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## The Holocaust According to Its Anthologists

AT THE CENTER OF their single-minded effort to extirpate the Jews of Europe, the Germans turned the conquered territories into a dystopia. Within a few select ghettos—Warsaw, Lodz, Lublin, Cracow, Bialystok, Vilna, Terezín—they concentrated Jewish populations from far and wide; villagers and city-folk, the pious and politically active, east and west, the law-abiding and the criminal class, the apostates and the atheists, a veritable babble of tongues. When ghettos proved insufficient to effectuate their master plan, the Germans built special camps, some primitive, some state-of-the-art, and from the south of France to the Pripet marshes, from Riga to Salonika, the surviving Jews were transported there to labor, to starve, and to be ground into ash. The apotheosis of the German dystopia was the Institut zur Erforschung der Judenfrage in Frankfurt, the final repository for the plundered Jewish books and cultural treasures, a diabolical caricature of a future encyclopedia on the vanished Jews of Europe.<sup>1</sup>

One way that the Jews responded to their forcible concentration was through the creative anthology. At three known points on the Holocaust compass—Warsaw, Lodz, and Auschwitz-Birkenau—the very subjects of this coerced ingathering compiled anthologies whose aim it was to encompass the temporal and spatial, the linguistic and societal contours of the German blueprint. Just as the literature of and on World War I attempted to reflect the multinational and intergenerational scope of this first total war, which just yesterday had divided all of Europe along the Western, Eastern, and home fronts, so the aim of contemporary wartime anthologists was to reflect the pan-Jewish scope of this unprecedented slaughter.

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By September 1939, European Jewry, both east and west, had become so thoroughly secularized that there was never any question of adopting or adapting the classical anthological models. Those responsible for chronicling the destruction did not assemble a latter-day *Miqra'ot gedolot*, in which the only ontological reality was that of the sacred text as interpreted by the sanctioned commentators. If anything, the operative category in wartime was encyclopedic, as the staff of the ghetto archives assembled eyewitness accounts, diaries, autobiographies, personal letters, official and underground documents, statistics, questionnaires, monographs, novels, short stories, plays, reportorial fiction, poems, songs, jokes, music, charts, maps, photographs, and graphic art. Indeed, an *Encyclopedia of the Lodz Ghetto* was very nearly completed, with concise definitions from A to Z, designed for postwar consumption. Meanwhile, in Warsaw, Emanuel Ringelblum handpicked the staff of his underground archive, code-named "Oyneg Shabes," to compile the data and to begin writing a comprehensive social history of Polish Jewry *in extremis*. Ringelblum gave pride of place to the sixty-odd monographs he had commissioned, each documenting the life and death of a different Polish-Jewish community.<sup>2</sup>

Not every collaborative effort was designed to be anthological, but every wartime anthology was both collaborative and anonymous. *The Chronicle of the Lodz Ghetto, 1941–1944*, as its abridged version is known to English readers, achieves a single reportorial tone although it was compiled by a stellar group of German-Jewish, Polish-Jewish, and Polish-Yiddish intellectuals laboring day in, day out, to cover every aspect of ghetto life. It is a seamless work, a remarkable testimony to absolute group discipline and unity of purpose. *Lódz Ghetto: Inside a Community under Siege* (1989) represents the very opposite editorial principle. Here the reader is exposed, albeit in English translation, to the unique style and sensibility of a dozen or so voices—that of Moravian-born Oskar Rosenfeld, Prague-born Oskar Singer, Polish-born Jozef Zerkowicz, the anonymous young man who recorded his ghetto experiences on a copy of the French novel *Les vrais riches*, not to speak of Mordecai Chaim Rumkowski himself, the king of the ghetto. The intent of the editors Alan Adelson and Robert Lapides is to create a chronological collage, from 24 August 1939 until the liberation of a Judenrein Lodz by the Red Army, which cuts and pastes across generations, ideologies, languages, and various media (sketches, oil paintings, photographs), and draws its material from Jewish and German sources alike.<sup>3</sup>

The encyclopedia, the collaborative chronicle, the collage: each is a compilation of authentic wartime data. The mark of authenticity insofar as writings of the Holocaust are concerned is their strict adherence to

chronology, to a clear demarcation of Before, During, and After. Ringelblum was acutely aware of this when deciding the scope and assigning the specific tasks of the Oyneg Shabes archive. He devoted one entire research project to "Jewish Participation in the September 1939 Campaign," not only in order to chronicle the extent of Jewish involvement in the defense of Poland (a central tenet of his ideology), but also to recapture an important narrative that later events would otherwise have eclipsed. Aware of the cataclysmic changes occurring all around them, Ringelblum and his staff dedicated their efforts to rendering a sense of durational time. Soon after the war, some literary gleanings from the Oyneg Shabes archive were published in Communist-ruled Poland, most notably, Peretz Opoczynski's *Reportorial Sketches from the Warsaw Ghetto* (1954), which provided a microscopic view of the ghetto's social organism and a chronological overview of how this part-for-the-whole (be it the courtyard, the delivery of mail, the culture of smuggling) was transformed over time.<sup>4</sup> Among the realistic prose offerings anthologized in Leyb Olicki's *Tsvishn lebn un toyt* (Between life and death, 1955), the most impressive by far are Leyb Goldin's "Chronicle of a Single Day" and two works by the veteran novelist Yehoshue Perle: "The Destruction of Warsaw," his detailed chronicle of the Great Deportation; and "4580," the anatomy of a Jew who is turned into a number.

Had Ringelblum lived to oversee the publication of his archive, the chronology of occupation, concentration, disease and starvation, accommodation, mass destruction, and resistance would have been its organizing principle. What a shame that editor Joseph Kermish lost sight of this, or any other clearly defined principle, when compiling *To Live with Honor and Die with Honor! . . .*, 772 pages of densely printed text, which provide the richest sampling to date of Ringelblum's colossal project. Worse yet is what happens in the process of translation. Readers of this Oyneg Shabes anthology may experience what it's like to decipher a hodgepodge of archival materials in a foreign tongue. The English ranges from passable to butchered; the juxtaposition of material is idiosyncratic and lacks internal consistency; references that cry out for annotation are left unglossed. Israel Lichtenstein's last testament, a moving and memorable document, concludes as follows in Kermish's anonymous translation:

Wish we were the redeeming sacrifice for all other Jews the world over. I do believe in the survival of the People. Jews shall not be wiped out. We the Jews of Poland, of Czechia [*sic!*], of Slovakia, of Lithuania, of Latvia, we are the redeemers for the entire People of Israel in all other lands. (p. 59)

Compare this rendering by Lucy Dawidowicz:

May we be the redeemers for all the rest of the Jews in the whole world. I believe in the survival of our people. Jews will not be annihilated. We, the

Jews of Poland, Czechoslovakia, Lithuania, Latvia, are the scapegoats for all Israel in all the other lands. (*A Holocaust Reader*, pp. 296–97)

As even this briefest of excerpts makes clear, the demarcation of time in authentic wartime writings was fraught with covenantal meaning. Indeed, the first creative anthology produced during wartime was specifically designed to bond the ideologically committed youth of Jewish Warsaw through a sense of covenantal time. *Payn un gvore in dem yidishn over in likht fun der kegnwart* (Suffering and heroism in the Jewish past in the light of the present, 1940) is a 101-page mimeographed anthology of literary responses to catastrophe from the Crusades until the Jewish self-defense during the Ukrainian civil war and the battle for Tel Hai. This anthology rests its case on modern literary texts that actualize the past within the present, notably, Isaac Lamdan's expressionist poem "Masada" (1929). Three years later, Yitzhak (Antek) Zukerman, the coeditor and translator of this anthology, was inspired by Lamdan's poem to take up arms in a desperate last stand against the Germans.

Auschwitz-Birkenau was the point of end-time, the crucible of despair, yet the desire to bear witness was the last to die. How else can one explain the writings of the *Sonderkommando*, the Jewish men assigned to "special duty" at the gas chambers, or the almost-executed plan of "publishing" a literary-historical miscellany titled *Auschwitz* in January 1945? Of the latter—to have included poems, eyewitness accounts, and documents pertaining both to the camp itself and to life in the ghettos—only the introduction survives, which reads, in part:

מיר ווייסן: מיר וועלן לעבידיק פֿון דאָנין נישט אַרויס. אָף דעם טויער פֿון דעם אָט גיהנום האָט דער טייוול אייגנהאַנטיק אויפֿגשריבן: "וואַרפֿט אַוועק די האַפֿנונג, איר אַלע וואָס קומט אַהער אַרײַן." מיר ווילן זיך מתווה [וויין], זאָל דאָס זײַן דער "שמע ישראל" אונדזערער פֿאַר די קומינדע דורות. דאָס זאָל זײַן די ווידוי פֿון אַ טראַגישן דור וואָס איז נישט גיווען דערוואַקסן צו זײַן אויפֿגאַבע, וואָס זײַנע ראַכטישע פֿיס האָבן זיך אונטערגיבראַכן אונטער דער שווערער לאַסט פֿון מאַרטירערטום וואָס די צײַט האָט אָף זײַנע פֿליצעס אַרויפֿגעלייגט. (ײַנוואָך בלעטער 27 [1946]: 195)

We know: We will not come out of here alive. On the gates of this hell the Devil has inscribed with his own hand: "Abandon hope, all ye who enter herein." We wish to confess our sins; this will be our proclamation of "Hear O Israel [the Lord our God, the Lord is one]" for all future generations. May this serve as the confession of a tragic generation that was not equal to its task, whose rachitic legs buckled under the heavy weight of the martyrdom that the age had placed upon its shoulders.

These anonymous, collective chronicles, written in the first-person plural, have rightfully been dubbed *Megiles oyshvits*, *The Scrolls of Auschwitz*, by

the historian Ber Mark. For even as they bespeak the desperate desire to atone for the moral degradation that attends "survival in Auschwitz," they have recourse to Dante, and reveal a spark of literary ambition.

Underground anthologies produced in wartime required absolute group discipline, a common culture, and a common goal. It is no wonder that the surviving "scrolls" of Auschwitz were written in a fluent Yiddish by young Polish Jews just one step removed from the heder and house of study, whose last words of confession and condemnation were addressed to the Yiddish Diaspora. The *Auschwitz* miscellany was apparently intended for the YIVO Institute, "the archive of Jewish suffering." A similar unity of purpose, to rouse the conscience of the Polish-speaking community living in freedom, informed the writing of *Z otchiani* (De profundis, 1944), a slim anthology of poems by Czesław Miłosz, Mieczysław Jastrun, Jan Kott, and others. The underground Jewish National Committee, an association of Zionist parties operating out of (officially Judenrein) Warsaw, smuggled a copy to the West, where it was republished, in 1945. What even these prescient young poets and prose writers could not have imagined, as they raced against time in Auschwitz and Warsaw, was that the communal mandate and universal human values they upheld so courageously would not survive the liberation.

The demarcation of time was the first thing to go. In an effort to work through the collective trauma, the surviving Yiddishists blurred the distinction between the culture that was irrevocably lost and the response to that destruction from afar. The first Holocaust anthology to appear in Yiddish was *Kiddush hashem* (1948), subtitled "a collection of selected, oftentimes abbreviated reports, letters, chronicles, testaments, inscriptions, legends, poems, short stories, dramatic scenes, essays, which describe acts of self-sacrifice in our days and also in days of yore." No attempt was made to verify the record, for "legend is truer than fact." Rather, this massive, latter-day *seyfer*, or sacred tome, was to restore the lost collective by presenting the material in order of community, making it that much easier for the mourners to locate their unmarked graves and to celebrate the heroism of their lost sisters and brothers. Equal emphasis on the survivors as on the martyrs further underlined Jewish continuity. And the reversed chronological order underscored the greater scope of the present catastrophe over anything that had ever happened before.

With the notable exception of Poland, where a Marxist, and therefore historically driven approach to the Jewish destruction prevailed, postwar attempts to anthologize the literature of the Holocaust were guided by liturgical considerations. Shmerke Kaczerginski's *Lider fun di getos un lagern* (1948) represents one of the earliest efforts to collect and record the

lyrics and music of Yiddish songs from the Holocaust. Although Kaczerginski always identifies the names of his informants, tries to credit the original author(s), and provides a thumbnail sketch of their specific *Sitz-im-Leben*—whether the concert hall, the ghetto streets, the work battalion, or the camp barracks—the songs are nowhere listed either by point of origin or by author. Instead, they are grouped thematically, impressionistically. And although many songs are contrafacts, new lyrics set to old melodies, only the most obvious prewar source is given: “Afn pripetshik,” “Tumbalalayka,” “Tango.” Worse yet, the editing of the song texts was entrusted to the American-Yiddish poet H. Leivick. Still laboring under early Romantic conceptions of the Volk, Leivick took the liberty of improving upon the texts. The grit and vulgarity have been expunged, along with local dialect and grammatical infelicities. Fortunately, this song culture lives on, as I discovered from a recent interview with Leah Holtzman (née Swirsky) in Ramat Gan, Israel. One two-hour conversation yielded missing stanzas, much relevant data, and all the melodies to her eight songs that appear in the Kaczerginski-Leivick volume. Most important, I learned that the melodies were all borrowed: five from popular Russian songs, one from Polish, and only one from the prewar Yiddish song repertory. (Swirsky’s “Look at the Moon,” written five days before the liberation, was composed to be read and not sung.) Kaczerginski’s informant remembered the lyrics, however, with remarkable accuracy, and even today, when the surviving women from her work battalions get together, they sing the songs that Leah wrote.<sup>5</sup>

Before we abandon the authentic corpus of wartime writing, it is worth taking inventory of what little was deemed appropriate for post-war consumption. The songs traveled best, popularized by live performers as diverse as Emma Schaver and Pete Seeger, and pressed into service at Holocaust commemorations the world over. Nowadays one can even hear ghetto songs performed at klezmer concerts, and I will have more to say later about their radical recontextualization on the dramatic stage. Diaries are the next most viable genre. Like lyric poetry, diaries preserve an individual voice, allowing readers to identify with a personal narrative. Only in recent years has the reportage, or journalist sketch, a central genre in the literature of the Holocaust, begun to make its way into anthologies—although Zelkowicz, Opoczynski, and Auerbach have hardly become household names. Least accessible are the most overtly “Jewish” forms of self-expression, such as the few surviving sermonic texts: Kalonymus Shapira’s *Esh kodesh* (The holy fire, 1941–42) and Issachar Teichtal’s *Em habanim semeikha* (A joyful mother of children, 1943).<sup>6</sup> It requires a staggering amount of annotation simply to lay bare their denotative—let alone, referential—layers of meaning. In general, the

more time- and culture-bound a wartime text proves to be, the shorter its bookspan. Herein lies the paradox facing anthologists of the Holocaust. For if the destruction of European Jewry in the years 1939 to 1945 is not rendered as a time- and culture-bound event, how else can one make sense of it?

Among survivor communities, the Zionists had the most profound stake in historical memory.<sup>7</sup> For them, the end of one war was the beginning of another. American Zionist intellectuals were particularly well situated to access the unprecedented outpouring of testimonies in Yiddish and Hebrew. As director of the Joint Distribution Committee in the American Zone of Germany, the veteran anthologizer Leo W. Schwarz was able to do his own fieldwork among the inmates of the DP camps, and to consult with the first scholars of the Holocaust who were stationed in Europe, Lucy Dawidowicz and Philip Freedman. While acknowledging his debt to Nizer's *Kiddush hashem*, Schwarz's *The Root and the Bough* (1949) takes a fresh look at *The Epic of an Enduring People* (the subtitle of his book). Dedicated to "The Sheerith Hapletah," the anthology concludes with "Homecoming in Israel," a collective journal of Kibbutz Buchenwald. Still more explicit in its ideological focus is Marie Syrkin's literary-historical compilation, *Blessed Is the Match: The Story of Jewish Resistance* (1947).

The "liturgical" impulse, shared by Schwarz and Syrkin, is to deny the terrible finality of the Holocaust by incorporating it into a coherent "epic" or "story." Another, less blatant way of achieving the same purpose is by limiting one's choice to a single genre, say, lyric poetry, and then to obliterate all temporal boundaries. Anthologies of lyric verse, redolent with the stock phrases of Jewish lamentation, and that barely distinguish between the living and the dead, the literature of the Holocaust and the literature *on* the Holocaust, can double as a secular liturgy. In Kadia Molodowski's anthology of Yiddish Holocaust poetry (1962), an anemic selection of eleven "Martyrs" precedes an overrepresentative sampling of vicarious survivors. Excluded from the latter, presumably because they are not sufficiently "Jewish," are the Soviet-Yiddish poets and the sensibility of American-Yiddish modernism. Most problematical is the status of the survivor-poet Abraham Sutzkever, represented by four poems, only one of which, his popular ballad "Mira the Teacher," was written in the Holocaust proper. In a comparable collection of Hebrew verse (1974), edited by Natan Gross et al., the two bona fide poet-victims, Yitzhak Katzenelson and David Fogel, are lost within a chronological ordering of too many poets, whose diction and literary allusions are heavily liturgical.

No one would deny the Yiddish- and Hebrew-speaking survivor community the right to mourn, or to enlist the poems of and on the Holocaust for liturgical ends. Yet the succor they offer comes at a price. As Molodowski knew only too well, the prophet whom Yiddish poets heeded was sooner Marx than Moses, while the greatest poems in the Yiddish secular prayer book—Peretz's *A Night in the Old Marketplace*, Halpern's "A Night," Markish's "The Heap," Greenberg's "Mephisto"—were poems of blasphemy. As for Hebrew verse, the most oft-quoted poet in the Holocaust is the one who is missing from the Gross anthology—Ḥayyim Nahman Bialik—presumably because he died in 1934. Instead of dredging the bottom of the barrel to demonstrate the depth of the Israeli poetic response to the Holocaust, it would have been more honest to acknowledge the break that occurred between the generation of Statehood and those European-born poets who came before.<sup>8</sup>

Then we have anthologies of Holocaust verse that mix and match Before, During, and After; "truth" and "lamentation"; Yiddish, Hebrew, English, and all the languages of Europe. Here, almost anything goes. Milton Teichman and Sharon Leder include both poetry and prose fiction in their *Truth and Lamentation* (1994), and do accord special status to authentic wartime writing. As a descriptive model, however, the distinction between "truth" and "lamentation," between the facts and the meaning of the facts, does not work, because it is obeyed mostly in the breach. After spelling out their feminist and modernist agenda, the editors deliver a generous sampling of women writers, writing about women, and a strong aesthetic preference for the ironic, understated, poetic voice. The culture of American English departments, in other words, is the final arbiter of taste. Teichman and Leder wisely limit their choice to works that engage the historical reality of the Holocaust; therefore, Sylvia Plath's "Daddy," for all its feminist and modernist credentials, is excluded from the canon. Not so anthologist Hilda Schiff. In her compilation of *Holocaust Poetry* ("119 poems from 59 poets," 1995), the inclusion of Plath's poem is defended on the grounds that it "embodies an instance where Holocaust imagery abounds, some might say is exploited, in the service, not of the Holocaust itself, but of the poet's parental vendetta, showing how Holocaust terms have become absorbed in everyday language" (xxiii–xxiv). Heeding these guidelines, the editor ought to have cast her net even wider and included some poetry from black and Chicano "ghettos."

Needless to say, no poem in either New Critical anthology is burdened with a date or any bibliographical data. And this is where the greatest lie is perpetrated. The autobiographical referent of Plath's poem is obvious to the point of absurdity, so that pairing it up with Natan



Zach's "Against Parting," a bitterly ironic portrait of a Holocaust survivor, is fair game. Both are typical of "Second Generation" responses to the Holocaust. But elsewhere in her anthology, under the heading of "Rescuers, Bystanders, Perpetrators," Schiff pairs Miłosz's "Campo di Fiori," his courageous poem written on the Aryan side of Warsaw and first published in the underground anthology *Z otchłani*, with Denise Levertov's exoneration of Adolf Eichmann ("During the Eichmann Trial"). An editor who uses sleight of hand to suggest such a moral equivalency is guilty, in my book, not only of falsifying history, but also of sacrilege.<sup>9</sup>

The problem with these anthologies of Holocaust poetry is essentially the same: they all respond to the utopian impulse in the anthological imagination, whereas what is needed here is precisely the opposite. Any anthology that purports to be "about" the Holocaust should attempt to mimic the claustrophobia, the containment, the exclusivity, the dystopian quality of the thing itself. Every anthology is an imagined community on the printed page, where the generations magically engage in dialogue, where materials differing in origin and audience are seamlessly joined. But an anthology devoted to the systematic destruction of European Jewry—an event that from a late twentieth-century perspective already verges on science fiction—cannot be allowed to define a totality that did not exist in a state of nature. Unless the anthologist wishes to be truly encyclopedic, to include every poem by every poet who ever dealt with the subject, however obliquely, there is nothing to be gained by having Sylvia Plath "speak" to Czesław Miłosz, or by allowing every Yiddish versifier who was living comfortably in New York City to feed off the moral stature of the martyred poets of Europe. An encyclopedia of Holocaust poetry, moreover, would have to begin with those hundreds of murdered poets who wrote in Yiddish and Polish in a poetic idiom far removed from the postwar sensibilities of America, England, or Israel. Bringing *them* to life again—that alone would be a utopian venture worth pursuing.

Anthologists—as distinct from encyclopedists—are faced with draconian choices. Holocaust anthologists must further choose either to pursue a strictly historical approach, allowing chronology and the facts on the ground to dictate the order and selection of materials, or they must follow a metahistorical blueprint, displacing the Holocaust in space, in time, or both. Each approach entails a different set of priorities, a different sequence, and, above all, a different literary canon.

Published by and for the Reform movement in North America, Albert H. Friedlander's extremely influential *Out of the Whirlwind: A*

*Reader of Holocaust Literature* (1968) reflects the seismic shift in postwar consciousness from the historical to the ecumenical axis. It is also, not coincidentally, the first anthology to give Elie Wiesel a dominant voice. Because Reform is of German provenance, this anthology understandably shifts the order of Holocaust priorities from Eastern to Western Europe, from history to theology. Wiesel's tale of Elijah the Prophet as a Hungarian-Jewish deportee makes up the prologue, while the book concludes with a Judeo-Christian dialogue on God "after Auschwitz." Sandwiched between is the central theological chapter of the *Reader*, titled "The Great Silence," which moves from the complicity of the Gentiles to the silence of God. "Can God speak out if man is silent?" asks Friedlander in his introduction. "When we believe in man," he replies, "God speaks through man. And when our fellow man fashions the darkness of hell at Auschwitz—God hangs upon those gallows." The latter image alludes to the famous (excerpted) chapter in Wiesel's *Night* (1956, 1960), which describes a public hanging in Buna-Monowitz as a travesty of the crucifixion.

Friedlander's *Reader* admirably serves the aesthetic and theological needs of its interpretive community: second-, third-, and fourth-generation American Jews. If Yiddish proper makes but a symbolic appearance, during a lyrical interlude of "Songs of the Night, the Art and Music of the Shoah," it is because the only usable Eastern European Jewish past is one that foregrounds the individual. Otherwise, two brief selections stand in for authentic wartime writings: the obligatory *Diary of a Young Girl* and Chaim Kaplan's *The Scroll of Agony*. What Friedlander accomplishes, then, by framing his anthology with Wiesel's fiction on the one hand and Holocaust theology on the other, is to recontextualize the literature of and on the Holocaust within the existentialist worldview of the individual facing a godless void. The Franco-Jewish writers fare especially well within such a framework: Piotr Rawicz at one extreme, Wiesel and André Schwarz-Bart at the other.

Rather than pick and choose, edit and translate, with one's interpretive community held firmly in view, an alternative, more radical approach, is to turn the process around, viz., to harness the integrative power of an anthology in order to *create* an interpretive community. Thus far, there have been three main attempts to do so in English, each piggybacking on the anthologist's prior research: Lucy S. Dawidowicz's *A Holocaust Reader* (1976), my own *The Literature of Destruction* (1989), and Lawrence L. Langer's *Art from the Ashes* (1995).

*A Holocaust Reader* follows the exact contours of Dawidowicz's epoch-making *The War Against the Jews, 1933–1945*, which is to say, it brings

together all relevant sources: the precise unfolding of the "Final Solution" as revealed and concealed by official German documents; the ordeal of German Jewry as expressed in its public stance toward the Third Reich; the ordeals of the ghettos in Eastern Europe as reflected in their songs, reports of social welfare and cultural activities, rabbinical decisions, and political broadsides; the ordeals of the Judenräte, as reflected in *their* official documents; the ordeals of deportation, as revealed in diaries, testaments, letters, appeals, and contemporary reportage; and finally, the "ordeal of desperation," as revealed in the calls-to-arm, the communiqués from the battlefield, the eyewitness account of the surviving commander. In a brief but indispensable introduction, Dawidowicz instructs her readers on the manifold dangers that attend the study of Holocaust documents. "To extract the full value of any document," she writes in her uniquely authoritative voice,

the historian must first screen it for defects. He must try to establish its genuineness and authenticity. He must verify its credibility, accuracy, and veracity, study the internal evidence of its language, style, and content, and confront it with other, often contradictory, evidence. The documents of the Holocaust should, indeed must, undergo such scrutiny and examination, for they too suffer from the defects spawned by subjectivity and partisanship, bias and prejudice. (pp. 9–10)

Holocaust documents, according to Dawidowicz, are different in degree but not in kind from comparable documents written in secrecy, in extremity, in duplicity. No one is spared her historian's rigor: neither Ringelblum nor Czerniakow (the first chairman of the Warsaw Judenrat); neither propagandists nor pietists.

Dawidowicz, preceded by the historian of the Judenräte, Isaiah Trunk, and succeeded by the historian of the Lodz ghetto, Lucjan Dobroszycki, brought about a fundamental shift in the order of scholarly priorities, from the exhaustive documentation of the Final Solution—of what the Germans did to the Jews, when, and why—to an examination of the Holocaust itself—the complex internal response of the Jewish victims, particularly in Eastern Europe. Riding on her coattails a decade later, I set out to reclaim the multilingual canon of Jewish responses to catastrophe in the light of the Holocaust but not superseded by it.

In *Against the Apocalypse* (1984), I trace the development of an above-ground, cumulative literary tradition. My primary sources are earlier anthological attempts at Jewish self-understanding, from the *Kinot* for Tisha b'Av and Jonas Gurland's *Leqorot hagezeirot 'al yisra'el* (1887–92), to Gutkowski's and Zukerman's *Payn un gvure* (1940), Israel Halpern's *Sefer hagevurah* (1941–50), A. M. Haberman's *Sefer gezeirot ashkenaz* (1945), and

S. Niger's *Kiddush hashem* (1948), not to mention the thousand or so *yizker-bikher*, memorial volumes for the murdered European Jewish communities. What defines a text as "canonical" within this vast body of writing is its intertextuality, its pious or parodic reference to earlier responses to catastrophe. As of the 1890s, with the rise of militantly secular ideologies, such references were increasingly eclectic. There emerged, I argue, two distinct schools of Jewish literary response to catastrophe—the one metonymic and neoclassical, which tended to prey upon Jewish texts exclusively, and the other mythic and apocalyptic, which cast a wider net, embracing Christian symbols and sancta as well. One line of development led from Mendele to Bialik to Sholem Aleichem to Ansky to Glatstein to Agnon to A. M. Klein, while another described an apocalyptic arc from Lamed Shapiro to Isaac Babel to Moyshe-Leyb Halpern to Avigdor Hameiri to Isaac Lamdan to Uri Zvi Greenberg to Piotr Rawicz. Together, they define the mental curriculum required to "read" catastrophic events archetypally, through the polished lens of Jewish collective memory.

Now that two generations have passed since the end of World War II, and sufficient groundwork has been laid publishing, translating, and evaluating authentic wartime writings, I could describe the literature of the Holocaust as a closed chapter of Jewish literary history; closed and utterly distinct, because of the enormous amount of individual talent and collective energy that went into shaping an anthological response commensurate with the catastrophe itself.<sup>10</sup> Each major ghetto had its underground archive. Each archive had its resident chroniclers who labored, day in, day out, to encompass the genocidal slaughter in its temporal and spatial totality. As the first anthologist to roam free among the *sheymes*, the sacred fragments of this wartime geniza, I selected those exemplars of literary art that also succeeded in finding the part that stood for the whole, whether by enlisting a neoclassical or an apocalyptic approach: Opoczynski's "House No. 21," Goldin's "Chronicle of a Single Day," Perle's "4580," Shayevitsh's "Lekh-lekho," Sutzkever's poetry from the Vilna ghetto, Katzenelson's *Song of the Murdered Jewish People*, and, above all, Rachel Auerbach's "Yizker, 1943."

Although only four out of twenty chapters of my anthology are devoted to authentic wartime writings, these four constitute its core. I would even say they justify the whole endeavor. Such is the anthological power of these texts that they redefine the artistic canon both forward and backward. It is impossible to reread Sholem Aleichem's tales of Kasrilevke without being reminded of Opoczynski's reportorial fiction from the Warsaw ghetto, or to think of Bialik without hearing the echoes of his pogrom poems reverberate in the poetry of Shayevitsh, Sutzkever, and Katzenelson—just as it is impossible ever again to recite the Memorial Prayer on Yom Kippur without the mediation of Rachel Auerbach.

*The Literature of Destruction* is a primer in Jewish collective memory. Designed to be “Jewish” both in form and substance, it advances a neotraditional mode of reading by means of a glossary, intertextual references, and explanatory notes that appear alongside the text, in a Latin facsimile of Rashi script. What such a textual apparatus gains in depth, however, it sacrifices in scope. While it presents a descriptive model broad enough to encompass the early short stories of Aharon Appelfeld, or the poetry of Paul Celan, Dan Pagis, and Nelly Sachs (all of whom I foolishly omitted), it is not catholic enough to make room for the concentration-camp prose of Tadeusz Borowski, the philosophical essays of David Rousset and Richard Antelme, or the psychoanalytic cartoon art of Art Spiegelman.<sup>11</sup> In point of fact, I could not cast my net much wider than I did because the method of creating meaning through creative memory is extremely labor-intensive. Each writer must first be situated within a nexus of language, genre, stylistic register, poetic and parodic tradition—in short, requires a crash course in Polish, German, French, Israeli, or American culture. Even if I possessed the requisite knowledge and linguistic competence to do so, I would still prefer to situate the literary response to the Holocaust within an anthological framework of Jewish collective memory alone, both for the sake of reconnecting a severed link in that chain, and for the sake of an imagined future.

Lawrence L. Langer sets out from a completely different point of departure and has a fundamentally different goal in mind. With a consistency of vision second to none and a rigor of judgment that rarely misses its mark, he has fashioned an apocalyptic countermodel, first, in such critical studies as *The Holocaust and the Literary Imagination* (1975) and *The Age of Atrocity* (1978), and most recently, in *Art from the Ashes: A Holocaust Anthology* (1995). For Langer, the Holocaust is emblematic of ultimate Evil, the Jews are viewed not as heroic “survivors” but as victims of massive psychic trauma, of modern technology gone mad. His is a vision as global as mine is hermetic, as subversive of hope as mine is insistent upon continuity.

From first to last, Langer’s approach to the Holocaust has been guided by the principle “Abandon all cultural and ethical conventions, ye who enter herein.” Langer sees the accumulated weight of the past as merely a hindrance in confronting the radical otherness of “the Holocaust experience.” He evinces, moreover, an ever-growing skepticism about literature and art per se. Just prior to compiling this 694-page anthology, Langer promoted the use of video testimonies of former Holocaust victims in his prize-winning book *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory*.<sup>12</sup> Langer makes a similar case in *Art from the Ashes* by giving primacy to documentary and historical writings that eschew an artistic design. In this way, he forces the reader first to confront the unmediated

"truth" of the Holocaust. Through the multilingual scope of his anthology, its texts originally written by Jews and Gentiles alike in German, French, Italian, Polish, Czech, Hungarian, Yiddish, and Hebrew, in addition to English, Langer refuses to privilege any one culture. His generic sweep, finally, is extremely diverse, and includes courtroom testimonies, eyewitness accounts, letters, diaries, reportorial fiction, essays, short stories, novellas, prose poems, lyric poetry, and one full-length drama. He concludes with reproductions from the artists of Terezín.

What Langer values most about authentic wartime writings, to which he pays much greater attention here than in any of his prior work, is its immediacy, its unmediated quality. Hence, he selects those passages from the diaries and journalistic prose of Abraham Lewin, Jozef Zelkowicz, and Avraham Tory that treat the most horrific events in the Warsaw, Lodz, and Kovno ghettos, respectively. By the same token, Langer chooses those of Sutzkever's poems that express the poet's moments of radical self-confrontation. Rather than present a potpourri of poets, Langer wisely focuses on six who have consistently struggled to find "a form for chaos by including chaos as part of the form": Abraham Sutzkever, Dan Pagis, Paul Celan, Miklós Radnóti, Nelly Sachs, and Jacob Glatstein. Significantly, the poets are put in next-to-last place.

Because, for Langer, the Holocaust is self-contained, defying analogy, it demands a strictly mimetic order of priorities. After one establishes "The Way It Was," one may sample the journals and ghetto diaries written by those who knew what was happening in front of their eyes but could not apprehend the full extent of the horror. Then and only then may one move on to fiction, drama, and poetry, leaving graphic art for last. A work is judged by its success in rendering the radical otherness of the Holocaust, and indeed, most of Langer's selections are justified in terms of his goals. A good example is the meticulously written fictional memoir "The Season of the Dead" by Pierre Gascar, a writer whom Langer introduced to American readers. There is one writer, however, who works against Langer's own professed values of truthfulness, and that is the Israeli playwright Joshua Sobol, whose drama *Ghetto* is the longest single text in Langer's anthology.

As a dramatic, self-contained setting, the Nazi ghetto is every playwright's dream. The Aristotelian unities of time and place come ready-made, courtesy of the SS. (Two out of the four plays included in Robert Skloot's anthology of *The Theatre of the Holocaust* are set in the Lodz ghetto.) Here, as in all of Western drama, conflicts abound between members of different social classes, nationalities, generations, or genders. Sobol's drama, commended for its "theatricality," seems to pass Langer's mimetic standard with flying colors. The well-worn device of writing a

play-within-a-play invites the audience, in Langer's words, "to experience simultaneously history as performance and performance as history." But what new truths about the Holocaust are revealed by this English adaptation of a contemporary Israeli play, complete with original lyrics by Broadway lyricist Sheldon Harnick?<sup>13</sup> That the surviving Jews of the Vilna ghetto defied their fate through creative vitality? Surely Sutzkever's poetry is testimony enough. That the ghetto populace and leadership were faced with "choiceless choices"? Virtually every other selection in Langer's anthology makes the same point. Or is it Sobol's bold leap from past significance to present meaning? The destruction of European Jewry is here reduced to a morality play at best, a piece of agit-prop, at worst, which pits power against powerlessness; the former is represented by SS officer Kittel and his Zionist-Revisionist lackey Jacob Gens, while the anti-Zionist chronicler of the ghetto, Herman Kruk (erroneously called Herschel in the play), represents the humane alternative to the exercise of raw power. Small wonder that Sobol recasts the Vilna ghetto into a Brechtian cabaret.

The truth-claim of a work of the historical imagination such as Sobol's *Ghetto* has little to do with its verisimilitude or theatricality. History is not performance, and (this particular) performance is not history. The only reality accurately reflected—or refracted—in Sobol's play is that of present-day Israel. It "speaks" most eloquently to a politicized theater audience that shares Sobol's vision of a brutalized present versus a sentimentalized Yiddish past.<sup>14</sup>

As someone who insists that Holocaust literature be judged on its own terms, be answerable to its own poetics, Langer ought to be held responsible for checking Sobol's sources, for explaining why the portrait of Kruk, the play's main protagonist and mouthpiece, diverges from his *Diary of the Vilna Ghetto*; for noting how the Yiddish and Hebrew productions actually performed in the ghetto differed from Sobol's grotesque-sentimental songfest. (The historian must labor to verify the "credibility, accuracy, and veracity" of each text, wrote Dawidowicz, "study the internal evidence of its language, style, and content, and confront it with other, often contradictory evidence.") And if the bottom line reveals more debits than credits, Langer ought to reconsider whether including so flawed a drama was really worth it, just to be able to claim that all main literary genres have been duly covered.<sup>15</sup>

Ultimately, Langer pays a high price for his consistency of vision and rigor of judgment (with the exception of Sobol's play). The individual works appear stripped of their cultural context and do not answer to creative memory. As in his critical studies, Langer repeatedly exhorts his readers to renounce their normal reading habits. Writers of Holocaust fiction, he asserts, "know the limitations of their art, when the issue is

mass murder. The evil they need to portray is so unlike Satan's, the suffering so remote from Job's, that the very categories inspiring their literary ancestors prove useless to them" (p. 238). Kafka and Camus, Faulkner and Joyce are likewise dismissed as inadequate guides to Holocaust fiction. Rather than engage in a hermeneutic wrestling with the past for the sake of the future, that future is dead-ended.

Consider this: Langer's first survivor-author is Ida Fink, who writes in Polish and lives in Israel. She is about as "displaced" a writer as they come. From her collection *A Scrap of Time*, Langer does well to select "A Spring Morning," a story about a man who tries to save his child from death. The story is spare to a fault, as naked as biblical narrative. And indeed, when the story is done, the reader schooled in the Hebrew Bible immediately recognizes its antecedent, the terrible Akedah, here invoked in two ways: the father is first seen *carrying* his child along the road to death, like a sacrificial offering, and only then does he urge her to walk away from the procession of the doomed; and the event takes place on "a spring morning," as it is written, "So early next morning, Abraham saddled his ass and took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac" (Gen. 22:3). The final tableau of the father once again carrying the child, now dead, is a heartrending reversal of the patriarch whose son was spared by the intervention of a heavenly angel and the substitution of a ram. This is as surely the intention of Ida Fink as Shayevitsh meant his "Lekh-lekho" to counter God's command to Abraham to "Go forth" from his native land. As Katzenelson wrote *The Song of the Murdered Jewish People* to be a countercommentary on Bialik's poems on the Kishinev pogrom. As surely as Bialik repudiated the liturgy commemorating the Chmielnicki massacres and the Crusades. As surely as the Crusade chronicles redefined the meaning of the Temple sacrifice in the light of Jewish mass martyrdom.

The literature of and on the Holocaust derives its unique power from the deliberate—and desperate—ingathering of all these possibilities. Writers and anthologists alike selected from the vast corpus of Jewish and world literature what could be brought to bear on the twin subjects of destruction and resistance—however futile—to destruction. This radical concentration of cultural resources expressed the personal desire and the collective need to counteract the German drive for global conquest, which was predicated upon the forced ingathering of European Jewry in preparation for their final slaughter. One was a creative, life-affirming, reponse to the murderousness of the other.

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## NOTES

1. For a recent study of the Jewish response to the systematic German plunder of Jewish books, see David E. Fishman's English-Yiddish monograph "*Embers Plucked from the Fire*": *The Rescue of Jewish Cultural Treasures in Vilna* (New York, 1996).
2. Excerpts from the *Encyclopedia* in Hebrew translation appear in *Yedi'ot beit lohamei hageta'ot*, nos. 7, 8, 9–10, and 11–12 (1954–55). It was later fully exploited by Nachman Blumental in his valuable reference work, *Verter un vertlekh fun der khurbn-ikufe* [Words and sayings from the Holocaust] (Tel Aviv, 1981). The best account of the activities of the Oyneg Shabes archive is still Ringelblum's own, written in January 1943. For a slightly abridged translation, see my *The Literature of Destruction*, sec. 71. For Ringelblum's social-historical mandate, see Samuel D. Kassow's forthcoming article, "Two Ghetto Diaries: Herman Kruk and Emanuel Ringelblum," in *The Individualization of the Holocaust*, ed. Lucjan Dobroszycki and Robert Shapiro (New York, 1997).
3. Under the strict tutelage of the late Holocaust historian Lucjan Dobroszycki, the editors included only authentic wartime materials from the surviving ghetto archive, the writings of deportees unearthed in Auschwitz, or from diaries reconstructed by survivors immediately upon liberation. This unfortunately excluded the short stories of Isaiah Spiegel, available at that time only in their revised, postwar versions. But see, now, Isaiah Spiegel, *Proza sipurit mi geto Lodz'* [Yiddish narrative prose from the Lodz ghetto: 16 stories edited from rescued manuscripts with introductions and a series of oral interviews with their author], ed. Yechiel Szeintuch (Jerusalem, 1995). Jozef Zelkowicz, the major Yiddish writer in the Lodz ghetto, is finally receiving his due. See the first attempt in any language to collect his writings: *Bayamim hanora'im hahem: reshimot mi geto Lodz'* [In those nightmarish days: reportorial sketches from the Lodz ghetto], ed. Michal Ungar, trans. Aryeh Ben Menahem and Yosef Rav (Jerusalem, 1994).
4. Peretz Opoczynski, *Reportazhn fun varshever geto* [Reportorial sketches from the Warsaw ghetto], ed. Ber Mark (Warsaw, 1954).
5. For non-Yiddish readers, the most accessible selection of Yiddish songs from the Holocaust is *We Are Here: Songs of the Holocaust*, ed. Eleanor Mlotek and Malke Gottlieb, with

singable translations by Roslyn Bresnick-Perry (New York, 1983). A scholarly study on this subject, with new song texts in Yiddish and Polish, is Gila Flam, *Singing for Survival: Songs of the Lodz Ghetto, 1940–45* (Urbana and Chicago, 1992).

6. See Nehemia Polen, *The Holy Fire: The Teachings of Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira, the Rebbe of the Warsaw Ghetto* (Northvale, N.J., 1994), and Harav Issachar Shlomo Teichtal, *Em habanim semeikha*, 2d ed. (Jerusalem, 1983). For a very provocative discussion of Teichtal's book, see Rivka Schatz-Uffenheimer, "Confession on the Brink of the Crematoria," *The Jerusalem Quarterly* 34 (winter 1985): 126–41.

7. See Israel Bartal's essay in the present volume.

8. The same uncritical approach characterizes the companion volume to this anthology, Hanna Yaoz's study of *Hasho'ah beshirat dor hamedinah* [The Holocaust in Hebrew poetry of the Statehood period] (Tel Aviv, 1984).

9. Schiff also presents a caricature of Emanuel Ringelblum and a fallacious biography of Abraham Sutzkever.

10. This line of argument is developed more fully in two subsequent studies of mine: "The Library of Jewish Catastrophe," in *Holocaust Remembrance: The Shapes of Memory*, ed. Geoffrey H. Hartman (Cambridge, Mass., 1994), pp. 33–41, and "Landkentenish: Yiddish Belles Lettres in the Warsaw Ghetto," in *The Individualization of the Holocaust*, in press.

11. My original plan had been to end *The Literature of Destruction* with "Hagerush," a short story by Appelfeld about a hasidic anti-pilgrimage. Appelfeld, however, refused permission to have it translated. In this instance, the anthologist's design for "canon formation" clashed with the authorial design for self-canonization. Appelfeld, to put it simply, wishes to be known abroad on the strength of his later novels and novellas, which, sadly for my enterprise, partake much less of classical sources than do his earlier short stories.

Stymied by Appelfeld's refusal, and at a late stage in my own work, I was sent scrambling to find a new way to end. That is when I decided to move beyond the European continent and return my story to its point of origin—the covenantal relationship of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel. To this end, I concluded with three different responses to the Israeli War of Independence: Natan Alterman's ballad "The Silver Platter," Abba Kovner's "Battle Bulletins" from the front, and S. Y. Agnon's "Kaddish for the Fallen Soldiers of Israel." The loss of Appelfeld was more than compensated for.

For a reading that contextualizes the poetry of Dan Pagis within Jewish literary history, see Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi, "Dan Pagis—Out of Line: A Poetics of Decomposition," *Prooftexts* 10 (1990): 335–63.

12. So far as I know, mine was the only dissenting voice. See David G. Roskies, "Through a Lens, Darkly," *Commentary* (November 1991): 58–59.

13. After revising the play numerous times and for different audiences, Sobol published a definitive Hebrew edition of *Ghetto* in the Or-Am series of theater scripts, 2d ed. (Tel Aviv, 1992). Comparing this Israeli version with the English adaptation that appears in Langer's anthology is so depressing a task, that I leave it for others to do.

14. See Yael S. Feldman, "Zionism: Neurosis or Cure? The 'Historical' Drama of Yehoshua Sobol," *Prooftexts* 7 (1987): 145–62.

15. Another literary text that lies is Arnost Lustig's story "The Lemon," anthologized by Teichman and Leder. Set in the Lodz ghetto, it describes the confrontation between two Jewish boys, the cynical Chicky and the morally vulnerable Erwin. Lustig dramatizes Chicky's cynicism by having him say, "They [i.e., the deported Jews] went up the chimney long ago." The most basic fact about the Lodz ghetto, as distinct from all the others, is that no one, with the possible exception of Rumkowski, had any idea about the gas chambers and crematoria. The responsible anthologist, therefore, must either flag this as an example of "poetic license" or choose another story. In Lustig's case, any story set in Terezín, where he himself was interned as a child, would have been preferable.