thus, the ease with which Sloan makes this statement, and the brevity and assumed self-evidence of the statement itself, serves as another example of the ways in which the memory of a complex historical event is mythologized and appropriated as a device with which to ensure social cohesion.

<sup>xv</sup> In the context of Fogel's study, deconstruction "refers to Derrida's attempts to undo metaphysical schema or constructs, to demonstrate the flimsiness of the overviews and arguments as well as the logocentrism of the Western world's foremost philosophers. It devalues and denigrates, among other concepts, idealism, transcendence, self, and origin" (9). Fogel attributes "the popularity of Derrida and what have been called his poststructuralist writings" to the "experiments of the metafictionists" with whom Fogel believes "deconstruction has many affinities": the interest of both deconstruction and metafiction, he writes, involves the undoing of "holistic, integrated modes of understanding the world" (9). Thus,

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according to Fogel, deconstruction “also implies the undermining of established meaning generally, whereas construction entails the opposite, the creation and development of such meaning” (9).

<sup>xvi</sup> Fogel’s argument concerning the dearth of both Canadian interest in both poststructuralism and Canadian national identity is, however, a problematic one that threatens to fall to pieces once it is considered with regard to film and media studies. After all, it was Canadian native son Marshall McLuhan, who, in his landmark text *Understanding Media*, coined the phrase “the medium is the message” and whose study of the ways in which specific media affect discourse influenced countless studies – for example, Stuart Moulthrop’s investigation of the relationship between hypertext, intertextuality, and the laws of media in “You Say You Want a Revolution?: Hypertext and the Laws of Media” (in *Postmodern Culture*, 1.3, 1991).

Moreover, if Fogel’s contention regarding the lack of any substantial connection between Canadian aesthetic and intellectual work with poststructuralism is to some extent unsound, so too is his argument concerning the general lack of interest, in Canada, in problematizing Canadian national identity. For example, as Adam Lowenstein argues in *Shocking Representation: Historical Trauma, National Cinema, and the Modern Horror Film* (2005), the depiction of severed or otherwise distorted bodies in the films of Canadian director David Cronenberg allegorizes the Canadian national body, which “resists being imagined in its comforting wholeness ... [and is instead] imagined as fragmented, fragile, even colonized” (149).

Similarly – and especially relevant to this present study – many of Canadian filmmaker Atom Egoyan’s texts trouble the boundaries between Armenian cultural memory and Canadian national identity. In Egoyan’s *Ararat*, (2000) for instance, a character dismisses his co-worker’s newly-discovered obsession with the Armenian genocide by insisting that Canada is a “new country” where such painful memories can be put aside. Likewise, in *Next of Kin* (1984), a young Canadian man who has become dissatisfied with his upper-middle-class, milquetoast, Anglo family poses as the long-lost-son of a lower-middle-class Armenian immigrant family. As the film progresses, the viewer senses that while the protagonist can move fluidly from one family to the other, his dual identities are nevertheless ultimately unreconcilable; the film thus implies that the lack of any definable Canadian identity is due less to an “anorectic” national ideology than it is to the convergence of discrete communities, bound by ethnicity, religion, and class, that cannot be subsumed under a monolithic whole. In this way, *Next of Kin* critiques the conventional “solution” to the “problem” of Canadian nationhood to which, as I argue in this section, Skrypuch’s novel subscribes.

<sup>xvii</sup> Landsberg’s concept of “prosthetic memory” is a complex one on which she elaborates and problematizes throughout the course of her text, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (2004). For the purposes of this present study, however, it may be sufficient to note that Landsberg characterizes prosthetic memories as those memories which “originate outside a person’s lived experience and yet are taken on by that person through mass cultural technologies of memory” (19). Like artificial limbs that are surgically attached to and subsequently used by the body, prosthetic memories are “not natural, not the product of lived experience ... but are derived from engagement with a mediated representation”; moreover, they are “actually worn on the body; they are sensuous memories produced by an *experience* of mass-mediated representations” (20). In the course of her text, Landsberg considers different sources of prosthetic memory, including film, interactive museum exhibits, graphic novels, and ritual performances (such as the one in which immigrant-employees of the Ford Motor Company participated). For the most part, Landsberg believes prosthetic memories enable empathy and socially-progressive action, insofar as they encourage emotional identification with images of others’ experiences which might “affect [the audience] so significantly that the images would actually become part of the archive of their own experience” (30). Landsberg admits, however, that certain forms of prosthetic memories – namely, those narratives imposed upon new immigrants to the United States – can be coercive and hegemonic.

<sup>xviii</sup> This is possible, Althusser argues, because ideology interpellates us as subjects, just as a policeman might hail a person on the street. A person who has been hailed, Althusser writes, will turn round because “he has recognized that the hail was ‘really’ addressed to him, and that ‘it was *really* him who was hailed’ (and not someone else)” (118). Just so, “ideology ‘acts’ or ‘functions’ in such a way that it ‘recruits’ subjects among the individuals” (118) so that “individuals are always-already subjects” (119). For example, even before its birth, a child is “expected” and assumed to “bear its Father’s Name” – that is, the

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child is already assigned a subject position in the social, which he will come to recognize (and claim) as his own.

### **III. Anne Frank's "Own True Heir": Intertextuality and the Intergenerational in *Zlata's Diary***

At the center of J. K. Rowling's second novel, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (1999), is an enchanted object: a "very secret diary" which promises to reveal the mysteries of Hogwarts's legendary Chamber of Secrets. When Harry first finds the diary under the sink of a flooded, unused bathroom, he thinks little of it: the "non-descript and soggy" book is disappointingly blank, and seems to reveal none of the clues Harry had hoped it would offer (231). However, once Harry prints his name in the diary, "words [he] had never written" appear across the blank page. The words belong to the diary's author, a former Hogwarts student named Tom Riddle, who responds willingly when Harry subsequently enters questions into the diary's blank pages. Riddle confesses, for example, that he knows about the racially motivated violent acts that are occurring on the school-grounds; moreover, he implies a connection between these episodes and a monster who dwells in the supposedly legendary Chamber. When Harry excitedly pursues this new information, Riddle makes him a greater offer yet: he promises to take Harry inside of his – Riddle's – memory, thereby allowing Harry to witness first-hand certain events that will unlock the secret of the chamber and the violence its inhabitant has wrought.

Harry's willingness to be transported into the "memory" of the secret diary is motivated not only by his curiosity regarding the present affairs taking place in his school but also by his quest to discover his own origins. In the course of the novel, Harry becomes increasingly disturbed by parallels he observes between himself and Salazar Slytherin, the infamous co-founder of Hogwarts who, according to school legend, sealed the Chamber of Secrets until his "own true heir" would arrive to unseal it and "unleash

the horror” within it (151). In his anxiety to learn whether he himself is the prophesized heir of Slytherin, and thus whether he is in some way implicated in the bloody events that have recently transpired at his school, Harry accepts the diarist’s invitation to enter into its memory of past events, so as to confirm or disprove his possible genealogy, and by extension, to articulate his own, present, identity.

In its development of Harry’s relationship with Riddle’s diary, Rowling’s novel proposes an implicit relationship between subjectivity, memory, and intertextuality. The self, the novel implies, is never created in a vacuum. Rather, Harry may only realize who he “is” by first discovering where he came from – that is, by emplotting himself within a collectively-shared genealogical narrative. As Charles Taylor states in his exploration of historical “sources of the self,”:

I define who I am by first defining where I speak from, in the family tree, in social space, in the geography of statuses and functions, in my intimate relations to the ones I love, and also crucially in the space of moral and spiritual orientation within which my most important defining relations are lived out. (35)

The attempt at self-definition, Taylor argues, cannot be accomplished without two crucial phenomena: first, the existence of “other selves” to whom such a definition may be addressed, and second, by extension, a commonly shared language which makes possible such an articulation and the meaning that one’s interlocutors subsequently make of it. Thus, it is fitting that Harry’s quest to discover whether he is or is not the heir of Slytherin – and, correspondingly, what specific role he occupies in the violent affairs faced by his school – involves his engagement with an interlocutor, whose literally



absorbing narrative account prompts Harry to piece together his own narrative in relation to it. In effect, Harry intuits that his own identity is *encrypted* in Riddle's diary, an intuition that is literalized when his engagement with the diary leads him to open the Chamber of Secrets, that is, the crypt.

As an exposition of the processes involved in the articulation of subjectivity, Harry's relationship with Riddle's diary may be read as a figure through which to study a very different literary text, Zlata Filipovic's *Zlata's Diary: A Child's Life in Sarajevo* (1994). At first glance, *Zlata's Diary*, a work of non-fiction, seems radically different from Rowling's fantasy novel. While excerpts of the diary were first published by UNICEF in 1992, *Zlata's Diary* became an international bestseller in 1994 when readers learned of the plight of its young author, who recorded her two-year experience of the siege of Sarajevo before being airlifted to safety in Paris in December of 1993. In the course of the diary, whose entries span from September of 1991 to October of 1993, Zlata<sup>1</sup> documents the drastic adjustments she must make and the losses she endures as her once-peaceful city suddenly comes under siege. While the diary often includes Zlata's reflections on her relationships with her family and friends and the anxieties she feels upon entering adolescence, its main purpose, as Zlata herself admits, is to document the immediate circumstances of war and their effect on the children of Sarajevo, of whom Zlata posits herself a representative. Clearly aware that her wartime circumstances have shaped her quotidian habits and the ways she interacts with those around her, Zlata, not unlike her fictional counterpart, Harry Potter, undertakes a quest to discover her position within a larger historical context of racially-motivated violence; her diary entries, addressed to an imaginary interlocutor, provide her with an opportunity to articulate an

image of herself as an innocent victim of “evil people who hate children and ordinary folk” (188). Moreover, like Harry, Zlata is able to secure this position through her engagement with another diary, Anne Frank’s *Diary of a Young Girl*. Frank’s diary, insofar as it exists in cultural memory as a “classic” example of children’s wartime writing, legitimizes – or, in effect, makes legible – not only Zlata’s claim to the status of “wartime child” but the notions of childhood on which such a claim is founded. In turn, it is this legitimizing quality of Anne Frank’s text that prompts Zlata to consider herself an heir not only to a tradition of children’s wartime writing but to the memories contained in Anne’s diary.

Zlata’s reliance on the legitimizing potential of Anne Frank’s earlier wartime diary makes her text a particularly intriguing case study for this present discussion of second-generation memory. The representations of second-generation memory that I have studied up to this point – Epstein’s *Children of the Holocaust* and Skrypuch’s *The Hunger* – have featured individuals who have made personal claims on the memory of traumatic events they have not experienced by virtue of the ties of kinship that bind them intimately to the survivors of these events. Epstein, for example, is able to posit herself as an “heir” to the legacy of the Holocaust because she has grown up with both the stories and the silences that are the effects of her parents’ experiences of the genocide; similarly, Paula, the protagonist of Skrypuch’s novel, comes to regard the Armenian massacre as part of her own heritage not only because her maternal grandmother is a survivor of this event but because, as the novel implies, she lives in a society that privileges the individual’s ties to a collective, pre-immigration past. By contrast, Zlata has no familial ties to Anne Frank, whose “heir” she nevertheless implicitly claims to be. Zlata is not

directly related to Anne; she is not Jewish (or, at least, she never admits to being Jewish<sup>ii</sup>); and her only knowledge of the Holocaust, and more generally, Anne's Second World War-era context, comes solely from literary and filmic, rather than familial, sources. Nevertheless, Zlata's diary posits a kinship between its author and her literary predecessor that is determined not by blood, physical proximity, or the ties of diasporic memory but rather by a perception of the similarities that exist between the two authors' respective historical contexts – a perception that is enabled by the mediation of various cultural texts that make such similarities evident and that, in turn, serve as the sources which permit Zlata to trace a genealogy that links her directly to her Dutch counterpart.

Zlata's claim to a certain kinship with Anne in turn permits her to adopt her literary predecessor's style and rhetoric as her own. Initially, Zlata's adoption – or what I will later call her “consumption” – of Anne Frank's prose style appears problematic: it may well prompt a reader to questions whether Zlata's reliance on Anne's voice limits, rather than amplifies, the effectiveness of Zlata's representation of herself and her contemporary context. Indeed, as Adrienne Kertzer remarks in her discussion of *Zlata's Diary*, certain passages in Filipovic's text “suggest that, even if giving children Frank's diary does not stop a war, it may well produce children who will learn to imitate her voice”; her observation implies that, in relation to Anne Frank's diary, *Zlata's Diary* is comparatively inauthentic and uninspired (136). However, I would like to propose that a reading of the imitative strategies enacted in *Zlata's Diary* tell us much more about this text, and the historical context in which it was written, than a first reading might initially seem to suggest. Specifically, a reading of *Zlata's Diary* may reveal much about the

limits inherent in any text – including that of Anne Frank’s – that claim to represent both war and childhood.

### **Entering the Diary**

The first few passages of *Zlata’s Diary* are brief, matter-of-fact entries that document events one might expect to see addressed in any other Western middle-class pre-adolescent’s diary: impressions of the first day of school, a birthday party to which both girls and boys are invited, a catalogue of test grades, and a weekend away at the family’s country home. None of these entries is especially insightful or attentive to detail: for example, when Zlata describes her first-day-of-school reunion with her classmates, she merely notes that “[w]e all went somewhere and we all have so much to tell each other” without bothering to elaborate on what exactly she and her friends did over the holiday, or what news they have to disclose (1). Moreover, there is little indication that Zlata has any specific audience or interlocutor in mind as she registers her daily activities: she drops proper names without bothering to account for their relationship to her, and she provides only the barest of sketches of the different environments in which she finds herself. There is no suggestion of literary pretension in these early passages, nor is there any hint of self-conscious desire to document – journalistically, as it were – noteworthy experiences for posterity. Rather, one has the impression that these early entries are merely cursory jottings intended only to jog the memory in later years.

As the diary progresses, however, a subtle shift occurs in Zlata’s tone and style, as well as in the content she addresses: her entries begin to allude, tentatively, to the

internecine violence that is encroaching dangerously on Sarajevo's city limits. For example, in an entry made on 19 October 1991, Zlata reports with alarm that her father has been called up by the police reserve; later in October, she reports having seen disturbing televised images of violence in the city of Dubrovnik and expresses concern about the safety of family friends who live there (7). Yet these entries – which are somewhat more detailed and emotionally charged than the ones preceding them – are still nevertheless punctuations in an otherwise routine catalogue of quotidian activities. As soon as Zlata's father returns from a weekend of service, she quickly proclaims that “it looks as though everything will be all right” (6); similarly, the entry in which she darkly reflects upon recent events in Dubrovnik is immediately followed by a passage on an upcoming piano recital and the promise of a ski vacation (6). The sudden shifting from self-conscious reflection on national events to unselfconscious matter-of-factness is especially evident in the following entry, made on 14 November 1991:

War in Croatia, war in Dubrovnik, some reservists in Herzegovina. Mommy and Daddy keep watching the news on TV. They're worried. Mommy often cries looking at the terrible pictures on TV. They talk mostly politics with their friends. What is politics? I haven't got a clue. And I'm not really interested. I just finished watching *Midnight Caller* on TV. (10)

At this point in the diary, Zlata regards war, like the less visceral “politics,” as an abstraction: something to be reflected on and questioned, certainly – but also something distant and strange, and thus best to be put out of mind by a comfortingly familiar

television program. However, a sudden turn in Zlata's style and narrative approach occurs in an entry made on 30 March 1992. While the passages preceding this one reveal an increasing attention to the steadily mounting violence in Zlata's native Sarajevo, this entry is one of the first in which Zlata acknowledges the direct effect the hostilities may have on her personally:

Tomorrow we're supposed to go to a classical music concert at Skenderija Hall. Our teacher says we shouldn't go because there will be 10, 000 people, pardon me, children, there, and somebody might take us hostages or plant a bomb in the concert hall. Mommy says I shouldn't go. So I won't. [...] I'm afraid to say this next thing. Melica says she heard at the hairdresser's that on Saturday, April 4, 1992, there's going to be BOOM – BOOM, BANG – BANG, CRASH Sarajevo.

Translation: They're going to bomb Sarajevo. (27-28)

Significantly, in this same passage – in which Zlata acknowledges the war as an immediate reality rather than as a mere abstraction – she decides to give her diary a name. “You know what I think?” she writes at the beginning of the entry. “Since Anne Frank called her diary Kitty, maybe I could give you a name too” (27). After listing a catalogue of names (including “Asfaltina,” “Sevala,” and “Hikmeta”) Zlata finally settles upon “Mimmy,” a name that bears the most striking resemblance to the one Anne Frank gave her own diary.

The concurrence of Zlata's recognition of war as an immediate reality and her decision to name her diary in imitation of Anne Frank is not, I would argue, a mere

coincidence. First, the very act of naming a diary implies the recognition of an interlocutor (if only an imagined one) who has some vested interest in Zlata's immediate situation. This in turn implies that Zlata acknowledges her circumstances as significant and worthy of being related to an outside observer in a clear and detailed manner, rather than being casually jotted down for her own edification, as she previously had done. Indeed, Zlata recognizes her immediate context as being historically significant – and thus worthy of being related to another. Thus, she posits an equivalence between herself and Anne Frank, another young girl who herself lived in and documented a state of emergency. In other words, the diary's sudden appeal to Anne Frank can be read as a direct effect of the narrator's equally abrupt recognition of the political crisis in which she finds herself implicated.

Once Zlata establishes a parallel between herself and Anne Frank, she begins to inhabit her literary predecessor's style in ways that surpass the mere address of an interlocutor. First, she begins to adopt Anne's journalistic approach as she describes events that occur in the city. Just as Anne summarizes news reports her family hears on their contraband radio, Zlata recapitulates information she receives from television and radio news. Similarly, just as Anne describes street scenes she observes from her limited vantage-point in the attic, Zlata describes episodes from her occasional forays away from the safety of home. Such descriptions provide the reader with some larger context that will enable her/him understand better the more immediate struggles Zlata and her family undergo as they wait out the siege. While Zlata's description of the cellar in which she and her family take shelter from the bombing are not nearly as detailed and compelling as

Anne's thorough portrayal of the secret annex, they do communicate something of the atmosphere surrounding the experience of hiding:

The cellar is ugly, dark, smelly. Mommy, who's terrified of mice, has two fears to cope with. The three of us were in the same corner as the other day. We listened to the pounding shells, the shooting, the thundering noise overhead. We even heard planes. At one moment I realized that this awful cellar was the only place that could save our lives. Suddenly, it started to look almost warm and nice. It was the only way we could defend ourselves against all this terrible shooting. (39)

Here, the sense of danger communicated by descriptions of pounding shells and over-flying planes is balanced by an impression of domestic comfort: assured of her family's unity against the backdrop of chaos, Zlata can now imagine the dank cellar as a "warm and nice" place of familial respite. A reader is reminded of passages from Anne Frank's own diary, which document how alternate moods of boredom and anxiety are occasionally broken by pleasant family conversations and games of Monopoly.<sup>iii</sup>

However, the most revealing parallels in style between Zlata's narrative and that of Anne Frank appear in those entries that are more contemplative and meditative in tone and content. For example, in an entry in which Zlata confesses a penchant for "philosophizing," she meditates on the politics of ethnic difference:

I keep wanting to explain these stupid politics to myself, because it seems to me that politics caused this war, making it our everyday reality. War has crossed out the day and replaced



it with horror, and now horrors are unfolding instead of days. It looks to me as though these politics mean Serbs, Croats, and Muslims. But they are all people. They are all the same. They look like people, there's no difference. They all have arms, legs, and heads, they walk and talk, but now there's "something" that wants to make them different.

Among my girlfriends, among our friends, in our family, there are Serbs and Croats and Muslims. It's a mixed group and I never knew who was a Serb, a Croat, or a Muslim. Now politics has started meddling around. It has put an "S" on Serb, an "M" on Muslim and a "C" on Croats, it wants to separate them. And to do so it has chosen the worst, blackest pencil of all – the pencil of war that spells only misery and death. (96-97)

This passage bears a remarkable resemblance to those in which Anne, while she originally disavows any personal interest in politics, goes on to analyze, with remarkable astuteness, both the wartime political climate and her fellow annex-members' various opinions on the present situation. For example, in her 27 March 1944 entry, Anne announces that "[a]t least one chapter on our life in hiding should be about politics, but I've been avoiding the subject because it interests me so little" (240). Despite her proclaimed disinterest in politics, Anne goes on to describe, with great sophistication, the dissension in the annex that is caused by political debate; in doing so, she aims to explain the discourse of the grown-up world of which she is a part, but from which she still feels alienated (240). Zlata's attempt to "explain these stupid politics to myself," because such

political fissures make up our “everyday reality,” thus echoes her predecessor’s desire – a desire articulated through an affected reluctance – to explain to herself the world of adults.

Similarly, Zlata’s entry recalls passages in which Anne evaluates the complex and intertwined conflicts between various groups – most notably, conflicts between Dutch Christians and German-Jewish immigrants to Holland – in order to discover some explanation for both the war and what she perceives to be the elements of human nature that make such war possible. For example, Zlata’s passage, quoted above, bears some resemblance to a passage in *The Diary of a Young Girl* dated 22 May 1942:

When you hear [about conflicts between the Dutch and the German-Jewish immigrants seeking asylum] you begin to wonder why we’re fighting this long and difficult war. We’re always being told that we’re fighting for freedom, truth and justice! The war isn’t even over, and already there’s dissension and Jews are regarded as lesser beings ... To be honest, I can’t understand how the Dutch, a nation of good, honest, upright people, can sit in judgment on us the way they do. On us – the most oppressed, unfortunate and pitiable people in all the world. I have only one hope: that this anti-Semitism is just a passing thing, that the Dutch will show their true colors, that they will never waiver from what they know in their hearts to be just, for this is unjust! (303-304)

In addition to expressing the optimistic confidence in human goodness for which she has become best-known to modern-day readers, Anne communicates here an unwavering belief in the innate equality of human beings: the conflict between the Dutch Christians and the German Jewish immigrants is all the more tragic to her because of the failure of the Dutch (an inherently “good, honest, upright people”) to recognize their Jewish neighbors as equal compatriots, joined with them in a united front against Nazi occupation. The frustration with which Anne makes this statement is underscored by her sense that, although she is merely a child, she sees such equality as self-evident (and the denial of such equality as “unjust”) while Dutch adults are dangerously slow in coming to this conclusion. Such frustration with adult blindness to the seemingly self-evident truth of equality is dramatically reflected in Zlata’s own humanist proclamation (“But they are all people. They are all the same”) and in her realization that she and her girlfriends are aware of such sameness while adult citizens, politicians, and soldiers remain blind to it. “I think we ‘young’ would do it better,” Zlata writes later in her entry. “We certainly wouldn’t have chosen war” (97). Here, she stands in allegiance with Anne – drawing on a vision of her own childhood wisdom derived from Romantic notions of the child and in juxtaposition with adult irrationality – to articulate a plea for peace and justice.

While Zlata’s adoption of Anne’s humanist rhetoric and righteous indignation is immediately evident in the passage quoted above, what is perhaps more subtly expressed is the particular mode of perception that allows Zlata to adopt such rhetoric in the first place. In this passage, Zlata regards her “everyday reality” precisely as a *text* which is written by a particular author – “politics” – who communicates through a specific medium – that is, writing (made possible through the “pencil of war”). In other words,

Zlata engages with the circumstances in which she is placed in a manner that is similar to the way she might read a book: she carefully scrutinizes the scenes “spell[ed]” out before her, noting the editorial changes, as it were, made by an author (“politics”) who uses a black “pencil” of war to “cross out” once-scripted settings and quotidian exchanges. Moreover, she observes the ways in which this author’s “pencil” literally marks individuals who had formerly appeared to be relatively indistinguishable: politics, she writes, “has put an ‘S’ on Serbs, an ‘M’ on Muslims and a ‘C’ on Croats.” By approaching her “everyday reality” as one might approach a passage in a novel, Zlata fashions herself as a textual critic of sorts, making note of original markings and their later emendations, judiciously citing scenes or “passages” she finds particularly significant, and interpreting them according to a standard she believes “correct.”

Zlata’s orientation to perceived reality as a text – a text that is constantly in a state of revision and which therefore demands attendant commentary or exegesis – in turn elucidates her relatively liberal borrowing of Anne’s style and rhetoric. That is, if Zlata is already predisposed to regarding perceived reality as inherently textual – or, in other words, as *constructed* and thus open to scrutiny, quotation, and interpretation – then it is not entirely surprising that she should consider Anne Frank’s diary in a similar manner.<sup>iv</sup> According to Zlata’s perspective, *all* of the objects and scenes that she encounters in the course of everyday life – whether they take the form of a street-battle in a residential neighborhood of Sarajevo or a passage from a published diary – equally constitute a rich field of sources that she may draw into and reconstitute in her own meditation on her present circumstances.

Indeed, while Anne Frank's diary is the one text on which Zlata's own writing most heavily draws upon (for reasons that I will elaborate on below) it is difficult to read the above-quoted passage without remarking upon other literary texts it calls to mind. For example, Zlata's insistence that politics has "put an 'S' on Serbs, an 'M' on Muslims and a 'C' on Croats" might be read as an allusion to Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), whose protagonist Hester Prynne is forced to wear a scarlet letter "A" on her clothing that identifies her (falsely) as an adulteress. Similarly, Zlata's assertion that Serbs, Croats, and Muslims are fundamentally "all the same" because they "all have arms, legs, [and they all] they walk and talk" bears a striking resemblance to Shylock's famous set-piece in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* (1598):

... I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes? hath not a Jew hands, organs,  
dimensions, senses, affections, passions? fed with the same  
food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases,  
healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter  
and summer as a Christian is? -- if you prick us do we not bleed?  
if you tickle us do we not laugh? if you poison us do we not die?  
and if you wrong us do we not revenge? (3.1.52-60)

Of course, Zlata never admits to reading either of these texts: thus their direct influence on her own writing is questionable. However, their *indirect* influence is indeed possible. Zlata is well-enough acquainted with works of American literature (for example, she notes that she has read the works of Jack London) that she may at least be familiar with the title and general plot of Hawthorne's novel. Moreover, while Zlata never cites *The Merchant of Venice*, Shylock's words are quoted frequently enough that even those who

have never read Shakespeare might recognize this celebrated passage. Thus, the striking resemblance between critical moments in Hawthorne's and Shakespeare's texts and moments in Zlata's own diary points to the rich intertextual dimension of her diary – in other words, it speaks to the ways in which she unselfconsciously (and perhaps also unconsciously) draws on various sources – even those that have been freed from their original contexts – in order to articulate her own, equally textual, impressions of her “everyday reality.” In this way, the passage quoted above epitomizes what Roland Barthes describes, in “The Death of the Author” (1978) as a “text”:

[A text is...] a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations ... The writer can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original. His only power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as never to rest on any one of them.” (*Image-Music-Text*, 146)

Considered from this perspective – one that Zlata intuits when she gestures to the “always already written” textual character of her “everyday reality” – *Zlata's Diary* may not be as derivative or inauthentic as critics such as Kertzer imply that it is. Rather, it is as multiply-mediated as *any* text necessarily is. Thus, what perhaps distinguishes *Zlata's Diary* is that – at least with regard to those passages that allude heavily to and imitate those from Anne Frank's diary – Zlata is *conscious* of the ways in which her own writing “blend[s]” and “clash[es]” with that of another, and thus she recognizes that her own diary is indebted to and shaped by the texts that preceded it. Here, the similarities between Zlata's recognition of the inherent intertextual dimension of her diary and

second-generation memory cannot be ignored: just as second-generation memory involves its bearer's conscious recognition of the ways in which collective memory has shaped her habits and perceptions, *Zlata's Diary* involves its writer's awareness of the antecedent forms that shape – and indeed make possible – its own composition. Considered thus, *Zlata's Diary* may very well be read as a material (textual) instantiation of second-generation memory.

### **Sifting Through the Fragments**

While the status of *Zlata's Diary* as a literary artifact may be, in effect, justified by an analysis of its rich intertextual character (which its narrator herself recognizes) it nevertheless appears problematic once it is considered as an historical account of the Bosnian war. For example, in the passage quoted above, Zlata subtly likens her “everyday reality” to the Second World War-era context in which her predecessor lived by accounting for the ways in which the “pencil of war” has “marked” the various ethnic groups living in Sarajevo. As an obviously astute reader of *The Diary of a Young Girl*, Zlata is certainly aware of the Nazi law that required Jews to wear yellow stars that literally marked them as Jewish; many of these stars bore the letter “J” or the word “Jude” – an additional identifying marker. Zlata's insistence, then, that “politics” has “put an ‘S’ on Serb, an ‘M’ on Muslims, and a ‘C’ on Croats” implies her correlation between the racist violence that forced Anne Frank into hiding and the violence which Zlata now faces. This sense of historical parallels appears in an entry made four days earlier, in which Zlata describes the mass emigration of Sarajevo's citizens and remarks

that the sight “reminded me of the movies I saw about the Jews in the Second World War” (93).

This reference to the Holocaust, it appears, further strengthens Zlata’s sense of connection to her literary predecessor. However, it also points to what may be considered a certain lack of distinction between the present and the past. Like her fictional counterpart Harry Potter, who becomes literally absorbed by a text whose composition preceded his own birth, Zlata seems to be so fascinated by Anne Frank and her historical context that Zlata’s ostensible goal (reporting the siege from the perspective of a native Bosnian) seems, in effect, to be swallowed up by her will to pattern her voice and narrative strategies after those of a writer whose life and times were significantly different from Zlata’s own. According to this view, *Zlata’s Diary*, while it ostensibly aims to preserve memory – of both the Bosnian genocide and, indirectly, the earlier Nazi genocide that claimed the life of Anne Frank – ironically institutes a form of *forgetting*: that is, it marks a refusal or an inability to recognize the inherent differences between these two historical moments and the respective writers’ placement within them. Moreover, Zlata’s attempt to extend a connection between herself and Anne Frank by likening the sufferings of Bosnian émigrés to those of Jews she has seen in Holocaust movies signals an equally problematic forgetting of the boundary between historical events and the aesthetic representations of those events.<sup>v</sup>

However, despite Zlata’s apparent tendency to conflate her contemporary moment with that of Anne Frank, and despite the degree to which such conflation puts to question the authenticity of what could be considered Zlata’s specifically Bosnian voice and perspective, there remain significant differences between Zlata’s depiction of Sarajevo



and Anne's depiction of Holland during the Second World War. These differences are not immediately obvious: after all, both texts are diaries. Both texts share a sense of chronology that is necessary to the diary-form: each of their entries, made on a more-or-less daily basis, follows one after the other, giving the reader a sense of progression in time. Moreover, the two texts share both a first-person narrative perspective and certain objects of discussion and contemplation at which such a perspective is aimed; in the case of these two specific diaries, the most prevalent object of inquiry is the effect of extraordinary war-time circumstances on the interior lives of self-proclaimed "ordinary" adolescent girls. However, insofar as both of the diaries' narrators are invested in documenting both the political crises in which they are implicated and their own internal dramas, the two texts can just as well be considered as historical narratives. As historical narratives, however, *The Diary of a Young Girl* and *Zlata's Diary* manifest two distinct formal approaches: that of the history and the chronicle, respectively.

Hayden White has made a useful distinction between what he calls "proper history" – a mode of historical narrative whose emergence was concurrent with the rise of modernity – and the pre-modern chronicle form. "Proper history," White argues, perceives historical events as existing within a totality: it "reveals to us a world that is putatively 'finished,' done with, over, and yet not dissolved, not falling apart" (21). The historian approaches events as though they "had a plot all along," and thus understands his responsibility as involving the "finding" of an already existing plot within the events he documents. For this reason, "proper" historical narrative seeks to represent events in their "coherence, integrity, [and] fullness"; more significantly, it imposes a demand for closure, for a moral meaning that springs organically from events in their totality (24,

21). The chronicle, on the other hand, lacks the historical narrative's impulse toward cohesion and closure. While a chronicle, like the historical narrative, may concern itself within a geographical and social center, and treat the activities of a central subject within a localized period of time, it nevertheless "fails as proper history" because it does not perceive within events a plot which it might discover, extract, and exposit. Rather, the chronicle merely presents events within a basic chronology, "throw[ing] onto the reader the burden for retrospectively reflecting on linkages between the beginning of the account and its ending" (18).

Strictly speaking, Anne Frank's diary is not "proper history" in White's terms. Written during the Second World War, rather than after its end, the diary lacks a certain critical distance or detachment necessary to a proper final evaluation of the war and its effects on those in hiding. Moreover, Anne's tragic deportation to and death in Bergen-Belsen foreclosed the possibility of a definitive conclusion: the diary simply stops abruptly, days before Anne's arrest. Nevertheless, *The Diary of a Young Girl* does imagine disparate events as existing within a coherent, totalizing narrative. While Anne's writing may be read simply as a series of journal-entries – that is, as separate and distinct records of events that unfold on a given day – they may be alternately read as episodes within a larger, serial narrative. Each passage of the diary builds upon the last, documenting the intermittent swelling and recession of the narrator's adolescent anxieties as they occur against a backdrop of inter-familial conflict and, even more dramatically, against the historical conflict in which they are implicated. In the course of the diary, each of Anne's fellow annex-members – from her gentle and erudite father, Otto, to her irascible and ever-snoring roommate, Dr. Drussel – emerges as a fully and distinctly

developed character whose pain-stakingly documented desires, habits, and eccentricities motivate the various conflicts that unfold over the course of the text. Moreover, Anne's distinctive voice, which is characterized by a delicate balance of sardonic wit and tenderness, as well as her realist's eye for detail and ear for turn of phrase, transform what could be otherwise a desultory recitation of quotidian affairs into a gradually unfolding narrative that is part memoir, part adventure story, and part domestic drama.

By contrast, Zlata's own narrative is comparatively sparse and undeveloped. Even the most cursory glance at both texts as they appear on the printed page reveals an important distinction between them. While Anne's entries consistently involve at least five well-developed paragraphs that span across an average of two or three pages, Zlata's entries are often only a paragraph long, and, despite the large type-face used by the Penguin edition, only occupy a third of the printed page. While *Zlata's Diary* involves its own cast of friends, family members, and political figures, these individuals – unlike Anne's fellow attic-residents and the individuals who aided them – are not sufficiently developed enough to take on a life of their own; indeed, these characters are so thinly developed that the Penguin edition of the diary includes a list of individuals Zlata mentions throughout her narrative and brief descriptions of their relationships to her, ostensibly so that the reader might make quick reference to each as s/he encounters them in his/her reading. Similarly, while Zlata makes an effort to explain the major events she records and to describe the settings in which they take place, her descriptions, unlike Anne's, are thin enough to require the editor to make bracketed notes that better contextualize these events and settings. Finally, while Zlata's more meditative entries are certainly lucid and poignant, they lack the lyrical sweep of Anne's prose. Overall, the

diary communicates not so much a distinct voice as it does a matter-of-fact, detached narration, as exhibited in the following entry, made on 10 August, 1992:

Dear Mimmy,

Mommy's [brother] Braco is fine. He's already walking well. Today he went to Otes. He'll be working in the press center there, reporting on the situation. Things are all right there. They have no shooting and they have food. They're lucky. I really miss my cousins Mikica and Daco.

I haven't seen them since the war broke out.

Your Zlata (73)

In many ways, this passage is characteristic of most of the entries included in the diary. First, it begins abruptly and with little narrative exposition; unlike Anne's diary, there is no attempt at a characteristically epistolary unfolding of topics to be developed within the course of the passage. Absent, too, is any attempt to link the topic of the entry – the uncle's recuperation from a gunshot wound – to earlier passages that addressed the circumstances under which he was wounded and hospitalized; rather, the narrator takes it for granted that the reader will remember this information from entries made several weeks prior. Moreover, such lack of contiguity between this passage and those preceding it is paralleled by the general lack of coherence within this passage: Zlata moves, in a series of blunt, staccato sentences, from reviewing her uncle's health to documenting conditions in Otes to expressing her wish to see her cousins, without accounting for the associations she makes in order to make the transition from one topic to the next.

The fragmentary, chronicle-like nature of *Zlata's Diary* is especially clear in a particularly memorable entry, dated 27 May 1992, in which Zlata attempts to document her mother's near-escape from shelling:

Dear Mimmy,

SLAUGHTER! MASSACRE! HORROR! CRIME!

BLOOD! SCREAMS! TEARS! DESPAIR!

That's what Vasco Miskin Street looks like today. Two shells exploded in the street and one in the market. Mommy was nearby at the time. She ran to Grandma and Grandad's. Daddy and I were beside ourselves because she couldn't come home. I saw some of it on TV but I still can't believe what I actually saw. It's unbelievable. I've got a lump in my throat and a knot in my tummy. HORRIBLE. They're taking the wounded to the hospital. It's a madhouse. We kept going to the window hoping to see Mommy, but she wasn't back. They released a list of the dead and wounded. Daddy and I were tearing our hair out. We didn't know what had happened to her. Was she alive? At 4:00, Daddy decided to go and check the hospital. He got dressed, and I got ready to go to the Bobars', so as not to stay home alone. I looked out the window one more time and ... I SAW MOMMY RUNNING ACROSS THE BRIDGE. As she came into the house she started shaking and crying. Through her tears she told us how

she had seen the dismembered bodies ...

A HORRIBLE DAY... UNFORGETTABLE... (50-51)

Unlike the passage cited previously, this entry seems comparatively cohesive: Zlata delivers a chronological account of the day's events that begins with her mother's disappearance, explains her family's subsequent search, and ends with her mother's shaken return. In other words, Zlata journalistically describes a specific episode. However, she cannot fully communicate how exactly she *experiences* this event. Certainly, some statements ("Daddy and I were tearing our hair out" and "Was she alive?") communicate the anxiety she feels before her mother returns, but the sheer horror of losing the person she most loves – indeed, one of her last ties to protection and comfort – ultimately remains unexpressed. Zlata can only gesture toward, or indirectly communicate, her reaction to her mother's potential loss by reciting a series of abstract nouns ("SLAUGHTER! MASSACRE! HORROR! CRIME! ...") which stand in the place of directly perceived images and emotions, but which fail to bring forth such perceptions in their concrete specificity; the list can only attempt to compensate for the overwhelming character of such perceptions by its use of capital letters and exclamation points. Likewise, the disturbing image of Zlata's mother "running across the bridge" relates a specific event and implies, through its use of capitalization, a particularly strong emotional response to her mother's return. However, it is unclear what this response is, exactly: does Zlata draw attention to the image of her mother crossing the bridge because she wants to communicate the relief she feels upon discovering that her mother has survived the shelling, or is she instead gesturing toward a renewed sense of terror she feels as her mother crosses a structure frequently targeted by snipers? Either response

seems viable, and yet, no clear contextual clues either precede or follow the image to indicate the response it signifies. Indeed, the image, detached as it is from any contextual ties that would affix it definitively to any particular affective response (a detachment that is emphasized by the use of capitalization) may in fact signify no response whatsoever – that is, the isolated statement may be read purely as an image (or, rather, as a “pure” image) whose sudden and shocking appearance on the printed page precedes, or pre-empt, any attempt to explain or make meaning of it. In other words, it is as though this image, and the capitalized words that communicate it, serve as a screen which obscures the full experience: Zlata can recite the external details of the events she has survived, but cannot describe such events from her position *within* them.<sup>vi</sup>

This entry, which is one of the most fully developed passages of the diary, dramatizes the extent to which *Zlata’s Diary*, as a chronicle, places the burden of meaning-making squarely on the shoulders of the reader, prompting him<sup>vii</sup>, as White argues, to reflect retrospectively on the “linkages between the beginning of the account and its ending” (17). While, certainly, the reader may extract from the diary an image of the events in Bosnia, and Zlata’s position within them, he is able to do this, not by immersing himself in a coherent narrative made full and immediate by thick description<sup>viii</sup> (such as that provided by Anne Frank’s diary) but rather by piecing together the non-contiguous words and entries heaped up one after the other throughout the text. By assembling these scattershot images, the reader becomes conscious of the narrative gaps that make such an assemblage necessary – that is, he becomes aware of what Zlata (and, by extension, the reader) cannot know or tell of her experience. For example, while the image of Zlata’s mother’s flight across the bridge may give the reader

an impression of what life under siege might “look like,” its isolated and uncontextualized placement within the narrative calls the reader’s attention to the gaps implicit in the narrative – that is, to what Zlata (and, hence, the reader) cannot fully know of what it is to experience the limit-situation of a violent siege “from the inside.” Moreover, while the reader might be able to extrapolate some sense of meaning to the events Zlata attempts to document in her diary – for example, he might interpret Zlata’s exclamatory sentence regarding her mother as an expression of relief, or, conversely, of terror – he recognizes that such meaning is not that which Zlata herself has assigned (ultimately, the events Zlata witnesses confound her, and thus forbid her making “sense” of them). Rather, such meaning is that which the reader brings to his reading. Certainly, this notion of the reader’s interpretive primacy applies to *all* acts of reading – indeed, the concepts of the “death of the author” and of the inaccessibility of full textual meaning are those which underpin contemporary literary criticism.<sup>ix</sup> However, the obvious gaps and false starts within *Zlata’s Diary* dramatize the limits of determinate and transmittable meaning that a more linear, cohesive narrative – such as *The Diary of a Young Girl* – might obscure.

As a chronicle – rather than as a fully-developed, moralizing “proper history” – *Zlata’s Diary* reveals trauma. Trauma, according to Cathy Caruth, is a wound inflicted upon the mind, a wound which causes a “breach in the mind’s experience of time, self, and the world” (4). Unlike a physical wound, such a psychological wound can never be fully healed, as it was “experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known”; it makes itself available to consciousness only belatedly, as it gradually becomes manifested in the “nightmares and repetitive actions” of the survivor (4). Trauma, then,



cannot be located in the “simple violent or original event in an individual’s past” for the individual’s encounter with this event was necessarily a missed one – that is, one which could not be originally assimilated by the individual’s consciousness (4). Thus, trauma can only be identified in the traces it leaves in its wake – for example, in the repetitive attempts to articulate the traumatic event through language, which is ultimately inadequate to giving full expression to the event. Thus, insofar as the traumatic event exists in excess of language (which exists in the domain of consciousness, and of the “everyday”), its expression, through language, ultimately reveals less of what the witness knows than of what the witness *does not* know.

Bearing in mind this definition of trauma, it becomes easier to see how *Zlata’s Diary* assumes the form of a chronicle. Unlike Anne Frank’s diary, which was written during a period of seclusion (albeit forced seclusion) which allowed its writer the time to edit and refine her text to the extent that it could become a fully developed narrative peopled with round<sup>x</sup>, dynamic characters whose complex and various motives intersect with larger, carefully accounted historical and material circumstances, *Zlata’s Diary* was composed even as its author-narrator was continually and literally exposed to the threats of the “outside world.” While Anne frequently complains of being bored,<sup>xi</sup> her Bosnian counterpart laments that she “can’t relax for even a second”: the quiet moments in which she finds time to write, draw, study, or spend time with family and neighbors are merely punctuations in a continual series of efforts to hide from shelling to secure water and food in the midst of sniper-fire, and to cross the city in the heat of street-battle in search of more secure shelter (74). Given the precariousness of these circumstances, it is surprising that *Zlata’s Diary* could be composed at all: one might well imagine that the

constant inundation of the senses brought about by warfare, compounded by the struggle to meet immediate physical needs, might drastically limit the diarist's ability to take in and subsequently transmit the events she witnessed, as well as the time she would have to do so. Conversely, it is not surprising that the diary ultimately emerges as a collection of loosely-connected fragments, whose minimally coherent form attests to its narrator's limited ability to assimilate the images that constantly barrage her senses. Indeed, a great many passages in *Zlata's Diary* greatly resemble entries made soldiers' war-journals, whose composition between battles and marches render them brief and barely contiguous, and whose blunt allusions to fallen comrades speak less to any callousness or masculine stoicism than they do to an inability to account for, immediately, these sudden losses.<sup>xii</sup> The difference is, perhaps, that unlike a soldier who receives some degree of training and preparation for battle, Zlata is a civilian who is suddenly and involuntarily exposed to warfare, and who thus lacks any communally received framework through which she may interpret her experiences. The young narrator may only repeat, emphatically, "WHY? WHY ME? WHY? WHY IS THIS HAPPENING?" (170).

In light of Zlata's inability to account for any reason as to why the events she witnesses should occur in the first place, her allusions to film and television news take on new significance. In the passage cited above, for example, in which Zlata documents her mother's perilous crossing over a local bridge, Zlata begins her account not by alluding to the scene visible immediately outside her apartment, but to images she sees on television news reports. These news reports, which account for three bombs that have exploded on Vaso Miskin Street ("two in the street and two in the market") and which include images of the wounded being taken to the hospitalized amidst "madhouse" chaos, serve as a

contextual backdrop for the event Zlata is most intent upon relating – that is, her mother’s return home from Vaso Miskin Street via the nearby bridge (50). Zlata’s recourse to televised news images renders this passage more coherent and structurally sophisticated than other entries, insofar as it allows her to place a single, immediate event (the mother’s escape) within a larger set of circumstances and thus allows her to understand, if only minimally, the causes of the near-loss of her mother.

Zlata’s reference to “movies ... about the Jews in the Second World War” (95) fulfills a function similar to her use of television news, insofar as it places into relief the radical disorientation Zlata feels in her present situation and her consequent need to find a stable point of reference by which she may better articulate her experiences. On several occasions in the diary, Zlata states that her wartime existence “isn’t life – it’s an imitation of life”(80).<sup>xiii</sup> Her comment gestures toward the performative character of the wartime practices she must adopt: her daily activities are part of a role with which she is neither familiar nor comfortable playing. Moreover, it implies a certain sense of detachment or lack of agency, as if her life has become as distant to her as someone else’s life being performed on the big screen. Thus, Zlata’s reference to Holocaust films may be read less as a comparison of her present-day circumstances to those of the past than to a sense of alienation brought on by her traumatic experiences: a spectator of her own life, she may only gaze at the street-scenes below her – and at herself, as she “imitates” life – with the same sense of detachment she might feel upon watching a film. Furthermore, insofar as Zlata’s wartime experiences are in some sense alien to her, and thus profoundly difficult to describe, films provide her with a way in which she might describe the siege analogically. In no section of the diary does Zlata state, either implicitly or explicitly, that

the warfare and ethnic cleansing taking place in Bosnia is “another” Holocaust, or even that the siege is “just like” the Second World War – a comparison that others have not been hesitant in making.<sup>xiv</sup> That is, she does not confuse two distinct historical events, and thus risk slipping into a dangerous ahistorical account of her present situation.

Rather, she merely states that the sight of Bosnians leaving Sarajevo *reminds* her of scenes from Holocaust films. By proposing an analogical relationship between the events she witnesses and the films she has watched – and, ostensibly, which she assumes the reader has watched as well – Zlata is thus able to communicate indirectly what, in her traumatized state, she is unable to relate directly.

If Zlata’s occasional references to television news and film help her better relate specific incidents, then her more pervasive allusions to Anne Frank’s diary might be read as an attempt to grant a greater sense of coherence to Zlata’s diary as a whole. In the course of his discussion of the chronicle form, White argues that while the chronicle fails to secure narrative closure – that is, while it is unable to provide a thick description of the object it treats and in that way draw a “moral meaning” from that object – the chronicle form does nevertheless aspire to some degree of coherence through its invocation of a “patron.” The chronicler’s allusion to a patron – generally, a fellow chronicler or set of chroniclers within a specific tradition – lends his text an “authority” and, moreover, bestows upon the chronicler a “‘right’ to narrate” (18, 19). That is, the chronicler, as a self-conscious narrator, recognizes the contested nature of the “facts” he reports, and thus appeals to predecessors whose own works might confirm the veracity of his present account. As an example of such citation of authority, White cites *The History of France* (998 A.D.) written by Richerus of Rheims, who admits to drawing on and modifying the

annals of the scribe Flodoard, and who cites “such classics as Caesar, Orosius, Jerome, and Isidore as authorities for the early history of Gaul and suggests that his own personal observations gave him insight into the facts he is recounting that no one else could claim” (18). By making such citations, the chronicler at once places himself within a tradition which confirms the legitimacy of his present study, and posits his own text as offering a new, unique perspective on the events he documents.

If one identifies *Zlata's Diary* as a chronicle – that is, as a document that is cohesive enough to offer some representation of a particular series of events but is still so fragmentary as to place the burden of closure onto the reader – then one might argue that Zlata's appeal to Anne Frank echoes the chronicler's appeal to a patron. In effect, Anne Frank, as a literary patron of sorts, *authorizes* Zlata's diary, insofar as Anne functions as an author by whom Zlata may establish the legitimacy and purpose of her own text. In the Foucauldian sense, the term “author” does not designate an actual individual but rather operates as a figure – or a “function” – under which a body of texts may be classified: the “name of the author,” writes Foucault, “remains at the contours of texts – separating one from the other, defining their form, and characterizing a mode of existence” (123). The name of the author, moreover, may be assigned not only to those texts traditionally attributed to a specific individual, but to an entire discursive tradition “within which new books and authors can proliferate” (131). In this way, Foucault argues, Marx and Freud can be understood as authors not only of specific texts (such as *Capital* [1867] and *The Interpretation of Dreams* [1900], respectively) but of an “endless possibility of discourse” that extends beyond the scope of these individual texts (131).

Given this understanding of authorship, one might recognize Zlata's explicit and implicit allusions to Anne Frank not as an appeal to a specific historical personage, with whom she identifies and whom she tries to emulate, but rather as an appeal to a particular literary tradition of child's wartime writing – whose inauguration is conventionally attributed to Anne Frank – into which Zlata might insert her own text and thereby assert its legitimacy. On its own, Zlata's narrative threatens to appear as a collection of trauma fragments that are only minimally connected to one another. However, the invocation of a figure, Anne Frank, bestows upon these fragments a cohesion they might not originally have had: such an invocation signals, in other words, the form (that is, the wartime diary) under which these otherwise disparate entries are organized. The articulation of a form in turn gives expression to the diary's purpose: *Zlata's Diary*, like *The Diary of a Young Girl*, is to be understood as the relation of a series of wartime events from the perspective of a child.

In aligning her diary under a form already established by her literary predecessor, and thus implicitly confirming the purpose of her writing, Zlata is then able to adopt the discursive practices instituted by the original text: she is able, for example, to employ Anne's journalistic style, as well as her more meditative tone. Admittedly, *Zlata's Diary* lacks the literary finesse of its predecessor; indeed, when compared to the richly developed account offered by Frank's text, *Zlata's Diary* continues to resemble a chronicle, rather than a "proper history." Nevertheless, by situating her diary within a specific literary tradition, and by employing the rhetorical and philosophical perspective of its most notable author, Zlata is able to grant a degree of shape and cohesion to a narrative which otherwise threatens to collapse. In effect, Anne Frank's diary legitimizes

– or, in other words, makes legible – not only *Zlata's Diary*, but, significantly, Zlata's representation of herself as a “wartime child.”

### **Consuming the Romantic Child**

As I have argued above, Zlata's constant and traumatic exposure to shelling and deprivation renders her diary a chronicle-like collection of narrative fragments and thereby impels its narrator to invoke another text which confers upon the diary a coherence it cannot have on its own. However, the trauma Zlata suffers involves just as much her sudden and unceremonious propulsion into adulthood as it does her witness to the decimation of her native city. While Zlata regularly refers to herself as a child – albeit a “wartime child,” (158) a “child hungry for everything”(121) and a “child of rice, peas, and spaghetti” (183) – the conditions and responsibilities the war has thrust upon her render her more a woman than a girl. In the course of her narrative, Zlata reports crossing the city for much-needed supplies, comforting her grief-stricken mother, and deciding for herself to stay in Sarajevo instead of leaving – all actions one might expect from the head of a household rather than from an eleven-year-old girl. Similarly, the tone with which Zlata addresses developments in Sarajevo occasionally surpasses her young years. Regularly referring to politicians and soldiers as mere “kids,” and chastising them for “drawing maps,” “coloring with their crayons,” and “playing games of War and Peace” while their fellow citizens struggle for survival, Zlata often sounds uncannily maternal (167). At some points, her voice fluctuates from despondence and resignation (she even once considers suicide) to detached flippancy (“The Security Council is hopeless. It makes no reasonable decisions at all”) (65).

Zlata's sudden and unbidden entrance into adulthood prompts in her an intense longing to return to the "shores of [her] childhood" (156). In perhaps the best-known passage of the diary, Zlata bemoans the loss of those everyday pleasures she associates with childhood:

That's my life! The life of an innocent eleven-year-old schoolgirl!!! A schoolgirl without school, without the fun and excitement of school. A child without games, without the sun, without birds, without nature, without fruit without chocolate or sweets, with just a little powdered milk. In short, a child without a childhood. (61)

Childhood, for Zlata, is a cozy Neverland, hermetically sealed off from the outside world.<sup>xv</sup> In this blissful state, the child wants for nothing, as all of her needs are provided for her by nature and by the presence of solicitous adults who are content to ensure her happiness. While it promises "fun and excitement," this notion of childhood does not threaten those who are inside its secure borders with any significant or life-altering challenges. While games may begin and end, friends may come and go, and "chocolates and sweets" may be alternately presented and consumed, nothing significantly changes in such a neo-Romantic childhood: as a self-contained and self-sufficient little world, it promises a certain comforting stasis. Thus, to be expelled from this state of existence into one marked by contingency, responsibility, and permanent loss is the equivalent, for Zlata, of being cast out of Eden. It is – as trauma always is – an irreparable gash in a system of meanings, practices, and expectations that was previously considered immutable and natural.



It is not surprising, then, that Zlata should find Anne Frank's diary so compelling. Ending as it does before Anne's own more tragic expulsion into the violence of the adult outside world, *The Diary of a Young Girl* creates the illusion of the self-contained existence Zlata desires. Compared with Zlata, the narrator of *The Diary* is relatively sheltered and well-provided for: she is looked after and sustained not only by the benevolence of her family's adult protector, Miep Gies, but by the paternal affection of her father, whom she regards as "goodness personified" (125). Moreover, while Anne regularly reports the troubling events that occur around her and voices her anxiety concerning them, she is, until the point of her arrest, merely an on-looker: unlike Zlata, who regularly must leave the safety of home, Anne may escape the glare of the news-radio or leave her perch at the attic window to retreat to her room, where she can delve, uninterrupted, into reading and writing. Secure – for a time – in the secret annex, Anne appears to inhabit a state of constancy and cohesion that exists independently of the chaotic and ever-changing circumstances that surround her. Indeed, the fullness and solidity of Anne's narrative seems to mirror the relative plenitude and self-containment of her material existence. In effect, and ironically, Anne occupies what Zlata would consider an ideal childhood.

If Anne's occasional complaints of boredom, coupled with her frequently voiced desire for the war's end and her subsequent release from the attic, belie this vision of childhood bliss in stasis, popular uses of her image nevertheless work to reaffirm it. Anne's manifestation in cultural memory as an eternal child, forever content to recline on what Zlata would call the "shores of childhood," is perhaps most heavily influenced by the photograph that graces the cover of most of *The Diary's* editions. To a certain extent,

this portrait, taken in 1941, gives the reader a snapshot, as it were, of the personality of the diary's narrator: Anne greets the camera with a direct and confident gaze and a wide smile as she holds her hands over a notebook, which the viewer might conclude is the original diary itself. The slight incline of Anne's head, the direct line of her gaze, and the somewhat stiff posture of her arms above the diary's pages suggest that the photograph is staged. However, despite the artificiality of the subject's pose, the photograph is still a convincing "portrait of the artist": the image is crafted to suggest that the camera has captured its subject looking up in pleasant surprise only seconds after having been immersed in her favorite activity.

Initially, one might suggest that this photograph offers the *Diary's* readers some degree of consolation regarding the tragic death of its author – that is, the image of a young and vibrant Anne Frank seems to promise that, while the individual Anne Frank has died, an extension of her, present in both the photographic image and the diary, survives even to the present. Upon closing the book after having read its final entry and having acknowledged the end its author would face only weeks after its composition, the reader is once again greeted with an image of a smiling girl, fully restored to health, happiness, and "life"; the photograph thus seems to assure the reader that Anne lives on – if not in body, then in eternal memory. However, if one pushes beyond this initial, emotionally satisfying response to the iconic image, then one may begin to recognize the photograph as an ultimate testament to its subject's *death*, rather than as a reassuring promise of her survival. However – perhaps counterintuitively – this acknowledgement of death best sustains the popular image of Anne's eternal childhood.

In order to better explicate the apparently incongruous relationship between the photographic image, death, and childhood, it may be helpful to turn to Roland Barthes's mediation on photography, *Camera Lucida*. In the course of this text, Barthes notes the uneasiness he feels upon inspecting a photograph of himself. In the photograph, he writes, he encounters himself as other – that is, he recognizes an image of himself that is detached from the corporeal being he recognizes as “himself.” This sensation of detachment leads him in turn to pose an equivalence of the photographic image with death. Photography, Barthes writes, has the uncanny capacity to “transform [...] subject into object,” just as in death, a once animate agent is rendered an inert body, a mere object whose use and disposal is left to the whims of others (13). “What I see [in the photograph],” Barthes writes, “is that I have become the Total Image, which is to say Death in person; others – the Other – do not dispossess me of myself, they turn me, ferociously, into an object, they put me at their mercy, at their disposal, classified in a file, ready for the subtlest deceptions” (14). Thus, Barthes reports a strange exhilaration – a “voluptuousness” – at the moment the “metallic shifting of the [camera's] plates” signal the creation of his photographic image, for it is at this moment that he is “neither subject nor object but a subject who feels he is becoming an object”; in effect, it is at this moment that he experiences a “micro-version of death” (14).

According to Barthes, photography's capacity to render the subject into an object makes it not unlike the ancient theatre of the dead, in which actors “separated themselves from the community by playing the role of the Dead” and thus marked themselves as “simultaneously living and dead” (31). Photography, Barthes writes, is similarly a “kind of primitive theatre, a kind of *Tableau Vivant*, a figuration of the motionless and made-up

face beneath which we see the dead” (31-32). However “lifelike” the photographer wishes to make his scene and the subject within it – for example, by photographing his subject in the outdoors rather than within the neutral confines of a studio – the product of his labor is still ultimately a frozen, transmogrified image that is detached from the original, living subject. Indeed, Barthes notes that the “frenzy to be life-like can only be our mythic denial of an apprehension of death” – that is, an unconscious compensation for the photograph’s mortifying potential.

According to Barthes’s formulation, then, the “life-like” image of Anne Frank before her open diary does not, as one might originally imagine, contain within it something of the “living essence” of its subject – an assuring presence that might signal Frank’s survival – but rather testifies ultimately to her death. That is to say, the photograph – detached as it is from its subject, inert, and made available to whatever uses its viewers might make of it – hauntingly figures Anne’s own passage into death (before and during which, it might be added, she was most mercilessly made use of, or objectified, by her Nazi persecutors<sup>xvi</sup>). This recognition of death figured by the photograph is underscored, moreover, by the gaze to which its viewers subject it. Even as the viewer attempts to bring Anne’s photograph “to life” – for example, to read in the image something of her personality and ambitions, and thus to posit these attributes as still “present” and “alive” within the photograph – he *acts upon* the image; that is, he objectifies the image, thereby recognizing at once its difference from himself and its passive openness to his own uses. Moreover, in recognizing the photograph as an historical trace, a monument to a bygone era, the viewer implicitly reaffirms the wide gulf of death that separates himself from the photographed girl. “History,” writes

Barthes, “is hysterical – it is constituted only if we consider it, only if we look at it – and in order to look at it, we must be excluded from it” (65). To recognize the photograph of Anne Frank as the portrait of a schoolgirl who grew up in the 1930’s and died in 1945 is to recognize her existence in a time and society that is radically other relative to the position from which the viewer now contemplates it. That is, to recognize the photograph as an historical trace is to recognize it, simultaneously, as a trace of death.

The death of the child is a central trope in those literary representations most influenced by Romantic notions of childhood – notions that are immanent in Zlata’s own characterization of childhood. The concept of a child’s occupation of a separate realm of existence is so dramatic that the child’s existence as a child is guaranteed, in much of nineteenth century British and American literature, by her absolute *non-existence* – that is, by her death.<sup>xvii</sup> For example, in Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women* (1868), Beth March is such a model of child-like goodness and purity that her death becomes absolutely necessary. If Beth – who, as Elizabeth Lennox Keyser argues, is the only March daughter who is “incapable of imagining a life outside her parents’ home” – were to live beyond her tender years, she would have to abandon her position at the center of a close-knit circle of sisters (a circle so vividly portrayed in the first chapter of Alcott’s novel). Thus, Beth’s death guarantees that her childhood has been preserved intact; ultimately, her loss, though sad, is considerably less tragic than the losses incurred by her sisters, who must eventually leave their childhoods behind forever.<sup>xviii</sup> Similarly, William Wordsworth’s dead child-figure Lucy, entombed as she is in “rocks and stones and trees,” remains in the enviable position of never having to feel the “touch of earthly years”; instead, her body persists in an ideal state of harmony with nature (“rolled round

in earth's diurnal course") while her living counterparts depart, slowly and inevitably, from that state of original grace (246).

Anne Frank's iconic photograph, insofar as it is a testament to her death, thus can be read simultaneously as a testament to her inviolate childhood. The black-and-white cover-photograph, taken four years before her death, literally *covers over* the desire to grow up which Anne regularly expresses within the diary's pages, and instead puts forth the image of a young girl suspended, quite blissfully, in a perpetual state of childhood grace. The fresh-faced girl in the photograph will never outgrow her charmingly youthful appearance. Instead, her death guarantees that her purity and her absolute *completeness* as a child remains intact, embalmed as it were and made available to an adult gaze desperately in search of evidence of an elusive golden age of inviolate childhood. Moreover, the photograph, and the death it implies, assures the viewer that Anne will never emerge from the camps to tell of her suffering, or – even more disturbingly – to revise her famous proclamation regarding the innate goodness of humankind. Rather, the image assures the viewer that her childish ideals remain as frozen as her photograph pose, undisputable and inviolate.

Anne's suspension in a perpetual state of childhood grace is further ensured by the decision, on the part of the cover designer of the diary's definitive edition, to crop the photograph so that only Anne's face and the tops of her shoulders are visible. This cropped version of the photograph bears a striking likeness to a school portrait, which traditionally focuses only on the subject's face against a neutral background. While the ostensible purpose of the school portrait is to capture the uniqueness of each individual schoolchild – hence, its focus on the child's face and its unmistakable features – it

ultimately diminishes the difference between each photographed subject and thus posits one child as interchangeable with any other. The child is directed – occasionally, with gentle prodding – to incline her head, to square her shoulders, to look directly into the camera’s lens, and (most importantly) to smile. While the occasional photograph might reveal a mischievous grimace or a stubborn frown, most school photographs reproduce the same image of a well-behaved and poised little individual who appears to be happy simply being a child – an image that is more clearly aligned with the adult’s desire to remember childhood as a pleasant and neatly-ordered realm of existence than it is with the child’s own inclinations. Such a desire to imagine the child’s fixture in a happy and self-contained little world is underscored, moreover, by the neutral background of each school portrait: the child is seized, as it were, from the flux of time and the materiality of space and is suspended instead in a dimension that exists outside of the affairs of everyday existence. The cropped cover photograph of the *Diary*’s definitive edition, which obscures its historically-specific “workplace” setting, thus reproduces the neutralizing effect of the school portrait and extracts Anne from her contemporary context. Moreover, by limiting the viewer’s focus solely on Anne’s face, and thereby simulating the universalizing effect of the school photograph, the cover portrait suggests that she is not unlike any other child who obligingly smiles and tilts her head for the camera’s benefit. Significantly, by positing Anne as “any child” – virtually interchangeable with children from around the globe and across the expanse of time – the photograph posits her as *The Child*. That is, if the aim of the school photograph is to elide difference and to posit one child as effectively indistinguishable from others, then the isolation and display of a single photograph stands in, metonymically, for the rest.<sup>xix</sup>

If the photograph of Anne Frank makes possible a collectively-shared image of the young writers as an ideal child, then George Stevens's immensely popular 1956 film, *The Diary of Anne Frank* (based on the equally popular stageplay by Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett) further bolsters this image. As several critics have noted,<sup>xx</sup> the Hollywood film dramatically downplays Anne's religious, cultural, and national background, ostensibly so that its young protagonist may be more accessible to a largely Protestant American audience. Rather than focusing on the conflicts Anne registers in her diary regarding her identity as an assimilated German Jew living in Holland, the film merely nods at her Jewish identity by inserting a token Hannukah scene, which so resembles a typical Christmas dinner that it renders any question of religious and cultural difference invisible. Moreover, while the film makes clear that the Frank family has gone into hiding because, as Jews, they are being persecuted by the Nazis, the Nazi threat is reduced to a disembodied wail of a police siren and to the lone appearance of a night-watchman, whose bemusement at finding Peter's cat dissipates not only the dramatic tension of a key scene but the sense of mortal danger felt daily by the Frank and VanDaan families. Most significantly, the film's conclusion forgoes an account of Anne's deportation to and death in Bergen-Belsen, and focuses instead on a chaste kiss she shares with Peter; furthermore, at the film's final dissolve, Anne makes her famous declaration, via voice-over, that "all men are really good at heart." Here, history gives way to a formulaic Hollywood ending: the audience is left to conclude, as Zlata once does, that "it looks as though everything will be all right" (Filipovic 6).

Virtually evacuated of any historical specificity, the film seems to resemble less an adaptation of Anne Frank's diary than it does a retelling of *The Swiss Family*



*Robinson*.<sup>xxi</sup> At the center of this “adventure story” – which renders Anne’s attic home as distant and mysterious as a faraway island – Anne, played by the waiflike Millie Perkins, alternately giggles, simpers, romps, and pouts throughout the duration of the film. Perkins’s doe-eyed character is naïve, almost maniacally exuberant, charmingly attached to her father, and a tiny bit naughty – a veritable female Little Lord Fauntleroy (with a pinch of Tom Sawyer) for the 1950s.<sup>xxii</sup> However, the film’s accentuation of Anne’s childish magnetism downplays the diarist’s more “adult-like” intellectual sophistication. For example, when Anne walks in on a dispute between the elder VanDaans, she ingenuously remarks that she has “never seen grown-ups quarrel before” – a guileless observation that seems uncharacteristic of the *Diary*’s Anne, who not only documents the various domestic spats that occur in the attic, but analyzes them with an almost derisive pleasure.

Clearly, this saccharine rendering of Anne Frank, arguably inspired not so much by the *Diary* itself as it is by the photographic image of the young girl, posits a figure who meets Zlata’s requirements for a “proper” childhood. Even if the Anne one meets in the diary is, like Zlata, bereft of “school,” “friends,” “sun,” “trees,” and “chocolate and sweets” – all those elements Zlata deems essential to a “normal” childhood – the image of Anne that remains prevalent in cultural memory is one of a virginal young girl, forever smiling and forever about to record in her diary her newest adventures in her secret hiding place. It is no wonder, then, that Zlata appeals to Anne’s memory by adopting her voice and literary style – for, in doing so, she is able to reclaim that voice of childhood innocence she fears she has lost.

Indeed, Zlata's application of Anne's voice and style may be considered as analogous to a physical incorporation, or consumption, of the desired Romantic child. In her study of Charles Lamb, Judith Plotz argues that the Romantic poet, who was also a legendary gourmand, exhibits in his poetical oeuvre a desire for food that is equaled only by his desire for his lost childhood. These twin desires are not unrelated, according to Plotz; rather, she argues, Lamb's longing for childhood is often, not so subtly, expressed simultaneously in his expressions of appetite. In the poem, "The Dessert," for example, Lamb's speaker compares a child's features to such delicacies as peaches, strawberries, cherries, and cakes: the child is rendered "explicitly good enough to eat" (127). According to Plotz, these images of virtual child-consumption reveal a desire on the part of the poet/speaker to assimilate the childhood he has lost (and which is still available in the "dessert" he wishes to devour) into the adult-self he has become. The poem thus

suggests a pattern of incorporation by eating a child, an act  
once a source of continuing comfort and the mark of a fall.  
To preserve the child self within the adult is to consent to  
growing up into the adult social world and is thus ... the  
beginning of civilization. It is also a strategy of self-protection,  
preserving what is most lovely in the original self and keeping  
it safe within the enclosing walls of flesh. (127-28)

Plotz's argument regarding Lamb's desire to consume the child in order to assure the existence and protection of the "child within" may be extended to Zlata's case as well. A self-described "child hungry for everything," Zlata – for reasons very different from those of Lamb – expresses a continued obsession with food which is linked to her

obsession with childhood: she craves not only “chocolates and sweets” and “chicken, a good cutlet, pizza [and] lasagna” but a “normal” middle-class childhood that is characterized, in part, by the assured presence of these delicacies. Thrust prematurely into adulthood, Zlata longs for a time in which not only her material needs (including her dietary needs) were provided for her, but when she had the luxury to move and play as she wished, secure in the knowledge that she was safe and protected. Her appeal to Anne Frank’s memory, then, can be read as one marked by an intense nostalgia: recognizing in Anne Frank (or in culturally circulating images of Anne Frank) the qualities of wholeness and invulnerability that she herself desires, Zlata seeks to assimilate those traces of her predecessor that are most readily and materially available to her – that is, the language of Anne’s narrative. Zlata’s incorporation of Anne’s narrative strategies – and I use the term “incorporation” deliberately, in order to gesture toward both her borrowing of Anne’s literary techniques and her assimilation of another’s voice into the body of her own work – implies a twin recognition. By having to assimilate – digestively, as it were – the voice of the desired child, Zlata recognizes childhood’s existence as external to her own, present situation; that is, she confirms, as Plotz argues that Lamb does, her own adulthood, her own distance from childhood. By the same token, however, by internalizing the voice of another child (an “eternal” child), she protects and preserves those qualities she most valued in her own (lost) childhood, and which she sees reflected in Anne Frank: her curiosity, her optimism, and her humanist impulses. In other words, Zlata’s evocation of Anne Frank through her use of the latter’s voice and narrative strategies serves as the catalyst by which she might achieve the unification of the “adult self” she has suddenly come to occupy and the “child self” whose traces she wishes to

preserve. If, as I have argued above, Zlata's dependence upon the *Diary's* narrative strategies allow her to render her own, potentially fragmentary, narrative relatively more coherent and cohesive, then it can be argued as well that her appeal to a child-figure perpetually resting on the "shores of childhood" allows Zlata to "shore up" her own sense of childhood.

### **"A Bundle of Contradictions"**

It may be helpful, at this juncture, to return to the text with which this discussion began: Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*. Rowling's novel, while a fantasy, and thus distinctively different from *Zlata's Diary* in terms of genre and ostensible "social importance," nevertheless bears a helpful analogous relationship to the young Bosnian's diary. Like her fictional counterpart, Harry, Zlata finds herself unwittingly implicated in a social-political crisis which radically destabilizes her own sense of selfhood – and, like Harry, she attempts to resolve the question of her position within this new and troubling set of circumstances by turning to a diary composed before her birth – one whose narrative, she believes, might assist her in composing her own account of her present situation. Unlike Harry, however, Zlata is not so much "absorbed" by her predecessor's diary as she is willing to "consume" it. That is, unlike Harry, who complies with being physically transported into the past, Zlata does not passively submit herself to Anne's diary, overlooking the historical and cultural differences between them. Rather, Zlata remains attentive to the particular set of historical circumstances she currently faces, and actively incorporates her predecessor's narrative strategies only

insofar as they might guide her in creating a cogent, cohesive representation of her present situation and her role within it.

However, there is yet another aspect of Rowling's novel that may further expose questions inherent in Zlata's relationship with Anne Frank's diary. This is Harry's essential *misreading* of the "very secret diary" and the narrator, Tom Riddle, whom he encounters within it. As his name implies, Riddle is not who he seems. The voice which emerges from Riddle's magical diary is solicitous and mildly conspiratorial: it is apparent that he will become yet another one of Harry's avuncular allies, ready to assist the young protagonist in his hot pursuit of truth. The memory-image of the young Riddle that Harry encounters "within" the diary only seems to confirm Harry's initial impression of his elder: the youthful Riddle is a serious, buttoned-down prefect, who, like Harry, breaks the rules only when he is intent upon exposing a wrong committed on school grounds. Only when it is almost too late does Harry realize that Tom Riddle is actually none other than his arch-enemy, Lord Voldemort himself. Flattered by Riddle's ostensible show of confidence in him, and eager to see pleasing parallels between himself and the mystery diarist, Harry interprets the diary – and the past events to which it bears witness – according to his own desires, rather than through a critical, contextualizing investigation of Riddle's narrative and the motives expressed within it. While, ultimately, Harry's history *is* in fact bound up with Riddle's own – a relationship which Rowling's seven-part series undertakes to expose – it is certainly not the connection Harry had originally imagined.

Similarly, *Zlata's Diary* reveals a narrator/protagonist whose appeal to another's diary is motivated more by her needs and desires than by any particularly attentive

reading of the actual text and of the self-representation of its narrator. As I have argued above, Zlata adopts Anne's use of form and narrative strategies – her address of an interlocutor, her approach to historical documentation, and her inflection of voice and tone – in order not only to lend her own narrative greater cohesion but to recapture those “childlike” qualities she senses present in Anne but lost to herself. Yet despite her apparent close attention to her predecessor's use of language and form, Zlata seems comparatively inattentive to some of the content it expresses – specifically, to Anne's intense dissatisfaction with her own experience of childhood. Instead, she appears to be swayed more by the more Romantic, extra-textual cultural memory of Anne as the virginal child-martyr, forever suspended, through her death, in a state of happiness and charmingly blind faith.

Admittedly, Zlata may have overlooked certain aspects of Anne's less ideal childhood qualities because, in most editions of the *Diary*, many examples of them are not-so-mysteriously absent. That is, most editions of Frank's text are not the original manuscript she herself arranged (now known as “version a”) but the text her father, Otto Frank, edited (“version b”). According to the introduction of the definitive version of the *Diary*, Otto Frank, who assumed responsibility for the diary's original publication in 1947, expurgated certain passages that either involved “unflattering” representations of Anne's fellow annex-members or included sexually-explicit content (vi). While, as the introduction notes, Otto Frank's editorial decisions were motivated by a desire to respect the memory of his deceased fellow annex-members and a prudent wish to withhold potentially disturbing sexual content from mass audiences, these decisions seem as much influenced by a wish to preserve intact certain deeply-held ideals of childhood. For

example, while Otto Frank's caution regarding respecting the memory of the dead is reasonable – and thus it is understandable that, even in the definitive version, the individuals with whom the Franks lived continue to be referred to by their pseudonyms, rather than by their given names – this caution seems to speak not only to an official respect for the dead but to a certain uneasiness with the contradictions inherent in many of Anne's professed sentiments. After all, how should one reconcile passages in which Anne looks skyward and declares her faith in humankind's goodness with those in which she caustically refers to one of her elders, Mrs. VanDaan, as a “silly, sniveling specimen of humanity”? (321) If the former image of the meditative – even prayerful – Anne confirms a Romantic notion of the child's innocence and innate goodness, the latter introduces the suspicion that young girls, for all their naïve charm, can just as much be insolent, angry, and – worse yet – aware of grown-ups' occasionally transparent behavior. Thus, the expurgation of Anne's more vituperative statements easily resolves what could pose an uncomfortable ambivalence.

Given his arguable insistence upon purging those passages that reveal the “bad” Anne in order to maintain an image of the “good” one, Otto Frank's claim to expurgating overtly sexual content from the diary because “at the time of the diary's initial publication ... it was not customary to write openly about sex, and certainly not in books for young adults” seems suspicious, if not disingenuous (vi). After all, in the *Diary* itself (albeit only in the definitive version) Anne expresses her desire to read “adult” books owned by the Frank family and reports with great glee having pilfered a semi-pornographic novel in which the female protagonist strips down to simulate childbirth and produces a “sausage” on her bedroom floor; this book, Anne notes, also mentions

menstruation and alludes to prostitution (51-52). This fact alone belies the claim that sex was not openly written about in the early 1940s: indeed, even a respectable bourgeois family like the Franks owned books of questionable sexual content which they could not successfully keep hidden from their teenage daughter. This suggests that the motivation behind the expurgation of more sexual material was more conceivably the denial of what Freud calls the “polymorphously perverse” sexuality of the child – a crucial aspect of childhood that Jacqueline Rose argues, that children’s literature has traditionally waged a desperate effort to repress.<sup>xxiii</sup>

However, even a great many of those passages of the *Diary* that were *not* expurgated are in some way or other concerned with Anne’s desire to grow up, and the various ways in which she feels thwarted in her attempts to be recognized as an adult. Literally trapped in the attic, the Anne of the *Diary* is trapped, as well, in a state of childhood she desperately longs to outgrow. She confesses, for example, that she can no longer love her mother “with the devotion of a child” and declares that, even in the crowded confines of the attic, she may assert some degree of independence (159): “I have to mother myself,” she announces after a particularly furious row with her mother; “I’ve cut myself adrift from them. I’m charting my own course, and we’ll see where it leads me” (141).

In the well-known final passage of the *Diary*, Anne refers to herself as a “bundle of contradictions”: a self whose serious, contemplative inclinations are perpetually in conflict with her cheerful, more exuberant exterior. Frustrated by what she perceives to be her inability to reconcile these two aspects of her personality, Anne ends her entry (and, unbeknownst to her, her diary) on a particularly woeful note:



I get cross, then sad, and finally end up turning my heart  
inside out, the bad part on the outside and the good part on the  
inside, and keep trying to find a way to become what I'd like to be  
and what I could be if ... if only there were no other people in  
the world. (337)

It is difficult, perhaps, not to dismiss this final sentiment as simply a symptom of adolescent angst, or to regard it – as well as Anne's term, a "bundle of contradictions" – as somehow charming in its naïveté. Yet this is precisely the patronizingly reflexive adult attitude Anne protests, and which makes her so "cross." To be treated as an adult, rather than as a child, is equivalent for Anne with being treated with a certain amount of dignity: she is "no longer the baby and spoiled little darling whose every deed can be laughed at" (142). Thus, it is ironic that the diarist who so wished to be considered a woman is now known to her readers by the title, "young girl," and that the photographic image with which she is recognized is one taken before significant portions of her diary were written.

The insistence with which this memory of Anne-as-young-girl has survived into the contemporary moment speaks to a discomfort with precisely those "contradictions" Anne articulates so clearly in her final entry. According to Rose, adults wish to see in the child a "unified subject" who has successfully transcended the messiness of the Oedipal drama in order to emerge, once and for all, a coherent and stable self; to see a child in this way is to confirm the adult's own sense of stability. The child's expression of an innately "perverse" sexuality – or, concomitantly, any behavior that transgresses adult notions of a well-ordered self – thus threatens adult expectations that "subjectivity [is] something

which we can fully know, or that ultimately can be cohered” and must be summarily repressed (15). It is not surprising, then, that Anne’s representation of herself as a “bundle of contradictions” should be replaced in cultural memory by a frozen, smiling portrait – or by a film character who, in her transference of affection from her father to Peter VanDaan, moves swiftly and comfortably through the Oedipal drama to emerge with an affirmation of the goodness – and implicitly, the wholeness – of humankind. Nor is it surprising that Zlata should prefer this conventional rendering of Anne Frank over the “contradictory” Anne of the actual diary, for, considering Zlata’s own increasing sense of self-fragmentation, the iconic image of Anne promises a solidity that a “bundle of contradictions” cannot.

However, Zlata herself is not immune to the uses readers make of her own image. If Anne Frank, who wants so desperately to be considered as an adult, paradoxically has been iconized as an eternal child, Zlata, who desires nothing more than to return to her childhood, has become celebrated – in a paradox that is inversely proportional to the one inherent in Anne Frank’s case – for her prematurely “adult” voice. Whatever strategies the narrator might employ in order to rescue and secure a childlike voice – from her evocation of the iconic child, Anne Frank, to her temperamental characterizations of the siege as “STUPID!” to her sentimental declarations of love for her kitten – she nevertheless earns the reputation of being “precociously wise” (*Newsweek* 25). This characterization is perhaps not so much influenced by a reading of the actual diary as it is by the introduction that prefaces it, written by Canadian journalist Janine DiGiovanni. In her introduction, DiGiovanni describes the first time she met the young diarist. Filipovic, she remarks, seemed to her to be “more adult, more resigned

and stoical, than most of the adults I knew” (ix). She notes, for example, that Filipovic did not flinch as DiGiovanni did at the sound of shelling, and she describes a meeting during which Filipovic calmly consoled her own mother, who sobbed violently as she described the effects of war on her family. In a later passage of the introduction, DiGiovanni implies that Filipovic seemed older and wiser than even herself:

At one point, I turned around to see Zlata. I placed my hand on her shoulder and asked, “Are you all right?” She looked at me gravely and said, “I have to be all right.” Her voice was *very old* and it *chilled me*. Not only had she lost her innocence, those wonderful years when she should have been meeting boys and laughing with her girlfriends, but she was in the terrible reversed position of having to be strong for the sake of her parents. Even if she wanted to, she could not fall apart. (x, italics mine)

The consternation DiGiovanni expresses upon observing this stoical child who cares for her own parents is uncannily similar to the intense unease Henry Mayhew expresses in his interview with the little watercress girl in *London Labour and the London Poor* (1851). Mayhew is utterly confounded by the young vendor he interviews, who, while she was only “eight years of age, had entirely lost all childish ways, and was, indeed, in thoughts and manner, a woman” (64). Finding the girl’s mature bearing to be incompatible with her immature physical features, Mayhew realizes that he “simply did not know how to talk with her” (64). As a middle-class Victorian, Mayhew expects the watercress girl to enjoy games, toys, and days spent in the park, and is literally dumbfounded when she expresses surprise at the very existence of these pastimes;

likewise, he is baffled by the matter-of-factness with which she discusses her long hours of labor, the care she gives to her younger siblings, and her poor diet. Clearly, the watercress girl does not have what Mayhew considers to be a “childhood” – and, what’s more, she does not even seem to care. Mayhew’s bewilderment (as well as the girl’s indifference) suggests that, ultimately, he does not perceive childhood as an innate quality, but rather as a category demarcated by class – for example, by the presence of a domestic circle in which parents are clearly caretakers while children are relatively passive, as well as the presence of certain material accommodations such as clothing and toys which mark the child clearly as a child. Moreover, Mayhew’s conclusion that the watercress girl is not really a child implies that childhood is not a state of being that she naturally inhabits, but rather is a quality that he, as an adult, has the power to determine.

DiGiovanni’s impressions of Filipovic, which so clearly echo Mayhew’s observation of the watercress girl, are similarly inflected through class. While DiGiovanni’s introduction suggests that she is drawn to Filipovic out of a concern for the girl’s physical safety and well-being, her chief concern seems to be with what she considers Filipovic’s lack of those luxuries to which she expects every child is entitled. Her introduction draws less attention to Filipovic’s vulnerability to sniper-fire and shelling, and to the entire complex of racial injustice which effects her placement in mortal danger, than it does to Zlata’s inability to enjoy “pop music, boys, Linda Evangelista and Claudia Schiffer, skiing in the mountains outside Sarajevo and her next holiday in Italy or at the beach” (v-vi). Confronted with a child whose “adult-like” responsibilities leave her no time or opportunity for these decidedly middle-class pleasures, DiGiovanni is hesitant to recognize Filipovic as a child at all, and instead

pronounces the girl “old.” Like Mayhew, DiGiovanni assumes the role of arbiter of a girl’s childhood (or lack thereof), and, like Mayhew, the shock she registers upon her interaction with this girl seems less directed toward the object of her observation than it does a crisis she perceives, if only unconsciously, as she witnesses an exception to her bourgeois expectations.

Of course, *Zlata’s Diary* demonstrates the fact that its author-narrator, unlike the watercress girl, is keenly aware of her interviewer’s understanding of a “proper” childhood; moreover, Zlata’s narrative reveals that she, unlike her nineteenth-century counterpart, shares her interlocutor’s desire that she might have access to those material goods and practices that may render her closer to the bourgeois ideal of childhood. However, paradoxically, it is precisely the demands impressed upon her by DiGiovanni and other journalists who take interest in her that make possible Filipovic’s reputation as a prematurely adult child, rather than as an “innocent” child. In the latter half of her narrative, Zlata reports the publicity she receives after passages from the former half of her diary are published by UNICEF: scores of international journalists greet her at home and at school with gifts of chocolates and flashing cameras, and ABC News honors her as its “Person of the Week.” In an entry dated 17 July 1993, Zlata describes how a Spanish journalist photographs her at a book promotion – a relatively extravagant affair, by wartime standards – posed atop jerrycans of water, emblems of wartime deprivation (156). The press’s obvious concern with Zlata’s status as a war-victim – indeed, as a spokesperson of sorts for all suffering Bosnians – arguably affected the revised, complete version of *Zlata’s Diary*, which amplifies accounts of wartime deprivation and the

“adult” responsibilities Zlata must take on in the face of them, while An entry in which Zlata documents the origins of her diary’s public form is particularly telling:

Maja [an older friend who works at a community center Zlata attends] is still working with our teacher Irena Vidovic. And the other day, Maja asks me: Do you keep a diary, Fipa (my nickname)?”

I say: “Yes.”

And Maja says, “Is it full of your own secrets or is it about the war?”

And I say, “No, it’s about the war.”

And she says, “Fipa, you’re terrific.”

She said that because they want to publish a child’s diary and it just might be mine, which means – YOU, MIMMY! And so I copied a part of you into another notebook and you, Mimmy, went to the City Assembly to be looked at. And I’ve just heard, Mimmy, that you’re going to be published! You’re coming out for UNICEF week! SUPER! (89-90)

Zlata’s response indicates that, if she wants her voice to be heard – something she clearly desires – then she must concentrate on providing her audience with what it ostensibly wants to hear: that is, a testimony as to the effects of war. To accomplish this, however, she must refrain from dwelling on those aspects of her life – her “own secrets” – which might impede her primary goal of documenting the siege. Consequently, she denies the reader a glimpse into the unexpressed desires and fears that shape and motivate her, ostensibly because she assumes that such “secrets” would be of little interest to her

reader. Thus, if there is a child's voice in Zlata's narrative, that voice has been repressed – not, as in the case of Anne Frank, by an editor who deems certain passages inappropriate, or by an audience that would rather forget the troubling significance of her secrets – but by the author-narrator herself, who modifies her prose as she constitutes herself according to an adult gaze. Thus, if Zlata is celebrated as an “Anne Frank of Sarajevo” – in effect, as Anne Frank's “own true heir” – it is only insofar as she is an heir to a tradition which strategically undercuts the child's voice, even as it professes to reveal it once and for all.

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<sup>i i</sup> In the course of this chapter, I refer to Zlata Filipovic and Anne Frank as “Zlata” and “Anne,” respectively. I do this not to imply some intimate knowledge of these individuals, but rather to gesture toward their status as narrator-protagonists of specific texts – that is, to their status as literary constructs.

<sup>ii</sup> Zlata is careful never to identify her cultural and religious background. While the fact that her diary was originally written in Croatian might suggest that she is of a Croatian Roman-Catholic background, she also notes celebrating the Muslim holiday of Bairam (29) and considers leaving on a Jewish convoy organized to transport refugees to safety (84).

Zlata's refusal to identify herself as belonging to any specific cultural or religious group points to the easily-overlooked sophistication of her text. While the aim of her diary may be, in part, to produce a self-portrait of sorts, she insists upon doing this squarely on her own terms: to “out” herself as belonging to any specific group would be to allow herself to be “marked” by the same political discourse she critiques.

<sup>iii</sup> Anne's descriptions of birthday celebrations especially make life in the secret annex appear “homey” or otherwise not so removed from “ordinary” life: for example, she notes that, on his sixteenth birthday, Peter VanDaan receives a cigarette lighter that makes him look “distinguished” (61) and that, on her own birthday, her father composes a witty poem in her honor (103-104). Similarly, her account of the families' celebration of St. Nicholas Day and Hannukah – holidays that they anticipate with improvised decorations, gifts, and poems – contribute to her depiction of the attic's more “cozy” atmosphere (73).

The most ingenious description of the attic is one in which Anne likens the secret annex to a hotel or resort – an exercise in parody that simultaneously places into relief the bleak conditions of attic life and makes light of otherwise depressing circumstances. Under the title, “Prospectus and Guide to the Secret Annex: A Unique Facility for the Temporary Accommodation of Jews and Other Dispossessed Persons,” she lists the annex's “features” and “rules.” Among them:

*Open all year round:* Located in beautiful, quiet, wooded surroundings in the heart of Amsterdam. No private residences in the vicinity. Can be reached by streetcar 13 or 17 and also by car or bicycle. For those to whom transportation has been forbidden by the German authorities, it can also be reached on foot. Furnished and unfurnished rooms available at all times, with or without meals.

*Price:* Free

*Diet:* Low-fat.

*Running water* in the bathroom (sorry, no bath) and on various inside and outside

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walls. Cozy wood stoves for heating.  
[...] *Free-time activities*: None allowed outside the house until further notice.  
*Use of language*: It is necessary to speak softly at all times. Only the language of civilized people may be spoken, thus no German. (66-67)

<sup>iv</sup> Of course, as I demonstrate in the following sections, Zlata obstinately neglects the constructed character of perceived reality in her articulation of childhood as a “natural” category; such neglect may place into more immediate relief the particular trauma instantiated by her recognition of the “loss” of her childhood.

<sup>v</sup> The (perceived) tendency of readers – especially young adolescent female readers – to “over-identify” with Anne Frank to the point of neglecting the differences between their contemporary historical moment and that of the diarist is a problem Susan David Bernstein takes up in her essay, “Promiscuous Reading: The Problem of Identification and Anne Frank’s Diary” (2003). “Promiscuous reading,” Bernstein writes, is an “unreflective assimilation of the read subject into an untroubled unitary reading of self”; such reading, moreover, “highlights a correspondence between textual and historical subjects that champions an uncomplicated resemblance, one that displaces a vexed and more productive non-resemblance” (146). While Bernstein never mentions *Zlata’s Diary* – her critique is confined to YA novels such as Jane Yolen’s *The Devil’s Arithmetic* (1998), Cherie Bennett’s and Jeff Gottesfeld’s *Anne Frank and Me* (2002), and the Disney film, *Anne Frank: The Whole Story* (2001) – her argument that readers tend to relate uncritically to Anne Frank’s image could potentially be used to bolster a critique of *Zlata’s Diary* (although, as I argue presently, Zlata’s identification with Anne is not as naïve or uncritical as it might initially appear).

To a certain extent, Bernstein’s analysis is a useful one, especially in its insistence that readers remain vigilant to the processes by which they read memoirs, diaries, and other historical artifacts. Nevertheless, I wish to distance my analysis substantially from her own on several counts. In arguing that the image of Anne Frank has been, in effect, diluted by successive literary and filmic representations of her, Bernstein argues (quite naively) that “‘reel’ knowledge has displaced real knowledge,” thus implying that direct access to or “knowledge” of the past would be possible if it were not for the mediation of other, interfering, textual sources. In making such an argument, Bernstein neglects to admit that all “knowledge” is necessarily mediated; moreover, she does not make a critical distinction between Anne Frank (the historical personage) and Anne Frank’s diary, which itself is multiply mediated (as I argue below).

<sup>vi</sup> Additionally, the capitalized words may remind a reader of newspaper headlines; such resemblance calls further attention to the intertextual dimension of Zlata’s diary.

<sup>vii</sup> As the two figures (that is, Zlata Filipovic and Anne Frank) with whom this chapter are concerned are female, I use the masculine pronoun to designate the hypothetical reader, so as to avoid a preponderance of feminine pronoun and to evade such wordy and problematic constructions as “s/he” or “his or her.” Additionally – pace Laura Mulvey – the pronoun, “he,” implies a masculine gaze that constructs the feminine object – a construction that is analogous to the adult gaze that, as I argue in the final section of this chapter, constitutes the child.

<sup>viii</sup> The term “thick description” is one used by Clifford Geertz in *The Interpretation of Culture: Selected Essays* (1973). According to Geertz, culture is a “system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms [e.g., anything from a wink to an exchange by bartering] by which people communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life” (6). In order to interpret the symbolic forms in which culture is expressed, Geertz argues, the anthropologist or ethnographer must take note of even the most minute details that characterize that “symbol” and, moreover, account for the context in which it occurs.

One may qualify Anne’s more detailed observations of attic-life as examples of “thick description” especially insofar as such entries are intended for the benefit of a reader – if only Anne’s imaginary interlocutor, Kitty – who is unacquainted with the habits, exchanges, and rigors that life in hiding entails, and who thus requires Anne (who implicitly posits herself as an anthropologist of sorts) to explain this “culture” to her.



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<sup>ix</sup> In “The Death of the Author” (published in *Image-Music-Text* [1977]), Barthes challenges the assumption that statements within a text can be attributed to the intentions of the individual author; rather, he argues, meaning exists solely in the text’s language, which itself is a “tissue of quotations” from antecedent texts (146). According to Barthes, “it is language that speaks, not the author; to write is ... to reach the point where only language acts, ‘performs,’ and not ‘me’” (143). As Barthes demonstrates in *S/Z* (1970), it is the reader, rather than the author, who grants meaning to the text. Barthes’s writings on authorship and reading have been particularly influential on contemporary literary criticism and theory; “The Death of the Author” in turn influenced Foucault, who, like Barthes, dismisses the idea of the author as originary genius and guarantor of meaning, but nonetheless preserves the notion of an author as a “function” or category under which to organize bodies of work (“What is an Author?” [1969]).

<sup>x</sup> As I note in the preceding chapter, the term “round character” is one coined by E.M. Forster in *Aspects of the Novel* (1927). Forster introduces the concept of the round character by first distinguishing it from that of the “flat” character – which, according to Forster, is “constructed round a single idea or quality” and whose general defining features can be “expressed in one sentence” (103-104). By contrast, a character “curve[s] toward the round” when there is “more than one factor in them” (104) and when he or she is “capable of surprising in a convincing way” (118).

<sup>xi</sup> For example, in an entry dated 28 January 1944, Anne writes that she fears her imaginary interlocutor, Kitty, will find the “monotonous fare” Anne offers her to be as “dull as dishwater” (177). Having lived, at this point, in the attic with the same people for two years, Anne confesses to “how sick and tired I am of hearing the same old stuff.” She continues:

If the talk at mealtime isn’t about politics or good food, then Mother or Mrs. Van Daan trot out stories about their childhood that we’ve heard a thousand times before, or Drussel goes on about beautiful racehorses, his Charlotte’s extensive wardrobe, leaky rowboats, boys who can swim at the age of four, aching muscles or frightened patients. It all boils down to this: whenever one of us opens his mouth, the other seven can finish the story for him. (177)

This speaks to the literary merit of the diary: Anne transforms even the most mundane and “boring” details into interesting and amusing facts. Of course, there is an extent to which Anne is aware of this – the apology for being as “dull as dishwater” can just as well be read as a self-conscious excuse to make amusing comments on otherwise unamusing subject matter.

<sup>xii</sup> As an example of a soldier’s war diary, I might cite a journal kept during the Second World War by my great-uncle, Colonel Emil M. Ulanowicz, who survived a prisoner-of-war death march from Manila to Takao, Japan. The first part of his journal details, among other events, his participation in the U.S. seizure of Corregidor, an island located west of Manila:

29 DEC 41: First bombing of Corregidor. Raid lasted about 2.5 hours. Approximately 30 killed, 13 Japanese planes downed. Approximately 54 heavy bombers, and 10 dive bombers overhead at any given time. Battery area hit. Much damage to surface buildings. Anti-aircraft did very well. USAFFE moved into tunnel.  
2 JAN 42: Command Post of L-battery 60<sup>th</sup> Coastal Artillery Regiment, Phillipine Scouts, received direct bomb hit killing Captain Hamilton and several enlisted men. Captain Bovee and I helped in rescue work. Way Hill area also hit. Several men killed and wounded.  
6 JAN 42: Battery Geary disaster, 34 killed, several wounded.  
14 JAN 42: End of first period of bombings. (2)

Here, as in other passages, there is no attempt to embellish details – only necessary, technical facts are reported. Moreover, the constant vigilance and work necessitated by battle ostensibly makes impossible any time for personal reflection.

The second part of the diary, which documents the march to Takao, is even more spartan in its narration – although, significantly, it does involve more personal commentary. An excerpt reads thus:

16 DEC [44]: 1333 survivors ashore out of 1619. No clothes, torrid sun,

- 
- no food. Nine US dive bombers strafed and bombed Olongapo area. Several men injured from bomb fragments.
- 17 DEC [44]: Sun terrible; four deaths. 2 ½ spoons dry rice. Thank God we could get water.
- 18 DEC [44]: Same.
- 19 DEC [44]: Men are getting so weak they can hardly walk. We are scorched by the sun during the day, and freezing at night. Four spoons dry rice and water (almost a banquet?). (7)

<sup>xiii</sup> Not insignificantly, the phrase “imitation of life” serves as the title of Douglas Sirk’s 1959 film, *Imitation of Life* (itself a remake – or “imitation” – of John M. Stahl’s 1934 film of the same title, which, in turn, was based on Fannie Hurst’s 1933 novel). All three of these texts involve two intertwining mother-daughter conflicts – one between a faded movie star and her teenage daughter, and the other between an African-American maid and her daughter who prefers to pass as white. While Zlata may not be consciously referencing these texts, their themes of cinematic representation, racial conflict, and intergenerational bonds clearly resonate within her text.

<sup>xiv</sup> The reader may be reminded of Barbie Zelizer’s critique – cited in Chapter 1 – of the news media’s tendency to “recycle” terms such as “Holocaust, genocide, massacre, [and] ethnic cleansing” in order to document contemporary moments of atrocity; Zelizer critiques, as well, the tendency to describe events of the more distant past in terms of those occurring in the present (as in the *New York Times*’s retrospective article on Cambodia entitled “Before Bosnia, Before Rwanda”) (204-205). According to Zelizer, “while the continual references [to terms such as “Holocaust” and “ethnic cleansing”] keep atrocity in the public imagination, they also abandon it there. Employing familiar terms in so many new contexts of barbarism flattens the original term’s resonance and denies the complexity of the events to which it refers” (205).

<sup>xv</sup> The reference is, of course, to J.M. Barrie’s *Peter Pan* (1911). The Neverland is the home of Peter Pan, who – as the very first sentence of the novel states – has the distinction of being the only child who never grows up; the Neverland is a place so distant and hidden that “even birds, carrying maps and consulting them at windy corners, could not have sighted” it (56).

<sup>xvi</sup> According to the afterword contained in the definitive edition of Frank’s diary, after an SS raid on the attic on the morning of 4 August 1944, Anne Frank, along with her sister Margot, was transported to Bergen-Belsen in October, 1944 and died there shortly before the camp’s liberation by British troops on 12 April 1945 (339-340). The afterword also lists the camps to which other attic-members were transported, as well as their probable dates of death. Only Otto Frank survived; he died in Basel, Switzerland on 19 August 1980.

<sup>xvii</sup> Admittedly, depictions of the child’s death precede the nineteenth century’s romanticization of children. According to John Rowe Townsend, eighteenth-century Puritan books for children generally provided their young readers with harrowing images of death and the afterworld in order to inspire them (or, as it were, scare them) toward good behavior in the present mortal realm. Thus, for example, one finds in 1727 edition of *The New England Primer* the following poem:

I in the Burying Place may see  
Graves shorter there than I;  
From Death’s Arrests no Age is free,  
Young Children too may die. (Townsend, 8)

However, Townsend notes, some decidedly more sentimental representations of children’s deaths did circulate in eighteenth century literature. For example, Benjamin Colman remarks in his *Devout Contemplation on the Meaning of Divine Providence, in the Early Death of Pious and Lovely Children* (1714) that an “abundance of the Children of Men, and of our most hopeful, pious, and promising Children Do Die Young ... What brittle and tender Things are our Babes, and what Multitudes die in Infancy!” (Townsend, 9).

According to Gillian Avery, these pious tracts had an immense effect on the “morbid pleasure” that Victorians, a century later, derived from “contemplating [children’s] slow and morbid extinction” (102).

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“One might guess,” Avery notes, “that Dickens, when he came to describe the deaths of Paul Dombey and Little Nel, remembered something of the emotion he had felt as a child reading tracts about the deaths of children who, unlike him, were admired and valued” (34).

<sup>xviii</sup> Beth’s death has generated a great amount of controversy among Alcott scholars – though, generally, such debate has had more to do with the effect of Beth’s demise on her sister, Jo, than it has with Beth as a character in her own right. For example, Elizabeth Lennox Keyser argues that, despite her proto-feminist inclinations, Alcott was most preoccupied with women’s ability to sustain the close domestic circle; thus, according to Keyser, Beth’s death is a necessary precondition for Jo’s return to the privileged, self-enclosed space of the family and thus the survival of this institution (89-90). Michelle A Massé, however, contests such readings that posit Beth as a “sacrificial maiden” – or, as it were, as a martyr to the cause of domestic bliss; according to Massé, Jo’s return to a state of dependence family following Beth’s death should be read as “a stage and not a permanent resting place” (337).

<sup>xix</sup> The definitive edition of *The Diary of a Young Girl* includes individual photographic portraits of Anne taken from 1935 to 1942, though it does not specify in what context these portraits were taken. Most likely, these portraits were privately commissioned, rather than taken in the school setting. The tradition of taking individual school photographs is a relatively recent, and largely American, phenomenon (indeed, the one school photograph contained in *Zlata’s Diary* is a group portrait of her fifth grade class, rather than an individual shot of Zlata alone). Thus, the similarity this closely-cropped cover photograph of Anne bears to a school portrait demonstrates the ways in which her image has been co-opted and re-contextualized for a more recent generation of (American) readers.

<sup>xx</sup> For example, Bruno Bettelheim condemns Stevens’s universalization of the Frank family, which renders its depiction of the family’s two years in hiding a mere domestic drama. “While play and movie are ostensibly about Nazi persecution and destruction,” he writes, “in actuality what we watch is the way that, despite the terror, lovable people manage to continue living their satisfying intimate lives with each other” (“Surviving” 250). Similarly, Susan David Bernstein, following Cynthia Ozick, critiques the film’s “Americanization” of Anne Frank (142).

<sup>xxi</sup> Johann Wyss’s novel, *The Swiss Family Robinson* (1812) tells the story of a family – a minister, his wife, and their four sons – who, after being shipwrecked on an isolated island, created a new, ingeniously improvised life for themselves and share various adventures.

The manner in which Stevens’s film bears a strong resemblance to *The Swiss Family Robinson* – or, indeed, the way in which the diary itself may be read as such – is taken up in Philip Roth’s novel, *The Ghost Writer* (1979). In the course of Roth’s novel, his recurrent hero, Nathan Zuckerman, becomes attracted to a young woman he imagines is Anne Frank in disguise and subsequently imagines “Anne’s” reflections on her diary and its necessary predication on her supposed death:

This was the lesson on the journey home she came to believe she had the power to teach. But only if she were believed to be dead. Were *Het Achterhaus* known to be the work of a living writer, it would never be more than it was: a young teenager’s diary of her trying years in hiding during the German occupation of Holland, something boys and girls could read in bed along with the adventures of the Swiss Family Robinson. But dead she had something more to offer than amusement for ages ten to fifteen; dead she had written, without meaning to or trying to, a book with the force of a masterpiece to make people finally see.” (145-46)

Here, Nathan’s imaginary Anne believes her death prevents her diary from being read merely as a pleasant story (that is, something akin to *The Swiss Family Robinson*) and instead exposes the tremendous losses incurred by the Holocaust. However, the novel suggests that the opposite is in fact the case: the ways that Anne Frank’s posthumous image has been used, it implies, are not any less driven by fantasy than the cozy Robinson-esque image of attic-life the diary might inspire. Throughout the novel, various characters co-opt and romanticize the image of Anne Frank to suit their own desires. For example, Nathan’s neighbors use her as a mascot of sorts in their defense of the American Jewish community they believe Nathan has slandered; Nathan, for his part, day-dreams about bringing Anne Frank home to meet his family and neighbors so that they may finally believe he is a “good” Jew capable of marrying a “good” Jewish wife.

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<sup>xxii</sup> The title-character of Frances Hodgson Burnett's *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (1886) is an angelic child whose sweetness and charm (embellished by Burnett to perhaps a nauseating degree) wins over even the most resistant and skeptical of adults. By contrast, the title character of Mark Twain's *Tom Sawyer* (1876) epitomizes the "good bad boy" who, despite his constant mischief-making, is a largely sympathetic character.

Admittedly, these are male protagonists. One might be tempted to compare Perkins's rendition of Anne to Jo March, the exuberant heroine of Alcott's *Little Women* – but, sadly, Perkins captures the intellectual and emotional depth of neither Anne nor Jo.

<sup>xxiii</sup> The second section of Freud's *Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex* (1905) – "Infantile Sexuality" – counters the popular belief that children are asexual until puberty; rather, Freud argues, young children are innately sexual, and while their early sexual inclinations lapse into "sexual amnesia" during the later years of childhood, "the very impressions which we have forgotten have nevertheless left the deepest traces in our psychic life" (549-550). Drawing heavily on Freud's essay, Rose argues that adults are threatened by the anarchic potential signified by childhood sexuality and thus seek to retain control over childhood by repressing a recognition of childhood sexuality and putting in its place a nostalgic image of childhood purity (12-20).

#### **IV. Sitting Shivah: Holocaust Mourning in Judy Blume's *Starring Sally J. Freedman as Herself***

When Judy Blume's twelfth novel, *Starring Sally J. Freedman as Herself*, was published in 1977, its critical reception was, at best, lukewarm, and at worst, scathing. Of course, Blume's previous books, including *Are You There God? It's Me Margaret* (1970) and *Forever* (1975) similarly endured negative critical reviews, mostly in response to their frank – and to many viewers, “obsessive” – treatment of such topics as menstruation, masturbation, and premarital sex. However, what most provoked the reviewers of *Sally* was not its representation of sexual awakening or its depiction of (pre)adolescent angst, but its startling, and occasionally graphic, references to the Holocaust. Overwhelmingly, critics were simultaneously drawn into and repulsed by the central conflict of Blume's novel, which involves its ten-year-old protagonist's obsession with, and fantasies about, the atrocities suffered by Jews at the hands of the Nazis. Such treatment of the Holocaust, reviewers agreed, was “unnecessarily violent in its expression,” “trivialized by poor taste and unnecessarily ghoulish fantasies,” and “neither credible nor humorous” (Haas, Weeks, Steiner).

If critics' responses to Blume's novel are at all surprising, it is only because children's novels that represent the Holocaust are generally praised, rather than condemned, for their inclusion of disturbing imagery. According to Elizabeth Baer, in 1977 – the year of *Sally*'s publication – children's author Eric Kimmel published an article in which he catalogued Holocaust texts written for children, ranking them according to what he perceived to be their general effectiveness “in terms of presenting the profound evil of the Holocaust”; significantly, the single book Kimmel found most

“effective” in its representation of the event is Marietta Moskin’s *I Am Rosemarie*, a novel which, of all those Kimmel considers, most directly portrays life and death in Nazi concentration camps (Baer 383). A year later, critics unanimously praised Doris Orgel’s *The Devil in Vienna* (1978), applauding its skillfulness in providing a “graphic documentary picture of the intrusion of Nazism into Vienna and of the following years of harassment and brutality” (Haviland). A decade later, reviewers generally praised Lois Lowry’s Newbery-award-winning *Number the Stars* (1989) – in which a Christian girl aids the Danish resistance by helping her Jewish best friend – although a critic for the *New York Times Book Review* noted that the “book fails to offer [...] any sense of the horror that is the alternative if the Johansens’ efforts to save Ellen and her family fail” (Milton 32). This sense of “horror” was clearly felt, however, by readers of Jane Yolen’s *The Devil’s Arithmetic* (1988), whose penultimate chapter involves its protagonist’s entrance into a gas chamber, and whose publication was closely followed by its reception of the esteemed National Jewish Book Award.

Given these readers’ responses to the graphic Holocaust imagery (or lack thereof) contained within children’s novels, it appears as though the general consensus is that such imagery is a necessary component in representations of the event – that is, the implication seems to be that a “good” or “effective” Holocaust novel is one that shocks, or otherwise disturbs, its young reader. Blume’s novel, however, appears to be an exception to this generally upheld standard: far from being praised for containing necessarily shocking imagery, its allusions to the genocide – which, indeed, are truly jarring – were explicitly condemned as *unnecessary*. While this discrepancy may initially seem surprising, it may be readily explained upon an analysis of the context in which such imagery occurs.

Unlike Blume's novel, which is set in the post-war United States (partly in suburban New Jersey, partly in beachfront Miami), the aforementioned novels are all set primarily in World War II-era Europe, and thus – in obedience to the conventions of historical realism – aim toward creating the most detailed and historically verifiable portrayal of events which precipitated on European soil; their objective, in other words, is to represent events “as they really happened.” For example, *Number the Stars* includes an author's note in which Lowry explains the process by which she shaped her characters and plot, noting that this process was informed both by her conversations with first-hand witnesses to the Holocaust and by her extensive research of the Danish resistance. Likewise, *The Devil's Arithmetic*, while it employs a fantastical time-travel device (its author is best-known as a children's fantasy writer), similarly contains an author's note – entitled “What is True About This Book” – in which Yolen accounts for the documentary evidence on which she based her portrayal of the concentration camp her time-traveling heroine visits. Blume's novel, however, makes no attempt to “get the facts straight,” as it were: rather than providing its reader with a comprehensive introduction to the historical conditions in which the Holocaust took place, it instead alludes to the genocide only through sporadic fantasy sequences, in which the protagonist, Sally, indiscriminately blends graphic Holocaust imagery into backyard games or detective plots inspired by Hollywood movies, and in which the event's European setting is undifferentiated from the protagonist's American home (Dachau, in Sally's fantasies, is conveniently located next to a Rexall's drugstore). No doubt, it was the novel's liberal blending of graphic Holocaust imagery into whimsical fantasy sequences, with its attendant implication that the details of an historical event of such enormity could be adapted into mere child's

play, that so offended Blume's critics: seen from this perspective, the novel's use of the Holocaust appears irreverent, if not blasphemous. Moreover, the reviewers, who were most likely pre-disposed to Blume's characteristically unorthodox approaches to childhood sexuality, were taken aback by the novel's protagonist, who, rather than learning lessons of friendship and ethical obligation (as do the heroines of Orgel, Lowry, and Yolen) instead appears to exact some certain sexual pleasure in imagining Hitler's victimization of the Jews.

However, it may be useful to think about Sally's Holocaust fantasies – notably, her game of “concentration camp” – from a perspective that looks beyond the novel's mere “shock value” or exploitative potential. That is to say, a closer reading of the novel may suggest that the Holocaust fantasies it envisions, far from being “trivial” or “in poor taste,” may in fact play a pivotal role in its subtle exposition of the ways in which individuals approach an ultimately ineffable historical event and attempt to mourn the traumatic loss it has incurred. What follows, then, is a reading of Sally's various Holocaust games and fantasies which argues that such games, far from being mere whimsical or frivolous play, are, in fact, “work.” That is to say, I would like to argue that these episodes in Blume's novel represent the ways in which an individual belatedly “acts out” a traumatic loss in order to achieve mourning – or what Freud calls the “working through” of trauma. Moreover, I argue that the novel's implicit sexual content, far from being obscene or merely distracting, actually plays a significant role in its representation of the mourning process. Like Blume's other novels, such as *Are You There God? It's Me Margaret* and *Then Again, Maybe I Won't* (1971), *Starring Sally J. Freedman as Herself* relies heavily on a depiction of sexual awakening to signal its



protagonist's passage into maturity; however, unlike these former works, it does not confine its attention solely to emergent sexuality, but rather skillfully employs the familiar narrative of sexual passage in order to place into relief another passage – that is, the one to a mature recognition and acceptance of loss.

**“Let’s play Concentration Camp instead”: Approaching the Event**

*Starring Sally J. Freedman as Herself* is, like many of Blume's other novels, a coming-of-age story. In the course of the novel, which is set primarily in 1947, the protagonist, Sally, moves with her family from her native New Jersey town to a Florida beach city, which functions as the site in which Sally discovers for and by herself certain “facts of life” which had previously remained mysterious. For example, as the novel progresses, the protagonist comes to discover, on her own, the “secrets” of sexuality, religious difference, and American racial intolerance. However, it is the “secret” of the Holocaust that remains most mysterious and intriguing to Sally, and therefore it is that subject with which she is most preoccupied. The reader learns, in the novel's prologue, that Sally has received some – albeit scanty – information about the Holocaust from her mother. As Sally and her mother walk to the beach to join the celebration of the Allied victory, Sally complains of a stomachache and a sore throat, but her mother responds by ordering her to ignore these symptoms and to think of the possible happy endings afforded by the victory:

“Think about peace instead ... think about Uncle Jack coming home ...  
think about Tante Rose and Lila ...”

“Who are they?”

“You know ... Ma Fanny’s sister and their daughter ... my *Aunt* Rose and my *cousin*, Lila ...”

“Oh, them ... the ones Hitler sent away.”

“Yes. Maybe now we can find where they are.”

“Do you think they’re in New Jersey?” Sally asked.

“No, honey ... they’re far away ... they’re somewhere in Europe.” (8-9)

This first conversation between Sally and her mother establishes a pattern which most of their subsequent conversations follow: Sally asks a battery of more or less simple questions of clarification – the answers to which she hopes to gather together in an attempt to understand the object of inquiry – and her mother responds impatiently (yet not without affection) by offering brief, matter-of-fact answers. The guardedness of the mother’s replies to Sally’s questions communicates something of her unwillingness to dwell on the subject of recent events in Europe, an unwillingness that may be born of her own lack of information vis-à-vis these events, or her inclination to protect her young daughter from those gruesome stories which she does know. It is obvious that she has already shared with her daughter some of the basic facts of the Holocaust and her family members’ victimization by it – Sally already knows, for example, that Tante Rose and Lila have been “sent away” by Hitler – but the euphemistic phrase, “sent away,” which Sally appears to repeat unconsciously, betrays the mother’s reluctance to discuss the details of ghettoization, deportation, and extermination. Furthermore, Sally’s naïve suggestion that her great-aunt and cousin may be in the United States implies gaps in her received knowledge, gaps that are underscored by the frequent ellipses in the text.

As the novel progresses, however, the reader not only learns that Sally has been able to fill in some of the gaps left open by her protective mother, but is able to intuit why Sally so desires to engage with them in the first place. This becomes especially clear in a passage in which Sally and her friends gather in her backyard to play role-playing games. When a friend proposes to play a game of “Love and Romance,” Sally suggests that they play a game of “War” instead. The group has obviously played this war-game before: Sally’s friend Alice announces that she is “sick of playing War” because she “always end[s] up playing Hitler” – to which Sally responds that she, herself, could not possibly play Hitler because she is Jewish. Thus, when it seems as though her group cannot agree upon a suitable game to play, Sally presents a third alternative:

“We can play Concentration Camp instead. And nobody has to be Hitler because he is away on business.”

“How do you play?” Betsy asked.

“The usual way ...” Sally answered. “First I tell you who you are and then I make up the story ... Alice, you can be Lila ...”

“Who’s she?” Alice asked.

“This beautiful woman who gets captured and sent to Dachau.”

“What’s that?” Alice asked.

“It’s the concentration camp where the story takes place.”

“Oh.”

“And Betsy, you can be Tante Rose, Lila’s mother ...”

[...] “I’ll play,” Alice said, “as long as I can be Lila ... you did say she was beautiful, didn’t you?”

“Yes, very ... we have pictures of her. She has long, dark hair and big eyes.”

[...] “What am I supposed to be?” Christine asked.

“You can be the concentration camp guard. You hand the pretend soap to Tante Rose and Lila and tell them to go to the showers.”

“Why do they get *pretend* soap?”

“Because it’s a trick. They’re not really going to get showers, they’re going to get killed in a big gas oven.” (28-29)

### **The Photograph**

At the center of Sally’s game is the figure of her second-cousin Lila, the dark-haired beauty whom the reader already knows has perished in Dachau. In the course of the novel, the reader learns that Sally’s family owns “twenty two photographs in silver frames, four of them showing Tante Rose and Lila at different ages,” and that Sally’s favorite photograph is one that shows Lila to be “happy even though she isn’t really smiling” (104). There is something compelling about this description of Lila’s image – indeed, something vaguely reminiscent of da Vinci’s Mona Lisa, whose famous half-smile continues to prompt audiences to wonder what so preoccupied Leonardo’s subject. The appeal of the Mona Lisa is the enigma it poses: Leonardo’s subject *knows* something, which causes her to smile serenely, yet also somehow complacently. However, the viewer, who does not know the source of the Mona Lisa’s perplexing amusement, is left to grasp at explanations for her secretive demeanour. Similarly, Lila’s own expression, which is neither explicitly happy (she is “not really smiling”) nor sad or

distraught, suggests an ambiguity which Sally feels compelled to unravel. Like the Mona Lisa, Lila *knows* something that Sally as of yet cannot.

The secret knowledge the photograph promises is tied, in part, to the mature sexuality the “beautiful woman” within it exudes, and thus it invites Blume’s young protagonist to look at it until she may possess the mystery it holds. According to Freud, the question that initially most perplexes young children is not, as one might expect, the difference between the sexes, but the “Sphinxian riddle” of where babies come from – in other words, it is a question of origins (*Three Contributions* 562). Such an obsession with origins, Freud writes, is manifested in the immense curiosity with which children regard their surroundings. “About the same time as the sexual life of the child reaches its first rich development,” Freud writes, “... there appear the beginnings of that activity which are ascribed to the impulse for knowledge and investigation” (562). He continues to state that this investigative impulse corresponds, “on the one hand, to a sublimated form of acquisition, and on the other hand, to the energy with which it works comes from the looking impulse” (562). Such a looking impulse – such a scopophilic tendency – is tied, in Freud’s view, to sexual awakening and the problems that such awakening inevitably brings with it.

Blume’s novel, I argue, offers a startlingly lucid representation of how the child’s immense desire to inquire, and to look, is deeply tied to her desire to unravel the “Sphinxian riddle” of origins and procreation: Sally’s obsession with Lila’s image is directly related to her other tendencies to spy, eavesdrop, or otherwise observe the objects and people that surround her in order to uncover what she perceives as “secrets” – secrets that are paradoxically readily available to her and simultaneously confounding.

However, Sally's scopophilic tendency, and the expression it finds in her preoccupation with Lila's photograph, is just as tied to her anxieties about death as it is with her fixation on sex.

As Blume's novel unfolds, the reader follows Sally as she becomes increasingly preoccupied with sex. At home, in school, and at the movies, Sally is surrounded by talk of sex and sexual imagery, and yet she is confounded by what this phenomenon is, exactly, and why even her vague idea of what it is should give her such a strange thrill. In order to solve this mystery, then, she begins to cobble together the "clues" she finds at her disposal. Inspired by a teenaged babysitter, whose letters she furtively steals and reads, Sally begins to sign letters to her best friend "love and other indoor sports"; while she is perplexed by the connection between "love" and "sport," she suspects that the phrase is one that indicates some sophistication, and that her friend will be duly impressed. Later in the novel, Sally becomes enchanted by a family friend's mistress, whose "backside wiggled from side to side and ... breasts bounced up and down" and follows the woman into a restaurant washroom, where she is given a brief lesson in eyeshadow application and diamond washing (something the mistress claims "every girl should know how to do the right way") (141,143). Near the end of the novel, Sally accepts a dare and kisses her classmate, Peter Hornstein, in the bushes behind the local synagogue, and subsequently prides herself on having won a "Latin lover" (127).

Sally's path to knowledge of procreation is similarly long and meandering. When her mother announces that Sally's Aunt Bette and Uncle Jack will soon be greeting a new "addition," Sally is initially perplexed by what the term "addition" might mean; she wonders if perhaps "Aunt Bette has passed some kind of arithmetic test" (254). When

her mother explains that Aunt Bette is expecting a baby, Sally immediately and inevitably responds by asking where the baby comes from in the first place. Her mother's answer is characteristically vague: Uncle Jack, she explains, has "planted a seed" in Aunt Bette. (Upon hearing this, Sally writes Aunt Bette a congratulatory letter in which she ingenuously notes that she is "very glad to hear that Uncle Jack got the seed planted at last") (256). However, Sally's satisfaction with her mother's cursory explanation of seed-planting is short-lived, and she demands a more detailed elaboration of this process. In a final concession to Sally's multiple requests, her mother finally buys her a book on sex and procreation. However, even this book is not enough to satiate Sally, as its insistence that only married couples can procreate fails to explain how Sally's teenaged neighbor "got a baby" without being married. Once again, Sally takes it upon herself to garner the details adults and their books fail to supply her, and she resorts to spying on her downstairs neighbor just as she once spied on her babysitter.

Of course, the question of origins invariably leads to another question, which initially appears to be directly opposed to it: that is, the problem of death. As Jacqueline Rose argues in her analysis of Freud, the child's capacity to reckon with its own origins through procreation prompts her to recognize, as well, that there necessarily existed a time that preceded her conception and birth – that is, that there was a time when, quite simply, she did *not* exist.<sup>1</sup> This is a sublime problem indeed, and it invites, in turn, the speculation that sometime in the future, she will *cease* to exist. Certainly, this is a problem that perplexes Sally just as much as the question of "getting a baby" does. When Sally considers that her parents will someday die, her thoughts turn to her own mortality and consequently cause her several sleepless nights:

Sally couldn't sleep. Couldn't stop thinking that one day *she* would be dead, too. What would it feel like? It could be nice. It could be that she'd turn into an angel and fly around and watch what was going down on earth. [...] And then she'd fly up to heaven and be a beautiful angel with long blonde hair. Or maybe she'd keep her own hair because who says angels can't have brown hair? But if it turned out that there were no angels and when you died there was nothing ... because you were just plain dead ... dead and cold ... lying in the ground .. *oh!* She moaned at the idea of that. There had to be angels. There just had to be! (280-281).

Sally's meditations on mortality lead her to engage in anxious fantasies about not only her death, but the death of those around her. She is dreadfully frightened, for example, that her father will die on his thirty-fourth birthday because he would be reaching the age that his two brothers were when they died. When Sally's friend Andrea is injured after falling off her bicycle, Sally runs home for help and entertains morbid visions of finding her playmate dead upon her return. Moreover, she is utterly confounded by her downstairs neighbors' decision to sit shivah for their disgraced pregnant teenaged daughter: what, she wonders, would impel her neighbors to mourn a still-very-alive girl as though she were dead?

Sally's often anxious curiosity about matters of sex, birth, and death find their ultimate expression in her fascination with the portrait of Lila. As I have argued above, Lila's half-smiling image appears to possess a knowledge that Sally is intent upon acquiring. Given Sally's preoccupation with sex and death, it may be argued, then, that it



is precisely the knowledge of these two phenomena that the protagonist presumes Lila's image to "know." Sally, mesmerized by her cousin's beauty, wants to "grow up to look just like Lila" – that is, she wants to achieve not only her cousin's physical attractiveness, but the sexual confidence such physical bearing communicates (104). However, Sally is aware that Lila's image communicates another sort of knowledge as well. The very eyes that gaze contentedly at the camera in "happier times" are those that, in later years, will witness first-hand the atrocities visited upon Jews in the ghettos and in the concentration camps; indeed, they will bear witness to Lila's own ultimate encounter with mortality. Lila's photographic likeness is a reminder to the protagonist that Lila knows what Sally cannot, and has seen what Sally will never see. And yet, her perplexing expression is nevertheless an invitation to Sally to pursue this knowledge – in effect, to "see from another's eyes."

It is no wonder, then, that Sally so venerates her cousin's portrait, for it contains – and promises to divulge – the twin secrets of sex and death that the protagonist is so intent upon unraveling. In effect, the photograph serves as a fetish. The fetish, according to Freud, is a "substitute for a sexual object" which is "generally a part of the body but little adapted for sexual purposes, such as the foot or hair or some inanimate object (fragments of clothing, underwear) which has some demonstrable relation to the sexual person" (*Three Contributions* 534). While Freud generally associates the fetish with what he regards as abnormal sexual activity, he concedes that a "certain degree of fetichism is ... regularly found in the normal, especially during those stages of wooing when the normal sexual aim seems inaccessible or when its realization is unduly deferred" (535). Freud's definition of the fetish lends Blume's narrative a particular

clarity. That is, by understanding the portrait as a fetish – or as a fragment of the whole which the protagonist would like to possess – the reader is better able to comprehend the desires which motivate Sally’s actions throughout the narrative.

### **“The Photograph, Taken in Flux”**

If, as I have argued above, Lila’s portrait serves as the centerpiece around which Sally’s game of “concentration camp” – as well as her numerous other fantasies – revolves, then the question that remains involves why Sally should incorporate this image into a *game*. That is, if Lila’s photograph holds the answers to the questions Sally so desires to have resolved, then what function does the framing narrative of the game play in extracting such answers from the silent and unyielding portrait?

In his meditation on photography, *Camera Lucida* (1981), Roland Barthes argues that the photograph is merely a single document – a transposition of the image of a physical body onto paper by means of light and chemicals – which, in its singularity, is “without future”: the photograph serves only to verify “what has been” (90, 82). While the photograph does affirm “what has been,” it makes no promises to restore the person or event whose existence it verifies (6). There is a certain damning finality about the photograph: as a single image, it implies a story – for example, the person to whose existence the photograph attests had a particular life history, which began and ended in such-and-such a way – but it denies any certain and cogent narrative. Given Barthes’s delineation of the limits of photography, one may better understand the problem Lila’s portrait presents to Sally. As I have argued above, Lila’s photograph promises to divulge the secrets it contains and which Sally is most intent upon acquiring. However, this

portrait is but a single, decontextualized image: whatever story it might tell is securely fastened behind its subject's static and placid expression. In order to make it speak, as it were, Sally needs to place it into a narrative in which she may glean from the photograph the answers she demands. This is by no means a new task for Sally. For example, while Sally and her friends know relatively little about sexuality, they nevertheless repeatedly play a game of "Love and Romance" (27). The game of "Love and Romance," like similar children's games such as "playing house" or "mothers and fathers", is an attempt to imitate, repeatedly, the sexual behavior of adults until the secrets of sexuality might ultimately be collected and assimilated from such restaging. Similarly, the game of "concentration camp" can be read as an attempt to reproduce the probable circumstances of Lila's death until the "secret" of that death – hidden or implied by the photograph – might be revealed.

What is especially remarkable about Sally's game of "concentration camp," however, is its matter-of-fact and thoroughly unsentimental recitation of the basic process of extermination employed by the Nazis. The basic elements of the game – the guards, the showers, and the "gas oven" – not only faithfully resemble the various objects and persons the Nazis employed in order to achieve their plan of mass murder, but Sally's careful organization of these elements into a narrative directly corresponds to established (and by now, well known) accounts of such mass executions. Given that, in the preceding chapter, the protagonist's ignorance of the Nazi genocide is such that she believes it to have occurred in the United States, a reader might well wonder how her fantasy has come to achieve such a documentary fidelity to detail.

An answer to this question might be found – perhaps surprisingly – in certain clues the novel furnishes regarding Sally’s love of film. Sally is a great fan of Hollywood cinema: she is familiar with the personal lives of her favorite movie stars, and she regularly engages in fantasies in which she performs alongside these actors. Her love for film is underscored, moreover, by frequent and sometimes casual references in the narrative to contemporary performers such as Bing Crosby and Esther Williams. The novel’s setting, as well as temporal markers such as actors’ names and film titles, presumes a knowledge, on the reader’s part, of the circulation of images within 1940’s cinema – specifically, it presumes the reader’s familiarity with the newsreels that regularly preceded films released in that historical moment. According to Barbie Zelizer:

Certain [Holocaust] photos found their way into atrocity films, which were screened in cinemas on both continents. During a two-week presentation of stills and footage taken by the U.S. Signal Corps and the British Army Film and Photographic Unit, one New York City theatre chain reported a 25 percent increase in audience attendance. The newsreels mesmerized audiences with their depiction of horror and “no persons took refuge in shutting their eyes” because nearly “all patrons were determined to see.” (148)

Certainly, the grim matter-of-factness of Sally’s game of “concentration camp” echoes something of the stoical narration one might expect of an “atrocity film” and thus this connection might give the reader some implicit explanation for Sally’s sudden acquaintance with the facts of the Holocaust.

What is of even greater significance to this study, however, is the way in which the game's resemblance to a documentary film places into relief the particular role that film, specifically, plays in Sally's fantasies. In his elaboration of the photograph's static, unshifting character, Barthes argues that while the photograph is an essentially static form, the film, on the other hand, involves the "photograph, taken in flux" which is "impelled, ceaselessly drawn toward other views"; unlike the photograph, which "flows back from presentation to retention," the cinema is "protensive" and "simply 'normal' like life" (90). Film – most notably Hollywood film – promises the possibility of narrative resolution: it speaks, it guarantees. In other words, if Lila's photograph remains mute and secretive (as Barthes argues a photograph always does), then Sally's insertion of her cousin's image into a reenactment of a narrative, "protensive" form can be read as an attempt on her part to place it into a context in which it is, in effect, *forced* to speak. That is, by imagining Lila as a specific, individual casualty of the gruesome process she sees dramatized in newsreels (or in whatever other source that has informed her knowledge of the Holocaust), Sally is better able to understand how her cousin died, and thus she is a step closer to approaching the mystery of death that so confounds her.

### **Hollywood Narrative and the Search for Meaning**

The question "how" is nevertheless often subordinate to – or at least much less compelling than – the attendant question of "*why*." That is to say, it is one thing to inquire into the exact process of an event's unfolding (for example, an innocent young woman's victimization at the hands of her own neighbors) and an entirely different thing altogether to ask for the reasons such an event occurred – to ask, in effect, for its

*meaning*. The question “why” is one that is typically asked by young children, and Blume’s young heroine is no exception: for example, she does not rest content with accepting the laws of segregation that prevail in her Florida beach town, but insists upon knowing what motivates them, and why they should exist in the first place (an inquiry that prompts a considerable amount of back-peddling on the part of her parents). It is not surprising, then, that Sally’s game of “concentration camp” – which allows her to confront *how* her cousin might have died – gives way, in the latter part of the novel, to fantasies which Sally constructs in order to discover the reason for, and meaning of, this inscrutable death. Unlike her game of “concentration camp,” however, these latter fantasies do not so much draw on images gleaned from documentary film as they do from images and narrative schemes prevalent in classical Hollywood cinema. While, no doubt, the novel’s seemingly indiscriminate weaving together of Holocaust imagery with Hollywood imagery probably motivated its reviewers to dismiss it as an exercise “in poor taste” that is “neither credible nor humorous,” I argue that its juxtaposition of otherwise irreconcilable images lends greater insight into the ways in which its protagonist confronts the meaning (or lack thereof) of her cousin’s tragic death. The conventions of Hollywood cinema on which Sally’s fantasies clearly draw incline toward a clear resolution, and thus they offer Blume’s heroine a tempting – if ultimately a disappointingly unsuccessful – means of garnering a satisfactory explanation for Lila’s death.

Soon after she moves with her family to Florida, Sally constructs a fantasy in which she imagines herself as a spy who is captured by Hitler in his “round-up” of New Jersey Jews. In the course of this fantasy, which Sally entitles “Sally F. Meets Adolf H.”

– and her use of a title is interesting in and of itself, insofar as it communicates a self-conscious drawing on filmic conventions – Sally confronts Hitler in his “private office,” where he cuts off her hair, burns her toes, and slashes her fingers until her blood covers the “huge swastika in the middle” of his rug (84-85).<sup>ii</sup> Ultimately, however, Sally escapes and gives the “underground” information “leading to the capture of Adolf Hitler and the end of the war” (85).

If Sally’s fantasy seems simplistic, it nevertheless bears a close resemblance to a formulaic espionage film, in which the hero sets out to uncover a conspiracy, is captured by the enemy and given a requisite roughing-up, and finally escapes to vindicate both himself and his country. According to Thomas Schatz, the Hollywood spy/espionage film gained greater prominence during the Second World War, at a time when the war film already constituted a substantial portion of the films released annually in the United States. The espionage film enjoyed such popularity, in fact, that producers scrambled to churn out “reformulations of low-grade crime formulas” in which “B-grade G-men and undercover cops simply turned their sights from gangsters to foreign agents; the trappings of the story – props, sets, costumes, cast, and plot structure – remained the same” (241). Similarly, Schatz notes:

Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson were updated to wartime sleuths in *Sherlock Holmes and the Voice of Terror* and *Sherlock Holmes and the Secret Weapon* and B-grade Western series were recruited in films like Republic’s *Valley of Hunted Men*, in which the Three Mesquiteers battle Nazi spies, and Monogram’s *Cowboy Commandos*, in which the Range Busters pursue Nazi saboteurs. Even the Universal horror

film was converted to war production in *Invisible Agent*; Jon Hall's "invisible man" took on both Nazi and Japanese spies. (242)

Given the preponderance of 1940s spy films that indiscriminately blended characteristic American genres such as the crime film and the Western with tales of European espionage, Sally's spy fantasy set in Hitler's "New Jersey office" does not seem so unique or problematic – rather, it can be read as an allusion to the "Americanization" of the Second World War effected by Hollywood film and the tremendous hold such an attempt had on even the youngest generation of American audiences.

Moreover, the novel's allusions to a genre that was especially dependent upon reformulation underscores its usefulness to a protagonist whose greatest desire is to resolve a mystery that haunts her. The formula-driven spy film promises, time and again, that no matter how daunting the hero finds his assignment, and no matter what obstacles he meets as he undertakes it, he will ultimately bring to light the conspiracy that lies beneath the clues he has amassed, securing both justice and truth once and for all. No doubt, this genre may be a compelling one to a young person who questions the truth or meaning of a confounding historical event, and who wonders what kind of justice could ever restore a loved one whose life this event has claimed. The spy film is consoling: unlike the adults who speak in hushed tones just slightly out of earshot, it is forthcoming in its revelation of "secrets," promising swift and definitive answers.

More generally, the filmic conventions that characterize not only espionage film but Hollywood film as a whole promise the kind of swift resolution that Blume's protagonist clearly desires. In their study of the classical Hollywood cinema, David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson elaborate on how American films



produced during the heyday of the Hollywood studio system are structured so as to ensure “closure” and thus reward the audience’s “search for meaning” (47). The conventional Hollywood narrative, they argue, is linear and forward-driven, so that the “arrows of the spectator’s expectations are turned toward the encounter to come, the race to the goal” of ultimate resolution (45). In order to make such a “race” as gripping and satisfying as possible, the narrative “creates gaps, holding back information and compelling the spectator to form hypotheses” (38). These hypotheses, the authors argue, pertain, most “minimally and generally,” to “what can happen next,” but may extend as well to the motivation behind the actions of a particular character or the significance of key bits of information the narrative either discloses or withholds (38). Moreover, the Hollywood film helps its audience along, as it were, by repeatedly returning to crucial details the spectator will need in order to uncover the “secrets” possessed by both the narrative and its characters: for example, according to the Hollywood “rule of three,” an event “becomes important if it is mentioned three times [...] once for the smart viewer, once for the average viewer, and once for the slow Joe in the back row” (31). Ultimately, the film’s divulgence and repetition of significant clues prompts the spectator to “pass through [it] as if moving through an architectural volume, remembering what he or she has already encountered, hazarding guesses about upcoming events, assembling images and sounds into total shapes” – an effort for which the film “rewards” her with a tidy conclusion in which her hypotheses are confirmed and in which justice is meted out (37, 38).

A brief elaboration of the history of the Hollywood espionage film, specifically, and the classical Hollywood narrative, more generally, places into relief the extent to

which Sally's perception is structured by the films to which she is exposed. As the very title of Blume's novel implies, Sally believes – solipsistically perhaps – that her *own life* is a film; situating herself at once as this “film's” director, star, and audience, she takes upon herself the necessary responsibility of unraveling both the great and small mysteries with which she, as its self-imagined heroine, is confronted. It is significant, therefore, that Sally's tendency to think of her life as a script in progress should coincide with her growing preoccupation with sex and death. That is, if Sally is predisposed to imagining her life as a linear narrative which contains within it certain “clues” that point toward clear and definitive answers, then her obsession with imagining herself within various filmic episodes in which she confronts the sexually-nefarious villain to whom she assigns full blame for murdering her cousin may be read as an attempt to gather together the information she has been given – as film has trained her to do – in order to work toward some satisfactory resolution. Read thus, Sally's fantasies do not so much seem to be moments of frivolous play as they do earnest attempts – albeit naïve ones – to confer meaning upon phenomena that exist outside the realm of understanding; moreover, such fantasies can be read as a clever exposition of the extent to which a media form such as film structures the protagonist's attainment and organization of knowledge.

### **Mastering the Narrative**

It is significant to note, moreover, that in fantasies such as “Sally F. Meets Adolf H.,” Sally takes on roles that are traditionally assigned to men. While it is apparent that Sally's torture at the hands of “Adolf H.” has a certain sexual, sado-masochistic dimension, and that some of the threats the villain uses against Sally are gendered (for

example, his threat to cut off her hair), the overall narrative structure of this fantasy, like many of the others Sally concocts, is one that typically involves a male protagonist. It is important to note as well that while Sally readily assumes a role that is gendered male, she frequently relegates her cousin Lila to a passive female role whose purpose is limited to placing into relief Sally's own heroics. Such an obvious polarity between gender roles at work in Sally's fantasies invites further inquiry into the ways in which Hollywood film structures her response to the mysteries with which she is confronted and offer the promise of a meaningful explanation of these "secrets." That is, Hollywood film plays a pivotal role in Sally's inquiry into sex and death not only because it suggests that "hypotheses" about accrued information may be tested and ultimately rendered true, but because it solidifies a gender-coded subject-object relationship that guarantees that the knowledge embodied by the objectified woman may be mastered by the controlling gaze of the male protagonist and spectator. In other words, Sally's assumption of an active male role and her relegation of her cousin to a passive female role makes visible the expectation, prompted by filmic conventions, that the inert female body – here figured as Lila's photographic image – may render to scrutiny its secrets, however threatening or forbidding they might be.

In her landmark essay, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975), Laura Mulvey argues that the visual apparatus grants the spectator (always coded as male) the opportunity to make others – specifically, the woman – the object of his controlling gaze. This process, Mulvey argues, is significant on two counts. First, film allows the spectator to indulge in a certain voyeuristic pleasure: the film constitutes a "hermetically sealed world" at which the spectator, situated in the "darkness of the theatre" and facing the

“brilliance of the screen,” may gaze without fear of retribution, and thus indulge in the pleasure of taking in the object of his desire. Second, film’s objectification of the woman allays certain anxieties the spectator retains concerning castration and sexual difference: while the spectator is initially threatened by the risk of castration the woman embodies, he soon identifies with the male protagonist who demystifies the female object and places her firmly under his visual control. Thus, according to Mulvey, the female character has no importance outside of the passive role she plays in delivering herself to male scrutiny and thus motivating the protagonist’s actions (and, in turn, the narrative).

The process Mulvey delineates resonates clearly in a lengthy fantasy sequence Sally entitles “Sally Saves Lila.” The fantasy, like many classical Hollywood films, begins swiftly and abruptly, *in medias res*: “It is during the war. President Roosevelt asks for volunteers to go to Europe to help” (31). Sally, of course, “is the first on line” of willing volunteers (32). While the “Head of Volunteers” expresses some hesitation at Sally’s age – after all, she is only ten years old – he eventually admits confidence in Sally’s claim that she is “smart,” “strong” and “tough” and declares that he will “take a chance and send” her on the next ship bound for Europe (32). Immediately, therefore, Sally is coded as the stereotypical young and idealistic soldier – a bit of a pipsqueak perhaps, but all the more impressive then in her alacrity to do battle against a formidable Goliath. Sally’s identification with the familiar figure of the underdog-soldier is evidenced, moreover, in her adoption of the iconic gesture of the soldier leaving home for battle: upon receiving her assignment, she “salutes” the Head of Volunteers and “slings her duffle bag over her shoulder and boards her ship” (32). The influence of war films on this sequence is undeniable, as is Sally’s identification with the male soldier-protagonist.

Once she reaches Europe, however, Sally does not report to the front, but rather finds herself in a pleasant city square, where she decides to buy some toothpaste and a “salami sandwich on rye and a Coke to go” (32). During an impromptu picnic in the park, she “hears someone crying” and swiftly “investigates” (32). As it happens, the source of the “sobs” Sally hears is Lila, “dressed in rags” and “huddled on the ground next to a tall tree” (32). Sally promptly questions the unfortunate woman, asking her where she comes from and how long it has been since she has eaten. In the sequence that follows, Lila breaks down in response to Sally’s persistent questions, and their exchange reaches a thrilling climax:

*I have no home ... no family ... no friends ... all gone ... gone ...* Finally [Lila] turns and faces Sally. Even though her hair is filthy and her big eyes are red and swollen and most of her teeth are missing, Sally knows her instantly. *Lila!*

At the sound of her name the woman tries to stand up and run but she is so weak she falls to the ground, beating it with her fists. *I knew you would catch me ... sooner or later ... I knew I could never escape ... but I won't go back to Dachau ... not ever ... I'll die right here ... right now ...* She pulls a knife from her pocket and aims it at her heart.

*No!* Sally says, springing to her feet. She wrestles the knife away from Lila. *You don't understand ... I'm here to help ...*

*You are not with the Gestapo?* Lila asks.

*No, I'm with the Volunteers of America. I'm Sally J. Freedman,*

*from New Jersey ... I'm your cousin, once removed ... (33-34)*

Here, Lila is the epitome of helplessness: she is reduced literally to a shivering mass of rags. By contrast, Sally exudes calm and a certain masculine solidity: while she certainly expresses compassion for the wretched woman she encounters, she nevertheless maintains control of a situation that potentially could get out of hand by firmly steering her cousin away from the point of near-suicidal hysteria to a state of relative composure. Here, Sally demonstrates complete mastery over her cousin, not only in her obviation of Lila's suicide but in her declaration that she will "help" the near-starved woman to survive. Moreover – and perhaps most significantly – Sally maintains power over Lila's very ability to speak. By assuming the authority of a soldier, Sally hails her cousin, obliging her to provide answers to Sally's persistent questions and thus extracting from her the knowledge that Sally herself would like to possess. For example, when Sally demands to know what has become of Lila's mother, and Sally's great-aunt, Rose, her cousin tearfully spills out a winding narrative that details her life in Dachau, her mother's death in the "showers," and her own fantastical escape.

Sally's position of masculine power vis-à-vis her comparatively feminized cousin is evident as well in the conclusion of her fantasy. After explaining that Lila should not "even try" to thank her for saving her life – like any good soldier, Sally is "just doing [her] job" – Sally whisks her cousin away, giving her a "bath and shampoo" and allowing her a "good night's sleep" (34). If, at this moment, Sally's abrupt "bedding" of her cousin bears a suspicious resemblance to a romantic turn in a war-time love story, in which the brave young soldier woos the lovely victim under his charge, the following detail in the fantasy confirms this hypothesis: the next morning, Sally surprises Lila with

a “big breakfast in bed” – an innocent yet telling substitution for the iconic post-coital cigarette.<sup>iii</sup> In this veiled allusion to sexual consummation, Sally’s mastery over Lila is confirmed once and for all: in effect, she now fully “knows” her cousin – and, by extension, her cousin’s secrets. To underscore this triumph – and to place into relief Lila’s lack of importance relative to Sally – the fantasy ends with Sally’s return home to a hero’s welcome, greeted with “cheers” and “confetti” by people watching a “big parade in her honor” (35).

The ecstatic imagery with which “Sally Saves Lila” concludes further resonates with Mulvey’s discussion of visual pleasure and narrative cinema as it demonstrates the parallels Mulvey observes between the Lacanian mirror stage and the spectator’s identification with the male protagonist. Briefly and succinctly summarizing Lacan’s concept of the mirror stage, Mulvey writes that this “phase occurs at a time when the child’s physical ambitions outstrip his motor capacity, with the result that his recognition of himself is joyous in that he imagines his mirror image to be more complete, more perfect than he experiences his own body” (749). Such a “recognition,” Mulvey reminds us, is “overlaid with misrecognition”: the child perceives his mirror-image to be a “superior” body projected outside itself as an “ideal ego, the alienated subject, which, re-introjected as an ego ideal, gives rise to the future generation of identification with others” (749). While Mulvey admits that this process occurs before the child’s acquisition of language, she nevertheless argues that it is repeated in the act of cinema spectatorship, in which the male protagonist becomes the “more perfect, more complete, more powerful ideal ego” with which the viewer – positioned across from the cinematic image as a child is situated before a mirror – may entertain a “joyous recognition” (749).

According to Mulvey, the “cinema has structures of fascination strong enough to allow temporary loss of ego while simultaneously reinforcing the ego,” a process that is achieved through the viewer’s temporary suspension of self-awareness and simultaneous identification with the protagonist projected before him (749) Certainly, this process is evidenced in the above passage from Blume’s novel: Sally’s identification with what appears to be a composite of strong male protagonists allows her to imagine herself as a subject who is more confident and knowledgeable than she otherwise believes herself to be. Once completely reliant on the (often withheld) knowledge of her elders, Sally can nevertheless rely on an identification with a male alter-ego in order to envision herself as an agent of change, rather than a mere receptacle of knowledge cobbled from various sources. Armed with such a sense of agency, she can in turn invert the relation of power implied in her position vis-à-vis Lila’s portrait: while once Lila’s photograph implied a knowledge that Sally herself did not possess, Sally’s placement of this image in the subjugated position of the passive female role relative to Sally’s assumption of the active male role ensures that Lila will give up her secrets at last.

### **Sitting Shivah: From Melancholia to Mourning**

Throughout the course of Blume’s novel, Sally persistently returns to her Hollywood-inspired fantasies, as if by doing so, she may extract Lila’s twin secrets of sex and death once and for all. At times, she resorts to reenacting her original games of “war” and “concentration camp” – although she soon finds that her new friends in Florida are more resistant to performing such spectacles than were her old friends in New Jersey. At other times, she invents new variations on her espionage fantasies: for example, while



still in Florida, she begins to imagine that her elderly Jewish neighbor, Mr. Zavodsky, is “Hitler in disguise” and writes him a series of unposted letters in which she threatens to report him to the authorities. As Sally’s obsession with Lila’s “secret” grows stronger, the frequency of her fantasies in turn increases exponentially. Nevertheless, not one fantasy appears to deliver the satisfactory answer Sally desires.

However, once Sally moves back to New Jersey, she gradually begins to lose interest in the games and fantasies that had once held her in thrall. For example, after her brother tells her of a lunatic who lives in the nearby woods, Sally’s immediate response to her brother’s story is to envision Hitler as the lunatic forest-dweller. When she tells her brother of this fantasy, however, he laughs at her – and surprisingly, his reaction causes her to laugh as well: “Sally started laughing too. She couldn’t help it either. It was funny ... *Hitler in Union Woods* ... why would he bother to go there?” (298). Sally’s ability to laugh at her proposed fantasy – a reaction that the self-conscious and defensive protagonist formerly would not have had – and her ability to see the preposterousness of the scenario (“why would he bother to go there?”) signal her abandonment of her fantasies, which nevertheless aided her in a time of trauma and uncertainty.

Moreover, Sally’s ability to laugh at – and thus distance herself from – her obsessive fantasies suggests that she has passed from a state of melancholic acting-out to a more stable state of mourning. Melancholia, according to Freudian theory, involves the ego’s inability to decathect from the lost object; in such a condition, “one part of the ego sets itself over against the other, judges it critically, and, as it were, looks upon it as an object” (“Mourning and Melancholia” 168). Moreover, melancholia involves “acting

out”: that is, the melancholic, instead of consciously remembering a traumatic loss, repeatedly acts out such loss “without ... knowing that he is repeating it” (“Remembering, Repeating, and Working-Through” 150). However, while such successive instances of acting-out may initially appear endlessly cyclical and therefore destructive, they may – under the proper circumstances – be necessary to an ultimate act of mourning, or the “working-through” of loss (“Remembering” 155). That is, it is only by repetitively acting out the drama of loss that an individual, with the help of an interlocutor (for Freud, the analyst), may identify the obsessions and habits that have held her in thrall and therefore consciously begin to decathect herself from the object of loss. According to this perspective, then, Sally’s games and fantasies may be read not only as a means by which she may understand and make meaning of her cousin’s death – and the problem of death more generally<sup>iv</sup> – but as a process by which she might come to terms with the traumatic sense of loss such death inspires. Of course, this is not to say that such abandonment is in any way ultimate or decisive. Indeed, in his exposition of Holocaust mourning, Dominick LaCapra notes that mourning (or “working-through”) while it “counters compulsive acting-out” nevertheless “does not provide full enlightenment or definitive liberation from the constraints of the past” (186). However, Sally’s ability to distance herself from her fantasies does indicate some degree of negotiation of traumatic loss.

Sally’s process of mourning is also based, in part, on her recognition of the important role of collective mourning. Such a recognition is made through her acquaintance with the Jewish custom of sitting shivah, in which the bereaved are visited by family and close friends, who together form a minyan (or group of ten or more Jews

over the age of 13) necessary for the praying of the Kaddish. In the course of the novel, the reader learns that Sally recounts with a sort of bittersweet pleasure the occasions on which her family would sit shivah for various relatives:

After their funerals they'd sat shivah for a week, at Sally's house. It was a Jewish custom, to help the family through those difficult first days following a loved one's death. Sally enjoyed sitting shivah very much. Every afternoon and evening friends and relatives would come to visit, bringing baskets of fruit and homemade cakes and cookies and boxes of candy from Barton's. And they would pinch Sally's cheeks, and tell her how much she'd grown since the last funeral. Then they'd all sit around and talk and Mom would serve coffee. And as they left they'd always say, "We must get together on happier occasions." But they never did. (24)

It is significant to note that, in this passage, Sally takes *pleasure* in sitting shivah: she "enjoy[s] sitting shivah very much." Sitting shivah is, for Sally, nothing more than a pleasant family gathering, during which Sally can enjoy not only the sweets her relatives bring but the attention they lavish upon her. It is also an opportunity for Sally to observe the interactions of those adults whose activities remain mysterious to her. For example, when, after having received news of their deaths, Sally's family sits shivah for Tante Rose and Lila, Sally is still, at this point, less preoccupied with the loss of her aunt and cousin than she is with observing those who came to pay their condolences. She takes pleasure, for instance, in watching the "people from the old country, who had known Ma

Fanny [Sally's grandmother] when she was just a girl, before she sailed to America on the banana boat": observing these "foreign" relatives becomes yet another way for Sally to entertain herself (24). The actual occasion for this ritual – the death of a loved one – is something that Sally casually overlooks. While she recognizes that sitting shivah is necessitated by a person's death, she does not yet understand the significance of death; this is partly because the deceased whom Sally's family has mourned have been either "foreign" relatives or those who "were much older or very sick and she didn't know them well enough to really care" (24). In effect, sitting shivah is, at this point in the narrative, still a *game* for Sally – and, in this way, it is not unlike the games Sally plays with her classmates. Like Sally's game of concentration camp, which is initially a mere scripted performance of historical circumstances she does not yet understand, sitting shivah is, for Sally, a performance of a ritual whose structure is evident, but whose significance or meaning is absent.

Sally's understanding of sitting shivah changes radically, however, when her brother Douglas becomes seriously ill. When Sally fantasizes about Douglas's death, and about the mourning rituals that would follow his death, she realizes that "with Douglas, [sitting shivah] would be different. It wouldn't be like a party at all" (25). In this moment of crisis, what Sally had previously understood as a "party" – as a game – now takes on its full significance: she now recognizes sitting shivah as a sober, collective response to an irrecoverable loss. That is, the custom of sitting shivah becomes *transformed* for Sally. And if one takes into account the transformation of Sally's understanding of this specific practice, then one might argue, as well, that the other practices Sally had previously understood as mere games – particularly, her game of

concentration camp – become transformed as well. That is to say, while Sally’s game of concentration camp initially might have been a rote (and morbidly pleasurable) reenactment of an event beyond her comprehension, it takes on new significance once Sally encounters yet another trauma. Having recognized the potential – and more immediate – loss of her brother, Sally may now better understand the loss of her distant cousin, and the necessity of responding to this loss in an active manner: thus her “game” of concentration camp is transformed into an act of mourning.

In this way, Sally’s game, like the practice of sitting shivah, can be interpreted as an attempt to work through a traumatic loss. This is not to say that Sally directly or consciously models her game on the Jewish custom of mourning, nor is it to say that she somehow “sacralizes” the Holocaust through a religious ritualization of her memory of the event. Rather, what I intend to argue is that, by coming to recognize the practice of sitting shivah as an effective and necessary response to loss, Sally in turn acknowledges her own need to memorialize – and thus “work through” – her cousin’s death within a familiar, collective context. According to LaCapra, “mourning [in order to be effective] would seem to require a supportive or even solidaristic social context” (184). Such collective mourning demands an active communal recognition – rather than a melancholic denial – of a loss; this active recognition thereby prompts the collective to seek out a transformative relationship to the present and the future, rather than a (potentially dangerous) repetitive-compulsive acting out of the past. While I have argued above that Sally’s game of “concentration camp” is indicative of the latter, melancholic, relation to the past, I would like to suggest that this game could be viewed alternatively as an appeal to collective mourning. Sally is well aware that her friends are ignorant of

the circumstances of the Holocaust – after all, the dialogue quoted above places Sally in the position of authority vis-à-vis the circumstances of the Holocaust – and thus intrepidly seeks to expose them to events that have been largely denied. By actively forbidding such a denial, Sally’s game instantiates a confrontation with the traumatic past, and thus at least the potential of resistance to its repetition. In this way, her game is transformative not only insofar as it evolves from an empty performance to a recognition of loss, but because it prompts an active, collective engagement with an event that might otherwise be repressed.

The transformative potential promised by Blume’s novel might, then, call into question the dismissive manner in which it conventionally has been read: not only does a close reading of *Sally* disrupt an interpretation of the protagonist’s games as merely “ghoulish” or violent for their own sake, but it prompts readers to reconsider their expectations of a “typical Judy Blume novel.” Blume’s novels have often been taken to task by reviewers and critics for their representations of “self-absorbed” children who are unable to decathect from their narcissistic investments. For example, R.A. Siegal argues that Blume “creates no place for her characters to inhabit except the self ... Things are *not encountered* by her characters; they are understood through intellection and rationalization” (76, italics mine). If Siegal’s argument regarding the overly-earnest “cogitating” of Blume’s protagonists is well-supported by Margaret’s self-scrutiny before a mirror in *Are You There God? It’s Me Margaret*, or Tony’s self-conscious acts of voyeurism in *Then Again, Maybe I Won’t*, it is nevertheless challenged by Sally’s *active engagement* – in effect, her *encounter* – with the world in *Starring Sally J. Freedman as Herself*. Sally’s response to the Holocaust – and to the other “secrets” she finds so

compelling – is in no way marked by the passive contemplation to which critics so objected in Blume’s other novels. Rather, Sally’s engagement with the “secret” of the Holocaust is in every way a *bodily* engagement, made manifest in the roles she physically enacts in her games and fantasies. Moreover, if this novel – like Blume’s other “coming-of-age” novels – implies some degree of (pre)adolescent “self-realization,” such self-realization is brought about, not through an inward turn, but through a conscious interaction with the world: Sally becomes dramatically aware of how events “somewhere in Europe” have affected her own, presumably sheltered, existence – and in turn, she learns, through the role-playing games she engages in with her friends, that her own attempts to bear witness to such events have immense transformative potential. Thus, a (re)reading of *Starring Sally J. Freedman as Herself* not only prompts us to critique the ways in which Blume’s work has been so readily dismissed by her critics, but to turn our attention to the revolutionary potential of childhood perception Blume’s novel implies.

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<sup>i</sup> According to Rose, the child – and the child’s questions regarding origins – threatens adult credence in a coherent subjectivity. “When we speak,” she writes, “we take up a position of identity and certainty in language, a position whose largely fictional nature only the occasional slip, and at times the joke, is allowed to reveal” (16). Language thus constitutes a problem for the adult’s assuredness of identity, and it is with the greatest care, then, that the adult answers the child’s questions concerning origin. Behind such questions, argues Rose, “is the idea of the moment when the child did not exist, and behind the question of [sexual] difference is the recognition that the child’s sexual identity rests solely in its differentiation from something (or someone) which it is not. There is a level, therefore, at which these questions undermine the very identity that they simultaneously put in place. We answer for the child at the cost of deceiving ourselves” (16).

<sup>ii</sup> Sally’s vision of torture at Hitler’s hands bears a certain resemblance to the torture suffered by fairy tale heroines: like Sleeping Beauty, Sally’s fingers are pricked, and like Rapunzel, her hair is cut. While such an allusion to fairy tales might potentially prompt further outcry regarding Blume’s supposed “trivialization” of the Holocaust, it is significant to note that *Sally* is one of a considerable number of Holocaust texts written for children that draws on the plot and structure of fairy tales. For example, Jane Yolen’s *Briar Rose* (1992) draws heavily on “Sleeping Beauty in the Woods” as it tells the story of a survivor of Chelmno who is saved by a kindly Polish aristocrat who kisses her back to consciousness. However, as Adrienne Kertzer notes, Yolen ultimately subverts the fairy tale form when, in her author’s note, “Yolen deliberately takes away both the kiss and the happy ending by reminding her that the story ... is a fairy tale ... [and that] ‘no woman [...] escaped from Chelmno alive’ (67).

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Additionally, in “The Hansel and Gretel Syndrome: Survivorship Fantasies and Parental Desertion” (in *Children’s Literature*, 33: 2005) U.C. Knoepfelmacher draws on Bruno Bettelheim’s analysis of fairy tales and their uses in his study of such Holocaust texts as Maurice Sendak’s *Brundibar* (2003) and Louise Murphy’s *The True Story of Hansel and Gretel: A Novel of War and Survival* (2003).

<sup>iii</sup> Here, Sally and Lila’s “reunion” resembles the romantic reunions represented in 1940s-era “home-front” films, which – as Schatz demonstrates in his reading of John Cromwell’s *Since You Went Away* (1944) – typically involves a heroine who is separated from, and later reunited with, her soldier-sweetheart (though not before having been “utterly transformed by the war”) (258).

<sup>iv</sup> Indeed, as I have suggested above, the trauma Sally suffers has as much to do with her own future death as it does with Lila’s murder – a future death Sally “reads” in Lila’s photograph. In her discussion of Holocaust-era photographs taken of children, Marianne Hirsch argues that such images are so compelling because they “elicit an affiliative and identificatory as well as a protective spectatorial look” that is mediated by Western notions of childhood (“Projected Memory” 13). The children in these photographs, Hirsch writes, are “less individualized, less marked by the particularities of identity” – and thus their less-defined (and thus more “universal”) features allow the viewer to project him/herself into the image, and to imagine how they, as children, might have responded to the events experienced by the photographed subject; such identification is effected, in part, by a culturally-mediated practices of remembering childhood as a shared experience (13). On the other hand, Hirsch argues, the adult viewer approaches such photographic images from a distance: the adult, now no longer a child, sees in the photographed child what s/he “once was”; moreover, s/he is prompted by culturally-inscribed notions of the child as “vulnerable” and “innocent” to feel protective of – and therefore in a relation of power to – the photographed figure.

In Blume’s novel, such a relationship of identification and distantiation is inverted: Sally sees Lila not as “what she once was” but rather, “what she might be.” Sally, who wants to “grow up to look just like Lila,” sees in Lila’s photograph a mirror image of herself – that is, while she retains some distance from Lila (an adult-other who occupied a different space and time) she nevertheless projects upon Lila’s photograph an image of her own latent womanhood, and thus comes to identify with her second-cousin (104). Thus, her acknowledgement of Lila’s death in turn leads to her acknowledgement of her own (future) death.



## V. Spectacles Without Lenses: The Optical Unconscious and Second-Generation Memory in M. Night Shyamalan's *The Sixth Sense*

At a crucial and easily-overlooked moment of Judy Blume's *Starring Sally J. Freedman as Herself*, the reader brushes up against an especially well-kept secret that might perplex her as much as it does the novel's young protagonist. Something is troubling Sally's mother – so much so that she is even less attentive than usual to Sally's constant barrage of questions and declarations. When, at one point, Sally bursts into her family's Florida apartment, prepared to expound upon her first meeting with the mysterious Mr. Zavodsky, she finds her mother sitting alone, visibly holding back tears. Apparently undisturbed by this sudden discovery, Sally proceeds to badger her mother with questions, but Mrs. Freedman is so preoccupied by whatever it is that distresses her that she only half-responds to Sally's queries. In the middle of this staggered conversation, Mrs. Freedman abruptly mutters – seemingly to no one in particular – “Oh God, what am I going to do?” and presently dashes off to the bathroom (102). A few pages later, this sequence repeats: Mrs. Freedman suddenly cuts short a conversation with her daughter to run off to the bathroom, leaving Sally to wonder what might be wrong with her.

The adult reader – or the child reader who is better acquainted with the “facts of life” that Sally has yet to learn – may well hypothesize that Sally's mother is pregnant: after all, her disturbed state, coupled with her hasty dashes to the washroom, seem to indicate as much. And yet, even as the narrative affords such telling clues, it ultimately refuses to confirm the suspicions they raise. Mrs. Freedman's mysterious condition is never alluded to again: a few pages after her latter incident of panic, she reappears in a

healthy, cheerful, and otherwise undisturbed state. The reader is left only to guess what might have transpired in the time between Mrs. Freedman's speedy retreats to the bathroom and her return, a few weeks later, from a pleasure-trip to Cuba with Sally's father. Is the trip to Cuba – ostensibly a holiday – actually an attempt to procure an abortion? Is Mrs. Freedman's sudden panic merely indicative of a pregnancy scare that is eventually allayed by time and the course of nature? Is she feeling overly nervous and guilty about leaving her mother and two children alone while she travels to the Caribbean? Or is she simply suffering from a bout of the flu? While each explanation is certainly plausible, not one is ever verified by the narrative.

Admittedly, the reader is certainly capable of drawing her own conclusions about Mrs. Freedman's condition and thus may not be all too troubled by the novel's apparent refusal to deliver any definite answer of its own; in any case, the matter of Mrs. Freedman's situation is peripheral enough to the central action of the novel that it ultimately does not matter one way or another what her state might be. And yet, this otherwise negligible moment in Blume's novel has the potential to *tease* the reader: it may prompt her to stop short and review any telling information she suspects she might have missed, even as it withholds any direct affirmation of her suspicions. In effect, the novel briefly places the reader in a position that is similar to that of its inquisitive child-protagonist: it makes the reader conscious of the process by which she arrives at certain conclusions even as her efforts go unrewarded by the omniscient narrative. This tiny and otherwise negligible gap left open by the narrative thus speaks to the particular brilliance of Blume's novel. While *Sally*, like most children's novels – and like many of those written for adults – seeks to represent a child's experience and perspective by developing

a child protagonist with whom the reader might sympathize and whose adventures she might follow from the novel's exposition to its denouement, it also strives to make visible the child's perspective as much through its structure as it does through its content. That is to say, while Blume's novel is certainly effective in showing the ways in which its protagonist becomes frustrated by the secrets she believes adults are keeping from her, it is equally successful in prompting this same frustration in its reader, who labors in vain to wrest answers from an unyielding narrative. In this way, the narrative allows the reader to occupy the child's perspective analogically, as it were, by creating the circumstances in which the reader's interaction with the narrative runs parallel to the protagonist's interactions with the circumstances in which she is placed.

As I have sought to demonstrate in the preceding chapters, no work of literature (or film, for that matter) can directly represent the perspective of the child, for every such text is mediated by the culturally-contingent notions of childhood that reveal the desires and anxieties of adults more than they "reflect" what might be considered the "reality" of childhood. Thus, as in Marsha Forchuk Skypuch's *The Hunger*, a child (or adolescent) character should be regarded less as an effective expression of childhood interiority than as a conduit of sorts for the articulation of contemporary adult concerns. Moreover, as my chapter on *Zlata's Diary* seeks to make clear, even texts written by child-authors bear the telling fingerprints of adult intervention: they variously demonstrate, for example, the child-author's internalization of adult expectations of how a child should think and appear, the child-author's adoption of adult-crafted literary practices, and, finally, her relinquishment of her manuscript to the hands of editors and publishers who market it to carefully targeted audiences. It would seem, then, that the voice of childhood – and the

particular perspective to which this voice gives utterance – is forever lost, even in spite of (or perhaps precisely because of) the countless attempts of aesthetic works to bring it forth. However, as the above reading of Blume’s novel suggests, there exist critical moments in certain texts that attempt to represent childhood in which the audience is situated in such a position in which it is enabled – if only momentarily – to occupy a position *similar* to that of the child who, not yet fully sutured within the structures that guide adult perception and engender a certain complacent faith in “things as they are,” sees the world anew, filled with countless mysteries and their various possible explanations.

It is the potential of aesthetic works to illuminate the child’s mode of perception – if only briefly, and if only by analogy – that most concerns this final chapter because, as I intend to argue below, the study of what might be considered the unique, and even revolutionary, mode of childhood perception may be key to understanding what especially distinguishes second-generation memory. For this reason, I would like to turn to a discussion of a text that operates similarly to, but on a much greater scale than, the brief illuminating moment in Blume’s narrative – that is, M. Night Shyamalan’s film, *The Sixth Sense* (1999). In one respect, *The Sixth Sense* may be regarded, like the other texts I have studied up to this point, as a dramatization of a child’s ability to remember events he himself did not directly experience. The protagonist of Shyamalan’s film, a young boy named Cole (Haley Joel Osment) is both blessed and cursed with the ability to “see dead people”: he is able, as no one around him is, to perceive the spirits that roam the streets and hide in the hidden corners of his native Philadelphia and he is often at pains to explain his particular gift to those who do not share it. Even a simple summary of the

film makes clear the extent to which it lends itself to a discussion of second-generation memory and its representation. If second-generation memory can be qualified through the metaphor of the ghost-image – or the superimposition of one photographic image over another – then *The Sixth Sense* literalizes this metaphor insofar as it presents a character whose vision is imposed upon by eerie ambassadors of the past. Yet Shyamalan’s film is worthy of further analysis not only because of the content of its narrative – that is, its particular story of a boy who, not unlike Helen Epstein or Blume’s Sally, entertains grisly visions of the past within his own relatively sheltered community – but because of its narrative *structure* and the ways in which such structure enables the spectator to exercise a mode of perception similar to that of Cole’s own visionary gift.

While the central character of Shyamalan’s film is undoubtedly Cole, the film arranges the spectator’s perspective so that it is aligned with that of the child-psychologist Malcolm Crowe (Bruce Willis) who seeks to “help” Cole, whom he considers disturbed. It is not until the end of the film, however, that the audience realizes (as Malcolm does) that the psychologist is himself one of the ghosts who trails the young clairvoyant and that it is he, and not Cole, who is in desperate need of assistance. The film’s celebrated “twist” thus invites the spectator to recognize the ways in which she, like Malcolm and the other ghosts who trail Cole, has seen only what she “wants to see” and it calls her, moreover, to review the course of the film’s events anew from the perspective of the child Cole, who has known Malcolm’s phantom-state all along. In this way, Shyamalan’s film not only represents second-generation memory by objectively depicting a character who bears it – he sees ghosts much as, say, Epstein or Sally recognize the presence of the past in their own quotidian lives – but it *enacts* a mode of

perception that is analogous to that of its protagonist, much as Blume's novel briefly places its reader in a position that is comparable to that in which its heroine is situated. Thus, it becomes of interest to examine how exactly *The Sixth Sense* achieves this effect and what, moreover, its revelation of its own structured deception may tell us about the relationship between the child's revolutionary mode of perception and the equally illuminating quality of second-generation memory.

In performing such a study, I anticipate several possible objections to it. First, the preceding chapters of this dissertation have been devoted to discussions of children's books, and thus the departure to a study of film may seem abrupt and merely contingent to the questions posed by children's literature as a distinctive form. Moreover, while *The Sixth Sense* involves a child protagonist, it has been conventionally categorized as a horror film or a psychological thriller targeted toward an adult, rather than a child, audience – a fact that distances it even more greatly from the previously discussed texts. Finally, while the texts discussed within the preceding chapters explicitly address the memory of specific historical incidents – for example, the Armenian genocide, the Bosnian war, and the Holocaust – Shyamalan's film is not overtly preoccupied with any one historical event: the ghosts who impose themselves on Cole's memory come from a range of historical eras, ranging from the early nineteenth century to the present-day. It may well be objected, therefore, that this film's relative lacking preoccupation with any specific historical event markedly separates it from the other previously-discussed texts, whose interest in particular historical incidents dramatically affects their form and content.

Despite these possible objections, I insist that a discussion of Shyamalan's film is crucial to a conclusion of this study. In each of the children's books I have examined in the course of this dissertation, the visual media have played a significant role in the representation of second-generation memory's formation and particular constitution. For example, before Skrypuch's protagonist is transported back in time to turn-of-the-century Armenia, she is first haunted by photographs of the genocide's victims posted on the Internet; *Zlata's Diary* depends as much on Zlata's assimilation of television specials on the Holocaust and news footage depicting the war occurring outside her front doorstep as it does on her reading of Frank's diary; and, perhaps most clearly, *Starring Sally J. Freedman as Herself* suggests that Sally's memory of the Holocaust is predicated upon her exposure to Hollywood narrative conventions. Given the significant role that the visual media play in each of these texts, it would seem necessary, then, to study a specific visual text in order to examine how it operates, both independent of and in relation to the previously discussed children's books. This task becomes all the more pressing when one considers that the visual media have played a significant role in the dissemination and confirmation of conventionally-held notions of childhood, so that even if a text is not specifically targeted *for* children, its representation *of* children may be useful in evaluating the popularly-held concepts of childhood that are both drawn on and rejected in the previously-discussed children's texts. Finally, while it is indeed the case that *The Sixth Sense* does not address any specific historical moment from which its many ghostly visitors originate, it is nevertheless important to consider the moment in which the film itself appeared: released in the final year of the twentieth-century – the era that has won the ignoble distinction of being the “age of genocide” – Shyamalan's ghost story

appeared at precisely that moment at which, even as global society looked forward to the dawn of a new era (and not without a great deal of apprehension, as the WTO protests and the Y2K scare indicated), the ghosts of its inglorious past nevertheless clamored to be recognized. Thus, Shyamalan's film seems to lend itself to a study of the anxiety – and even fear – that accompanies a confrontation with the past and the particular role that childhood second-generation memory plays in making such a confrontation possible.

### **Reincarnating the Romantic Child**

At the center of Shyamalan's film is Cole Sear, a tiny and excessively anxious boy of approximately eight years of age who obviously harbors a dark secret. When the viewer first meets Cole, he is scurrying from his South Philadelphia rowhouse to a nearby church, where, hidden in a row of empty pews, he plays with a set of toy soldiers – a game he seems to enact more out of a sense of compulsion than from any sense of distinct pleasure. When his self-appointed therapist, Malcolm, first encounters Cole after having followed him from a distance, he is momentarily astounded to discover how aged and weary his charge appears: the boy's eyes are framed by an enormous pair of owlish spectacles (his absent father's, as Malcolm soon finds out) and his otherwise golden locks are marked by a subtle streak of grey. Clearly, this is a child who has known things other children his age – and, indeed, even adults – have not, and whose secret knowledge has rendered him older than his years. Cole's preternatural wisdom is intensified when, speaking through one of his toy soldiers, he quotes the first line of Psalm 130<sup>i</sup> in Latin – “*De profundis clamo a te domine*” (“Out of the depths I call to you, O God”).<sup>ii</sup> This



recitation troubles Malcolm and prompts in him (and in the audience) a desire to discover what so haunts the child.

As the film progresses, it turns out that Cole is quite literally haunted: he is gifted – or, as it might initially seem, cursed – with the ability to see ghosts. As Cole later confesses to Malcolm, “I see dead people ... walking around like regular people. They don’t see each other. They only see what they want to see. They don’t know they’re dead.” Immediately after this revelation, which marks a major turning point in the narrative, the film enables the audience to see the specters that have followed Cole throughout his entire life. Ghosts constantly clamor around the young boy: they bang around in his mother’s kitchen, taunting him with the knife-marks that serve as emblems of their spiteful suicides, and they invite him to marvel at the guns with which they have accidentally shot themselves. No place – save, perhaps, the nearby church – is safe from their constant intrusion into Cole’s everyday life: they swing from hangman’s ropes in his school doorways and they tear down the tent Cole builds in his bedroom to hide from them. It is only when Malcolm, finally convinced that Cole is clairvoyant rather than schizophrenic, advises Cole to talk with the ghosts instead of running from them that the boy is able, literally, to put the ghosts to rest.

The question that drives the first half of the film pertains to what exactly it is that troubles young Cole. Once this question is satisfactorily answered, the mystery then involves the possible ways Cole might manage his ghostly stalkers; moreover, Malcolm’s own ambiguous condition might perplex the viewer as well. What does not appear to be a mystery, however, is the source of Cole’s clairvoyance: this, it seems, springs from his innate childhood innocence, which, like his ability to see the dead, is a “gift” he alone

possesses. Unlike his jaded and competitive classmates, who are more interested in “adult” matters such as material consumption and notoriety – Cole’s brutish foil, for example, prides himself on having starred in a cough-syrup commercial – Cole is earnest, sweet-tempered, and loyal to a fault. Moreover, unlike the film’s adult characters, who, despite their good intentions, are frequently suspicious, short-tempered, and committed only to “rational” explanations for the occurrence of mysterious phenomena, Cole is vulnerable, gentle, and open to the world and its many possibilities. In short, Cole is a complete innocent – and the film takes pains to amplify his pure and uncorrupted state. The child’s golden locks, his small kittenish face, and his soft pre-pubescent voice, all of which render him slightly asexual, not only suggest that he is untainted by corporeal desire but that he is veritably *angelic* – a quality that may account for his ability to communicate both with earthly beings and with the representatives of the not-so-sweet hereafter. At times, he resembles something of a noble princeling: for example, at a key moment in the film in which Cole plays the role of the young King Arthur, the play’s narrator declares that “only he who is *pure of heart* can remove the sword from the stone” – a statement that is ostensibly intended to apply to Cole as much as it does to the mythic character he plays. On yet other occasions, he is depicted as the proverbial sacrificial lamb, as when a group of bullies push him into an attic that, unbeknownst to them, is haunted by a particularly nasty prisoner-ghost – an incident that lands Cole in a hospital bed, swaddled in a pathetically flimsy institutional blanket.

Cole’s innocence is not of the same kind that is represented, for example, in *Starring Sally J. Freedman as Herself*. While Sally’s innocence inheres in an *intellectual* naïveté which permits her to encounter the world in fresh and often surprising ways,

Cole's innocence is of *moral* nature, characterized by an endearingly vulnerable disposition and an innate, uncontaminated goodness which allows him to place others before himself and to love unconditionally.<sup>iii</sup> Such original goodness, the film suggests, is what links Cole solidly to the past and enables him to see ghosts. One of the first facts the audience learns about Cole is that he is a member of a single-parent home, his father having left him and his mother when Cole was even younger than he is now. However, while Cole's mother is obviously committed to steeling herself against the memory of her former husband, focusing less on recalling an unsalvageable past than she is on managing the day-to-day needs of her household, Cole is considerably more vulnerable to the sorrow his father's loss inspires. Unlike his mother, who scarcely ever mentions her husband, preferring instead to look forward to the future, Cole sees traces of his father's presence everywhere: he wears his father's lens-less spectacles, he keeps a photograph of both of his parents next to his bed, and he wears his father's watch (it is broken, as if time stopped for Cole upon his father's departure). Apparently, it is Cole's vulnerability to sorrow (and to the love which inspires such sorrow) that allows him – unlike the adults who have gradually learned to gird themselves against the pain stirred by loss – to seek out the traces left by the past. That is, Cole's uncompromising faithfulness to his father – who has callously left him and his mother for a “woman who works in a tollbooth in Pittsburgh” – forbids him from ignoring the past's “having been.” In turn, it seems that Cole's utter vulnerability – his openness to encountering telltale signs of the past – attracts other spirits who clamor to be recognized.

While an ability to recognize the past's survival within the present is precisely the capacity inherent within second-generation memory, the explanation the film's narrative

suggests for its manifestation in a child is a relatively sentimental one which relies more on romantic notions of how a child *should* behave and react than how in fact one might. Like Malcolm's assailant, the equally clairvoyant Vincent Gray, Cole is "compassionate – unusually compassionate": his sensitivity is tied not only to his perception or conscious recognition but to a pre-determined moral disposition. Indeed, a shot of Cole's baby pictures, in which tiny arcs of light indicate the presence of his ghostly companions, implies that Cole's gift exists *even before* his father leaves him – such a pre-existing gift is only amplified after the father's leave-taking. Similarly, as the narrative's allusion to Cole's "purity of heart" suggests, it is the boy's original moral disposition which allows him to engage with the past in the way that he does.

Cole's complete innocence – and the occasionally excessive sentimentality with which such innocence is communicated – poses a considerable problem to a reading of Shyamalan's film as a representation of the particular mode of perception inherent in second-generation memory. That is, the constant, and at times overt, reference to Cole's moral purity suggest that his ability to engage with memories of the past – dramatized in his ability to see ghosts – is predicated solely on the virtue of his very childhood. In effect, the viewer is expected to believe that Cole possesses the "sixth sense" simply because he – unlike the film's other characters – is innately vulnerable, free of sexual desire, preternaturally wise, and otherwise "pure of heart." Nothing, it seems, could be further from Judy Blume's aggressive, sexually-inquisitive, and comically naïve Sally, whose ultimate ability to take on her murdered cousin's memory is due less to any inborn disposition than it is to her active engagement with the cultural artifacts with which she is surrounded. Rather, Cole more greatly resembles Zlata's idealized vision of a sweet and

saintly Anne Frank – a vision of the eternal child that Zlata ultimately finds impossible to live up to and that Anne Frank herself clearly did not want to emulate. It would appear, then, that the story Shyamalan’s film tells – ostensibly to a more mature and sophisticated audience than that to which Blume’s and Filipovic’s texts are targeted – is relatively naïve and even reactionary when compared to key works of children’s literature.

### **“They Only See What They Want to See”**

Shyamalan’s mystification of his child-hero might prompt one to argue that *The Sixth Sense* offers little in terms of enabling an elucidating study of second-generation memory and its relationship to childhood: all that it does seem to afford is pleasure enhanced by nostalgia, sentimentality, and the assurance that the future generation – which is infinitely better morally-equipped than the present one – is somehow able to balm the sufferings of the past. However, if the narrative of Shyamalan’s film fails to deliver a satisfactory explanation for the correlation between childhood and the capacity of the bearer of second-generation memory to engage with the ghosts hurtled forth from the past, its filmic *structure* offers quite a different explanation indeed; in fact, it grants the viewer a perspective that effectively abolishes the sentimental, conventionally-held notions on which the narrative is ostensibly predicated and thus enacts a mode of perception that is analogous to the once-mystified gift of vision presumably endowed to Cole alone. That is, by exploiting and subsequently subverting certain cinematic codes, Shyamalan’s film is able to expose a crucial connection between a mode of perception inherent to childhood – a type of vision not yet fully inhibited by socially-prescribed (or

proscribed) habits of interacting with perceived reality and its representations – and second-generation memory’s capacity to recognize traces of the past within the present.

In order to follow through with this argument, it may be best to leave aside briefly a discussion of Cole’s character and to focus instead on the mode of perception enacted in cinema, generally, and in Shyamalan’s film, specifically; such a discussion may in turn illuminate the ways in which the film’s structure, unlike its narrative, emphasizes the child’s capacity for vision rather than his innate moral disposition. In the fifteenth section of “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” Walter Benjamin counters the “spirited attack” made by critics such as Georges Duhamel against the “kind of participation which the movie elicits from the masses” (239). In Duhamel’s view, which Benjamin quotes, film is:

a pastime for helots, a diversion for uneducated, wretched, worn-out creatures who are consumed by their worries . . . , a spectacle which requires no concentration and presupposes no intelligence . . . , which kindles no light in the heart and awakens no hope other than the ridiculous one of someday becoming a “star” in Los Angeles. (239)

One would expect Benjamin to share Duhamel’s sentiment: after all, given the emphasis Benjamin’s writings place on the necessity of action, one might expect he would object to an aesthetic form whose viewing depends upon its absorption by a passive (or pacified) captive audience.<sup>iv</sup> Yet Benjamin insists that Duhamel and other intellectuals who share his view know “nothing of [film’s] significance” (238). Duhamel’s objection, he argues, is just another articulation of the “same ancient lament that the masses seek distraction while art demands concentration for the spectator” (239). Such an argument is inherently

flawed, according to Benjamin, because it privileges the experience of the individual viewer who basks in the aura of the artwork – which is ritually separated from the spaces of quotidian life – and whose experience is therefore a private one, consistent with the reigning bourgeois ideology that privileges isolated interior life. In Benjamin’s view, however, film is best suited for collective, rather than individual, experience, insofar as it is mechanically reproduced and thus, unlike painting, can be appreciated by large numbers of people simultaneously in various locales. It is its collective experience, Benjamin writes, that allows the film in effect to school the senses of the masses, making possible their ultimate mobilization.

To drive home this point, Benjamin gives the example of architecture. Buildings, he writes, “are appropriated in a twofold manner: by use and perception – or rather, by touch and sight” (240). It would be impossible, he suggests, to appreciate fully a structure simply by looking at it, as a tourist does when she stands rapt before a famous building. Rather, the “appropriation” of a building comes about just as much by using it in an “incidental fashion” as it does by merely contemplating it from a distance (240). In other words, one can only take in a building, so to speak, only gradually over an extended period of time in which one becomes intimately and physically aware of its every corner and archway – that is, only after having developed habits of interacting with it on a tactile level. This is crucial, according to Benjamin, because “the tasks which face the human apparatus of perception at the turning points of history cannot be solved by optical means, that is, by contemplation, alone. They are mastered gradually by habit, under the guidance of tactile appropriation” (240).

It is cinema's potential to distract its collective viewers, Benjamin writes, which allows for the formation of habits that may be appropriate to the solution of the "tasks" presented to the collective at "turning points of history" – for the "distracted person, too, can form habits" (240). In other words, the cinema gradually trains the tactile senses as it does the optical ones. Benjamin's likening of the camera to a surgeon's hand<sup>v</sup> is not a mere literary flourish: the camera's "penetration" into reality that is not ordinarily perceived by the "naked eye" breaches taboos and enacts a certain violence – as the surgeon's hand does – that is viscerally felt by the audience. In turn, the audience is gradually trained, through its habitual exposure to film, to see and thus interact with perceived reality in startling new ways.<sup>vi</sup>

Benjamin writes about cinema generally, rather than about any specific film – after all, it is the habits created in the masses through the distraction afforded by multiple films, over a gradual period of time, that interests him the most. However, it may nevertheless be of interest to consider the arguments he puts forth in this essay in relation to the specific film under discussion – that is, *The Sixth Sense*. In light of Benjamin's comments regarding the relative merits of contemplation and distraction, what appears curious about Shyamalan's film is that it initially seems to privilege, or encourage, the former over the latter – that is, it appears to invite its audience into a mode of fixed concentration rather than one of distraction. Admittedly, the film cannot enable the kind of contemplation a poem or a painting would: as a film, it necessarily involves the persistent movement of fragmented, juxtaposed images that would prevent the viewer from being absorbed by any singular image for too long. Nevertheless, it still implicitly prompts the viewer to remain attentive to those details she believes may be key to



arriving at the solution to the film's mystery before it is delivered to her by the narrative – as if she were in a competition with the film, ready to beat it at its own game, as it were. From this perspective, the viewer cannot simply absorb the film – through the skin, as it were – but rather remains at a vigilant distance from the action, scouring it for tell-tale signs that might deliver a satisfactory answer.

In this way, the viewer's position vis-à-vis the narrative is analogous to Malcolm's to Cole. Malcolm, though he is a therapist, is also something of a detective: his job, as he sees it, is to discover the secret Cole keeps to himself so that he may not only help his young charge but also understand the motivation of his similarly "cursed" assailant and thus salvage his tarnished reputation in the process. To do this, Malcolm places himself in a position of authority relative to Cole, whom he regards as a project of sorts – a specimen to be studied at an appropriate distance. Certainly, Malcolm likes Cole well enough – he regards the boy with a degree of paternal affection and protectiveness – but yet he never abandons a certain critical, professional distance from his charge, all the way up to the point when he takes his leave of him, finally assured that he has effectively fulfilled his duties in helping Cole cope with the ghosts that accost him.

Malcolm's orientation to Cole (and, in turn, the viewer's) is established in the very first scene in which they appear together. Observing Cole from a distance, Malcolm follows him into an empty church. The first shot of the church's interior is situated from Malcolm's perspective: the camera, taking Malcolm's point of view, slowly tracks down the aisle until it stops – as though settling upon the prime object of inquiry – at the pew where Cole crouches with his toy soldiers. The following series of reverse shots emphasize Malcolm's authority and Cole's vulnerability: Malcolm towers over Cole,

who looks up at him in turn. Even when Malcolm sits down next to Cole in the neighboring pew, as if to assuage the anxiety his presence provokes in the boy, the low angles from which he is shot, combined with the higher angles with which Cole is filmed, imply his continued authority; moreover, the absence of any medium shots in which both characters appear together underscores the fact that, despite Malcolm's conciliatory intentions, the two are not on equal footing. Close-ups of Cole's gigantic glasses and his scarred wrists, which are followed by shots of Malcolm's perplexed expression, not only signal what Malcolm has found especially significant about the boy but suggests that the viewer too should take note of these images, as they may be helpful to her in untangling the film's mystery. The scene ends, as it began, with Malcolm, this time staring open-mouthed as Cole exits the church, stealing a plastic statue of a saint as he goes.

While Cole is undoubtedly the center of attention in this scene, it is Malcolm with whom the audience is invited to identify, for both Malcolm and the spectator are positioned as investigating subjects who are compelled to examine a common object of inquiry and who, though certainly perplexed, feel assured that their labors of scrutiny and reasoning might offer up a satisfactory solution to their queries. Like Malcolm in this scene, the viewer assumes that she is in control – that she can keep pace with the narrative, deftly arranging the visual cues the film provides to reach the logical conclusion that Cole's sixth sense is manifested in his ability to see ghosts. The clues are abundant and the audience has the pleasure of lining them up as neatly as Cole does his toy soldiers. Indeed, when the film rewards the audience for having anticipated Cole's ultimate confession of clairvoyance by finally exposing the tortured souls who follow Cole, the viewer may well pride herself at having been able to come to this conclusion

before Malcolm does. For example, when Cole and Malcolm stroll through the empty hallways of Cole's school, the boy suddenly halts and gazes upward at a stairwell. A following shot of the stairwell exposes three hanged persons, each wearing clothes typical of that of the early nineteenth century. The second shot of the stairwell, this time signifying Malcolm's perspective, reveals only empty space. Malcolm, it seems, cannot see what Cole (and the audience) can see because his own particular efforts at reasoning have led him astray – true to his disciplinary training, he is still convinced that Cole is suffering from a form of schizophrenia. From the clues she has amassed, the viewer has already determined Cole's true condition and is therefore rewarded both with the privilege of seeing what Cole sees and with the satisfaction of having beat Malcolm at his own game.

However, even as the viewer has had the pleasure of determining Cole's secret before Malcolm does, she may still be intent upon pulling apart yet another mystery – that of Malcolm's ambiguous condition following the violent episode with which the film begins. On the one hand, the fact of Malcolm's survival after being shot by his former patient seems self-evident, even logical. After all, the scene immediately following the shooting scene features Malcolm seated at a park bench near Cole's rowhouse, neatly dressed and studiously poring over the notes he has made about the boy. Malcolm's professional attire and the scrupulous attention he pays to his notes suggest that not only has he survived a near-fatal blow, but that in the time that has passed, he has been strong enough to return to the responsibilities that his work demands. Malcolm's pensive expression and the grim *mise-en-scène* – it is a dull autumn day and the bench on which Malcolm is seated is located on a bare city block eerily void of any bustling city activity

– suggest that his recovery has only been a partial one: he still bears psychic wounds, if not physical ones. However, his continued dominance on the screen suggests that he is still very much alive and relatively well. On the other hand, the viewer has been given certain clues that suggest that something is seriously wrong with him. Why, she may well wonder, does Malcolm review his notes at a park bench instead of at his office, where one might expect someone of his professional status to work? Why does he trail after Cole – surprising the boy at home, at church, at school, on city sidewalks – instead of expecting his patient to meet him, as is generally protocol in doctor-patient relations? Moreover, if Cole has become his sole professional preoccupation, why does Malcolm return home so late at night even on the occasions when he has only met Cole briefly in the morning? And what accounts for the doctor’s strange household habits – his preference for working in his dingy basement and his strained attempts to interact with his obviously incommunicative wife – which do not appear to be adequately explained by his workaholic tendencies? In effect, the viewer’s observation of Malcolm’s strange habits places her into a position that is analogous to that occupied by Malcolm in relation to Cole: that is, Malcolm himself becomes an object of inquiry for the spectator, who labors, as Malcolm does vis-à-vis Cole, to detect in the character’s words, gestures, and habits certain patterns or clues that might afford an answer to her questions and thus allow her to reconcile the evidence of his apparent survival with the troubling mannerisms his sudden brush with death seems to have effected.

Of course, as the film’s celebrated twist reveals, Malcolm in fact did *not* survive the shooting and is instead merely one of the ghosts who persistently follow after Cole. This revelation occurs in an abrupt and dazzling montage. Malcolm, finally convinced

that he has helped Cole find a way to put his ghosts to rest, returns home to make amends to his neglected wife, Anna. Finding her asleep on the living room couch, he makes an attempt to rouse her; she makes muttered responses in her sleep. Then, a curious event occurs: Anna's tight-fisted grip on an object she has been holding relaxes and a wedding ring falls to the floor. Noticing that Anna is still wearing her own ring, Malcolm glances at his hand and realizes that it is bare. As the camera focuses on Malcolm's dazed expression, Cole's voice returns in a voice-over, proclaiming his well-guarded secret: "I see people... they don't know they're dead." As Cole's confession continues – this time, with completely new resonance – images from earlier scenes of the film flash on the screen with a startlingly renewed effect. The audience sees, from Malcolm's perspective, the ways in which he has inhabited a phantom state all along – that is, the ways he has been able to see "only what [he] wants to see." A shot of Malcolm's "meeting" with Cole's mother – in which the two adults appear to be sitting in silence, equally troubled by Cole's problems – gains new significance: in fact, such a "meeting" (as the audience was prompted to see it) never actually occurred, as Mrs. Sear was never aware of a ghostly presence sitting opposite her. Similarly, Anna's single table-setting is not – as both Malcolm and the audience believed – evidence of a solitary dinner taken by a woman whose husband prefers his professional obligations to his domestic ones, but rather the lonely meal of a widow; moreover, Anna's anniversary wish to her husband, depicted in an earlier scene, is not the spiteful remark of an abandoned and embittered wife but rather the lament of a woman who will never see her beloved husband alive again. Finally, a shot of a table that blocks the entrance to Malcolm's basement office reveals the physical obstacles that Malcolm, as a ghost, was able to overcome, intent as

he was to see only what he wished. This devastating series of flashbacks culminates in a return to the shooting scene with which the film began, in which the audience sees – as it had not originally been able to see – Anna turn over Malcolm’s body to take in the bloody exit wound on his lower back; the sequence returns to the present, where Malcolm swivels around to discover that he still bears this wound, which has been conveniently hidden by his omnipresent suit-jacket.

Unlike the majority of the film, which moves slowly and almost luxuriously, giving the viewer plenty of opportunity to consider thoughtfully the images she encounters along the way, the images in this climactic montage move at a rapid-fire pace, leaving the audience no time to dwell on any singular image, for each is swiftly supplanted by the next. In other words, the viewer can no longer be absorbed *by* the film, feeling herself at home in the world it has created and assured that her adaptation to it will allow her to wrest from it the answers she desires; rather, she now *absorbs* it as one absorbs a shock. And indeed, this final montage is shocking, as an electric current or a lightning rod is shocking: its force (its charge, as it were) instantaneously destroys any hypothesis or critical doubt the viewer might have had even as it places into relief – in the matter of a few devastating seconds – the true relationship between its many images, now rearranged and volleyed at the audience one after another. Given the sensation created by the film after its initial release,<sup>vii</sup> one might imagine that, in various theatres around the globe, this final montage might have evinced a collective gasp, as audiences recognized that they, like Malcolm, had unwittingly seen only what they had wanted to see and that their stubbornness of vision had prevented them from seeing what had been before them all along. While it certainly would be an exaggeration to suggest that this moment in

Shyamalan's film is revolutionary, in any strong sense of the word, it may not be as hyperbolic to gesture toward its potential to reawaken deadened senses through an experience that is at once visual and visceral.

This final montage is significant, too, because it allows us to reexamine the nature of Cole's mysterious "gift." Inasmuch as the final montage brings to the viewer's awareness the crucial connections she has overlooked, it also calls her to recognize that Cole *has seen all along* what she now knows. Moreover, she becomes conscious of the fact that when she, along with Malcolm, finally realizes – in a flash of insight – his true condition, she is seeing *as if from Cole's perspective*. At this point, it matters little whether Cole can perceive Malcolm's (and others') ghostly state because he is especially good or compassionate – after all, at this climactic moment, the viewer can see as he does, no matter what her moral disposition. Instead, the film's ability to tear its audience away from its detached state of contemplation and to prompt in its place an engagement with images that is intuitive and associative suggests that Cole's "gift" – which the montage dramatically analogizes – is rather the effect of a cognitive *mode of perception*. Moreover, as the final montage makes clear in its very structure, Cole's vision is tied to an ability to see images as they appear, in effect, in a constellation, rather than as reduced to their discrete, causally-linked parts.

### **Awakening to a Dream**

In order to elaborate on this particular kind of vision and to question why it is manifested in a child-character – and why, moreover, it is adopted with greater difficulty by an adult character or audience-member – it may be helpful to return once again to a

Benjaminian text: this time, Benjamin's 1938 essay, "Berlin Childhood Around 1900." In the course of this essay, Benjamin relates the memory of a childhood dream. As is often the case with dreams, the setting of this dream bears an uncanny resemblance to a place with which the young Benjamin is already well-acquainted in his waking life: it is his parents' bedroom in the family's summer residence at Babelsberg. Benjamin spares no detail in describing this bedroom before going on to recount the events of his dream. In the corner of this room is a "faded purple velvet curtain behind which hung my mother's dressing gowns"; behind this curtain, too, is a linen closet which holds all the staples of a proper bourgeois existence – the "neatly stacked linen for bed and table, all the sheets, pillowcases, tablecloths, napkins" – all of which exude a heavy scent of lavender (376). Into the dream-image of this well-appointed bourgeois household enters a ghost who casually sorts through the silken fabrics stored there; while the ghost "did not snatch them up, nor did it carry them away," the dreaming Benjamin knows that this intruder is most certainly a thief.

In the second part of this passage, Benjamin narrates a curious incident that occurs the night after he has his strange dream. "The following night," he writes, "I noticed – and it was as if a second dream had intruded upon the first – my parents coming into my room at an unusual hour. My eyes were closed again before I could grasp the fact that they had locked themselves in with me" (376). Upon awakening the next morning, the child Benjamin learns that a "large band of thieves was said to have slipped in during the night" and that his parents, fearing for their safety, had locked themselves in his room and waited by his window "in the vain hope of sending signals to the street" (377). The young Benjamin is subsequently called to "make a statement ... concerning



the behavior of the maidservant who had stood at the iron gate in the evening” – obviously, the young woman is thought to be an accomplice in the burglary – but he insists that he “knew nothing” of this matter, even though, in the very beginning of the passage, he makes a passing reference to her position at this entrance. Additionally, he keeps silent about his prescient dream: “And what I thought I understood much better – my dream – I kept secret” (277).

As is most often the case with Benjamin’s writings, this fragmentary passage illuminates only when it is considered in relation to the other, similarly fragmented, passages by which it is surrounded. In the passages that immediately precede and follow this one, Benjamin juxtaposes images of the closely-guarded bourgeois interior with those of the exterior world inhabited by the working class. In the immediately preceding passage, he recounts hiding in the secret corners of his parents’ house. Secured in the dark removes of his hiding places, his home appears to him at once a “fairy kingdom” and a foreboding fortress, where “whoever discovered me could hold me petrified as an idol under the table, could weave me as a ghost for all time into the curtain, confine me for life within the heavy door” (375). In his moments of greatest fear, his home – which, as the following ghost-dream-narrative makes clear, stores all the accoutrements of bourgeois pretensions to “civilization” – becomes a prison-house or an “arsenal of masks” (375).

The narrative placed opposite this one, with the ghost-narrative cushioned between them, describes a specific scene which the young Benjamin perceives *outside* his fortress-like home. This passage details the holiday rituals observed by the citizens of Berlin, in which “poor people were allowed, with their tinsel and colored candles, into

better neighborhoods” and during which the “rich would send their children out to buy woolen lambkins from the children of the poor, or to distribute the alms which they themselves were ashamed to put into their hands” (377). On this day of self-consciously ostentatious display of charity, the young Benjamin observes the “windows across the courtyard”: “it seemed to me,” he writes, “that these Christmas windows were harboring loneliness, old age, privation – all that the poor people kept silent about” (377).

These two narratives, which juxtapose images of the bourgeois interior and those of the deprivation that skirts around the edges of this closely-guarded comfort, resonate clearly within the ghost-dream narrative that divides them. Here, the interior world of the bourgeoisie and the exterior world inhabited by the working class collide in a moment of potential violence: the pack of thieves – representatives of the latter realm, which is only recognized by the former in highly ritualized encounters – forces its way through the “heavy doors” of the middle-class household. Benjamin’s dream of the ghostly intruder pre-figures this event, but this is not due to any otherworldly gift of prescience on his part; rather, it is the effect of his recognition of the class relations that are built into the very fabric, as it were, of his family’s material existence. That is, the young Benjamin can anticipate the burglary because he already recognizes that, while the working class has been reduced by the bourgeoisie to an invisible, phantom-like state, it cannot be held back for too long. Ultimately, however, he chooses to keep this dream-like insight a secret – most obviously because a child’s dream would never be recognized by the police or a court of law, but perhaps also because he recognizes the violence (surpassing that of any break-in) that is enacted by a privileged class upon those whose humanity it denies.

Of course, the figure of the ghost within these pages of the “Berlin Childhood” should resonate clearly with the phantom images contained within *The Sixth Sense*. Like Benjamin’s phantom proletarian, who, having been barred from sight, finally forces his way into a home to finger the linens his own labor has afforded someone else, Shyamalan’s ghosts cannot rest easily in their coffins but rather clamor to keep their own stories of injustice – their wrongful hangings, their deliberate poisonings, their forced conscription into domestic labor – from lapsing into forgetting. However, what is of immediate interest to this present discussion is the child’s *relation* to these ghosts and how Benjamin’s reflections on his Berlin childhood might in effect illuminate the relationship between the child and the past as put forth in the structure of Shyamalan’s film.

Benjamin’s moment of quasi-clairvoyance, as recounted in “Berlin Childhood,” occurs in a dream, a phenomenon that is itself a montage – a series of rapid, successive images that initially appear to be incongruous. Dreams, as Freud tells us, contain the “remains of the day” – the veritable waste products generated by waking consciousness.<sup>viii</sup> And waste products, as Benjamin writes in “One Way Street,” (1928) are precisely what interest children the most. In the course of this essay, he writes:

...children are particularly fond of haunting any site where things are visibly being worked on. They are irresistibly drawn by the detritus generated by building, gardening, housework, tailoring, or carpentry. In waste products they recognize the face that the world of things turns directly and solely to them. In using these things, they do not so much imitate the works of adults as bring together, in the

artifacts produced in play, materials of widely differing kinds in a new, intuitive relationship. (449-450)

Children, in other words, have a capacity to find immense significance in objects that adults consider valueless or otherwise unworthy of attention, a tendency that Benjamin emphasizes in his scrupulous descriptions of the objects he encountered in his Berlin childhood. Moreover, children's delight in these objects is manifested not only in the visual pleasure they extract from them but in their ability to touch them and manipulate them manually. This is true, for Benjamin, not only in children's engagement with the "detritus" generated by carpentry or gardening, but in their use of the books adults give them in an attempt to educate them. While a well-intentioned adult might give a child an alphabet book with the hope that this text might help the youngster associate alphabet-letters with the pictures and words that begin with such letters, the child might instead find, in the "higgledy-piggledy still-life" printed on the page, any number of surprising associations between the pictures of the "Ape, Airplane, [and] Anchor" that they find there (Benjamin, "Children's Books" 436). Moreover, the delight the child takes in such a book extends not only to the stories it allows him to tell, but to the opportunity the child has to scribble on it and thus to engage with it on a tactile level. The remarkable thing about children's books, writes Benjamin, is that, in them, "children's hands were catered to just as much as their minds and their imaginations" – that is, the producers of the best of these books recognize that children are as inclined to *act* on an image as they are to *think* about it.

If, according to Benjamin, the child eventually loses his inclination to create associative and sensual connections between incongruous objects otherwise dismissed as

waste products, this fact is due less to any biological process inherent to physical growth than it is to the socializing effects of bourgeois education. Once the child reaches a “proper age” at which society deems it necessary to behave “correctly,” this particular mode of consciousness is “badgered out of existence by bourgeois education”: no longer allowed to engage with objects in a radically tactile way, the pupil is consigned to “parroting back the ‘correct’ answer, looking without touching, solving problems ‘in the head,’ sitting passively, learning to do without visual clues” (Buck-Morss, 263-265). Whereas once the child was permitted to engage with the world intuitively and sensually, his induction into bourgeois society demands that he perceive the world from a controlled distance, contemplating and quantifying the phenomena he encounters through the convex lens of reason.

This lost mode of childhood perception, it appears, is what allows the young Benjamin to recognize, as his elders cannot, the inevitability of the drama that will unfold them: even in his waking state, he perceives the significance of tiny, overlooked details of quotidian material existence that adults can only occasionally appreciate while dreaming. He absorbs every impression made on him by physical objects – the resistance of a thick wooden door, the surprising weight of velvet curtains, the gentle scent of lavender, the light that leaks through drawn curtains of a neighbor’s home – indeed, everything that adults have learned to ignore (save for, perhaps, each object’s fetishistic value). In turn, in the moment of ultimate distraction – that is, in a state of reverie – he is able, as though in a flash of insight, to perceive the connection they bear toward one another in the class conflict that presently unfolds literally at his doorstep. What his adult counterparts should have noticed in the first place has been apparent to the boy all along.

In a similar manner, the final montage of Shyamalan's film, which permits its audience finally to see as Cole does, both dramatizes and enacts the dream-like mode of seeing that its adult viewers have long relinquished; in this way, moreover, it makes clear its choice of a child clairvoyant. While the adult viewer might have noticed certain images – for example, a resistant doorknob or a single table setting – in passing during the film's slow and steady rise toward its ultimate climax, she may well have dismissed them as merely incidental details, valuable only to the extent to which they consolidate the backdrop against which the much more compelling narrative occurs. For example, before the final montage, Anna's single table setting appears to be merely a reminder of Malcolm's strained marriage – a clue, perhaps, but a relatively peripheral one. Similarly, a close-up of the resistant doorknob appears to be only a device intended to prolong narrative tension, forestalling as it does the moment at which Malcolm's solitary brooding in the basement results in his translation of Cole's cryptic Latin phrase. In other words, these details appear valuable only as they occur within the context of the immediate narrative; in this way, they are easily forgotten as the narrative moves steadily forward. However, once these ostensibly peripheral and easily discarded images reappear, newly rearranged, in the final montage, they shimmer with meaning. Thus, the general effect of the montage is to heighten the viewer's awareness of how easily she allows such details to escape her conscious vision and to place into relief, moreover, the crucial importance of what she is only peripherally aware. In effect, this montage can be an effort, if only a singular one, to invigorate the viewer's lost capacity of vision – to prompt the viewer to see, as a child might, the luminous potential of otherwise incidental

details and the way their “higgeldy-piggeldy” arrangement brings forth a “new, intuitive relationship.”

If, before this literally stunning montage, the viewer was unable to grasp how the association of incongruous and otherwise “throwaway” images spells out Malcolm’s fate – just as Benjamin’s parents are unable to recognize how the minute details of their quotidian existence prefigure the imminent break-in – the implication is that Cole has been long aware of Malcolm’s condition because he, not unlike the young Benjamin, has maintained both a sensitivity to details and an ability to grasp intuitively their relationship to one another. Admittedly, the final montage is presented from Malcolm’s perspective and features images from scenes in which Cole does not appear. Nevertheless, as the presence of Cole’s voice-over in the montage suggests, these images appear as Cole *would* have been able to see them. That is, even if the film does not allow the viewer to see directly from Cole’s perspective, it allows her to see as he might, by analogy.

Moreover, Cole’s capacity for the sensual, intuitive vision implied by the montage is underscored by yet another seemingly insignificant detail: his lens-less glasses. Initially, Cole’s glasses appear to be a mere costuming device intended to place into relief the smallness of his face, emphasize his eccentricity, and suggest his attachment to his absent father. However, in addition to communicating these features, the lens-less spectacles also suggest the mode of vision that Cole alone possesses. Lenses are *corrective*: they enable an individual to see according to a pre-established standard of vision. That Cole does not need lenses to see what he does – indeed, that he sees what others cannot *without* them – speaks to a kind of vision that precedes (and surpasses) normalized or otherwise “correct” ways of perceiving the world. In effect, his lens-less

spectacles can be considered a metaphor for the mode of cognitive perception that operates prior to (or relatively free of) the impositions placed on vision through socialization – impositions that, while they enable one to operate within the social arena with considerably more ease (as glasses certainly do), also permit one to take for granted, or otherwise overlook, “objects as they appear at close range.” (Benjamin, “Work of Art” 223). A person who has ever lost her glasses has no doubt experienced the need to grab hold of objects and inspect them closely with both her hands and her limited vision, as if identifying them for the first time – just as a child marvels at a newfound bauble not only by gazing upon it but physically seizing it. Thus, Cole’s particular mode of vision is implied through yet another analogy: he is able to see as an adult suddenly deprived of her glasses might see – that is, with attention to otherwise overlooked details and as much with touch as with sight. It is this manner of engaging with the world that makes Cole, as his surname suggests, a “seer.”

It is important to note, however, that the mode of childhood vision that Cole implicitly bears is not, as one might initially believe, compatible with a romantic view of childhood; in other words, this mode of perception, which Benjamin clearly privileges in his reflections on his own childhood, does not imply an image of childhood as a lost, glorious state of being to be recaptured through sentiment or whimsy. As Susan Buck Morss argues, “Benjamin’s appreciation of childhood cognition did not imply the romanticizing of childhood innocence. On the contrary, he believed that only people who were allowed to live out their childhood really grew up – and growing up was clearly the desired goal” (265). Moreover, the child’s potential for sensual vision and his attendant “gift for producing similarities” is not, in Benjamin’s view, a consequence of any



particular moral goodness on his part (“Mimetic Faculty” 333) . Indeed, even in his essay, “Program for a Proletarian Children’s Theatre,” (1929) in which he extols the “secret signal of what is to come that speaks from the gesture of the child,” Benjamin nevertheless admits that the “child inhabits his world like a dictator” (206, 204). Similarly, he writes elsewhere that, in observing children, one “comes upon the terrifying, the grotesque, the grim side of the child’s life. Even if pedagogues are still hanging onto Rousseauian dreams, writers like Rodriguez and painters like Klee have grasped the despotic and inhuman side of children” (Buck-Morss, 265n). Certainly, Benjamin entertains few sentimental illusions of childhood – and yet he never loses sight of the enormous potential children nevertheless have for teaching adults to reawaken to that dreamlike (but by no means “dreamy”) sensual awareness of the world they have gradually lost. It is this specific valorization of childhood that *The Sixth Sense* ultimately dramatizes and enacts: even as the film initially appears to privilege a tired and clichéd vision of childhood innocence, its structure deftly undermines such an illusion in favor of an image of childhood perception that is tactile, intuitive, and otherwise actively engaged with the material world.

### **Memory in the Ruins**

The question that remains to be answered, however, pertains to the relationship between the child’s revolutionary mode of cognition, as dramatized and enacted in Shyamalan’s film, and second-generation memory. How, in other words, is Cole’s ability to see ghosts – that is, to see the past within the present – tied to his particular mode of perception? How does a capacity for vision that is not yet “badgered out of existence by

bourgeois education” and that relies as heavily on tactile engagement as it does on seeing allow for a memory of directly unexperienced events?

A hint of this connection appears in a scene depicting an altercation between Cole and his mother. Mrs. Sear is distressed to find that her beloved pendant – a gift from her deceased mother – is missing, and urges Cole to confess to having taken it. Cole has not stolen the pendant – rather, he knows that his grandmother’s ghost occasionally enjoys “borrowing” it – but is wary of telling his mother this fact, as this would expose his closely-guarded secret of clairvoyance. Characteristically honest to a fault and thus unwilling to make a false confession, Cole can only answer his mother’s charges with an enigmatic response: “Sometimes, people think they lose things, but they really didn’t lose them. It just gets moved.” Duly unimpressed by this response, Mrs. Sear promptly sends her son to bed without his supper; it is only when Cole later confesses (and proves) to her his clairvoyant ability that she can fully appreciate his statement.

Cole’s ingenuous statement might well encapsulate the knowledge born of second-generation memory – knowledge that the past never completely disappears, but rather survives in traces hidden within the present. That is, the past survives, but is not easily perceived: it lingers in the shadows and ruins of the present of whose existence most are unaware, having been warned from early youth the dangers of lingering there for too long. Or, by contrast, these traces survive in such clear sight that, paradoxically, their obviousness is such that it becomes easily overlooked – as the film’s final montage clearly dramatizes – so that it takes, in effect, one who can “see without lenses” to detect their existence.

As the film's host of grisly phantoms suggests, the remains left by the past are not easy to behold, not only because they are not easily perceived but because their very existence is disturbing – it might seem better to disavow them stubbornly (as one might deny the possibility of ghosts) than to confront them head-on. The scene in which Cole maintains his confidence in the presence of the past is deceptively sentimental: situated as it is within the context of Mrs. Sear's desire for some connection to her dead mother, Cole's response implies the consolation that departed loved ones never actually leave us but rather remain ever at our sides, protectively watching over us. Yet, on the whole, the ghosts Cole encounters more often resemble harrowing corpses than they do gentle guardians. Shyamalan's ghosts are nothing like the phantoms depicted, say, in Jerry Zucker's film *Ghost* (1990), in which a charming and handsome Patrick Swayze, having been violently murdered by a domestic intruder, returns to earth physically and mentally intact, albeit translucent and pleasingly shimmery. Rather, the ghosts of *The Sixth Sense* more greatly resemble animated corpses: physically solid, their wounds and orifices still leaking, their corporeality – their material existence – is undeniable, even as their dull stares and repetitive statements suggest a vacancy of life. These ghosts are neither dead nor alive, neither absent nor fully present. Like the omnipresent death's head of German Baroque drama,<sup>ix</sup> these spectres are emblems of the ruins of history – allegorical figures of the broken and fragmented remains of a past that have been swept away, and otherwise made to be forgotten, by the “storm [of] what we call progress” (Benjamin, “Theses” 258).

If his adult counterparts would rather seal the cracks left in the ruins, scattering away the children who might be tempted to play there, Cole remains obstinate in his will

to remain entrenched among them. While the most celebrated or otherwise more memorable scenes of Shyamalan's film may be its concluding "twist" or even Cole's ultimate tearful confession to his mother, perhaps the most important incident may be one that occurs early into the film, as Cole sits through a school history lesson. The topic of the lesson is the history of Philadelphia: ostensibly in preparation for the lesson, the classroom is decorated with maps of Pennsylvania and the American eastern seaboard, line-drawn portraits of presidents, and a poster cheerfully proclaiming the statement, "Freedom Rings!" When Cole's teacher asks whether any of his students know how their school-building was used a hundred years ago, Cole timidly raises his hand and offers a response that obviously shocks both his teacher and his classmates: "They used to hang people here," he matter-of-factly reports, "They pulled the people in, crying and kissing their families bye. People watched, spit at them." Visibly disturbed, the teacher tersely corrects Cole, categorically stating that "this building was a legal courthouse. Laws were passed here, some of the very first of this country. The whole building was full of lawyers, lawmakers" – to which Cole responds "They were the ones that hanged everybody." Pandemonium ensues – Cole is driven to insult his teacher with names he has no doubt learned from a ghost of one of the teacher's dead classmates – and the scene ends with the teacher decisively calling Cole a "freak."

In this moment of verbal and potentially physical violence, the conflict that occurs is waged over events Cole's teacher would just as soon deny and whose memory Cole struggles to preserve. In his attempt to maintain an unblemished and even glorious account of American history for the benefit of his class, the teacher disingenuously neglects to admit that a court of law would of course sanction hangings and thus the

untold sufferings of the condemned and their families; rather, he upholds the staid myth of an untarnished and smoothly-operating system of American justice. This narrative seems quite palatable to Cole's classmates, who dutifully shout in chorus the answers they suspect the teacher desires. However, Cole, the "freak" who has not yet been so fully integrated into the classroom setting and the rituals of instruction practiced there, can still intuit the less-than-glorious relationship of the law and those powerless individuals who live under it – an association that is materialized, later in the film, in images of hanged and broken bodies swinging in the school's stairwell.

In this way, the schoolroom scene crystallizes the crucial connection between childhood perception, the ruins of history, and second-generation memory: not yet made completely docile by an educational system that would otherwise make him susceptible to consuming the grandiose metanarratives offered him, Cole can recognize the fissures and inconsistencies in the version of history his teacher so confidently recites – that is, he alone recognizes what Benjamin calls the "wreckage" and "catastrophe" presumably cleared from view to make way for the seemingly impenetrable institution of history ("Theses" 257). In making such a recognition, Cole salvages a trace of the past that would otherwise be forgotten, keeping its memory intact within the present even "at a moment of danger" – concretized in his altercation with the teacher – when it threatens to be swept away once more. Moreover, one might venture to add that he recognizes that the political structures kept intact by sturdy and unquestioned historical narratives ensure the *repetition* of those past injustices condemned to forgetting – to be sure, the poor are legally executed today just as they were a hundred years ago – and, in identifying such

similarities, recognizes the darker and more regrettable moments of the past kept alive within the present.

### **Fragments of Redemption**

*The Sixth Sense* is a story of redemption: this is most obvious, of course, in its depiction of its two main characters, one who recuperates his professional passion by helping a troubled boy, and the other who learns to transform what he had thought was a “curse” into a “gift.” However, more implicitly, Shyamalan’s film may be considered an account of the redemptive possibilities of second-generation memory – an order of memory that recognizes the survival of barely-perceptible traces of the past within the structures of the present. Both the film’s narrative and its structure dramatize the possibility of such non-experientially-based memory – the narrative by featuring a child-protagonist who publicly contests historical and national metanarratives by gesturing toward the ruins and corpses over which they are paved, and the structure by forcing the viewer herself to realize how easily she is deceived by such narratives and thus challenging her to recognize the impediments to her vision. However, if second-generation memory redeems the past, reconfirming its placement within the constellation of images within the present, what does it *do* with the past it recognizes? In other words, how might an order of memory that is so based on reproduction become productive?

What is especially significant about Cole is that he is not only able to see ghosts but, ultimately, he learns to talk with them. In doing so, he learns as well to overturn the structures of injustice that had allowed for their earthly misery, thus redeeming not only the ghosts but those living individuals still entrapped within these structures. That is, his

perception is active and tactile not only to the extent to which he interacts with objects that others might overlook – as is implied in the metaphor of the lens-less glasses – but in the ways in which he responds to and actively seeks to transform the structures in which these objects are a part.

This active engagement is best dramatized in a sequence in which Cole is accosted by the ghost of a girl who has been poisoned by her mother. When the girl, Kyra, first appears without warning in his bedroom at night, Cole initially recoils at the sight of her: her face taut, her eyes cavernous, and her mouth frothy with vomit, the girl is the very image of death itself. However, Cole soon draws on the confidence he has gradually gathered under Malcolm's protection and hesitantly asks the girl whether there is anything she would like to tell him. The next scenes follow Cole as he carries out the charge Kyra's ghost has given him. In the company of Malcolm, Cole travels to a Philadelphia suburb where the girl's family and friends are assembled for her wake. Following her instructions, he retrieves a videotape she has secretly made that documents the manner in which, on a daily basis, her mother covertly laced her food with what appears to be a household cleaner.<sup>x</sup> Cole gives this tape to the girl's father, who, in the company of the assembled guests, watches it and subsequently confronts his wife. In this way, Cole not only vindicates the memory of the murdered girl but also saves her younger sister from meeting a similar fate.

This scene effectively captures the revolutionary potential of second-generation memory. In perceiving the ways in which traces of the past linger like ghosts in the hidden corners of the present, the bearer of second-generation memory is able not only to draw them into the light of the present, thereby confirming their "having been," but to

transform the structures that allow the injustices of the past to be revisited upon present and future generations. Indeed, as Alan Berger notes in his study of children and grandchildren of Holocaust survivors, these individuals, fully cognizant of the suffering their parents endured under the Nazis, often strive to achieve *tikkun olam* – or the healing of a broken world – by working on behalf of groups who are oppressed within their own contemporary context (8).

Admittedly, not all representations of second-generation memory admit such a radical potential: for example, Marsha Forchuk Skrypuch's *The Hunger* employs a narrative of second-generation memory that sustains national myths and metanarratives rather than challenging them. However, despite accounts such as these, which only employ the past insofar as it may perform service on behalf of the present, others are more effective in demonstrating the continuation of the past *within* the present, and thus suggest the necessity of looking, with fresh eyes, at the structures of injustice that survive in the contemporary moment and warrant transformation. However one might qualify the uses of the child's voice in *Zlata's Diary*, the ghost-image-like superimposition of Anne Frank's literary style and Zlata Filipovic's documentation of war-time conditions in Sarajevo should, in the final analysis, remind the reader that, while the "ethnic cleansing" taking place in late-twentieth-century Bosnia was of a different order than the wide-scale extermination of Jews, Gypsies, and others in second-world-war-era Europe, certain similarities between the two events – racial hatred, religious intolerance, and the use of space and technological means to concentrate and murder innocent civilians – suggest that Europe perhaps has not yet learned the lessons it should have after 1945, and that a great deal has yet to be done in a society that prides itself in being "civilized" and



“humane.” Similarly, Helen Epstein’s memories of childhood visions in which subway cars became cattle cars and schoolbuildings become concentration camps should remind the reader that, just as the everyday objects that pre-second-world-war Europeans once took for granted could the next day be used in the service of violence of tremendous proportions, the same objects could just as well be (mis)used similarly once again; if this possibility seems unlikely, one has only to remember that it was only recently that American courthouses and universities were used as sites for the “special registration” of Arab-Americans and foreign nationals, and that civilians continue to be held without charge in the American military base in Guantanamo, Cuba.

Despite the initial vehemence with which it was proclaimed in the early 1970’s and 80’s, the slogan “Never Again” has now become a tired catchphrase, its credibility having been slowly eroded in light of general apathy toward Bosnia, Rwanda, and now, Sudan, as well as the on-going violence in the Middle East. Clearly, this is not due to any lack of observation on the part of the global community – these events have long been fodder for daytime talk shows and nightly news reports. Rather, the confidence lost in the erstwhile cry of “Never Again” derives from the dearth of response to and active engagement with such circumstances that should attend such observation. Thus, it is perhaps its potential to wed action to perception that is the “gift” second-generation memory has to offer – a gift that texts such as *The Sixth Sense* attempt to reawaken and reinvigorate as they habituate and train the senses of a dreaming collective. Moreover, if there is action to be taken, as these texts suggest, it may be accomplished if individuals learn to engage with the world as though through the eyes and gestures of a child.

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<sup>i</sup> “Out of the depths I cry to thee, O Lord!/Lord, hear my voice!/Let thy ears be attentive/to the voice of my supplications!” (Psalm 130:1).

<sup>ii</sup> It is significant that, in quoting this passage from Psalms in Latin, Cole speaks – and thus resuscitates – a “dead” language, the traces of which still linger in contemporary Western languages. Thus, this moment gestures toward Cole’s ability to perceive traces (“ghosts”) of the past within the structures of the present. Moreover, the phrase Cole intones is a Latin translation of an even earlier Hebrew text – a fact that suggests the depth (or the profundity – *profundis*) of living memory.

<sup>iii</sup> It is perhaps not coincidental that, after starring in *The Sixth Sense*, Haley Joel Osment was subsequently cast in the lead role of Steven Spielberg’s *A.I.: Artificial Intelligence* (2001). In this film, Osment plays a robot-boy who has been programmed to appear human in all ways, including a capacity for human warmth and love; his character’s greatest desire is to be reunited with his adoptive (human) mother from whom he has been separated. No doubt, Osment’s portrayal of Cole’s more romantically-inclined characteristics influenced his casting in Spielberg’s (at times, excessively sentimental) film.

<sup>iv</sup> Benjamin’s emphasis on action is perhaps best expressed in “Program for a Proletarian Children’s Theatre” (1929). Here, Benjamin critiques bourgeois educational “methodologies” by arguing that the “education of a child requires that *its entire life is engaged ... within a clearly defined space*” – specifically, the theatre (202, emphasis in text). While the goal of bourgeois theatre is the ultimate performance of a play and the profit it generates, the aim of Benjamin’s proletarian children’s theatre is the resolution of “tensions” once enacted in multiple performances and the release of “powerful energies” enlivened by children’s play. Children’s gestures, enacted in the space of theatre, constitute a “signal” to which collectives should remain attentive, insofar as such gestures carry within them radically new ways of seeing and engaging with the world: “[Children’s performance] represents in the realm of children what the carnival was in the old cults. Everything was turned upside down; and just as in Rome the master served the slaves during the Saturnalia; in the same way in a performance children stand on the stage and instruct and teach the attentive educators” (205).

<sup>v</sup> “How does the cameraman compare with the painter? To answer this we take recourse to an analogy with surgical operation. The surgeon represents the polar opposite of the magician. The magician heals a sick person by the laying on of hands; the surgeon cuts into the patient’s body. The magician maintains the natural distance between the patient and himself; though he reduces it slightly by the laying on of hands, he greatly increases it by virtue of his authority. The surgeon does exactly the reverse; he greatly diminishes the distance between himself and the patient by penetrating into the patient’s body, and increases it but little by the caution with which his hand moves among the organs” (Benjamin, “Work of Art,” 233).

<sup>vi</sup> Admittedly, as Benjamin admits in his epilogue, the revolutionary potential of film is constantly threatened by Fascism, which presses it “into the production of ritual values” (“Work of Art,” 241). This Fascist “violation” of film is most obvious, Benjamin argues, in its aestheticization of war, which “can set a goal for mass movements on the largest scale while respecting the traditional property system” (241). Here, Benjamin distinguishes Fascist uses of film (or art more generally) from those espoused by his philosophy of historical materialism: Fascism aestheticizes politics while “Communism responds by politicizing art” (242). That is, if Fascism depoliticizes art – for example, by rendering war “beautiful,” as the Futurists insisted – Communism uses what might otherwise be regarded as “apolitical” art to engage and train the collective’s senses, thus making possible renewed perception and political action.

<sup>vii</sup> According to the Internet Movie Database ([www.imdb.com](http://www.imdb.com)), *The Sixth Sense* is the 23<sup>rd</sup> highest grossing film to date, earning almost \$300 million at the U.S. box office. ([www.imdb.com/boxoffice/alltimegross](http://www.imdb.com/boxoffice/alltimegross)). In addition, it was the most-rented DVD/video of 2000 – a fact that suggests that many viewers who originally saw the film in theatres chose to see it again, not only out of fondness for the film but in an effort to catch the clues they might have missed during its original release in theatres ([www.imdb.com](http://www.imdb.com)).

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<sup>viii</sup> In “The Material and Sources of Dreams,” the fifth section of *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), Freud traces the ways in which seemingly insignificant impressions from waking life resurface – although “dismembered, and slightly altered, and above all removed from their context” – within manifest dream content (219). Once subjected to analysis, these dream-images of impressions from waking life reveal associations to one another and, moreover, expose, through displacement and distortion, memories psychologically-significant events that have been barred from conscious, waking reflection by the unconscious. Thus, in one of the examples Freud offers, a man’s dream of feeling a sense of dread while putting on a winter coat is triggered not only by the onset of cold weather but to a story he has heard the day before from a woman who deliberately broke her husband’s condom – a word which, in German, is the same term used to designate an overcoat (221). Thus, according to Freud, this apparently “innocent” dream, which bears otherwise inconsequential memory-traces from waking life, betrays the man’s latent anxieties concerning the potentially unforeseen consequences of protected sexual contact.

<sup>ix</sup> In *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (1928) Benjamin critiques German romanticism’s use of the symbol, which puts forth a notion of the world as perfect, balanced, and self-contained, and which implies a consubstantiality of the signifier and the signified. In turn, Benjamin valorizes the allegorical emblem of the death’s head (or skull) prevalent in German Baroque drama (or the *trauerspiel*), which suggests “everything about history that, from the very beginning, has been untimely, sorrowful, unsuccessful” (166). The death’s head cannot be considered a symbol because, unlike the symbol, it suggests a certain lack of life and meaning rather than its fullness.

<sup>x</sup> The episode involving Kyra’s tape may require some suspension of disbelief: it seems improbable that an otherwise critically-ill child could orchestrate a surveillance system in her own bedroom, and much more improbable that a child capable of doing so would be incapable of simply warning her father in person. However, this sequence might be read as a self-referential moment in Shyamalan’s film which gestures toward the film’s ability to make visible – as Kyra’s video does – details that were formerly overlooked.

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