

The Problematic Nature of Modern Holocaust Fiction: From Holocaust Impiety to the Suffering Body

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Abstract

This thesis takes issue with Emily Miller Budick's assertion that Holocaust fiction no longer needs "to establish its legitimacy against the charge that a fictional text is either inadequate, inappropriate or even endangering to the task of representing the Nazi genocide of the Second World War" (2015, p. 1). It argues instead that modern Holocaust fiction – texts written between the year 2000 and the present – demonstrates a particularly reductive and depthless approach to the subject, which is typified by a growing obsession with the suffering body. This stems, I contend, from a specifically Auschwitz-oriented understanding of the Shoah which has gradually been solidified in both commemorative culture and fictional recreations of the event over the last half-century.

The works utilised span from 1961 to 2018. While the pre-21st century texts are used to establish problematic trends in Holocaust writing, those written from the year 2000 forward are assessed according to Berel Lang's standard of silence. In contrast to Budick's position, the thesis argues that a text must be "more probative, more incisive" or "more *revealing*" (Lang, 2000, p. 18) than silence in order to have societal value. Many modern texts, it argues, do not meet these criteria.

Though the thesis utilises the work of several theorists, two particular figures have shaped the central argument: Alison Landsberg and Gillian Rose. Landsberg's theory of "prosthetic memory" is used to explore the notion that modern fiction has become overly reliant on recreations of bodily suffering as a means of post-memorial connection with the past. Rose's theory of Holocaust Piety is then used to outline the condition modern Holocaust fiction should aspire to. While pious texts are designed to keep the Holocaust ineffable, by maintaining psychological distance from the victims and perpetrators, impious texts are intended to demystify the Holocaust. For the Holocaust to have continued meaning in the present, I argue, we must come to a more psychologically and culturally particular (or impious) understanding of the victims of the Shoah. We cannot understand them only as suffering bodies.

Content List

Declaration Page	1
List of Illustrations	2
Introduction	3
Methodology	8
Critical Field	13
Textual Choices and Rationale	22
The Structure	24
Chapter I: Holocaust Synecdoche: Surrendering to the Simplifying Impulse	30
The Depreciating Value of the Auschwitz Tattoo	35
The Many Facets of the Cattle Car	50
The Enduring Legacy of the Sexualized Sufferer	63
Conclusion	80
Chapter II: Second-Generation Holocaust Fiction and the Legacy of the Hinge Generation	84
Thane Rosenbaum and the Failure of Transmission	89
The Failure of Recovery	107
Shalom Auslander and the Rootless Holocaust	124
Conclusion	138
Chapter III: Visualizing the Holocaust: Landmarks, Photographs and Post-Memory	141
Representing the Arrival Process	146
Representing Life and Death in Auschwitz	166
A Gratuitous Approach to Representation	184
Conclusion	203
Chapter IV: Exploring the Limits of Modern Holocaust Fiction: From Fraternity to the Suffering Body	207
Ida Fink and a Feeling of Fraternity for the Holocaust Dead	211
<i>The Tattooist of Auschwitz</i> and the Problems Underpinning Modern Holocaust Fiction	221
Shalom Auslander, Jonathan Littell and the Body	235
Conclusion	256
Conclusion	261
Bibliography	277
Appendix: Certificate of Ethics Review	288
Appendix: UPR16 Form	290

Declaration Page

Declaration

Whilst registered as a candidate for the above degree, I have not been registered for any other research award. The results and conclusions embodied in this thesis are the work of the named candidate and have not been submitted for any other academic award.

Word Count: 84, 284 (including references).

List of Illustrations

Chapter I

Figure 1: A still from <i>Europa</i> (0:10:52).	52
Figure 2: A still from <i>Europa</i> (0:41:49).	54
Figure 3: A still from <i>Europa</i> (0:42:01).	54
Figure 4: A still from <i>Europa</i> (0:56:31).	56
Figure 5: Photograph #78358 (USHMM). Ebensee, Austria.	56

Chapter II

Figure 6: A still from <i>Triumph of the Spirit</i> (0:05:35).	118
Figure 7: A still from <i>Triumph of the Spirit</i> (0:05:42).	118

Chapter III

Figure 8: A still from <i>Triumph of the Spirit</i> (0:13:46).	149
Figure 9: A still from <i>Triumph of the Spirit</i> (0:13:55).	149
Figure 10: A still from <i>Schindler's List</i> (0:17:45).	150
Figure 11: Spiegelman, 2003, p. 159	153
Figure 12: Photograph #77241 (USHMM). Auschwitz-Birkenau.	156
Figure 13: A still from <i>Triumph of the Spirit</i> (0:17:06).	157
Figure 14: A still from <i>Schindler's List</i> (0:23:36). ¹	160
Figure 15: Yad Vashem Photo Archives. Item ID: 35059.	161
Figure 16: A still from <i>The Grey Zone</i> (0:22:09).	163
Figure 17: A still from <i>The Grey Zone</i> (0:22:28).	163
Figure 18: Spiegelman, 2011, p. 105	169
Figure 19: M. Bourke-White. Buchenwald, April 1945. Life Magazine, Time Inc.	170
Figure 20: Spiegelman, 2003, p. 169.	171
Figure 21: Spiegelman, 2003, p. 201.	173
Figure 22: Croci, 2009, p. 45.	175
Figure 23: Yad Vashem Photo Archives, Item ID: 103371.	176
Figure 24: Croci, 2009, p. 41.	179
Figure 25: Croci, 2009, p. 55.	180
Figure 26: A still from <i>The Grey Zone</i> (0:36:58).	199
Figure 27: A still from <i>The Grey Zone</i> (0:38:24).	200

Chapter IV

Figure 28: Anne Frank. June, 1942. Source: Anne Frank House	239
Figure 29: James Cochran's portrait of Anne Frank.	239
Figure 30: Eduardo Kobra's Anne Frank Mural.	240
Figure 31: Anne Frank, A28, Netherlands.	240

¹ The timestamps for Figures 10 and 14 both refer to the second disc of the standard UK DVD release of *Schindler's List*.

Introduction

It has been many years since Holocaust fiction has had to establish its legitimacy against the charge that a fictional text is either inadequate, inappropriate or even endangering to the task of representing the Nazi genocide of the Second World War. (Budick, 2015, p. 1)

In the opening of her study *The Subject of Holocaust Fiction*, Emily Miller Budick suggests that Holocaust fiction – a body of texts previously described by Sue Vice as inherently “scandalous” and liable to inspire “repulsion and acclaim in equal measure” (2000, p. 1) – no longer needs to justify its own capacity to represent the horrors of the Nazi genocide. By making this claim, Budick is asserting that the position of restraint favoured by critics such as Berel Lang is now a thing of the past. Lang’s core position is that historical writing is simply “more adequate”, “more compelling” and indeed “more *valuable*” (2003, p. 140) as a means of representing the subject. Chief among his concerns, as Bernard Harrison notes, is the notion that the author will fundamentally warp historical fact in his attempt to reframe it into a narrative. In short, Holocaust fiction runs the inherent risk of incorrectly interpreting and foundationally misrepresenting the truth of the Holocaust. Holocaust fiction, therefore, has the potential to put forward and then perpetuate a misreading and misrepresentation of the Holocaust past, one which will potentially alter our collective cultural memory of the atrocity. As Harrison puts it: “On the one hand, [the writer’s] choices will exhibit a bias determined by his personality and outlook, which will work to interpose that persona and point of view between the reader and the unvarnished facts of the Holocaust” (2006, p. 81). The inbuilt limitations of the author – from their personal prejudices to their partial readings of the historical raw data – will likely influence their presentation of the subject. While the phrase “unvarnished facts” may be considered problematic, Holocaust texts undoubtedly

require a historical foundation on which to construct their narrative.² As Vice has noted, “intertextuality is likely to be the central element in Holocaust fiction” (2000, p. 161). By this she means that Holocaust fiction is explicitly reliant on “anterior sources” (p. 161) – largely survivor texts and assorted historical documents – in order to provide a foundation of authenticity for the piece of work in question. However, this thesis argues, our current post-memorial distance from the Holocaust is beginning to profoundly affect the relative value of modern-day Holocaust fiction.³ Returning to Budick’s quotation, it argues that many modern Holocaust texts – particularly those attempting to depict the reality of life within the camp system – are inadequate, inappropriate and even endangering to the task of representing the Nazi genocide.

This thesis explores the gradual conceptual narrowing of the Holocaust, as the historical Holocaust has been re-shaped into an explicitly Auschwitz-centric vision of the atrocity. As Irving Howe notes, the death camp now represents “what must be considered the essential Holocaust” (1988, p. 189). As Tim Cole implies, this broader vision of the death camp has devolved into one defining location: “More than any other place, ‘Auschwitz’ has come to symbolise everything about the ‘Holocaust’. ‘Auschwitz’ is to the ‘Holocaust’ what ‘Graceland’ is to ‘Elvis’” (1999, pp. 98-99). Auschwitz, therefore, has become the focal point of modern Holocaust memory. It is the defining element of the Shoah which modern

² Hayden White, for instance, would argue that historical raw data must be narrativized in order for it to have meaning. Facts cannot stand on their own but must be framed within a narrative in order for them to have significance. As White puts it: “For example, no historical event is *intrinsically tragic*; it can only be conceived as such from a particular point of view or from within the context of a structured set of events of which it is an element enjoying a privileged place (1978, p. 84).

Moreover, as Peter Weiss’s *The Investigation* (1965) illustrates, it is essentially impossible to reproduce the “raw data” (Rosenfeld, 1988, p. 158) of the Shoah without narrativizing or biasing the presentation to a certain extent. As Tammis Thomas suggests, Weiss’s text is slanted towards a particularly “Marxist reading of the facts” (2010, p. 558), which depicts Auschwitz as an “extreme form of capitalism” (p. 558) and its natural consequence.

³ As the ‘Textual Choices and Rationale’ portion of this Introduction illustrates, the dissertation utilises both pre-21st century texts and 21st century (or “modern”) Holocaust fiction. While the pre-21st century material is used to establish trends in Holocaust writing, the 21st century material is judged for its potentially problematic qualities.

texts pivot around, given their regard for it as the conceptual centre of the atrocity. This “exceptionalist” (Mintz, 2001, p. 38) view of the Holocaust – which emphasises the “horror of the Holocaust” (p. 78) and which regards Auschwitz as “a metonymy for the Holocaust as a whole” (p. 62) – has profoundly influenced the core truths reproduced in Holocaust fiction. As this thesis contends, however, our post-memorial understanding of Auschwitz has become increasingly partial. To borrow a phrase from Alan Mintz, we have “an urgent need to imagine the Holocaust, while at the same time we have a poverty of images” (p. 147). Modern fiction, this thesis argues, frequently struggles to connect with both the physical and experiential reality of the Auschwitz space. Given our post-memorial distance from the events of the Shoah, we lack the capacity to reproduce the inner-reality of the Auschwitz camp – the space as it was experienced by the internees themselves.⁴ As Holocaust fiction relies on a foundation of historical fact in order to produce an authentic narrative – one which represents certain core truths regarding the atrocity – flawed and partial historical foundations commonly lead to problematic and unrepresentative Holocaust texts. Modern Holocaust fiction, this thesis contends, often struggles to convey the truth of the Holocaust, instead conveying only its own inability to engage with the Holocaust past. Frustrated with the unreachable distance of the Holocaust dead, along with the experiential reality of life in Auschwitz, modern fiction has come to focus increasingly on representations of the suffering body.

Our collective memory of the Holocaust, as asserted by both Mintz and Sophia Marshman, “has been shaped more by popular representation than by testimony” (Marshman, 2005, p. 1).⁵ Both authors focus predominantly on film in their work; yet they do note that “works of

⁴ As Chapter Three argues, we lack the visual resources to reproduce the reality of life and death in Auschwitz. A cultural overreliance and handful of assorted images and films and led to a partial reproduction of the Auschwitz site, one which is broadly unrepresentative of its historical reality.

⁵ Sophia Marshman has also published under the name Sophia Wood.

popular culture” (Mintz, 2001, p. 83) in general have impacted our cultural conception of the Holocaust. Fiction, according to Marshman, has effectively edged the survivor to “the margins of Holocaust representation” (2005, p. 4), given its general accessibility and its immediate cross-cultural appeal. This is deeply problematic, this thesis contends, as in place of the humanity of the survivor – or the Holocaust dead, who have been portrayed with fraternal depth in survivor and ghetto writing – modern fiction instead presents the victims of the Holocaust as empty, inhabitable shells.⁶ As this thesis suggests, modern Holocaust fiction is concerned explicitly with facilitating a bodily connection to the Holocaust.⁷ Unable to connect with the Holocaust dead and incapable of fathoming the experiences of survivors, modern Holocaust fiction often resorts to creating moments of bodily connection to Holocaust suffering – scenes of trauma which the viewer/reader may engage with on a physical level, which invite the sense of having experienced *something* of the Holocaust – not its experiential reality, certainly, but a sympathetic sense of physical unease or discomfort.

What is at stake here, therefore, is not simply our understanding of the Shoah itself – which is gradually narrowing due to our overreliance on Holocaust media – but also our moral regard for the Holocaust in general. The increased popularity of certain films depicting the Holocaust – Sophia Wood cites, for instance, Steven Spielberg’s *Schindler’s List* and Roberto Benigni’s *Life is Beautiful* specifically – is illustrative of “a continuing (if not growing) desire to ‘gaze’ at the Holocaust” (Wood, 2012, p. 22). Proof of this impulse to gaze upon the horrors of the Holocaust is evident, I contend, at certain memorial sites. Cole, for instance, discusses the “peep show” (1999, p. 156) quality attached to the display of

⁶ Chapter Four of this dissertation, for instance, describes the fashion in which modern fiction portrays Anne Frank – focusing particularly on her deindividualisation and our enduring focus on her body.

⁷ This assertion is supported with reference to the work of Alison Landsberg, as is outlined in the ‘Methodology’ section.

Holocaust horrors found in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM). He describes visitors peering over a low wall at a screen displaying assorted depictions of Holocaust suffering. Visitors, he notes, are almost uniformly “transfixed by the horror show on offer” (p. 155). Culturally, therefore, a predisposition already exists to luxuriate in the horrors of the Shoah – an impulse which the USHMM has arguably exacerbated given the illicit frisson of wrongness which they have attached to the act of looking with their exhibit. Modern Holocaust fiction, this study asserts, intensifies this pre-existing impulse. As modern texts demonstrate their inability to engage with the victims of the Holocaust on a human or, to borrow a term from Gillian Rose, “impious” level, they instead resort to scenes of gratuitous bodily suffering in order to generate a sense of connection to the Holocaust past.⁸ Holocaust fiction, therefore, runs the risk of further dehumanising the Holocaust dead by transforming them into suffering bodies, stripped of all human particularity. Moreover, this emphasis on human suffering and gratuity only serves to exacerbate our pre-existing voyeurism. To continue Wood’s argument, this desire is “growing” in proportion with our fictional reproductions of the Holocaust. If this impulse is not curbed, the human specificity of the Holocaust dead and the reality of the survivors’ suffering will be forever eclipsed by these base fictional representations of bodies in pain.

This thesis consequently argues against Budick’s assertion about the merits of Holocaust fiction and, instead, contends that it is an inadequate and often inappropriate means of engaging with the Holocaust past. Borrowing from Berel Lang, it asserts that valuable texts must in some sense be “more probative, more incisive” and indeed “more *revealing*” (2000, p. 18) than silence. They must, in short, contribute to our cultural conception of the Holocaust by either illustrating certain foundational truths, examining certain wartime

⁸ Rose’s concept of Holocaust Piety is essential to this study and is covered in more detail in the ‘Methodology’ section.

behaviours or, just as crucially, revealing flaws in our current cultural conception of the Shoah. Texts which complicate our understanding of the event or cater to voyeuristic impulses – by graphically recreating scenes of suffering or edging ever closer to the representation of death in the gas chamber – will then be measured against Lang’s established standard of silence. Rather than accepting Budick’s position that Holocaust fiction no longer needs to justify its own existence, this thesis asserts that many modern works of Holocaust fiction only serve to complicate our understanding of the event. It then argues that, in several instances, silence would have been preferable to this kind of brazen misrepresentation.

Methodology

From a methodological standpoint, this thesis relies on the work of seven theorists: Eva Hoffman, Marianne Hirsch, Dana Wardi, Gillian Rose, Gary Weissman, Alison Landsberg and Berel Lang. While Rose, Weissman and Landsberg are used to discuss the shift away from character depth and towards the suffering body, Hoffman’s work is used to outline the role of the second generation in shaping Holocaust fiction. Specifically, the thesis borrows the concept of the “hinge generation” from Hoffman:

The second generation after every calamity is the hinge generation, in which the meanings of awful events can remain arrested and fixed at the point of trauma; or in which they can be transformed into new sets of relations with the world, a new understanding. (2005, p. 103)

Hoffman, therefore, emphasises the role of the second generation in shaping Holocaust memory. She conceives of it as a potentially positive one, as the second generation may move past the inarticulable trauma of their parents in order to reframe our broader understanding of the events. This thesis, however, takes the opposite stance. It argues that

the second generation have indeed played a central role in shaping Holocaust memory, by communicating only the message of failed transmission and thereby affirming that survivor parents can communicate nothing of their experiences to their child. As Giorgio Agamben asserts, the experiential reality of the Holocaust is fundamentally inarticulable and so all nonwitnesses must concede to the entirely constructed nature of their Holocaust knowledge.⁹ This section of the discussion is also supported with references to Marianne Hirsch and Dana Wardi. While Hirsch is used to introduce the concept of “post-memory”, Wardi provides additional psychological information regarding the second generation. They may feel a profound emotional attachment to the Shoah, but their understanding of it is almost entirely reliant on post-memorial media. All present-day representations must therefore rely on the elements articulated in survivor testimony and other assorted post-memorial resources to provide their historical foundation.

Having established the failure of transmission from parent to child, the thesis considers the impact of this experiential distance from the Shoah on Holocaust fiction. The works of Rose, Weissman and Landsberg are used to illustrate this conceptual shift in Holocaust writing.

⁹ Focusing specifically on the plight of the Muslim or “*der Muselmann*” (Agamben, 2012, p. 41), Agamben identifies this subgroup of prisoners as non-humans who “obstinately appear as human” (p. 82). For Agamben, the “complete witness” is not the exterminated – as Levi would have it – but rather “he whose humanity has been wholly destroyed” (p. 82). The Muselmann, for Agamben, represents the purest embodiment of dehumanisation, the point at which the human body has sunk into apathy, speechlessness and consuming hunger.

If the central horror of the camps lies in absolute negation of self – the transformation of the prisoner into an unthinking and unprincipled walking corpse – then the Muselmann embodies the core of the atrocity, a core which remains beyond the limits of language. As Agamben notes, the witness can only hope to “bear witness for the Muselmann” and thereby “bring to speech an impossibility of speech” (p. 164). In asserting this, Agamben is affirming that the reality of Auschwitz remains unsayable and that we must societally concede to the impossibility of speaking. Though his text ends with testimony from surviving Muselmänner, the core of their experiences – their loss of self – remains inarticulable.

While this dissertation does not fully endorse Agamben’s thinking, it does find value in the general notion of incommunicability.

Rose's work is openly critical of texts which fall under the umbrella of what she terms "Holocaust Piety" (1996, p. 41). Using Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* as her test case, Rose argues that traditionally pious texts are committed to a doctrine of "ineffability" (p. 43). Rather than presenting properly fleshed-out characters whose behaviours are understandable to the viewer, Spielberg instead keeps the viewer at an emotional distance from his characters. Schindler is not a man with understandable motivations, but rather he is a "ludicrous saviour on a charger" (p. 45). Thomas Keneally, by contrast, makes the violence of the Holocaust fathomable. By presenting the brutality of the Jewish police, Rose claims, Keneally is able to illustrate the corrupting influence of life under Nazi oppression as his characters have been caught up in the "contagion of violence" (p. 45). Keneally, therefore, is not simply presenting them as depthless embodiments of good or evil. Valuable Holocaust fiction, this thesis contends, therefore requires some attempt to approach its characters' psychology – to construct them as individuals with depth and to explore their underlying thinking. Benn E. Williams has previously stated, for instance, that fiction is uniquely suited to unpacking the psychology of wartime collaborators and internees, saying: "a serious writer's *histoire* often elucidates a gray zone, explores greater psychological depths, or simply furnishes the better literary punch to the stomach than an historian's belabored prose" (2009, p. 126). Fiction, according to this logic, should have the capacity to bring the reader into impious proximity with a given character. It should be able to elucidate their underlying motivations, and yet modern-day Holocaust fiction commonly fails in the attempt. Holocaust Impiety, this thesis argues, represents a practical impossibility at the present time.

It is here that the theories of Alison Landsberg and Gary Weissman become significant, as – having established the impossibility of connecting with the experiential reality of Holocaust suffering – Weissman and Landsberg both illustrate the lengths to which post-memorial nonwitnesses must go in order to connect to the Holocaust in other ways.

Weissman's work revolves around what he terms "fantasies of witnessing" (2004, p. 4). Specifically, his work is concerned with the attempts of "nonwitnesses" (p. 20) – those who did not directly live through the atrocity and so only have contact with it through mass media and commemorative sources – to connect with the event. As his work highlights, this experiential gap cannot be bridged. Nonwitnesses may wish to reconnect with the experiential reality of the Shoah, but – as is illustrated in Chapter Two – the traumatic reality of Holocaust suffering is non-transmissible. Unable to access the experiential reality of the events, therefore, nonwitnesses instead seek to experience "*something*" (p. 5) of the atrocity. Unable to approach the Holocaust dead as people, or to fully engage with the reality of in-camp suffering, nonwitnesses instead latch on to particular visions of suffering.¹⁰

This emphasis on bodily suffering as a means of engaging with the Holocaust past then finds a parallel in Alison Landsberg's theory of "prosthetic memory". Landsberg argues that cinematic representations of Holocaust suffering have allowed nonwitnesses to touch elements of the Shoah. As she puts it, cinema has the capacity to "suture" viewers "into pasts they have not lived" (2004, p. 14). It "offers spectators from diverse backgrounds and ancestries a shared archive of experience" (p. 14). In short, Landsberg believes that cinema allows latter-day viewers to incorporate the experiences of racially distinct groups, those to which they clearly do not belong, into their worldview. We may not have experienced the Shoah, but we can prosthetically experience Jewish suffering by watching *Schindler's List* and thereby incorporating the Jewish experience into our worldview.¹¹ These memories are described as being "prosthetic" as they are temporarily worn and are, ultimately, removable. We are only momentarily inhabiting the suffering of Schindler's Jews; we are not fully

¹⁰ Weissman's work is discussed in detail in Chapter Four

¹¹ Landsberg does view prosthetic memory as a potentially positive force. Thanks to the advent of cinema, she contends, memories can now be acquired by anyone "regardless of skin colour, ethnic background or biology" (p. 2). This capacity to take on memories to which we do not have a generic or biological right, Landsberg asserts, should act as a "powerful corrective to identity politics" (p. 21).

experiencing their reality. As Landsberg herself highlights, however, the prosthetic connection latter-day viewers are forming through watching *Schindler's List* is based explicitly on suffering. She highlights certain scenes of violence that force viewers into a feeling of shared anxiety with the persecuted – from the infamous shower scene to the death of the hinge maker.¹² Once again, therefore, our post-memorial connection with the past is founded specifically upon scenes of suffering bodies.

Finally, having established both the near impossibility of Holocaust Impiety and the inherently depthless nature of post-memorial fictional recreations of the concentration camp space, the thesis returns to Lang's standard of silence. It asserts that several texts under consideration are "inadequate, inappropriate" and "even endangering" to the task of representing the Nazi genocide. While it does not suggest, as Lang has, that the "most valuable" writings about the Nazi genocide "appear in the forms of historical discourse" (2003, p. 123), it does assert that Holocaust fiction – now more so than ever – must establish its legitimacy. Along with the standard of silence, therefore, the one concern of Lang's which proves central to this thesis is the role of the author. As Lang puts it: "In one sense, the *fact* of writing reflects a moral judgement, through its implied claim that writing will usefully add something to what the subject otherwise, *unwritten*, would fail to disclose to itself" (p. 124). A piece of fiction has value for Lang, therefore, if it helps to illustrate certain core truths regarding the Holocaust – truths which, otherwise, would not have been forthcoming, based on the facts alone. The act of writing, Lang argues, reflects an element of presumption on the part of the author – an implied assertion that their narrativization will serve to highlight or demystify certain parts of the Shoah. In actual fact, however – this thesis asserts – present-day authors achieve only the opposite. Their texts are not reflective of Holocaust

¹² These sequences, and their importance to Landsberg's work, are further discussed in Chapter Four.

truth, they are instead only illustrative of the author's own latent desire to prosthetically connect with the Shoah through elaborate recreations of human suffering.

Critical Field

Many critics have attempted to address the fictionalisation of the Holocaust, and its inherent (un)representability. Taking as their starting point Elie Wiesel's firm anti-representational stance, they discuss the inherently problematic nature of fictionally recreating the Holocaust – arguing that a series of moral and stylistic limitations have previously applied to fictional approaches.¹³ Writing in 1988, Terrence Des Pres outlined a series of conditions which were attached to the subject.

1. The Holocaust shall be represented in its totality as a unique event, as a special case and kingdom of its own, above or below or apart from history.
2. Representations of the Holocaust shall be as accurate and faithful as possible to the facts and conditions of the event, without change or manipulation for any reason – artistic reasons included.
3. The Holocaust shall be approached as a solemn or even a sacred event, with a seriousness admitting no response that might obscure its enormity or dishonour its dead.” (1988, p. 217)

Given his frequent use of the word “shall” and his overt references to the sacral dignity of the Holocaust, these three established rules must be read as semi-sacred prohibitions. Considering the placement of this list within an essay concerning ‘Holocaust Laughter’, however, it must also be asserted that Des Pres is not reproducing it sincerely. Instead, he is mocking the moral inflexibility which attends the fictional representation of the Holocaust.

¹³ In *A Beggar in Jerusalem* one of Wiesel's characters notes that words “destroy what they aim to describe, they alter what they try to emphasise. By enveloping the truth, they end up taking its place” (Wiesel, 1970, p. 135)

This attitude, his essay suggests, shapes the vast majority of representation. As he puts it, these rules are “not tyrannical”, and yet they are “fundamental and widely shared” (p. 217), having seeped into the public consciousness. The pre-21st century model, therefore, was defined broadly by representational restraint. However, Des Pres is careful to emphasise that this situation is likely to change, noting specifically that these rules apply “at present” (p. 206).

Alvin Rosenfeld, in keeping with the previous list, adopts a singularly conservative model of representation. While he does advocate for representation, arguing that to surrender to silence is “tantamount to granting Hitler one more posthumous victory” (1988, p. 14), he is also conscious of the enormity of Auschwitz and its potential to overwhelm the literary imagination. He is particularly concerned with what he terms the “post-Auschwitz imagination” (p. 65) and the inability of fiction to represent the nature of Auschwitz. As he puts it: “In the absence of firsthand documentation, how, in other words, can fiction – the imaginative reproductions or transformations of experience – begin to register meaningfully ‘a world that had no reality or meaning’?” (p. 66). In a fashion similar to Agamben’s, therefore, Rosenfeld feels that – once removed from the particular reality of Auschwitz and placed back into the civilised world – even the survivor could not recapture a sense of the camp’s chaos and cruelty. By conceiving of Auschwitz as an unfathomable other world, both Rosenfeld and Agamben therefore place the reality of the Holocaust beyond the writer of fiction.

This then helps to contextualise Sue Vice’s references to the intertextuality which seems to define the vast majority of Holocaust fiction. Vice stresses the attached level of scrutiny which seems to attend most works of Holocaust fiction. She notes that Holocaust texts are commonly judged by the dual standards of “authenticity and accuracy” (2000, p. 162), with most complaints regarding their worth arising from a presumption that they have

misrepresented the experiential or factual truth of the event. It is for this reason that nonwitness authors have developed an overreliance on survivor texts and other assorted anterior sources. Implicit in this argument, once more, is the presumption that the experiential reality of the sufferer remains beyond the reach of those who did not experience the Shoah first-hand.¹⁴

By contrast, Lawrence Langer suggests that one particular nonwitness may have been able to imagine herself into the experiential reality of the Shoah – to have connected with its horrors. Utilizing Stephen Spender’s analysis of the poetry of Nelly Sachs – a “Jew who escaped from Germany to Sweden in 1940” – Langer argues that Sachs’s poetry is the “lived material” (1977, p. 24) of Holocaust suffering. While not depicting the reality of Holocaust suffering, it is implied to speak from a place of knowledge. Langer believes Sachs possesses the unique capacity to imagine herself into the Holocaust world, thereby writing from inside the catastrophe and taking on the suffering of the dead for herself. Her poetry seems to speak to having effectively imagined real trauma. However, he does not believe that she possesses the capacity to represent the horror of Auschwitz as he believes no one may ever “portray completely” the “quivering flesh” (p. 7) of its reality. Despite his slight concession, this is still a bold assertion which this thesis strives to argue against. Nonwitnesses, it contends, do not possess the capacity to experientially inhabit the Auschwitz world.

Modern criticism, however – of which Budick’s work is an example – does not regard Holocaust fiction from a position of representational restraint. Gavriel Rosenfeld even asserts that, in the present moment, “there are no longer any limits – cognitive, moral or aesthetic – to representing the Holocaust” (2015, p. 27). This assertion is then functionally

¹⁴ It is important to note that Vice draws a sharp distinction between charges of historical accuracy and the representation of broader truths regarding the nature of the Holocaust. As she puts it: “isolating features such as historical inaccuracy to condemn a Holocaust fiction is not enough; historical inaccuracy, of itself, tells us very little about a text or how effective its representation is of the Holocaust” (2000, p. 167).

reinforced by Matthew Boswell's work regarding Holocaust Impiety. Boswell's study begins with the foundational assertion that Holocaust fiction does possess the innate capacity to approach the victims of the Holocaust impiously. He believes that nonwitnesses can "look the Holocaust in the eye", despite its perceived "ineffability" (2012, p. 15). This is due, he contends, to the gradual demystification of the Holocaust through the use of anterior sources.¹⁵ As this thesis argues, however, these sources have not provided a solid foundation upon which to build our cultural conception of the Holocaust. Instead, our flawed conception of the Auschwitz camp is complicating our relationship to the Holocaust past. In place of impiety we have instead developed a mania for replication – a desire to fictionally depict the horrors of the Holocaust.

Beyond the authors listed both here and in the Methodology portion of this introduction, this thesis has been particularly influenced by five critics: Emily Miller Budick, Tim Cole, Erin McGlothlin, Robert Eaglestone and Alan Mintz.

This thesis sets out to oppose Emily Miller Budick's core assertion that Holocaust fiction no longer needs to defend itself from claims that it is "inadequate, inappropriate or even endangering to the task of representing the Nazi genocide" (2015, p. 1). It should be noted, however, that Budick does take a similar stance to modern society's broader cultural "overinvestment in the subject of the Holocaust" (p. 14). Budick highlights the potentially dubious impulses which often draw modern readers and viewers to fictional recreations of the Holocaust. She focuses particularly on the "moderately distasteful" (p. 42) interest which society seems to take in the suffering of the survivor. Our excessive emphasis on their "shame, humiliation" and, ultimately, their "psychological distress" (p. 43) is symptomatic

¹⁵ Boswell discusses "detail after detail" emerging in "testimony, archival footage and historical studies". These, he contends, allow modern creators to "take the imaginative leap" (2012, p. 15) of collaborators and those within the grey zone. His text, for instance, includes representations of the *Sonderkommando*, as is discussed in Chapter Four.

of our more dubious impulses, she contends. We are not “listening” (p. 42) in a fashion which would reveal the hidden depths of their trauma – the unspeakable truth of their suffering (p. 42). Instead, we seek out these stories only to indulge our latent voyeurism.

Budick, I contend, does not go far enough in her assertions regarding this kind of Holocaust voyeurism. Our desire has clearly surpassed a foundational fascination with the suffering of the survivor. It has instead become explicitly bodily and often, as Chapters Two and Four outline, overtly sexual.

Tim Cole’s work, meanwhile, influences several of the foundational presumptions which underpin this project. Specifically, his writing is used to argue for the gradual simplification and calcification of Holocaust memory. As he puts it: “Rather than memory being alive and fluid, it becomes dead, fixed, and forgotten” (1999, p. 5). Cole specifically deconstructs our particularly Auschwitz-oriented conception of the Holocaust, stating that Auschwitz – more than any other site – has “come to symbolise everything about the Holocaust” (pp. 97-98). This is particularly problematic, he implies, as our cultural conception of Auschwitz has also been profoundly shaped by popular media. At the end of the 20th century, thanks to its representation in popular media, Cole contends that Auschwitz “has become so much more than simply a place, it is ‘a place of the mind, an abstraction, a haunted idea’” (p. 106). Cole, therefore, argues that the historical Holocaust has been transformed into a mythic cultural construction which is unrepresentative of historical fact. Fictional and commemorative representations of the Shoah, he argues, have only served to obscure the foundational reality of the Holocaust – complicating our relationship to, and understanding of, the past.¹⁶

Erin McGlothlin’s writings concerning second-generation fiction also have relevance to this thesis. McGlothlin, using Anne Karpf as her conceptual foundation, stresses the

¹⁶ Cole’s work, and his view of the “mythic Holocaust”, is discussed in Chapter One.

explicitly physical nature of second-generation children's Holocaust inheritance. She describes the profound lack of knowledge at the centre of their relation to the Shoah. They have no conception of the experiential reality of the Holocaust and yet their bodies still come to display "the symptoms of a trauma" they have "never experienced" (2006, p. 9). Borrowing from the work of Nadine Fresco she describes survivors as having transmitted "only the wound to their children, to whom memory had been refused and who grew up in the compact void of the unspeakable" (p. 8). For McGlothlin, there is no content to the second generation's Holocaust inheritance. This purely physical form of transmission, in which the second generation come to inherit the physical symptoms of an un-lived catastrophe, has profound relevance to my reading of two key texts: Thane Rosenbaum's collection of short stories *Elijah Visible* and Shalom Auslander's *Hope: A Tragedy*.¹⁷

This thesis draws a distinction between historical facts and certain broader truths regarding the nature of the Holocaust. This distinction, though he employs different terms, does feature in Robert Eaglestone's *The Broken Voice: Reading Post-Holocaust Literature*. Eaglestone does not distinguish between facts and broader essential truths, but rather between "truth" and "meaning". As he puts it: "Meaning and truth are not opposed to each other, but in the study of history, while meaning without truth is empty, truth without meaning is hollow" (2017, p. 3). He then expands on this position by referring to Bernard Williams's contention that with "history . . . every statement . . . can be true and it can still tell the wrong story" (p. 3). This idea is very much in keeping with Hayden White's position regarding the relative worth of Holocaust fiction. Facts alone, as has been previously established, have no inherent meaning. They require a historian's particular framing in order for them to possess meaning. Eaglestone's chosen terms, therefore, represent a certain level

¹⁷ While this dissertation does agree with McGlothlin's foundational assertions, it takes issue with her reading of certain elements regarding *Elijah Visible*.

of argumentative caution. He is not willing to refer to concrete truths, as “truth” remains a foundationally tricky proposition.

Historical texts cannot provide a faultless factual accounting of the past, therefore, but rather they are a lens through which meaning is tentatively developed. As Williams’s quotation implied, only the raw data of a given event may be deemed true. All historical and fictional texts following thereafter, therefore – this thesis argues – aim to assert tentative overarching truths regarding the nature of the Holocaust. While Eaglestone would never endorse the usage of this term, his study does involve several examples of these overarching interpretations of Holocaust fact.¹⁸ Eaglestone, it may be argued, does possess a series of core presumptions regarding the nature of the Holocaust – from the mindset of the perpetrator to the relative social impact of the “public secret” (p. 9) of mass genocide. Valuable fiction in his view – it is important to note that he does describe Jonathan Littell’s *The Kindly Ones* as “the most significant work of Holocaust fiction in recent years” (p. 54) thanks to its presentation of Aue as a “rootless and shallow” (p. 59) killer – should represent a set of foundational presumptions regarding the Holocaust. These may be taken as serviceable overarching truths, asserted in accordance with certain prevalent theories – Eaglestone, for instance, places extreme value on the thinking of Hannah Arendt. This thesis,

¹⁸ Eaglestone, for instance, uses Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go* to discuss how the public secret of mass genocide “lets the atrocity happen” (2017, p. 20) by binding the population “together in complicity” (p. 26). Fiction, he then goes on to note, provides a medium through which to examine the likely impact of this public secret on the interpersonal dynamics of the complicit populace – stating that it would likely “deform social relationships” (p. 19). As such, Eaglestone is positing a likely truth regarding the nature of the Holocaust.

Similarly, Eaglestone also discusses fiction which depicts the psychological reality of Nazi violence. Using Hannah Arendt’s conception of banal evil, he looks for texts which frame the SS as “incomprehensible, boring, evasive, and rootless characters” (p. 40). This vision of the SS, perfectly aligning with both Arendt and Robert Lifton, represents another core truth about the Holocaust which Eaglestone is keen to endorse. Their acts of violence, he claims, should be framed as possessing neither “depth nor any demonic dimension” (p. 38). Despite Eaglestone’s claims to the contrary, therefore, there is something almost Berel Lang-ian in his assumptions regarding the nature of the Holocaust and the ideas to which fictional representations should conform in order to authentically portray the nature of the event.

therefore, adopts the same stance – that Holocaust fiction must accord with certain foundational truths, otherwise it will prove inadequate to the representation of the Shoah.

This thesis diverges from Eaglestone’s writing, however, in its analysis of texts directly concerned with the representation of the Holocaust. In his search for Holocaust meaning, Eaglestone frequently analyses texts that are either entirely unrelated to or only peripherally concerned with the Holocaust.¹⁹ While he does reference *Fateless* (1975) by Imre Kertész in the earlier chapters of his text, only his final chapter explicitly addresses Holocaust-centric works – focusing exclusively on Holocaust kitsch. While he does assert that *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* (2006), and by association other kitsch texts, could “begin to solidify a very dubious understanding of the Holocaust” (pp. 155-156), this represents a comparatively narrow view of problematic Holocaust fiction. These misrepresentations, this thesis contends, exist outside of the confines of Holocaust kitsch.²⁰ While I may share Eaglestone’s definition of valuable Holocaust fiction, therefore, I also believe fictional recreations of Holocaust suffering to be almost uniformly problematic.

Finally, the work of Alan Mintz also impacts the conclusion of this thesis. “Exceptionalist” writing and commemoration, he argues, takes a particularly concentration camp and extermination-oriented view of the Holocaust. Constructivists, meanwhile, focus more on writing related to the ghettos and the particular humanity of the inhabitants contained within. Focusing specifically on the value of ghetto diaries, he notes that – in stark

¹⁹ Chapter One of *Broken Voices* features a Holocaust-informed reading of *Never Let Me Go* (2005), a text with no specific relation to the Holocaust. Chapter Four, meanwhile, presents a “newly inflected reading” (Eaglestone, 2017, p. 7) of Joseph Conrad’s *The Heart of Darkness* (1899).

²⁰ Eaglestone conceives of kitsch texts as perpetuating a kind of Gillian Rose-inspired moral simplicity. He particularly highlights issues regarding the *Hell* sculpture by the Chapman brothers: “The ‘conclusive’ punishment enacted in Hell implies, then, not only a finished punishment, but in the same gesture a finished chapter, an end, a disassociation between the past events and the present” (p. 149). For Eaglestone, therefore, kitsch texts block off our capacity for personal reflection. The Holocaust is not taken as an event which may influence the present and our own potential fascist tendencies are not examined. Eaglestone, therefore, seems to presume that a certain level of impiety must be present in valuable Holocaust fiction.

contrast to most survivor texts – they provided an unmediated glimpse into the interpersonal dynamics that existed under these extreme circumstances: “There is a pronounced tendency in survivor testimony... to play down the feelings of accusation and betrayal that were strongly felt at the time” (2001, p. 67). Mintz contends, therefore, that survivor writing provides a mediated version of the Holocaust past, one which consciously censors or elides certain more unpleasant aspects. As ghetto diaries are not “recollections and reconstructions written at different removes from the war” (p. 64) they provide a comparatively unvarnished view of these interpersonal dynamics. In these ghetto diaries “collaborators are named” and “the behaviour of Jews towards other Jews is unflinchingly described” (p. 66). Ghetto writing, therefore, approaches the murdered Jewish population with both impiety and a level of fraternal familiarity. The ghetto inhabitants are not abstract figures, but rather players within a community who can be named and understood. Ghetto writing, in short, humanises the murdered rather than transforming them into untouchable abstractions.

Ghetto writing, Mintz also argues, serves as a missing component from our post-memorial conception of the Holocaust. There are two principal reasons for this. Firstly, as Mintz notes, “shockingly little” (p. 69) ghetto writing is available to the English reader and, perhaps more significantly, engaging with ghetto writing represents a significantly trickier proposition than reading a standard survivor text:

The problem, I suspect, lies in the embarrassment of particularity embodied by these documents. The ghetto writers describe lives that are enmeshed in the very particular culture and politics of their times, and to know these lives requires acquiring some familiarity with this tangled knot of time and place and belief. (p. 70)

In a world where the Holocaust has been deparicularised and universalised, the ghetto text is a comparatively daunting document. We are not inclined to engage with texts which include an excess of particularising detail – specifically when concerned with matters of

culture or religion. As such, even were they to be translated and made publicly available, they will never supplant more easily processible texts by middle-class, acculturated Jewish figures. This, my thesis contends, has profoundly impacted our broader cultural conception of the Holocaust. Holocaust fiction must find a way to reconnect with the writing of the ghetto in order to impiously approach the Holocaust dead. At present, no one living seems to possess this capacity. It seems to have died with the survivor-authors and those who lived in close proximity to the events of the Holocaust.²¹

Textual Choices and Rationale

The fictional texts included in this thesis can be grouped into two broad categories: “modern” and “pre-21st century”. The pre-21st century texts included are, broadly speaking, being used to demonstrate problematic trends in Holocaust fiction. All of the modern texts featured, by contrast, are eventually measured against Lang’s established standard of silence.

Beginning with the pre-21st century texts, the thesis includes *The Book of Questions* (1963) by Edmond Jabès, *Eve’s Tattoo* (1991) by Emily Prager, *The Emigrants* (1992) by W.G. Sebald, Jerzy Kosinski’s *The Painted Bird* (1965), John le Carré’s *Call for the Dead* (1961), Thane Rosenbaum’s *Elijah Visible* (1996), *The Search Warrant* (1997) by Patrick Modiano, *Götz and Meyer* (1998) by David Albahari, Art Spiegelman’s *Maus* (1991) and Ida Fink’s *A Scrap of Time* (1987).²² Three films are also included under this category: Robert M. Young’s *Triumph of the Spirit* (1989), Lars von Trier’s *Europa* (1991) and *Schindler’s List* (1993) by Steven Spielberg.

²¹ Chapter Four of this dissertation suggests that Ida Fink possesses the fictional capacity to impiously connect the Holocaust dead. Though it does not feature in this study, Jiří Weil’s *Mendelssohn Is On the Roof* can also be said to provide an impious representation of life within the ghetto. It may have been written after the fact, but it possesses the emotional frankness and accusatory power of a ghetto diary.

²² Listed in order of their inclusion within the dissertation, along with the original publication dates.

These texts come from a range of cultural contexts and time periods. As the thesis aims to address general trends established in Holocaust fiction – from the replication of certain defining images to the perceived intangibility and unreachability of the Holocaust dead – it does feature texts written between 1961 and 1998. Similarly, as the focus is on generalised trends and not specific cultural responses to the Holocaust, both European and American authors are featured.

The more contemporary texts which feature are as follows: Steve Stern's *The North of God* (2008), W.G. Sebald's *Austerlitz* (2001), Shalom Auslander's *Hope: A Tragedy* (2012), Pascal Croci's *Auschwitz* (2000), *The Tattooist of Auschwitz* (2018) by Heather Morris and *The Kindly Ones* (2006) by Jonathan Littell. Additionally, Tim Blake Nelson's *The Grey Zone* (2001) also falls into this category.

With the exception of *Austerlitz*, all of these texts are used to discuss the trends of emotional distance and escalating voyeurism.²³ While the desire to inhabit the Holocaust through prosthetic memory has featured in at least one pre-21st century text, the seeming standardisation of this trend has only become apparent in recent years. One text is used specifically to embody this problematic shift in Holocaust fiction: *The Tattooist of Auschwitz*. Having established the existing flaws within this text, and traced their origins back to the other works featured throughout this study, it is then used to emblematised the problems besetting modern Holocaust fiction – becoming the standard against which all other modern texts should be judged.

²³ Despite its relatively late publication date, *Austerlitz* does not demonstrate the voyeuristic impulses demonstrated in the other texts. As such, it is used to demonstrate certain recurring trends in Holocaust fiction. Specifically, it is used with reference to Modiano's text to emphasise the theme of the absent murdered. It illustrates the desire of the second generation to return some semblance of substance/physicality to the Holocaust dead.

Finally, *The Kindly Ones* and *Hope: A Tragedy* represent modern texts which may be deemed valuable, given my established criteria. Their shared focus on bodies is not simply voyeuristic but, as Chapter Four argues, instructive. They provide some level of insight into our present cultural fixation with bodies and, specifically in Auslander's case, critique our potentially unsalvageable emotional and experiential distance from the Holocaust.

The Structure

The thesis features four chapters. Chapter One, 'Holocaust Synecdoche: Surrendering to the Simplifying Impulse', addresses the gradual universalisation of the Holocaust. Chapter Two, 'Second-Generation Fiction and the Legacy of the Hinge Generation', builds on this by discussing the impact of the second generation on Holocaust fiction. Specifically, it highlights the failure of transmission from parent to child and the heightened emphasis on the absent bodies of the victims. Chapter Three, 'Visualising the Holocaust: Landmarks, Photographs and Post-Memory', examines the extreme paucity of images regarding the fictional representation of the Shoah. Finally, Chapter Four, 'Exploring the Limits of Modern Holocaust Fiction: From Fraternity to the Suffering Body', unifies all of the previous arguments by analysing the limitations of modern Holocaust fiction.

Chapter One focuses on three specific examples of Holocaust synecdoche: the Auschwitz tattoo, the cattle car and what Alvin Rosenfeld has referred to as "the desirability of the Mutilated Woman" (1988, p. 164). It does so in order to establish a general overview of our current post-memory of the Shoah – portraying the gradual winnowing down of our knowledge, and the images which have come to define the entirety of our current Holocaust world.

The significance of the Auschwitz tattoo is considered with reference to two texts: *The Book of Questions* and *Eve's Tattoo*. The significance of the cattle car is then established with reference to three separate works of fiction: Lars von Trier's *Europa*, Sebald's *The Emigrants* and Steve Stern's *The North of God*. By analysing the role of the train in post-Holocaust culture, the chapter establishes not only the reductive and synecdochic nature of Holocaust memory but also its increasingly voyeuristic leanings. Apparent in these texts is a desire to view the cattle car interior as a metonymy for the Auschwitz world.

Finally, the chapter considers the blurring of Holocaust violence and sexuality. Using John le Carré's *Call for the Dead*, *The Painted Bird* by Jerzy Kosinski and *The North of God* it explores the existing cultural desire to view the crimes of the Holocaust through an explicitly sexual lens – either through the eroticisation of the female sufferer or the reconceptualization of the Holocaust as a sexual crime.²⁴ The complexity of the Holocaust, this thesis asserts, confounds the modern mind, and so it is often reframed through a more comfortable lens – that of sexual violence or the domination/possession of the survivor.²⁵

Having established this trend of simplification and universalisation, Chapter Two addresses the role of the second generation in shaping our cultural conception of the Shoah. This chapter introduces not only the work of Eva Hoffman, but also Marianne Hirsch – whose concept of post-memory proves vital to all later assertions in this study.²⁶

The first section discusses the failure of transmission, as it is portrayed in Thane Rosenbaum's *Elijah Visible*. In Rosenbaum's text, second generation children inherit only

²⁴ This chapter, it is important to note, contains two texts which do not technically fall into the category of Holocaust fiction. *Europa* and le Carré's *Call for the Dead* do contain Holocaust themes, but they are not Holocaust texts. They are included here in order to illustrate the cultural prevalence of these examples of Holocaust synecdoche. By including them this chapter aims to imply that these images have become cultural standards, even for those not immersed in the world of Shoah commemoration.

²⁵ This trend also features in Chapters Three and Four.

²⁶ The concept of the "hinge generation" and Hirsch's "post-memory" are both detailed in Chapter Two.

the symptoms of their parents' trauma – the Holocaust is therefore both deeply felt and imponderably remote. Section two builds on this established distance from the Shoah by discussing two texts which demonstrate the unreachability and intangibility of the Holocaust dead: Patrick Modiano's *The Search Warrant* and W.G. Sebald's *Austerlitz*. These texts are used not only to illustrate the impossibility of recovery – emphasising our explicitly extermination-oriented conception of the Shoah – but also our increasing cultural focus on the materiality of the Jewish body.

Finally, building upon the established themes of emotional and experiential distance, *Hope: A Tragedy* is used to explore an entirely post-memorial vision of the Shoah. Auslander's text, the chapter contends, serves as a critique of the present – highlighting our ever-diminishing attachment to the Shoah while also positing a nightmarish future in which the Holocaust only exists as a series of empty icons and poorly understood behavioural tics.²⁷

Chapter Three further builds on the theme of distance by examining the role of atrocity imagery in shaping our depiction of the Holocaust.²⁸ The first section of the chapter addresses our continuing reliance on certain landmarks within the Auschwitz camp and the need to revive the power of these commemorative sites by reattaching them to scenes of suffering. It focuses principally on *Schindler's List* and *Triumph of the Spirit*, outlining the manner in which both Spielberg and Young have attempted to revive the power of Auschwitz by recreating scenes of suffering next to its iconic landmarks. It also addresses the impact of The Lili Jacob album on our visual vocabulary of the Holocaust.²⁹

²⁷ Symptoms transmitted from parent to child, but lacking any understanding of the experiential reality of the Shoah.

²⁸ As its critical foundation, this chapter employs the work of Barbie Zelizer and Janina Struk as both have written extensively on the visual representation of the Holocaust.

²⁹ This origins and contents of the Lili Jacob album are fully outlined in Chapter Three.

The second section of this chapter builds on this work by critiquing our limited visual vocabulary for in-camp suffering by discussing the presentation of the Shoah in two texts: Art Spiegelman's *Maus* and Pascal Croci's *Auschwitz*. While Spiegelman demonstrates an understanding of the limitations of Holocaust fiction – and the impossibility of visually capturing the Holocaust past – Croci's approach possesses a certain degree of desperation. Desperate to connect with the suffering of the dead, and to feel something of the atrocity, he not only ventures into the gas chamber but also physicalises, particularises and sexualises the image of the Jewish sufferer.

The final section of the chapter continues this exploration of Holocaust voyeurism and argues for the near impossibility of Holocaust Impiety. Contrasting the approaches to the subject in David Albahari's *Götz and Meyer* and Tim Blake Nelson's *The Grey Zone*, it argues that – as Chapter Two asserts – the Holocaust dead cannot be recovered. In response, modern creators are instead turning towards graphic recreations of Holocaust death.

The final chapter of this study explores the cultural shift towards prosthetic memory and a problematic fixation with the suffering Jewish body. Beginning with Ida Fink's collection of short stories *A Scrap of Time*, it argues that only survivors – or those who lived in close proximity to the events of the Holocaust – can approach the Holocaust dead with a sense of “fraternal” familiarity.³⁰ Fink's fiction, the chapter asserts, can represent the dead impiously. Modern creators, given our entirely post-memorial conception of the Shoah, cannot.

Section two outlines the inherently problematic nature of Heather Morris's *The Tattooist of Auschwitz*. Given that it employs many of the problematic trends established in Chapters One to Three, it emblematises the current issues affecting the fictional presentation of the Holocaust. Not only is Morris's presentation of the Auschwitz camp poorly textured and

³⁰ This term has been borrowed from Jorge Semprún, as is outlined in Chapter Four.

lacking any form of solidifying detail, but she reconceives the Holocaust as an explicitly sexual crime – depicting Holocaust suffering almost exclusively through a series of victimised female bodies.

Finally, the chapter focuses on two texts which explore this cultural preoccupation with the inhabitable sufferer and/or the material reality of Holocaust death: *Hope: A Tragedy* by Auslander and *The Kindly Ones* by Jonathan Littell. Auslander’s text is used to examine our cultural preoccupation with the body of Anne Frank – she is, this thesis asserts, the ultimate facilitator of prosthetic memory. Littell’s text, by contrast, is literally constructed around the image of a corpse.³¹ It represents the concept of the bodily and the material as taken to its logical extreme. As such, it is used to analyse and further critique our modern pre-occupation with the material aspects of Holocaust death.

In contrast with Morris’s text, this thesis suggests, both Auslander and Littell help to elucidate the more problematic trends in Holocaust fiction. They are informative and illustrative as to our own modern biases and limitations when addressing the Holocaust. As such, they may be thought of as “valuable”. In contrast to Eaglestone’s approach, therefore, this thesis asserts that modern Holocaust fiction tends not to illustrate broader truths about the nature of the Holocaust itself, but rather our own present relation to it.

In contrast with the current critical view of the Holocaust, therefore, this thesis argues from a position of representational restraint. Its uniqueness lies not only in the stance that it takes against the relative value of Holocaust fiction but also its opposition to the suggestion that fiction may approach the Holocaust impiously. While Budick suggests that Holocaust fiction no longer needs to justify its own existence, I contend that modern Holocaust fiction

³¹ A photograph of Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya’s body, as Chapter Four outlines, provided the first inspiration for the text. Kosmodemyanskaya was a Soviet partisan, whose corpse has come to exemplify generalised Nazi violence in certain instances in modern media. A lingering shot of her body can also be found in Abel Ferrara’s *The Addiction* (1995) as a totemic stand-in for the evils of the 20th century.

is foundationally problematic. Texts written following the beginning of the 21st century represent the culmination of the last half century's reductive and universalist thinking regarding the Holocaust. While other critics and historians may have highlighted the problematic nature of our Auschwitz-specific conception of the event, I take this assertion further. Specifically, I argue that our Auschwitz-oriented conception of the event will commonly produce texts that are lacking in both contextual detail – as Chapters Three and Four argue, modern fiction struggles to engage with the inner-reality of the camps – and humanity. An Auschwitz-oriented focus, this thesis argues, generally leads to dehumanisation. As we are both unable to connect with the experiential reality of the survivor's experiences within the camp or conceive of the murdered as anything other than distant, quasi-sacred figures, modern Holocaust fiction is severely limited in its approach. As Matthew Boswell and Benn E. Williams suggest, modern Holocaust fiction *should* possess the capacity to approach the Holocaust impiously – specifically, by examining the moral complexity of life in the grey zone. Uniquely, however, I assert that Holocaust fiction is broadly incapable of approaching the Holocaust impiously. At present, fiction frequently approaches the Shoah through the image of the suffering body – specifically, as a means to make the event accessible to a universal audience. We cannot understand the sufferer's psychology, modern fiction suggests, but we can engage with their pain prosthetically. In order to correct this, I contend, fiction must shift away from its fascination with Auschwitz. If we cannot find a way to rehumanise and re-particularise the dead, our understanding of the event will continue to degrade and Holocaust fiction will become effectively worthless – serving only as a means to *feel* something of the Holocaust on a bodily level without understanding it from either a historical or psychological standpoint. In contrast to the current critical consensus, therefore, I argue that modern Holocaust fiction must be regarded with extreme suspicion.

Chapter I: Holocaust Synecdoche: Surrendering to the Simplifying Impulse

This chapter addresses the gradual simplification and universalisation of Holocaust memory. It does this by focusing on three examples of Holocaust synecdoche – three symbols which have come to exemplify the Holocaust in its entirety. These are: the Auschwitz tattoo, the cattle car – and by extension associated representations of the rail system – and the sexualised female sufferer. By establishing our emotional and experiential distance from the events of the Holocaust, along with our increasingly reductive understanding of the events themselves, it establishes the thinking which has come to shape fictional representations of the Shoah. This, then, lays the foundation for the coming chapters. The discussions featured in this chapter are underpinned, additionally, with references to the work of Tim Cole.

In his essay ‘The Social Construction of Moral Universals’, Jeffrey C. Alexander describes the transformation of the Holocaust from a distinctly Jewish event featuring particular human players into what he terms a “trauma-drama” (2009, p. 32). While the Holocaust was initially framed using a progressive narrative in the post-war period, he implies – as the genocide was to be used as a lesson to guide humanity towards a more “progressive and democratic future” (p. 31) – the emphasis gradually shifted towards a narrative focused on destruction. As he puts it: “In this new tragic understanding of the Jewish mass murder, suffering, not progress, became the telos towards which the narrative was aimed” (p. 32). Once the collective cultural emphasis shifted towards a focus on extermination, he goes on to state, the Holocaust began to lose its defining details – the historical and human specificities which once particularised it. Instead, it became a socially constructed universal – or rather, a “tragic narrative of sacred evil” (p. 32) The historical Holocaust, Alexander implies, was a discrete historical event with identifiable victims. Our current conception of the Holocaust, defined by our emotional and experiential distance from

the event, is simply an archetype. As he puts it, in order to undergo this transformation from history into “trauma-drama” the Holocaust had to shed certain elements along the way:

As archetype, the evil evoked an experience of trauma greater than anything that could be defined by religion, race, class, region – indeed any conceivable sociological configuration or historical conjuncture. This transcendental status, this separation from the specifics of any particular time or space, provided the basis for psychological identification on an unprecedented scale. (p. 32)

Our current conception of the Holocaust, therefore, is one in which its inherent Jewishness is de-emphasised. This is largely due to a rebranding of the Holocaust victim as the public at large sought to psychologically and symbolically identify with the victims of the Shoah. This was achieved largely, according to Alexander, through the “personalisation” of the trauma and its characters. As he states: “Rather than depicting the events on a vast historical scale, rather than focusing on... mass movements, organisations, crowds and ideologies, these dramas portrayed the events in terms of small groups, families and friends, parents and children, brothers and sisters” (p. 37). The Jewishness and Judaism of the victims, in short, has the tendency to interrupt our attempts to incorporate the Holocaust into the broader cultural context.³² The vast majority of non-Jewish readers, he claims, need something rather more universal as a way into the tragedy. The current cultural impulse, then, is one of simplification and commodification. We seek an active connection to the Holocaust, but what we receive and perpetuate is a diffuse after-image of the event; one crassly commercialised for the means of easy identification.

According to Alexander, this universalising tendency can be traced back to American attempts to transform Anne Frank into a “universal symbol of suffering and transcendence” (p. 38) in the 1950s. However, the trend was not solidified until 1978. If Anne’s story “laid

³² As Chapter Four discusses, this is exemplified by the representation of Anne Frank in fiction.

the basis for psychological identification and symbolic extension on a mass scale” (p. 40), then the four-part drama *Holocaust* established a new representational norm. From 1978 onward, therefore – according to Alexander – the emphasis in Holocaust fiction shifted away from the specifics of history towards a broader, more accessible, explicitly extermination-oriented conception of the Shoah.³³

This tendency towards simplification has profoundly affected our fictional representation of the Holocaust. Fiction, I contend, perpetuates an Auschwitz-centric, extermination-oriented view of the Holocaust stripped of subtlety and specificity. Auschwitz, specifically, has undergone a gradual simplification through its representation in both commemoration and media. Auschwitz I and Auschwitz II-Birkenau have been fused to create a mythic distortion which features in everything from the filmic representation of Auschwitz – Tim Cole speaks damningly of the Auschwitz featured in *Sophie’s Choice*, for instance, as it presents us with an “amalgam of different places” and “different chronological periods”, in which Sophie may “walk past Block 25 (in Auschwitz-II) on the way to the Commandant’s House (in Auschwitz-I)” (1999, p. 106) – to the active memorialisation of the camp itself. Both the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) and the Auschwitz Museum itself feature simplified, mediated representations of the Auschwitz complex. Both, for instance, give undue emphasis to the gateway sign, and yet we must question its centrality to Holocaust iconography. Though certainly recognizable, it does not necessarily correspond to the historical reality of Auschwitz – particularly when accounting for the prisoners’ actual

³³ This chapter takes the view that, from “the late seventies through the nineties” – what Barbie Zelizer has termed the “Third Memory Wave” (1998, p. 171) – Holocaust memory has been gradually shaped through both cultural commemoration and the representation of the event in media. Holocaust memory, this chapter contends, then calcified in the 1990s. The texts featured in this chapter therefore serve to illustrate the images and representational trends which have endured over the latter half of the 20th century and have come to dominate our current conception of the Holocaust. While the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) is referenced in this chapter, therefore, it has not influenced any of the texts in question – given that it did not open until 1993. Instead, it is used to represent the calcification of Holocaust memory. It embodies the ideas which came to dominate the third wave and, similarly, will impact our future conception of the Holocaust.

experiences of arrival. This is a point with which Tim Cole takes issue, particularly with regard to the artificial narrativisation of the Auschwitz tour:

The tourist's experience of 'Auschwitz-land' starts at the gate proclaiming *Arbeit macht frei*, and ends at the reconstructed Crematorium. It is a manipulated tour which makes claims to authenticity, and yet owes much more to the constructed symbol 'Auschwitz'... an amalgam of the pre-1942 gateway of Auschwitz-I and the post-1942 gas chambers of Auschwitz-II... collapsed together in an attempt to create an authentic tourist experience. (p. 110)³⁴

Though the attempt may have been to simplify for the sake of coherence, this distortion has led in fact to the mythification of the Auschwitz complex. Its physical dimensions have been elided and simplified for the sake of narrative simplicity, as Auschwitz-I is being used to inauthentically represent the horrors of Auschwitz-II. This is further complicated by the use of historical props gathered largely from Auschwitz-II, which bombard the viewer with categorical evidence of mass murder which has, nevertheless, been removed from its original context. Having been taken from Birkenau, it now conjures the idea of the gas chamber and the crematoria impressionistically. This has been made worse as, in their quest for authenticity, the USHMM has borrowed certain items from Auschwitz and shipped them to the US. Now, at an even further remove from the site of mass killing, the notion of Auschwitz has become even more abstract. Both institutions, in short, peddle mediated versions of the concentrationary journey – from arrival to mass slaughter, with borrowed props inviting abstract images of mass killing. This leads to an ever more diluted understanding of the Auschwitz complex and, I contend, the Holocaust in general, as rather than questioning our preconceptions regarding the systematic slaughter of millions, we rely instead on familiar narratives which are repeated and solidified through memorialisation. This chapter examines

³⁴ Cole's term 'Auschwitz-land' will be used frequently throughout the study as a form of shorthand. It refers, as the quotation implies, to the culturally processed vision of the Auschwitz camp. Rather than recalling the site accurately it has become a vague fusion of specific landmarks and associated ideas – such as the *Arbeit*-gate, the Birkenau entrance, the gas chamber, the crematorium and more common evocations of barbed wire and watchtowers.

the extent to which this simplified notion of Holocaust reality has affected our fictional representations of the subject. More particularly, the chapter addresses the notion of Holocaust synecdoche as, rather than representing the subject directly, writers have a tendency to represent it abstractly – choosing one of several key signifiers. This chapter focuses on three instances of Holocaust synecdoche specifically: the Auschwitz tattoo, the cattle car and the Mutilated Woman.³⁵ The first section examines the shifting cultural conception of the Auschwitz tattoo, from a signifying symbol of an internee's personal suffering to something rather more generic and lacking in specificity. While Edmond Jabès's *The Book of Questions* is used to examine the former point, *Eve's Tattoo* by Emily Prager introduces the possibility that the tattoo has experienced a degree of conceptual slippage in recent years – becoming instead the logo for the reconceptualization of the Holocaust. This is then connected with the simplification of Auschwitz, which has been discussed with such clarity by Tim Cole. The second section of the chapter, meanwhile, builds on this notion of simplification – examining the degree to which the cattle car, and by extension the railway itself, has been used to symbolically encompass the nature of the Holocaust. Lars von Trier's *Europa* introduces the notion that the railway does not simply invoke the image of the Holocaust, but rather possesses the potential to transmit its essence across the intervening landscape – effectively carrying the taint of Auschwitz back to the heart of Germany. It is then also used to illustrate the cattle car's capacity to bring the past into the present, in a fashion which is frequently echoed by memorial institutions across the United States. W.G Sebald's *The Emigrants* and Steve Stern's *The North of God* are then used to discuss the concept of representational restraint, using the different museological uses of the boxcar as a point of comparison. Finally, the chapter transitions into a related topic – the train car and

³⁵ While the placing of the Mutilated Woman beside two objects may seem incongruous, this example of synecdoche has been included in order to stress that writers of fiction – survivors and nonwitnesses alike – do tend to brazenly objectify female sufferers. They are rarely allowed to tell their own stories, but rather they are spoken for and eroticised by male observers.

instances of sexual assault having been curiously linked in fictional representations – the image of the sexualised sufferer.³⁶ This section argues that Jewish victims of the Holocaust are frequently portrayed using the same archetype – one of mute passivity. They exist, commonly, as a prop for the narrator – a means to boost their waning masculinity. This section will examine the degree to which fiction has endorsed and perpetuated this image of the suffering Jewish woman as the purest embodiment of victimhood.

The Depreciating Value of the Auschwitz Tattoo

As an enduring and all-encompassing symbol of the Holocaust, the Auschwitz tattoo is arresting in its potency. It has been described as a “marker for evil, theft, murder and power” (Baum, 2010, p. 47) and yet its most immediate and most forceful association is with the Auschwitz complex itself. This is thanks, largely, to the fact the prisoners were exclusively tattooed there. As Rob K. Baum’s quote implies, however, the tattoo also invokes the image of a de-particularised Holocaust. “Evil, theft, murder and power” are singularly vague terms which hint at the broader genocidal process – from arrival to extermination. The tattoo, it seems, is only ever able to conjure the image of the mythic Auschwitz written of by Cole. In her essay describing the enduring cultural significance of the KZ tattoo to Jewish culture at large, Dora Apel provides the specific example of Marina Vainshtein – a young Jewish woman whose body art features all of the visual touchstones commonly associated with the mythic Auschwitz. Apel states:

On her upper back, the central image represents a train transport carrying Jewish prisoners in striped uniforms toward waiting ovens. Smoke billows above the train cars while a swastika, represented in negative space, wafts through the ashes that are spewed forth by the crematorium chimney... Below the train and brick lined ovens, a tattoo represents the

³⁶ Both Steve Stern’s *The North of God* and Jerzy Kosinski’s *The Painted Bird* link instances of sexual excess or sexual violence to the cattle car.

notorious inscription on a number of concentration camp gates, *Arbeit macht frei*. (2001, p. 306)

Without wishing to impugn her life choices, it is possible to say that Marina Vainshtein's tattoo is, quite literally, a living canvas of Holocaust reductionism. It is a pictorial representation of the metaphorical journey taken by tourists at Auschwitz. It is a visual checklist of the landmarks and signifiers which have been culturally entrenched by both the USHMM and the Auschwitz complex, to say nothing of the texts which then perpetuate these images.³⁷ From the *Arbeit Macht Frei* gate, to the images of smoking chimneys and prisoners clad in striped uniforms, this tattoo unreflectively replicates the standard images which have come to define our visual vocabulary of the Shoah. Auschwitz, therefore, has become a series of interlinked symbols. We may, for instance, create an associative link between the Auschwitz tattoo and the associated images of smoke and ash. These images certainly feature in Vainshtein's tattoo and, similarly, they are among the only genuine signifiers of the Holocaust in Edmond Jabès's *The Book of Questions*.

The Book of Questions is defined by its singular evasiveness. A wilfully difficult text which avoids narrative coherence at every turn and imparts little about its central characters, Sarah and Yukel, it chooses to orbit the Holocaust rather than addressing it directly. It is an ardent rejection of 19th-century realism and a moral challenge to those who would seek to represent the events of the Holocaust explicitly. Berel Lang summarises Jabès's approach to the topic as follows:

The enormity of the Nazi genocide against the Jews is evident, goes without saying. Because of this, it cannot be represented with the usual poetic or fictional devices that would... "epitomise" it, exhibit features by which the narrator might more fully imagine or realise it.

³⁷ The landmarks and visual signifiers which define the representation of the Auschwitz camp will be further addressed in Chapter Three.

At best, the writer would here only labour the obvious: what artifices could more fully realise the facts of such events. (2003, p. 105)

For Lang, the nature of the Holocaust will always overwhelm writers of fiction. Fiction cannot hope to enlarge upon the events of the Holocaust, as it represented a series of a previously unfathomable horrors. The writer, as such, cannot expand upon it imaginatively. At best, one can merely represent the raw facts as they transpired, as to expand upon them risks distorting or diluting Holocaust fact with literary figuration. It is because of this that Lang treats Jabès's text as one of the worthier attempts at Holocaust representation. The only way to bypass the moral and conceptual pitfalls of direct representation, according to Lang, is to create a work that is, by definition, anti-representational. Jabès achieves this by explicitly avoiding direct references to the Holocaust, by forsaking a coherent narrative voice and by allowing the subject to speak for itself:

Here, in contrast to intransitive writing, the subject, not the author, is written: in effect the subject writes itself. The narrative voice – so far as we refer at all to what is not quite clearly an anthropomorphism – is the voice of history; the object itself takes over, construing the form and means in addition to the literary content. (p. 108)

According to Lang, therefore, Jabès avoids the editorial embellishment that usually comes with fictional representations by acting essentially as a medium through which Holocaust history can convey itself. There is no attempt to narrativise the events in question. Indeed, the text does not feature a narrative of any kind. Instead, Jabès presents a series of thematically related dialogues from a series of Orthodox Jews. Given its determinedly indirect approach, the text must employ a series of striking images in order to signal its relation to the Holocaust – images which possess the power to invoke the atrocity indirectly.

The coda of the novel can be found in the juxtaposition of two lines. In a conventional narrative, Sarah and Yukel's plight would have been explicitly depicted and their suffering would have been narrativized. Jabès, however, overtly references their lack of inclusion,

having a character state: “You hardly talked about Sarah and Yukel” (1991, p. 122). In response someone, effectively standing in for Jabès himself, replies: “It is the whole truth I wanted to express. And truth is a scream, a stubborn, ineradicable image which pulls us out of our torpor. An image which overwhelms and nauseates us” (p. 122). This functions as Jabès’s meta-commentary on the nature of his project. Sarah and Yukel do not feature as characters as this would limit the scope of the text, rendering it small and partial. One cannot encompass the Holocaust in its entirety if we are limited by the need to narrativise, interpret and reproduce the events of the past. And yet arguably, at this stage in the text, Jabès is still aiming to create a clear associative link with the Holocaust itself. Though Lang claims that Jabès only features a handful of minor references specific to Auschwitz – “The SS man, the number tattooed on an arm, the yellow star” (Lang, 2003, p. 105) – I contend that Jabès lays the groundwork for the coming revelation with earlier, still relatively brazen references to ashes and smoke. We must consider, for instance, the following example: “After the road, /and before the road,/ there are stones/ and ashes scattered on the stones./ The book/ rises out of the fire/ of the prophetic rose,/ from the scream of the sacrificed petals./ Smoke./ Smoke” (Jabès, 1991, pp. 41-42). Those familiar with survivor writing will understand the iconic potency of the word “smoke” in this particular context. It features not only in the writing of Charlotte Delbo and Fania Fénelon, but is also dominates Seweryna Szmaglewska’s account of her time spent in Birkenau.³⁸ Smoke and ashes are natural corollaries when discussing Auschwitz, as one always seems to produce the other. The smoke not only defines, but quite literally permeates every aspect of the camp for Szmaglewska:

³⁸ This image also appears in some of the earliest cultural representations of the Holocaust. Paul Celan’s *Todesfuge*, for instance, includes the lines “then as smoke you will rise into air/ then a grave you will have in the clouds” (1996, p. 65).

In the barracks and among the barracks, under the sky and above the earth, in the movable air, heavy and motionless as a solid body it fills the mouth, the throat, the lungs, it soaks into the clothes, it penetrates the food. From the two nearest crematories, two pillars crawl out in dark billows, hitting straight into the sky and then falling down in spirals. (2001, p. 244)

It is understandable, then, that the notion of smoke over Birkenau recurs time and again in survivor writing. For those fortunate enough to escape the extermination process, it existed as an all-pervasive reminder of its nearness. The slaughter of new arrivals in 1944 became mentally linked with this one all-pervasive by-product. Szmaglewska may not have witnessed their passing, but evidence of it did leach into her clothing and corrupt her food. It choked the living on a near daily basis at times of high intake and so, in their future attempts to recount their time in the camps, it became one of the central ways in which they bore witness. As such, the mention of it here cannot be accidental.

Even with the additional image of “ashes scattered on the stones”, however, there is a certain degree of ambiguity to Jabès’s extract – enough, for instance, to elude Lang. The clearest and most concise piece of evidence comes not in the form of the SS man, therefore, but the tattoo. Though the surrounding text may have been designed to repel easy interpretation, Jabès is certainly clear about the nature of the tattoo: “We both have the number of our expiration tattooed on our forearms” (1991, p. 162). This is then linked associatively with “the ashes of Jews sent to the ovens” (p. 163) on the following page. The juxtaposition of these two images has a clear effect on the reader. The tattoo is connected, permanently and intractably, with the image of Jews being sent to the crematoria. Automatically, this text is not simply concerned with the Holocaust at large, but with Auschwitz as the embodiment of the Nazis’ murderous intent. For all his many stylistic contrivances, and his attempt to avoid the reductive qualities of realism, Jabès has managed only to perpetuate a particular image of the Holocaust – one limited conceptually by its selection of stock images. The tattoo, given its in-built specificity, can only ever bring to

mind the mythic Auschwitz, which has come to dog the majority of modern fiction. This extreme hesitance regarding direct representation, therefore, does have an inbuilt flaw. It relies rather too heavily on what the reader brings to the table. When an author relies entirely on a series of abstractions, the reader is left with only one impression: that there must somehow be truth in synecdoche, that the whole can be adequately encompassed by its parts. The truth of the matter, I contend, is rather different. This synecdochic conceptualisation of the Holocaust has led to its untimely mythification. It has lost, in effect, its historicity and specificity, becoming instead a series of simplistic abstractions. “Auschwitz-land” (Cole, 1999, p. 110), in effect, has become our truth. This has a great deal to do with our present-day methods of commemoration and the extent to which the Holocaust has now been universalised, as Alexander would have it. This inherent tension is illustrated in *Eve’s Tattoo* by Emily Prager. If Jabès’s text illustrates the transformation of the historical Holocaust into a small series of interlinked images – a mythic distortion which stands in for the event itself – then Prager’s text illustrates the natural end point of this conceptual distancing. In Jabès’s text the tattoo may hint at a distorted vision of the Holocaust but it is still worn by a survivor, which anchors it to the past and lends it a sense of historical legitimacy. Prager’s text, by contrast, explores the relative signifying power of the tattoo when it has been removed from its original source. The tattoo does not, this chapter asserts, possess the same power when it is worn by a nonwitness.

Before addressing Prager’s text, however, I must first outline the work of Daniel Brouwer and Linda Horwitz and their beliefs concerning the cultural value of the “progenic” tattoo.³⁹

The Auschwitz tattoo, they contend, has not merely lost its sense of specificity but rather it

³⁹ While Prager’s text predates this trend, which seems to have risen to prominence in the 2000s, it is useful to consider the differences between Eve’s tattoo and those worn by the grandchildren of survivors. Eve’s tattoo, this chapter argues, is more abstractly symbolic as it does not represent part of her cultural inheritance. It does not represent sincere memorialisation, but rather an attempt to rebrand a specifically Jewish tragedy.

has become, in recent years, a tool to be used in the “resignification” (Brouwer & Horwitz, 2015, p. 545) of the Holocaust. Detached from its original bearer, it has been transformed into an abstract symbol – representing the post-memorial Holocaust rather than serving as proof of a lived experience. This “progenic” tattooing, most frequently worn by the grandchildren of survivors, has come to typify the commemoration *and* mythical distortion of the Holocaust. They, after all, are not survivors and so their understanding of the Shoah is dependent on media and other commemorative sources. Brouwer and Horwitz explain:

in this case resignification works through a combination of the tactical retention of some prior meanings and active denial of another... on progeny’s bodies, they index not their lived experience of the Holocaust but the fact of the Holocaust, and they index not the wearer’s ability to recall directly but to recall their mediated memories of the Holocaust through “imaginative investment, projection and creation... at a generational remove (p. 545).

The progenic tattoo, then, exists as a distortion of the original. Whereas the survivor’s tattoo spoke of lived experience and genuine trauma, as well as the capacity to add productively to our collective knowledge about the Holocaust, the progenic tattoo speaks only of mediated memories. In this extract, Brouwer and Horwitz even invoke Marianne Hirsch’s concept of postmemory – a concept which will be further outlined in Chapter Two – as they speak of the nonwitness’s “generational remove” from the events of the Shoah. Their vision of the Holocaust is entirely mediated, Brouwer and Horwitz imply, relying on filtered cultural representations of the Holocaust. It may therefore be implied that the bearer of the progenic tattoo contributes nothing to our understanding of the events in question, beyond their own filtered, indirect, poorly substantiated understanding of the Shoah – one no doubt tainted by decades of standardised memorialisation and filmic reproduction.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ While this statement may seem unduly harsh, the concept of the failed transmission of trauma will be detailed in the following chapter. This dissertation explores the notion that – given the impossibility of transmitting suffering from the parent to the child – the second and third generations are only able to access their relatives’ suffering through mediated representations of the Holocaust.

The progenic tattoo, therefore, has created a level of problematic distance between the original bearers' lived experiences of the Shoah and their grandchildren's attempt to connect to this unreachable Holocaust past. The progenic tattoo's power, therefore, rests only in its capacity to speak to an experience that the third generation cannot understand. It signals the entirely mediated nature of their understanding of the Shoah and yet, at the same time, it also serves to commemorate their grandparents' actual suffering. After all, the tattoo does still serve to commemorate its original wearer, to whom these children have an emotional connection. The Holocaust is their generational inheritance – albeit one they cannot understand or touch. *Eve's Tattoo* explores what happens when this link back to an original survivor is lost. The Holocaust past is not an inherited legacy but rather it becomes an assumed identity.

Eve's Tattoo focuses on a New York-based writer who, on the morning of her 40th birthday, decides to have the number of an Auschwitz prisoner tattooed onto her left forearm. While, at first, this seems to be a response to her general lack of fulfilment – her 40th birthday having acted as an emotional spur – the tattoo also has two other implications. Firstly, Eve wishes to use it to shock her friends out of their early-90s complacency – it is used as a rebuke against the comfort and apathy of the period – and, subconsciously, she also wishes to seize the Holocaust from her Jewish boyfriend. As a closeted anti-Semite, she wishes to possess this uniquely Jewish event and wear it as her own, essentially disempowering his Jewish heritage. In order to do this, however, she must de-particularise and universalise the tattoo's meaning.⁴¹

Initially, Eve describes her vision of the tattoo as follows: “To me, this tattoo is about the fate of women” (Prager, 1993, p. 12). Already, then, the tattoo exists as a disembodied

⁴¹ Eve's tattoo, it is important to note, has been borrowed from a woman in a photograph. However, as Eve knows nothing about her history – and she is blonde, like Eve herself – she is able to project various identities onto this nameless victim.

marker – a means to make a broader point about the Holocaust, rather than denoting the suffering of a specific internee. Though this sentiment serves, throughout the text, as Eve’s personal self-justification for her aggressive use of the tattoo, her intent is not really to educate others about the fate of women. Her intent is to project her own rebranded, de-Judaised interpretation of the events of the Shoah while simultaneously seeking her own way into the events of the Holocaust – her own non-Jewish claim to victim status. Echoing Alexander’s theory of universalisation, Eve is looking for a means to strip the Holocaust of its particularities in order to make it more accessible. It cannot be an inherently Jewish drama and, in her view, sufferers cannot possess their own distinct identities. They are, instead, supposed to stand only as inhabitable shells.⁴²

Before discussing Eve’s own personal attempt at symbolic identification, I must first discuss *how* her particular interpretation of the Holocaust is being disseminated. In seeking to memorialise it in her own way, to act as the mouth-piece for its non-Jewish rebranding, Eve seems to understand that the one unchangeable element in the telling of Holocaust-themed narratives is the basic format – the “trauma-drama” with extermination as its end point and telos. This effectively embodies Alexander’s theory of universalisation. As he puts it: “The quality of compulsively returning to the trauma-drama gave the story of the Holocaust a mythical status that transformed it into the archetypal sacred-evil of our time” (2009, p. 34). Not only has Eve internalised the broader format of the trauma-drama – all of her stories follow the standardised memorial narrative of establishing preface, deportation and extermination – but she also adopted the secular sacralisation of the Holocaust as well. Each time she tells a story she expects, and the tattoo commands, a period of awed reverence following the revelation of each character’s stock death in Auschwitz. This is perhaps best illustrated by her second attempt at “enlightenment”: “Eva died of typhus in Auschwitz soon

⁴² While this theme will recur throughout the dissertation, it is discussed in detail in Chapter Four.

after her arrival... Eve lowered her eyes to indicate she was done and silence reigned” (Prager, 1993, p. 41). It is this final performative indulgence that rings hollow for the reader, particularly when we begin to understand precisely how Eve interprets the Holocaust in its entirety. She has clearly internalised a mythic version of Auschwitz, an incarnation stripped of any complexity or structural specificity. She understands it simply as the logical endpoint of the Holocaust narrative, the point from which all meaning emanates – everything must be tragic and anti-redemptive. This is because, quite simply, Eve conceives of the Holocaust as something indefinably sacred. She knows that one is supposed to bow one’s head reverentially at the end of a story, because the enormity of the Holocaust as the “archetypal sacred-evil of our time” (Alexander, 2009, p. 34) demands it.⁴³ And yet, Eve’s Holocaust is broadly an imaginative one – it is a trauma without concrete victimhood, fuelled by imaginative overinvestment. We receive solid proof of this in Eve’s one encounter with an actual survivor, named Jacob Schlaren. In response to the question “How do you feel?”, Eve replies with the following: “Ashamed to talk to you. You experienced it. I’m humbled in your presence” (Prager, 1993, p. 145). There is something disturbingly unreflective about Eve’s exaggerated display of reverence. This is simply another instance of the survivor as secular saint – a by-product of the mythification of the Holocaust – as Eve, once again, knows none of the specifics. It is here that Prager uses Schlaren to illustrate the difference between the mediated Holocaust, as Eve understands it, and the lived one. Their tattoos are placed in explicit contrast with one another. After rubbing her arm to see if the mark is permanent, he responds with the following: “So... you came to the camp in ‘forty-four about when Primo Levi came. Late in de war. Perhaps that’s how you survived” (p. 144). Here we have a detail-oriented, specifically Jewish, entirely historical understanding of the Holocaust

⁴³ Eve is, in effect, weaponizing the concept of Holocaust Piety, as she is counting on her listeners to lapse into the appropriate response – an unreflective sentimentality which is founded on a depthless understanding of the Holocaust.

placed in contrast with one driven by fantasy and supposition. Eve's tattoo corresponds not with one fixed history but with six reductive, imaginative Evas, each having been designed to embody another aspect of an explicitly female and rarely Jewish vision of Holocaust. Actual details, such as the corresponding link between the number itself and the period of arrival, are antithetical to Eve's understanding of the Holocaust. Eve, after all, is a product of the culture of memorialisation. Just as is the case in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, in Eve's Holocaust individual stories have been "submerged in favour of the grand narrative" (Linenthal, 1997, p. 189). Though in the strictest possible sense Eve is attempting to tell the story of six individuals – Klein, Hoffler, Berg, Merlo, Beck and Hertz – these fictional inventions do not represent a particularised, factual vision of the Holocaust. Instead, each one represents another contrivance, another carefully calibrated *character* designed to foster easy identification for the listening audience. This is facilitated by the tattoo's lack of fixed ownership, and its value only as an icon of the departicularised Holocaust. Its meaning can therefore vary depending on the needs of the listener. Eva Hertz, given that the audience for this particular story is a pair of Carmelite nuns, is presented as a Maximillian Kolbe-esque martyr – "shot for conducting a layman's mass on Christmas day" (Prager, 1993, p. 174). Meanwhile, in the veterinary office, Eva Beck becomes a rescuer of Jewish animals scheduled for euthanasia. After being sent to Auschwitz she dies doing hard labour in 1942. In both of these instances there is a clear element of contrivance. These are not three-dimensional, vital characters. They are half-hearted non-Jewish archetypes designed to tug at the heartstrings of each listening audience and to foster their symbolic identification through a vague web of shared traits.

Eve's clear intent is not education, but the desire to forge a non-Jewish connection to the Holocaust. This is epitomised in the story of Eva Merlo, a German Red Cross nurse forced into a cattle car by a member of the SS after attempting to help the Jews mid-transport. Eve

then goes on to describe her fate as follows: “Attempts were made to free her. But the papers got lost in the bureaucracy of the camp, and so did Eva. She was gassed by mistake at Auschwitz three months later” (p. 91). Eve, therefore, has imaginatively created a scenario in which a non-Jew is gassed, expanding the remit for a particularly Jewish fate and – in doing so – securing her own right to share in the Holocaust.

It is important to note that the Auschwitz tattoo, in all of the above instances, is only ever able to conjure a vision of the mythic Auschwitz. There is a profound lack of detail, in each and every performance, when Eve finally reaches the Auschwitz portion of the narrative. It functions, simply, as a performative punchline. It is the portion of the story which links, explicitly, the institution of Auschwitz to its embodying tattoo. As such, with every new improvisation, Eve is further cementing the notion that the tattoo implies only this vaguely defined vision of Auschwitz. The tattoo has become the logo for the myth, while also serving as an emotional trigger. Once its meaning has been established for the audience – the link to the mythic Auschwitz having been explained through reference to an imaginary Eva – the tattoo then triggers the audience’s learned, respectful silence. In essence, therefore, the tattoo has come to act as the logo for Eve’s rebranding of Holocaust history. Proof of this can be found in one explicit instance which carefully outlines the role of the tattoo. Immediately following her first performance – the story of Eva Klein, the one unambiguous Jew – Eve describes the effect her prop tattoo has had on her audience:

The tattoo was perfect and terrible. She was pleased with its effect on the dinner party. Eva Klein has been the right choice. Even Benny Slinky has been visibly moved... Everyone had identified. For a few minutes the tattoo had jolted them from the lethe of middle-class life and they suddenly looked not sophisticated or cynical, not fed up or bored... just human, exposed.

(p. 29)

Frustrated with the apathy which seemed to dominate life in the upper-echelons of the middle-class in the fiction of the 1990s, she uses the tattoo to shock people out of their

bourgeois boredom by forcing them into a moment of “pious” reflection – to borrow Gillian Rose’s term.⁴⁴ Again, Eve’s vision may be defined as traditionally pious as it represents a singularly depthless vision of the Holocaust which remains committed to the notion of ineffability. For her, it is a poorly understood tragedy packed full of hollow players – figures she can prosthetically wear and inhabit when she needs an emotional kick. When the end goal is engagement rather than learning, identification rather than understanding, the tattoo transmits only a distortion of historical fact. Eve’s sanitised reinterpretation of the Holocaust echoes the culturally produced vision of the Shoah critiqued by Alexander and Cole. Her understanding of the events has been culturally limited through memorial repetition and fictional reproductions, and so she is only able to pass on her inherited understanding of the Holocaust – the brand at the centre of the Shoah Business.

Prager’s text, therefore, hints at the prospect of a singularly worrying future regarding Holocaust knowledge. Her text implies that, following the death of the survivor generation, Holocaust knowledge will become entirely post-memorial in nature and, consequently, will become a shallow distortion of the event almost entirely removed from the experiential and historical reality of the Shoah. This concern becomes particularly relevant as our culture moves into what Brouwer and Horwitz have termed the “fourth generation” of Holocaust commemoration. This is building on the work of Barbie Zelizer, who defined the nature of the three existing stages. While phase one constitutes the information gathering process immediately following the liberation of the camps, and phase two relates to the period of selective amnesia that lasted from 1945 until the trial of Eichmann, phase three would seem to encompass our current age of commemoration. Spanning from the “1970s to the present”, Brouwer and Horwitz define this Third Wave as follows:

⁴⁴ The term “pious” relates specifically to Rose’s concept of “Holocaust piety” (Rose, 1996, p. 41).

“memorialization took shape as a concerted undertaking, the Holocaust newly established both as an academic subject and in more popular cultural representations.” In this third wave, official memorials, monuments, and museums have proliferated, and survivors have shared their stories in overwhelming numbers in person and across a wide range of media productions.

(Brouwer & Horwitz, 2015, p. 541)

This third phase, then, marks the period of memorialisation – the point in time in which the Holocaust lost its solidity and specificity as a factual event, and the fictional and commemorative began to take precedence. While the presence of living survivors provided a much-needed counterpoint to the ever-broadening redefinition of the Holocaust – from the creeping Aryanisation of Anne Frank to the aesthetic distortions of the *Holocaust* miniseries – there are now very few living survivors to distinguish fact from fiction. This encompasses the nature of the fourth phase:

In the fourth wave, whose commencement we are temporalizing in relation to the death of all Holocaust survivors, all testimony will be in the form of secondary, mediated texts—the photographs, writings, and recorded stories of survivors but not their living, enfolded, co-present testimony. (p. 543)

I contend that *Eve's Tattoo*, for all its creative shortcomings, forecasts and provides a satirical mascot for the fourth wave of Holocaust commemoration. It unwittingly predicts the problematic trends which will come to dog all future attempts to represent the reality of the Holocaust in fiction. Eve wishes to engage with the Holocaust past, but in order to do so she must shape a series of prosthetic identities – poorly defined characters that she may live in temporarily in order to experience their suffering. While Prager could not possibly have taken influence from Alison Landsberg's theory of “prosthetic memory”, Eve's bodily engagement with Holocaust suffering does mirror the prosthetic engagement with filmic

suffering which Landsberg describes in her text. Prager has therefore unknowingly predicted our present fascination with the suffering body.⁴⁵

The tattoo captures the gradual dilution of the historical Holocaust over time. Its cultural evolution charts its progress from a unique identifier attached to a living survivor, to a totemic image used to embody the vague concept of mass extermination and finally its use as simply a behavioural trigger. In Prager's text, the tattoo has become a depthless icon – a sign designed to trigger a pious response in Eve's listening audience. Eve's tattoo has power, but it is a non-specific power. Her Holocaust is entirely ineffable as her characters are depthless and psychologically unapproachable. Eve's listeners are not remembering the Holocaust dead, or experiencing a felt connection back to the Shoah; instead, they are recalling the *Holocaust* miniseries or other culturally cemented visions of the Holocaust.

As a form of Holocaust synecdoche, however, the tattoo is a relatively abstract symbol. It may contain within it evocations of the extermination process, but these are indirect. By contrast, the cattle car is often used as a more direct form of shorthand for those wishing to invoke death in the gas chamber indirectly, as it has come to symbolise the driving force behind the Nazi push towards industrial mass murder. As Oren Baruch Stier puts it:

trains are some of the most significant and recurring symbols of the Holocaust, for they represent a turning point in the destruction of European Jewry. Deportation via railway marked a systemic shift from mobile murderers and stationary victims to stationary murderers and mobile victims. (2005, p. 83)

The railcar, therefore, presents those looking to memorialise the Holocaust with a clear symbolic link to the gas chamber – a synecdochic icon which is able to hint at its existence without having to risk its direct representation. Both Auschwitz and the United States Memorial Museum, after all, have standardised the experience of the deportee – creating a

⁴⁵ Chapter Four of this dissertation addresses Landsberg's theory in more detail.

direct linkage between the train, as the universal method of transportation, and the crematorium. Moreover the train car is not simply a corollary of the killing process, but rather it is able to conjure Auschwitz in absentia – to remind us, through osmosis, of the selection process, which narratively leads back to the gas chamber. In short, it is the most prevalent and culturally recognisable item of Holocaust synecdoche which exists today.

The Many Facets of the Cattle Car

As Jabès illustrated, historical uses of synecdoche pivoted around a core of unsayability. As was noted in the Introduction, few now subscribe to this notion that the Holocaust is an inherently unrepresentable subject. The overwhelming majority of texts attempting to represent the horrors of the Holocaust, even those which may be deemed gratuitous, do adhere to one abiding principle, however: that one must stop at the periphery of the gas chamber. The core of unsayability is not gone, therefore, but rather it has narrowed. Auschwitz has come to define our current cultural conception of the Holocaust because, as Tim Cole notes: “Unlike the camps in the West, Auschwitz had been the site of mass killing by gas, and thus its gas chambers became the centre of the ‘Holocaust’ world” (1999, p. 101). This represents only a partial truth, as it neglects entirely the 1.6 million killed at Treblinka, Chelmo, Belzec and Sobibor. As few survived these camps, and only Auschwitz and Majdanek still remained relatively intact at the end of the Second World War, they have not been centralised in either Polish or American commemorative culture. Treblinka exists within the prevailing American narrative, for instance, as an evidentiary aside, as both the Washington Memorial Museum and the Florida Holocaust Museum feature train tracks from Treblinka as part of their exhibit. The cattle car, however, has been generally linked to Auschwitz contextually, given the relative abundance of evidence which survived from that camp specifically. As Linenthal describes it:

after visitors walk through the railcar on the third floor, to their right are extraordinarily painful photographs, taken by a member of the SS in May 1944, of Jews transported from Hungary standing on the ramp at Auschwitz, most of them destined for immediate murder in the gas chambers. Two brothers, dressed alike in matching coats and caps, fear etched on their faces, gaze at the camera, into the eyes of the visitors. (1997, p. 174)

The cattle car, then, does not supply its own evidentiary value. Having walked through the railcar, which itself fosters symbolic identification – a moment of empathetic unease in which one imagines one’s own potential confinement – the visitor is immediately bombarded with pictures depicting the unloading of new Hungarian arrivals in 1944.⁴⁶ As Linenthal’s language implies, these pictures do not simply foster identification. Instead, they seem to prompt a degree of emotional over-investment. In describing the picture of the two boys – which he then goes on to display, as if to stress its universal potency – Linenthal speaks evocatively of the “fear etched on their faces”. This is loaded language, which tells the reader only that this particular image has punctured his reserve – that more than any other it has brought the Holocaust home to him. As such, the railcar – which should encompass a multitude of sins – has been linked very specifically to the crimes committed in Auschwitz. The scope of the cattle car as a symbolic item has not simply been narrowed, but it has been standardised and solidified by the associative evidence provided by the Memorial Museum. When we think of the cattle car, we must bring to mind the ramp at Auschwitz. We may even find evidence of this, it seems, in the supposedly neutral Hall of Remembrance, which marks the end of the tour in the Memorial Museum:

at the end of the tour visitors are allowed to walk into an exhibit area that brings back a sense of reassurance and reverence, the 70-foot-high hexagonal Hall of Remembrance... This room is meant to be a space for quiet contemplation, but you are still surrounded by steel-braced

⁴⁶ Their extermination, while obviously unrepresented, is clearly implied.

walls inviting you to recall the crematoria, and a “V-shaped ramp evoking the railway sidings at Auschwitz” (Hasian, 2004, p. 82)

These architectural details are able to recall the mythic Holocaust – the established narrative framed around the cattle car and the death camp – without actually representing either of these images literally. Not only can the mythic vision of the Holocaust be invoked through the image of the V-shaped ramp, but also the tracks themselves can be viewed as an arterial link which carries the essential essence of the Shoah all the way from the unloading ramps back to the very heart of post-war Germany – infecting every portion of track in-between with an unusual potency. This becomes particularly evident when we try to decode the role of Zentropa, the fictional stand-in for the *Deutsche Reichsbahn*, in Lars von Trier’s *Europa*.

The film’s foreground and background details were generally filmed separately. As such, the principal actors – the characters existing in post-war Frankfurt – often find their image directly juxtaposed with footage filmed in Chojna, Zachodniopomorskie. Given the setting of the film, it is only fair to presume that the inclusion of footage from Poland – including the use of a genuine pre-war traincar on Polish tracks – is another deliberate detail, adding literal subtext to the frame.



Figure 1: A frame illustrating the use of layering in “Europa”. While the foreground material was recorded in Germany, the background had been captured in Poland.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ All images sourced from: von Trier, L. (Director). (1991). *Europa* [Motion Picture] [DVD]. France: Opening Distribution. (2009)

In Figure 1, for instance, we see the moment prior to the introduction of the sleeping car which will prove central to the plot of the film. Here we have the deliberate inclusion of the German foreground and the Polish background. In overlaying these two images, von Trier visually depicts the simplified deportation journey which has now become part of our established conception of the Shoah.⁴⁸ In this one frame, he manages to link the German railcar – and by extension, those linked associatively with the industry – back to Polish soil and, more crucially, Polish rails. In doing so he has visually elided the link between the *Deutsche Reichsbahn* and the concentration camp. The Holocaust exists subtextually in this image, lurking in the background of the frame. The subtitles for the scene, specifically the use of the phrase “human transportation”, then add additional context. In light of the fact that the majority of named or featured passengers on the sleeper car happen to be Jewish – namely the newly appointed Mayor Ravenstein and the characters identified simply as “Jewish Man” and “Jewish Wife” – the phrase “human transportation”, with its unsettlingly euphemistic connotations cannot help but invoke the Holocaust past. In this text the Shoah still has the capacity to haunt the present.

The presence of post-war Jews returning to their homes affirms this, as their initial deportation is passively hinted at here. Trains previously carried these individuals away from their homes and now they are returning to a land which is still brimming with Nazi sympathies. The Nazi past, as the film illustrates, is still palpably present in many ways – often lurking in the literal background of the frame.

This idea is literalised in the sequence in which Maximilian Hartmann, a former railway magnate, is forced by his American ally to sign de-Nazification papers. A Jewish individual is brought into his home in order to corroborate an invented story – one designed to pacify

⁴⁸ The USHMM, as was noted above, links the rail car to the idea of extermination. This is also the same simplistic conception of events captured in Marina Vainshtein’s tattoo, as was outlined in the previous section.

the American authorities. Maximillian's mindset during this process is aptly illustrated by the contrast between the background and the foreground of the image. The frame shifts from a shot of him standing before his window to an image of him standing in front of



*Figure 2:
Maximillian stands
in front of a rear-
projection of
window. The
industrial structure
visible behind him is
a raised rail track
running past his
home.*



*Figure 3: A rear-
projection of the
de-Nazification
questionnaire.*

the de-Nazification questionnaire itself. This then fades away to be replaced with the image of a train slowly creeping into the shot from the upper-left hand corner. Again, all of the crucial details exist in the background, which frequently seems to embody those elements suppressed by the post-war German consciousness. The Holocaust is always present. By linking the images of the questionnaire and the train car, von Trier has linked the two associatively. This visual association allows the film to emphasise the falsity of the document, while also signifying that the root cause of Maximilian's culpability lies in the

German transport system. Though never stating it explicitly, the film once again draws a distinct visual parallel between the railcar and Nazi guilt. The slow creep of the train, passing by on an elevated platform beyond the Hartmanns' window, seems to highlight its insinuating power. Maximillian's culpability cannot be denied, as the railway will always provide an inextricable link back to the concentration camp.

This is by no means von Trier's most graphic evocation of the Holocaust, however, as the film seeks to wrench the Shoah out of the unconscious and into the light – or out of the background and into the foreground. Having been continuously prompted by the unseen narrator to “go deeper” – the whole film being narrativised as a hypnotic journey into the heart of “Europa”, with the Holocaust serving as the conceptual core of the European experience – Kessler is told to explore the unseen recesses of the sleeper car. As the narrator puts it: “You are being led through the train. You are led through carriages you never knew existed” (von Trier, 1991, 56:02). One of the carriages that he passes through depicts a scene which will be immediately recognisable to anyone familiar with those liberation pictures which sought to represent the horror of the camps. The brief glimpse of gaunt men, partially clad in prison stripers and occupying bunks immediately brings to mind every photograph which attempted to represent the interior-reality of Dachau, Ebensee or Buchenwald.⁴⁹ All feature roughly the same visual details, from the positions of the men to their nearly uniform expressions – all facing the camera with a mixture of apathy and agony, while some sit and some stand to better display their malnourished bodies. They all represent

⁴⁹ Ebensee may seem a comparatively uncommon choice, given its relative obscurity. Though it was only a subcamp of Mauthausen, the images recorded during its liberation have become emblematic of the types of photographs captured during the liberation process. Barbie Zelizer, for instance, uses a picture captured in Ebensee on May 7th, 1945 to exemplify the trend of photographing “small groups of survivors” (1998, p. 160).



Figure 4: One of the unexplored compartments on Kessler's sleeper car.



Figure 5: Photograph #78358, taken from the visual archive of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Photographer J Malan Heslop, taken May 08, 1945. (Source: <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/pa9114>)

an homogenised and barely distinguishable vision, which speaks generally of Holocaust suffering. One cannot, for instance, discern which might represent Buchenwald and which might represent Ebensee on first glance.⁵⁰ Given the content of the scene, then, and the arrangement and appearance of the actors, it seems clear that von Trier is trying to bring to mind the concentration camp.⁵¹ The similarities between Figures 4 and 5, for instance, are striking – with one appearing to mirror the other. This represents an attempt to bring to life the post-war atrocity image. While the previous scenes have merely insinuated the railcar’s relation to the Holocaust past, this sequence has brought the concentration camp space into the present. This is the sin at the heart of Germany’s national consciousness which the film’s characters have conspicuously tried to ignore. It may not be relegated to the Nazi past but lingers on through its enduring connection to the railway. According to this logic, therefore, this association may never fade with time. The railway will always carry the taint of Europe’s Holocaust history.

Looking at the sequence from another standpoint, however, it may also be said that von Trier has inadvertently mimicked a common commemorative use for the cattle car. In certain memorial sites, such as the Dallas Holocaust Memorial Centre, the cattle car is used as a device to transition from our everyday reality in the Holocaust past:

because boxcars, as the primary vehicles of deportation, served as initiations into the logic of the Nazi “Final Solution”... its emplacement suggested that one must pass through this space to understand the events represented inside. The DHMC privileged this symbolic, initiatory space over an alternative narrative of deportation. (Stier, 2005, p. 85)

⁵⁰ The visual similarities which seemed to define the vast majority of post-liberation images will be further discussed in Chapter Three. It is Barbie Zelizer’s contention that, through their poor attribution and general visual similarities, these post-liberation pictures presented a visually non-descript account of the atrocity. One camp could not be distinguished from another visually, meaning the whole atrocity could be defined by a handful of like images.

⁵¹ By replicating these images, he has literalised the railway’s connection to the concentration camp.

Just as visitors to the Dallas Memorial Centre must first pass through the boxcar in order to process the reality of the Holocaust, Kessler is made to walk through a similarly symbolic boxcar which has effectively compressed the reality of the concentrationary universe into one small space. For the viewer, at least, the synecdochic value of the boxcar is clear: as a cultural symbol, it is inextricably linked to the extermination process. In this instance, the train car is not simply facilitating the Holocaust but quite literally housing it, creating a rare example of visual synecdoche in which the signifier literally contains the thing it is trying to abstractly signify. This is where the profound lack of specificity in the image of the internees comes back into play as, once again, it can quite literally embody the whole of the Holocaust – representing, as it does, undifferentiated suffering.

Von Trier's film functions as a study of the synecdochic potency of the boxcar. As is the case in the three American memorial institutions which use the boxcar as a commemorative centrepiece – those centres in Washington, Dallas and Florida – von Trier conceptualises the train car as both a point of transition – the point at which one is induced into the nightmarish logic of the Holocaust – and as a free-standing invocation of Auschwitz.

Having already established the broader symbolic view of the boxcar, there is one more facet which must be addressed: the notion that the cattle car can be used to embody the debate regarding restraint versus representation. Traditionally, it has been used to embody the distant Holocaust, as in Aaron Appelfeld's *Badenheim, 1939* (1979) or Helmut's story within Rachel Seiffert's *The Dark Room* (2001). However, it can also be used to foster identification with the suffering victim or to indulge certain representational excesses – specifically manifesting, as will shortly be detailed, in an unhealthy fixation with the grim reality of confinement. Evidence of this can be seen in both the commemorative uses of the cattle car and in its use in fiction.

Ideologically speaking, one may construe the sealed boxcar as representing the purest form of ideological restraint. This certainly seems to align with Oren Baruch Stier's interpretation of the boxcar display in the Florida Holocaust Museum:

Because the railway car in St. Petersburg is closed, it suggests a distinct representational scheme. It preserves its mysterious quality, requiring visitors to supplement what they see of the car's outside with mental images of the experiences of those who have seen its inside or, rather, the inside of boxcars like it. Keeping the car closed thus preserves its "sanctity," since no one is allowed to violate its inner space... Presenting the inside of the car as "off-limits" suggests that at least some of the Holocaust is off-limits too. (2005, p. 95)

The statement, then, posits that there are two commemorative modes when representing the Holocaust: respectful distance and voyeuristic excess. To focus on the interior of the boxcar, according to this line of reasoning, is to invite imaginative overinvestment – the underlying assumption being that to represent the horrors of the actual deportation journey is either ethically dubious or artistically redundant, given the inability of the author to exceed the details of reality. The sealed boxcar, on the other hand, infers that certain aspects are beyond the ethical limits of worthwhile commemoration.⁵² Fiction faces precisely the same representational quandary, as while some choose to maintain a reverential distance from the events, others choose to fully inhabit the cattle car interior. While their foundational elements bear a striking resemblance to one another at times, W.G. Sebald's *The Emigrants* and Steve Stern's *The North of God* approach the matter of representation from entirely different viewpoints. While Sebald opts for marked restraint, Stern chooses to wallow in the excremental excesses of the deportation journey. Beginning with Sebald, the train, and by extension the deportation journey, exist as a persistent undercurrent throughout Paul

⁵² While still bringing to mind an abstract, extermination-oriented conception of the Holocaust. It simply approaches the same subject from a position of ineffability. The horrors of the Holocaust cannot be understood and must not be represented.

Bereyter's story. Though Paul did not experience deportation directly, having instead served for six years in the motorized artillery, we can see elements of it creeping into his subconscious. His post-war claustrophobia, which frequently manifests in the form of violent outbursts towards his pupils, can be traced directly to the reflexive hatred that he harbours for the Aryan townspeople. Though "he always held affection" (Sebald, 2002, p. 43) for the children, and he was additionally keen to stress this, the feeling of confinement prompted "an utterly groundless violence in him on more than one occasion" (p. 44). This violent response is only "groundless" in the purely immediate, situational sense. His students have not actually done anything to prompt it in the present moment. Instead, this sense of confinement has created a cognitive link back to the image of the train car which bore his lover Helen Hollaender "probably to Theresienstadt" (p. 50).

Sebald's direct references to the train system are deliberately minimal. Beyond the explicit reference to the "special train" which conveyed Helen to her untimely death, there is only one other extract which helps to contextualise Paul's suicide. When trying to rationalise his death, Mme Landau notes the following:

I soon realised, it was for Paul a perfectly logical step. Railways had always meant a great deal to him – perhaps he felt they were headed for death. Timetables and directories, all the logistics of railways, had at times become an obsession with him. (p. 61)

In a story driven entirely by the unspoken, this is the most explicit justification given for Paul's death. The phrase "perhaps he felt they were headed for death" once again reminds the reader of the deportation process and its inferred destination – with Theresienstadt existing only as a transitional camp. What is of more significance is the imagined ultimate destination – here a nebulous death in the concentrationary system. Moreover, the culpability of the German populace at large, or rather those responsible for the running of the railway, is invoked through the reference to "timetables and directories". Echoing *Europa*, the distance between Auschwitz and the armchair executioners in Germany is being deliberately

elided. Responsibility for the Holocaust always manages to trace its way back along the line, seeking out those who facilitated the mass deportation of Europe's Jewry.⁵³

Both texts, therefore, assume that the responsibility for Holocaust death cannot stop at the camp gates. Instead, it can be traced back to the very heart of German industry, with civilians indirectly facilitating the slaughter of millions. Paul's suicide, therefore, can only be viewed as a symbolic extension of this notion. He kills himself on the rails because they synecdochically epitomise the Holocaust in its entirety and Jewish death specifically. Feeling, potentially, that the Shoah somehow passed him by – that, like George Steiner, he survived on the basis of a technicality – he seeks to redress the balance by dying on the rails.

While Sebald represents the boxcar exclusively from the outside, representing a completely pious and therefore distant approach, Steve Stern almost seems to revel in its interior. While the cattle car serves mainly as a framing device, a justification for Velvl Spfarb's bizarrely coprophilic Jewish folktale, the description of the space itself is always pointedly excessive. Having made note of the loss of personal dignity – “a quality that seemed redundant in the jolting car, where every private function was exposed to public scrutiny” (Stern, 2008, p. 53) – Stern then describes the morass of human waste inside the cattle car:

Velvl struggled along with the widow to keep the child (who slumped like a ragdoll) from sliding into the stew in which they stood... A trickle of lump brown broth coated Velvl's arm, signalling that the girl had also succumbed to the dysentery that was rife in the railway car. (p. 63)

⁵³ This sentiment is relatively common in fictional representations of the Holocaust. In Jerzy Kosinski's *The Painted Bird*, for instance, the boy speaks admiringly of those distant planners who wielded so much power: “I recalled the trains carrying people to the gas chambers and crematories. The men who had ordered and organised all that probably enjoyed a similar feeling of complete power over their uncomprehending victims” (2000, p. 220).

As the use of the descriptive terms “stew” and “broth” imply, this is not the cattle car being represented with Sebaldian discreetness. Stern revels in the atmospheric detail, describing with unseemly relish the thick layer of pervasive filth which seems to coat the inhabitants while also infecting the secondary narrative – Velvl’s story.⁵⁴ Uncomfortably, however, there is also a contrived attempt to mix the faecal with the literally sexual:

young people, reduced to their rawest instincts, ground themselves against one another in full view of the doleful company and, in their thirst, licked the sweat from each other’s necks... he might have suffered the full impact of his situation and succumbed as well to his baser self. But the young widow’s eyes – it was a safe bet that she was a widow... would not release him.

(pp. 54-55)

This is a text, in short, which borders on the pornographic in quite literally every sense. Not only is it wilfully explicit in terms of its featured details, not only can we say that it brings the cattle car to life as a mobile Gehenna of filth and debauchery, but it also “wrenches the suffering body out of its proper historical context” and makes it into “the object of our own desires and identifications” (Dean, 2004, p. 36). Stern is problematically overwriting the historical reality of the Holocaust by focusing excessively on the themes of “Sex” and “Shit”.⁵⁵ Unable to connect with the emotional reality of transit to the death camps he instead chooses to revel in bodily excess. While sexuality was potentially an element of the pre-camp experience – Arnošt Lustig, for instance, states in *The Unloved: The Diary of Perla S.* (1985) that people did “all kinds of things with their bodies when they [knew they were] going East” (1996, p. 145) – and human waste was certainly present in the cattle car, Stern has chosen excess over the humanity of his characters.

⁵⁴ Velvl’s story is discussed in detail in the following section, as it is directed towards a female sufferer.

⁵⁵ Berel Lang draws attention to three common elements which were often missing from ghetto or camp diaries. These are “Sex, Shit, and Status” (2005, p. 124). He claimed that writers often exorcised a particular degree of “self-censorship” (p. 124). He believes that diarists had the tendency to avoid direct references to wartime sexuality, the pervasive atmosphere of filth within the ghetto or camp or instances of wartime complicity – namely Kapos, the Jewish police or the *Judenrat*. By contrast, I contend, these are the three components which have come to preoccupy modern authors.

Both the open and closed conceptions of the synecdochic cattle car, then, contain significant problems in terms of representation. While one chooses to pack the story with lurid details, the other is able only to conjure the faint image of the mythic Holocaust. Sebald, thanks to his restraint, leaves the matter rather too open. He relies entirely on the reader to fill in the associative blanks. As was proven with *The Book of Questions*, when the emphasis is placed on the reader to fill in their own representational blanks, they are essentially guaranteed to conjure a traditionally depthless and pious vision of the Holocaust – one almost certainly framed around certain images from the Auschwitz camp. Auschwitz, after all, is now culturally inextricable from the image of the cattle car, as the cattle car has been shown to lead to the crematoria. This association has been standardised through decades of cultural reproduction and, most crucially, legitimised by the memorial narratives. As such, both approaches inevitably lead us back to a deliberately vague, easily processible image of the death camp.

The fictional representation of the boxcar often seems to feature another pivotal emblem of Holocaust suffering: the image of the female victim. Often sexualised and always designed for easy identification, the female victim has always served as the embodiment of Nazi cruelty. This archetype, more than any other, has come to epitomise Jewish victimhood.

The Enduring Legacy of the Sexualised Sufferer

As Janet Jacobs noted, there is a tendency – at least in visual terms – to represent the extremity of the Holocaust via the image of the suffering female body. Using the tattoo collage featured in *Auschwitz* as something of a template, she notes that there is a singular emphasis on the one female example – which carries an additional gendered connotation. As she puts it: “the women become larger, more obvious in their degradation, suffering and

humiliation, while the men recede into the ethnic background” (2010, p. 14). The reason for this seems not to be simply the greater potential for symbolic extension – images of wounded women often appealing to the viewer’s primal sense of protectiveness – but rather the undercurrent of sexuality which seems to exist in the framing. Describing the one image of a tattooed female prisoner, she notes: “The upper limits of the photograph are bounded by a skirt which appears to have been raised intentionally for the camera. Had the image stood alone... it might be mistaken for a 1940s pornographic postcard” (p. 14). While the pictures depicting the male tattoo are presented neutrally, then, there is an unseemly undercurrent of voyeurism evident in this representation of female suffering. It is this curious co-mingling of sentiments – the automatic empathy inspired through images of female suffering, frequently infused with a tinge of “somasochistic eroticism” (p. 14) – which I explore throughout this chapter. Though Jacobs has expressed the fear that excessive academic emphasis on this topic, however well intentioned, will contribute “to a literature on Nazi genocide in which the violated Jewish female is re-inscribed in post-Holocaust memory” (p. 19), I contend that the image of the violated Jewish female is already inscribed in post-Holocaust memory – an immovable standard, represented with astonishing frequency in the fictional reproduction of the Holocaust. Fiction which features female sufferers or survivors often tends to resort to the sexualisation of their plight or the romanticisation of their suffering.

Sharon Oster, for instance, discusses the sexualisation of female suffering in both Jerzy Kosinski’s *The Painted Bird* and William Styron’s *Sophie’s Choice*. She notes that, in both texts, the featured women have been transformed into a new archetype, whose “only agency” is “to fuck and to suffer” (2003, p. 103). While Kosinski’s text replaces authentic Holocaust suffering with scenes of sexual violence, Styron’s text introduces an additionally problematic element. Sophie is erotically interesting to Stingo, the novel’s protagonist,

because she has suffered. As Oster puts it, her “punishment and sex appeal” have become “intertwined” in a “new singularly perverse type of sex object” (p. 101). Styron’s non-Jewish character, therefore, is erotically drawn to a survivor partly because she bears the scars of the Holocaust.⁵⁶

Holocaust fiction, therefore, frames the horror of the Holocaust through the image of a woman’s suffering body. While it does not contain the level of sexualisation of evident in *Sophie’s Choice*, John le Carré’s *Call for the Dead* does represent Holocaust suffering through the representation of one particular survivor – a woman named Elsa Fennan. A great deal of emphasis is placed on her suffering body and, while it is not as overtly sexual as Styron’s text, the story does revolve around male attempts to dominate and master a female sufferer – in order to counter their own masculine insecurities. There is, therefore, still an element of sexualisation present in these interactions.

Call for the Dead, though it is not actually a Holocaust text, is a novel entirely concerned with the image of the suffering woman, and in this case depicts a survivor’s attempts to break away from her status as a victim. The male characters in the novel are intent to view Elsa Fennan simply as someone passive and wounded, and cannot acknowledge that she survived the Shoah with her sense of self intact. When she is first described by George Smiley in the text she is epitomised by two qualities – an unbecoming emotional severity and the physical frailty that comes with years of suffering: “Foreign, Jewish too, I gather, suffered badly in the war, which adds to the embarrassment. She is a strong-minded woman and relatively unmoved by her husband’s death. Only superficially no doubt” (Carré, 2012, p. 16). This

⁵⁶ This non-Jewish sexual attraction to suffering also features in ‘Cake’, a short story by George Steiner, in which a young American academic finds himself drawn to two separate suffering Jewish girls. The first is a young woman brutalised on a train, who has cinders rubbed on her face by the German occupiers. The second is Rahel, a waif-like Jewish girl with whom he forms a confused romantic attachment. His lust for her is suffused with images of the first girl’s suffering: “For a moment, I was certain it was Rahel, that it was into her skin they had rubbed the cinders” (1996, p. 228). Tellingly, this moment occurs during their first (and only) sexual encounter. Steiner’s protagonist, as such, has half-consciously eroticised the image of Jewish suffering.

latter statement, I contend, factors into her later treatment throughout the novel. There is an underlying supposition, or rather a desperate need, for the masculine characters in this text – represented generally by Smiley – to fracture her emotional hardness. As her body has visibly been marked by her wartime experiences – a great deal of emphasis is given to her post-war frailty – Smiley is intent on maintaining his vision of her as a frail, passive, traumatised victim. Though, upon first meeting her in person, he notes that she conveys an “impression of endurance and courage” (p. 19), all of his following interactions with her seem designed to undercut this harder edge to her character. Not only is it necessary to his role as spy, as he hopes by fracturing her reserve she will come to confide in him, but there also appears to be an element of manful pride in the desire to overmaster her – to force her into a position of emotional submission. Essentially, he wishes to remould her into a more tolerable archetype of female suffering – one of cowed dependence and feminine frailty. In keeping with the narrative which dominated the post-war period – the return to pre-war normalcy which featured, as a key element, the appropriately domestic woman – any categorically unfeminine behaviour, such as a lingering post-war resentment or sense of defiance, is viewed as something which must be corrected by the men in the novel.⁵⁷ We can see for instance, after their first meeting, that Smiley has created an internal narrative, a comfortable archetype to which he expects her to conform:

He could not believe that Elsa Fennan had killed her husband. Her instinct was to defend, to hoard the treasures of her life, to build about herself the symbols of a normal existence. There was no aggression in her, no will but the will to preserve. (p. 33)

⁵⁷ As Barbie Zelizer notes, photographs reproduced in the British media sometimes focused on the representation of women carrying out domestic duties within the camp setting. She references, specifically, a photograph of women peeling potatoes in post-liberation Bergen-Belsen. Run as a front-page photo in the *British News Chronicle*, Zelizer states that it linked the concept of women’s survival to “so called normal or domestic routine” (2001, p. 260). The image, therefore, stressed the return to normalcy that was expected of female survivors following the Holocaust.

As befits the narrative of the day, she is not expected to retain even the merest hint of post-war hostility. Instead – in keeping with the idea of untainted, unaltered femininity – Smiley assumes that her sole aim is to return to domestic life, putting these events behind her. His presumptuousness is later compounded when he notes: “I think I understand her suffering” (p. 34). There is an underlying assumption here that Elsa, and by extension the horrors that she has suffered, can be reduced, categorised and rendered in a form that’s readily coherent. By looking at this one particular survivor, Smiley has begun to feel that he has ready access to the horrors of the Shoah. He believes that he has a handle on her plight and that he fully understands her post-war mentality – thereby understanding the depths of her psychic scars and the absence of any desire for vengeance. She does not hold anger, he assumes, but rather has learned to live in a state of constant, quiet submission: “He was an oppressor, but she accepted oppression” (p. 19). Smiley’s assumption, here, is that the Nazis have conditioned Elsa to be perpetually passive. She should not have the capacity to fight or resist any longer as her experiences under Nazi rule, and in the camps, have broken her body and her will.

By looking at this one particular female survivor, Smiley has begun to feel that he has ready access to the Shoah in all its extremity. That this one female body with “frail hands” (p. 98) and the face of an “eternal refugee” (p. 19), which has been compared evocatively to the “carcass of a tiny bird” (p. 115), in some sense summarises the event in its entirety. This quality of synecdoche, this understanding that the Holocaust has been adequately represented through her frailty, fuels his presumptuousness. Without having experienced the camps directly, and with this one survivor’s body as his window onto the nature of the atrocity, Smiley clearly believes that he understands the reality of the prisoner’s daily struggle within the camps:

It was an enchanting smile; her whole face lit up like a child’s... Smiley suddenly had a vision of Elsa as a child... He saw her as a wheedling *Backfisch*, fighting like a cat for herself alone,

and he saw her too, starved and shrunken in prison camp, ruthless in her fight for self-preservation. It was pathetic to witness in that smile the light of her early innocence, and a steeled weapon in her fight for survival. (p. 32)

Using only her body as his guide, Smiley feels that he has unpicked both the depths of her character and the reality of her in-camp experiences. He imagines her as a ruthless figure in the camps – he leaves no room for the kind of comradeship or humanity spoken of by Primo Levi, Joan Ringelheim and Seweryna Smaglewska. Her childlike smile is described as being “pathetic” as it acts as a reminder of her pre-war innocence, starkly contrasting with the woman Smiley now believes her to be – a woman debased by her in-camp acts of selfishness. None of these statements are based in evidence, but rather are fuelled by Smiley’s many assumptions. Her emaciation and her emotional hardness have led him to believe that she was callous and self-interested while interned. Moreover, Smiley also feels that he understands the psychology of the internee, as he has effectively imagined himself into Elsa’s shoes. This form of extreme emotional engagement suggests that Smiley feels he has a grasp on the internee’s mentality. As John le Carré’s text is a spy thriller, however – founded on a film noir-style misreading of a woman’s character – these assumptions can only be read as being inherently flawed. Elsa still possesses considerable post-war anger.

Without this key misapprehension, Elsa’s role as one of the novel’s key conspirators would have been discovered immediately. Upon discovering that she has been meeting with Dieter Frei – the novel’s central villain – Smiley redoubles his efforts to force her back into a state of passivity. It is in this sequence that we begin to detect another facet of this dynamic, a quasi-sexual subtext to Smiley’s attempts to master her emotionally:

When he spoke his voice was gentle, concessive. To Elsa it must have seemed like a voice she had longed for, irresistible, offering all strength, comfort, compassion and safety. She... then fell to her side in a gesture of submission. She sat opposite him, her eyes upon him in complete dependence, like the eyes of a lover. (p. 93)

For Smiley, a character emasculated by his wife Ann's frequent and flagrant infidelities, this scenario provides him with the illusion of sexual dominance. In seeking to provide her with masculine comfort – the story repeatedly marginalises the masculinity of her Jewish husband, a character defined by his child-like dependence – Smiley is able to bolster his sense of white, British potency. It is not incidental that she is described as looking at him with the “eyes of a lover”. Nor is it trivial that the very first line in the story concerns Ann Sercomb – establishing her as Smiley's chief preoccupation and the source of his present insecurities. From the outset, therefore, it is clear that he conceptualises Elsa as the epitome of feminine victimhood. In essence, these two women have been placed in opposition, with Ann as the embodiment of the youthful, the wayward and the uncowed. In order to retain even the vaguest semblance of manhood, therefore, Smiley needs Elsa to represent unambiguous victimhood – a woman who will yield to the slightest pressure, thus reaffirming his masculinity. To return to Oster, the only agency generally accorded to the synecdochic female victim is her capacity to “to fuck and to suffer”. Or, in this instance, to yield obligingly to the masculine reassurances of her non-Jewish saviour, thus reaffirming his sexual superiority over the Jewish male in the process. At no point in the story is Elsa given agency. Her betrayal of Smiley is construed simply as another moment of masculine dominance. When watching her in collusion with Dieter Frei, Smiley describes Elsa as being: “animated and articulate like a puppet brought to life by her master” (p. 124). It is the lot of the former internee, it seems, to simply be buffeted about by wills greater than her own. To yield to every post-war expression of dominance, as this corresponds with the established image of the passive, brutalised, grateful Jewish survivor, seeking the guidance of a firm masculine hand. As Jacobs notes, the Holocaust constituted a “cataclysmic break in the history of masculinity” (2010, p. 36), with the cultural conception of the Jewish male having shifted towards an image of feminised passivity – having failed to protect their women. It is

this flawed foundational assumption that fuels Smiley's actions throughout the novel and rebrands Elsa as easy prey. He is, in essence, capitalising on the work of the Nazis by seeking out a product of the concentrationary environment and trying to use her towards his own ends – a moment of dominance over one already used to domination.

The inherent tension in the novel, therefore, revolves around the notion that a survivor may try to break out of the narrow, somewhat romantic archetype of the female sufferer and try to regain some semblance of selfhood. In trying to do this however she ultimately dies as a passive tool in the schemes of dominant men. She even predicts her own fate in the line: "I'm the wandering Jewess, the no man's land, the battlefield for your toy soldiers" (Carré, 2012, p. 102). Ultimately, this is indeed the case. She is the passive landscape upon which men conduct their schemes and express their power. For Smiley, and by extension for all of the authors who will be cited in this section, there is a profound eroticism lurking behind this idea. As Auschwitz survivor Karen Goertz has noted in the past: "The idea of having absolute power over someone arouses feelings of pleasure" (Jacobs, 2010, p. 43). In a text concerned first and foremost with Smiley's emasculation, therefore, it seems only logical to conclude that Elsa represents – despite, or perhaps even because of her ruined body – a masculine fantasy of victimhood.

Returning to Stern's *The North of God*, the young Jewish widow featured in this novella also aligns with the image of the passive sexualised sufferer. Whereas Elsa Fennan at least had the capacity for self-expression, however, Stern's female sufferer is entirely mute. Indeed, this silence can only be said to heighten her symbolic potency, as – given that she is almost literally an object, being corpse-like in her stillness – she is a character ripe with imaginative potential. She has no characteristics of any kind to get in the way of the narrator's romantic suppositions. She is simply a blank slate waiting to be imbued with broader meaning. In this regard she cannot help but remind one of the deceased mother of

Bergen-Belsen, referenced by Barbie Zelizer – beautiful, motionless and vulnerable to the voyeurism of the male viewer.⁵⁸ The tendency in both instances, it seems, is to remould this expressionlessness into something pleasingly romantic and/or domestic. This is evident in the following extract:

Unless you counted the dowdy Mehitabel... Velvl, despite his better than two-score years, had never known a woman intimately. He felt a little ashamed that he should impose himself on this one, desolate in the absence of a husband who had doubtless perished in the current epidemic of death; but that his own death was also imminent... emboldened him, and he resolved to try to beguile the young woman with a story of the legendary friend of his youth. (Stern, 2008, pp. 52-53)

While Velvl may understand on an intellectual level that his interaction with the young woman counts as an imposition, this does not curb his behaviour. He has begun to imagine himself as her temporary husband and, at least for the duration of the journey, as a surrogate father to her child. The story itself, therefore, takes on another connotation. Having explicitly mentioned that Mehitabel counted as his only pre-deportation experience of sexual intimacy, the story is depicted as something approaching a sexual act. This explains the violence of the telling, the fact that Velvl simply begins speaking – unbidden and with relentless enthusiasm – about the sexual misadventures of his legendary colleague. Their physical arrangement in the train car is also relevant, as Velvl notes: “Besides, pressed against her in the crush of human freight, with the child wedged awkwardly between them, it would have been more cruel to say nothing than to distract them with a frivolous tale” (p. 53). While this clearly represents Velvl’s attempt at self-justification – Velvl claims that he is speaking only

⁵⁸ Zelizer describes a picture entitled ‘Corpse of mother at Bergen-Belsen, April 17, 1945’ which, though it did not make it into the press following the liberation of the camps, has become the subject of later fascination. As the woman is both “nude and beautiful” (1998, p. 117), the photograph is open to an element of sexualisation or romantic reconceptualization. She notes that Robert Morris later “painted an erotic gloss” (p. 179) over the image, literally reframing it as a photograph depicting a woman who has “innocently fallen asleep” (p. 179). The tendency to romantically recast and repossess the suffering woman is certainly evident in post-Holocaust culture.

out of politeness – it can also be read as his attempt to salve his own conscience. Velvl has convinced himself that he is speaking in order to distract her from the horror of the situation, and yet his story is also charged with an undeniable sexual energy. With the child acting as a literal physical barrier, and the crush of bodies preventing free movement, this story must suffice as the outpouring of his sexual energies – this is what gives it its priapic urgency. He is talking *at* her after all, talking over her grief and forcing this narrative upon her – freighted as it is with sexual imagery. Indeed, Velvl tries to make the meaning of the story clear to the mother – that it is taking the place of a sexual encounter – by infusing his highly sexed tale with descriptions which mirror their current environment. He continues to include references to the excremental, which connects his story to the environment of the cattle car. Note the following sequence from the story of Hershel and the succubus, which takes place inside a “privy”: “But the creature rocked her hips as if in a *shukeling* prayer – and despite his exhaustion and the fetid surroundings, despite everything he’d previously deemed to be decent, the scholar responded to her beckoning movements” (p. 39). The atmosphere in which this story takes place, the overcrowded boxcar, is one of rampant dysentery. As such, it is telling that he chooses to paint a particularly lurid picture of a sexual encounter which takes place in an outdoor lavatory. He is telling a story, in effect, about two people who yield to their animalistic impulses and copulate in an environment exactly like their own. It is his attempt, I believe, to infuse their dynamic with a frisson of sexuality – to make his story more pointedly relevant. He is attempting to participate in the “indecent” sexuality of the cattle car without actually having sex. None of this, however, seems to register on the widow in any way. She is, in every respect, the perfect embodiment of vacancy. She gives him nothing. She infers nothing. She is merely passive and unresisting. There is only one instance in which she shows even the merest flicker of an expression:

he expected that at any second the woman might snap out of her trance, clap hands over the little girl's ears, and cry, "*A shandeh!*" He ought to be ashamed of himself! But instead, Velvl discerned the fishtail flicker at the corner of her bloodless lips, which he decided was the stillbirth of a smile. He mourned its passing, then resolved that his story... must never end. So long as he could keep the mother and daughter captivated, he could keep them safe. (p. 54)

All the while, then, he is waiting for a rebuke and when none ever comes he feels licensed to go on with the telling of his story. This passage displays his problematic relationship with the nature of consent. He freely admits that the "stillbirth of a smile" is an ambiguous sign – perhaps not even a smile, given that it never actually evolved into an expression. As a stillborn smile it is nothing more than an expressionless twitch. All it amounts to, then, is another instance of emotional transposition on the part of the man. The woman is as pliant and unmoving as a corpse and so there is nothing to block Velvl's attempts to transform her, however unwillingly, into a frightened widow in need of his masculine reassurance. Once again, the sexualised sufferer exists only as a tool – the means by which a nearly virginal man seeks to simulate the feeling of married life in his final hours.

While the text itself seems to consider Velvl's storytelling to be in some sense heroic – an act designed to displace the horror of the gas chamber – the end of the novella compounds its dubiety. Following their arrival at Auschwitz, Velvl's ersatz family is violently split apart:

Velvl glimpsed, in the adjacent ranks of women, one from whose arms dangled a spindly, bug-eyed little girl. The child was torn from the mother's arms and carried like a defective mannequin across the platform, where she was flung atop the tangled heap of bodies in a truckbed, while the hysterical woman fell to her knees in the thickening mist. (pp. 95-96)

It is significant that the principal tragedy here is not Velvl's, but rather the mother's. It is she who has lost her husband and child to the violence of the Holocaust. We are never given her perspective, however, as that does not fit the established archetype of the female victim as masculine prop. She does not exist to convey her own narrative but rather to be narrativised

by the resident man. This, by contrast, makes Velvl Spfarb's act of storytelling seem even more unseemly. He is a priapic stranger, hounding a woman literally to the gates of Auschwitz and beyond, inserting himself into her plight. This rather blurs Velvl's moment of implied heroism, then, when he rejects his position of safety, having passed through the selection process, and joins her en route to the gas chamber. As an emotional prompt for the reader, a German officer states, somewhat leadingly: "This is the place where all stories end" (p. 98). As such, the reader is primed for Velvl's final act of "defiance". The narrative has attempted to reconceptualise Velvl's simulated sex act as something heroic – a rejection of life in favour of one last distracting tale. However, this is undermined again by his choice of listener. He once again seeks out his adopted wife – now reeling from the loss of her child and having been wounded by one of the guard dogs:

he reached her – at least he believed it was her... He grabbed hold of her clammy hand and squeezed tight, feeling a corresponding sensation envelop his heart... When finally she turned toward him... the widow greeted Velvl with a look of unalloyed terror – the kind of look he supposed the Angel of Death himself must have been accustomed to seeing in his victims.

Nevertheless, buffeted by the storm, he continued his story. (p. 99)

This is the last instance in the text in which the surrounding Holocaust narrative features. Stern's clear assertion, therefore, is that Velvl continued the telling of his story right up until the point of dying, providing a supposed moment of solace to his adopted wife. The phrase "buffeted by the storm" certainly contains a connotation of heroic endurance, and yet Stern has never clarified the degree to which the widow has taken comfort in Velvl's verbal assault. The terror on her face – which acts as a spur for Velvl, engaging his drive to protect and distract her – may just as easily be construed as uncomprehending horror. The problem inherent in the novella is that Velvl's act of storytelling has never needed the active participation of a second party. Problematically, therefore, Stern has compounded the objectification and eroticisation of the female sufferer. She at once emblematises the true

horror of the Holocaust – it is she, after all, who experiences a moment of genuine loss – and yet she is construed simply as a mute prop, a voiceless emotional spur which prompts Velvl to acts of heroism. She, however, does not possess agency. She is merely a suffering body upon which the horrors of the Holocaust are visited.

Jerzy Kosinski's *The Painted Bird* also features the image of the mute sexualised sufferer. In this instance, however, the emphasis is not on the male desire to speak for her or to emotionally dominate her. Instead, Kosinski aims to reconceptualise the Holocaust as an explicitly sexual crime – a trend which carries forward into modern literature.

The suffering Jewish woman in Kosinski's text is clearly an emblematic character, designed to speak to the broader reality of Jewish suffering. This is evident, first and foremost, thanks to her connection to the cattle car. Kosinski's text, as Lawrence Langer has implied, does not look to explicitly replicate the horrors of the Holocaust. Instead, Langer suggests, Kosinski's work is a piece of Holocaust fiction which aims "to discover legitimate metaphors that might suggest without actually describing or even mentioning its world" (Langer, in Vice, 2000, p. 68). Kosinski's text, therefore, aims to capture the essence of the Holocaust without explicitly referencing the camps themselves. This is signalled through the use of the train, which again acts as a contaminating link back to the concentrationary system. This becomes particularly evident in the sequences in which the possessions of deportees fall from the cattle car. As the boy notes, various objects come to line the tracks after the cattle cars pass, from scraps of paper to notebooks and calendars. Most crucially, however, pictures also fall from the passing trains:

The pictures were of course the most desirable to collect, since few in the village could read...

The women giggled and whispered to one another about the pictures of the men, while the men muttered obscene jokes and comments about the pictures of the girls. People in the village collected these photographs, traded them, and hung them in their huts and barns. (Kosinski, 2000, pp. 101-102)

From a post-Holocaust standpoint, these images are totemic stand-ins for the dead. Just as the photographs hanging in the Tower of Faces in the USHMM speak to the fate of the missing, these pictures stand-in for the murdered in Kosinski's text. Commemorative institutions, however, also use these images to humanise the dead.⁵⁹ In Kosinski's text, by contrast, the photographs are merely erotic objects traded by Polish locals. The Jews for them are simply a commodity, a thing to be used to satisfy one's base desires. The pictures, therefore, represent both the scale of the atrocity and the sexual dehumanisation of the victims, as the dead are literally transformed into erotic possessions. If the trading of these photographs may then be taken as a broader metaphor about the nature of Holocaust violence, then Kosinski is identifying two key aspects: the dehumanisation of the victim and the sexualisation of their suffering.

Kosinski does seem to conceive of the Holocaust as an explicitly sexual crime. This is made clear in the afterword to his novel: "another Jewish attendant described the SS guards nonchalantly feeling the sexual parts of every adolescent girl who passed on her way to the gas chambers" (p. xxii). For Kosinski the killing process is not impersonal and dispassionate, but rather sexual and dehumanising. He describes throngs of girls being fondled on the way to their de-personalising deaths, as if this was SS standard practice – an inveterate part of the killing process. He, therefore, views Holocaust suffering through the plight of one specific victim – the dehumanised girl.

Kosinski then takes this idea to its logical extreme by graphically depicting the rape of one teenage sufferer. Just as the pictures speak to the fate of the missing in general, this

⁵⁹ Yaffa Eliach's tower exhibition in the USHMM, for instance, is designed to recapture a sense of Ejszyszki (a Lithuanian shtetl) as it existed in the pre-war period, before the liquidation of its inhabitants. Eliach's connection represents a carefully constructed arrangement, which aims to capture the emotional reality of the community. As Edward T. Linnenthal notes, she intended for the collection to be "an organic whole, a living memory of the town" (1997, p. 182) and so photographs of families that had feuded were not placed next to one another. This, therefore, may be said to represent a partial resurrection – an attempt to particularise and humanise the deceased.

Jewish girl must be viewed as a totemic sufferer – her experience stands in for all of those unseen women bound for Auschwitz. Both, Kosinski would have it, will be dehumanised and sexually debased.

The young Jewess is taken aside by one of the Poles named Rainbow – a widower and apparent simpleton – in order to “spend the night” (p. 104). She is then violently raped, despite being injured. For Kosinski, the brutalised Jewish girl represents absolute victimhood. She has no agency of any kind. She is described only in terms of her ethnicity, her foreignness and her suffering. She “babbles” (p. 103) in a language no one can understand, before later uttering “strange words in her language when his touch grew rougher” (p. 104). As such, the text denies her the capacity for self-expression. Though she tries to speak, meaning is never transmitted. She cannot encourage empathy or establish even her basic humanity. Instead, she exists simply to be debased and to die like an animal – all while embodying her entire race through her emphasised ethnicity. Kosinski emphasises her “thick eyebrows and very black eyes” (p. 102) as racial signifiers, to signal her difference from the locals. She is, in short, the novel’s only totemic Jewish female and, as such, embodies Jewish femininity and, by implication, the fate of the Jewish sufferer.

Her status as an object is further affirmed as, during her violent rape, the girl becomes sexually conjoined with her rapist – in a fashion similar to coital lock in dogs or wolves. Unable to free himself, Rainbow calls for assistance and has the girl violently cut away, with less compassion than one would show an animal: “I could see nothing; I only heard the girl’s last piercing shriek... At dawn I ran to the knothole... On the threshing floor, close to the wall, a human shape lay stretched out flat, covered from head to foot with a horse blanket” (p. 108). The Jewish girl, therefore, is regarded as having less inherent worth than an animal. She is an object to be utilised and then discarded. Rainbow’s rape of the Jewish girl is categorically not about her, as she is simply another consumerist item – another *thing*

collected from the side of the train tracks, like the pictures collected by the townsfolk. Indeed, she is regarded as having less worth than the photographs, which are at least traded and fetishized. This dehumanisation becomes complete as she is transformed into a “human shape” beneath a horse blanket. She is not a person but a usable mass of flesh. That is how she is viewed by the Poles in Kosinski’s text. In short, as Langer suggests, Kosinski has populated his world with “creatures whose values coincide with those of Auschwitz, as if no other [world] had ever existed” (1977, p. 167). Through their proximity to Auschwitz and the passing of the cattle car, the Poles have learned to devalue Jewish life. These are not people, as far as they are concerned, but objects bound for extermination. Objects which, lacking basic humanity, may also be put to other unseemly sexual uses.

Similarly, and just as crucially, Kosinski has replaced direct representation of mass gassing with an explicit focus on sexual violence. As this thesis argues throughout, while the emotional and experiential reality of industrial mass murder is almost impossible to represent, sexual violence is a more instinctually understandable crime. Kosinski, however, rather over-emphasises this element and, in so doing, creates a singularly warped picture of the Holocaust.

Sexual violence, as recent research has revealed, was certainly an *element* of the atrocity. While the laws of racial purity may have curbed the standardisation of sexual violence by German forces, it did not eliminate it entirely. As Helene J. Sinnreich notes, sexual violence on the part of the Nazis was perhaps more likely to take place on the administrative fringes of the Reich: “Nazis in charge of localities were sometimes at odds with central Nazi policy not only with regard to accepting bribes or other indiscretions but also in relation to creating an atmosphere conducive to sexual abuse” (2010, p. 109). The sexual exploitation of Jewish women within the camp system was certainly not routinized, as Robert Sommer clarifies, as there is “no evidence of a Jewish woman being exploited” (2010, p. 53) within the brothel

system. However, survivor accounts have occasionally referenced isolated instances of sexual abuse at the hands of the SS. While the precise scale of these assaults is hard to quantify – as rape during the Holocaust was not commonly recorded in official documents or spoken of by victims after the fact – enough evidence exists to assert that “some degree of sexual contact between Jewish women and German soldiers did occur” (Flaschka, 2010, p. 92). Sexual violence was provably an element of the atrocity, therefore. To represent the violence of the Shoah purely in the form of sexual assault, however, represents a fundamental misrepresentation of established fact. It was a part of the Holocaust, though not its defining element.

Fiction should, I contend, possess the capacity to represent the reality of sexual violence during the Holocaust. Rather than simply presenting a scenario in which Jewish women are menaced by cartoonishly demonic members of the SS – as has become standard in representations of the camps – it should instead represent the broader reality of wartime sexuality.⁶⁰ As Nomi Levenkron has noted, sexual violence was not solely attributable to the Nazis, as women were also likely to be subject to assault at the hands of “the Germans’ collaborators” and even “Jewish men in the ghettos and camps” (2010, p. 17; p. 18). Survivor writing also features a number of references to “sex for food” (p. 20) arrangements, in which privileged prisoners would prey upon the vulnerabilities of the starving in order to barter for sex.⁶¹ The reality of sexual interactions during the Holocaust should therefore not be portrayed with pious reductivism, in which the participants are either mute yielding victims or lascivious Nazis. The moral reality, as is suggested by the variety of forms of sexual threat, is rather more grey. One could argue, for instance, that *The North of God* provides a

⁶⁰ *The Pawnbroker* (both Edward Lewis Wallant’s 1961 novel and Sidney Lumet’s 1964 film), *Schindler’s List* (1993) and *The Tattooist of Auschwitz* all feature the sexualisation of Holocaust violence, with passive victims being exploited by monstrous Nazis.

⁶¹ Instances of this are referenced in several survivor texts, including Olga Lengyel’s *Five Chimneys* and Magda Herzberger’s *Survival*.

genuinely impious insight into male wartime sexuality, as it does allow the reader to fathom the motives of a would-be assaulter. Velvl's pursuit of the mute widow is in keeping, for instance, with Lisa S. Price's theory of rape. Analysing the role of rape in former Yugoslavia she notes: "I AM only to the extent that you are not – male because you are female, Serb because you are Muslim, soldier because you are a civilian" (2001, p. 213). Velvl used the femininity of the widow, and her pliancy, to reaffirm his own masculine identity. His maleness stems from those elements which he takes from her – he projects his self-affirming fantasy onto her and solidifies it through her lack of resistance. If rape follows this pattern of gender affirmation, then Stern has impiously represented the thinking behind Jewish wartime sexual assault. This, however, represents a relatively charitable reading of the text, as Velvl is still heroized. The story is not meant to be read as a deconstruction of his wartime emasculation, but rather as a humanising tale of emotional co-dependence in extreme circumstances. Nevertheless, Stern's text does demonstrate that an impious presentation of wartime sexuality is possible. The sexual grey zone can be represented, but modern fiction frequently does not capitalise on this possibility. Instead, the presentation of the Jewish suffering body is both pious and exploitative. The reader is not meant to understand their plight or the complex motivations fuelling wartime sexual compromise. Instead, they are meant to connect to scenes of sexual suffering on a bodily level.⁶²

Conclusion

Our current conception of the Holocaust, therefore, has been shaped by our partial understanding of the mass extermination process. As is demonstrated in sections one and two, the icons which have come to embody the Shoah tend only to invoke a simplified

⁶² The notion of forming a bodily connection to the events of the Holocaust, or of engaging with these scenes as "prosthetic memories", is further discussed in Chapter Four.

version of the Auschwitz site. The tattoo, which once invoked the idea of a survivor's lived suffering, now hints only at the processed reproduction. As *Eve's Tattoo* demonstrates, the tattoo does not possess the capacity to connect one with the reality of Holocaust suffering. When worn by anyone other than a survivor, the tattoo merely serves as a logo which indicates their limited understanding of the Holocaust. As all nonwitnesses must rely entirely upon post-memorial media and commemorative sites in order to flesh out their understanding of the Shoah, the nonwitness's Auschwitz tattoo can only emblemise this post-memorial vision of the event. It has become a sign which indicates their distance from the Holocaust, and the entirely constructed nature of modern Holocaust memory.

Additionally, as the texts featured in section two illustrate, the cattle car has served as an embodying icon for the atrocity for the greater part of the last half-century. This is also problematic, however, as it continues to perpetuate a simplistically exterminationist view of the Shoah. By using the cattle car as a synecdochic symbol, Holocaust fiction – and, by extension, commemoration – is perpetuating the idea that Shoah can be summarised by the vision of deportation and death in the gas chamber. This clearly ignores the broader reality of the Holocaust, which also encompassed death in the occupied territories at the hands of firing squads.

Section three, vitally, then illustrates the consequence of this simplifying trend. By focusing on the example of the sexualised sufferer, it explores the problematic emotional distance which has come to define our relation to the Shoah. Unable to connect with the idea of Holocaust suffering on an emotional level, as we understand the Shoah only as a vague assemblage of related images, it has instead been reconceptualised as a sexual crime – something the nonwitness can understand, to a certain degree. This gap in authenticity, or post-memorial knowledge, has then been filled in – as Sharon Oster noted – with women's suffering bodies. While John le Carré's *Call for the Dead* represents a comparatively early

response to the suffering woman – a male desire to master her in order to reassert their own masculinity – Kosinski’s simple sexualisation of Holocaust suffering is more representative of the approach taken by modern fiction.⁶³ In Carré’s text, after all, the Holocaust is not a remote event. Given its setting, and Elsa Fennan’s lingering anger, it can be said the wounds of the Shoah are still very much present. For modern authors, by contrast, the Holocaust has become impossibly remote. The suffering woman is not a figure to whom they can form a connection in the present and so there is no desire to sexually master her. Instead, she has become an abstract symbol – a device used to illustrate the horrors of the Holocaust. This is again problematic as it rules out the possibility of an impious approach to the Shoah. If we cannot conceive of the victims as people – if they come to exist only as suffering bodies – then we cannot hope to represent the Holocaust with depth. As Stern’s text demonstrates, the potential does exist to impiously depict the sexual reality of life during the Holocaust. Culturally, however, we cannot move beyond the objectification of the female sufferer. We are presently doomed to the endless reproduction of Elsa Fennans and Helen Hirschs – embodying women, whose suffering is meant to abstractly represent the horrors of the Holocaust. Women without agency or personality, whose suffering we are meant to *feel* but not understand. This is problematic as, this thesis contends, it runs the risk of forever limiting our conception of the Shoah. We are not remembering the event, but rather a simplistically vague distortion.

Chapter Two continues to build upon the theme of emotional distance by discussing the inherent unreachability of the survivor’s experiences, and the extent to which the second generation understand their parents’ Holocaust pasts. Vitaly, it also continues to explore the

⁶³ Despite Kosinski’s text having been first published in 1965. The sexualisation of Holocaust suffering, it should be noted, is not a new trend. Yehiel Dinur’s *The House of Dolls* also took this approach to the subject in 1955. This objectification of the female sufferer, given that it does not rely on emotional depth, simply aligns well with our present conception of the Holocaust.

cultural fascination with the Jewish body. This seems to stem, the chapter argues, from the frustrating distance of the Holocaust past and the unreachability of the Holocaust dead.

Chapter II: Second-Generation Fiction and the Legacy of the Hinge Generation

The guardianship of the Holocaust is being passed on to us. The second generation is the hinge generation in which received, transferred knowledge of events is being transmuted into history, or into myth. (Hoffman, 2005, p. xv)

When Eva Hoffman speaks of the children of survivors as the “hinge generation”, she conceives of them not simply as the inheritors of their parents’ knowledge, but also crucial figures in the shaping of Holocaust memory. The second-generation child is in the unique position, she argues, of being able to clarify and recode their parents’ experiences – ensuring that at least something of their Holocaust suffering will be passed on to future generations. She conceives of the second-generation child as an interpretive mouthpiece, re-ordering their parents’ testimony into something less fragmented than what was originally presented. This statement may seem both sweeping and judgemental; yet it is Hoffman’s belief that survivor testimony communicates very little beyond the existence of trauma. In a position in keeping with Marianne Hirsch’s concept of post-memory, she describes the children of survivors as receiving only partial fragments of their parents’ experiences – isolated scenes which come to define their vision of the Holocaust. These “dark amulets” (Hoffman, 2005, p. 10), as she calls them, make up the entirety of her own parents’ Holocaust testimony, with the rest of their experiences being represented only through traumatic silences. This experience, she claims, is common to the children of survivors:

Many others who grew up in households like mine remember the torn, incoherent nature of those first communications about the Holocaust, the speech broken under the pressure of pain. The episodes, the talismanic litanies, were repeated but never elaborated upon. They remained compressed, packed, sharp. I suppose the inassimilable character of the experiences they referred to was expressed – and passed on – through this form. (p. 11)

For Hoffman, then, the second generation is able to learn nothing coherent from their parents' recollections. Their experiences were not presented as chronological narratives, complete with an easily digestible and codifying moral. Instead, the child receives only an impenetrable fragment, or potentially a series of fragments. Though these episodes come to dominate the child's understanding of the Holocaust – Hoffman herself, for instance, is still plagued by the image of the peasant's cabin in which her parents sought refuge for two years – they do not actually transmit any usable information. The only thing that is successfully transmitted from the first generation to the second, then, is the idea that a given experience may be “inassimilable”. By this she means that the survivor was not able to incorporate the most traumatic of their Holocaust experiences as processed memory. As Cathy Caruth notes, the victim was “never fully conscious during the [event] itself” (1991, p. 187) and so the moment continues to exist in the recesses of their psyche as an unresolved wound. As such, it cannot be assimilated into any spoken narrative. Here, Hoffman is drawing a sharp distinction between spoken testimony and the actual experiences of survivors, as oral communication is simply not a suitable vehicle for the transmission of Holocaust trauma. Without actually using the terms, Hoffman is utilising Lawrence Langer's notions of “common memory” and “deep memory”.⁶⁴ If “common memory” may be thought of as spoken narrative – the Holocaust experience that survivors can actually tell – then “deep

⁶⁴ While these terms have been popularised through their use by Lawrence Langer, they originated in the writing of Charlotte Delbo. Langer translates an excerpt from Delbo's original 1985 publication *La mémoire et les jours* as follows: “I have the feeling that the ‘self’ who was in the camp isn't me, isn't the person who is here... And everything that happened to this other ‘self’, the one from Auschwitz, doesn't touch me now... so distinct are deep memory [*mémoire profonde*] and common memory [*mémoire ordinaire*] (Delbo, in Langer 1991, p. 13). In her text, Delbo notes that when she speaks of Auschwitz in the present, the words “don't come from deep memory” (p. 7). This, according to Langer, is due to the fundamentally inarticulable nature of the Auschwitz experience, as conventional language lacks the power to convey experiences which are often “beyond analogy” (p. 12). As such, deep memory is not openly expressed, but rather – as his analysis of video testimony demonstrates – it intrudes on the present in the form of silences: “We wrestle with the beginnings of a permanently unfinished tale, full of incomplete intervals, faced by the spectacle of a faltering witness often reduced to a distressed silence by the overwhelming solicitations of deep memory” (p. 21).

memory” corresponds with the inexpressible and irresolvable experience itself. James E. Young highlights the difference between these two forms of memory as follows:

common memory is that which “tends to restore or establish coherence, closure and possibly a redemptive stance,” whereas deep memory remains essentially inarticulable and unrepresentable, that which continues to exist as unresolved trauma just beyond the reach of meaning... every common memory of the Holocaust is haunted by that which it necessarily leaves unstated, its coherence a necessary but ultimately misleading evasion. (2003, p. 24)

If common memory represents the survivor’s desire to give order to their chaotic experiences by reshaping them into something coherent, then deep memory is the counterpoint which renders this a fruitless endeavour. All attempts at testimony are fundamentally undermined by the fact that they represent only a partial reality – they represent the stories that survivors are able or willing to tell. In his analysis of the speech patterns of Mary R., Holocaust survivor and docent in a St. Louis-based museum, Michael Bernard-Donals stresses the insufficiency of her testimony. Her speech acts as a veneer, papering over her trauma without ever successfully conveying it. As he puts it: “The silences and hesitations that appear throughout this section of Mary R.’s interview mark the spaces in which the experience of her mother’s death cannot be narrated but nevertheless continue to haunt her” (2003, p. 203). For Bernard-Donals, therefore, the worth of Mary R.’s testimony lies not in what has been said, but in her telling pauses. The reality of Mary R.’s loss cannot be transmitted, as it exists exclusively in her silences. According to this reading, therefore, a survivor’s testimony only has worth as a potential lens through which the careful listener or reader may detect the traces of trauma. The actual words themselves communicate very little of the survivor’s lived experiences, and so the priority becomes searching for the signs of deep memory. As Richard Crownshaw puts it: “Deep memory registers in the breakdown of testimonial language and signals a supposedly purer and unmediated form of memory event” (2010, p. 29). Once the

dutiful listener or reader has actually been able to discover this “breakdown in testimonial language”, however, what has actually been learned in the attempt? While we may be able to discern its existence, we are fundamentally incapable of touching or experiencing the foundational trauma which has now become deep memory. When a trauma is fundamentally inaccessible, and conveyed entirely through the absence of expression, we must resign ourselves to one final realisation: the horrors of the Holocaust cannot be transmitted or conveyed. This is the enduring legacy of deep memory.

Borrowing the dual concepts of the “hinge generation” and “deep memory”, this chapter assesses the ways in which second-generation fiction has sought to shape our broader cultural understanding of the Holocaust. All of the texts featured in this chapter are united by their shared assertion that the trauma of the Shoah, and therefore the reality of genuine knowing, remains the firm property of the survivors themselves. There is, to borrow a phrase from Hirsch, an “unbridgeable gap” (2012, p. 80) between survivors and their descendants. At the very most, the second generation may state that they have borne witness to their parents’ trauma – that they have detected its presence in the lapses of their parent’s speech and their lingering anxieties. They cannot, however, claim to share in it or to understand it – despite their desire to take on their parents’ representational burden. Using this concept as its foundational premise, this chapter claims that all of the featured works of fiction – whether they have been written by or are simply concerned with the second generation – seek to convey one foundational message: that the lived reality of the Holocaust cannot be recaptured and is therefore doomed to erasure. As the second generation failed to either inherit or transmit their parents’ bodily trauma, their understanding of the Holocaust has become an entirely mediated one. Post-memory has taken the place of genuine understanding, as our entire conception of the Shoah has become founded upon the “numberless images” passed down to us through “books, films and photographs” (Young,

2000, p. 44). This entirely mediated form of memory, which focuses explicitly on the cultural reproduction of the Shoah – the texts, photographs and memorial representations which seek to represent it after the fact – comes to form the third category of memory which proves central to this chapter. While “common memory” and “deep memory” refer specifically to the survivor, therefore, “post-memory” refers explicitly to our culturally produced conception of the Shoah.

The first section of this chapter refers specifically to Thane Rosenbaum’s collection of short stories, *Elijah Visible*. It focuses on the representation of Holocaust transmission, as Rosenbaum explores the distinction between deep memory and post-memory. Despite their wish to share in their parents’ trauma, he implies, second-generation children cannot access the Holocaust as an experiential reality. Though they may claim it as their natural inheritance, their understanding of the Shoah always remains profoundly mediated. This then transitions into the second section of the chapter, which expands on the notion of post-memory by featuring two texts which are principally concerned with the concept of Holocaust absence. Patrick Modiano’s *The Search Warrant* and W.G Sebald’s *Austerlitz* both highlight the impossibility of recovering the Holocaust dead. Both authors conceptualise death in Auschwitz as an entirely destructive process which yielded no bodies and thereby robbed the Holocaust dead of their individuality. In both cases, the principal characters of these texts become obsessed with the concept of irretrievability. They cannot accept the notion of the intangible, unreachable dead and so they become intent on restoring a sense of materiality and individuality to those lost in the Holocaust. Their attempts, however, only highlight the unreachability of the Holocaust dead and our own reliance on post-memory. When the dead leave nothing behind, beyond a series of disembodied artefacts, we must rely entirely on post-memorial sources in order to form even a fractional understanding of the Shoah. The final section of this chapter then takes the concept of post-

memory to its logical extreme, by examining a text in which the central characters have no substantiating connection to the Shoah. Shalom Auslander's *Hope: A Tragedy* features a world in which the Holocaust has been effectively commodified. Rather than existing as a series of particular events, it has been transformed into a series of empty symbols. By closing with this text, and analysing Auslander's vision of a rootless Holocaust, I come to the conclusion that the "hinge generation" have forever shaped the content of Holocaust fiction - specifically, by passing forward the message that the Holocaust cannot be accessed or understood by subsequent generations.

Thane Rosenbaum and the Failure of Transmission

A common thread unites the works of Eva Hoffman, Marianne Hirsch and Dana Wardi: all three authors believe in the transmission of a *certain strain* of Holocaust trauma from parent to child. While Wardi speaks of the "perpetuation of the stigma", as the survivor-mother passively transmits her own "non-verbal and almost unconscious messages" (1992, p. 58) to her child, Hoffman notes that she received the Holocaust as her "first knowledge, a sort of supercondensed pellet of primal information" (2005, p. 6). In unpacking Hoffman's phrasing, we must first note that these are not the clear communications of common memory – these are not coherent stories, rehearsed and clarified by her survivor parents over many years. As this knowledge is both "supercondensed" and "primal" it represents the non-verbal signs of her parents' unprocessed trauma – their unreachable deep memories. In the most technical sense, the survivor parent is communicating something that is simply not passed through spoken or even conscious channels. As Hoffman continues: "There was a casting of a shadow, a transference of an immensely heavy burden. There were signals conveyed along subterranean passages from survivors to their descendants that injected anxiety into the

latter's veins" (p. 60). These "subterranean passages" are all forms of passive transmission, from the survivor parent's behavioural quirks to their generalised anxiety. In short, it is the physical and unconscious manifestations of their trauma. These, in turn, are then passed on to the second generation, who inherit their parents' symptoms as their Holocaust inheritance. According to this logic, therefore, a certain element of the Holocaust is transmissible. The child cannot inherit the experiential reality of their parents' lived trauma, but can inherit the symptoms of their suffering. Indeed, as Wardi notes, second generation children were even bombarded with these parental messages while still in-utero. Fuelled by an inherent distrust of their new post-Holocaust husbands and unable to process the deaths of their pre-war families, pregnant survivors would often flood their unborn children with "neurohormonal substances" (1992, p. 59) which would transmit anxiety to them in the womb. The Holocaust, therefore, has been transmitted to the second generation, as something tangible has passed from parent to child. However, it would be incorrect to claim that the second generation has truly inherited their parents' Holocaust trauma. At the very most, we may say that they have inherited only the survivor's symptoms.⁶⁵ As Hoffman notes, the first generation cannot communicate their lived experiences to their children: "The attic in my imagination, to give only the most concrete example, probably bore no resemblance to the actual attic in which my parents were hidden" (2005, p. 34). Hoffman, therefore, cannot access the experiential reality of her parents' experiences. In order to reconstruct even a partial vision of their suffering she must still rely on the post-memorial tricks of "imaginative investment,

⁶⁵ Marianne Hirsch also speaks of these inherited symptoms, with children coming to manifest their parents' Holocaust behaviours:

"The language of family, the language of the body: nonverbal and precognitive acts of transfer occur most clearly within a familial space, often taking the form of symptoms. It is perhaps the descriptions of this symptomatology that have made it appear as though the postgeneration wanted to assert its own victimhood, alongside that of the parents, and to exploit it. To be sure, children of those directly affected by collective trauma inherit a horrific, unknown, and unknowable past that their parents were not meant to survive" (Hirsch, 2012, p. 34).

projection, and creation” (Hirsch, 2012, p. 4). Her image of their attic, even though it is forever lodged in her mind as a second-hand traumatic memory, bears no resemblance to their actual experiences. All that she has truly inherited, therefore, is the residue of post-Holocaust anxiety without ever actually having lived through the event itself. She carries the symptoms of the survivor, but understands the Holocaust only as a depthless abstraction. Crucially, the vision of the attic is later displaced by that of the concentration camp: “I had grown up with the subliminal expectation of catastrophe and the received ‘memory’ of mass death in my very bones” (Hoffman, 2005, p. 238). Though her parents were not in the camps, Hoffman still claims to have received the memory of “mass death” – clearly relating to the concentrationary system. Her parents’ particular memories, therefore, have been overwritten by the image of the concentration camp. Their memories, it seems, did not possess enough cultural relevance to have resonance. As she herself notes, the camp serves as the modern “locus classicus” (p. 193) for the Holocaust. She may not have a familial stake in the image of the camp, but she certainly understands that it now defines what is quintessentially *of the Holocaust*. The experiential reality of the Holocaust has become little more than an abstraction, centred around the concept of mass extermination and linked to a series of images and commemorative sites. This is our post-memory of the Shoah. When the second generation’s only true inheritance amounts to little more than “the subliminal expectation of catastrophe” the only possible result is a vision of the Holocaust devoid of specificity and depth.

Practically all of the stories featured in Thane Rosenbaum’s *Elijah Visible* address this concept of failed transmission to varying degrees. Despite presenting nine distinct versions of Adam Posner – all with different professions, specific family histories and at different stages in their personal development – Rosenbaum’s stories are united by a fixed view of cross-generational inheritance. In short, all nine Adams embody the concept of post-

memory: while they may bear the emotional traces of the parents' Holocaust experiences, they have only a partial and historically diluted vision of the Shoah as an event. As Hirsch outlines, despite the comparative shallowness of post-memory, it does have a similar potency to lived memory:

Postmemory is not identical to memory: it is "post"; but, at the same time, I argue, it approximates memory in its affective force and its psychic effects... These "not memories," communicated in "flashes of imagery," and these "broken refrains," transmitted through "the language of the body," are precisely the stuff of the postmemory of trauma, and of its return. (2012, p. 31)

Despite lacking access to the original experience, therefore, the second generation may still suffer the psychic after-effects of their parents' trauma. While they have no experiential understanding of the Holocaust, relying instead on secondary sources and their own imaginations to fill in the representational gaps, they still experience the trauma of having lived through the event. This is profoundly problematic as, to borrow a phrase from Anne Karpf, it means that the second generation have not lived the "central experience" (1997, p. 146) of their lives. They feel a profound emotional proximity to the Holocaust, surpassed only by the survivors themselves, and yet their understanding of the Shoah is partial at best. This feeling of near-genetic inheritance is mentioned explicitly in two of Rosenbaum's short stories. In 'The Cattle-Car Complex' the first Adam Posner is described as having inherited his parents' transportation-related claustrophobia: "Adam himself knew a little something about tight, confining spaces. It was unavoidable. The legacy that flowed through his veins. Parental reminiscences had become the genetic material that was to be passed on by survivors to their children" (Rosenbaum, 1996, p. 5). In a similar sense to Eva Hoffman, therefore, this Adam has absorbed one of his parents' stories as a defining vision of Holocaust horror. Unlike Hoffman, however, this Adam believes that the horror of

deportation has been passed on to him as a “psychogenetic endowment” (Hoffman, 2005, p. 34). He speaks of the horror of claustrophobia as having been “passed on through his genes”, which hints at his belief that trauma can be fully inherited as a form of genetic memory – that his parents have transmitted the felt reality of their cattle car experiences as part of his genetic make-up. In truth, this is a flawed presumption, as Rosenbaum highlights in his use of the cattle car as the story’s central image. Given that Rosenbaum provides explicit mention of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) and Yad Vashem in the collection’s titular story – ‘Elijah Visible’ – it is only reasonable to assume that he has a functional understanding of the cattle car’s broader symbolic significance as an access point for those looking to gain greater insight into the Holocaust. By experiencing the cattle car interior, and reflexively imagining the reality of transportation, one is theoretically brought closer to the deportees’ experiences. As Rosenbaum seems to know, however, this is deeply flawed logic. The cattle car does not create a moment of genuine engagement with the Holocaust past, it only creates a depthless prosthetic memory. Alison Landsberg describes the role of the cattle car in commemoration as follows:

Inside it is dark and small and empty, and yet the thought that one hundred bodies once filled that car haunts the space. Its emptiness produces a kind of cognitive dissonance as you attempt to reconcile its present emptiness with the fact that people were at one time crammed into its interior. The effect... is an odd sense of spatial intimacy with those people who are at an unbridgeable distance, who are conspicuously absent. (2004, p. 133)

A vital part of Landsberg’s theory of prosthetic memory is its physical aspect, in which a person bodily experiences a moment of engagement with the past. As this quotation illustrates, the cattle car engages on a purely physical level. Just as one is shocked into a feeling of emotional proximity by the camera’s closeness to suffering in *Schindler’s List*, one is made to imagine the crush of bodies in the cattle car space. Its authenticity as a relic

hints at the presence of previous victims, and so this creates what Landsberg terms the “illusion of unmediated proximity” (p. 123) to the Holocaust dead. One feels their potential closeness, the previous claustrophobia of the space and, just as crucially, one feels their absence on a physical level. Simultaneously, one feels an “odd sense of special intimacy” and the conspicuous absence of the murdered. This form of purely physical engagement, however, creates only the illusion of proximity. The Holocaust dead still remain hopelessly, untouchably absent and their mental state still remains unapproachable. The victims remain, to borrow a phrase from one of Wardi’s patients, “ghosts without definite faces” (1992, p. 106). While the cattle car does serve as a common space in which the Holocaust may be *experienced* by nonwitnesses, therefore, this experience is an unquestionably shallow one. *Something* may be felt, but prosthetic memory has the capacity only to convey historical generalities. The gap between our experience and theirs remains unbridgeable, and so we are able only to experience the fact of their absence.

While we may seek to approach the Holocaust through bodily identification, therefore, the attempt is doomed to failure. Prosthetic engagement cannot yield anything of the event beyond a simplistic focus on materiality – manifesting as a desire to touch the past by reconnecting bodily with certain historical experiences. It is my contention that Rosenbaum understands this, and so Adam’s over-identification with his parents’ suffering is to be viewed with extreme criticality. This is proven by Rosenbaum’s use of the cattle car as his story’s defining image, an exhibit which seems to embody depthless bodily connection with the Holocaust past. While Gary Weissman believes that this story may be described as a “romantic fantasy”, in which an American Jew is literally transformed into a “full-fledged Holocaust victim” (2004, p. 15), I contend that the story is intended as a scathing critique of the second generation’s tendency to absorb their parents’ experiences. The second generation may feel that they have a genetic claim to their parents’ Holocaust histories, and

yet their vision of the event is founded on a thin tissue of assembled references – shared visual cues and scenes replicated time and again across all forms of media.

Adam's central thesis in this story would seem to be that parental reminiscences are quite literally passed on through the blood. The Holocaust is his genetic legacy, and his parents' suffering has been transmitted to him without any loss in fidelity. The crux of the story comes in the moment in which Adam's identity, following a short period of being trapped in an elevator, effectively blurs into that of the new arrival at Auschwitz. The doors to the elevator open and Adam is described as follows:

Adam was sitting on the floor, dressed in soiled rags... He presented the men of the transport with an empty stare, a vacancy of inner peace. As he lifted himself to his feet, he reached for a suitcase stuffed with a life's worth of possessions... Adam emerged, each step the punctuation of an uncertain sentence. His eyes were wide open as he awaited the pronouncement: right or left, in which line was he required to stand? (Rosenbaum, 1996, p. 11)

Scenes of arrival and selection, as the following chapter addresses, are now beyond ubiquitous in our cultural reproductions of the Holocaust. This is true both of the representation of the Holocaust in media and in a commemorative setting.⁶⁶ Numerous photographs in the visual archives of Yad Vashem, for instance, depict the arrival of the Hungarian transports in the May of 1944, just as the USHMM juxtaposes its cattle car experience with photographs of Hungarian children awaiting selection on the *Judenrampe*. As with all of Adam Posner's mentions of specific Holocaust scenes, I argue, this scene is a profoundly mediated one. In truth, Adam has only internalised two points of visual reference for the Holocaust. The other is the stock image of the gaunt prisoner, enshrined through

⁶⁶ Chapter Three analyses the role of the arrival process in Holocaust media.

numerous liberation pictures: “Liberate us! We are starving! We are skeletons, walking bones, ghosts! Get us out of this hell!” (p. 10) This extract is profoundly telling, as here we see the blurring of his two Holocaust touchstones. He mainly imagines himself trapped in the cattle car and yet here, momentarily, he falls back on the image of the liberated prisoner. The word “liberate” is supposed to act as a mental spur, I contend, as it draws the reader back to a particular set of Holocaust images – namely those taken in the days immediately following liberation. As Barbie Zelizer notes, the photographs which began to emerge during the period of liberation were all of a singularly common type: “Nazi brutality came to be repeatedly visualised through the depiction of survivors – small groups of survivors who looked full view into the camera, often from behind barbed wire or the barriers of unidentified camps” (1998, p. 160). In drawing us consciously back to the moment of liberation, therefore, while marrying this with the image of the skeletal prisoner, Rosenbaum is reminding us of the origin of this image. In short, Adam is emotionally transposing himself into a variety of ready-made and culturally standardised Holocaust scenes. He is trying to take the burden of experience upon himself, and yet his understanding of the Shoah – beyond his inherited anxieties – amounts to a vague assemblage of borrowed imagery.

Returning to the final scene, then, in which his elevator has “become a transport”, it is telling that Adam greets his would-be perpetrators with a “vacancy of inner-peace”. This is not the expected reaction for a new arrival in Auschwitz and it is therefore the one detail out of place. Adam’s inner-peace, I contend, can be traced to the satisfaction of his memory envy. As Susan Bernstein notes, memory envy may be described as “a psychic consequence of the excesses of sympathetic identification where one desires ‘strong memories’ that carry cultural capital as historically valuable” (2003, p. 154). The second generation, according to this statement, face a continuous internal struggle in which their own daily experiences, anxieties and accomplishments are continuously overshadowed by their parents’ Holocaust

pasts. The lives of the second generation, in short, have no cultural cache or historical relevance – especially when placed in contrast with their parents’ semi-mythic status as Survivors, with a capital “S”. As has been noted by Eva Hoffman, therefore, it is only natural that, over time, the second-generation child will gradually develop a “tacit sense of their own inadequacy, or banality” (2005, p. 69). The end of ‘The Cattle Car Complex’, as such, marks the moment in which Adam effectively renounces his own inherently banal identity and instead gives himself up to visions of grand suffering, albeit unquestioningly manufactured ones.

Adam’s moment of peace, therefore, is not to be taken as a sign of his romantic ascension from nonwitness to survivor, but rather we are to read it critically as a sign of his egotism. His feeling of tranquillity is simply an indication of his self-delusion, as he has convinced himself that his fraudulent vision of suffering is the same as the real thing. Rosenbaum, however, is keen to stress that this is a conceptual impossibility. In all of the other stories featured in *Elijah Visible* a clear distinction is drawn between the experiences of the survivor and the post-memorial fantasies of the second generation.

‘The Cattle Car Complex’, consequently, must not be viewed in isolation, but should instead be measured by the content of the other featured stories. Erin McGlothlin also believes that every story in the collection should be viewed intertextually, though her emphasis is on the character of Adam and his possible polyidentity – his unorthodox upbringing having shattered his core identity into a multitude of Adams:

Adam is the fractured product of the Shoah, a conglomeration of multiple pieces that cannot be retrofitted together to make a whole... Like his parents... he is broken and incomplete, for the impact of the traumatic memory he has inherited from them necessarily precludes a whole, continuous self. (2006, p. 47)

McGlothlin, therefore, reads this as the stylistic literalisation of the second generation's inability to understand their defining trauma. They have no access to their parents' Holocaust pasts, in which they share an emotional stake, and so they are unable to form a stable identity. Each incarnation of Adam, given that they all exist in their individual bubbles, represents a different fragment of a divided self. It is my contention, however, that McGlothlin has chosen to focus on the wrong thing. The focus should not be on the concept of polyidentity, as the name Adam Posner simply serves as a serviceable placeholder. It is not one man split nine ways, but rather nine distinct second-generation figures. Their shared name merely invites the reader to examine the differences and commonalities which carry over from each Adam to the next. By referring to each as Adam, Rosenbaum is simply heightening their symbolic significance, as each Adam becomes a totemic second-generation character. They are designed to represent common traits in the second-generation community, with their shared experiences representing culturally recognised parts of the second-generation upbringing. The first Adam, therefore, is designed to represent something of an outlier. He represents the delusional over-identification of a child who believes he understands the trauma of his parents. However, as the first story stresses, what Adam takes to be an authentic reproduction of the Holocaust past is merely a borrowed tissue of culturally enshrined post-liberation images. His vision of the Holocaust is entirely manufactured, having been based purely on his limited visual vocabulary of the events. All of the other stories in the collection are therefore designed to highlight the falsity of this first Adam's thinking.

In the fourth story, 'An Act of Defiance', Adam also regards the Shoah as his genetic inheritance. Crucially, however, he also notes that his understanding of it is entirely theoretical:

The Holocaust survivor in me was passed on through the genes. Who knows how many generations it will take to cancel this virus from the blood... Me, Adam Posner, unharmed in

New York, never even the victim of a veiled anti-Semitic remark, an entire ocean and a full generation removed from the ghettos and the camps. My DNA may be forever coded with the filmy stuff of damaged offspring, the handicap of an unwanted inheritance. (Rosenbaum, 1996, p. 63)

Here, then, we see the literal articulation of Hirsch's concept of post-memory. Rather than believing in the transmission of unmediated experience, this Adam describes his inheritance simply as the damage done by his parents. He understands that, for him, the Holocaust can never be felt as an experiential reality. By mentioning the entire ocean and full generation which separate him from the camps, he is consciously highlighting the fact that the Holocaust must remain a post-memorial abstraction. It is telling that Holocaust inheritance is described as a "virus". No information is being transmitted, it is simply a series of contextless symptoms which manifest across the generations. This is again in keeping with Hirsch's thinking, as this reiterates the impossibility of transmitting "lived experience". As such, while Adam still feels a profound emotional connection to the Holocaust – having described the weight of carrying it as a burden – his understanding of the events remains superficial. Indeed, the text goes out of its way to highlight Adam's reliance on heavily mediated written sources, while also undermining the depthlessness of post-memory. The most telling moment of the text comes following the arrival of Adam's Uncle Haskell – a genuine survivor of Auschwitz. From the outset, Adam draws a clear distinction between the authority of the survivor and his reading: "Now, nearing eighty, he was a walking ghost of horrors past. I imagined what he looked like, this witness who wouldn't go away, this author of all that silent testimony" (p. 58). Automatically, a distinction has been drawn between the power of spoken/written testimony and the traumatic silence of the survivor. Whereas written testimony amounts to the safe, distant, tempered product of common memory, Uncle

Haskell's silent testimony contains the raw evidence of incommunicable suffering: the undiluted essence of the Holocaust.

This distinction between the authenticity of the survivor and the postness of Holocaust writing becomes clearer in a later moment, when Uncle Haskell is literally juxtaposed with Adam's personal library:

Books that he had neither heard of nor read welcomed my uncle. The historians, philosophers, the psychologists, the theologians, the novelists, the poets, the playwrights – all had appropriated the Holocaust, making the suffering universal...the wail and shriek of the twentieth century. A cottage industry of Holocaust speculation had risen from the ashes of the dead... (p. 65)

In this extract Adam links together two core concepts – universalisation and appropriation. By referencing the transformation of the particular Holocaust into the “wail and shriek of the twentieth century”, Rosenbaum echoes Alexander's theory. The specific suffering of Adam's uncle is being literally contrasted with the cottage industry of post-memorial discussion which has transformed the Jewish stories of the past into a “master symbol of evil” (Alexander, 2009, p. 56). The Holocaust is not understood as a crime with identifiable Jewish victims in our broader cultural sphere, Rosenbaum implies, as it has instead become a moral universal, a standard by which other atrocities will be judged in the future and a lesson for the whole of humanity.

Placed alongside the presence of his uncle, Adam is now disgusted by his Holocaust texts, as they represent the gradual de-particularisation of the Holocaust. This recalls, for instance, Anne Frank's gradual Americanisation – in which she was gradually stripped of her Jewish identity. This was done, as Chapter Four argues, to facilitate the identification of non-Jews with particular Holocaust sufferers. Problematically, however – as Susan David Bernstein has noted – this kind of de-particularised portrayal of Jewish individuals can facilitate what

she terms “promiscuous identification”. She defines this concept as the “unreflective assimilation of the read subject into an untroubled reading self” (2003, p. 146). As these characters lack their own fixed identities, she implies, readers can often form an unhealthy level of identification with them – as they transpose their own qualities onto the suffering body of, for instance, Anne Frank. ‘An Act of Defiance’, therefore, served to particularise the Holocaust survivor – to block off the nonwitness’s tendency to identify with their suffering. By highlighting the individuality of the survivor, and the unreachability of their experiences, it serves as a direct response to ‘The Cattle Car Complex’.

While ‘An Act of Defiance’ may be the only text in the collection to explicitly discuss the distinction between the survivor’s experiences and the post-memorial reproduction of the Holocaust, the final two stories – ‘Lost, in a Sense’ and ‘The Little Blue Snowman of Washington Heights’ – solidify Rosenbaum’s stance on transmission. In both cases, the stories focus heavily on parent-child dynamics, with a particular emphasis on what second-generation children stand to learn from their parents.

Both stories focus on the unfitness of survivor-parents. This is perhaps most explicitly stated in ‘Lost, in a Sense’ when the eighth Adam wonders about the logic of survivors bearing children:

All survivors must have contemplated this dilemma... Wasn’t someone interested in discussing the awesome responsibility of child rearing, and the disqualifying circumstances that would have made them particularly unfit for the task? Why burden a new generation with such an unwanted legacy? (Rosenbaum, 1996, p. 172)

This Adam once again speaks of the inevitability of a second-generation legacy. Here, crucially, it is the only thing that his parents transmit to him. They do not have the capacity to provide a nurturing environment or to foster a stabilising atmosphere in the home. As Erin

McGlothlin notes, this is the one theme which remains consistent across the nine Adams: “In every story, the parents recede into the background, living ghosts who are themselves haunted, and it is the Holocaust that emerges as Adam’s true parent” (2006, p. 48). None of the parents presented in *Elijah Visible* emerge as dynamic characters. They are merely presented as insular bundles of post-Holocaust anxiety – people who are not simply defined by their trauma, but who embody it through their every moment of existence. When McGlothlin notes that it is the Holocaust who parents Adam, she infers that Adam’s parents are literally Shoah anxiety made manifest. Adam’s parents transmit nothing of themselves, conveying no usable information about either their pre-war lives or their Shoah-experiences, and so Adam’s sole inheritance remains the anxieties which have been transmitted from parent to child. Rosenbaum, echoing Hoffman’s general position, therefore believes in the transmission of a certain element of the Shoah – namely a common series of symptoms, manifesting as generalised anxiety. All of the Adams feel the root of the Holocaust in their bones, as a form of genetic inheritance, but they cannot connect with its experiential reality – something which remains locked away in their parents’ deep memories.

While ‘An Act of Defiance’ stressed the constructed nature of the post-memorial, ‘Lost, in a Sense’ takes this a step further by incorporating our temporal and emotional distance from the Holocaust as a vital plot element. Throughout the story, the suffering of Adam’s parents is juxtaposed with the comparatively banal death of a close neighbour. This man’s slow death from cancer, unlike the abstract vision of suffering conjured by his parents, strikes Adam as an approachable tragedy: “The same guy who used to swim laps in the pool and run us around the park now got winded so easily. The Adonis reduced to a skeleton... Different but somehow more real than the walking bones my parents may have brushed up against in the camps” (Rosenbaum, 1996, p. 178). There are two vital elements to unpack from this statement. The use of “may have” pointedly suggests that Adam has no real

understanding of his parents' concentration camp reality. Their time in the camps is understandable only as a post-memorial abstraction, with Adam having filled in the blanks in their stories with common post-war imagery. This then corresponds with the second element of the quotation, as Adam notes that the image of this wasting man is simply "more real" than his second-hand vision of the Holocaust. Adam experiences this cancer death as approachable suffering, in contrast to his parents' Holocaust experiences which stand only as an imponderable abstraction – a series of standardised, frequently reproduced images which cannot correspond with his daily reality.

Here, Adam is not only expressing the depthlessness of his post-Holocaust inheritance, but also its inherent uselessness. Despite growing up in a home where "apocalyptic preparation" (Rosenbaum, 1996, p. 174) had become the norm, Adam is fundamentally unprepared to deal with real grief. Adam's vision of death, for instance, is entirely founded on that which he has inherited from his parents: "Mr Isaacson's end was not death as they knew it: so powerfully abstract, in which naked bodies holding infant children were shot and thrown into ravines, buried over in mass graves in anonymity" (p. 179). Given that these images correspond with our established post-memory of the Holocaust – here presented as a meshing of standard atrocity scenes, though specifically evoking images from the likes of Liepaja and Ivangorod – the reader must question whether these images truly correspond to Adam's parents' conception of death. Given that he has already stressed his fundamental lack of understanding of their wartime experiences, they must be interpreted as *his* post-memorial projections. As Hirsch notes, even the most "intimate familial transmissions" are "mediated by public images and narratives" (2012, p. 29). Unable to understand the private reality of his parents' pasts, the gaps in his knowledge have been filled in with publicly available images. This is a story in which the concrete reality of Auschwitz, or Majdanek in the case of Adam's mother, remains fundamentally irrecoverable. Adam speaks of his

parents' perspective, and yet he has no conception of their past experiences or their inner-life in the present.

Once again, therefore, this story must be taken as a firm rebuttal of Adam's thinking in 'The Cattle Car Complex'. This is the second story to have explicitly emphasised the entirely post-memorial nature of Adam's thinking, though more emphasis has been placed in this instance on the impenetrability of his parents. They remain entirely closed-off figures, whose pasts remain firmly unarticulated. Adam has a diffuse, generalised understanding of the Holocaust – founded entirely on the images he has absorbed from media at large. This constitutes the whole of his understanding of the event. Unable to understand his parents' particular experiences, he simply has to fold them into this mythic vision of the camps – founded largely on visions of walking skeletons and other culturally reproduced atrocity images.

The final story of the collection, 'The Little Blue Snowman', takes the vision of the impenetrable survivor-parent to its logical extreme. While other stories may have emphasised the fragility of survivor parents, stressing their profound psychic damage and literal frailty, here we see the image of two survivors frozen in a state of perpetual trauma.⁶⁷ When the young Adam of this story – by far the youngest featured in the collection – returns home from kindergarten, having trudged through a snowstorm, he encounters the following scene: "The door was already open. The room completely dark. By the window, two naked bodies were shuddering in the darkness. Two pairs of terrorised eyes" (Rosenbaum, 1996, p. 205). In ending his collection on this note, Rosenbaum clearly wishes to mark this as the central thesis of his collection: for survivors, the past exists as an unprocessed wound. It

⁶⁷ Rosenbaum's 'Bingo by the Bungalow' also deals with the notion of survivor parents who have been debilitated by their wartime traumas. In it, a father has been so sapped of his emotional reserves that he is literally killed by a minor instance of post-war stress.

cannot be relegated to the past, as the nature of trauma seems to preclude recovery. The Holocaust, in short, is ever-present. Adam's parents, here, have lapsed back into the experiential remembrance of the Holocaust. Adam, meanwhile, is unable to reach them emotionally. He has no concept of their inner suffering, just as they have no grasp on the present. They exist in two irreconcilably different worlds. He can see the terror in their eyes, and he can internalise it as his own panic, but he cannot understand its origins. This is the very summation of Rosenbaum's thesis of unreachability: an uncomprehending child faced with literally speechless and unreachable parents.

Returning to 'The Cattle Car Complex', therefore, one can argue that the collection has been designed with a certain degree of circularity. The final story serves as the ultimate rebuff to the notion that the Holocaust can be accessed by the second generation. In reality, all second-generation children stand to inherit from their parents is survivor symptomology. As Mrs. Turner, the school nurse and stand-in child psychologist, notes in 'The Little Blue Snowman': "The parents have turned this little boy into a concentration camp survivor, and he wasn't even in the camps!" (p. 200). Adam has inherited his parents' survivor behaviours without having lived their trauma. Rosenbaum continuously draws this distinction by stressing that while the second generation may share the foundational symptoms of their parents' trauma, they have no understanding of its origins. The experiential reality of the Holocaust remains the sole province of the survivor-parent. *Elijah Visible* can only be read, therefore, as a firm rebuttal against the occasional presumptuousness of the second generation and their fantasies of witnessing. The first Adam may feel a moment of tranquillity, having discovered the root of his suffering, but this is based on a false foundation. As this collection continues to reiterate, every second-generation child understands the Holocaust only as a collection of borrowed imagery – the standard set of images enshrined in our collective cultural memory of the event. As Eva Hoffman states, the

second generation inherits “not the event, but its shadows” (2005, p. 66). The first Adam’s stance, therefore, may be charitably described as tragic self-delusion. He has convinced himself that the Holocaust can be approached and that the suffering of his parents may be lived vicariously. Every other story in the collection, however, functions as a systematic rebuke to this mode of thinking.

Returning to the concept of the “hinge generation”, therefore, it is clear that Rosenbaum has used his fictional exploration of the second generation to convey a specific point. Namely, that all nonwitness writing must maintain a reverential distance from certain aspects of the Holocaust. Rosenbaum’s representation of the second generation, I contend, perfectly aligns with Alison Landsberg’s vision of prosthetic memory. As his text illustrates, our unbridgeable emotional and experiential distance from the Holocaust has left the second generation with something of a quandary. Though they feel a profound sense of connectedness to the Holocaust, given their inherited anxieties, they cannot engage with it fully. Any attempt to touch the Holocaust in the present will be, unavoidably, entirely depthless. As Rosenbaum illustrates, the Holocaust may be engaged with on a purely bodily level – through imagined physical suffering in the cattle car – but our present-day conception of the event is based entirely on a post-memorial reconstruction.

Referring back to Gillian Rose’s concept of Holocaust Piety, therefore, Rosenbaum has used his short stories to critique post-memorial attempts to engage with the Holocaust past. Rose’s theory focuses specifically on fictional attempts to approach the psychology of sufferers and survivors in order to make the Holocaust fathomable. Pious fiction, she argues, keeps the Holocaust ineffable by refusing to approach the inner life of its characters. As ‘The Cattle Car Complex’ illustrates, one cannot truly reconnect with either the experiential or psychological reality of Holocaust suffering. No incarnation of Adam Posner is able to understand his parents’ mindset or to fathom any of their experiences during the 1940s, and

so they must maintain a frustrated distance from the Shoah. All one can achieve in reality, as this thesis discusses further, is a depthless moment of connection with scenes of physical suffering. In place of a truly impious moment of access to the Holocaust past, as Rose would have it, one is only able to access a prosthetic memory of bodily suffering. One may be able to touch the Holocaust on a purely material level, by walking through the cattle car space or feeling a sympathetic moment of physical discomfort while watching *Schindler's List*, but one cannot reconnect with either the Holocaust dead or the present-day survivor on a human or empathetic level. All attempts at impious engagement, Rosenbaum's text suggests, are therefore inevitably doomed to fail. In place of this, Chapters Three and Four discuss further, nonwitnesses have instead become fascinated by the physical elements of Holocaust suffering – from the raw materiality of death to the victim's suffering body. Gratuity, in short, has come to replace impiety. The following section, which focuses specifically on Patrick Modiano's *The Search Warrant* and W.G. Sebald's *Austerlitz*, begins to outline the cause for this shift in perspective – as, frustrated with the absence of bodies, both authors come to focus on the concept of materiality.

The Failure of Recovery

Young, in *At Memory's Edge*, discusses the inherent complications that come with commemorating the Holocaust – namely, how can one commemorate an intangibility? The Holocaust, despite the aforementioned post-liberation photographs from sites such as Bergen-Belsen and Buchenwald, has been reconceptualised as an atrocity which yielded no bodies. As Auschwitz has come to form the conceptual core of the Holocaust world, mass extermination – and the transformation of bodies into ashes – has become the dominant image of the atrocity. As such, our models of commemoration tend to revolve around similar

themes – a focus on artefacts, for instance, or monuments which invoke the abstract concept of cremation while also conspicuously highlighting the absence of the murdered. Both the *Bibliothek*, the memorial to the Nazi book burnings found in the Bebelplatz in Berlin, and Rachel Whiteread's *Judenplatz Holocaust Memorial* in Vienna literalise the concept of absence while tacitly hinting at the concept of Jewish extermination. Young describes Micha Ullman's *Bibliothek* monument thus:

A steel tablet set into the stones simply recalls that this was the site of some of the most notorious book-burnings and quotes Heinrich Heine's famously prescient words, "Where books are burned, so one day people will be burned as well." But the shelves are still empty, unreplenished, and it is the absence of both people and books that is marked here in yet one more memorial pocket. (2000, p. 107)

Both Ullman's and Whiteread's memorials, to borrow a phrase from Robert Storrs, stand as "the solid shape of an intangible absence" (Storrs, in Young, 2000, p. 112). The very nature of this intangibility is implied by Heinrich Heine's quotation, as the burning of books, along with their conspicuous absence, is automatically contextualised and given a significance beyond itself. The bookshelves remain empty in continued acknowledgment of the worst excesses of the Nazi era. The concept of Jewish death is invoked in the form of a pure abstraction, tied simply to the concept of burning. While the monument is multi-layered, therefore – as it does also serve to commemorate the book burning itself – it consciously invokes Auschwitz as the end point of Nazi persecution. Additionally, as Young notes, Whiteread's monument not only represents the "destruction itself" but also gestures "silently towards the acts of reading, writing, and memory that had once constituted this people as a people" (p. 113). Both monuments, as such, include – as part of their intended messaging – an abstract vision of extermination. While they do speak to the destruction of Jewish life,

and the incremental shifts in policy which led to their extermination, they also invoke the spectre of Auschwitz and the indirect evocation of mass death.

Horst Hoheisel's "Warm memorial" at Buchenwald also invokes this vision of extermination. Young describes it as a slab of concrete containing a "radiant heating system" which brings it to a "constant 98.6 degrees Fahrenheit (36.5 degrees Celsius) that might suggest the body heat of those whose memory it would now enshrine" (p. 105). Even though Buchenwald was not classed as a killing centre, therefore, this memorial pivots around the notion of absent bodies. It aims to add a degree of physicality and materiality to those who have been transformed into smoke and ash. At the core of our cultural conception of the Holocaust, therefore, there has always been a foundational preoccupation with bodies – with the need to particularise and physicalise the Jewish dead. The concept of mass extermination, after all, serves only to anonymise the Holocaust dead by transforming separate and identifiable bodies into an abstract vision of commingled ash. It is for this reason that Auschwitz represents the dead abstractly, through the image of piled objects. Referencing the piles of shoes presented in Auschwitz, Liliane Weissberg notes: "Homogenised as one group, these shoes speak as a mass and exemplify mass murder" (2001, p. 23). These objects do not have the capacity to individualise their owners, therefore, but rather speak to the anonymising nature of industrial mass murder. Given the absence of bodies, and considering the sheer number of the murdered, the Holocaust dead have been effectively anonymised by the process of mass killing. We cannot recover a sense of the individual from these homogenous piles or the ashes disposed of in the Vistula. And yet, the compulsion clearly exists to reconnect with the Holocaust dead – to give them back an element of physicality.

The two texts considered in this section, Patrick Modiano's *The Search Warrant* and W.G. Sebald's *Austerlitz*, address the attempt to recover an individual who has been lost in the fires of Auschwitz. The protagonists of both novels understand the Holocaust simply as a

depthless abstraction – a collection of distant horrors to which they have no felt connection. Their desire to give form back to the murdered, this chapter suggests, is symptomatic of their desire to connect with the Shoah – to close the emotional distance they feel from the event as nonwitnesses. There is, I contend, a prurience to their determination – a palpable Holocaust envy, grounded in their inability to understand the reality of the event.

Beginning with *The Search Warrant*, there is a curious similarity between the narrator's perception of Dora Bruder and Shimon Attie's *Writing on the Wall* project, in which Germany's missing Jews were partially re-embodied as ghostly projections onto the city's walls. Young explains:

Like many Jewish Americans pre-occupied by the Holocaust and steeped in its seemingly ubiquitous images, he saw Jewish ghosts in Europe's every nook and cranny: from the Scheunenviertel in Berlin to the central train station in Dresden... For Attie, however, private acts of remembrance... were not enough. He chose, therefore, to actualise these inner visions, to externalise them, and in so doing make them part of a larger public's memory. (2000, pp. 64-65)

Attie's artistic vision is founded on the concept of mass extermination. The Holocaust dead have no substance, having been reduced to ash. Their extermination is hinted at emblematically through their recreation as ghostly projections – they have become people made of air, like Celan's dead. Attie believes that he is merely literalising their felt presence, as he claims to feel them as they haunt the streets of Berlin. By projecting their images back onto the streets of the present, therefore, he is theoretically collapsing the distance between the modern day and the victims' past. As such, he is effectively trying to transform an erased group of people into an approachable reality – to tie these vanished people back to the material reality of the present. Just as the cattle car added a physical component to the absent dead, as one was sharing the space that they previously occupied, the streets of Berlin are

being used to physicalise the absence of the Holocaust dead. This approach echoes Modiano's attempted resurrection of Dora Bruder. However, it is first important to note that Attie's ghosts come with serious conceptual limitations. While his photographs do represent the former inhabitants of Scheunenviertel – he was able to cull several images from the Berlin archives, all representing life in the 1920s and 1930s – his representations are not intended to literally evoke the missing. Instead, his visuals are designed to critique the German perception of the Jewish other. As Young puts it:

Because German Jewry itself was often so well assimilated as to appear effectively invisible, Attie has had to rely on the image of the Ost-Juden to make visible the otherwise invisible Jews of Germany – even though they themselves were not representative faces of German Jewry itself... It would be easy to work up sympathy in Germans for all the Jews who were murdered “even though they looked just like us”. But it is the idea and treatment of ‘the other’ that concerns Attie... (p. 71)

The people of Scheunenviertel, therefore, are not being haunted by humanised victims of the Holocaust – who have been individualised and reconstituted by Attie's process. Instead, they are being persecuted by a generalised representation of the racial Other. If Attie's installation may act as a testament to anything, therefore, it is the impossibility of representing anything beyond the mythic after-image of the Holocaust. One may literalise the haunting of the Holocaust dead, bringing them forcefully back into the present, but this can only ever serve as a partial resurrection. We cannot restore their voices or imbue them with humanity, as Modiano's attempt to recover Dora Bruder ultimately attests.

The first point of connection between Modiano and Attie is evident in their shared desire to link the Holocaust dead back to a specific place. Just as Attie sought to reintegrate the people of the past into the landscape of the present, Modiano's narrator views the landscape of Paris as the only legitimate means of approaching Dora Bruder:

They are the sort of people who leave few traces. Inseparable from those Paris streets, those suburban landscapes where, by chance, I discovered they had lived. Often, what I know about them amounts to no more than a simple address. And such topographical precision contrasts with what we shall never know about their life – this blank, this mute block of the unknown. (Modiano, 2014, p. 23)

Like Attie, therefore, the narrator is overly conscious of the presence of the murdered on the streets of the present day. Their absence has a material reality to him, as he seems aware of the gaps left by their missing bodies. However, there is also a paradox at play here. While he clearly feels a physical and emotional connection to the missing Bruders – the word “inseparable” speaks to both his preoccupation with them and the intensity of his feeling – he knows nothing about them as people. Like the vast majority of the Holocaust dead, their pre-war lives have become a “blank” as few signs remain to fill in the details of their identities. This lack of particularising detail, rather than complicating the narrator’s attempt to connect with Dora Bruder, only serves to intensify his desire to identify with her.

We can see evidence of this in a later extract, as the narrator imagines her Sunday journeys back home from her convent school:

I wandered around the neighbourhoods, weighed down after a while by the sadness of those other Sundays when it was time to return to the convent... She would have put off the moment when she must enter the gate and cross the courtyard. She prolonged her walk, choosing streets at random. It grew dark. The Avenue de Saint-Mande is quiet, bordered by trees. I forget whether or not there is a stretch of open ground. (p. 123)

This extract is symptomatic of the narrator’s core presumption. At an earlier point in the novel he states: “That afternoon, without knowing why, I had the impression of walking in another’s footsteps” (p. 44). He is not simply aiming to reconstruct a narrative map of Dora Bruder’s life, therefore, but rather he is trying to “walk in her footsteps” by imagining, and

thereby vicariously experiencing, her past reality in order to absorb an element of the atrocity itself. This is an example of prosthetic memory – albeit a prototypical one, as it lacks Landsberg’s ethical restrictions.⁶⁸ It is clear, for instance, that Modiano’s narrator has experienced his connection to Dora’s past physically, as a sensuous memory. By walking in her literal footsteps he is trying to merge with her pre-war self. We see the moment of elision in the first line of the extract: “I wandered around the neighbourhoods, weighed down after a while by the sadness of those other Sundays when it was time to return to the convent”. The sadness he speaks of is purely his own imaginative invention. He knows nothing about Dora’s inner-self and has merely transposed a series of likely emotions onto the ghostly image he has reconstructed of her – the *Luftmensch* he has decided to project on to the streets of Paris.

While the narrator will later acknowledge that he will never really know “how she spent her days” (p. 137), conceding that she must ultimately remain hopelessly irretrievable, this moment in the text still reads as an extreme instance of over-identification. The narrator tries, in a quite literal sense, to inhabit the mind and body of one who has passed. He assumes her identity, blurring the temporal distance between the two of them. While a prosthetic memory does involve a “deeply felt” (Landsberg, 2004, p. 3) experience which did not originate “organically” (p. 26) in one’s own body, Modiano’s narrator exceeds this by beginning to confuse his own memories with those of Dora. Or rather, the version of Dora Bruder which he has invented.

By presenting the reader with this sequence, therefore, Modiano is highlighting the paradox at the centre of the nonwitness’s approach to the Holocaust. While they may

⁶⁸ As Landsberg notes, prosthetic memories: “do not erase differences or construct common origins. People who acquire these memories are led to feel a connection to the past but, all the while, to remember their position in the contemporary moment” (2004, p. 9). Prosthetic memory, therefore, is not designed to foster an excess of identification. Modiano’s narrator, on the other hand, does begin to fuse his own identity with Bruder’s.

intellectually acknowledge their distance from the Holocaust dead, they still wish to connect with them – to touch them, in some sense. This can only be achieved through depthless moments of bodily identification, which ultimately yield nothing of value.

Both Attie's work and *The Search Warrant*, then, are founded on the notion of absence. As Modiano's narrator puts it: "I have a sense of absence, of emptiness, whenever I find myself in a place where they lived" (2014, p. 24). It is the quality of this particular absence which unites the two works. There is a unique quality which comes with the spectre of the Holocaust dead. They have not simply been murdered, but the manner of their killing has robbed them of all particularity. Attie's *Luftmenschen*, and by extension Dora Bruder herself, are not vividly realised victims of the Holocaust. They are not people with dimensions or fixed interior lives. They are totemic stand-ins for the Holocaust many – Primo Levi's *sommersi*, who cannot be resurrected from the flames of the Holocaust. Their transformation into smoke and ash, or the absence of a tangible body providing a stable identity, renders them ill-defined and nebulous. The only physical remnant of their passing, as was noted previously, comes in the objects that have been left behind. As such, both works imply the fundamental irretrievability of the Holocaust dead.

Erin McGlothlin, however, disagrees with this stance, arguing that Modiano is able to restore something of Dora Bruder:

although evidence of Dora's struggle in Paris is all but non-existent, it can be made manifest for the reader by the joint exercise of memory and imagination. In this way, despite the nearly total resistance to the reconstruction of her life he encounters in the archives, Modiano is nevertheless able to recover Dora's memory by writing her into the text as a real body on the street. (2006, pp. 138-139)

McGlothlin's core position is that Modiano's text acts as a counterbalance to the years of bureaucratic self-censorship which erased Dora Bruder from existence. However, by

describing Dora as a “real body on the street”, and thus emphasising this aspect of physicality, McGlothlin has effectively fallen into a common post-memorial trap. She is assuming that the re-physicalisation of Dora Bruder somehow equates to a genuine resurrection of the lost girl. McGlothlin’s insinuation is that Modiano’s narrator has achieved something substantial by re-imagining Dora back onto the streets of modern day Paris, and mapping out her previous paths so that he may walk in her now inhabitable shoes. As the final paragraph of Modiano’s text states, however, nothing of Dora’s actual identity has been recovered. He concedes that he will never know any of the details of her wartime experiences, as that “is her secret” (Modiano, 2014, p. 137). In dying, Dora has become entirely unreachable – taking all of her experiences with her to the grave. Her ghost may be placed back into the Paris streets, but this will only ever be a post-memorial projection – a fantasy created by nonwitnesses. The narrator’s final concession, therefore, is that despite his best efforts he has done nothing to revivify the absent Dora Bruder. By focusing too excessively on the notion of Dora Bruder as a “real body”, McGlothlin has therefore fallen into the post-memorial trap of assuming that the body may be used to impart something meaningful about the Holocaust. As this thesis argues, however, this excessive focus on the body and the physicalisation of the Holocaust dead never yields anything positive. As Modiano’s narrator infers, he will never be able to approach Dora Bruder impiously. She must remain entirely unfathomable to him. Her body, therefore, serves only as a hollow shell – a prosthesis that may be worn by those looking to touch the Holocaust, but which will ultimately impart nothing about the victim. It is, in short, simply a tool designed to facilitate Holocaust voyeurism. The real Dora Bruder remains irrecoverable.

The theme of irrecoverability, as Crownshaw and Hirsch discuss, is also central to Sebald’s *Austerlitz*. While both stress Austerlitz’s reliance on the artefactual, it is Hirsch who is blunter in her appraisal of his search:

The confusion experienced by Sebald's character, the profound losses he has suffered, his helpless meanderings and pointless searches, and the beautiful prose that conveys absence and an objectless and thus endless melancholia, all this combined with blurry, hard-to-make-out photographic images, speak somehow to a generation marked by a history to which they have lost even the distant and now barely "living connection". (2012, pp. 41-42)

Once again, the word "absence" is being used in a Holocaust-specific context. Austerlitz's parents have not simply been killed, but they have been absorbed into the collective anonymity of the Holocaust dead. His later fixation on finding an image of his mother, therefore, stems from his need to give her back an element of solidity – to reimburse her with form in order to dispel the lurking image of the ash cloud which haunts this text. Indeed, despite the absence of direct representation – or even direct mention of the name Auschwitz – Sebald's text is laced with post-memorial references to that camp in the East. In describing the deaths of Hugo and Lucy Sussfield, two people killed following their deportation in 1944, Austerlitz states that they dissolved "into the empty air" (Sebald, 2011, p. 363). This phrase is particularly evocative as it hints at the imagined loss of substance which seems to define his vision of Holocaust death. Their bodies have been stripped of form and they have been transmogrified into smoke and ash. This corresponds with the fixed, inherited vision of death in Auschwitz which has come to define our post-memorial understanding of the Holocaust. Austerlitz understands his parents' murder simply as a depthless abstraction – they were transported and killed before dissolving into the empty air. In conjunction with this, it cannot serve as a mere coincidence that Austerlitz's search for his father is immediately juxtaposed with the following scene:

a television screen measuring at least two square metres and fixed high on the wall was just transmitting pictures of the great palls of smoke which had been stifling the towns and villages

of Indonesia for weeks on end, and dusting grey ash over the heads of all who for any reason ventured out of doors. (p. 356)

Though the television may be depicting images from Indonesia, the placement of this scene clearly implies that Sebald intends for it to carry an element of subtext. In the very next moment, Austerlitz tries to imagine his father occupying the streets of Paris: “I sat in this bar too for hours on end, trying to imagine him in his plum-coloured double-breasted suit, perhaps a little threadbare now, bent over one of the café tables” (p. 358). In a fashion singularly reminiscent of Modiano’s text, Austerlitz is trying to place his father back on the streets of modern day Paris as a “real body”. His fixation on the minute details of his father’s clothing represents a desperate attempt to clothe his father in some kind of materiality. Austerlitz may be no closer to recovering the human essence of his father, or to form even a basic understanding of his persona, but he can imagine the texture of a threadbare suit. In reality, however, Maximilian must remain a memorial ghost. The previous sequence tells the reader this by creating a cognitive link with the image of smoke and ash. By placing this scene from Indonesia in conjunction with Austerlitz’s imaginary reconstruction of his father, Sebald has intentionally primed the reader for the hopelessness of the attempt.

This vision of anonymising destruction returns again in a later scene in which Austerlitz imagines his father boarding a train from the Gare d’Austerlitz:

an idea came to him of his father’s leaving Paris from this station... soon after the Germans entered the city. I imagined, said Austerlitz, that I saw him leaning out of the window of his compartment as the train left, and I saw the white clouds of smoke rising from the locomotive as it began to move ponderously away. After that I wandered round the deserted station half dazed. (p. 406)

While Austerlitz may outwardly maintain the hope of one day encountering his father – he goes on to claim that he will “continue looking” for him (p. 408) – the imagery provided by

Sebald continuously hints at the manner of his death. Given the previously discussed significance of the train in Holocaust culture, one can only assume that Sebald has positioned it here as a visual shorthand for Maximillian's likely extermination. The smoke pouring from the locomotive further bridges the gap, drawing the reader's mind back to the image of the crematoria smokestack. This image of the smoking train, it must be noted, has become a standard form of visual shorthand in our post-memory of the Holocaust. The opening scenes of *Triumph of the Spirit* (1989), for instance – a film which details the deportation of a family to Auschwitz – opens with the image of a steam train pulling into a station:



Figure 6: A still from 'Triumph of the Spirit' (1989).



Figure 7: A still from 'Triumph of the Spirit'. The smoke from the previous image gradually consumes the frame.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ All still from: Young, R.M. (Director). (1989) *Triumph of the Spirit* [Motion Picture] [DVD]. Germany: Crest Movies. (2014)

As this sequence acts as a preface for the coming events, it can be inferred that the director, Robert M. Young, intends for it to serve as an emotional primer for his audience. Without entering into the confines of Auschwitz, he has effectively conjured the spectre of industrial mass murder. It is not the train which is the focus of the frame, but the smoke which gradually obscures the background image, as Figure 7 illustrates. The connection to the crematoria is then made explicit in a later sequence as, having depicted the moments of undressing prior to extermination, Young then cuts to the image of smoke rising from a chimney. Again, the smoke comes to dominate the frame – standing in for the grim reality of mass death. Just as Young prefaces the events of his film with this evocation of mass extermination, then, Sebald uses this image to explicitly infer Maximillian's fate.

This becomes more apparent when considering the additional historical significance which Sebald attaches to the Gare d'Austerlitz. Tellingly, Austerlitz describes his initial feeling upon entering the station as one of "being on the scene of some unexpiated crime" (p. 407). Following his earlier visit to the Ghetto Museum in Terezín (Theresienstadt), it is clear that Austerlitz does understand the historical significance of the railway system. Having examined the exhibits there he notes the following:

I traced the railway lines running through them, felt blinded by the documentation recording the population policy of the National Socialists... I was confronted with incontrovertible proof of the setting up of a forced labour system throughout Central Europe, and learned of the deliberate wastage and discarding of the work-slaves themselves, of the origins and places of death of the victims, the routes by which they were taken to what destinations (pp. 278-279)

In viewing these records, Austerlitz comes to understand that the railway system served as the principle means of transportation for the Reich's victims. Their paths from the ghettos to the various concentration and extermination camps of Germany and Poland are retraceable. A tangible connection runs from these sites, the locations of their eventual deaths, all the

way back to their homelands. The train system is again portrayed as an arterial link which carries the essence of the Holocaust back to those countries which carried out organised deportations. The Gare d'Austerlitz, in short, will never be able to fully expiate the crimes of the past, because the vast majority of historical railroad lines which once carried people from Paris to the murderous camps of the East still exist. France, in other words, is forever bound to its history of complicity by the permanence of the railroad. While the dead may not be returned to the streets of Paris bodily, therefore, this one physical element of their extermination remains.

There is one further physical element which links the Gare d'Austerlitz to the crimes of the past, however. Employing that other common remnant of the Holocaust dead, their abandoned possessions, Austerlitz implies that France will likely still contain certain pieces of evidence which would implicate its people in the crimes of the past:

Thus, on the waste land between the marshalling yards of the Gare d'Austerlitz and the Pont Tolbiac... there stood until the end of the war an extensive warehousing complex to which the Germans brought all the loot they had taken from the homes of the Jews of Paris... All who had taken part in any way in this highly organised programme of expropriation and reutilization... must undoubtedly have known that scarcely any of those interned in Drancy would ever come back. (pp. 401-402)

The Austerlitz-Tolbiac storage depot, thus, contains another potent signifier of Holocaust absence – the objects left behind by those who have been deported. However, as is generally the case with object-based commemoration, the items cannot convey anything meaningful of their owners. These objects point only at a generalised vision of extermination, as is implied by their nature as everyday, unremarkable things: “In the years from 1942 onwards everything our civilization has produced... from Louis XVI chests of drawers, Meissen porcelain, Persian rugs and whole libraries, down to the last salt-cellar and pepper-mill, was

stacked there in the Austerlitz-Tolbiac storage depot” (p. 402). None of these items hint at the individuality of the Holocaust dead. An inevitable consequence of storing several examples of the same generic household item – from the profusion of rugs to the indistinguishable mass of salt and pepper shakers – is that a certain impression begins to form. The human specificity of Jewish suffering across mainland Europe is buried underneath a mountain of similar items. One cannot determine individual ownership or pick out particularising details when presented with a mountain with indistinguishable things.

This becomes yet more problematic when we factor in the word “reutilization”, as Austerlitz has raised the probability that these items will still be in circulation. In ‘Brick by Brick’, a 1995 project which saw the projection of everyday turn-of-the-century household items onto the enormous brick columns of the Rheinhalle in Cologne, Shimon Attie once again brought the crimes of the Holocaust back into the present. By drawing the viewer’s focus towards these commonplace antiques, Attie has raised certain questions regarding the provenance of these items: “What were you doing during the war... To whom did that table belong before the war? Is it an ill-gotten gain, a Nazi-sanctioned piece of war booty? Or was it passed down innocently from one generation to the next?” (Young, 2000, p. 82). Rather than providing a concrete answer to this question, Young notes, Attie allows it to “float in the space of the art fair” (p. 82). The viewer is made to ponder their own second-hand complicity as they consider the origins of every item. The crimes of the past, therefore, carry on into the present in the form of these slight memorial traces. Given that the confiscated items housed in the Austerlitz-Tolbiac storage facility have been reintegrated into society, having been passed on the wilfully ignorant populace, the likelihood is that certain people in our present-day post-memorial society may have inherited items with an undisclosed past. The crimes of the Nazi state, therefore, continue into the present in the form of these tokens

of annihilation. They cannot specify the time or place in which their owners died, however, and so they bring to mind only a generalised image of mass extermination.

This, despite his principal character's moments of ill-judged positivity, is Sebald's intended message. He wants the reader to come to terms with the irrecoverability of a specific Holocaust past – or the resurrection of one of the murdered. Material traces of the murdered may remain in modern society, but these speak only to the generalised concept of mass extermination. In order to counter his mother's erasure, therefore – and to distinguish her from the rest of the murdered – Austerlitz becomes intent on recovering her image. He begins by scanning a film recording of the Theresienstadt camp in the hope of recovering some concrete trace of her – of fixing her image in his mind. In reality, however, he cannot find her and so he must resort to an invented image, a fantasy based around its material qualities:

I imagined seeing her walking down the street in a summer dress and lightweight gabardine coat, said Austerlitz: among a group of ghetto residents out for a stroll, she alone seemed to make straight for me, coming closer with every step. (Sebald, 2011, p. 343)

Her coat, he notes, would be lightweight and gabardine. He can imagine the texture of her clothes, but she remains a faceless abstraction. This anonymity may be linked to the setting of the video. As James Wood notes, Auschwitz was the place to which “most of the surviving Jews of Theresienstadt were eventually taken” (p. xxv). As such, Sebald is specifically invoking the idea that Auschwitz has the power to anonymise the dead. Though he does not mention it by name, he explicitly alludes to the Auschwitz camp in order to make this connection explicit. Particular emphasis is paid to the “Hydrogen-cyanide chamber” which had been “introduced by the Kommandantur in an all-out campaign against infestation with lice” (p. 336). This can only be read as an unambiguous allusion to the gas chambers of Auschwitz and the Zyklon-B compound which was used therein. According to the *Encyclopaedia of Chemical Technology*, Zyklon-B was broadly composed of Hydrocyanic

acid (HCN, or prussic acid) and one other additional element: “The German Cyclon B was a mixture of this acid with diatomaceous earth creating the blue crystalline substance often described” (Höss, 1996, p. 155). As such, the inclusion of prussic acid, along with particularly pertinent references to the extermination of pests, will inevitably conjure images of death in Auschwitz. The historical complexity of Theresienstadt has been simplified and, in its place, Sebald has left the standardised memory of mass extermination in Auschwitz. Austerlitz’s mother, therefore, is currently being eclipsed by the mass of faceless deportees transported from Theresienstadt to their common doom.

Austerlitz’s quest to recover a sense of his mother ends, ostensibly, when he discovers a picture which matches the “dim memory” (Sebald, 2011, p. 353) he has carried since early childhood. As Crownshaw notes, however, despite receiving external verification from Věra – the mother’s former neighbour and Austerlitz’s one-time nursemaid – even the authenticity of this image must be called into question: “If all images have so far proved unreliable, the immediate verification of this one seems conspicuous” (2010, p. 75). In truth, however, the actual validity of the image is of little import. All that is required is licence from a third party, some form of external verification, to give the image meaning. As Crownshaw puts it: “witnesses are needed to corroborate history; the past and past objects cannot speak for themselves” (p. 68). The image itself, therefore, possesses no innate properties of any kind. It evokes nothing of the dead and will not act as a substantiating bridge, reconnecting Austerlitz with his deceased mother. In reality, it is merely a screen onto which he can project his own associations. Austerlitz, by bringing with him his desperate need to attach a sense of fixity to his mother’s memorial ghost “animates these photographs with a life they do not possess on their own” (p. 68). Having been granted permission by Věra, Austerlitz is able to use this image to flesh out his remembrances of his mother. The only thing Austerlitz has been able to recover from the fires of Auschwitz, therefore, is a fixed shape for his mother.

He has solidified his image of her body, even if it may – in actuality – prove to be someone else. All that we may recover of the Holocaust dead, therefore – Sebald’s text implies – is a partially materialised form onto which we may project our fantasies. We cannot recover the Holocaust dead as people, but we can partially rematerialize their spectres. Just as Modiano’s narrator wills Dora Bruder back onto the streets of Paris, Austerlitz is able to partially physicalise his image of his mother. Or rather, to finally add fixed proportions to her body.

Both authors, in exploring the issue of recovery, mean to transmit the same message to future generations. Both wish to highlight the desperation of the second generation and the profound emotional dissatisfaction which comes with distance. There is no alternative to the post-memorial, they tell us, and all of our attempts to connect with the Holocaust dead will prove hopelessly superficial. The text addressed in the following section, Shalom Auslander’s *Hope: A Tragedy*, takes the idea of the post-memorial Holocaust to its logical extreme by creating a world in which the Shoah is remembered only as a mythic vaguery. Having accepted the message of the hinge generation, he seems to suggest, we are doomed to remember the Holocaust only as a mythic agglomeration of standardised post-memorial images.

Shalom Auslander and the Rootless Holocaust

The first section of this chapter established the notion of inherited trauma, or rather the possibility of inheriting its symptoms without having access to the experiential reality of the Holocaust itself. While the vast majority of Rosenbaum’s stories focus on the passive transmission of Holocaust trauma through the survivor’s behaviours – their general anxieties gradually passing on to their children through shared proximity – Rosenbaum also hinted at the possibility of genetically transmitted trauma. His characters spoke of the Holocaust as existing in their bones, implying that these anxieties may have been with them since birth.

This aligns with Wardi's suggestion that survivors may have passed on their anxieties to their children through a flood of neurohormonal substances, as their post-war anxieties were chemically transmitted to their children while still in the womb. While these texts, then, seemed to endorse the concept of genetic transmission as a possibility, they did not possess sufficient scientific knowledge at that point in time to support this thinking. In the intervening years, however, research has been done which suggests that the genetic transmission of trauma is a real possibility.

Following on from the research of Rachel Yehuda, an increasing amount of emphasis has been placed on the concept of Epigenetic Transmission. At its most basic level, Catherine Malabou notes, epigenetic transmission differs from simple genetic heredity due to its impermanence: "epigenetic inheritance is reversible, meaning that it can cease at some point of the transmission chain" (2018, p. 189). It is not, then, a permanent genetic characteristic which will affect every future generation. It is instead the direct genetic result of a particular environmental experience – for instance, a period of profound stress or prolonged starvation – which will then be passed along to the second generation. Natan Kellermann expands on this by noting the following:

"The body keeps the score", not only in the first generation of trauma survivors, but possibly also in subsequent ones. Because of their neurobiological susceptibility to stress, children of Holocaust survivors may thus easily imagine the physical suffering of their parents and almost "remember" the hunger, the frozen limbs, the smell of burned bodies and the sounds that made them scared. (2013, p. 34)

It is important to note the level of equivocation which surrounds the word "remember" in this extract. Of course, the second-generation child cannot inherit their parents' memories as an experiential reality. What has been transmitted is merely the epigenetic log of the experience. The second generation, therefore, do indeed inherit *something* of their parents'

Holocaust experiences – as the first section of this chapter outlined. Specifically, in the form of inherited symptoms. As Kellermann implies, the children of sufferers will often develop a biological inability to cope with all forms of stress. Even comparatively minor triggers, he states, may prompt disproportionate reactions:

The epigenome thus would function like a “switch,” which has the inherent ability to turn certain functions “on” or “off.” From such a point of view, offspring of trauma survivors would be somehow “programmed” to express a specific cognitive and emotional response in certain difficult situations... This bug would for example switch on a panic attack and instruct the genes to prepare for “fight and flight” when triggered, as if the individual were thrown into a Nazi persecution manuscript of catastrophic proportions, even in a relatively non-threatening situation. (p. 35)

Rather than contradicting the assertions of those theorists who argue for the psychological influence of survivor parents, epigenetic research merely provides a genetic grounding for some of their core notions. While Wardi may have argued for the learned inheritance of certain behaviours, Rachel Yehuda’s research suggests that second-generation children are also genetically pre-disposed towards bouts of reflexive anxiety. As the above excerpt argues, the children of survivors are genetically primed to react to relatively common stresses with a level of anxiety comparable to that of Nazi persecution. As such, we may re-examine certain elements of ‘The Cattle Car Complex’. The extremity of Adam Posner’s reaction may indicate that, on a genetic level, he has indeed inherited a certain element of his parents’ experiences. The taint of their Holocaust trauma is made manifest in his inability to cope with certain forms of triggering pressure. This lends genuine scientific substance to the idea that his parents’ reminiscences “had become genetic material that was to be passed on by survivors to their children” (Rosenbaum, 1996, p. 5). In the very strictest sense, he is entirely accurate. As Rosenbaum seems to understand intuitively, however, even if a certain

level of genetic inheritance existed, this would not mean that the child would inherit their parents' experiences in their totality. Once again, all the second-generation child may receive is symptoms of a trauma they themselves have not experienced. As Eva Jablonka puts it:

it is important to emphasize that the specific trauma is unlikely to be inherited. So the fact that children of Holocaust survivors dream of the Holocaust was not transmitted through gametic epigenetic inheritance... What could have been inherited is the disposition to have nightmares, and of course if they know something about the Holocaust through primary exposure, from stories and so on, the nightmares will take this form. (Jablonka, in Kellermann, 2013, p. 35)

While epigenetics may therefore, in some cases, provide a scientific rationale for the inheritance of certain traumatic behaviours, it cannot directly transmit the lived experience of the Holocaust from the survivor to their offspring. At the very most it merely provides an element of materiality, creating a tangible link between the child and their parents' history. It effectively ratifies the profound feeling of emotional investment spoken of by Hirsch and Hoffman, as their very genes have literally been affected by their parents' Holocaust suffering. However, that is not to imply that their understanding of the Holocaust can ever evolve beyond the realm of post-memory. They may behave in a fashion similar to that of the survivor, but their understanding of the Holocaust remains partial and mediated.

Effectively, therefore, a post-memorial vision of the Holocaust has been created which is comprised of two elements: the symptomatic expression of trauma and post-memory. As the children of survivors have no experiential link back to their parents' suffering, the only thing to authenticate their connection to the Holocaust comes in the form of this epigenetic link. This, however, is only visible to external observers when it manifests in the form of their inherited anxiety. Or, put another way, in a series of recognisable behaviours – behaviours which have already been charted, codified and then represented in various forms of media as they gradually slip into the realm of post-memory. As such, we effectively have a version

of the Holocaust which exists entirely through signification. As the previous two sections have illustrated, our substantiating link to the past has always been tenuous. Our inability to connect with the victims of the Holocaust, either living or dead, has created a vision of the Shoah which fixates purely on surface details. Having abandoned all hope of connecting with the survivor's experiential reality, and thereby getting to grips with the nature of their trauma, we must instead focus on the lapses in their speech and their pregnant silences. This obsessive focus on expressed behaviours has left us in a precarious position. If the experiential reality of the Holocaust cannot be accessed, and if authentic suffering is visible only through a series of behaviours, then what is to distinguish genuine evidence of trauma from the mere pretence of it?⁷⁰ Moreover, if our conception of the Holocaust is entirely removed from the experiential reality of suffering, what do we stand to inherit beyond our increasingly reductive post-memory of the event? Shalom Auslander goes some way towards answering these questions in *Hope: A Tragedy*.

Auslander's novel differs from the previous texts in that, rather than representing characters with a genuine connection to the Holocaust, it pivots around a Holocaust pretender. The novel's principal character, Solomon Kugel, exists to explicitly problematise the concept of Holocaust inheritance. His mother, problematically, has adopted the persona of a Holocaust survivor. Despite having been born in Brooklyn in 1945, she has adopted a series of behaviours which are supposed to hint at her Holocaust history. In *Hope*, from the very start, the Holocaust is represented entirely through a series of established images. The Holocaust, according to Auslander's reading, has devolved into a series of signs without a

⁷⁰ This is a potentially dangerous viewpoint as it has been previously abused by Holocaust deniers. However, it is neither Auslander's intention – not the intention of this dissertation – to endorse the standpoint of the deniers. Rather, Auslander's text is further illustrating the problematic universalisation of the Holocaust. Specifically, he highlights the inherent danger of reducing the Holocaust to a series of borrowable symbols and affectations. It is then open, the text suggests, to potential abuse by pretenders.

corresponding point of signification. This first becomes apparent in his reference to the Auschwitz tattoo.

Though he is initially sceptical of the old woman he finds in the family's attic – a monstrous incarnation of Anne Frank, who will come to haunt the rest of the narrative – he is convinced of one thing: that she's a survivor. This is due to the “fading blue-black concentration camp numbers tattooed on the inside of her pale forearm” (Auslander, 2012, p. 32). His reaction upon seeing the tattoo is to revert to a kind of reflexive reverential awe – a position of automatic restraint and respect: “he had seen them, those damned numbers, and the numbers meant that Anne Frank or not, consumed by madness or not... the old woman was a goddamned Holocaust survivor” (p. 34). The phrase “goddamned Holocaust survivor” perfectly punctuates the significance of the survivor-figure in Solomon's world. It comes at the end of a long list of extenuating circumstances which should, in principle, make any rational person baulk. However, the concept of being a survivor has very specific, and yet fascinatingly abstract, connotations for Solomon. It is clear that the survivor's tattoo has a profound signifying power – given that it figuratively stops him in his tracks, curbing all of his natural, rational responses to the situation. However, as Auslander goes on to demonstrate, Solomon's understanding of the Shoah is profoundly limited. The tattoo, therefore, only has the power to invoke his simplistic post-memory of the event.

Recalling another instance from his early childhood, Solomon describes a scene in which his mother produced a rather generic-looking lamp and declared: “That, she said with a sigh, That's your grandfather” (p. 76). As the comic punchline to this sequence, Solomon turns the lamp over only to discover that it says “Made in Taiwan” on the lamp's base. Confronting his mother with this fact, she haughtily defends her position: “Mother looked at him, disappointment and anger in her tearstained eyes... Well, they're not going to write Made in Buchenwald on the base, are they? she snapped” (p. 77). This is representative of Mother's

general approach to the Holocaust. She seizes on certain standard instances of post-memorial iconography and then seeks to claim ownership of them. In his text *The Lampshade: A Holocaust Detective Story from Buchenwald to New Orleans*, Mark Jacobson describes Billy Wilder's role in transmitting the image of the lampshade to an American audience. The image "entered the wider American mindset" (Jacobson, 2011, p. 102) thanks to the footage utilized in the post-liberation propaganda feature 'Death Mills' – the editing for which had been overseen by Wilder himself. As Jacobson puts it:

A lampshade allegedly to have been constructed on the orders of Ilse Koch appears several times in the footage shot the day of the Weimar march. It is visible as part of what is described by the narrator as "the parchment display," an array of camp evidence Weimar residents were forced to view. (p. 103)

Given that this sequence once again revolves around the forced viewing of Nazi atrocity – Weimar residents having been made to witness the crimes of their countrymen – the lampshade may be considered literally totemic of Nazi atrocity. As the editor of this footage, Wilder has singled out this one item as an embodying artefact, one which economically captures the essence of Nazi brutality. Given the frequency with which this footage was viewed – Jacobson notes that this documentary was shown as a "regularly scheduled feature" (p. 102) in the United States – it is only natural that it would then come to occupy a central place in the American cultural consciousness. Proof of this can then be found in Sylvia Plath's 'Lazy Lazarus', in which she invokes the spectre of skin "Bright as a Nazi Lampshade". The presumption inherent in this reference is that the American populace at large holds this image of the Nazi lampshade as part of their inner storehouse of Shoah iconography.

This adoption of lazy iconography is later echoed in another sequence in which a young Solomon is handed a box which, ostensibly, contains the remains of his great-grandmother:

“The inside of the box was lined with purple velvet and the base was covered in purple satin, upon which sat a smooth white bar of soap” (Auslander, 2012, p. 80). Having aged slightly since the lamp incident, Solomon is rather less accepting of his mother’s eccentricities and so he decides to question the legitimacy of this item. “Her name was Ivory? he asked. Mother frowned and grabbed the soap from him. Her eyes filled with tears. Well, they’re not going to write Auschwitz on it, are they? she said” (p. 81). While there is a certain degree of historical validity to the Buchenwald lamp, the image of the bar of soap exists as something of an oft-perpetuated Holocaust exaggeration. Just as Mother notes in this instance, there is an enduring presumption in post-memorial culture that the bodies of the dead were frequently repurposed in the form of soap. She considers it to be a commonplace activity and links it specifically to the Auschwitz camp. Historical research, however, has proven that claims of this nature were greatly exaggerated. Indeed, while the bar of soap often surfaces as a persistent idea in Holocaust testimony, it is significantly harder to verify. Speaking specifically of the Warsaw ghetto, Myron Taylor suggested that the bodies of the dead had been put to unseemly uses. He claimed that their corpses had been utilized for “making fats” (Taylor, in Sereny, 1983, p. 141) and their bones had then been put to use as fertilizer. As a corrective to this, however, Gitta Sereny informs that: “the universally accepted story that the corpses were used to make soap and fertilizer is finally refuted by the generally very reliable Ludwigsburg Central Authority for Investigation into Nazi Crimes” (p. 141). As a point of clarification she then states that while only one experiment was ever made with “a few corpses from a concentration camp” (p. 141), the process proved impractical and so the whole idea was duly abandoned. Mother’s determined focus on this image, therefore, illustrates the entirely constructed nature of her Holocaust knowledge. She has absorbed the images which have been perpetuated in the intervening years, and these have formed the entirety of her conception of the Shoah.

The focus, so far, has explicitly been on the nature of Mother's knowledge and the profoundly mediated message that she has actively passed on to Solomon. However, just as previous sections focused on the nature of unconscious transmission and adopted behaviours, Mother's attempts to actively mimic survivor-trauma needs to be considered. This also forms a crucial part of her simulation, as she consciously adopts certain standardised behaviours in order to sell her performance. This chapter has already outlined the silence which exists between survivors and their children. The children have often only been told a handful of embodying stories. Nadine Fresco, who conducted a great many interviews with the children of survivors, describes their experiences as follows:

the forbidden memory of death manifested itself only in the form of incomprehensible attacks of pain... The silence was all the more implacable in that it was often concealed behind a screen of words, again, always the same words, an unchanging story, a tale repeated over and over again, made up of selections from the war. (1984, p. 419)

This screen of words is marked by its consistency and its insinuating power. When masking their trauma, she implies, survivors will always use the same phrases – essentially stock expressions. Their narratives, in effect, have calcified in the telling. These unchanging phrases serve as employable screens, and so their repeated use continues to hint at the vast reservoir of inarticulable trauma which exists just beneath the surface. Auslander further demonstrates the artificiality of Mother's performance by having her mimic this behavioural trait. Whenever she speaks of her suffering, she always employs the same expressions: "Kugel never asked Mother which war she was referring to... Her references were vague: Those sons of bitches, she said, or Such cruelty, or Whole families destroyed, or Never again" (Auslander, 2012, p. 75). These are stock phrases, designed to hint at the existence of an inarticulable trauma. Mother clearly understands the mechanism and has internalised this as something that survivors commonly do. While genuine survivors will also employ

fragments of their experiences, however – just as Hoffman’s parents spoke of their cottage – Mother has no direct experience of the Holocaust. Bearing this in mind, her frequent repetition of these phrases merely highlights their artificiality. They are no longer expressions of trauma but Holocaust slogans. They may prompt an immediate emotional reaction from the audience, but this is merely a shallow reflex – another example of Gillian Rose’s unexamined Holocaust sentimentality.

The parent-child dynamic in *Hope* can therefore be read as a satirical re-working of the pattern of Holocaust transmission examined in the earlier portions of this chapter. Solomon is, to all intents and purposes, a second-generation child. His mother may not be a genuine survivor, but she has assumed their expected behaviours. Her general modus operandi, as the text notes, is to adapt her behaviour until it is functionally indistinguishable from that of the survivor: “Mother had been hiding bread around the house ever since reading that this was common behaviour among survivors of the Holocaust” (p. 161). Though Mother does not understand the origins of this behaviour, this is clearly a lingering manifestation of the in-camp practice referred to as “organisation”. She has read that it is something that is commonly done and so has worked it into her ongoing performance, altering its parameters every time she learns new expected behaviours.

In terms of pure appearances, therefore, Mother does enact the behaviours of the survivor. While her performance is depicted in a semi-comic light, Auslander is still highlighting the problematic potential of our post-memorial Holocaust world. Whereas before survivors embodied the real event – the experiential reality of the Shoah, which nonwitnesses could not experience – in Auslander’s world real survivors have become irrelevant. Given the unreflective focus on symbols in *Hope*, the survivor as a concept has no value. Their genuine suffering is irrelevant, as they now exist merely as a series of imitable behaviours. People, in Auslander’s reality, cannot see beyond the surface of the symbol, as they cannot connect

with the historical reality of Shoah. If our conception of the Holocaust continues to degrade, *Hope* implies, the original event will be lost, having been replaced with an overly reductive after-image.

This focus on surfaces is further explored through Solomon's simulated Holocaust inheritance. In practice, it is almost entirely identical to Adam Posner's. In both instances, the children inherit only a generalised sense of anxiety and a contextless fear of persecution. For the Adam Posner of 'Lost, in a Sense' and 'The Little Blue Snowman', his connection to the Holocaust exists exclusively as a form of generalised anxiety. His parents had been able to transmit only their lingering sense of wartime panic and their desire to prepare for every conceivable eventuality. Adam has therefore inherited a level of anxiety proportionate with their Holocaust suffering, but he has no fixed enemy. In 'The Little Blue Snowman', Adam shows that he is pathologically afraid of all authority figures. For reasons almost entirely beyond his comprehension, he physically attacks a policeman during a school trip: "Adam had not been to the battle, but yet his soul feared the enemy – *some* enemy" (Rosenbaum, 1996, p. 198). As Rosenbaum notes, he has not experienced the battle – the tension of actually living in occupied Europe and experiencing the reality of ghettoization – and yet his body and mind are primed for it. He has inherited a level of panic and neurosis equal to that of a genuine survivor and yet he has no functional understanding of the Holocaust.

It is telling, therefore, that *on the surface* Solomon's inherited vision of the Holocaust mirrors Adam's flawlessly. He too has inherited an abstract anxiety from his mother. Rather than pertaining specifically to authority figures, however, he has internalised a general persecution complex. His paranoia revolves around an imagined second Holocaust. This, as with Adam Posner's example, is merely another example of directionless catastrophising, as Solomon has no specific cause in mind. His starting position is: "Someone would have to

hide them... If something happened. If what happened? Something. What? Whatever” (Auslander, 2012, p. 108). Solomon’s anxiety, therefore, has no basis in reality. It is not the product of a genuine external threat, but simply the manifestation of his inherited panic.

A significant portion of Chapter Eleven of Auslander’s text is then dedicated to planning the logistics of this act of hiding, despite the clear absence of an earthly need to hide. Solomon, relying as ever on processed Holocaust themes, decides that the only option is for his family to seek refuge in an attic. Two solid pages are then spent debating which of the 2400 residents of Stockton might offer the family shelter. Solomon eliminates all of the available possibilities before settling on a final family – the Dooners. However, he then recalls having once borrowed a lawnmower of theirs that he forgot to refill: “Nice planet, Kugel thought; he and his family were going to die in a concentration camp because of a stupid lawnmower he forgot to refill” (p. 111). Solomon, therefore, has adopted the panic of the second-generation children, which manifests as a fear of future catastrophes. His neurotic fixation on the minutiae of hiding – how he might factor in his wife’s dye allergy or his own issues with gluten – points to his mother’s impact on his general psychic wellbeing. She has, in effect, transformed him into a second-hand survivor, just like the various iterations of Adam Posner. Despite the absence of an originating trauma, Solomon’s Holocaust inheritance has adopted precisely the same character as that of an actual second-generation child. Auslander, therefore, is gradually obscuring the division between reality and this clear simulation. The only difference between the two lies in Adam’s *felt* connection to his parents’ Holocaust past. The phrase “his soul feared some enemy” would seem to harken back to this concept of a biologically inherited Holocaust – a trace of the trauma that is literally passed on through the survivor’s genes. Solomon, however, clearly does not have an epigenetic link back to the Holocaust. While Adam’s case involves the passive transmission of genuine trauma, therefore, Solomon’s Mother is only transmitting the

surface-level myth of the Shoah. Solomon's behaviours certainly seem to mirror those of a genuine second-generation child and his inherited paranoia *seems* legitimate in nature. This is the result, I contend, of his semi-conscious desire to fully inhabit the position of the second-generation child. While he may acknowledge the ludicrousness of his mother's claims on an intellectual level, an element of his psyche requires the Holocaust and so is willing to put aside all criticality in order to buy into the fantasy. Or, put another way, he legitimises his own inherited trauma by participating in his mother's simulation.

Modern attempts at Holocaust engagement, Auslander implies, are driven specifically by a perverse need to engage with the Holocaust. In the context of this novel, the Kugels are driven by a need to engage with the Holocaust as fully inhabiting a Shoah fantasy is, ironically, less painful than living with the inherent randomness of daily life. It is better to imagine the unremitting horror of constant persecution than to live with the uncertainty of some unimagined future suffering. This is best articulated by Solomon's brother-in-law Pinkus, who attempts to explain Mother's fixation with the Shoah. People, he claims, are fundamentally unable to exist in the stable present. Rather than living in the moment and trying to find a measure of contentment, they are wont to catastrophise and to exist in a state of panic and pessimism:

What would we have done without gas chambers and ovens?... What would we have done, Pinkus continued, without Dresden, without Srebrenica, without the Katyn Forest and the Killing Fields?... peace frightens us. Expecting hell, we're ill-prepared for heaven. It's like watching two men carry a pane of glass across a busy highway: we expect it to break, we know it will, the situation itself is so precarious that we almost *want* to see a car drive through it. (p. 242)

Our understanding of man's capacity for evil, and the existence of previous instances of persecution, has left us in a constant state of wariness. Rather than spending our every

waking moment anticipating the next great calamity, Pinkus claims, people would rather fully embrace a historical tragedy. “Agony is ecstasy” as it is better to experience the certainty of direct suffering than to wait for life’s next unknowable trauma. In a fundamentally chaotic universe happiness can only be found in the face of an immediate and all-consuming sense of danger. In a way that is both conscious and wilfully unconscious, therefore – as he has had to ignore many inconsistencies regarding his mother’s story – Solomon has fully surrendered himself to his mother’s delusion. He will not be the victim of another of life’s unknowable calamities, but rather he must prepare for a second Shoah. His Holocaust-related panic provides a paradoxical sense of stability as it gives form to his generalised fear of the future. According to his post-memory of the Shoah, persecuted people hide in attics in times of trouble.⁷¹ Though his understanding of the Holocaust may be lacking in detail, therefore, it certainly sets limits for his vision of future trauma and thus provides a curious sense of comfort.

In practice, therefore, Mother has been able to transmit her manufactured Holocaust suffering to her child. In this sense, her method of transmission is functionally identical to that of a genuine survivor. In willingly participating in her simulation, and adopting the essence of her neurosis, Solomon validates her constructed trauma. She has passed on the essence of her experience to him, and he has manifested a set of inherited symptoms. To the external observer, therefore, nothing distinguishes the simulated reality from real epigenetic transmission. In Auslander’s world, there is no difference. He has created a nightmare world in which the historical Holocaust has become entirely unreachable, having been replaced by a post-memorial reproduction of the event. The complexity of the Holocaust is gone, having been replaced by embodying images of soap and lampshades. Similarly, the survivor’s

⁷¹ The post-memorial focus on hiding in attics also features in Nathan Englander’s *What We Talk About When We Talk About Anne Frank*.

experiences have now been effectively erased, or rather rendered irrelevant as survivor status has been transformed into a set of imitable behaviours. Our post-memorial obsession with surface details and codified behaviours, he seems to say, could result in a world in which the identity of the survivor can effectively be “put on”, simply through the adoption of certain quirks and affectations. This already has parallels in the real world, as Benjamin Wilkomirski sold his survivor status by openly weeping at events and donning a tallith-inspired shawl in order to imbue his readings with a special “sacral dignity” (Maechler, 2001, p. 283). Post-memorial culture, therefore, runs the risk of eclipsing the experiential reality of the Shoah. An excessive focus on icons and signifiers can only lead to a singularly depthless conception of the event, which only manages to obscure the human and historical realities of Holocaust suffering. This, the thesis contends, presents a profound problem for Holocaust fiction.

Conclusion

This chapter argues that the second generation have impacted our broader societal conception of the Holocaust – specifically, by affirming the contention that survivor parents transmitted little of their experiences beyond small fragments of story, their accessible common memories and the symptoms of their trauma. Their deep memories of Holocaust suffering, the experiential core of their experiences, remain unreachable. However, the second generation still retain their feeling of connectedness to the event. This, the chapter argues, likely relates back to their epigenetic connection to their parents’ Holocaust suffering. They have inherited their parents’ anxiety, and yet they have not experienced the original trauma. As such, the Holocaust exists as a phantom presence – permanently affecting their lives and yet remaining frustratingly distant. Thane Rosenbaum’s short stories effectively convey the quality of this inheritance by focusing on both the Adams’ almost

biological feeling of connectedness to the Holocaust – it is often framed as having been passed down in their blood – and their profound lack of knowledge. The Holocaust exists for all nonwitnesses, Rosenbaum’s text suggests, as a post-memorial abstraction. Nothing can be done to rectify this, as the survivor is the sole possessor of deep memory.

Rosenbaum, Modiano and Sebald are therefore in agreement regarding the reachability of the Holocaust: we cannot fathom the experiences of the living and we cannot connect with the plight of the Holocaust dead. In both instances, we can only resort to our post-memory of the Shoah. This is problematic for the reasons illustrated by Modiano and Sebald as, unable to connect with the Holocaust dead as fully contextualised people, nonwitnesses are instead prone to focus on the image of the body. Just as Austerlitz and Modiano’s narrator began to emphasise the physical aspects of the murdered – such as their clothing or their relation to the streets of Paris or Berlin – modern-day authors have come to focus on the materiality of Holocaust suffering. As Modiano’s text suggests, the desire clearly exists to connect with the murdered on a deeper level – to engage with their wartime experiences and the reality of their suffering. However, our post-memory of the event cannot possibly hope to satisfy this impulse. Instead, as Modiano’s text demonstrates, the nonwitness is likely to focus on the sufferer’s body. This desire to rematerialize the body does not stem from a wish to recover the lost, I contend, but rather to create an inhabitable shell – an identity into which the viewer/reader can step. Modiano’s text substantiates this assertion, as his narrator physicalises the image of Dora Bruder only so that he may walk in her “footsteps” (Modiano, 2014, p. 44) and connect with the Holocaust on a prosthetic level. The second generation, therefore, have laid the foundation for bodily engagement. By signalling that the deep memory of Holocaust suffering is unreachable, and that the Holocaust dead are unrecoverable, they have established the need for another form of engagement. If the sufferer cannot be understood, then they may instead be prosthetically inhabited. This, as Chapter

Four outlines, has arguably become normalised in modern attempts to engage with the Holocaust. As *Austerlitz* establishes, however, these attempts at bodily engagement generally prove fruitless. These spectres, as Austerlitz discovers, communicate nothing of the dead or their experiences. Instead, they are merely shapes onto which the nonwitness projects their post-memory of the Holocaust. Austerlitz's search for his mother ends, after all, when he discovers her picture. Beyond seeing her image, which gives shape to her absent body, he can learn nothing more.

Finally, Auslander's text also introduces a vital element into the discussion. Specifically, by highlighting the dangers inherent in post-memory. In his text, the Shoah exists only as a post-memorial distortion. He has created a world in which the survivor's deep memory of the event – the actual reality of Holocaust suffering – has become irrelevant. Instead, the characters in *Hope* only understand the Shoah as a collage of poorly understood icons and imitable behaviours. The risk modern culture runs, Auslander's text implies, is that post-memory may forever eclipse the human reality of the Holocaust – from the sufferer's actual experiences to the specific details which particularised them as people. If we cannot find a way to re-engage with the sufferer on a human level – for instance by engaging with the specifics of their pre-war communities, as Yaffa Eliach's tower attempts to, or the complex reality of their time in the ghetto, as Alan Mintz has suggested – then we run the risk of falling into Auslander's trap. We may, also, come to view the Holocaust only as a series of reductive post-memorial icons.

Chapter III: Visualising the Holocaust: Landmarks, Photographs and Post-Memory

As the previous chapters have outlined, the Anglo-American cultural understanding of the Holocaust has undergone a gradual conceptual narrowing. In the first wave of commemoration, immediately following the liberation of certain camps by the British and Americans, our understanding of the Holocaust was broadly defined by those images produced by the British and American press. As Janina Struk notes, no pictures of the liberation of Auschwitz appeared in British newspapers and “hardly any reports” (2004, p. 147) appeared regarding the liberation itself. As such, our visual vocabulary for the atrocity, as experienced on a human level, came to be defined by pictures from camps such as Bergen-Belsen, Buchenwald and Nordhausen. As Barbie Zelizer puts it, these images of “mounds of corpses, gaping pits of bodies” and “haunted faces behind barbed wires” became what Saul Friedlander described as an “indelible reference point of the Western imagination” (Zelizer, 1998, p. 1, p. 14; Friedlander, 1993, p. 1). However, as the texts which have been addressed thus far have illustrated, the fictional representation of the Holocaust does not revolve around the representation of camps in Germany itself, but rather has shifted towards the representation of industrial mass murder in Auschwitz specifically – or, as in the case of W.G. Sebald’s *Austerlitz* and Arnost Lustig’s *The Unloved: The Diary of Perla S*, in Theresienstadt which is conceptualised as a holding pen for those bound for Auschwitz. In short, therefore, Holocaust fiction is pulled in two contrary directions. It uses Auschwitz as a metonym for the Holocaust, but it has no existing visual vocabulary for suffering in Auschwitz. Despite the fact that the Soviets had, to a certain degree, recorded their liberations of Auschwitz and Majdanek, these visual records have not entered the Western cultural consciousness with as much cultural impact as the British and American imagery. Struk notes that, in their presentation of Soviet images from Majdanek, the British press did not focus on the “emotive images of human suffering” (2004, p. 142) used in their

presentation of the camps liberated by the Western allies. Instead, they focused on the industrial nature of mass murder – from the representation of the “gas cells”, to “piles of shoes and boots” and a “pile of identity cards” (p. 142). The Eastern camps, therefore, were presented in the Western media in an explicitly evidential and deliberately unemotive fashion. I argue that this has contributed to a dual presentation of the Holocaust. While Auschwitz remains a recurring feature of Holocaust fiction, modern creators lack the visual vocabulary to explicitly portray human suffering within the camp setting. As such, our representation of the camp itself commonly revolves around a standard set of landmarks. Dan Stone, for instance, describes our current conception of the Auschwitz camp as follows:

even since the first photos of Auschwitz, the meaning imputed to it has been encompassed in the symbolic framework of the barbed wire, the ramp, or the famous entrance gate. These things are important parts of the camp, yet they are not the camp but only how we wish to keep seeing it. (1995, p. 57)

We have, according to Stone, a fixed conception of the camp based around certain common landmarks and physical elements. With unerring reliability, fictional representations of Auschwitz cycle through a standard set of culturally enshrined locations – from the *Arbeit Macht Frei* gateway in Auschwitz I to the imposing entrance of Birkenau and the unloading ramp. As Stone implies, however, these locations do not represent the reality of Auschwitz but rather its post-memorial reproduction. Such is our emotional and experiential distance from the Holocaust that we have no earthly conception of its inner reality, as it was experienced by the internee.⁷² It stands simply as a series of recognisable locations, to which we have an ever-diminishing emotional connection.

⁷² The phrase “inner reality”, which is utilised throughout this chapter, refers to the experiential reality of the Auschwitz camp, which exists beyond the Birkenau entrance. It is the reality which exists within the deep memory of survivors and which cannot be communicated to, or reached by, the nonwitness.

Given that we may now only connect with the Holocaust through the post-memorial approach of “imaginative investment, projection, and creation” (Hirsch, 2012, p. 5), our ability to represent human suffering within the camps is limited by our visual vocabulary of the Shoah. As such, given the lack of available images representing suffering within the Auschwitz camp, modern Holocaust fiction is now limited to two general sources. The first, as has already been noted, is the culturally enshrined liberation imagery captured by the British and American Allies. The second is the Lili Jacob album, which was recovered from the Dora-Nordhausen concentration camp.

The Lili Jacob album, often referred to simply as ‘The Auschwitz Album’, represents the only existing visual resource depicting the sorting of arrivals on the Birkenau ramp. Containing 193 images, spread over 56 pages, the album exhaustively charts the arrival, selection and eventual processing of new arrivals from Subcarpathian Rus (Ukraine) in the May of 1944. The pictures were taken by the *Erkennungsdienst*, or Identification Service, within the camp itself. As such, they do represent the perspective of the perpetrator which, as the first section of this chapter discusses, has unavoidably influenced our cultural reproduction of the Shoah. Though the images have been in circulation since 1949, with seven of the pictures having been published in a text entitled *The Tragedy of Slovak Jewry*, it is reasonable to assert that they did not enter into our collective memory of the Shoah until the early 1980s. This, it should be noted, is despite their use as evidence in the Eichmann trial in 1961. Struk notes:

Lili Zelmanovic kept the photo album until 1980, when she was finally persuaded to hand it over to Yad Vashem Martyr’s and Heroes’ Remembrance Authority in Israel... The photographs in the album were to become central to the visual representation of the Holocaust. Apart from their value as evidence, they would be imbued with an emotional intensity and reproduced in books, films and museums worldwide. (2004, p. 102)

While the vast majority of the new arrivals experiences remain undocumented we do have an exhaustive visual archive recounting the deportee's first hectic moments within the Auschwitz camp. Pictures depict people being hurried from the train by the *Kanada Kommando*, the moments immediately following their sorting at the hands of the SS and, perhaps most significantly, their slow walk towards the gas chamber. These images, along with those photographs captured by the Western allies, have come to form the majority of our visual vocabulary for human suffering during the Shoah.

Auschwitz has become the “black hole into which all images of the Holocaust are drawn” (Struk, 2004, p. 189). Our fictional representations of it are therefore comprised of two elements: Auschwitz landmarks and representations of human suffering assembled from various sources, most of which do not correspond with the Auschwitz site. As such, the fictional representation of the Holocaust is now driven by a specific impulse – something akin to Gary Weissman's “fantasies of witnessing” (2004, p. 4). The sites themselves, this chapter argues – though they may still prove emotionally potent spaces – cannot evoke the experiential reality of the past. In other words, they cannot provide nonwitnesses with the sense of emotional connectedness to the Holocaust which they have come to crave. Modern creatives are therefore keen to re-inject a sense of human horror into these commemorative sites, which now possess the “cold soul of a museum” (p. 2). In their desire to feel *something* of the Shoah, therefore, they position scenes of human suffering inside the modern camp setting – scenes borrowed, most commonly, from the Jacob album. This attempt to recreate documented scenes of historical suffering, and to place them back into the context of the ageing Auschwitz camp, clearly represents an attempt to reattach an increasingly absent sense of horror to a present-day landmark. Modern Holocaust fiction, in short, aims to make us all second-hand witnesses to the atrocity, as these crimes are brought to life for a second time.

This frustration regarding our emotional distance from the Shoah reaches its logical culmination in the representation of the gas chamber interior. Frustrated with their limited access to the Holocaust past, which has been constrained by our visual records, modern creators have resorted instead to imaginative projection and creation. This, once again, leads to a focus on the minutiae of human suffering and an overemphasis on the body. This increasingly results only in a voyeuristic impulse to explore the unrepresented areas of Auschwitz and to imaginatively recreate scenes of suffering – namely, death in the gas chamber.

Utilising Robert M. Young's *Triumph of the Spirit*, Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* and Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, the first section of this chapter addresses the representation of the arrival process in Auschwitz. It describes the use of specific landmarks in Holocaust fiction – namely the entranceways of Birkenau and Auschwitz I – before outlining the ways in which human suffering has been reattached to these spaces. It focuses on the use of the Lili Jacob album as a template to shape the representation of human suffering in Holocaust fiction.

The second section of this chapter then addresses the fictional representation of suffering and death inside the Auschwitz camp. It focuses specifically on two texts: Art Spiegelman's *Maus* and Pascal Croci's *Auschwitz*. Both of these texts, it suggests, have utilised borrowed imagery. While Spiegelman is conscious of the constructed nature of his vision of Auschwitz, however – as he is haunted by the inadequacy of his own presentation – Croci is rather more brazen in his approach. Despite his determination to represent the reality of death within the Auschwitz camp, however, Croci still fails to connect with the Shoah on an emotional level.

Finally, the last section of this chapter builds on the work of the previous two sections by featuring two authors who have clearly sought to reconnect with the Holocaust in a radical fashion: namely, by explicitly recreating death by gassing. While the other texts featured in this chapter have pivoted around this one core of unsayability, David Albahari's *Götz and Meyer* and Tim Blake Nelson's *The Grey Zone* aim to connect with the Holocaust past by imaginatively recreating this previously unrepresentable moment of suffering. It argues that several creators have confused the concepts of Holocaust Impiety and what I shall refer to simply as Holocaust gratuity. Though they claim to be attempting to connect with the perpetrators and victims of the Shoah on a fundamentally human level, I argue that their underlying aim is more voyeuristic in nature. They are not looking to rationalise the event, but rather to luxuriate in its horrors.

The aim of this chapter, therefore, is to highlight the increasing level of frustration which has come to dominate the fictional representation of the Holocaust. This, it argues, stems partly from our limited visual vocabulary for representing the horrors of the Shoah. As the greater part of the atrocity remains unseen, and therefore broadly unrepresentable, modern creators are instead resorting to their own imaginative recreations of the Shoah's innermost horrors. Gratuity and an obsession with the suffering body have now become, I contend, common elements in Holocaust fiction, as the final chapter then goes on to address.

Representing the Arrival Process

As Chapter One argued, our current conception of the Auschwitz camp has been altered by commemorative culture. Both the Auschwitz site itself and the USHMM have portrayed the camp as a linear journey with a few key points of reference. As Cole noted, the Auschwitz tour conspicuously, and misleadingly, "starts at the gate proclaiming *Arbeit macht frei*, and ends at the reconstructed Crematorium" (1999, p. 110). It, in effect, has placed two points

on our visual roadmap of suffering in Auschwitz. The USHMM expands on this by also bringing in that other symbolic Auschwitz visual, the Birkenau entrance. This location, as Keilbach and Wächter have noted, is commonly photographed using the same aesthetic standard – an attempt to mimic the original image captured by Stanislav Mucha in 1945, in the months immediately following the liberation of the camp. They describe its particular qualities as follows:

The impression of being devoured... is evoked by the picture independently of knowing the "right" direction of the gaze, as the central perspective of its construction pulls the beholder inside. At the same time, it transmits a feeling of desertedness, a feeling created by the vastness of the area, the snow, and the absence of people... The presentation of an empty place with no people... can also be read as a hint at the tracelessness of the victims and the horrors that befell them, implying the impossibility of a photographic depiction of them. (2009, p. 73)

Our post-memorial conception of the Birkenau entrance, therefore, is very much defined by this post-war image. Though Mucha's framing may hint at its capacity to devour, given that the mouth of the entrance is positioned at the centre of the frame, the image is characterised by the emptiness of the foreground. It is yet another evocation of the absent dead, with the absence of people – either living or dead – serving only to remind the viewer of those who have vanished into substanceless oblivion. What the image really communicates, therefore, is the concept of ineffability. The empty foreground communicates to the viewer that the suffering of European Jewry remains forever beyond our grasp, with only a handful of locations standing in for the atrocities of the past. It is therefore telling, this chapter argues, that post-memorial media has frequently sought to re-employ this image. The desire exists to revive the Holocaust dead simply in order to place them back into these environments. Struk, for instance, has frequently spoken of the image of the old woman, accompanied by two children, which has been erected on the path leading directly to the gas chamber.

“Whoever they were”, she tells us, “they have been condemned to tread the path for ever” (2004, p. 216). In order to properly contextualise the Auschwitz space, therefore, it is considered necessary to revive the Holocaust dead and to place them back on the path to the gas chamber. As Struk implies, there is something inherently problematic in this desire to revive the sufferer in order to satisfy those in the present. It is symptomatic of our emotional and temporal distance from the events themselves as, in order to reaffirm our connection with the Shoah, we must visually and imaginatively dig up the dead in order to place them back into the Auschwitz landscape. It is precisely this desire which underpins the vast majority of post-memorial Holocaust fiction. Modern fiction may claim to represent the Holocaust dead with impious depth, as the final section of this chapter discusses, but all that it presents in actuality is an endless procession of suffering bodies.

However, this attempt to revive the Holocaust dead – in either cinematic or literary terms – has generally been constrained by the limits of our visual imagination. In order to return a sense of historical horror to these present-day sites, modern creators have come to rely specifically on scenes of arrival and selection. By passing sequentially through the different stages of the arrival process, this section of the chapter will cover the ways in which modern media have sought to recontextualise these locations by placing images of suffering back into Auschwitz.

Both *Triumph of the Spirit* and *Schindler’s List* actively aimed to restore the presence of mass extermination and visible Jewish victimhood to the Auschwitz site. Both films chose to film on location and, with varying degrees of intrusiveness, both aimed to erect a simulated gas chamber/crematoria on the site itself.⁷³ Ultimately, however, only *Triumph of*

⁷³ In *The Texture of Memory* James E. Young describes the “fake gas chamber and crematorium complex”, which stood for “months after filming” of *Triumph of the Spirit* was completed. This structure was erected “within meters of the ruins of the real gas chambers” (1993, p. 144).

In *Fantasies of Witnessing*, meanwhile, Gary Weissman quotes from a time article which stated that “Mr. Spielberg planned to use hundreds of extras at Auschwitz and that he would be filming a fake gas chamber

the Spirit would erect a gas chamber within the grounds of Auschwitz. Spielberg, by contrast, was only allowed to film outside of the camp gates. In this regard, both films took a present-day location defined principally by its symbolic significance and artistically wound back the clock in order to reintroduce the suffering victim into the Auschwitz landscape. Nowhere is this more evident than in both films' use of the Birkenau gate as a forbidding transitional point into the concentrationary universe.



Figure 8: A still from *'Triumph of the Spirit'* depicting the approach to the Birkenau gate.



Figure 9: A still from *'Triumph of the Spirit'* depicting the train emerging.

there" (2004, pp. 170-171). Ultimately, however, he chose instead to film the camp from the outside, filming the train as it emerged "into a mirror replica of Auschwitz's interior" (Weissman, 2004, p. 171). While his desire to revive the Auschwitz space is evident, therefore, his access to the camp was more limited than Robert M. Young's earlier production.

In *Triumph of the Spirit*, the camera's rapid approach to the camp gate serves as a stark counterpoint to the representational restraint of the memorial image. In place of reverence, hesitation and a commitment to the ineffable we have the camera's determined push towards the camp interior. The railway tunnel is not simply an abstractly evocative void, imagined to be like "the mouth of an ogre's cave" (Matthiessen, 2014, p. 29), but it serves as a real transitional point into the space beyond. The camp interior is not unknowable or unrepresentable, but rather it is a space into which Young is determined to take the viewer. This becomes evident as we pass through to the other side, with Young depicting the train as it emerges from the train tunnel – as is illustrated in Figure 9. The belching smoke, which the camera lingers upon as it drifts ominously towards the guard tower, is then mirrored by the smoke from the crematoria. In this sense, through a form of visual shorthand, Young illustrates his commitment to returning destruction to Auschwitz. The Birkenau gate is no longer a static relic, but a revived symbol of extermination. The gaping mouth of the Birkenau gate has been made to swallow new victims, with their impending deaths having been heavily implied through the film's inferential focus on billowing smoke. Extermination is not simply a historically and emotionally distant abstraction, barely traceable in the current Auschwitz site; instead, Young revives the dead and reconnects them to this specific camp



landmark.

Figure 10: A still from 'Schindler's List', depicting the arrival of a new transport.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ All stills from: Spielberg, S. (Director). (1993). *Schindler's List: Special Edition* [Motion Picture] [DVD]. UK: Universal. (2004)

In a remarkably similar fashion to Young's approach, Figure 10 depicts Spielberg's attempt to combat the emotional remoteness of the post-war memorial image. This frame represents a stark counterpoint to those empty, evocative shots which characterised all post-Mucha attempts to photograph the site. In place of the desolate, snow-covered landscape of the camp interior – whose lack of visual evidence invokes the irrecoverable absence of the dead – we have a visually busy scene, crowded with people and striving to evoke the reality of arrival and unloading. In packing the frame in this fashion, Spielberg revivifies the camp space by re-introducing both the victim and the perpetrator to the location. In this regard, his evocation of Holocaust horror is rather more explicit than Young's, as it takes place in the literal shadow of the Birkenau gate and involves both parties. This sequence, I contend, is emblematic of Spielberg's frustration regarding the concept of a fundamentally unrepresentable Holocaust. If Mucha's picture starkly implies the futility of all attempts at representation, and the unbridgeable distance between the memorial present and the reality of the past, then Spielberg counters this by filling Mucha's empty frame with calamity, noise and recreated horror. In this regard, he shows both his commitment to reconnecting the Auschwitz site to its Holocaust past and his brazen dissatisfaction with a non-visual approach to Holocaust suffering. The Shoah can be depicted, he actively implies, and yet a certain limit has been placed on the mind of the creative. As with all of the texts featured in this chapter, *Schindler's List* highlights the weakness of its own attempt at representation through its use of profoundly mediated visuals. In short, no matter the intent, the creative's visual imagination is handicapped by a lack of available visual evidence. The cinematic Holocaust extends approximately as far as our collective memory will allow. This would explain, I contend, the frequency of disembarkation and selection scenes featured in visual media, as this serves as the one portion of the arrival process for which we have a detailed visual reference point. This part of the sufferer's experiences can be partly visualised, as it has been

captured on film. Beyond this, arrival is merely characterised by a sequential tour through a series of iconic visual checkpoints.

The Birkenau entrance is not the only point in the Auschwitz landscape with significance, however. Modern fiction also tends to focus on the Arbeit-gate in Auschwitz I, which continues to possess a certain kind of cultural significance. As Andrea Liss notes, the sign has come to occupy a dubious place on our post-memory of the Shoah:

this canonical inscription looms large in reconstructed memory. It has come to represent the threshold that separates the world of the living from the unspeakable beyond the gate. And yet the cliché trivialises the experience of the extermination camp through its misappropriation of signs. The steel gate bearing this famous inscription did not, in fact, have a central position in the history and architectural schema at Auschwitz. Very few Jews deported there ever saw that gate. (1998, pp. 72-73)

Though the mythic memorial construction of Auschwitz, as Cole would have it, posits a straight line from the gates of Auschwitz I to the gas chamber, this simply is not reflective of the geographical complexity of the Auschwitz site. Anglo-American culture has, post-memorially, over-emphasised its importance within the Auschwitz world. As Liss continues, new arrivals would not pass through it but rather they would be immediately taken by truck or marched to Birkenau. Later, a railway would transport new arrivals to the Birkenau subcamp directly, and so the *Arbeit Macht Frei* gate only has value for the nonwitness. It certainly was not a featured stop on the new arrival's path to extermination, as the main Auschwitz camp was not principally exterminationist in its design. Even those entering into Auschwitz-I, it should be noted, did not pass through this entranceway following the work of the expansion programme of 1942. Instead, it may be thought of simply as *our* transitional point into the world of commemoration and an emblematic signpost for the Holocaust in its entirety. Through the narrativization of the Auschwitz museum itself, and the corresponding

exhibit at the USHMM, it has been linked inexorably with the concepts of arrival and extermination.



Figure 11: A frame from 'Maus I', depicting arrival in Auschwitz (Spiegelman, 2003, p. 159).

Art Spiegelman's decision to depict the *Arbeit Macht Frei* gate in the final moments of *Maus I* has particular relevance here, as it illustrates the role this iconic landmark has assumed in the post-memorial imagination. As Spiegelman implies during his interviews in *MetaMaus*, this image was always intended to possess a certain exaggerated prominence. It is the largest single image featured in Spiegelman's graphic novel and so its symbolic significance cannot possibly be overstated. As Spiegelman's illustrations are always drawn and then printed in exactly the same size, it is clear that he intended for this image to draw in the reader's attention and, having done so, encapsulate the coming horrors of Auschwitz.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ In *At Memory's Edge* Young notes that Spiegelman drew *Maus* using a "one-to-one ratio", ensuring that his original version would perfectly parallel the "finished version" (2000, p. 19).

Coming as it does at the very end of *Maus I*, it serves as the only direct visual evocation of the Auschwitz camp in the entirety of Volume I. As such, Spiegelman is relying on its broader symbolic resonance in order to communicate the horror of the coming events. At this point in the narrative, Auschwitz stands as an unexplored space. Spiegelman has not articulated the distinctions between Auschwitz-I, Auschwitz-II and the Buna-Werke, and so the reader is simply being presented with the image of the camp as a mythical abstraction. Much like the narrativized exhibition on the third floor of the USHMM, and the Auschwitz tour itself, Spiegelman is using the *Arbeit*-sign as a simplified symbolic marker. It is the first step in a journey which culminates in death in the gas chamber. This much is implied by Spiegelman's accompanying text: "And we came here to the concentration camp Auschwitz, and that from here we will not come out anymore... We knew the stories – that they will gas us in the ovens" (2003, p. 159). As such, Spiegelman has deliberately presented the reader with a compressed image of the Auschwitz camp. For the moment, it exists principally as a mythical blur. While there are two certain points in the camp's landscape, the iconic gate and the crematoria, everything else presently exists for Spiegelman as an unrepresentable void. Rather than simply trying to revive a present-day landmark through a renewed proximity to suffering, the image hints at Spiegelman's lack of knowledge concerning the inner reality of Auschwitz and his trepidation regarding the possibility of future representation.

This trepidation is stated explicitly in a sequence in *Maus II*, in which Artie visits his therapist Pavel – a "Czech Jew, a survivor of Therezin and Auschwitz" (p. 203). The theme of survival dominates their interaction from the outset, as Artie explores – in a fashion which also invokes the writings of Karpf – the inadequacy of his own life when placed in comparison with his father's: "No matter what I accomplish, it doesn't seem like much compared to surviving Auschwitz" (p. 204). The very use of the word "Auschwitz" hints at

Artie's mythic conception of the camp. He cannot fathom the reality of his father's suffering, but he does conceptualise it as something momentous – something entirely removed from the approachable norms of life in "Rego Park" (p. 204). This is emphasised by the fact that, throughout this sequence, Artie is presented as having shrunk in size. Before visiting his therapist, Artie shrinks down to the size of child having noted both that he sometimes does not "feel like a functioning adult" and that, relatedly, his "father's ghost still hangs over [him]" (p. 203). Artie, I contend, is infantilised by the mythic vision of his father's survival in Auschwitz. His own life's achievements – given that they represent the normal, fathomable world – cannot possibly measure up to surviving Auschwitz. He cannot view himself as a man, as a functioning adult, as he exists in a world peopled with survivors. He cannot regain his own proportions in Pavel's office as he too represents a survivor – someone else who survived the mythic world of Auschwitz. The crux of Artie's insecurity is then revealed towards the end of the therapy session as he confesses: "Some part of me doesn't want to think about Auschwitz. I can't visualise it clearly, and I can't BEGIN to imagine what it felt like" (p. 206). Artie's insecurity, therefore, stems from his lack of knowledge concerning the inner reality of Auschwitz. He does not wish to represent it in fiction, as he knows that his representation of the camp will lack authenticity. Artie expresses a specific anxiety that he cannot represent the finer details of the Auschwitz tin shop: "I have no idea what kind of tools to draw. There's no documentation" (p. 206). This attention to minute detail, and the apparent level of insecurity that it has invoked, illustrates Artie's anxieties concerning representation. He, as a nonwitness, cannot ever fully grasp the finer details of life within the camp. As such, he must rely on documentation. This post-memorial distance, however, proves inadequate to the task of representing the genocide and therefore compounds his insecurities. Pavel then helps him by identifying the specific tools Vladek may have used – "a cutter – like a giant paper cutter – and maybe an electric drill press or

two” (p. 206). It is only after receiving this extra level of detail that Artie’s mood improves: “I don’t understand exactly why... but these sessions with Pavel somehow make me feel better” (p. 206). Artie is pacified, in this instance, as Pavel has helped him to connect with the historical reality of the Holocaust. He has injected an element of authenticity into Artie’s presentation and, in so doing, partly demystified the Shoah. While a solution is found in this case, however, it still stands as proof of Artie’s underlying concern: that his text cannot possibly hope to capture the experiential reality of his father’s past.

While Spiegelman’s use of the *Arbeit-gate* may be pointed, therefore, he has still internalised the image of it as a form of visual shorthand. It is still, unavoidably, a landmark in our mythic conception of the Auschwitz camp. The other vital part of our common memory of Auschwitz, thanks to an increasing cultural awareness of the Lili Jacob album, is the process of unloading itself. This represents the next element in the imagined journey towards the gas chamber.



Figure 12: Jews from Subcarpathian Rus (Ukraine) undergo a selection on the ramp at Auschwitz-Birkenau. Photograph Number: 77241 (USHMM). Originally from The Lili Jacob Album. (Source: <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/pa8273>)



Figure 13: A still from *'Triumph of the Spirit'*, illustrating the Arouch family's arrival in Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Returning to *Triumph of the Spirit*, one can detect a comparatively early visual indication of the Lili Jacob album's cultural influence in Young's attempt to replicate the reality of arrival in Birkenau. Following their passage through the Birkenau gate, the Auroch family are immediately unloaded from their cattle car. The frame is filled with the crush of bodies and the entire sequence possesses a remarkable sense of historical fidelity, which would seem to be traceable back to those images from the Jacob album.

There is a marked similarity between Figures 12 and 13. Beyond the density of the crowd, the presence of the Kanada Kommando in their prison stripers and the emergence of two gendered lines, we also have the alignment of the cattle car at the extreme edge of the frame. Young's shot has attempted to mirror the angled composition of the perpetrator's image. Both have been composed in order to capture the scale of the crowd. The original images, it must be noted, were captured by *SS-Hauptscharführer* Bernhardt Walter and *SS-Unterscharführer* Ernst Hofmann of the *Erkennungsdienst*, or Identification Service. Though their common duties tended to involve the photographing of non-Jewish prisoners – and, as Struk notes, certain experiments and medical curiosities for Johann Paul Kramer

and Josef Mengele – this album was intended as a gift for the camp commandant. As such, rather than humanising the victims, they are objectified by the perpetrator's gaze. Its recreation in cinema, then, represents an ethical misstep. Young's enthusiasm for authenticity has blinded him to the more problematic elements of the image. He has assumed the position of the *Erkennungsdienst* photographer, sitting safely on the periphery of the unfolding chaos of selection. He has become, in effect, a post-memorial Holocaust voyeur. Not only has he resurrected the dead using the Jacob images as a template, and fastidiously recreated them down to the last detail, but he has assumed the perspective of the emotionally vacant perpetrator.

The issue lies not with the content of the frame, which clearly reflects the reality of the events, but with the origin of the image. In her essay 'Choosing Not to Look', Susan A. Crane considers the issue of authorial intent, and places particular emphasis on the nature of the Nazis' gaze. She characterises the Nazi viewpoint as follows:

Bernd Huppauf argues that the Nazi gaze was never only sadistic (or at least not only sadistic). Huppauf instead suggests that the Nazi gaze was "empty": that the Nazified photographer's "de-corporealizing gaze" characterizes all of their atrocity images alike, and represents an attempted documentary neutrality or objectivity that "give[s] rise to the hope of creating a memory removed from historical time." The Nazi gaze rendered victims into objects, bodies into things framed by the camera. (2008, p. 318)

Crane's contention is that the Nazi gaze was not overtly sadistic, but rather empty of all sentiment. The photographed Jewish subject is not a person, someone whose terror has emotional resonance, but rather they serve simply as intellectual curios. They are photographed with pure emotional abstraction. The Jacob album, in keeping with this theory, encapsulates this imagined sense of documentary neutrality. The people in these images are merely objects in front of a camera, to be herded from one location to another before being

transformed into a literal object – a body, depersonalised and de-particularised amidst a mass of other bodies.

The use of these images by latter-day filmmakers and creators, thus, further problematises our emotional connection to the Holocaust. Our emotional distance from the events has led to an apparent desire to fictionally recreate these scenes of suffering. However, the pictures being utilised as our visual baseline come – in the instance of the Jacob album – from explicitly Nazi sources. As such, in our haste to simulate a fantasy of witnessing on film, we have begun to replicate images intended to objectify the victims of the Holocaust. We are reviving the Holocaust dead, but only as they were envisioned by the Nazi gaze. As Jaimey Fisher implies, one must go to extraordinary lengths in order to avoid the unintentional reproduction of the de-humanising Nazi perspective. Péter Forgác, he suggests, is only able to imbue the body of a naked Jewish woman with humanity and “substantive agency” (2012, p. 256) by utilizing footage filmed by her soon-to-be husband. The perpetrator perspective, he suggests, will always contain a contaminating element of Nazi influence. Only the “private gaze of the Jewish filmmaker”, he suggests, can resist the Nazi intent to “utterly de- (or rather sub-) humanise” (p. 256) the Jewish people.

By reproducing images contaminated by the Nazi gaze, therefore, we are merely perpetuating the image of the Jewish dead as bodies without humanity. We are, in effect, actively setting aside their personhood and placing the emphasis specifically on what they will endure physically. As such, each new film or text which perpetuates these images will further add to our disregard for the Holocaust dead as people and simply intensify our interest in their bodies as an experiential tool – a thing we may engage with, or even potentially step into, in order to understand *something* about the horrors of the Holocaust.

While Young's use of the Lili Jacob album serves to remind the viewer of the objectifying quality of these images, Spielberg's use of the Jacob images speaks more to the idea of representational restraint. For Spielberg, I contend, the Holocaust dead are still unreachable and unknowable. His use of these images indicates his unwillingness to cross certain representational boundaries. He will not, in short, violate the sanctity of the gas chamber sincerely or represent the deaths of the exterminated in detail.



Figure 14: A still from 'Schindler's List', representing the extermination of those Jewish people not saved as part of the Schindlerjuden.

As Rose notes, the use of water and not gas in Spielberg's contrived "extermination" sequence induces "a regressive identification... with the few women who are saved" (1996, p. 47). In other words, the film is only able to empathise with the plight of the living. While the camera willingly follows the *Schindlerjuden* into a false gas chamber, the actual Holocaust dead are depicted only at a literal distance. By placing them on the other side of the fence, Spielberg is actively implying that the Shoah dead – though they may be invoked visually – cannot be approached by the post-memorial filmmaker. They are simply too remote from the present. Rather than seeming like approachably human individuals, they have been transformed into embodying victims of the atrocity. They have become

representative stand-ins for the many who must go unrepresented and this, correspondingly, has stripped them of their humanity and particularity. We cannot, in short, ever hope to redress the anonymising power of death in the crematoria. The Holocaust dead will never be reconceptualised as individuals with agency, but rather will be forever used as tragic props.

As Figure 14 illustrates, Spielberg's depiction of those bound for the gas chamber closely mirrors a specific selection of images found in the Jacob album – those showing the march towards the gas chamber. The images themselves, it must be noted, are relatively non-descript. Each features a small band of people, usually comprised of women and children, walking in front of the iconic Auschwitz fencing. They are not hurrying, indeed the images give the impression of a slow trudge, and they remain entirely ignorant of their fate.



*Figure 15:
Birkenau, Poland,
May 1944, Women
and children on
their way to gas
chamber no. 4. Yad
Vashem Photo
Archives. Item ID:
35059. Archival
Signature: 4522.*

(https://photos.yadvashem.org/photo-details.html?language=en&item_id=35059&ind=2)

While these images may seem comparatively neutral, given that they do not depict the eventual fate of the new arrivals, they do still possess the dehumanising power of the other images in the Lili Jacob album. The Jewish dead are, once again, portrayed as suffering bodies. Spielberg's presentation differs from Young's only in our visual distance from the

Holocaust dead. While Spielberg does not shy away from inhabitable moments of human suffering, as his gas chamber sequence illustrates, he wishes to draw a discreet veil over the Holocaust dead. They, he seems to assert, must remain unapproachable. However, this may not be a position that he adopts wholeheartedly. While he does come down on the side of representational restraint ultimately, his film has flirted with the representation of death in the gas chamber.

Joshua Hirsch, for instance, describes Spielberg's approach as falling somewhere in the ethical middle ground of visual representation:

The sequence thus concludes with a nod to the modernists, showing only the entrance and exit to the "true" gas chamber, but not the inside... it resolves the dilemma of a point of view inside the gas chamber by not committing itself to a realist "yes" or a modernist "no," but by playing a yes/no game – by quoting both strategies. (2004, p. 149)

Hirsch's insinuation, therefore, is that Spielberg's visual approach to the atrocity is deliberately non-committal. He has effectively attempted to venture into the Holocaust's darkest recesses, as the committed realist would, and yet he also concedes that certain aspects of the Shoah cannot and should not be represented, in the fashion of the modernist Resnais. If *Night and Fog* (1956), as Hirsch suggests, is designed to illustrate the failure of images "to capture the reality of the past" (p. 52) and the inadequacy of archival footage as a means to capture the nature of the Holocaust, then Spielberg's film partly seems to endorse this modernist sentiment. Our available visual records, he seems to suggest, represent a partial and unsatisfying vision of the atrocity. And yet, as is evident from his representation of the shower sequence, his film seems to be straining against these representational limits. He clearly considers a moment of impropriety and yet ultimately concedes that the Holocaust dead should not be touched. By flirting with the representation of the gas chamber, however

– and therefore straying into the realm of imaginative reproduction – Spielberg has opened a dangerous door. By passively hinting at his frustrations regarding the limits of representation, and the supposed unreachability of the Holocaust dead, Spielberg has inadvertently encouraged others to follow in his footsteps.

Tim Blake Nelson's *The Grey Zone*, therefore, can be seen as a deliberate response to Spielberg's film. While Spielberg may have hinted at his frustration, having begun to simulate a moment of gassing before ultimately backing away, Nelson's film aims to fully engage with the horrors of the Holocaust. He makes his position clear, first and foremost, by explicitly outlining his dissatisfaction with the Lili Jacob imagery as a resource.



Figures 16 & 17: Two stills taken from Tim Blake Nelson's 'The Grey Zone'.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ All stills from: Nelson, T.B. (Director). (2001). *The Grey Zone* [Motion Picture] [DVD]. Holland: Bridge Entertainment Group. (2003)

Figure 16 almost faultlessly replicates the contents of the Jacob album. The distance of the figures from the camera is almost identical, and the additional contextual information – again, the subjects’ proximity to the wire and the relative period dress – is perfectly mirrored. It is worth noting that the events of the film take place during precisely the same period in which the pictures were taken, with both depicting the arrival of the Hungarian transports in the summer of 1944. Given Nelson’s mania for authenticity and replication, therefore – as Matthew Boswell has noted, the film takes place in an “80 percent scale replica” (2012, p. 164) of *Crematoria II*, complete with the authentic sprinkler heads and period-appropriate brickwork – it is beyond question that Nelson used these images as a reference point. On the surface level, then, we may say that Nelson has intentionally mimicked Spielberg’s modernist approach to the subject matter. By showing the crowds, and pointedly juxtaposing them with the image of the smoking chimney, Nelson has employed the characteristically indirect approach to their extermination. However, Nelson does not stop here. Whereas Spielberg uses this imagery to reiterate his commitment to non-representation, Nelson’s film appears to be an explicit response to Spielberg’s restraint. Boswell similarly assumes that: “*Schindler’s List* is the cinematic reference point that *The Grey Zone* specifically defines itself against” (p. 164). For Spielberg, these images are ultimately used as markers for the impossibility of representation. For Nelson, they are empty tokens of the distant Holocaust. He uses them to highlight their inability to convey the horror of the event. This becomes apparent in Figure 17, as the camera has pulled away from the characters in order to incorporate a view of the chimney. They are now remote, distant and faceless. They are specks on the horizon, linked only to the concept of mass extermination. Memorial imagery, Nelson asserts, cannot humanise the dead. It can only invoke the image of an unsatisfyingly remote atrocity. Instead, he infers, we must approach it directly.

Nelson's approach to this material, I contend, is emblematic of the modern filmmaker's growing frustration with the temporally and emotionally distant Holocaust. The available images have done little to counter the ineffability and untouchability of the Shoah. This, then, has led to a growing frustration on the part of modern creators. Beginning with Spielberg and then continuing with Nelson, creators have begun to express a deep dissatisfaction with the notion of a temporally and emotionally remote Holocaust. Both wish to approach the more unrepresentable elements of Holocaust suffering and, specifically, to imaginatively recreate death in the gas chamber.⁷⁷ Unable to conceive of the Holocaust dead as real people, given the objectifying quality of the Lili Jacob album, they instead sought to depict them as suffering bodies. These visual records, then, have merely served to compound the emotional distance from the Holocaust dead which was outlined in the previous chapter.

The focus, thus far, has been on the initial stages of the deportee's arrival, for which a certain level of visual representation exists. The following section, by contrast, explores the fictional recreation of life and death within the Auschwitz camp itself – for which we have no visual guide, at least in terms of photographic representations.⁷⁸ It explores the images which have come to stand in for the reality of Auschwitz, and relatedly, the frustration which this post-memorial distance from the event has provoked. It has created, I contend, the desire to touch the experiential heart of the Shoah – to approach the gas chamber.

⁷⁷ Nelson's desire to recreate death in the gas chamber interior will be addressed in greater detail in the final section of this chapter. This section is intended to simply outline the origins of his frustration and his desire to carry Spielberg's attempt at representation to its ultimate conclusion.

⁷⁸ It should be noted that a sketchbook depicting life in Auschwitz does exist. Representing "the only set of drawings made in the camp depicting the extermination of Jews deported by German Nazis to Auschwitz" (Auschwitz-Birkenau, 2012), it provides an unparalleled glimpse into the inner reality of Auschwitz. However, as the text was only published in its entirety in 2012, the collection's cultural influence is currently minimal.

Representing Life and Death in Auschwitz

In contrast to the camps liberated by the Western allies, the liberation of Auschwitz and Majdanek went comparatively unrecorded. This was due, in large part, to the Eastern troops' relative lack of resources when compared to the British and American media machine. As a prototypical example of the Soviet approach to documenting atrocity, Struk provides the example of Adolf Forbert – one of the first Polish soldiers to arrive at the Auschwitz site. Armed with “only 300 metres of film, a camera ‘of the Bells and Howell type’... and one Leica” (2004, 146) he spent two days attempting to document the extent of the atrocity. Given the nature of the event and his profound paucity of resources, this would prove a logistical impossibility. At the very most, he may have hoped to capture a handful of embodying images – in this case, a series of photographs of corpse piles and shots of prisoners incongruously posing with cans of Zyklon-B. While his pictures and footage were later “filed away” (p. 147) by the Soviet state, Forbert's attempt to capture the reality of Auschwitz perfectly justifies the lack of corresponding post-liberation imagery stemming from the Auschwitz site. While British and American liberators were able to saturate the media with images – as Struk notes, the American media machine had a system in place to disseminate pictures to the British and American press within a period of 24-hours – the Soviets not only lacked the resources to disseminate images, but they also lacked images to disseminate. A lack of photographers and a corresponding strain on their resources meant that the liberation of Auschwitz went broadly unrecorded.

As Struk infers, the vast majority of available images of the Auschwitz camp stem from the same film. Titled *Chronicle of the Liberation of Auschwitz*, it has been attributed to four Soviet Army filmmakers. Given that the footage was captured in 1945, it is representative only of the final stages of the crime. Like the photographs taken by the Western allies, it captured residual traces of the atrocity – “mass graves, the sick in the

hospital, the camp grounds, the piles of hair, suitcases, shoes” (p. 147). While some of these images have come to define our post-memorial representation of the event – with a specific emphasis on the piles of hair, suitcases and shoes – it is still the images captured at Bergen-Belsen and Buchenwald which are commonly used as reference points for human suffering.⁷⁹

As Zelizer stresses, the media’s careless use of post-liberation Holocaust imagery has forever complicated our visual relationship with the Holocaust. Photographs documenting atrocities in one camp are frequently used to illustrate articles discussing another, which set a problematic precedent for the future. As Zelizer puts it: “Often, the public was told little or nothing about the place being depicted, leaving the photo to function instead as a generalised spot of Nazi horror” (1998, p. 93). The Holocaust, therefore did not emerge as a visually distinct atrocity. It emerged instead as a vague blur of similar images, often featuring non-descript piles of bodies, which could be used to illustrate any camp being discussed in a given article. This has essentially laid the conceptual groundwork for the future absorption of all imagery by the Auschwitz camp as, from the outset, the Holocaust has stood as an atrocity without specificity or proper attribution. If the bodies of Belsen and Buchenwald serve as only “generalised spots of Nazi horror”, forever removed from their original sources in order to serve as typifying images of Nazi evil, then they will inevitably be pulled into the black hole of Birkenau.

⁷⁹ It must be noted that Lee Miller’s Dachau photographs also occupy a crucial place in the American conception of the Holocaust. Miller’s photographs focus explicitly on a train which arrived from Buchenwald on the 28th of April, 1945, containing “almost 3000 corpses” (Sliwinski, 2010, p. 402). As Sharon Sliwinski notes, her camera depicts both “the terrible tangle of corpses inside the train, as well as the solitary, fragile bodies that lay on the tracks below” (p. 395). While they do speak to the horror of the atrocity, therefore, they do not align with the common images which are frequently replicated in Holocaust fiction. As Chapter Two established, the train is conceptualised as a mode to transport *to* the camps rather than a site of Holocaust death. Similarly, Miller’s focus on individual bodies – she captured images of “three different corpses next to the train, each agonizing in its solitude” (p. 401) – does not correspond with the images of mass death frequently reproduced in Holocaust media. The dead, as this chapter illustrates, are rarely pictured in isolation. As such, the impact of Miller’s work is not explored in this analysis.

Given the lack of available imagery relating to life in Auschwitz, therefore, it is inevitable that the gaps in our knowledge are filled in with a selection of these post-memorial standards. However, as Zelizer implies, our collective cultural memory of the Western camps is also severely limited in nature. Though many images exist, they all happen to conform to particular types. This section focuses on two of these specifically – shots of survivors standing in close proximity to barbed wire and the ever-ubiquitous corpse pile. It begins with reference to Art Spiegelman’s *Maus*, before moving on to Pascal Croci’s *Auschwitz*. It focuses on the ways in which both texts have created a vision of Auschwitz which is entirely post-memorial in nature. While Spiegelman knowingly incorporates this into his text, understanding the insufficiency of his representation, Croci struggles with the notion of an unrepresentable atrocity. His failure to connect with the Shoah on an emotional level, I argue, has resulted in a problematic focus on the suffering female body.

Spiegelman has incorporated images of survivors either behind or in close proximity to barbed wire into both of his iterations of *Maus*. When asked by Hillary Chute in *MetaMaus* if any of his illustrations had been based on particular instances of atrocity photography, he recalls “that ubiquitous photo by Margaret Bourke-White of prisoners at the liberation of Buchenwald” (Spiegelman, 2011, p. 54). The original three-page version of *Maus* – published in *Funny Animals* in 1972 – stands as a proof-of-concept, a tentative stab at creating a narrative which manages to encompass (and also compress) the events of the Holocaust into a digestible form. It covers a number of the same story beats – the discovery of the attic, arrest, incarceration and Vladek’s semi-cathartic burial of the man who betrayed their hiding place – as well as providing a template for Spiegelman’s later stylistic approach to the subject.

With their angular faces and vacant, unfocused eyes the mice in Spiegelman's illustration capture the essence of the original image. Intended to act as a mirror to Bourke-White's original, we can see the degree of specificity with which certain elements have been captured. Focusing specifically on the two men to the far right of Bourke-White's original – a taller man with what might be construed as a paunch and a shorter, more harried individual partially obscured by a man with cane – we can see that Spiegelman has provided exact equivalents for them in mouse form. While this demonstrates a precise attention to detail, the rest of the image is rather more impressionistic in its approach. Rather than replicating this image of Buchenwald with unquestioned fidelity, the image incorporates elements from other pictures. While Bourke-White's image represents the spine,

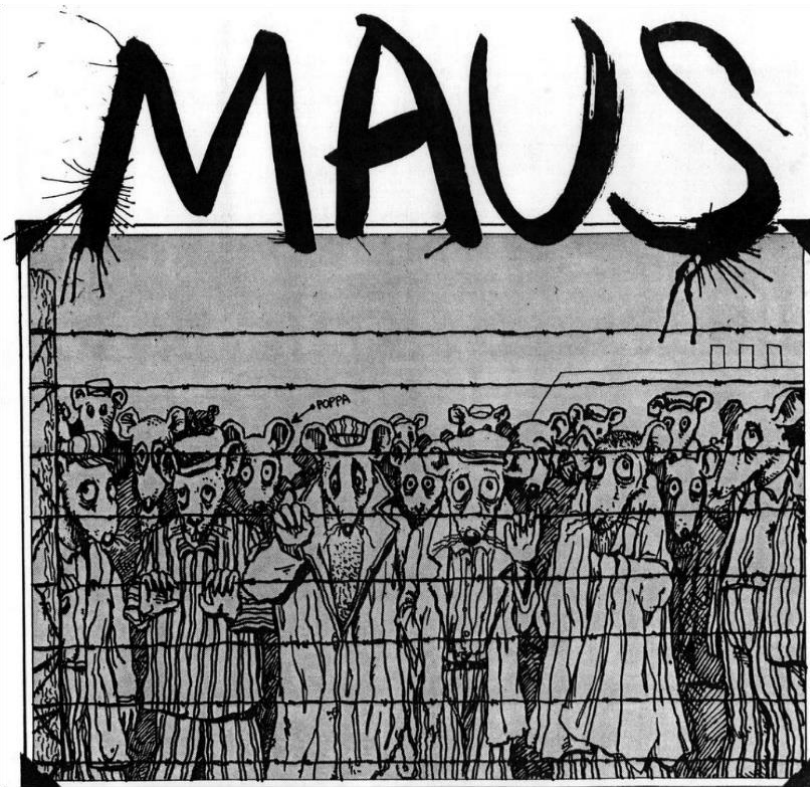


Figure 18: The “splash panel” from Spiegelman's 1972 prototype version of ‘Maus’. Originally printed in ‘Funny Animals’ by Apex Novelties, San Francisco. The comic was reprinted in its entirety in ‘MetaMaus’ (Spiegelman, 2011, pp. 105-107).



Figure 19: Margaret Bourke-White's original image, taken in Buchenwald in the April of 1945.

the foundation upon which other elements are placed, smaller details have been incorporated from other associated images. The open-shirted mouse third from the left, for instance, has more in keeping with the survivors of Ebensee than with those liberated in Buchenwald. Visually, the comparatively dapper survivors of a camp that was, in effect, self-liberated may not be able to encompass the extent of the horrors alone. In order to emphasise their degradation, therefore, Spiegelman has dressed some in rags – handpicking elements from other images to create a perfectly emblematic summary of the prisoners’ suffering. This is entirely in keeping with the practices of our memorial culture which prioritises symbolism over accuracy, as false attribution and generalisation have always been commemorative staples when it comes to the representation of the Holocaust. As Zelizer noted: “Images also generalized the witnessing that had been recounted with precision in the verbal narratives of reporters” (1998, p. 100). Rather than verifying the context of specific written reports, then, the published photography of the post-war years served to effectively erode any sense of specificity that the article may have created. This early unwillingness to particularise, to

specify the origins of each image and therefore establish the various camps as discrete entities, has led precisely to the situation in which we now find ourselves – with Auschwitz as both the commemorative and conceptual heart of the atrocity. It is the black hole which swallows all other commemorative images. As they were not specifically attached to other camps initially, these images easily slide into our poorly constructed vision of life in Auschwitz. Early commemorative culture, after all, established the notion that the horrors of the Holocaust are broadly interchangeable. Any picture, therefore, can be used to represent the atrocity. And, as Auschwitz has come to represent the whole of the atrocity, any image can be used to represent life and death in Auschwitz.

Though this image is not fully replicated in the finished version of *Maus*, Spiegelman does include a frame which contains some of the same core elements. Prior to the start of Chapter I in *Maus II*, Spiegelman uses Figure 20 as an introductory image:



Figure 20: An illustration from Art Spiegelman's 'Maus', depicting a solitary Vladek behind barbed wire. (Spiegelman, 2003, p. 169)

As Vladek is again looking “full into the camera” and he is positioned “behind barbed wire” (Zelizer, 1998, p. 160), it is clear that this image contains several of the reference points

common to the post-liberation survivor images. Given that his knowledge of Bourke-White's picture has been well-established, this image demonstrates the impact of her framing on Spiegelman's post-memorial mind. As it features prior to the start of Chapter One of *Maus II*, this is the first picture to represent the reality of life within the camps. Before this, the reader was left with a picture of the *Arbeit*-gate. As such, this image is designed to trigger a natural association in the reader's mind. The audience is supposed to recall Bourke-White's picture and its former use as a totem to represent the general suffering of the Holocaust. It is then, in short, designed as another form of visual shorthand, aiming to hint at the impossibility of representing suffering in Auschwitz. Spiegelman has no experiential understanding of his father's experiences. His visual recreation of life in Auschwitz is amassed from a handful of post-memorial sources. This image of Vladek on the other side of the barbed wire exemplifies the entirely constructed nature of Spiegelman's representation. It is, like his image from the first *Maus*, a corruption of an original source – a picture from another camp which has come to represent life in Auschwitz. It is thus another example of post-memorial “imaginative investment, projection and creation... at a generational remove” (Brouwer & Horwitz, 2015, p. 545). By showing only one individual and not several men, Spiegelman is highlighting the constructed nature of this image. All representations of the Auschwitz space, this picture implies, will be assembled from assorted post-memorial sources. Visual media, Spiegelman tells us, cannot replicate the Holocaust past. It remains unknowably distant.

The entirely post-memorial nature of *Maus* becomes clearer when Spiegelman later incorporates that other common atrocity image: the corpse pile. Figure 21 illustrates Spiegelman's use of the tangles of bodies common to representations of the Bergen-Belsen camp. It could not be said to resemble the bodies neatly “stacked atop a wagon” (Zelizer, 1998, p. 112) in Buchenwald or those “laid out” side by side like “apparel” left to “dry in

the sun” (p. 99) like the dead in the courtyard at Nordhausen. Instead, Spiegelman represents a tangle of corpses “thrown together so indiscriminately that it was difficult, if not impossible, to discern which appendage belonged to which body” (p. 110).



Figure 21: A frame from 'Maus' showing Art sitting on top of a pile of corpses. (Spiegelman, 2003, p. 201)

Whereas the dead in Buchenwald and Nordhausen are at least partly identifiable, as they are shown as separate and distinct bodies, Spiegelman has gone for the Belsen-esque tangle of corpses as it is entirely anonymising. It represents Holocaust death as a pure abstraction, without identifiable victims. Whereas a picture of a person conveys a sense of “individual agony” (Zelizer, 1998, p. 111), this representation of the dead as a confusing mass of limbs captures “the far reaching nature of the atrocity” (p. 111). As such, Spiegelman has chosen this picture as his embodying image to represent the Holocaust dead in their entirety. He sits atop them as they represent the murdered who continue to haunt his text, hinting at its insufficiency. It cannot hope to revive them as individuals or represent their suffering authentically. He can, as the image itself implies, only represent their suffering through a handful of chosen images. Images which, as they do not represent the reality of death in Auschwitz – given the comparative lack of bodies in the Auschwitz camp – also represent a

misleading portrayal of the atrocity. Spiegelman is, in effect, being haunted by the problems underpinning the representation of the Holocaust.

This becomes evident two pages later, as the corpse pile continues to haunt the frame. As Artie walks to meet his therapist, tangles of dead Jewish mice litter the streets. Pavel's survivor status, like Uncle Haskell's impact in *Elijah Visible*, is highlighting the inauthenticity of Artie's post-memory.⁸⁰ As a survivor of Auschwitz, Pavel understands the experiential reality of the camp. Artie, however, has no functional understanding of the reality of Auschwitz. He must concede that post-memorial representations are cobbled together from broadly unrepresentative sources. Both his therapist and his father possess deep memories of the Shoah – memories his fiction cannot hope to access. The persistence of this image of the corpse pile, therefore, represents Artie's continuing unease regarding his attempt to represent Auschwitz. Given our explicit reliance on these post-memorial images from the Western camps, all nonwitness creators must concede to the ineffability of the Shoah. All fictional representations of Auschwitz, Spiegelman implies, are complicated by their problematic representation of the Holocaust. The camps cannot be portrayed with a tolerable level of authenticity, as our fictional reconstructions of the Auschwitz space are always post-memorial distortions based on a limited set of common images.

Pascal Croci's *Auschwitz* further concedes to this impossibility through its use of two specific representations of mass death.

⁸⁰ Uncle Haskell's role in Rosenbaum's story is addressed in Chapter II of the dissertation.



Figure 22: A page from Pascal Croci's 'Auschwitz' representing the overflow of bodies in the summer of 1944. The second panel clearly illustrates the burning of the bodies in makeshift pits, an image which is borrowed directly from an actual photograph taken by the Sonderkommando (Croci, 2009, p. 45).⁸¹

⁸¹ While the pictures included from this text have been sourced from the 2009 Spanish edition of Croci's *Auschwitz*, all featured quotations are extracted from the 2004 English language version. In terms of their presentation, these two versions of the text are identical.



Figure 23: One of four covert pictures taken by the Sonderkommando in the “autumn of 1944” (Struk, 2004, p. 113). It represents the burning of the dead in outdoor pits, as the four crematoria in Birkenau could not handle the abundance of new arrivals. Yad Vashem Photo Archives. Item ID: 103371. Archival Signature: 20AO8.

(https://photos.yadvashem.org/photo-details.html?language=en&item_id=103371&ind=0)

In Figure 22 two types of atrocity images are evident. The standard anonymising corpse pile dominates two of the frames, as Croci has fallen back on the same standardised imagery as Spiegelman. Once again, this is emblematic of the general issues one is faced with when representing a broadly unrepresented atrocity. These tangles of bodies, in a perfect replication of their history in Britain and America’s mass media, are used to represent the atrocity in its entirety. As the “referential data surrounding the photo’s time and place” has always been regarded as something of an irrelevance, any image of bodies may be used as a representative stand-in to show the “scope of the atrocity” (Zelizer, 1998, p. 99) while also emphasising the dehumanising nature of the killing process. From the initial face in the topmost frame, Croci transitions into the Belsen-inspired tangle of bodies. By doing this he reiterates the transformation of the Holocaust dead from people with discrete identities into anonymous corpses, lost in amongst the now nameless others.

This generalised representation of death is starkly contrasted, however, by the atrocity image represented in the second frame. Comparing Figures 22 and 23, it becomes immediately apparent that Croci has copied the picture taken by the *Sonderkommando* with a deliberate attention to detail. This is evident not simply in the positioning of the figures standing over the bodies – as in both a male figure stands at a curious angle, as if he has lost his balance among the bodies – but also in the relative framing of the image. As Franziska Reiniger notes two of the images captured by the *Sonderkommando* are bordered “by a black frame” (2013, n.p.). This frame, according to Alter Fajnzylberg – a member of the *Sonderkommando* present at the taking of the picture – is the doorframe of the “Western entrance leading from the outside to the gas-chamber of Crematorium V” (Struk, 2004, p. 114). While Figure 23 does not feature the frame, as many incarnations of this picture have been cropped “to highlight the “important” details” (Reiniger, 2013, n.p.), Croci has chosen to represent this element. As such, he is drawing the reader’s attention back to the originating image. This border attaches the image to a specific time and place and, at the same time, reminds the viewer of its origins. The border, after all, hints at the covert nature of the photograph, while also reaffirming the picture’s value as evidence. In short, Croci wishes to imply that the Shoah has been seen and represented. To borrow a phrase from Reiniger, the picture proves “that the unimaginable is imaginable” as “nobody can deny the existence of the pictures” (n.p.). Put another way, Croci is using this image as it does provide an actual glimpse into the representation of death in Auschwitz. This formerly unimaginable reality has been concretely realised in the form of this one picture. By inserting it into his text Croci seems to be actively implying that death in Auschwitz can be shown and that it is no longer unimaginable.

By immediately juxtaposing this picture with the generic replication of the dead from Belsen, however, Croci has undermined his core position. As Reiniger notes, the

Sonderkommando images do not encompass the whole of the atrocity but rather they represent “only one moment of the ‘truth’” (n.p.). They stand simply as the representation of one moment in time, a partial glimpse into the reality of body disposal “somewhere about midway through 1944” (Struk, 2004, p. 114). The broader cultural acknowledgement of these pictures – which, as Keilbach and Wächter have stated, happened “quite recently” (2009, p. 75) – means, simply, that we do now have a limited number of visual references relating to death in Auschwitz.⁸² These images, however, provide only a partial and fragmentary glimpse into the atrocity, as is evident in Croci’s need to flesh out his scenes with other substituting images of mass death. Despite the boldness of its approach, therefore, *Auschwitz* has done little to argue for the representability of the Shoah. The reality of the atrocity, simply put, remains broadly beyond our understanding. In reality, all his text has accomplished – with its vivid recreations of the Holocaust dead – is to draw the reader’s focus back on to the suffering Jewish body. His failure to connect with the Holocaust on an emotional level, I contend, has led him – as is the case with many modern creators – to focus specifically on the material reality of the Holocaust dead and, additionally, the representation of the suffering body.

This may be taken as a relatively severe reading of Croci’s text, given his assertion that he wished “to avoid voyeurism” as well as the “perverse effects of fixed images of nudity” (2004, p. 79). It was for this reason, he states, that he did not attempt “visual representation of the gas ovens” (p. 79). Despite pivoting around this one core of unsayability, however, it is worth noting that Croci has attempted to represent the horrors of the Holocaust. He may not have sought to sexualise his atrocity imagery, but he has represented death in Auschwitz

⁸² As Keilbach and Wächter note, the photographs were featured in an exhibition entitled *Mémoire des Camps* in the year 2000, before being reproduced in a book by Georges Didi-Huberman in 2003 (2009, p. 76). As such, it may be reasonably asserted that they had entered into the public consciousness during the first decade of the new millennium.

in physical rather than emotional or psychological terms. His text, after all, provides several vivid recreations of the Holocaust dead. Meanwhile, he also uses the character of Ann – a child who survives the gassing process, who has clearly been designed in response to a real-world event – as an embodying survivor.⁸³ Whereas the actual child on whom this story was based was soon murdered by *Oberscharführer* Mussfeld, after having been sheltered by the *Sonderkommando* for a few short hours, Croci decides to build on her story in a fashion that is both familiar to modern fiction and still dishearteningly perverse.



Figure 24: A page from 'Auschwitz' showing the opening of the gas chamber. The character of Ann is the only identifiable figure among the Holocaust dead (Croci, 2009, p. 41).

⁸³ In his text *Auschwitz: A Doctor's Eyewitness Account*, Miklós Nyiszli tells the story of a "frail young girl, almost a child" (2012, p. 80) who survived the gassing process.



Figure 25: A panel showing a series of images discovered following the evacuation of the camp in Pascal Croci's *'Auschwitz'*. A highly sexualised image of Ann features at the top right of the frame (Croci, 2009, p. 55).

Describing Figure 24 Croci has stated that he wanted his reader to “feel crushed by this incredible vision of horror” (p. 79). He hopes, in short, that they will be overwhelmed by the sheer scale of the atrocity on display and, similarly, shocked by the dehumanising and departicularising nature of death in Auschwitz. The vast majority of the faces are, after all, entirely unrecognisable. However, Croci’s intentions are once again undermined by the reality of his presentation. The anonymous dead are automatically deprioritised by the author’s focus on Ann. As she is the only identifiable character within the image, she becomes the text’s point of focus and, therefore, Croci’s totemic suffering body. He cannot form an emotional attachment to the nameless and faceless dead and so he has created a figure to embody the Holocaust sufferer. Ann is being used to ensure that Croci feels *something* of the Holocaust. As prosthetic memory relies on our physical “proximity” (Landsberg, 2004, p. 125) to the victims of the Holocaust, Ann’s literal physical closeness to the viewer signals her role as a prosthetic tool. She is the suffering body who makes the

Holocaust approachable for Croci. The horror of the Shoah is communicated explicitly through *her* pain.

Compounding the problematic nature of Croci's representation is his desire to imbue Ann's suffering with an unwelcome element of sexuality. While he previously claimed that he chose to avoid the direct representation of gassing, as he did not want to appear voyeuristic or to invoke the "perverse effects of fixed images of nudity" (Croci, 2004, p. 79), the reality appears rather different. In making this statement Croci was tacitly implying that, should he have wished to, he could have represented the reality of death in the gas chamber. It was, he asserts, merely a sense of propriety that stopped him from doing so. However, as has already been argued, Croci's text stands simply as a tissue of assorted references. He has borrowed principally from two distinct commemorative sources which suggests that, like all modern creators, his understanding of the Holocaust is entirely post-memorial in nature. Death in the gas chamber remains entirely unimaginable. It is for this reason, I contend, that he chooses to switch to a more approachable form of Holocaust horror.⁸⁴

As Figure 25 illustrates, Ann survived her experiences in the gas chamber only to undergo a sustained period of sexual abuse at the hands of an SS officer. She is shown wearing a man's uniform and cap in a candid image which has been taken either during or in the moments following a sexual encounter. This is evident in her state of undress and her tilted expression, which both seem to imply her feeling of degradation. In place of the unimaginable reality of death in the gas chamber, therefore, Croci has instead reconceived

⁸⁴ While the use of the term "approachable" may seem controversial, I use it only to infer that sexual violence has featured in the fictional representation of the Holocaust. It is viewed culturally as a more inherently representable crime than death in the gas chamber which, as Barry Langford has noted, is frequently regarded as being beyond the limits of ethical representation. The gas chamber door, he states, represents "a literal threshold of unrepresentability... beyond which depiction ceases to be permissible or even possible" (1999, p. 32). By contrast, therefore, sexual assault represents a more societally comprehensible form of violence. Sex for survival dynamics have even been explored impiously, albeit in the context of the Bosnian war, in Juanita Wilson's *As If I'm Not There* (2010).

of the Holocaust as a sexual crime. The image not only records her sexual exploitation at the hands of a German officer, given that she is clearly dressed in a German uniform, but also seems to suggest that this was both a common occurrence and even a point of fetishistic pride for the officer involved. As Chapter One argued, sexual violence was certainly an element of the Holocaust. Survivor testimony indicates, as Joan Ringelheim notes, that female prisoners were “vulnerable to abuse of their sexuality”, specifically in the form of “humiliation, molestation, rape and sexual exchange” (1985, p. 743; p. 746). While, theoretically, the inclusion of the sexual violence may constitute a fuller and more authentic representation of women’s suffering, therefore, *this* representation is foundationally problematic. Ann’s scenario, given that it represents a relatively long-standing arrangement, constitutes an instance of private sexual slavery. While Levenkron notes that Jewish women “in parts of Galicia in Poland and elsewhere” (2010, p. 19) were kept as sexual slaves, along with those in certain forced labour camps, it is not described as a common practice in Auschwitz. Rather, as Sinnreich has demonstrated, reports from the Auschwitz camp reflect a more opportunistic, aggressive form of sexual assault.⁸⁵ By contrast, Croci’s picture portrays a more romantic form a degradation – a perpetrator who seems to revel in his assault by dressing his victim in his ill-fitting clothes. This is not a considered, impious representation of a woman’s wartime suffering, but rather one which is literally objectifying – her sexual assault is framed using the perpetrator’s picture, which doubly objectifies her by transforming her into a sexual object. Croci is not aiming to represent the past authentically, but to engender an emotional response through the creation of a deliberately salacious image. By sexualising Holocaust violence, Croci is able to make himself feel *something* about the atrocity. He may not be able to experience the reality of sexual assault

⁸⁵ As she puts it: “Several survivors of Auschwitz... have testified that women were dragged from their barracks by guards and raped” (2010, p. 111).

experientially, but he can experience an emotional response. The idea of shame is emotive and easily graspable to the nonwitness, whereas death in the gas chamber represents a crime for which we have no visual reference points – beyond, that is, the sketches of David Olère.⁸⁶

Both of the previous sections, therefore, have served to outline our post-memorial distance from the Shoah. As the first section illustrated, only a partial record exists regarding the fate of new arrivals in Auschwitz. The Jacob album has allowed a partial insight into the moments immediately following their arrival in the camp, though the moments following their march to the gas chamber have broadly gone unrepresented. The gradual cultural acknowledgement of the *Sonderkommando* images, however, has provided another partial glimpse into the reality of Holocaust suffering. These images have illustrated the reality of corpse disposal and, in other shots not detailed here, the final moments of a particular band of women as they were hurried into the gas chamber itself. However, as Croci's text served to illustrate, these images represent only partial glimpses into a broadly unfathomable atrocity. The Holocaust remains, for those still constrained by the limits of post-memorial imagery, hopelessly and unsatisfyingly remote.

Croci's approach, however, exhibited a certain level of visual daring. He demonstrates a desire to transgress beyond the limits of most previous texts – to represent the inherently unrepresentable. This is emblematic, this chapter argues, of the general thinking of current creators. Frustrated by the notion of an imponderably distant Holocaust, they have instead sought to violate its most sacred spaces in the hopes of approaching the sufferers on a human level. As the next section explores, both David Albahari and Tim Blake Nelson have written texts which attempt to resurrect the Holocaust dead impiously – providing real and

⁸⁶ David Olère was a survivor of the Auschwitz camp, who was formerly attached to “the *Sonderkommando* in Crematoria III” (Sujo, 2001, p. 110). His illustrations, as such, provide an unprecedented insight into the workings of the crematoria.

unmediated access to these figures, while also making their experiences accessible to the nonwitness. As this thesis outlines, however, this attempt is always doomed to failure. The Holocaust dead, as Chapter Two established, will always remain unreachable. In place of actual engagement, I contend, we have developed an unhealthy fixation with the more gratuitous aspects of Holocaust suffering – from the desire to recreate Crematorium III as a tangible, explorable space to the graphic depiction of Holocaust death and the suffering body. Gratuity, I argue, will always inevitably result from any attempt at Holocaust Impiety.

A Gratuitous Approach to Representation

Gillian Rose defines the concept of Holocaust Piety, as enshrined by the likes of Wiesel, Adorno and Habermas, as a conscious commitment to the untouchability and inexplicability of the Holocaust:

To argue for silence, prayer, the banishment equally of poetry and knowledge, in short, the witness of ‘ineffability’, that is non-representability, is to *mystify something that we dare not understand*, because we fear that it may be all too understandable, all too continuous with what we are – human, all too human. (1996, p. 43)

The texts addressed thus far, I contend, have chosen to opt for the conventionally pious approach. While choosing to display certain aspects of the atrocity, their reliance on available imagery and conscious avoidance of the gas chamber has illustrated their commitment to the ineffability of the central Holocaust crime. Even Pascal Croci, for instance – despite his intent to illustrate the horrors of the Holocaust – treated the gas chamber interior with a certain level of representational restraint. Though he intended to provide “no visual representation of the gas ovens” (2004, p. 79), he clearly violated this aim by illustrating a frame which does take place in the gas chamber interior. Instead, he merely

adhered to his desire to avoid “the perverse effects of fixed images of nudity” (p. 79). In the gas chamber, for Croci, the dead must remain clothed, as they should not be unduly sexualised. This prohibition, tellingly, only applied to the limits of the gas chamber space, as he was perfectly content to illustrate the naked dead once they had passed beyond the gas chamber door. The gas chamber interior, therefore, represents the one space in our culturally constructed vision of the Holocaust which still remains comparatively sacred. Culturally, as Barry Langford notes, the gas chamber door represents the “threshold of unrepresentability” (1999, p. 32), beyond which fiction commonly does not pass.

Rose’s theory, therefore, involves two key components. It focuses on both the visual representation of the atrocity and also our psychological proximity to those involved – both perpetrators and victims. A text, Rose claims, should provoke a “crisis of identity” (1996, p. 46) within our own breasts. Rather than maximising our distance from the characters presented, and reducing them to symbolic abstractions, an impious text should allow the reader to imagine their own potential corruption. Rather than conceding to the ineffability of the Holocaust, such a text would make it explicable by illustrating the steps which led to a given character’s moral downfall. We should understand their motivations while acknowledging that, but for the dint of circumstance, we too could be morally compromised.

Here, therefore, a distinction has been drawn between impiety and what may be considered simple gratuity. Though Rose blurs these concepts to a certain degree, I aim to reiterate the division between texts which actively aim to approach the morality of the event and those that simply wish to luxuriate in the horrors of the Holocaust. Rose, for instance, uses *The Remains of the Day* (1989) to exemplify the concept of an impious text. It is telling that, before discussing its inherent impiety, she chooses to stress its representational restraint. She characterises it as: “a film about violence in which not one blow is cast, a deeply erotic film in which not even a wrist is visible” (p. 51). The source of its impiety, therefore, lies

not in the extremity of its presentation, but in its capacity to approach the logic of the event – to de-mystify the morality of the age and, in so doing, make the perpetrator's position imaginable. In examining the relationship between the servant and his master, and in paying particular attention to the servant's collusion in his master's politics, *The Remains of the Day* brings the nonwitness closer to understanding the logic underlying the behaviour of the perpetrator. It provides a logical, incremental insight into the small moments of moral compromise which can lead to an eventual calamity. Having understood the potential motivations of those involved, Rose claims, the audience will then be forced to examine the Holocaust from a position of knowledge. Rather than depthless, reactive sentimentality, she contends, they will come to view the event from a position of deeply affected knowing:

Instead of emerging with sentimental tears, which leave us emotionally and politically intact, we emerge with the dry eyes of deep grief, which belongs to the recognition of our ineluctable grounding in the norms of the emotional and political culture represented, and which leaves us with the uncertainty of the remains of the day. (p. 54)

On the basis of this argument, therefore, Holocaust Impiety has little to do with representational proximity to the heart of the Shoah. It is not about violating the sacred places of the Holocaust in order to visualise the full extent of the atrocity. Instead, it pivots around the approachability of those involved – both perpetrators and victims – and a desire to make them comprehensible to a post-memorial audience. Sentiment, Rose infers, is the product of our emotional and moral distance from the events of the Shoah. This distance, I argue, is not decreased by violating the internees' dying moments, but rather by approaching them as humans – characterising them fully and forcing the viewer to inhabit their subject position. This does not merely involve the realisation of their suffering, it should be noted, but the reality of their daily struggle. There is a fundamental difference between Holocaust Impiety

and post-memorial voyeurism. Many works of fiction, this section argues, actively confuse the two.

David Albahari's *Götz and Meyer*, emblematises this muddled approach to Holocaust Impiety. It is at once a text which aims to fathom the perpetrator's mindset – with the unnamed narrator having attempted to imagine Götz and Meyer back into existence as fully-realised individuals – and a novel which demonstrates an unhealthy fixation with the reality of extermination. These two elements fuse in a curious logistical blurring of Holocaust Impiety, which correctly assumes that a desire for emotional proximity also tends to correspond with a desire to violate the unseen places of the atrocity. One, it seems, cannot exist without the other. The intellectually curious, this novel implies, always harbour a secret voyeurism – a desire to approach the event without limitations.

It is perhaps more apt to say that the novel does not actively endorse this vision of impiety, but rather seeks to critique it in its presentation of the unnamed narrator. Self-identified only as “a teacher of the Serbo-Croatian language and the literatures of the Yugoslav peoples” (Albahari, 2004, p. 59), he is also the child of a Holocaust survivor – whose story he was never able to fully grasp, given his mother's post-war reticence to speak of such things. The novel, as such, is presented as his attempt to historically and imaginatively reconnect with the events surrounding the extermination of his relatives. Returning to the themes of Chapter Two, we may therefore say that he has consciously assumed the position of the ‘memorial candle’, as defined by Dana Wardi:

in most of the survivors' families one of the children is designated as a ‘memorial candle’ for all of the relatives who perished in the Holocaust, and he is given the burden of participating in his parents' emotional world to a much greater extent than any of his brothers or sisters. (1992, p. 6)

While the role of memorial candle is traditionally imposed – the child’s parents transform their child into a vessel for their post-Holocaust reminiscences – the narrator here has taken this role upon himself. His mother has not transmitted, either actively or passively, her latent trauma to him, but still he feels the compulsion to connect to the Holocaust. This stems, he contends, from a comparative feeling of rootlessness: “I had just turned 50, I knew where I was going with my life, so all that was left was to figure out where I had come from” (Albahari, 2004, p. 15). While traditional memorial candles receive their psychic fixation on the Shoah as part of their inherited birth right – transmitted perhaps in their mother’s milk, “perhaps in the blood” or perhaps in their parents’ “midnight screams” (Wardi, 1992, p. 48) – the narrator’s fascination with the Holocaust is entirely self-constructed. This represents a profound departure from the traditional model, in which the memorial child generally receives their family’s Holocaust inheritance as an unwanted legacy:

I am actually carrying the whole family around on my shoulders... When they piled on me all the names of the dead relatives. I don’t believe they were thinking of me, they didn’t try to balance the injustice for me. Now I have no choice but to carry the dead on my back. (p. 28)

Here, a second-generation child, named Arye, is speaking of the burden inherent in his three given names. He has not actively internalised the memory of his deceased relatives, but rather their memory has been imposed on him in the form of a tragic legacy. Albahari’s narrator, by contrast, has taken this burden upon himself. He is not being haunted by his family’s dead. Instead, he has wilfully, actively invoked them. This desire to participate in his family’s Holocaust history, I contend, is deeply significant. Unlike the Memorial Candle, he has not been burdened with an unwanted past. He is not being haunted by the murdered. Instead, he is actively trying to engage with them, which gives his quest an unseemly level of prurience. Like Adam Posner in ‘The Cattle Car Complex’ an excess of interest in the Holocaust past leads to a singularly gratuitous interest in Shoah suffering.

Götz and Meyer begins with a seemingly earnest attempt at Holocaust Impiety. In the opening portions of the novel, the narrator's focus revolves around fathoming the perpetrator's mindset. Several references are made to Götz and Meyer's capacity to compartmentalise; their generally cheerful disposition; their serene nights, untroubled by pangs of conscience and the role of technology in shaping their psychology as murderers. Of this specifically the narrator notes:

They were, in fact, the best proof of how advances in technology enhance the stability of the human personality. They were living proof that Reichsführer Himmler had been right when he claimed that a more humane form of killing might ease the psychological burden felt by those members of the task forces assigned to shooting Russians and Jews. Here, Götz and Meyer felt no burden at all. Himmler would, I'm sure, have been delighted had he met them. (Abahari, 2004, p. 7)

Their Saurer truck, the narrator implies, provides a comparative degree of insulation from the reality of mass killing.⁸⁷ The bodies, he goes on to note, are not even processed by German hands, but rather by Serbian prisoners. Entirely separated from the human reality of mass murder, Götz and Meyer may therefore maintain a certain degree of positivity, carrying out their daily activities with a cheerful kind of bonhomie. They drive along whistling and exchanging jokes, we are told. Götz, or perhaps it is Meyer – this the first indication of the problematic vagueness of the narrator's imaginings – also sees no apparent hypocrisy in giving sweets to the children of the Fairgrounds camp:

Even as they came into the camp, swung children up off the ground, Götz, or maybe it was Meyer, never thought for a moment of what was to come. Everything fitted, after all, into a larger plan, each individual has his own destiny, no-one, least of all Götz, or Meyer, could

⁸⁷ The Saurer trucks were large furniture lorries which had been converted to facilitate the gassing of Jews in the occupied territories. As David Cesarani notes: "The victims were loaded into the back, the doors were sealed, and exhaust fumes from the engine were piped into it until they were asphyxiated" (2016, p. 428).

change that. He was with the children, therefore, only while he was with them. As soon as he'd ruffled the last tousled head, given out the last sweet, lowered the last pair of little feet onto solid ground, they faded from his thoughts... (p. 3)

Götz and Meyer, therefore, are protected by the mechanistic nature of mass extermination. Not only are they insulated from the reality of killing – with death having been compartmentally locked away in the hermetically sealed rear of their Saurer – but they may consider themselves to be mere cogs in an exterminationist machine. They are not active participants in a genocide, capable of acting with agency, but rather they are moving parts in Germany's meticulously planned, routinised extermination of European Jewry. They have, according to this reading, been divested of free will. Having been absolved of all culpability, therefore, there is no hypocrisy inherent in showing certain moments of kindness to the camp's children. For Götz and Meyer, the violence of the Holocaust has been literally partitioned. Enfolded within the safe embrace of their Saurer, the reality of the Holocaust stands as little more than an unseen abstraction. This represents a categorically impious approach to the subject matter. The narrator has approached the perpetrator's perspective and rendered it fathomable. This, however, is almost automatically undercut, leading to the revelation of the narrator's true purpose.

As the story progresses, the narrator concedes that despite his desire to bring Götz and Meyer into the present – he speaks of having drunk with them and smoked with them – they are flawed invocations, based on partial archives and his weak imagination: “Their faces continued to be white splotches, resembling flags of surrender, which was altogether the wrong impression, because if there was anyone in need of hanging out that sort of flag, it was I, not Götz and Meyer” (p. 123). Götz and Meyer have left behind comparatively few memorial traces. Though their names appear in certain files, we are told, there is “barely enough to fill a page” (p. 123). As such, they continue to exist as ill-defined distortions,

broadly indistinguishable from one-another. Rather than approaching them, the narrator has in fact conceded to their foundational inaccessibility. Two references are made in the text to their facelessness and their interchangeability serves as a running theme. At no point has the narrator truly approached Götz, or even Meyer. Instead, he has merely added texture to their formless spectres:

there is practically no difference between Götz and Meyer: they are the same height, of ordinary build, they wear the same-sized boots. Fine, one of them has slightly wider feet than the other, which means that his boots chafe him a little more, but a little difference like that, or so they say, only emphasises their similarity... Götz actually could be Meyer, and Meyer, indeed, could be Götz. Maybe they are, who knows? (p. 115)

Just as Austerlitz attempted to clothe the spectre of his father, or Modiano's narrator attempted to physicalise the partial spectre of Dora Bruder, the narrator has attempted to add an element of materiality to his Holocaust spectres. Just as in those previous examples, this serves as a tacit concession to the vagueness of the narrator's imaginings. Götz and Meyer remain historically remote characters. Their true motivations and rationalisations remain unknown. What the narrator has invoked is a pair of broadly indistinguishable figments based on unsatisfyingly vague sources. This adding of physical dimensions – from the relative shape of their feet to their style of walking – is weakly compensatory. The narrator is aiming for approachability, for a sense of proximity to the Holocaust, and yet all he has been able to recover is a pair of featureless mannequins devoid of human particularity.

This is emblematic, I contend, of Albahari's position regarding Holocaust Impiety. Just as Modiano and Sebald ultimately conceded to the ineffability of the event and the irrecoverability of the dead, Albahari has shown that those who strive to resurrect the past are doomed to failure. We may recover only a partial, insubstantial half-vision of the dead, fleshed out largely by our own imaginings. These are not visions from the past, but products

of the post-memorial ego. Moreover, it may be said, Albahari seeks to interrogate the motivations underlying his narrator's impious approach to the Shoah. This becomes apparent towards the end of the text, as the narrator's fixation with Holocaust death intensifies.

Whereas, for *Memorial Candles*, the dead are always present – as they have been made to carry them on their shoulders – for Albahari's narrator they are always frustratingly absent. Lacking the genuine sense of emotional connection that comes with the memorial child's imposed legacy, he has been forced to take drastic measures to emotionally engage with his family's Holocaust past. Having taken his students on a school trip – a bus journey which retraces the fatal route commonly taken by Götz and Meyer – the narrator effectively simulates the moment of gassing. Aiming to create a moment of engagement with the past, the narrator walks his students through a simulated moment of dying. In response to this, they manifest physical symptoms:

Most of them were straining to breathe, one girl had clutched her throat, someone's hand struggled feebly towards the window and then slid helplessly back, one boy covered his eyes with his hands, two girls had their arms round each other, their heads on one another's shoulders, I saw some lips moving, but except for the driver's soft whistling I heard no sounds.
(pp. 148-149)

Here, the narrator has adopted an identificatory model of education reminiscent of the approaches utilised by the USHMM.⁸⁸ In order to make the Holocaust approachable for his students he has created a scenario in which they may be “interpolated into the position of

⁸⁸ The USHMM utilises bodily identification not only in its use of the cattle car, as Chapter Two established, but also through the use of identity cards. These, as Gary Weissman notes, are designed to maximise the visitor's capacity to identify with their particular victim: “It seems that Americans can imaginatively put themselves in the place of Europeans; non-Jews can put themselves in the place of Jews... museum visitors can put themselves in the place of Holocaust victims” (2004, p. 82). Non-Jews, therefore, are asked to engage with the plight of the victims specifically through one body suffering body – the cards, it should be noted, are gendered to facilitate maximum engagement. Like Modiano's narrator, they walk in the shoes of another from one floor of the exhibit to the next, following their path through the Shoah.

witness and would-be victim” (Bernstein, 2003, p. 143). However, as Albahari implies, this is a fundamentally problematic approach to the material. What have the students learned through this experience? At the outset of this task, the narrator provided each student with the name of a particular victim – crucially, one of his own fallen relatives. Having done so, his students are then told that they must “imagine them as whole people, their every move, every part of their body, each of you be the person, feel how that person’s muscles tense and their lungs fill” (Albahari, 2004, p. 144). Inherent in this request there is a foundational paradox. As the narrator’s own attempts to conjure Götz and Meyer have demonstrated, one cannot create a whole person from a nebulous abstraction. The Holocaust dead continue to exist as an unfillable void. As such, the students are not able to conjure these absent spectres as vital humans. Instead, they may only promiscuously identify with their moment of dying. This moment in the text clearly represents an excess of identification, with the students having physically manifested some of the symptoms of dying. Rather than reading this as a sincere attempt to engage with the Holocaust past, Albahari stresses its depthlessness. The children are not engaging with the Holocaust intellectually, but excessively engaging with this one grim aspect. This represents another example of Bernstein’s “promiscuous identification”.⁸⁹ Once again, the “autobiographical ‘I’” (Bernstein, 2003, p. 147) is starting to blur with the vision of suffering being represented. As is clear in the students’ physical response to their simulated extermination, the boundary between self and other has clearly been elided in this instance. The narrator, in placing an excessive emphasis on the emotional and experiential reality of dying, has merely encouraged his students to egregiously over-identify with one particular aspect of victimhood. He has, in effect, reduced the entirety of the Shoah to this one encapsulating moment of horror. Despite his earlier protestations,

⁸⁹ This concept is introduced in Chapter Two.

therefore, and his expressed desire to fathom the perpetrator's mindset, we have discovered the heart of his Holocaust fixation – the experiential reality of the gas chamber interior.

This is later affirmed when he notes: "I found myself among my relatives, and I have no words to describe the sweetness I felt, that same way I felt when I hung the drawing of the family tree on the wall for the first time" (Albahari, 2004, p. 146). The narrator, however, is not among his relatives. In actuality, he is surrounded by a series of poorly constructed facsimiles. His students are wearing the identities of entirely decontextualized people, whose names have been borrowed from an atrocity of which they have no functional understanding. Therefore, the narrator has merely revived the partial spectres of his absent family in order to watch them die. This is simply not Holocaust Impiety, according to the established definition of the term. He does not reconnect with the dead on a fundamentally human level, reconstructing them as vital people with comprehensible motivations. Instead, he approaches them voyeuristically by reconstructing their moment of dying. This alone gives him a sense of emotional proximity to the heart of the Shoah. This, by the end of the text, is all that he has achieved. The dead remain irretrievably absent, but he has been "interpolated into the position of witness" (Bernstein, 2003, p. 143).

Behind the impious approach, Albahari seems to imply, there is a lurking sense of unseemliness. The narrator's only imagined moment of emotional connection came in his simulated re-imagining of death by carbon monoxide. The root of his Holocaust fixation, therefore, lies not in the resurrection of the absent dead but in the unseemly desire to explore the unseen aspects of the atrocity. Holocaust Impiety, Albahari implies, must always end in promiscuous over-identification and barely suppressed voyeurism.

While Albahari is conscious of the impossibility of impious engagement, Tim Blake Nelson demonstrates no such awareness. *The Grey Zone* is positioned as a sincere attempt

to demystify the psychology of the *Sonderkommando* – to truly illustrate the psychological reality of life under the constant threat of death at Nazi hands. As Albahari's text suggested, however, this attempt is ultimately doomed to failure.

Boswell, in his analysis of Nelson's film, argues for its status as an impious text by stressing its emphasis on representing the plight of the *Sonderkommando*. He takes, at comparative face value, Nelson's assertions that the film was intended to place the members of the *Sonderkommando* on the same line of moral continuity as the rest of humanity. They are not imponderably remote characters, according to Nelson, but rather we are supposed to consider our own potential corruptibility, when faced with the reality of the crematoria:

As an audience member you ask yourself, how would I have responded? What would I do to save my own life? How far would I go in sacrificing my own morality? My own ideal of myself? Would I help kill to stay alive? (Boswell, 2012, p. 170)

This statement does align with Rose's definition of Holocaust Impiety, as it should allow the viewer to examine their own inherent potential for corruption. In examining the content of the film, however, I believe that Boswell finds comparatively little evidence to substantiate his core contention. He seems to consider *The Grey Zone* to be a categorically impious text, and yet it is a film fundamentally lacking in humanity. Rather than emphasising the interior life of the *Sonderkommando*, it is instead preoccupied with propelling the narrative towards its explosive climax – the armed rebellion of 1944. The flaw in Boswell's position stems from one fundamental conception: that *The Grey Zone* exists as the representational opposite of *Schindler's List*. If Spielberg's film embodies the pious approach, Boswell presumes, then every attempt on Nelson's part to counter its sentimentality must then constitute an attempt at Holocaust Impiety. This, according to the established definition, is not precisely the case.

In terms of approachability, Boswell is able to cite comparatively few examples of Nelson's attempt to illustrate the relative morality of the *Sonderkommando*. All of his explicit references pivot around one particular character – namely, David Arquette's Hoffman. Having been responsible for the film's one defining act of compassion – the temporary rescue of another Nyiszli-inspired girl in the gas chamber – he is also responsible for the most spontaneously brutal action perpetrated by a member of the *Sonderkommando*. In this sequence, a wealthy new arrival has been asked to surrender his watch. He resists, calling Hoffman a "Nazi liar" as he both literally and metaphorically spits in his face. The explicit acknowledgement of his complicity is too much for Hoffman to bear, and so he proceeds to beat the man to death while two members of the SS watch impassively. Hoffman's sense of moral compromise is then compounded towards the end of the scene as, after shooting the man's screaming wife with marked dispassion, a member of the SS then smilingly hands the watch to him. It is Boswell's firm position that this sequence perfectly encapsulates the nature of the "grey zone", as defined by Primo Levi in *The Drowned and the Saved*. Specifically, he cites Levi's contention that National Socialism would not "sanctify" its victims, but rather that it would make them "similar to itself" (p. 168). Should this contention prove true, the sequence would perfectly reflect Rose's drive to explore the "contagion of violence" (1996, p. 45) which affected many under the influence of National Socialism. She cites the Jewish police specifically, though the *Sonderkommando* could clearly also fall under this banner of forced complicity.

This sequence, and the one which follows – in which the camera focuses on Hoffman as he sits outside the gas chamber, with the screams of the dying clearly audible as we watch his pained expression – does provide the viewer with the fleeting sensation of emotional proximity to a member of the *Sonderkommando*. We may read Hoffman's outburst as a vicious attempt to expiate his demons. Desperate to escape the truth of the man's accusation,

he has tried to exercise his own self-hatred through a vicious assault. The reality of his situation, however, is immediately hammered home, as he is handed the watch by his would-be oppressor in a smiling, almost collegial fashion. He is, he has come to realise, functionally complicit in the crimes of the SS. To those entering the gas chamber, he is broadly indistinguishable from the enemy – an enabler and facilitator of their genocide. What's more, he may also be construed as a profiteer. In claiming the watch as his property, he has demonstrated his willingness to profit directly from the extermination process. While this can be construed as a moment of impiety, therefore, I contend that Nelson's presentation of the sequence compromises this reading. His desire to inhabit moments of Holocaust horror has overridden his intent to approach the psychology of the *Sonderkommando*.

Rather than placing Hoffman on the same line of moral continuity as the rest of humanity, I contend, this sequence only serves to highlight the parenthetical morality of the concentrationary universe. Hoffman is, after all, steeped in the morality of the crematoria. His victim, by contrast, effectively embodies Western, middle-class, pre-concentrationary Jewish morality. Nelson is trying to embody Primo Levi's assertion that it is "imprudent to hasten to issue a moral judgement" (Levi, 2009, p. 28) of those forced to collaborate in the concentrationary system. This serves to explain Hoffman's motivations, as he resents being judged by those who have no understanding of his daily reality. He attacks the man for his failure to understand the particular morality of Auschwitz. We as audience members, however, must align ourselves with the man being attacked. As such, Nelson – despite his stated aims – has clearly distanced the values of the civilised world from those of the concentrationary system. He has, accidentally, conceded that Hoffman's reality is both ineffable and imponderable. The civilised cannot possibly understand the reality of Auschwitz, which seems irrationally barbaric. As such, Nelson's desire to manufacture

another scene of Holocaust horror has compromised his stated aims. By virtue of this sequence alone, I contend, Nelson's film cannot be considered impious.

Boswell's argument regarding the impiety of *The Grey Zone*, therefore, comes to seem rather weak. Indeed, his central justification for the supposed impiety of this sequence lies in Nelson's choice of actor. David Arquette, he notes, provides the scene with additional context. The extremity of the violence is tempered by Arquette's established cinematic persona as an amiable, semi-comic fool: "The actor's celluloid history affects our response to modern European history; in this instance, the casting means that despite the violence of the murder scene, it captures the underlying tone of sympathy that marks Levi's contention" (Boswell, 2012, p. 168). Boswell's assertion, therefore, is that full comprehension of this scene, and by extension the ethical subtext of the film, is broadly reliant on a foundational knowledge of David Arquette's career. In its wilful omission of the film's actual content, this argument seems rather myopic. It presumes that the film's attempt at Holocaust Impiety, and therefore moral complexity, is predicated entirely upon the audience's universal knowledge of Arquette's comparatively scant career in film. In stating this, Boswell is essentially admitting that the film's actual presentation lacks nuance. The actions may be unforgivably and unfathomably brutal, but this is softened by the good will that has been generated by the actor's other performances. When placed alongside the brutality of the sequence, and the audience's inability to understand the reality of Hoffman's underlying motivations, this argument simply does not seem valid. Despite his claims to the contrary, Nelson cannot access the morality of the *Sonderkommando* as their experiences remain unfathomable. Having no innate understanding of the corruptive power of National Socialism, Nelson can only hint at its presence – by indicating the passive SS officers in the background – while morally abstracting himself from Hoffman as a character. The inner logic of the *Sonderkommando*, as such, remains imponderably remote. What Nelson can

approach, by contrast – in a fashion eerily reminiscent of Albahari’s narrator – is the graphic representation of dying. Though his intent is superficially impious, therefore, his approach to the subject matter is simply gratuitous in nature. Unable to form a firm emotional connection with either the victim or the quasi-perpetrator, he resorts instead to the gratuity of the gas chamber.

Nelson’s gas chamber sequence, in keeping with the anti-redemptory stance of the project in general, is intended as a direct response to Spielberg’s faux extermination scene. While Spielberg merely approximates the new arrival’s perspective, by opting for the realistic swaying of the handheld camera, he does not actually imply a literal blurring of identities – we have not been transformed into one of the *Schindlerjuden*. Nelson, on the other hand, not only traps his audience within the perspective of the terrified internee, but consciously chooses an uncomprehending child as his chosen subject.



Figure 26: A still from 'The Grey Zone' (2001), showing a close-up of the Anne Frank-inspired character who will be sent into the gas chamber.



Figure 27: A still from 'The Grey Zone' (2001), representing the child's perspective as she is led into the gas chamber.

More so than any other cinematic evocation of Holocaust dying, this example is both conspicuously and excessively identificatory. It has been designed to maximise the emotional engagement of the viewer, while simultaneously shutting down their critical faculties. In effect, Nelson has crassly universalised the concept of death in the gas chamber by allowing this moment to be inhabited by all nonwitnesses. While Spielberg's example was particularised – we may identify the *Schindlerjuden* as semi-distinct individuals – these are merely nameless, decontextualized, broadly accessible visions of suffering. We are inhabiting a quasi-Anne Frankian embodiment of wartime innocence – Lawrence Baron has previously argued that this choice of actress is not accidental, claiming that she embodies Nelson's attempt to "challenge the optimism of Anne" (2005, p. 289) prior to her incarceration in Auschwitz – while being led into the gas chamber by a concerned mother. These are not definable people, in short, but simplistic archetypes. Everyone can read the suppressed panic of a dutiful mother, desperately attempting to mask her own anxiety. Similarly, we all understand the implications of the Anne Frankian child. Anne Frank, as

Chapter Four discusses, is not remembered as a distinct person but as a post-memorial distortion. Within the context of our post-memorial culture she has been stripped of her Jewishness, along with many other particularising characteristics, in order to make her identifiable to a non-Jewish audience. She is the prototype for the inhabitable sufferer. In order to facilitate our prosthetic engagement over the last half century, she has been transformed from a distinct girl into an empty vessel, which we experientially inhabit as a means to touch something of the Holocaust. As such, Nelson has manufactured a sequence which is both entirely stripped of particularising humanity and entirely open to audience participation. We can understand the reality of the Holocaust, he infers, by bodily inhabiting this one defining moment of horror.

In stark contrast to Spielberg's restraint, Nelson's aesthetic approach is to "show everything" (Boswell, 2012, p. 164). This is evident in his detailed depiction of body disposal. We see everything from the adding of Zyklon-B to the transportation of the deceased to the crematory ovens. The film even depicts the organised repurposing of hair and teeth as part of its drive towards de-mystification. In short, rather than emphasising the humanity of the *Sonderkommando* – from their relative degree of camaraderie to their frequent attempts to charitably assist the internees in the nearby women's camp – the film chooses instead to immerse its viewers in horror and barbarity.⁹⁰ No element of the atrocity shall remain ineffable for Nelson, including the moment of death itself. Though it does not feature in the initial sequence, the Anne Frank-inspired child has a moment of traumatic recollection following her recovery. She remembers the experience of being gassed, and this is shown on screen. Nelson, I argue, has no actual regard for the suffering of this child. She has no humanity or genuine complexity, she is valuable only in that she has a unique subject

⁹⁰ Miklós Nyiszli, for instance, has described the charitable efforts of the *Sonderkommando*: "Fully aware of this unbalanced situation, [they] distributed food and clothing to their less fortunate comrades whenever they could" (2012, p. 90).

position – she, alone, can serve as a functional witness to the extermination process. As such, she exists simply as the facilitator of his voyeurism. In borrowing her perspective, Nelson is able to see into the untouched recesses of the Shoah. This, in the end, is the overriding purpose of his film. Though he has previously claimed that his film is entirely about “being human” (Boswell, 2012, p. 169) – a claim Boswell wholeheartedly supports – there is little evidence of Nelson approaching his *Sonderkommando* characters as comprehensible humans. Instead, they are merely painted as brutal collaborators – subjects of a corrupting influence that the civilised world cannot understand. Having failed to gain either emotional or intellectual proximity to the Holocaust, therefore, Nelson’s only recourse is to fall back on Holocaust gratuity. This, however, does not accord with any definition of Holocaust Impiety. Nelson has not brought us closer to either the perpetrator or the sufferer. As characters, they still remain hopelessly simplistic. Nelson’s evocation of the atrocity does not unsettle our foundational sense of self, causing us to examine our own latent potential for violence. He has not de-mystified the human elements of the atrocity but instead has become overly pre-occupied with recreating the unseen aspects of the extermination process. This is not impious, but patently voyeuristic.

While the two previous sections, therefore, served to outline our emotional distance from the Holocaust – by highlighting the way in which the available photographs of the atrocity have only served to compound our emotional distance from it – this final section sought to examine the frustration this sense of distance has inspired in post-memorial authors. Both of the texts in this section served to problematise the idea of Holocaust Impiety. Both Albahari and Nelson seek to resurrect the dead and to engage with them impiously. The attempt, as Albahari’s text shows, is not only doomed to failure, but rather it is undercut by the true intentions of the nonwitness. Both Albahari’s narrator and Tim Blake Nelson abandoned their attempts to revive the Holocaust dead as vital, substantial characters and resorted

instead to elaborate recreations of Holocaust death. This form of crass bodily engagement, both texts suggest, will prove the end result of all texts which aim to impiously engage with the Holocaust past.

Conclusion

Implicit in almost every piece of Holocaust fiction, this chapter argues, there is a detectable subtext of frustration regarding the untouchability of the Holocaust. All of the texts cited here have effectively conceded to their own inadequacy through by using borrowed sources. Our limited visual vocabulary for the Holocaust has not merely determined the content of fictional representation – every text must rely on a certain set of images in order to maintain its sense of authenticity – but it has also shaped our emotional responses to the events themselves.

As the first section illustrated, those immediately killed upon arrival in Auschwitz have been forever placed beyond our reach. Conceptualised almost entirely through references to the Jacob album, we have come to view them as a homogenous mass of unreachable figures. Rather than humanising and particularising the victims of the Holocaust, these images have had precisely the opposite effect. The figures in these photographs, through their continued use as embodying images of the atrocity, have become totemic figures – embodying the broader nature of the atrocity and, therefore, losing their own distinct identities. It is telling that, when mimicking these images, filmmakers depict long queues of faceless individuals, passively walking to their doom. Our collective cultural memory of the Jacob album has been reshaped into a dehumanising blur of similar figures. Unable to conceive of them as people, therefore, modern creators have lost any sense of emotional attachment to the event

itself. This, accordingly, has led to an increased desire to emotionally reconnect with the atrocity.

Section two served to compound this sense of emotional abstraction by emphasising the lack of visible material regarding the inner reality of Auschwitz as a camp. As the discussion relating to in-camp suffering emphasised, all of the imagery that has come to define our vision of prisoner suffering has been borrowed from other sources. Every serving image – from the re-use of Margaret Bourke-White’s Buchenwald picture to the visual presentation of the corpse pile – serves to undermine its own sufficiency. Not only have these pictures been borrowed from other sources, but they also only represent a small portion of the atrocity itself – its post-liberation phases, generally speaking. The corpse pile, particularly, is not a serviceable image for our extermination-oriented conception of the Shoah. As our focus on Auschwitz has gradually increased, it has become less representative of the nature of the event. As such, those looking to reconnect with the inner reality of life in Auschwitz, must concede that the event is almost entirely beyond our powers of representation. Not only are the Holocaust dead unreachable, therefore, but the actual nature of the event itself is also largely beyond our imaginative grasp.

The discovery of additional images, as Pascal Croci’s text illustrated, has also done little to counter this problem. While the *Sonderkommando* photographs have provided a partial glimpse into the nature of the extermination process, these images only illustrate the experiences of one group in the summer of 1944. Croci’s presentation of Auschwitz still stands, simply, as a vague tissue of borrowed sources. He has no understanding of the experiential reality of the Shoah, and so his representation of Jewish suffering still relies on borrowed imagery. The *Sonderkommando* images may have expanded our visual vocabulary to a certain extent, but we still do not possess the resources to represent the whole of the atrocity. It must remain ineffable.

Holocaust imagery, therefore, has placed a relative cap on our potential to reconnect with the atrocity. Due to the lack of available imagery, it remains imponderably remote. It is this remoteness that provided the fuel for the chapter's final section. Unwilling to accept that both the victims of the Shoah and its experiential reality are beyond our reach, post-millennial creators have begun to approach the Holocaust in a radically different fashion. If pre-21st century creators tended to opt for the traditionally pious option – building their projects around memorial sources – then modern creators are instead opting for an increasingly imaginative approach to the event. Both Albahari and Nelson experimented with the concept of Holocaust Impiety, providing texts which attempted to approach perpetrators, collaborators and victims on a human level. As Albahari's text suggested, however, this proved to be a logical impossibility. One cannot reconstruct a human identity based on a partial archive and a name alone. Rather than creating tolerably comprehensible characters, both texts manufactured only poorly fleshed-out caricatures.

This failure to connect with the Shoah on a genuinely impious level, Albahari implied, can only lead to one natural consequence. When all other avenues fail, the post-memorial creator will inevitably resort to the representation of the gas chamber as their ultimate attempt to emotionally reconnect with the event. With all other sites lacking any form of resonance, following their many years of use as memorial staples, only the gas chamber retains the requisite emotional heft to enliven the atrocity once again.

Our collective cultural memory of the Holocaust, therefore, has reached something of a crisis point. Not only has the visual record of the atrocity been reduced to a handful of stock images, none of which fully embody the nature of the event, but we have lost any sense of emotional connection with the human reality of the Shoah. In place of Holocaust Impiety, we have only brazen gratuity. As Chapter Four outlines, it is my contention that – in our post-memorial present – impious engagement now stands as an impossibility. We cannot, at

this point in time, view the Holocaust dead as approachable humans. They have become, in modern Holocaust fiction, merely props to facilitate our engagement with the Holocaust past. The inhabitable Jewish body, in short, has effectively supplanted the possibility of impiety.

Focusing once again on Gillian Rose's theme of Holocaust Piety and Alison Landsberg's notion of prosthetic memory, the final chapter of this study asserts that only Holocaust survivors possess the capacity to represent the dead impiously. Modern attempts to represent life during the Holocaust, it argues, should be treated with a great deal of suspicion. In order to establish their relative value, it contends, we must consider once again employing Berel Lang's standard of silence.

Chapter IV: Exploring the Limits of Modern Holocaust Fiction: From Fraternity to the Suffering Body

This thesis began with reference to the modern contention, best articulated by Emily Miller Budick and Gavriel Rosenfeld, that Holocaust fiction is no longer required to justify its own existence. It was Budick's specific contention that Holocaust fiction may no longer be considered "inadequate, inappropriate or even endangering to the task of representing the Nazi genocide" (2015, p. 1).

As the previous chapters have gone some way towards outlining, however, this matter is far from being resolved. As the experiential reality of the Shoah – the reality hidden in the deep memory of survivors – cannot be reached by the nonwitness, the Holocaust exists in the present as a distant abstraction. This, as Chapter Two outlined, is due to the fundamentally incommunicable nature of deep memory. As Jorges Semprun implies, this has been the case since the time of liberation. In *The Long Voyage* (1963), Semprun actively tries to communicate the reality of Buchenwald to two kindly French women. Struggling to find the words, and failing to recapture the sense of lived horror that once defined the camp, Semprun instead shows them a corpse pile – allowing the evidence to speak for itself. As Sara R. Horowitz notes, however, evidence alone cannot encompass the nature of the atrocity: "what they see, horrifying as it may be, does not help them understand his experience. The French women see a reality different from the one that the narrator shows" (1997, p. 35). The French women, rather than seeing real people only see an anonymising tangle of corpses. They see only bodies, and they are stunned by the harsh physicality of death – the "yellowed" flesh and "twisted" limbs and faces "hideous with terror" (Semprun, 1964, p. 74). Semprun, on the other hand, focuses on his feeling of kinship with these dead men:

I'm thinking that one has to have experienced their death, as we have, in order to look at them with that pure fraternal expression It was stupid to try and explain to them ... these dreadful, fraternal dead need no explanation. They need a pure, fraternal look. (p. 75)

What is fundamentally missing from the perspective of the nonwitness, therefore, is their capacity to view the dead with a feeling of fraternity, humanity or common understanding. We cannot approach them or gain a sense of their personhood. Instead, we have come to fixate on the body. Having resigned themselves to this position, and internalised the message of the first and second generation, latter-day artists have instead turned away from the human aspect of suffering toward the pure materiality of Holocaust death. As the previous analysis of Stern, Modiano, Sebald, Spielberg, Croci, Albahari and Nelson illustrated, post-Holocaust fiction has become obsessed with the concept of materiality, both in an attempt to return a sense of materiality to the Holocaust dead – to give the vanished back their bodies – and to step into the physical suffering of the Jewish body. In place of a Gillian Rose style psychological proximity to the person, we have instead developed a crude fixation with prosthetic memory and the Jewish body as a point of access to Holocaust memory.

This chapter builds on the work of the previous three chapters by discussing the impossibility of Holocaust Impiety in modern Holocaust fiction. It uses Gillian Rose's theory of Holocaust Piety and Alison Landsberg's theory of "prosthetic memory" to suggest that modern Holocaust fiction, thanks to its emotional and experiential distance from the Holocaust past, has turned instead towards a fixation on the human form. The Holocaust dead, in short, have been transformed into inhabitable bodies, who may be used to experience *something* of the Holocaust. It focuses on the work of Ida Fink, in order to assert that only those with direct experience of the Holocaust can impietously recreate the Holocaust dead in fiction, before exploring three texts which demonstrate an alarming focus on the suffering

body: *The Tattooist of Auschwitz* by Heather Morris, Shalom Auslander's *Hope: A Tragedy* and Jonathan Littell's *The Kindly Ones*.

Having highlighted the importance of Berel Lang's work in the introduction, the thesis then comes back to his critical stance in a circular movement. Countering Budick's position of acceptance regarding Holocaust fiction, the thesis instead argues that Lang's standard of silence should be applied to works of contemporary Holocaust fiction. As Lang argues:

Indeed, silence arguably remains a criterion for *all* discourse (Holocaust or not), a constant albeit phantom presence which stipulates that whatever is written ought to be justifiable as more probative, more incisive, more *revealing* than would be its absence or (more cruelly) its erasure. (2000, p. 18)

Lang's position, in effect, is that the Holocaust has already been spoken. A great many works of fiction have attempted to represent the experience, with varying degrees of success. The question is therefore not one of sayability, but rather of the worthiness of a given piece of material. As a foundational assumption, this chapter will assert, a piece of fiction must not further corrupt or compound our already partial understanding of the Holocaust.⁹¹ However, given our established experiential distance from the Holocaust – and its gradual simplification and universalisation – modern fiction frequently proves inadequate, inappropriate and indeed endangering to the task of representing the genocide.

The first section of this chapter focuses on two stories from Ida Fink's collection *A Scrap of Time*. It argues that, in contrast to modern works of Holocaust fiction which simply utilise the Holocaust dead as inhabitable windows onto the atrocity, Fink's text manages to

⁹¹ A problematic piece of Holocaust fiction, this chapter contend, is one which either overemphasises certain elements of the atrocity – for instance, by depicting the Holocaust as an *explicitly* sexual crime, as this is indicative more of our post-memorial salaciousness than a desire to represent the atrocity authentically – or focuses excessively on graphic depictions of Holocaust suffering. This post-memorial obsession with the Jewish suffering body, and the material reality of the gas chamber or cattle car interior, yields nothing beyond a moment of prosthetic engagement with the Holocaust past

approach the murdered as fellow humans. Their suffering, in short, is rendered comprehensible. They are not simply post-memorial abstractions, stripped of particularising qualities, but rather Fink is able to view them with a Semprun-esque feeling of “fraternity”. This, the section argues, is a quality particular to the writing of survivors, as only they possess the understanding necessary to portray the dead with genuine impiety.

The second section then builds on this argument by analysing a defining example of problematic modern Holocaust fiction: *The Tattooist of Auschwitz* by Heather Morris. This section uses the work of Gary Weissman and Alison Landsberg to explore our current emotional distance from the Holocaust past. Morris’s text, this section argues, reads as a fantasy of witnessing as she struggles to connect with the experiential reality of the Holocaust. Instead, she must reimagine the horrors of Auschwitz through vividly describing the sexual suffering of certain internees. The constant brutality of the camp, therefore, is transformed into a more representable crime – rape or the persistent threat of sexual assault.⁹² As such, Morris not only overemphasises certain elements of the atrocity but once again fixates on the suffering Jewish body. Using Lang’s standard of silence, this text is found unfit for a modern audience as it compounds our problematically narrow conception of the Holocaust.

Finally, this chapter features two texts which do add something to our understanding of the Holocaust: *Hope: A Tragedy* by Shalom Auslander and *The Kindly Ones* by Jonathan Littell. Both explore the centrality of the body in modern Holocaust fiction. Auslander does this through his deconstruction of the Anne Frank myth. His text ties our mythic conception of Anne Frank explicitly to our image of her as a smiling child. Our understanding of her is

⁹² While this statement may seem controversial, as those who have not experienced sexual assault may be deemed incapable of imagining its experiential reality, Holocaust fiction does demonstrate a comparative willingness to represent sexual violence and its psychological ramifications. Beyond those texts already cited, it features in: Lustig’s novel *Lovely Green Eyes* (2000), Zivorad 'Zika' Mitrovic’s film *Witness Out of Hell* (1966) Liliana Cavani’s *The Night Porter* (1974) and Boaz Yakin’s *Death in Love* (2008).

therefore entirely depthless and tied to the idea of fixing her body in time. Littell's text, meanwhile, will be analysed using the concept of Abjection. This idea not only underpins this text, this section will argue, but provides the key to unpacking Aue's behaviour. Both texts, therefore, signal the centrality of the body to modern Holocaust writing while actively interrogating this idea. As such, they may be considered valuable as they do enhance our understanding of the Shoah by illustrating the nature of our current preoccupations. They highlight our obsession with the body and explore the impact of this on our view of the Holocaust. It is only by understanding our problematically narrow view of the Shoah that we may hope to alter it for the better. We may not be able to engage with the Holocaust dead as people, but we can shift our emphasis away from prosthetic memory.

Ida Fink and a Feeling of Fraternity for the Holocaust Dead

As has been established throughout this thesis, there are two central tenets to Gillian Rose's theory of Holocaust Piety: distance and ineffability. These two themes become particularly acute when discussing these Holocaust dead, as was established in Chapters Two and Three, as post-memorial culture has deemed their suffering to be unreachable. They must remain figures on the other side of the fence – as was demonstrated in *Schindler's List* through Spielberg's "regressive identification" (Rose, 1996, p. 47) with the living.

By contrast, this section asserts, Ida Fink's short stories approach the Holocaust dead with genuine impiety by both humanising them as individuals and authentically approaching their wartime mentality. Fink's emotional and experiential proximity to the Holocaust, this chapter asserts, has directly contributed not only to the relative audacity of her fiction but also the legitimacy of her insight. Who else could approximate the experiential and mental reality of the murdered than writers who lived through the ghetto, survived the horror of an

Aktion or directly experienced the persistent fear of deportation to near certain death? Sara R. Horowitz expresses this position most concisely when she notes: “The closer the writer to what Primo Levi refers to as “the bottom” – those murdered by Nazi genocidal practices – the more the work could be construed as itself being a part, a trace, a fragment of the atrocity” (1997, p. 8). More so than any living author in the present, this chapter contends – and certainly to a greater degree than many of her contemporaries – Fink has come close to the conceptual bottom of the Holocaust. While she did not directly experience the camps, she did experience life in the ghetto and, as has been fictionalised in *The Journey* (1990), a period in hiding. As such, the murdered are not distant abstractions for Fink, but rather former neighbours. Their suffering is not hopelessly remote, but painfully immediate and distinctly comprehensible. She understands the prospect of death at the hands of the *Einsatzgruppen* and the emotional potential of being led to the killing fields. This was not, for her, a remote historical event but a genuine prospect.⁹³

Two of Ida Fink’s short stories attempt to approach the perspective of those who are being exterminated. While ‘A Scrap of Time’ enters the subject position of a narrator who attempts to recount the last moments of her cousin, ‘A Spring Morning’ is unquestionably bolder in its presentation – choosing to represent the numb, silent horror of a father in the moments following the seizure of his family. In the final chapter of *Voicing the Void*, Sara Horowitz pays particular attention to the first of these two stories, arguing that it represents the

⁹³ This chapter subscribes to Ruth Klüger’s assertion that people who have gone through comparable experiences may be able to imaginatively engage with certain wartime events: “People who have experienced fear of death in cramped quarters have a bridge to understanding the kind of transport I have been describing... Europeans who have sat in air-raid shelters have something in common with me that Americans don’t” (2001, p. 94). As someone who lived with the prospect of death at the hands of a firing squad – a fate she understood, given the frequency with which it features in her stories – Fink is able to approach the mental reality of possible execution. Meanwhile, the “thundering train” (1987, p. 32) and the camps remain distant and abstract. Fink, in short, can write of ghetto clearances, and the mentality of the captured, as this represents a distinct possibility for her. She cannot conceive of life and death in the camps as these are not comparable to her experiences.

narrator's earnest attempt to connect with her cousin David's final moments. This is framed as a humane, indulgent moment of empathetic engagement:

To do this, the narrator must temporarily place herself alongside David, become the *we*, and live out – in her imagination and in this narrative – an alternative different from the one she herself lived out the day of the first action. She must imagine what she can never know – David's last moments, last feelings, last posture, before he falls victim to mass slaughter. (p. 223)

In her phrasing, Horowitz suggests a certain nobility in the narrator's actions. She notes that the narrator aims to "place herself" alongside her cousin, a phrase which implies an attempt at intimacy – a well-intentioned desire to fathom her cousin's actions. Without wishing to impugn Horowitz, this reading of the character is patently false. Her post-memorial reverence for the Holocaust dead, I contend, has blinded her to the possibility that this is not a story of active engagement, but one of distancing and resentment. It does not represent the temporary breakdown of the distinction between an "*I* and *we* and *not we* and *he*" (p. 224), as she implies, but instead charts the narrator's desire to distance herself from her frail, feminised, fatally neurotic cousin.⁹⁴ The crux of Horowitz's issue, and the source of her willingness to overlook the narrator's contempt, can be found in one particular quotation: "Willingness to hear, remember, imagine, and tell compensates for absence of experience, and the narrator produces a good enough testimony – one that rescues David and his fraternal dead from oblivion" (p. 224). Horowitz has internalised the traditionally pious view of the

⁹⁴ While evidence of this will be provided through this section, it is worth noting for the moment that her cousin is perpetually othered and described in derogatory terms. He is not humanised, but rather described simply as one of the Impatient Ones – Jews driven to their own destruction by their latent anxiety and "inability to remain still" (Fink, 1987, p. 7). Fink's short story is laced with references which imply that the boy's psychology and experiences are inherently unknowable: "We would never have guessed that..." (p. 7); "Like us, not comprehending that the boy belonged to the race of the Inpatient Ones..."; "What our cousin experienced, locked up in that room, will remain forever a mystery" (p. 8). This is not a story of empathetic or impious engagement, but rather one which treats the dead as incomprehensible figures – defined by their neurosis and (in the boy's case) his bookish femininity.

Holocaust dead. In dying, they have become figures of reverence to be viewed indirectly, and not to be treated as foundationally flawed human beings. To acknowledge the narrator's stance of active resentment would clearly contradict the decades of cultural conditioning Horowitz has internalised, and so clear contextual details are overlooked.

To evidence my contention, one should not ignore the narrator's desire to effectively "other" David, placing him in an alternate category of wartime Jews: "We would never have guessed that he belonged to the race of the Impatient Ones, doomed to destruction by their inability to remain still" (Fink, 1987, p. 7). More detail is then provided regarding this subgroup of people when the narrators goes on to note: "the Impatient Ones, who find it difficult to cope with isolation and who act on impulse" (p. 8). This does not represent an attempt to inhabit her cousin's subject position. She does not wish to truly understand his mentality. His death does not require empathetic identification, as he may simply be written off as one of the compulsively neurotic, who fatally panic when left alone. By referencing the Impatient Ones, the narrator is not attempting to rescue David and his fraternal dead from oblivion. Instead, she is creating an us-and-them binary between the dead and the living. She is a survivor, whose qualities stand in direct opposition to David's. He, on the other hand, is characterised only as a feminised *Luftmensch*, shown to be singularly lacking in terms of practical skills. This much becomes evident in her description of his personal qualities: "he was round-faced and chubby, not at all energetic, the sort of person who can't be pulled away from his book, who smiles timidly, girlishly" (p. 7). The characterisation here is one of a portly, impractical and profoundly un-masculine youth. It is the final two words, however, which best indicate the narrator's conception of his character. He is timid and girlish – an inherently useless and passive boy, existing in an era in which masculinity is already a sensitive subject. Loss of faith in masculine protection is a recurring theme in female-written post-war texts. Both Seweryna Szmaglewska and Krystyna Zywulska refer to it in their

Auschwitz texts. Ida Fink's short story 'Aryan Papers' also implies that it exists as an element in her conception of the Holocaust. 'Aryan Papers' presents a scenario in which a 16-year-old girl, robbed of every kind of parental support, must prostitute herself in the hopes of obtaining the transport papers necessary to her survival. In this text, the only featured men are would-be exploiters and passive bystanders. She must rely on her own agency in order to survive. In this world, the character of David epitomises failed masculinity. He is the very embodiment of male helplessness and an unwelcome reminder of the current order of things.⁹⁵

It is David's death, however, that most starkly contradicts Horowitz's position regarding this text. The narrator presents, she claims, a "good enough" testimony, one which – through its powers of imaginative engagement – has related the human reality of David's final moments. As written, Fink's text would not seem to align with this position:

At the first shots, our chubby, round-faced cousin David, who was always clumsy at gymnastics and sport, climbed a tree and wrapped his arms around the trunk like a child begging for his mother, and that was the way he died. (p. 10)

David's final moments, the narrator is careful to imply, are not invented. They come instead from a Polish eyewitness – a peasant, who "had not dared to speak at the time" (p. 10), but came back after the war and told the family everything. This is not, however, to be read as a straight relating of facts, but rather it is the story of David's death as filtered through the narrator's perspective. She refers to "our" cousin, explicitly reclaiming control of David's narrative. The reference to David's childlike begging, therefore, may be taken as her own.

⁹⁵ This, it should be noted, is further compounded by the narrator's reference to David's profession. When asked to write his profession by the occupiers he claims to be a teacher. The narrator is quick to undermine this assertion: "... although he had been a teacher for only a short time and quite by chance" (pp. 8-9). David, then, lacks the wherewithal or the motivation to seek out his own profession. His bookishness and inherent femininity, the narrator therefore implies, has left him perennially passive and impractical.

The very last line of the narrative, therefore, serves to infantilise David. It is a grim, farcical, ignominious death, entirely bereft of dignity. Given that it serves as the story's final point of punctuation, it may also be read as being indicative of David's character. For the narrator, this moment of dying perfectly encapsulates the entirety of his being – it is faultlessly representative of his essence. He was a feminine, passive, impractical boy, chronologically in the early stages of manhood and yet still inherently helpless. By identifying him as such, she is particularising his death. There is no potential to recall his fraternal dead, as the narrator has taken great pains to resurrect this one aberrant figure from the ashes.

At best, therefore, this may be classed as a complicated, singular act of remembrance. Fink's narrator has recalled her cousin, but not out of a positive inclination to testify to his passing or to re-imagine him with any sense of fidelity. He is, at all times, a reductive caricature of buffoonish helplessness – or, put another way, the consummate victim. Given that this story is being recalled after the fact, in the post-war years, it is only logical to assume that the narrator is rationalising her survival. In *A Double Dying*, Alvin Rosenfeld speaks at length on the inherent psychological burden of survivorship. It is, he notes, “more punishingly cruel” in some ways than death, as one must come to live with the “prolonged stress of an unwanted, unearned life” (1988, p. 53). Bearing this in mind, the narrator's characterisation of David may be read as a rationalisation. She is using him as the archetype of the Holocaust victim, the ultimate embodiment of helplessness and frailty. To survive required fortitude and ability, whereas David has been characterised as weak, feminine and impractical.

That is not to say that Horowitz's position must be entirely discounted, however, as the narrator has technically rescued at least a *part* of David from oblivion. Though she does not approach his mindset, therefore, the text may still be taken as being relatively impious. While a traditionally pious view would depict the dead as unapproachable figures, solemnly

embodying an ineffable tragedy, survivors possess the capacity to humanise the dead – sometimes by showing a barely suppressed disdain for the murdered, which is still undeniably humanising. Ruth Klüger, for instance, writes scathingly of her neighbours and her former Auschwitz associate Liesel, while also painting a singularly complex picture of her father. For Klüger, death has not sanctified these figures. They are still understood to be flawed humans. This distaste still hints at a certain kind of intimacy, as it is still able to characterise them as complex, formerly living people. Only in this one regard can ‘A Scrap of Time’ be viewed as an impious text. It does not enter David’s mindset, but it does partially humanise him.

‘A Spring Morning’, by contrast, is inarguably more audacious in its approach. The story focuses on Aron, a man whose family will soon die at the hands of the SS. Unlike ‘A Scrap of Time’, which actively strives to distance the reader from any human attachment to David, ‘A Spring Morning’ is unflinching in its attempts to focus on Aron’s final moments. It is, I argue, a story more deserving of Horowitz’s focus, possessing many of the qualities that she instead ascribed to ‘A Scrap of Time’. Though she does refer to ‘A Spring Morning’ in the introduction to *Voicing the Void*, this is only to make mention of the fact that it “explores the retrieval of impossible narratives, giving voice to stories consigned to muteness” (1997, p. 13). Aron’s story represents, she states, the retrieval of an “impossible narrative”, given the absence of survivors following the ghetto clearance. None would have survived to tell Aron’s story and so Fink’s engagement with his pain represents a “radical imagining” (p. 13) – an attempt to engage with the experiential reality of the hours preceding one’s death. Having stated this, Horowitz does not return to the text and it is not considered in relation to ‘A Scrap of Time’. This represents a curious failing on Horowitz’s part as, when viewed together, their relationship is profoundly instructive. Whereas ‘A Spring Morning’ avoided accessing David’s space, asserting that his experiences within his locked room would remain

“forever a mystery” (Fink, 1987, p. 7), ‘A Spring Morning’ actively enters Aron’s room. Specifically, it takes great pains to depict the small intimacies of its characters. As Aron and his wife await the arrival of the SS, having heard their trucks pass over the Gniezna river at 5:00am, there is a strained moment of human connection between them:

He stretched out his hand timidly, gently, stroked hers. She wasn’t surprised, although as a rule he was stingy with caresses, but neither did she smile. She shook his hand and squeezed it firmly. He tried to look at her, but he turned away, for something strange was happening inside of him... he knew that in a moment these rapid breaths would turn to sobs. (p. 42)

In contrast with the scant emotional distance of ‘A Scrap in Time’, here the viewer bears witness to an almost unbearable moment of weighted intimacy. Fink has revived a set of animate, vital, complex people. Sol’s gesture, for instance, is minutely characterised. We are told that he stretches out his hand “timidly, gently” in order to stroke hers. This gesture has multiple levels of meaning. It covers everything from Aron’s general lack of experience in providing physical comfort – we are then told, additionally, that he has always been stingy with caresses – while also hinting at his awareness of the inadequacy of the gesture. He reaches out to his wife timidly as, on a foundational human level, he wishes to provide her with some semblance of comfort. And yet, inherently, he does not know how to do so. It is a uniquely human moment of attempted, and arguably failed, intimacy. In contrast with the characterisation of David, this approach represents genuine impiety as Aron’s mindset is comprehensible. The Holocaust dead are no longer abstract figures, but humans whose every gesture may be micro-analysed and understood.

This impious presentation of character psychology continues following Aron and Mela’s capture. As they walk to the killing grounds, their emotional responses to their impending deaths – from the cognitively paralysing nature of sustained fear to the emotional reality of their long-anticipated separation – are clearly articulated:

The man and his wife no longer spoke. They had said their last words in the house, when the door crashed open, kicked in by the boot of an SS-man... For three hours they stood in the square surrounded by a heavy escort. They didn't say one word, it was almost as if they had lost the power of speech. They were mute, they were deaf, they were blind. (p. 44)

Here, Fink has genuinely attempted to put herself “alongside” Aron, imagining his “last moments” and “last feelings” (Horowitz, 1997, p. 223) in conspicuous detail. We have been made to witness the last spoken words of their marriage. Following their arrest by the SS, they have lapsed into what can only be described as a kind of animalistic paralysis in the face of danger. It is not resignation, but something primitive and automatic – the shutdown of their higher functions, as their bodies slip into panic. Here, Fink has managed to conjure up an image of mortal terror. This deadening of emotion and paralysis in the face of relentless brutality, more so than Spielberg’s dramatic manipulation or Nelson’s focus on the gratuitous, represents the very essence of Holocaust suffering. As Eric Sandberg notes, it is inherently difficult to express “the emotional impact of incessant violence” (2014, p. 235). This then also ties in with Irving Howe’s similar assertion that the Holocaust “is not, essentially, a dramatic subject” (1988, p. 189). A scenario in which masses of people are “barely able to respond to their fate” (p. 189), does not contain the potential for drama. Its grim relentlessness can only be presented as an exhausting, deadening weight – felt powerfully by the oppressed. This is precisely what Fink presents her reader with in her telling of Aron’s story.

Unlike most post-memorial attempts to represent the atrocity, ‘A Spring Morning’ does not represent a “fantasy of witnessing”.⁹⁶ Such is our current level of emotional and experiential distance from the Holocaust, Weissman argues, that without emotionally and imaginatively engaging with it through the use of films, television programmes, museums

⁹⁶ Refencing Gary Weissman’s term “fantasies of witnessing” (2004, p4).

and memorial sites, it “threatens to seem distant, remote, unreal” (2004, p. 24). We cannot hope to touch the nature of the event – to feel what survivors “know in their bones” (p. 18) – and so we try to vicariously engage with it through representations of Holocaust suffering. Ida Fink, on the other hand – having lived through the ghetto in 1942, before spending the rest of the war in hiding – understands the emotional possibility of capture and death. She is also able, in the fashion of Jorges Semprun, to look upon the Holocaust dead with a fraternal eye, as she has lived alongside them and experienced their daily reality. She feels no need to dramatize, sensationalise or focus on the gratuitous, as she does not have to strain to feel an affective connection to the murdered. It is for this reason that she is able to provide them with a “good enough” testimony, performing a partial revival which not only rescues Aron but also his “fraternal dead” from oblivion. It is also important to note that, unlike ‘A Scrap of Time’, ‘A Spring Morning’ does make some attempt to extend this resurrection to the rest of the dead. In the final line of the story, Fink notes: “The procession moved on, like a gloomy, grey river floating out to sea” (1987, p. 47). Having spent the story particularising Aron and his wife, this final line reminds us of the others that walk alongside them in the procession. As we understand the inner complexity of Aron, we must also consider the multitude of similar inner lives which have gone unrepresented. We are reminded that, just like Aron, they too would be approachable, comprehensible human beings. Though this, it must be conceded, is the exclusive privilege of the survivor – those with a tangible, experiential connection to the Holocaust.

The text addressed in the following section, by contrast – *The Tattooist of Auschwitz* by Heather Morris – is used to exemplify the notion of an entirely depthless work of Holocaust fiction. This section argues that Morris’s text perfectly encapsulates the issues besetting modern Holocaust fiction. In stark contrast to the work of Ida Fink, Morris’s novel is concerned entirely with surfaces. Her *Auschwitz* is a paper-thin construction of post-

memorial references, lacking anything resembling particularising detail. Most concerning, however, her text is also peopled with inhabitable shells. Unable to connect with the Holocaust dead on an emotional level, and unable to imagine the inner reality of the gas chamber, she instead reconceives the Holocaust as an almost exclusively sexual crime and over-emphasises particular examples of female suffering. In the fashion of many writers and film makers before her, she comes to view the horror of the Shoah specifically through the suffering of one female body.

The Tattooist of Auschwitz and the Problems Underpinning Modern Holocaust Fiction

Gary Weissman states that the Mauthausen camp is now said to possess “the cold soul of a museum” (2004, p. 2) Focusing on the experiences of Michael Lax, a second-generation child looking to reconnect with his father’s experiences, he notes that these commemorative sites no longer possess the capacity to convey the horror of the Holocaust. Despite its status as a memorial site – a carefully curated, well-maintained, present-day commemorative centre – both Michael and his father demonstrate an expectation that it will be able to convey the experiential horror of the Holocaust: “he had come hoping to be swallowed up by the camp, to experience what Mauthausen had been for me in 1944... to actually feel the horror I had felt” (p. 1). The post-memorial generation, therefore, often carries the unreasonable expectation that commemorative sites will still possess the essence of the atrocity; that simply by inhabiting the space one may come to find a felt connection to the past. Or, at the very least, that the environment should facilitate easier emotional and imaginative engagement with one’s fantasies – Michael speaks, for instance, of his disappointment at how “clean and empty” (p. 3) the gas chamber space seems. In practice, however, the post-memorial visitor finds only a “tidy camp” (p. 2) that conveys nothing of the Shoah. Lax’s

son, tellingly, only begins to feel a sense of connection to the Mauthausen space when his father begins recounting stories of human suffering:

Michael's desire to experience what Mauthausen had been for his father in 1944 gave way to a more basic effort to feel, to experience *something*, whatever would enable him to overcome his sense of estrangement from the Holocaust past. Finally it was hearing stories of how prisoners suffered and died in the quarry, told at the very scene of the crime, that enabled him to come closest to something of the missing horror, however fleetingly. (p. 5)

Inherent in this idea is the problem which underpins modern Holocaust fiction. Incapable of understanding the lived human reality of Holocaust suffering we are instead intent on feeling "*something*". In place of a fraternal association with the Holocaust dead we are left only with a series of loathsome extremes. Mauthausen only comes alive for Michael when he is able to tie it specifically to the vision of "helpless prisoners" (p. 3) being thrown from a cliff. As Weissman puts it, it was only after having viewed the "lake of the parachuters" that Lax's son "came closest to realising his desire to experience what his father had felt" (p. 4). Of course, what young Michael has experienced is not an inkling into his father's lived reality, but simply an emotional reaction of some form. Mauthausen becomes temporarily viewable for him through the window of human suffering – it momentarily possesses the power to affectively engage him, though only by focusing on a moment of gratuitous bodily horror.

The lesson to be taken from Weissman's text, therefore, is that the complex human reality of the Holocaust has been transformed into a series of horrifying vignettes. Incapable of understanding the sustained brutality of daily life within the camp system, we have instead begun to fixate on small scenes of extreme horror. Just as Mauthausen only came alive for Michael when he was able to visualise the vivid deaths of helpless prisoners, we too can only connect with the Holocaust through a series of calculatedly affective scenes.

By focusing on Heather Morris's *The Tattooist of Auschwitz*, this section outlines the current issues facing modern Holocaust fiction. In keeping with Weissman's position, it argues that Morris fundamentally struggles to engage with the experiential reality of the Auschwitz camp. As this study has illustrated, our current conception of Auschwitz is defined by a handful of embodying images. Tellingly, Morris touches on all of these. Her vision of Auschwitz is entirely post-memorial in nature and this is evident not only in her reconstructed vision of the camp but in her frequent attempts to touch the atrocity through scenes of bodily suffering. Unable to understand the experiential reality of daily life in Auschwitz, she instead provides the reader with a series of more accessible horrors – scenes of suffering which the modern-day reader may have some hope of understanding.

The three embodying images of the Holocaust discussed previously - the tattoo, the cattle car and the sexualised female sufferer - all feature prominently in Morris' text. The tattoo, however, serves as the novel's defining symbol. While, after the fact, the meaning of the tattoo has been reconceptualised, its meaning in survivor writing is commonly fixed – referring frequently to the idea of dehumanisation. As Krystyna Zywulska notes in *I Survived Auschwitz*: “I felt she was tattooing my heart and not my arm... In this one minute, with every prick of the needle, one phase of my life vanished” (2008, p. 16). The tattoo, here, is robbing Zywulska of her pre-Auschwitz identity. Having been shorn of her hair and stripped of her name she is now automatically rebranded as Prisoner No. 55908. The tattoo, therefore, is taken as being symbolic of the camp's dehumanising properties. The Holocaust, after all, has been contextualised as a crime which took distinct individuals and transformed them into anonymising piles. For survivors, the tattoo has become the embodiment of this. It is telling, therefore, that Morris seemingly ignores the historical framing of the tattoo and instead uses it to signify her own vision of the atrocity. For Morris the tattoo serves as a semi-sexual

violation and an embodying sign of Lale Sokolov's complicity. Lale, the eponymous tattooist of Auschwitz, was an Austro-Hungarian Jew who arrived in the camp in 1942.

Beginning with the first of these issues, Morris's vision of Auschwitz is bizarrely laced with sexual menace. Twice, the act of tattooing is characterised as a form of "defilement". When first speaking with Pepan, the current *Tätowierer*, Lale remarks: "Working for the kapo is not the same as defiling hundreds of innocent people" (Morris, 2018, p. 34). Taken on its own, this could simply be read as a curiously worded reference to the Jewish prohibition regarding tattoos. From a religious perspective, it does indeed represent a defilement. When given additional context, however, Morris's preoccupation with the sexual begins to creep in: "Tattooing the arms of men is one thing. Defiling the bodies of young girls is horrifying" (p. 43). Here, the concept of defilement has been conspicuously re-homed. Men can no longer be the victims, as the term now pertains particularly to vulnerable young women – it is not a religious crime, but an act of sexual violence. The tattoo serves as Morris's embodying symbol of the atrocity, and so she attaches to it those values which she feels define all acts of Nazi violence. Additional context proves that she views Holocaust threat through an overtly sexual lens. This becomes apparent not only in her representation of the character Cilka, whose role in the story is addressed shortly, but also through her representation of Josef Mengele. In every scene in which he is featured, Mengele is shown to be both devilishly sinister and oddly lascivious. Lale, for instance, is made to work in close proximity with Mengele in one sequence. He watches as Mengele menaces a series of naked women. There are two specific references to their sexual vulnerability: "Mengele is examining one of the girls, roughly opening her mouth, grasping her hips, her breasts, as tears fall silently down her face" (p. 127). "He looks over at Mengele, who has another frightened girl in front of him, and is running his hands over her hair and down her breasts... Lale watches the girl shiver in fear" (p. 128). These sequences are pointedly sensationalist

in nature. Rather than having the feel of replicated history they have the hollow ring of Holocaust pornography. Morris cannot understand the reality of Holocaust threat and so she has transformed it instead into something she finds more comprehensible. Budick, significantly, has spoken of the sexual nature of her own Holocaust imaginings. Her childhood fears, she noted, often had a peculiarly sexual tinge as this represented a comparatively fathomable horror: “Rape, infanticide, and bodily mutilation all hover at the borders of our anxieties, fears and curiosities, quite irrespective of our interest in the Holocaust” (2015, p. 16). In short, the threat of sexual violence represents something relatively approachable in comparison with the daily reality of Holocaust living. This is not to say that one can approach the experiential reality of rape, but it does stand as a more artistically representable atrocity – given the abundance of works which have chosen to utilise it either as a narrative element or visual theme.⁹⁸ Unable to effectively convey the grim reality of persistent dread, Morris has instead opted for the easier option – everyone may experience a moment of affective engagement when faced with a weeping naked girl or the threatening presence of an abuser.

Given that Lale has been forced to tattoo those women who successfully passed through Mengele’s selection process, he comes to associate the figurative defilement of tattooing with this literal defilement of young female flesh. Immediately after tattooing Mengele’s women he leaves the building, glancing again at a fenced-in area which contains naked

⁹⁸ As Ruth Harris notes, sexual violence was also employed as an emotive and processible image of wartime atrocity in the propaganda of the First World War. Harris describes the manner in which: “the actual victimization of women was transformed into a representation of a violated, but innocent, female nation resisting the assaults of a brutal male assailant” (1993, p. 170). France, unable to come to terms with its “near defeat” following the invasion of Belgium, and gripped by a “temporary panic” (p. 172), began to consider its own vulnerabilities. The metaphor of the raped woman is positioned, in this context, as being easily processible to the general public. It can be utilised by propogandists as its implications are comprehensible and, in contrast to the abstract reality of invasion, it represents a fathomable atrocity. From the 1910s, therefore – Harris notes that “it is difficult to think of an earlier historical example” (p. 174) of a country conceptualising war through the metaphor of rape – sexual assault has been positioned as an approachable element of war.

young women: “many lying down, some sitting, some standing, hardly any of them moving... Unlike the other fences in Auschwitz and Birkenau, this one is not electrified. The option for self-destruction has been taken from them” (Morris, 2018, p. 127). Given that this structure sits alongside Mengele’s workroom, this penned-in group of women is automatically reframed as some form of grim hareem. The use to which they will be put is not specified, and yet Morris distinctly hints at something sexual. It is telling that Lale “dry retches” (p. 129) upon seeing them. We do not know what their fate will involve, but they have certainly been left to the mercy of a supposed defiler. Lale’s dry heaving, therefore, may be read not simply as distaste regarding their fate but also his own feeling of complicity. By tattooing them – an act already categorised as a defilement – Lale has shown himself to be unwillingly complicit with the actions and aims of the SS. He may bridle at Mengele’s activities, but he is still contributing to the violation of these women. It is through this scene in which Lale’s tattooing is deliberately juxtaposed with this image of sexual threat that Morris establishes her baseline position. She has recontextualised the tattoo as an icon which not only carries an element of defilement but also one which embodies Lale’s complicity. This is relevant as it indicates precisely how removed Morris is from Holocaust history. She has effectively ignored the tattoo’s previously established cultural meaning. For survivors, the tattoo was commonly viewed as a sign of their own dehumanisation – both their transformation into a number and their separation from their pre-war selves. Instead, Morris uses it simply an empty icon which she may fill up with her own signification. Instead of dehumanisation, therefore, she has aggressively rebranded it as her own defining symbol of Holocaust violence – a sign of sexual violation and complicity.

This trend of superficially adopting the fixed iconography of the Holocaust continues in her presentation of the camp itself. Survivor writing often demonstrates a capacity to capture some of the finer experiential details of the Auschwitz space. For instance, several writers

have taken great pains to demonstrate the particular quality of the Auschwitz mud. Anita Lasker-Wallfisch, Fania Fenelon, Olga Lengyel and Pelagia Lewinska all make mention of it in their memoirs.⁹⁹ It is Lewinska who is the most evocative, however, as she notes: “the entire camp is a bottomless pit of clayish mud that constantly sticks to our heavy shoes... it is hard to pull our feet out of the gluey stuff... each step taken... imposes a strain on our weakened bodies” (1993, p. 86). Lewinska’s writing carries the feeling of verisimilitude. Having inhabited the camp space, she is able to provide minute details about the lived experience of walking through the clayish, sucking mud. By contrast, Morris’s text takes a markedly superficial approach to the Auschwitz landscape. Her text features almost no descriptive embellishments of any kind and so her evocation of Auschwitz appears textureless and ill-defined: “The tops of the fences are lined with razor wire. Up in the lookouts Lale sees SS pointing rifles in his direction. Lightning hits a fence nearby. *They are electrified*” (2018, p. 15). Once again, Morris does not possess either the experiential or imaginative capacity to inhabit the Auschwitz space. It stands instead as a vague assemblage of common images: razor wire, watchtowers and electrified fencing. It is telling, therefore, that she does choose to apply more imaginative and descriptive power to Lale’s journey in the cattle car. The cattle car represents a comparatively approachable space. Though, as Ruth Klüger intimated, we may not be able to imagine the “fear of death in cramped quarters” (2001, p. 93) which was experienced by those riding in the cattle car, we can imagine ourselves into a position of claustrophobia. This is what allows Morris to paint her scene with an uncharacteristic boldness. She is careful to emphasise the “stench” (2018, p. 5) coming from the two buckets within the compartment. These are soon kicked over, creating in Lale a “rising tide of nausea” (p. 5). To this, she then adds a sense of the general press of

⁹⁹ Lasker-Wallfisch references the “nasty yellow mud which appeared as soon as the weather became bad” (1996, p. 81). Fenelon notes: “I looked with loathing at the Auschwitz mud into which I was sinking, a clay soil which never dried out” (1986, p. 31). Lengyel states: “the mud never disappeared. It was a sly and powerful enemy... Mud and the crematory – these were our greatest obsessions (1995, p. 130).

bodies: “His shoulder is wedged into Lale’s chest and Lale can smell oil and sweat in his hair” (p. 4). For Morris, this represents a genuine attempt at imaginative engagement. She can imagine the crush of bodies, and the odd moments of strained intimacy that this forced closeness seems to create. Moreover, she can imagine the pervasive stench of filth and the general atmosphere of corruption within the cattle car. As other works of fiction have confirmed – Steve Stern’s *North of God*, to name one key example – these are the currently understood components of the car experience: filth and confinement. This, at least, is what we still remember and understand of it post-memorially. What is missing once again, however, is an element of humanity. Both Benjamin Jacobs and Olga Lengyel write eloquently about the gradual breakdown of learned social norms which occurred within the cattle car. Jacobs particularly expresses the innate human shock of performing private actions in a public space: “Our biggest dilemma was satisfying our physical needs. Everything that we once did in private had to be done now in public... We tried to dispose of the excrement through the wired windows but were unsuccessful” (2001, p. 114). When combined with Lengyel’s reference to a “curtain” designed to protect the modesty of individuals who still view themselves as people of “culture and position” (1995, p. 16), one sees a profoundly human picture of wounded modesty. As survivors, Jacobs and Lengyel once again understand the human reality of the cattle car. Morris, on the other hand, is merely in a rush to portray a setting which she can vaguely understand. Like Andrea Liss, she has convinced herself that she can fathom the reality of the cattle car space. Unlike Liss, however, she does not find herself “embarrassed” by her moment of “trespass” (1998, p. 71), having graphically and excessively recounted the indignity of the now dead. Instead, this is one of the few sequences in Lale’s life which she depicts with a certain degree of confidence. She inhabits the cattle car space as this one of the few moments of the atrocity which she can approach. She, like Liss, can use this scene to experience a moment of prosthetic

engagement with the Holocaust past. It is the rest of the camp which confounds her imagination.

The third synecdochic image featured in the first chapter of this text was that of the sexualised sufferer, which Alvin Rosenfeld has also described as “the Mutilated Woman” (1988, p. 164). Rosenfeld’s position is that “authentic” Holocaust writings are, by nature, “peculiarly and predominantly sexless” (p. 164). For Rosenfeld, William Styron’s Sophie Zawistowska is emblematic of the nonwitness’s desire to re-sexualise an inherently sexless subject. Inherent within all nonwitnesses, he asserts, is an inborn tendency to associate atrocity with sexual violence. This is not, however, a problem limited to the “contemporary imagination, inflamed as it is by hyped-up sexual fantasies” (p. 164). Instead, as Ruth Klüger notes, this suspicion of SS sexual violence existed even during that period following the end of the war, in which “the Holocaust had no name yet... it wasn’t even an idea, only an event” (2001, p. 181):

And there were, in fact, both men and women with whorehouse fantasies who wanted to know whether I had been raped... I was shaken, but I’d answer, no, not raped: they merely wanted to kill me. I’d explain the concept of *Rassenschande*, the rule against miscegenation Aryan style, because I found it interesting that a malicious idea could serve as protection (albeit not a foolproof one) against sexual abuse. (p. 184)

From the late 1940s until the present day, therefore, nonwitnesses have automatically presumed that an element of sexual menace was inherent in Nazi violence. They simply cannot conceive of an atrocity which does not involve a base sexual component. As Klüger affirms, however, the image of the defiled woman cannot be taken as a defining emblem of the atrocity, as the Holocaust was not a crime driven by violation. To place undue emphasis on this element of sexuality is to distort the truth. Crucially, however, she is also careful to qualify this to a certain extent. *Rassenschande*, she claims, did provide protection in most

instances. As Chapters One and Three have argued, sexual violence did exist as an element of Holocaust suffering. This is also traceable to the Auschwitz camp though, as Robert Sommer notes, it was not an openly endorsed policy within the concentrationary system as there “is no evidence of a Jewish woman being sexually exploited” (2010, p. 53) within any of the official camp brothels. Sexual violence within Auschwitz, as Chapter Three notes, is frequently characterised as being more violent and opportunistic in nature. Sexual violence can therefore be construed as an undeniable element of the atrocity, but not its defining element. To reconceive of the Holocaust as an explicitly sexual crime, by conveying its horror almost exclusively through sexual threat, is to misrepresent the truth of the event.

It is telling, therefore, that Morris does resort to a scene of sexual degradation as her embodying realisation of Nazi threat. From the very moment of her introduction Cilka is automatically humanised: “She moves with the grace of a swan, a young woman unaware of her own beauty and seemingly untouched by the world around her” (2018, p. 89). This does not stem, I contend, from an impulse to lend her character authentic depth. Instead, Cilka has been identified as the perfect victim. She is both strangely lacking in vanity and entirely untouched by the corruption of the camp. She is not “starved and deformed” (Landsberg, 2004, p. 124), as one might imagine the inhabitants of either the ghettos of the camps to be, but rather she is a modest woman in the full bloom of youth. In short, she is perfectly positioned to empathetically engage a broadly non-Jewish middle-class readership. It is with exceptional crassness that Morris then notes that she is also “untouched by the world around her”, considering her eventual fate in the novel. Morris, it seems, felt the need to stress her purity of character and spirit before forcing the audience to witness her serial defilement.

In Chapter Nine, set in the March of 1943, Cilka is seized from her workplace by two men in the SS and marched from the room with “confused and pleading eyes” (Morris, 2018, p. 101) towards a sexual encounter with *Lagerführer* Schwarzhuber, the Senior Commandant

of Birkenau. This is the one scene of Nazi violence in the novel, it may be asserted, which Morris fully inhabits. She stresses the manner in which Schwarzhuber's "nostrils distend" (p. 102), before launching into a quasi-pornographic depiction of Cilka's undressing:

He takes off his hat and throws it across the room. With his other hand he continues to hit his leg firmly with his swagger stick. With every whack Cilka flinches, expecting to be struck. He uses the stick to push up her shirt. Realising what is expected, with shaking hands Cilka undoes the top two buttons. (p. 102)

For Morris, just as with Martin Lax's son, the concentration camp is unable to create a felt connection with the Shoah. The only way for her to engage with it is through the imagined suffering of particular individuals. For Morris, Auschwitz clearly only comes alive through the minutely detailed sexual exploitation of Jewish women. With the fervour of a romance novelist, she recounts Schwarzhuber's every gesture – from the flaring of his nostrils to the steady, rhythmic beating of his leg. All of these details are invented, and so Morris has clearly sought to invest this scene with a sense of tactile, textured reality. She is trying, in short, to feel a moment of bodily connection to the events of the Holocaust. She is experiencing its reality through the sense impressions which she has attributed to Cilka – the feel of the back of Schwarzhuber's hand across her face and the disconcerting crack of the swagger stick against his boots. This is the Holocaust as both a vividly realised prosthetic memory and a literal fantasy of witnessing. This sequence, as with the presentation of Ann in Croci's *Auschwitz*, misrepresents the nature of German-Jewish relationships in the camp. As Wanda Witek-Malicka of the Auschwitz Memorial Research Centre notes, Morris's presentation in the text is foundationally problematic. Reiterating Ruth Klüger's essential point regarding Aryan-Jewish relations she states the following:

In practice, the possibility of maintaining such a long relationship... and, according to the book, a semi-explicit relationship between a Jewish female prisoner and high-ranking member

of the SS hierarchy was non-existent. The disclosure of such a relationship would have involved the accusation of race dishonour... and severe punishment for the SS man. (2018, p. 12)

As Morris notes in her text, Cilka had been grabbed by two SS men in order to be dragged to a room containing a “large four-poster bed” which “dominates” (2018, p. 101) the space. The purpose of her seizure, therefore, is framed as being entirely unambiguous. Its explicitly sexual component is clear not only in the large four-poster bed, but her confused and pleading eyes. Morris, as such, has framed her violation as a sanctioned and common event. It is not simply an established practice within the Auschwitz camp, according to Morris, but an archetypal form of Nazi violence, which has been endorsed by other members of the SS. Given the racial prohibitions concerning this manner of relationship, however, this kind of sustained sexual abuse – particularly when conducted without even the pretence of secrecy – is distinctly unlikely.¹⁰⁰ As it is the only sequence of SS brutality that she truly inhabits, it must also be viewed as Morris’s embodying act of Nazi violence. The horror of Auschwitz is not found in the gas chamber but in the bed chamber. By presenting sexual assault as standard practice for the SS, Morris has positioned it as a vital part of “German genocidal policy and what became known as the Final Solution” (Sinnreich, 2010, p. 117). While it did occur and was provably “a part of some Jewish women’s experiences during the Holocaust” (p. 117) it should not be presented as the defining image of the atrocity.

Cilka’s rape, therefore – like the death of the parachuters for Michael Lax – vivified the Auschwitz space for Morris. It provided a bodily point of access to an historical event that

¹⁰⁰ That is not to say that instances of sexual violence were always covert in nature. Sinnreich records several instances of public sexual assault, including a report in which: “the Germans arranged a ‘show’ in which they took twenty Jewish women prisoners and raped them in front of one of the labour groups” (2010, p. 111). Sexual violence was also at times, therefore, used as a spectacle intended to demoralise. This is a different concept, however, from the open indulgence of Jewish and German sexual relationships described in Morris’s text.

is at once deadeningly familiar and hopelessly abstract. Her vision of Auschwitz is the very embodiment of a post-memorial construction, given that it has been built entirely upon a foundation of standard Holocaust imagery. Morris cannot provide characters with depth, as she has no earthly conception of the daily threats they faced. Her intention as a post-memorial author, therefore, is not to recreate a sense of the Auschwitz space as a lived environment, but to craft a broadly pious and sentimental narrative designed to provoke moments of prosthetic engagement. This is affirmed by Witek-Malicka:

The most common and most evocative symbols of Auschwitz (such as the Arbeit Macht Freie gate, numbers tattooed on the forearm, the gas chambers, Dr Mengele) have been woven into the content. Their goal, however, is to create a background for a story of the great love of two young people in the death camp. (2018, p. 16)

Auschwitz for Morris, therefore, is not conceptualised as a vivid environment which her characters inhabit, but as a poorly constructed background designed to house her central narrative. As she only understands the Auschwitz space at a post-memorial distance, she has created a vague fusion built around the standard images and landmarks which have been identified throughout this thesis. As has been suggested throughout the previous chapters, however, this inability to connect with the Holocaust past on either an emotional or experiential level frequently results in an excessive focus on the suffering body. Just as Croci before her, Morris reconceptualises the Holocaust as a more culturally approachable crime – a sexual atrocity, understood through the suffering of one totemic individual. In place of impiety, therefore, we now have the prosthetic memory of sexual assault in Auschwitz. As with any representation involving a deliberate focus on the suffering body, this thesis contends, this does nothing to convey the broader truth of the Holocaust. In practice it merely serves to cater to post-memorial voyeurism and sensationalism.

Contrasting Morris's novel with the work of Ida Fink, therefore, we may detect a notable difference. While Fink is able to humanise her characters, having detectably engaged with their basic humanity, Morris merely creates a series of hollow puppets. With the exception of Lale and Gita – the only two individuals in the text provided even a semblance of depth – every other character exists as a hollow shell. Cilka is not a character but a vessel primed for prosthetic engagement. She is a device which Morris must use in order to make herself feel something for the victims of the Holocaust – to bring the too distant past back to life. There is no humanity in Morris's representation of the Holocaust sufferer, in short. There is only an emphasis on physicalised suffering. To reiterate the theme of this chapter, therefore: in modern Holocaust fiction, ultimately, there is only the body.

The Tattooist of Auschwitz, this section contends, emblematises the current state of Holocaust literature. Whereas first-generation writers possessed the capacity to regard the victims of the Holocaust impiously, we – through the passage of time – have lost any sense of them as approachably real people. As such, despite the assertions of Matthew Boswell, modern-day Holocaust fiction does not possess the capacity to represent the psychology and inner motivations of the Jewish sufferer. We may strive to do so, but our attempts will always be thwarted by two things: Firstly, our inability to see beyond the body – we cannot, like Semprun's French women, engage with them fraternally. And secondly, our prurient desire to inhabit them experientially – to touch the essence of the Holocaust through them, as Morris attempted with Cilka's character. The final section of this chapter addresses two texts which explore the current prominence of the body in Holocaust fiction: *Hope: A Tragedy* by Shalom Auslander and *The Kindly Ones*, by Jonathan Littell.

Shalom Auslander, Jonathan Littell and the Body

Present-day Holocaust knowledge production, as Alison Landsberg has intimated, takes place principally in the body. At the most foundational level, we may say that museum spaces have been calibrated to provoke a certain felt response in the viewer. After exiting the boxcar during one of her visits to the USHMM, Landsberg noticed smoke drifting into the room. Her immediate assumption was not the rational, grounded presumption that the building may have been on fire but rather, given her heightened sensitivity to vulnerability, that the museum patrons were being gassed:

This experience shows rather dramatically how the museum's transgression of the traditional exhibiting strategies – its blurring of boundaries between the spectator and the exhibit – might actually make vulnerable the bodies of its spectators... it speaks to the power of the museum to place its visitors' bodies in a threatening context. (2004, p. 137)

The interior of the USHMM, therefore, may be considered a liminal space between the external reality of the present day and the Holocaust past. Unmoored from her daily reality and placed in close proximity to the boxcar – which she has just passed through and therefore imaginatively experienced – Landsberg is primed for Holocaust disaster. She has actively, bodily engaged with the cattle car interior – it is a real, tactile space which creates a level of sensuous engagement with the Holocaust past. As this experience took place within the isolating interior of the USHMM – a space designed to shut out the outside world in order to prime the visitor for experiential engagement – Landsberg also experiences a new sense of bodily vulnerability. Removed from all stabilising influences of the outside world, anything seems possible. Moreover, the USHMM actively encourages its visitors to temporarily shed their own identities and to identify with the Holocaust sufferer. The USHMM card system has been designed, as Gary Weissman notes, in order to facilitate “an immediate personal leap of identity” (2004, p. 81), as the museum visitor is encouraged to

imaginatively engage with the fate of an historical victim of the Holocaust. Weissman is careful to place a great deal of emphasis on the strict gendering of these cards, as nothing must prevent the viewer from fully engaging with their victim-doppelgänger: “It seems that Americans can imaginatively put themselves in the place of non-Americans; non-Jews can put themselves in the place of Jews... But one should not, or simply cannot, ‘make the personal leap of identity’ across lines of sexual difference” (p. 82). By touring the museum space, and actively engaging with the exhibits provided – from the tactile reality of the cattle car to the shoes which emit the “sour smell of passed time” (Rothberg, 2000, p. 265) – the visitor is adding layers of substance to their doppelgänger’s Holocaust ghost. By literally touching history and experiencing it bodily the USHMM visitor is physically engaging with the person on their card. These two elements are combining to facilitate an excess of identification. By physically interacting with the objects featured in the USHMM we are bringing ourselves closer, in theory, to their lived reality. Though we cannot experience their suffering directly, as Landsberg would have it, we are now “better positioned” (2004, p. 131) to understand it.

Two elements seem to underpin our current conception of the Holocaust, therefore: a pedagogical assumption that one should try to identify with figures from the past *and* the assumption that this process of identification will involve a sensuous or bodily element. This becomes particularly apparent, I contend, when one considers the body of Anne Frank.

In their essay ‘Bodies in Space/Bodies in Motion/Bodies in Character: Adolescents Bear Witness to Anne Frank’, James Chisholm and Kathryn Whitmore describe an American middle school project in which the students of a particular drama class attempted to empathetically and experientially engage with the story of Anne Frank. The foundational assumption behind the theory was that “emotion happens in the body” and that learning is more effective when “bodies and emotions are engaged” (2016, p. 7). Taking the USHMM’s

model of bodily engagement a step further, this project aimed to foster engagement with Anne Frank through the use of the body as a an “anatomical mediator” (p. 6). In order to engage with Frank as a character, the children were made to physically act out certain diary entries. Following one such attempt by a group of four female students, the authors of the study note one student’s particular level of immersion: “At the conclusion of the scene she stepped back out of the boots, peeled off her “Anne” nametag and literally and figuratively returned to herself” (p. 14). Lacey, the student in question, has therefore used her body to both assume and inhabit the Anne Frank identity. By performing the act of writing in an attic, she has effectively tried to place herself in Anne’s figurative shoes, inhabiting the same experiential space. One may reasonably assert, therefore, that by physically engaging with this scene, Lacey prosthetically adopted the position of Anne Frank. She experienced a moment of sensuous engagement with Anne Frank’s life and, in so doing, had a “bodily, mimetic encounter” (Landsberg, 2004, p. 14) with a past that was not her own. As with the card system at the USHMM, however – and as with all other acts of prosthetic memory – the body into which Lacey has stepped is merely a hollow shell. As Landsberg has established, those subjects used for prosthetic memory generally tend to lack particularising qualities. An excess of personhood, in short, would block our attempts to engage with them. Anne Frank, therefore, stands as the perfect subject for this type of imaginative engagement.

The human specificity of Anne Frank has been gradually transformed into a serviceably stable archetype, constructed using her father’s modifications and then crystallised by others. After Otto Frank removed all elements relating to her sexuality and her fraught relationship with her mother, the writing team of Hackett and Goodrich then crafted the enduring vision of the Anne Frank character. This, as Tim Cole notes, came to cement the mythic version of Anne Frank as portrayed in their Broadway show and the subsequent film:

The 'Anne Frank' made in America in the 1950s is not allowed a hint of pessimism... but only speaks optimistically of an enduring belief in human goodness in spite of everything. The Broadway and Hollywood 'Anne Frank' is not even the Anne in the 'secret annexe', let alone the Anne in Bergen-Belsen. Rather, she is a creation who comes and offers reassurance that the central tenet of liberalism — that humans are essentially good — is still valid. (1999, p. 35)

Anne Frank, according to this reading, is now a quantified entity. She does not possess human subtleties and uniquely identifying characteristics, but she has instead become a broad cultural icon — a secular saint, embodying generosity of spirit and unrelenting positivity. She is not a girl, as Cole suggests, but rather an icon affirming the values of 1950s liberalism. We have a fixed and inflexible understanding of her character. This Anne Frank character constructed by the Hacketts may be engaged with and inhabited, therefore, as it both lacks definition and has fixed values. They have created, in essence, the solid outline of Anne Frank. We understand what she represents, and yet we are not prohibited from crossing the identificatory line as nearly everything particular about her has been sloughed away — including practically every example of her Jewishness.

This Anne Frank character, however, relies on one thing in order to survive: stability. A stability which comes, in turn, from our collective cultural vision of a smiling Anne Frank:



Figure 28: A picture Anne Frank taken in the “June 1942” (van der Rol & Verhoeven, 1995, p. 35).¹⁰¹ Copyright: Anne Frank Fonds - Basel via Getty Images. Source: The Anne Frank Fonds Getty Image archive: <https://www.gettyimages.com.au/photos/anne-frank-fonds?family=editorial&phrase=anne%20frank%20fonds&sort=best#license>



Figure 29: Street artist James Cochran’s portrait of Anne Frank, which was undertaken at the request of the Anne Frank Zentrum in Berlin. Copyright: Street Art Berlin (https://www.flickr.com/photos/berlin_streetart/albums/72157632147184138)

¹⁰¹ Not only is the image used on the cover of Ruud van der Rol and Rian Verhoeven’s *Anne Frank Beyond the Diary: A Photographic Remembrance* (Puffin, 1995) but the official Anne Frank House website also uses it as their embodying image of Anne. In their article ‘Who was Anne Frank?’ (<https://www.annefrank.org/en/anne-frank/who-was-anne-frank/>) the text sits over an enlarged version this picture. Additionally, it is also used as the cover image for *Anne Frank: The Collected Works* (Bloomsbury Continuum, 2019).



Figure 30: The Anne Frank mural by Eduardo Kobra. It can be found on the door of the lasloods (welding hangar) at the former [NDSM](#) shipyard in Amsterdam. Copyright: Anton Hein. (<https://antonhein.com/891-anne-frank-mural>)



Figure 31: An unattributed piece of wall art found on the sound barriers of the A28 motorway in the Netherlands. Image source: www.ad.nl. Copyright: Gemeente Amersfoort

(<https://www.ad.nl/amersfoort/anne-frank-graffiti-opgeknapt~a1ec9864/125915339/>)

As Figures 28 through 31 illustrate, our conception of Anne Frank has calcified around one image. Whether in the form of licensed memorials or unattributed wall art, the same image of Anne Frank is perpetuated, having entered into our broader cultural consciousness. The previously mentioned middle schoolers in the Southern United States can step into the body of Anne Frank because they carry, at all times, a fixed image of Anne – a specifically pre-hiding vision, in which she still stands as a smiling child. In reality, however, our desire to hold on to this image of Anne is tokenistic of our desire to stabilise her character. She must remain an accessible, static icon. She cannot be recontextualised as a real, flawed human sufferer.

As L. J. Nicoletti notes, this image of Anne Frank is not representative of reality. The Anne writing in the attic gradually began to deviate from this unchanging picture of a Holocaust icon: “Within three months of her sedentary life in hiding, Frank gained seventeen pounds and soon grew out of her clothes. Pencil marks on the Annex walls show she grew over five inches unseen” (2012, p. 106). This is to say nothing of her gradual degradation within the camps. Not only did she lose her hair during the arrival process but, as other survivors have noted, both she and Margot developed scabies while in the women’s barracks in Birkenau: “The Frank girls looked terrible, their hands and bodies covered with spots and sores from the scabies... They were in a very bad way; pitiful... There wasn’t any clothing” (Bigsby, 2006, p. 238). These changes in Anne’s body serve to effectively particularise her. Her suffering becomes both individual and completely inaccessible to the nonwitness. Changes in her body, in short, shut off our imaginative capacity to engage with her as they only serve to remind us of her changing, malleable, unpredictable human nature. The body, after all, is chaotic and completely immune to human reason. Pictures, on the other hand, provide the illusion of permanence and physical stability. They convince us that Anne is easily, readily definable, that we understand the fullest extent of her character and that she

is basically quantifiable. The reality of her changing body simply interrupts our attempt to engage with her as it introduces a new set of variables. It reminds us that nothing remains consistent. In order to emotionally engage with Anne, therefore, we require that our image of her body is stable and unchanging. It is precisely this which Shalom Auslander seeks to satirise in *Hope: A Tragedy*.

As Sanford Pinsker notes, in Auslander's novel "no Holocaust piety goes unpunished" (2014, p. 343). This is evident from the very first moment of Anne Frank's introduction: "Jesus fucking Christ, he said... Close, she muttered" (Auslander, 2012, p. 28). As his text demonstrates, Auslander is clearly familiar with the mythic vision of Anne Frank. He understands her status as a secular saint and he means to violently de-stabilise it. This is done principally not through her behaviour, which is abhorrent, but through the calculated distortion of her physical image.

Twice, throughout the course of the novel, Auslander references the iconic Anne Frank photograph. In the first instance, it is associated explicitly with the content of the diary. Anne, having pitched the idea of a follow-up to her diary, is violently rebuffed by her publisher: "He went to his desk, Mr Kugel, held up a copy of that goddamned diary, with that goddamned smiling child on the goddamned cover, and said. They don't want you. They want *her*" (p. 71). The smiling child, as Anne's publisher has intimated, is emblematic of her diary's core message. She embodies hope for the future and the possibility of societal resurrection. As Auslander's Anne puts it, people "want to know that we can rise like a phoenix from our own fiery human ashes" (p. 71). Anne's smiling face, therefore, is inherently linked to the concept of foundational human decency. It imparts to the reader the truth of her statement that people are really good "in spite of everything" and that every period of calamity must end. The permanence of this message, and therefore the stability of Anne's character, is explicitly tied to this image of a smiling child. To disrupt this image, by

altering our perception of Anne's body, is to kill the mythical Anne Frank. This is precisely Auslander's intent with this text.

Auslander's vision of Anne Frank is patently, cartoonishly monstrous. She is a "hideous" vision, with "cloudy yellow" eyes, "wiry and unkempt hair" and "gnarled hands... capped with yellowed, talonlike fingernails" (p. 61). She does not walk, additionally, but is described as moving in a literally verminous, insectile way: "Kugel returned... in time to see her scurrying, insectlike, along the floor and around the corner" (p. 62). Auslander's evocation of Anne, therefore, resembles a Disney-inspired crone with elements of Gregor Samsa added to the mixture in order to compound our visceral sense of disgust. She is not the smiling, approachable child of the standard image, but a figure designed to repel any attempt at emotional or affective engagement. One cannot inhabit this vision of Anne Frank, or approach her mimetically, as she is overly in-human. The children of Williams Middle School in the southern United States, for instance, cannot bodily mimic the scuttling step and ruined posture of this Anne Frank. By making her foundationally unapproachable, Auslander has – at least in practical terms – re-particularised her.

As an additional element, Auslander has also worked an aspect of satire into her physical deformity. This version of Anne's body, he reveals, has warped to adapt to the shape of the attic:

her body had adapted, or evolved, or devolved, into a shape most suitable for attic life: her knees seemed permanently bent at just the right angle to keep her head from hitting the rafters, and her spine and hips inclined forward at very nearly the same degree of slope as the roof. (p. 64)

As Anne intimated in the previous quotation, the world is unwilling to accept a vision of her which does not correspond with their fixed perception of the mythic, attic-bound sufferer.

As such, both literally and imaginatively, society has confined her to the attic space. Auslander's deformity, here, is emblematic of our societal distortions regarding the real Anne Frank. We are at once incapable of imagining her in another space and fearful of imagining any changes to our fixed perception of her body. Auslander has amalgamated these issues by presenting the reader with a literally, physically warped vision of Anne. She is a character designed to confront our worst fears regarding Anne Frank and our worst sins regarding her legacy. Rather than maintaining her physical and spiritual integrity by passing her story on from generation to generation, post-memorial culture has warped her beyond recognition. Auslander is therefore creating a satirical mirror to highlight our damaging pre-occupation with her body and our inability to allow her to evolve as a character. His Anne Frank is a nightmare vision designed to haunt the traditionally pious – those who cling to the vision of an Anne as a physically unchanging, faultless figure of moral inspiration.

Auslander has created a vision of Anne Frank which is the physical and conceptual opposite of the smiling martyred child of the standard image. At the end of the novel he then transforms Anne into the consummate survivor, countering our cultural perception of her as the ultimate embodying victim. As Roberta Rosenberg notes, Auslander links Anne Frank to Alan Dershowitz in her final scene in order to signal her departure from her former role as a “mythic sufferer: “Dershowitz... personifies politically incorrect chutzpah, cynicism, and courage rather than Anne Frank timidity, idealism, hope, and anxiety” (Rosenberg, 2015, p. 128; 131). Dershowitz, therefore, embodies a set of values which stand in direct opposition to those of the mythic Anne Frank. The smiling child of Frank's dustjacket would have nothing in common with this latter-day embodiment of Jewish boldness. Having altered the limits of Anne's body, Auslander now also reframes Anne's image. She is no longer the angelic, almost agnostic martyr created by the Hacketts, but an overtly Jewish survivor. As Rosenberg puts it, Dershowitz is at once “America's most public Jewish defender” and a

“diaspora warrior” (p. 131) – his Judaism is integral to his identity. By contrast, as Christopher Bigsby has noted, many would contend that Anne’s Jewishness had been “evacuated from both diary and play” (2006, p. 250). The Hacketts, and then our broader culture at large, have de-Judaised Anne Frank. Through her association with Dershowitz, her Jewishness has not only been reaffirmed but given an added element of combativeness. Her final words in this text, indeed, are designed to starkly contrast with her image as a passive, hopeful idealist. As she is carried from the burning house by Dershowitz she takes a moment to degrade Solomon Kugel, the novel’s protagonist: “You would never have made it Mr. Kugel!, she called. You would never have lasted five minutes in Auschwitz. I’m a survivor, Mr. Kugel!” (Auslander, 2012, p. 333). Auslander’s Anne, then, is a taunting, mean-spirited, self-centred survivor. Auslander has given her back a sense of personhood and individuality, as she is not being spoken for but is rather stating her own agenda. She will always survive. She is not an angelic martyr but a deformed, spiteful crone. In short, she is a character designed to provoke unease in the reader. We are meant to squirm reflexively, as our learned Holocaust Piety grates against his vision of Anne Frank. And then, thanks to Auslander’s emphasis on Anne’s body, we are meant to analyse this inflexibility and to consider its source. Our image of Anne Frank cannot evolve as it is tied explicitly to her photograph. Here, Auslander is highlighting both the foolishness and superficiality of this pre-occupation with the unevolving picture of Anne Frank. By definition, as we choose to ignore the reality of the human body, and those changes Anne endured, it must lack definition and depth. We have learned to fixate on an idealised, universalised image which bears no reality to the historical Anne. Bodies change constantly. Anne’s was subject to numerous changes, all of which would have blocked our attempts to romanticise and canonise her – one cannot, after all, idealise a person who continues to live and evolve.

Auslander's image of Anne Frank reminds us, therefore, that the historical reality of Anne has been lost to time. Her real body changed and her perspectives likely shifted away from the faultless optimism which may, at times, be gleaned from her diary. In place of her humanity, therefore, we have only our own constructed image of her and the fixed image of her pre-war body. As Auslander's novel explores, we are willing to admit changes to neither.

Conclusive evidence of this can be found in Kugel's mother's approach to Anne. Mother displays, at once, a refusal to accept an evolving vision of Anne Frank and a profound desire to inhabit her subject position. As Auslander notes, Kugel's mother is unwilling to acknowledge the apparent physical changes in Anne's body and is intent on crystallising the image of her as a young child:

The ghastly stench in the attic contrasted violently with the pastoral, angelic bedroom set that Mother had created in the centre of the attic. Mother had dressed the bed as if Anne Frank were still a young girl, with a teddy bear propped up on the pillow and a pair of child-size one-piece pyjamas... A childscape, thought Kugel, a won't-let-it-go tableau. (p. 310)

The vile stench – a powerful physical indicator of Anne's altered body, as well as the changeability of the physical form itself – is designed to starkly contrast with this attempt to freeze Anne in virginal girlhood. The clothes, seemingly intended for a much younger child, are clearly indicative of Mother's desire to freeze Anne in time. She will imagine her forever as an untainted vision of faultless purity. This is designed, clearly, as a satirical reference towards the broader American pre-occupation with Anne Frank, as Nathan Englander has also recently satirised in his short story 'What We Talk About When We Talk About Anne Frank'. There too Anne exists simply as a source of "inspiration" (Rosenberg, 2015, p. 125) lacking any form of discernible human depth. Mother, therefore, exists firstly to satirise this American – though one could argue that this impulse also exists globally – desire to stabilise the image of Anne Frank and to repel any attempts to actively change or evolve her character.

It is precisely this level of fixity, the text comes to show, which allows the nonwitness to step into and inhabit the Anne Frank persona. Again, Auslander takes this concept to its logical extreme as Mother actively steals Anne's narrative, assuming it as her own. As Chapter Two of this thesis outlines, Mother maintains her borrowed identity as a Holocaust survivor by incorporating standard images and stories into her performance. Given the lack of human particularity attached to the Anne Frank myth, it was somewhat inevitable that Mother would assume the backstory of Anne herself: "A child I was, nothing more, trembling in fear in a cold, bare annex, never knowing which hour death would come but knowing, yes, knowing it would" (Auslander, 2012, p. 241). As with the example of the 'Cattle Car Complex', featured in Chapter Two of this thesis, Mother has undergone a literal fantasy of witnessing. She has transformed herself into a first-hand witness, assuming Anne's position. Moreover, she is still also signalling her desire to crystallise the image of Anne Frank as the faultless, unevolved, victimised child. Note, she says, she was a child and "nothing more". The emphasis is then placed on Anne's pre-sexual, pre-Auschwitz innocence. In this example, therefore, Auslander has not only highlighted our general desire to cement our constructed vision of Anne Frank but our pronounced desire to step into her shoes. Such is the strength of this compulsion, he seems to imply, that one must put several barriers in place to block our attempts at identification. In order to block the audience's learned compulsion to step into the shoes of Anne Frank he has had to contort her into something unambiguously monstrous. This would seem to align with the findings of Alison Landsberg, as in *Engaging the Past* she notes the lengths to which *The Secret Annex Online* – a virtual tour of the Franks' attic – has gone to block the imaginative engagement of the viewer. As she puts it:

these sites refuse their visitors a kind of seamless point of identification with individual historical figures or specific perspectives. Instead of fostering the illusion that the user is

“actually there,” these sites’ artificiality and stylisation call attention to their own constructedness. (2015, p. 148)

Were these sites to present the user with an individual historical figure, she implies – a comparatively hollow shell that they may step into in order to better engage with the experience – the user would be compelled to inhabit their subject position. We simply cannot resist the possibility of inhabiting the body of the Holocaust sufferer. We seem to desire to wear their perspective prosthetically, briefly inhabiting the Holocaust space before returning to our own lives. We want a taste of suffering and roadblocks must be put in place in order to curb this impulse. Landsberg’s text is trying to find a series of tools and strategies which produce affect “but not in the service of facile identification” (p. 20). As Auslander’s text suggests, however – along with the work of Gary Weissman – this may be something of a lost cause. Not only does our compulsion to bodily identify with the suffering of Holocaust victims exist, but it stands as our primary mode of engagement with the Holocaust in the present. As we cannot connect with them fraternally, we have instead chosen to either imaginatively inhabit their bodies or fixate on the pure materiality of their suffering. Proof of this latter concept can be found in Jonathan Littell’s *The Kindly Ones*, which may be defined as a text which pivots around the image of the corpse.

In her essay ‘War of Images or Images of War? Visualizing History in Jonathan Littell’s *The Kindly Ones*’ Zoë Roth notes that the origins for Littell’s novel may be traced back to one particular image. In an interview with *Le Monde*, she states, Littell suggested that the novel’s origins could be traced back to the image of Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya – a Soviet partisan, whose death is actively recreated in Littell’s text:

She had been hung by the Nazis. The Soviets found her body later, half gnawed by wolves. Stalin subsequently made her into an icon. What is extraordinary about this image is that we

perceive how beautiful this woman was. That really got my mind working [Cela m'a beaucoup travaillé], and at the same time it was intolerable. (2017, p. 84)

This intolerability, I contend, stemmed from the absence of Abjection. Elisabeth Gross outlines the essential components of Kristeva's theory of abjection as follows:

The ability to take up a symbolic position as a social and speaking subject entail the disavowal of its modes of corporeality, especially those representing what is considered unacceptable, unclean or anti-social. The subject must disavow part of itself in order to gain a stable self, and this form of refusal marks whatever identity it acquires as provisional, and open to break down and instability. (2012, p. 86)

According to Kristeva's theory of abjection, therefore, the stability of our identity is conditional upon our rejection of our body's materiality. We are repulsed by our own human waste, all forms of bodily excreta and the human cadaver as these all act as reminders of our own physicality. The physical body, as has been implied throughout this section, is a wildly unpredictable entity, subject to constant change. In order to form a stable and abiding sense of self, we must try to ignore this materiality. The feeling of repulsion we feel when faced with the reality of human death should therefore be both natural and unavoidable. We are psychologically hardwired to feel a sense of repulsion when faced with the body as the corpse is the pure embodiment of an object – a categorical “not me”. Littell, however, is not repulsed by the body of Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya. Indeed, he is unnaturally drawn to the image of this girl. He describes noting how “beautiful” she was and the intolerability of this feeling. As Roth notes, the “striking composition and latent eroticism” (2017, p. 85) of the image is certainly at odds with its grotesque subject matter. This echoes the image of the deceased mother at Bergen-Belson which Barbie Zelizer called “both too beautiful and perhaps too erotic to be shown” (2001, p. 258). In short, both of these images conflict with our natural impulse towards repulsion as they imbue the raw materiality of death with an

unsettling element of eroticism which troubles the mind. This finding is borne out by Aue's reaction to this murdered partisan, who continues to haunt him throughout the text.

In the chapter simply titled 'Air', in which Aue has entered into a period of onanistic madness in his sister's house, he begins to hallucinate the spectre of a phantom lover. This lover is never provided with a fixed description as it seems to have no concrete form. As such, Aue's mind begins to wander during his sexual encounters with it – eventually landing on the image of the hanged girl:

I saw the hanged women in Kharkov who as they suffocated emptied themselves over the passerby. I had seen that girl we had hanged one winter day in the park behind the statue of Shevchenko, a young and healthy girl bursting with life, had she too come when we hanged her and soiled her panties... had she ever come before, she was very young, had she experienced that before we hanged her, what right did we have to hang her... and I sobbed endlessly, ravaged by her memory. (Littell, 2010, pp. 911- 912)

If the girls of Kharkov represent pure embodiments of the abject – things which are traditionally distancing as they hint at our own body's "relentless materialism and uncontrollability" (Arya, 2014, p. 5) – then Kosmodemyanskaya represents a window through which he may finally understand the humanity of the sufferer. While Roth characterises her as an "aesthetic object" (2015, p. 85) which has meaning thrust upon it by others, Aue instead chooses to imaginatively engage with her. Robert Morris, as Barbie Zelizer notes, could not leave the deceased mother of Bergen-Belsen as a murdered object.¹⁰² Instead, he chose to transform her into a "beautiful woman innocently asleep under neon and strobe lights" (Zelizer, 2001, p. 258) – giving her back an element of innocent eroticism and, in doing so, salving his own conscience. Both Aue and Littell, then, perform exactly the

¹⁰² The original image of the deceased mother is referenced in Chapter One.

same action with Kosmodemyanskaya. Their mutual fascination with her cannot allow them to leave her as an abject object. Instead, they begin to focus on her as a living being – a young woman, defined by her erotic potential. This reconstruction then re-humanises the hanged girl for Aue, as he begins to match her with other living women:

the girl we had hanged wasn't a pig or a steer that you kill without thinking about it because you want to eat the flesh, she was a young girl who had been a little girl who may have been happy and who was then just entering life... a girl like my sister, in a way. (Littell, 2010, p. 912)

In the space of this one sequence, therefore, Kosmodemyanskaya has been transformed from a troubling corpse into a fellow human being. Aue and Littell have resolved the essential crisis that they experienced in the face of a problematically erotic body by restoring her to life and recontextualising her sexuality. Instead of something to be cast away in disgust, as objects always are in Kristeva's system, she has been reintroduced into the human world. She is just like any other little girl, or just like Aue's own sister. As such, she may now be empathised with and engaged with imaginatively. In place of abjection, therefore, Aue and Littell have fallen into the trap of the Mutilated Woman. They have latched on to a character defined by their bodily suffering and then used them as a romantic window through which to view the suffering of the past. She therefore comes to represent a slightly eroticised version of *both* Weissman's fantasy of witnessing and Landsberg's prosthetic memory. For Littell, Kosmodemyanskaya's vividly realised hanging allows him to experience a fantasy of witnessing, just as Lax's son was able to emotionally connect with the horror of the Holocaust only through the felt pain of the parachuters. Aue, in effect, becomes the lens through which Littell views the atrocity and, arguably, interacts with it, instilling a distant historical event with a sense of tactility. Aue, after all, along with all of the other soldiers and officers present, kisses Kosmodemyanskaya prior to her hanging. This, I contend, allows

Littell to gain a sense of both physical and emotional proximity to the historical past. As Aue participated in the event, therefore, he cannot be said to have experienced a *fantasy* of witnessing. However, by creating a felt connection with the body of the Other – specifically, by focusing on her sexuality – he is able to engage with her as a fellow human. Throughout the text Aue has consistently demonstrated a preoccupation with female pleasure and, relatedly, a desire to inhabit his sister's subject position. Examining his own penetrative encounters with men, he notes: "I reasoned, it brought me even closer to her; in that way, I would feel almost everything she felt, when she touched me, kissed me, licked me" (p. 203). Aue's homosexual encounters are therefore staged as attempts to prosthetically inhabit his own sister's erotic experiences – to temporarily gain a sense of her uniquely womanly perspective on pleasure. This indicates that Aue already has a pre-existing tendency to equate eroticism with a blurring of identities. By focusing on Kosmodemyanskaya's thwarted erotic potential, he therefore comes to see the reality of his crimes as he finally conceives of her as a fellow human being – one who may be engaged with, inhabited and therefore partially understood, as she no longer represents a foreign entity.

It is telling, however, that Aue's moment of empathetic and imaginative engagement happens with a non-Jewish character. As he remains an unrepentant "intellectual" (p. 241) anti-Semite, he never quite manages to humanise the Jewish body. They, the text affirms, are still abjected.

Proof of Aue's stance regarding the abjected Jewish body is scattered throughout the novel. The basic premise is most explicitly articulated in the following section, however:

By killing the Jews... we wanted to kill ourselves, kill the vermin within us, kill that which in us resembles the idea we have of the Jew... For we've never understood that these qualities that we attribute to the Jews, calling them baseness, spinelessness, avarice, greed, thirst for dominion and facile malice are fundamentally German qualities. (pp. 874-875)

Though these words are not spoken by Aue, further context shows that they outline the National Socialist stance regarding the Jewish people. If within the context of the individual body/self the subject is “what I must get rid of in order to be an I at all” (Foster, 1996, p. 114), nationalist and racially driven groups will also define their own self-image by identifying, othering and expelling certain individuals. Wartime Germany, according to this reading, is redefining its own self-image by externalising a certain set of negative traits and assigning them to another racial group. As the Jewish population has now come to embody every internal trait that National Socialism wishes to expel, their murder will then stabilise Germany’s self-image. By having one of his characters explicitly state this, Littell is forcing the concept of abjection back into the reader’s consciousness. He wants his reader to consider the Final Solution from a purely Kristevan perspective. As such, the author’s frequent references to human filth – as Eric Sandberg has noted, “shit” comes to “permeate the novel” in “pronounced ways” (2014, p. 250) – become inextricably associated with both the corpse and murder as a means of affirming national identity.

During the massacre at Babi Yar, for instance, Aue notes: “The horrible smell of excrement was stronger than that of blood, a lot of people defecated as they died” (Littell, 2010, p. 128). This is typical of Aue’s descriptions of mass killings, which always focus on the extreme materiality of murder. Through habituation, therefore, the reader comes to associate mass killing with defecation. This link is further hammered home during a later sequence in which we are faced with the reality of death in a mobile killing van. It is not, as Aue is told, a clean form of murder: “The bodies were covered with shit and vomit, the men were disgusted” (p. 174). This excessive emphasis on the pure physicality of death does not exist simply for the sake of gratuity, I contend. Rather, Littell is trying to indicate to the reader abjection’s role as a key to unpacking his text. One always needs to bear it in mind, as its central tenets underpin every aspect of Aue’s life. More than this, however, it is also

crucial to unpacking Aue's basic psychology. He may not be familiar with the principle himself, but his behaviours are certainly defined by it and are only explicable through its application.

As we have seen, the politics of the Nazi state seem to align with the general principle of Kristevan abjection. They are othering large portions of their nation in order to reify their own constructed sense of self. The Holocaust, then, was an event in which abjection frequently took place on both a private and public level. The murder of the Jewish people represents national abjection while the murderers were frequently repulsed on a personal level. This connection is affirmed in the chapter 'Menuet (en Rondeux)' in which Aue is gripped by sickness. His illness is recounted with a characteristic fondness for detail. He speaks of a "long diarrhoea that seemed to never end" before referencing his "toilet bowl full of waste" (p. 809). It is important to note at this point, however, that Aue is not repulsed by his own bodily matter. Though he does not revel in its presence, he does feel a curious sense of shamelessness. For instance, he is content to have Frau Zempke clean him, "as if he were a little child" (p. 811). This is inherently unnatural, as Colin McGinn has previously noted as we, as humans, should be most repulsed when waste is in close proximity to our body: "bodily waste is at its most appalling when in the very act of leaving the body's interior – as with the dangling turd, the running nose, and spurting blood.... The closer to breathing life the material is the worse it seems" (2011, p. 103). Aue is presently unable to clean himself and so, practically speaking, he is figuratively steeping in his own filth – including, by association, his Holocaust sins. Despite this, however, he is content under the non-judgemental gaze of a neutral party. When Helene – his current female companion, whose interest in him is always kind and indulgent – becomes his carer, however, Aue suddenly becomes aware of the abject nature of his own filth. After she cleans him, he states the following: "I wasn't ashamed of it, but I was disgusted with myself and this disgust extended

to her, to her patience and her gentleness” (Littell, 2010, pp. 812-813). The source of this disgust clearly stems from his complex associations regarding human waste. This is not simply reflexive repulsion but a sudden awareness of guilt, as he is now under the watchful eye of a foundationally decent woman. She has not been corrupted by the taint of the Holocaust, and yet she is now in close proximity to his bodily filth – a substance which has become inextricably linked with his own guilt. This becomes overly apparent when he tries to force her, effectively, into inhabiting the grey zone. He begins to rail at her, implicating her in his own sins:

You come to take care of me, you think I’m a nice man, with a law degree, a perfect gentleman, a good catch. We’re murdering people, you understand, that’s what we do, all of us, your husband was a murderer, I’m a murderer, and you, you’re a murderer’s accomplice, you wear and you eat the fruit of our labour. (p. 816)

This reaction has clearly been prompted by Helene’s encounter with Aue’s human waste. Only now has his physical uncleanness, and his literal proximity to his own filth, come to bother him. This angst has then manifested as the furious spreading of blame. He is quick to remind Helene of her own inadvertent complicity. He may be a murderer, but she has benefited from the Nazis’ exterminationist actions. She is, after all, wearing clothes which once belonged to dead women and eating food seized from the homes and luggage of the Jewish population. This spreading of blame is emblematic of his desire to lessen his own sense of taintedness. His wishes to distance himself from his own physical and spiritual staining and so he is looking to bloody Helene’s hands by association. For a moment, therefore, Aue has genuinely entered into a state of bodily crisis. For perhaps the first time in his life Aue has experienced a moment of “corporeal turmoil” (Arya, 2014, p. 6), as his sense of disgust has shaken his foundational conception of himself. Aue is not, as he states in the opening of the text, a repentant man: “...I can assure you that they will at least be free

from any form of contrition. I do not regret anything: I did my work, that's all" (Littell, 2010, p. 5). Though his narrative may not demonstrate contrition, it certainly does feature one sequence fuelled by self-disgust and a reflexive to desire to expiate – even to abject, by giving them to Helene – his own sins. This is not the product of self-reflection, but a moment of realisation stemming from physical repulsion.

As with *Hope: A Tragedy*, therefore, at the end of the day there is only the body. Littell's text springs from his own preoccupation with a beatific corpse and his problematic fascination with it. Aue's narrative, similarly, is fuelled by a preoccupation with the body, excreta and the material substance of death. The body and its problematic physicality, therefore, practically underpins every aspect of this text.

Both texts featured in this section reduce the human complexity of the Holocaust dead to a simple preoccupation with the human body. We cannot form a felt, fraternal connection with Anne Frank as she existed in reality and so, in effect, we have become obsessed with maintaining her Holocaust ghost. Our broader cultural understanding of her was shaped in the 1950s and we are reluctant to allow this conception of Anne to evolve in any sense. Our vision of her has become fixed and static and, in order to give it an added sense of solidity, we have tied it to the image of a faultless smiling child. In place of a real body, therefore, we have a static picture, frozen in time. Anne's form will forever remain fixed and unevolved. Our broader cultural desire, therefore, hinges on our assumption that she will always look the same – that she will exist forever, hopeful and unchanged. In place of her human reality, therefore, we have an empty body – a hollow vessel, which people may use to engage with the Holocaust past. At the end of the day, as Auslander effectively illustrated, our preoccupation with her is almost totally bodily.

Littell's preoccupation with Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya then adds further evidence of our societal preoccupation with the bodies of the wartime dead, as it actively explores his desire to see her as something other than an aesthetic object. His text, in short, pivots around his desire to restore a sense of humanity and particularity to one sufferer, while also exploring Aue's feelings of guilt through the concept of abjection. Once again, therefore, the body is positioned at the very centre of a piece of modern Holocaust fiction.

Conclusion

This chapter began with the foundational assertion that modern Holocaust fiction demonstrates a fundamental incapacity to engage with the Holocaust dead on a human and, as Semprun would have it, "fraternal" level. This is foundationally problematic as this profound emotional distance from the Holocaust has led instead to an intense desire to touch the essence of the Holocaust – to actively experience some form of bodily engagement with the victim's plight. Holocaust sites, this study asserted, possess very little affective power and exist simply as sterile, manicured sites providing highly mediated snippets of information. In short, in order to engage with the Holocaust dead, something more radical is required of the modern writer/reader – a vivid, inhabitable moment of suffering. Unable to reconnect with their basic humanity, therefore, we have instead shifted emphasis onto their bodies. We now obsess over everything from the materiality of their deaths to their body as a means of affectively engaging with the Holocaust past. In place of fraternity, then, there is only the body.

The first section of this chapter utilised the writings of Ida Fink to explore the idea that Holocaust fiction has previously displayed the potential to approach the Holocaust dead impiously. Using Gillian Rose's work as its theoretical baseline it argued that only those

with first-hand experience of certain elements of the Shoah – those who may be at least classed as a “kind of survivor” – may reflect the Holocaust dead with depth and humanity. For Fink, the murdered are not intangible abstractions but approachable humans with whom she feels a detectable kinship. For her, the Holocaust is not an entirely post-memorial construction. Instead, her lived experiences have invested her fiction with not only authenticity but human specificity. Moreover, as Fink has a felt, experiential connection with the Holocaust dead, she does not need to strain – as Martin Lax’s son did – to touch the reality of human suffering. It is because of this, therefore, that she was able to provide a “good enough” form of fictional testimony for the missing.

Heather Morris’s *The Tattooist of Auschwitz*, by contrast, epitomises the current issues facing Holocaust fiction. Morris’s evocation of Auschwitz stands as a tissue-thin construction of assembled post-memorial references and common images. Just as Lax’s son could find no felt connection to the Mauthausen site, so too was Morris’s vision of Auschwitz hopelessly abstract. This much was confirmed by the findings of Wanda Witek-Malicka who had painstakingly catalogued all of Morris’s false assertions and outright inventions. In short, Morris felt no form of connection to the bodily reality of Holocaust suffering and so she sought to re-vivify the horror of the Auschwitz camp by reimagining the plight of several female sufferers. In turn, the incessant brutality of Auschwitz was then reconceptualised as an explicitly sexual form of violence. Morris, in short, has reconfigured the historical reality of the Auschwitz camp in order to make it more comprehensible to both herself and her nonwitness readers. Returning to Lang’s standard of silence, therefore, Morris’s text may be considered actively harmful to our understanding of the Holocaust. It is not “probative”, or “incisive”, or “revealing” (2000, p. 18). Instead, as the Auschwitz Memorial Museum itself

has asserted, it is “almost without any value as a document”.¹⁰³ This is problematic, as it claims to tell the true story of Lale Sokolov, while at the same time propagating a series of post-memorial distortions.

The final two texts discussed in this chapter, however – *Hope: A Tragedy* and *The Kindly Ones* – do add something to our broader understanding of the Holocaust. They are both, in their own ways, illustrative of our current pre-occupation with the body. Auslander’s text painstakingly explores the manner in which Anne Frank’s identity has been tied inextricably to the image of her as a smiling child. By creating a monstrous, insectile and patently cynical distortion of Frank, he has sought to trigger our own learned Holocaust pieties. We are incapable, just as Kugel’s mother is, of constructing an evolving vision of Anne. We wish to imagine her as a perpetual child, unaltered and accessible. To focus on the raw materiality of her body is to remind us, to again cite a quotation from Rina Arya, of the “relentless materialism and uncontrollability” (2014, p. 5) of the human form. Anne’s body did not remain static while in hiding. Our vision of her, however, demands stability. We need her to retain her dimensions, in short, in order to identify with her – to step into her persona and affectively engage with her past. Our modern-day preoccupation with the Holocaust, Auslander proves, is defined entirely by distance, a lack of knowledge and the absence of human understanding. All we have left is a preoccupation with the body – both ours and the victim’s.

Littell’s *The Kindly Ones* then built upon this argument by presenting the reader with a text which is entirely defined by the raw materiality of death. Not only did the germ of inspiration come from the body of Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya – a corpse with which both Littell and Aue formed a problematic fixation – but Aue’s guilt was also tied explicitly to

¹⁰³ This statement can be found on the official Twitter site for the Auschwitz Memorial Museum: <https://twitter.com/AuschwitzMuseum/status/1069110757693038593>

the dual images of defecation and death. It was, in short, a text entirely preoccupied with the raw materials of the Holocaust. Once again, therefore, in place of humanity we can find only the base components of the suffering body. In this way we may then say that both texts are, at the very least, probative in nature as they invite a level of self-analysis in the reader. By highlighting our preoccupation with the suffering body, and – in the case of Auslander’s text – by actively critiquing it, these texts may prove useful in correcting the foundational issues which underpin modern Holocaust fiction. Our frequent emphasis on the suffering body, as these texts illustrate, is emblematic of our current vision the Holocaust. We cannot understand their plight, or – in the case of the dead, recover them as people – and so we have become overly focused on either the material reality of death or moments of prosthetic engagement. This, however, is an approach which must be corrected as it represents a conceptual dead end. There is nothing to be learned from the suffering body beyond the simple existence of pain. We must find a way, I contend, to reconnect with the murdered as people, to particularise them as individuals by shifting away from these obsessive recreations of the atrocity.¹⁰⁴ If we cannot do this, then fiction will remain trapped in a pattern of endlessly recreating Holocaust horrors.

¹⁰⁴ This theme is further addressed in the conclusion.

Conclusion

This thesis has articulated, from the outset, that our current conception of the Shoah is both overly narrow and inherently problematic. A foundational preoccupation with Auschwitz, and a cultural assumption that it represents the conceptual core of the atrocity, has resulted in a view of the Shoah which frequently leads to the dehumanisation of its victims. We cannot humanise them or individualise them by attaching particularising details, as they are commonly eclipsed by the sheer number of the dead. The mountains of evidence which now speak to their passing – the items displayed in the museum of Auschwitz-I and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum – only convey the scale of mass murder and the irrecoverability of the individual. This, the thesis asserts, defines our present post-memory of the Holocaust. Mere months prior to the completion of this study, on the 18th of June 2019, the real-world consequences of this Auschwitz-oriented conception of the event became apparent. Responding to Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez’s assertion that America’s border detention facilities resemble concentration camps, Rep. Liz Cheney of Wyoming replied: “Please @AOC do us all a favor and spend just a few minutes learning some actual history. 6 million Jews were exterminated in the Holocaust. You demean their memory and disgrace yourself with comments like this [sic].”¹⁰⁵ The crucial word in Rep. Cheney’s statement, and the one which automatically elucidates her thinking while also invalidating her argument, is “exterminated”.¹⁰⁶ Rep. Cheney is disallowing Rep. Ocasio-Cortez’s analogy as the migrant

¹⁰⁵ Retrieved from Rep. Cheney’s Twitter account:

https://twitter.com/Liz_Cheney/status/1140988893627478018

¹⁰⁶ In a video posted on her own Youtube page, Rep. Cheney reiterates her explicitly extermination-oriented conception of the Shoah. At 2:23 in her interview with Fox News, anchor-man Ed Henry highlights Rep. Ocasio-Cortez’s attempt to distinguish concentration camps and extermination camps. He undermines this distinction by using the word “somehow”: “she tried to clarify that she was saying that there’s a difference between concentration camps and extermination camps, *somehow*” (2:25). The anchor’s incredulous tone and downward look suggest that this clarification is being actively refuted. Rep. Cheney goes on to describe Rep. Ocasio-Cortez as “ignorant” (2:49), endorsing her own exterminationist view of the Shoah. The full video can be found at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aFVlvodLbiw>

detention centres are not extermination sites. As such, to borrow a term from the USHMM itself, Rep. Ocasio-Cortez is being accused of “sloppy analogising” (Friedberg, 2018, n.p.). In an abbreviated statement in 2019, the communications director of the institution – Andrew Hollinger – warns that the museum “unequivocally rejects efforts to create analogies between the Holocaust and other events, whether historical or contemporary” (2019, n.p.). Though the institution may speak of the human particularity of the Holocaust – from the “brutal murder of a baby boy” to the “rape of a beloved sister” (Friedberg, 2018, n.p.) – it publicly endorses a traditionally pious view of the Shoah.¹⁰⁷ The Holocaust must not be approached or rationalised or made comprehensible through historical comparison, instead it must be regarded with unreflective reverence. Both Rep. Cheney and the USHMM are using Holocaust Piety as a rhetorical shield and a means to end the discussion. They wish for us to have no conception of the sufferers as people – to have no understanding of the moral reality of life within the camp system or the ghettos – but rather to be stunned into unreflective silence through the mere mention of the exterminated. Rep. Cheney’s statement is therefore not simply unreflective of the historical reality of the Holocaust – as Timothy Snyder has articulated the “huge majority of Jews murdered in the Holocaust never saw a concentration camp” (2019a, n.p.), having been murdered by killing squads in the occupied territories or disposed of in killing centres – but it represents a foundational misapprehension of Rep. Ocasio-Cortez’s position. As she stated in her now deleted video, she invoked the comparison to the concentration camps of the Holocaust as a means to explore the “Never Again” framing of the event. She intends, in other words, for Americans to ponder the political and cultural steps which have led to the creation of detention facilities on American soil – a form of moral decline which, as Christopher Browning has noted, does have certain

¹⁰⁷ The spokespeople currently speaking for the institution, it may be said, express this position of piety. It is overly simplistic, however, to state the museum itself is entirely pious in nature.

parallels with Germany's changing attitudes in the 1930s – and their failure to learn from the Holocaust.¹⁰⁸ As Snyder notes in a later piece, just like the concentration camps of the Holocaust, these detention centres demonstrate the moral impact of working in “legally gray places” as workers within these facilities gradually give way to “their worst impulses” (2019b, n.p.). As such, Rep. Ocasio-Cortez's position is more in line with an impious view of the Holocaust which explicitly analyses and articulates the motivations of those within the moral grey zone. She aims to make a present-day event comprehensible through active comparisons to a historical tragedy. A tragedy which, implicitly, she understands to be more complex, human and particular than Rep. Cheney and the USHMM. In short, Rep. Ocasio-Cortez has inadvertently proven that Holocaust Impiety is the only way forward. We can only understand the events of the present if we may come to terms with the moral complexity of the past. By contrast, Rep. Cheney has proven that the comparatively narrow conception of the Holocaust which is perpetuated in the vast majority of Holocaust fiction represents a conceptual dead end. When one understands the event only as a vague fusion of Auschwitz, the gas chamber and the quasi-sacred murdered then it cannot positively impact the present. It serves instead as a moral cudgel, to be used by those who wish to stun their opponents into silence.

Returning to Berel Lang, therefore, a valuable piece of modern Holocaust fiction – one which does not compound the problematically narrow conception of the event expressed by Rep. Cheney – must be “more probative, more incisive” or indeed “more *revealing*” (2000, p. 18) than silence. As Lang notes, the question must be asked if the loss of a given text might not, “in moral and/or cognitive terms, manifest itself as a gain” (p. 18). Four of the more contemporary texts analysed in this thesis – Pascal Croci's *Auschwitz*, Tim Blake

¹⁰⁸ See the following article in The New York Review of Books:
<https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2018/10/25/suffocation-of-democracy/>

Nelson's *The Grey Zone*, Steve Stern's *The North of God* and Heather Morris's *The Tattooist of Auschwitz* – represent works which, I contend, add nothing to our understanding of the Shoah. All four of these texts exemplify the flaws inherent in Auschwitz-oriented thinking. While Auschwitz dominates all four texts, Croci, Nelson, Stern and Morris all struggle to engage with the fundamental impossibility of representing the sufferer's plight. The experiential reality of life and death within Auschwitz, as was outlined in Chapter Two, remains locked away within either the deep memory of the survivor or the experiences of the dead. Similarly, as Chapter Four demonstrated, the modern-day creator cannot approach the dead with fraternal familiarity, as they now represent distant, abstract, semi-sacred figures. As such, they are also unable to represent the Holocaust dead impiously – they cannot represent their inner fears or underlying motivations as they have no conception of their psychology or experiential reality. In place of an impious representation, therefore, all four creators instead rely on the same representational ploy: they ignore the humanity of the sufferer and instead focus on the material and the bodily. All four texts, as has been demonstrated, feature a totemic suffering body – specifically, the body of a woman and/or girl. Crucially, they are also built around the concept of bodily engagement or “prosthetic memory”. In short, they utilise the physical suffering of their featured characters in order to make the reader/viewer feel *something* of the atrocity – to have it momentarily come alive, as it did for Michael Lax in Mauthausen when he imagined the suffering of the “parachuters” (Weissman, 2004, p. 4). Just like Lax, the creator only comes close to “realising [their] desire to experience” (p. 4) the reality of the camps when they engage with the past on a bodily level. When Auschwitz dominates our conception of the Holocaust, therefore, our understanding of the Shoah becomes explicitly bodily. We resign ourselves to the impossibility of connecting with the psychology of the dead and instead focus on their suffering bodies. This, however – as Rep. Cheney's statement illustrates – is not

instructive.¹⁰⁹ We learn nothing from this kind of bodily engagement, experiencing only a moment of pious horror. Describing the viewer's exposure to scenes of suffering in *Schindler's List*, Alison Landsberg notes: "Our discomfort derives from the power of the image to move us and to make intelligible and visceral what we cannot comprehend in a purely bodily way" (2004, pp. 125-126). Specifically, Landsberg asserts that these sequences allow the viewer to experience a lack of physical "agency" (p. 125) – imagining that modern viewers will not have experienced violent racial oppression or military violence. However, according to Gillian Rose's definition, this does not approach impiety. The viewer of *Schindler's List* has learned nothing about the reality of racial fear or the psychological extremes experienced by those under pressure. Instead, they merely feel "vulnerable in bodily ways" (p. 125), which implies simply that they have experienced a moment of purely physical anxiety after having been presented with the image of another suffering body. We experience the blunt reality of another's pain, and experience a moment of sympathetic unease, but the broader nature of the Holocaust remains ineffable. Proof of this can be found in Landsberg's further description of the de-racialised bodies in *Schindler's List*. Noting that a non-Jewish audience will likely struggle to engage with *Night and Fog* by Alain Resnais, as she believes media consumers to be incapable of "identification across ethnic lines" (p. 124), she suggests that *Schindler's List* presents more cross-culturally appealing characters:

The film offers its viewers Jewish bodies with which they might have a mimetic relationship... Having identified with the Jews first as members of the middle class before the dehumanisation begins, the spectator finds the torture and cruelty of the Nazis all the more traumatic. (p. 124)

The vision *Schindler's List* presents, therefore, is of an almost entirely de-Judaised Holocaust. Immediately, therefore, the religious context of the Shoah itself has been side-

¹⁰⁹ While I do not wish to claim that Rep. Cheney has engaged with the texts featured, I am asserting that she has an overly Auschwitz-oriented conception of the Holocaust. One which, I contend, leads inevitably to the dehumanisation of the sufferer/survivor.

lined in an effort to facilitate bodily engagement. Under these conditions the viewer learns nothing about the historical Holocaust, as the emphasis has been limited to bodily discomfort. They may, as Landsberg argued, engage on a physical level with the loss of agency, but this has been almost entirely de-contextualised. When the viewer is made to inhabit a body they do not understand, entirely lacking in motivations or – in most instances – a history within the narrative, they are only experiencing physical threat.

As Chapter Three outlined, Tim Blake Nelson's *The Grey Zone* takes this notion to its logical extreme by having the viewer experience a moment of gassing. Once again, we are placed in an entirely de-contextualised body – the girl we inhabit has no spoken dialogue and does not feature in the film as a major character – and made to fully inhabit a moment of pain. Nothing is done to block our attempt at emotional engagement as we are positioned within an almost faceless child – prior to her gassing we are shown only her eyes, as Figure 26 illustrates. As such, the viewer is once again learning nothing of the Holocaust. We are merely inhabiting a decontextualized, nameless, faceless child and experiencing a moment of primal insecurity – we, on a bodily level, do not wish to experience pain or to watch our mother die. The value of this experience, as such, is profoundly limited. The viewer's perhaps non-Jewish body has engaged with a moment of physical, universal pain but nothing about the particular reality of the Holocaust has been learned or imparted. We have not made the cognitive leap towards understanding an ethnic perspective other than our own. Instead, we have merely imagined our own bodies, as nonwitnesses and potentially non-Jews, experiencing a moment of discomfort. This is not the kind of experience which might inform our view of the present or impact the world in a useful way as we have still learned nothing about the Shoah itself. Our vision of it, in fact, has become rather more partial, as the experience has been removed from the Jewish suffering body and re-focused instead on our own discomfort.

Utilising Lang's standard of silence, therefore, I contend that the world would lose nothing from the erasure of these texts. They are problematic as they have been positioned, culturally, as a means to provide the public with a "dose of Holocaust" (Cole, 1999, p. 154). When we encounter these moments of bodily connection in fiction, or indeed experience the cattle car in a USHMM, the nature of the atrocity has supposedly been imparted in the form of a microdose – a minor exposure to the nature of the Shoah. This is then enough "the thinking goes" to communicate the essence of the Holocaust and to inoculate us against the prospect of "totalitarianism, racism" and "state-sponsored murder" (p. 154) in the present. However, as recent events have proven, this is not the case. This pious vision of the atrocity, which does not reflect the psychology of the sufferer or particularise them racially, conveys the message that bodily suffering and mass extermination are the only parts of the Shoah which have meaning or value in the present. This is the kind of thinking, however, which fuelled the statements of Rep. Cheney. It effectively ends all discussion, as it suggests that the Holocaust is a broadly unapproachable abstraction which we cannot understand but only *feel*. This is societally damaging as it means that the thinking which fuelled the Shoah, the degrees of moral slippage which affected both the perpetrators and those within the grey zone, remains unfathomable. The only way forward, I contend, is to find a way to reconnect with the victims of the Shoah impiously, both in order to demystify the atrocity and, vitally, to humanise the victims who have been utterly dehumanised by modern media and, arguably, the USHMM. This, however, would require a shift away from Auschwitz and extermination as the conceptual cores of the Holocaust.¹¹⁰

Even those modern texts which this thesis views as being valuable, crucially, convey nothing about the reality of the Holocaust itself. As they are still governed by Auschwitz-

¹¹⁰ While I do not wish to ignore industrialised mass extermination as a vital part of the Holocaust, I do argue that an explicit focus on extermination – at the expense of the victims' cultural and psychological particularities – is problematic.

oriented thinking, they cannot connect with the experiential reality of the past or the humanity of the dead. Instead, they have value as they critique our current vision of the Shoah. Shalom Auslander's *Hope: A Tragedy* and *The Kindly Ones* by Jonathan Littell both illustrate and, to different degrees, probe the current preoccupation with the suffering body and the materialisation of Holocaust death. As Chapter Four detailed, these texts are both "incisive" and "probative" (Lang, 2000, p. 18) and so they may be deemed valuable. They may be said to positively impact our conception of the Shoah. However, they do so by illustrating its flaws. Auslander's text, particularly, highlights the relative calcification of Holocaust knowledge and the degree to which our present vision of the Shoah now consists of two elements: limiting Holocaust iconography and inhabitable bodies.¹¹¹ Specifically, Auslander critiques the modern compulsion to inhabit the suffering body. Both Solomon Kugel and his mother attempt to step into the shoes of Anne Frank. While his mother assumes Anne's memories as her own, Solomon comes to fret about the prospect of a second Shoah and "who would agree to hide him and his family in their attic" (2012, p. 109). Bodily identification, Auslander's text implies, represents our primary means of engaging with the Holocaust past. This is why his characters continuously try to rehome the Shoah in their own bodies – why mother takes on the persona of a survivor and Solomon, by extension, becomes her second-generation child. Auslander's characters can only understand the Shoah when it has been repositioned in their bodies as nonwitnesses. Auslander's monstrous version of Anne Frank therefore represents an extreme attempt to re-particularise the Holocaust – to house it specifically in one suffering body which cannot be inhabited. Such is our compulsion to prosthetically wear the experiences of others, Auslander's text implies, that

¹¹¹ The imagery may be described as "limiting" as it promotes a specifically extermination-oriented, Auschwitz-specific vision of the atrocity.

the Kugels will step into anything humanoid, and so Anne must be warped beyond all recognition in order for her Holocaust past to remain exclusively her own.

Auslander's text is therefore particularly incisive as it provides a salient warning about a trend which has come to define modern Holocaust fiction. Future generations, I contend, are being primed to engage with the Holocaust in an exclusively pious and bodily way. Both John Boyne's text and Mark Herman's film of *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* illustrate that Auslander's warning has relevance. Assuming that the tragedy of the Holocaust would have less cultural significance when attached to the Jewish other – Shmuel is generally positioned as an alien figure on the other side of a fence – *The Boy* instead focuses on the death of a non-Jewish child. Bruno, given his lack of character definition, serves as the audience's surrogate. Anne Rothe describes him as a "mini-Schindler" or "an infantilised version of the good German figure" (2011, p. 139). By this she means that he is not really a character but rather a simplistic embodiment of non-Jewish decency. In short, he is a character designed to be inhabited – to allow the audience to experience the horrors of the Shoah in a body almost indistinguishable from their own. When Bruno is gassed, therefore, the audience is not simply inhabiting the Jewish body, but rather the prospect of gassing has crossed racial lines. It is not simply an experience that non-Jews may wear – while still recognising its ethnic origins – but rather one which has been re-homed in the non-Jewish body. Gassing, in short, has been universalised. As such, *The Boy* is priming its audience for a life of bodily Holocaust engagement. The Jewish sufferer, they are being told, must remain an abstract figure on the other side of a fence. You cannot comprehend their suffering but, when the prospect of gassing is applied to the Christian middle-class body, you can bodily engage with a part of the Holocaust experience – arguably, its conceptual core.

As Auslander warns, therefore, the body has become the accepted means of engaging with the Holocaust. Under this Auschwitz-specific conception of the event, the dead remain

distant, psychologically incomprehensible figures. This represents not only a threat to our future – as Rep. Cheney’s statements affirm – but also a continuing trend in Holocaust fiction. On 3rd October 2019, Heather Morris will release a follow-up to *The Tattooist* which focuses explicitly on Cilka – the minor character whose sexual suffering conveyed the horror of the Holocaust in the original text. While it is too early to pass judgement on the content of the text, the risk remains that Morris may again connect to the Holocaust through the sexualised suffering of the Jewish other – re-conceiving Auschwitz pain as something more representable than abstract extermination or sustained brutality. This is again problematic as it both fails to convey the nature of the atrocity – by reframing the Holocaust as an almost exclusively sexual crime – and further dehumanises the victims. The focus once more is positioned not on their psychology, or the emotional reality of sex-for-survival dynamics, but on our present-day capacity to touch the Holocaust past. These lurid depictions of sexual suffering illustrate the lengths to which the contemporary author must go in order to feel *something* of the Holocaust – to experience at least a portion of the atrocity in their own body. In order to correct this compulsion, I contend – to prevent further limiting our understanding of the Shoah – we must find a way to reconnect with the dead as individuals. We must find texts which outline their motivations, their particular fears, the reality of their wartime communities, their particularising Judaism and – in certain instances – their moral downfall. We must once again widen our scope and reconnect with other writing about the Holocaust: accounts from other camps (preferably with less of an emphasis on extermination), accounts of people surviving in hiding and, vitally, writing from the ghetto.

As noted in the Introduction, Alan Mintz distinguishes between two forms of Holocaust writing: “exceptionalist” and “constructivist”. While exceptionalist texts focus on the horror of the atrocity, viewing the camps as a metonymy for the event, constructivist texts take a different approach, focusing instead on the ghetto. Constructivist texts are therefore defined

by two elements which this thesis deems vital to a fuller understanding of the Holocaust: the cultural particularisation of the victims and an exploration of their wartime psychology. Mintz argues, critically, that Auschwitz-oriented survivor memoirs, despite their undeniable value, have also partly contributed to the cultural de-particularisation of the victims of the Shoah. As he puts it: “The life of the prisoner is a life that has been reduced to a biological core that exists before culture or beneath culture” (p. 70). Unlike the ghetto, he suggests, the concentration camp represents a culturally vacant space, defined generally by hunger and survival. Though certain sources make mention of hidden religious practices – Fania Fénelon notes that in her block “overt religious practices” did take place, despite being “badly received” (1986, p. 170) by the other members of the orchestra, while Sybil Milton also describes the clandestine religious activities of Orthodox Jewish women in Auschwitz – the vast majority tend to emphasise the mechanics of survival and the brutal reality of Auschwitz.¹¹² The specific culture of the victim, therefore, is eclipsed by the horrors of the atrocity. In order to come to a more complete understanding of the event, therefore – one which is not simply founded upon visions of extermination and inhabitable bodies in pain – we must supplement our Auschwitz-oriented reading with knowledge of Jewish pre-camp cultural life.

Unlike the camps, the ghettos existed as vibrant, complex communities with broadly unrestrained religious and cultural lives. David G. Roskies notes that life within the ghettos was “defiantly vibrant... Jews sang songs, delivered sermons and eulogies, declaimed poetry, mounted exhibitions, performed plays” (2012, pp. 45-45). By conveying these specific cultural details, and connecting the reader with the particular reality of the pre-camp

¹¹² Sybil Milton describes the Orthodox women from “Hungary and Subcarpathian Ruthenia” performing the following activities in secret: “When Sabbath candles were unavailable they blessed electric lightbulbs; their colleagues assigned to the Canada barracks... filched supplies for them to make Sabbath candles improvised from hollowed-out potato peels filled with margarine and rag wicks” (1993, pp. 229-230).

Jewish community, the ghetto diary is able to create a semi-fraternal connection to the Holocaust dead. As Mintz notes, the ghetto diary serves as a “window onto the experience of Jewry in real time rather than recollected time” (2001, p.65). This is not a post-Holocaust framing of the event, therefore – which will naturally have taken account of the prevailing view of the event at the time of writing – but rather real-time access to functioning Jewish communities. In lieu of having lived it, therefore, the ghetto diary provides the nonwitness with a means to reconnect with the Holocaust dead as culturally specific, complex people. In order to come to a fuller understanding of the event, therefore – and to provide the Auschwitz-oriented fiction of the present with much-needed context – we need to come to an intellectual and cultural understanding of precisely who the Holocaust’s victims were.

Roskies, for instance, outlines the role which songs often played in the ghetto communities. “In the East”, as he puts it, “everyone sang” (2012, p. 48). The harsh reality of ghetto life was framed and decoded using the music of street singers who would adapt the “familiar melodies” of Yiddish musical theatre or the “standard folk repertory” in order to sing pieces which were “highly topical” and “rooted in the present (p. 48). This represents a specific cultural response to the atrocity, a uniquely Jewish means of engaging with the events of the Holocaust as they transpired. This kind of specific detailing, I argue, is required to undo the decades of universalisation which have gradually transformed the Jewish victim into the suffering body. While I do not wish to discount and invalidate the writings of Levi and Wiesel, therefore, I do argue that – in the present – additional context is required in order to avoid a singularly reductive, purely horror-oriented conception of the Holocaust. In a thesis founded on the notion of post-memorial distance, therefore, the ghetto diary may begin to narrow the emotional and cultural gap which exists between the authors and readers of

the present and many of the victims of the Shoah.¹¹³ As Fink's short stories illustrated in Chapter Four, an experience of the ghetto – or simply wartime Jewish living – is seemingly required in order to regard the victims impiously. While the ghetto diary cannot entirely close this gap, it can potentially create a firmer understanding in our minds of the dead as people.

This, therefore, accounts for one aspect of the constructivists' attempt to particularise the Holocaust. As Mintz asserts, the ghetto diary also provides a greater sense of psychological proximity to the sufferer. Fink's 'A Spring Morning' may be considered impious as it manages to approach the emotional reality of living under Nazi threat and the prospect of imminent death. For Fink, the dead are not post-memorial abstractions but approachable people, whose psychology she understands as she has lived with the same threats and experienced the ghetto environment. While we cannot claim to have the same level of psychological insight – as we have not shared those experiences – we can reacquaint ourselves with the reality of Jewish wartime psychology by reading diaries written prior to internment or extermination. As Mintz puts it: "One of the key features of ghetto writing is its uncensored moral rhetoric in which names of collaborators are named and the behaviour of Jews toward Jews is unflinchingly described" (2001, pp. 66-67). Post-war survivor texts, he contends, often tend to "play down the feelings of accusation and betrayal which were strongly felt at the time" (p. 67) and so ghetto writing provides a kind of emotional honesty and immediacy to which we would otherwise have no access. As such, ghetto writing –

¹¹³ I do not wish to claim that it can provide access to all victims of the Shoah. *The Diary of Anne Frank*, Alicia Appleman-Jurman's *Alicia: My Story* and Ida Fink's *The Journey* all provide rich psychological insights into the mental rigours of a period in hiding. This also provides a vital part of the story. By their very nature, however, these texts are limited in scope and driven by the need to self-isolate. As such, they cannot provide as many insights into Jewish communal responses to the atrocity. I therefore argue that the ghetto diary may be used to provide vital cultural context for those still living in a Jewish community – information which is not as forthcoming in other sources. Additionally, they also provide more scope for the exploration of the moral grey zone.

instead of portraying the dead as quasi-sacred abstractions – provides a unique insight into the morality of survival. It can therefore be used to supplement our Auschwitz-focused conception of the Holocaust, as it once again contextualises the dead as people. It provides us with some inkling of the moral and psychological reality of survival and so helps to provide background information for those otherwise decontextualized bodies featured in most camp-centric fiction.

“Confessional diaries” (Roskies, 2012, p. 69), for instance, represent a particularly revealing subgenre of ghetto writing. Written in 1943, these diaries all represent “a moment... of radical self-confrontation” (p. 69) in which the privileged few came to consider the moral cost of survival. Calel Perechodnik’s *Am I A Murderer?: Testament Of A Jewish Ghetto Policeman* provides an unflinching account of man’s potential for moral compromise – demonstrating both the lengths to which one will go in order to ensure their own survival and the depths of shame to which they will descend in the aftermath. His text focuses, at least initially, on his time as a Jewish policeman within the Otwock ghetto. Written with full consciousness that he would “sooner or later share the fate of all Jews in Poland” (1996, p. xxi), it provides a thoroughly detailed portrait of not only his own primal desire to survive but also the moral complexity of his work. Describing his position within the community he notes: “Behind me are many nights I spent with my Jewish brothers. I lived through them threefold: as a Jew, as a human being, and as an animal led by the instinct for self-preservation” (p. 73). As a ghetto policeman, made to force his fellow Jews onto cattle cars and guard them in the hours prior to a mass killing, he is at once part of the community and removed from it. Though he still regards his fellow townspeople with a feeling of fraternal closeness – referring to them frequently by name and providing humanising glimpses of their lives – he also exists apart from them as a collaborator in their deaths, driven by his own self-confessed feelings of cowardice. By outlining the nature of this cowardice, and making

it comprehensible, Perechodnik's text provides much needed psychological context. He has articulated and demystified the morality of the grey zone, making his own moral compromise painfully plausible for the reader.

This kind of unique psychological portrait, I argue, makes the Holocaust more fathomable.¹¹⁴ Instead of viewing it as a pious abstraction built around the image of suffering bodies, we can come to understand it from a human perspective. We can begin to approach it impiously as, like Rose suggests, we can once again experience a "crisis of identity" (1996, p. 46) within our own breast. It is only this kind of moral and intellectual understanding, I contend, which will keep the Holocaust present. With this kind of additional context, we can begin to experience our own moments of personal crisis by wondering at our own capacity for moral downfall and considering our own fascistic tendencies. This, however, requires an impious understanding of the Holocaust. When it is regarded piously, the Shoah remains locked in the past. The dead are viewed simply as bodies to be regarded with unreflective reverence. When we begin to recontextualise them as people, however – people whose behaviours and anxieties we can understand – the past once again has relevance to the present. If we do not adapt our thinking, specifically by expanding our reading to include a more psychologically and culturally particular view of the victims, the Holocaust will forever remain an imponderable abstraction. Our understanding of it will calcify and the victims of the Shoah will become empty vessels, to be used either as vehicles for Holocaust engagement or weapons by those who wish to keep it ineffable. Progress, both in terms of fiction and our societal regard for the Holocaust, can only be made when we once again come to see the murdered as dynamic, fathomable, culturally specific people. If modern fiction cannot re-humanise the victims of the Shoah, and abandon its explicit focus on the

¹¹⁴ The psychology of the privileged is also explored in Arnošt Lustig's novel *The Unloved: The Diary of Perla S.* Through Perla, the reader gradually comes to learn of the psychology of those within the *Judenrat*, who also eventually experience moments of self-confrontation.

horror of the atrocity, the Holocaust will lose its capacity to positively impact the present. “Never again” will lose all meaning and we will lose a vital reference point for analysing our own potential fascist impulses. Given the current shift in Western politics, as evidenced by Rep. Cheney’s statement, the consequence of this would surely be grave.

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Certificate of Ethics Review

Project Title: From Holocaust Impiety to the Suffering Body: Exploring the Issues Underlying Modern Holocaust Fiction

Name: David Dickson

User ID: 790920 **Application Date:** 27-Mar-2019 16:20**ER Number:** ETHIC-2019-

391

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- [University Data Protection Policy](#)

You are reminded that as a University of Portsmouth Researcher you are bound by [the UKRIO Code of Practice for Research](#); any breach of this code could lead to action being taken following the University's [Procedure for the Investigation of Allegations of Misconduct in Research](#).

Any changes in the answers to the questions reflecting the design, management or conduct of the research over the course of the project must be notified to the Faculty Ethics Committee. **Any changes that affect the answers given in the questionnaire, not reported to the Faculty Ethics Committee, will invalidate this certificate.**

This ethical review should not be used to infer any comment on the academic merits or methodology of the project. If you have not already done so, you are advised to develop a clear protocol/proposal and ensure that it is independently reviewed by peers or others of appropriate standing. A favourable ethical opinion should not be perceived as permission to proceed with the research; there might be other matters of governance which require further consideration including the agreement of any organisation hosting the research.

(A1) Please briefly describe your project: **The project will explicitly focus on the discussion of Holocaust fiction-encompassing the use of literature and film. It will also, in passing, feature references to survivor writing- such as the personal accounts of Primo Levi, Olga Lengyel, Krystyna Zywulska and so forth. Additionally, it will use stills from certain films, frames from particular graphic novels and three to four instances of Holocaust photography. I have not featured atrocity imagery, but several pictures do depict prisoners in the camp setting or in the process of being unloaded from the cattle car. This is the only area which could prompt a certain degree of ethical concern.**

(A2) What faculty do you belong to?: **FHSS**

(A3) I am sure that my project requires ethical review by my Faculty Ethics Committee because it includes at least one material ethical issue.: **No** (A5) Has your project already been externally reviewed?: **No**

(B1) Is the study likely to involve human participants?: **No**

(B2) Are you certain that your project will not involve human subjects or participants?: **Yes**

(C6) Is there any risk to the health & safety of the researcher or members of the research team beyond those that have already been risk assessed?: **No** (D2) Are there risks of damage to physical and/or ecological environmental features?: **No**

(D4) Are there risks of damage to features of historical or cultural heritage (e.g. impacts of study techniques, taking of samples)?: **No**

(E1) Will the study involve the investigator and/or any participants in activities that could be considered contentious, unacceptable, or illegal, or in any other way harmful to the reputation of the University of Portsmouth?: **No**

(E2) Are there any potentially socially or culturally sensitive issues involved? (e.g. sexual, political, legal/criminal or financial): **No** (F1) Does the project involve animals in any way?: **No**

(F2) Could the research outputs potentially be harmful to third parties?: **No**

(G1) Please confirm that you have read the University Ethics Policy and have considered the implications for your project.:

Confirmed

(G2) Please confirm that you have read the UK RIO Code of Practice for Research and will conduct your project in accordance with it.: **Confirmed** (G3) The University is committed to The Concordat to Support Research Integrity.:

Confirmed

(G4) Submitting false or incorrect information is a breach of the University Ethics Policy and may be considered as misconduct and be subject to disciplinary action. Please confirm you understand this and agree that the information you have entered is correct.: **Confirmed**

FORM UPR16**Research Ethics Review Checklist**

Please include this completed form as an appendix to your thesis (see the Research Degrees Operational Handbook for more information)



Postgraduate Research Student (PGRS) Information		Student ID:	790920
PGRS Name:	DAVID JOHN DICKSON		
Department:	SSHPL	First Supervisor:	Dr C. Barbieri
Start Date: (or progression date for Prof Doc students)	01.10.15		
Study Mode and Route:	Part-time <input type="checkbox"/> Full-time <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	MPhil <input type="checkbox"/> PhD <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	MD <input type="checkbox"/> Professional Doctorate <input type="checkbox"/>
Title of Thesis:	The Problematic Notions of Modern Holocaust Fiction		
Thesis Word Count: (excluding ancillary data)	84,020		
<p>If you are unsure about any of the following, please contact the local representative on your Faculty Ethics Committee for advice. Please note that it is your responsibility to follow the University's Ethics Policy and any relevant University, academic or professional guidelines in the conduct of your study</p> <p>Although the Ethics Committee may have given your study a favourable opinion, the final responsibility for the ethical conduct of this work lies with the researcher(s).</p>			
UKRIO Finished Research Checklist:			
(If you would like to know more about the checklist, please see your Faculty or Departmental Ethics Committee rep or see the online version of the full checklist at: http://www.ukrio.org/what-we-do/code-of-practice-for-research/)			
a) Have all of your research and findings been reported accurately, honestly and within a reasonable time frame?	YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>		
b) Have all contributions to knowledge been acknowledged?	YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>		
c) Have you complied with all agreements relating to intellectual property, publication and authorship?	YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>		
d) Has your research data been retained in a secure and accessible form and will it remain so for the required duration?	YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>		
e) Does your research comply with all legal, ethical, and contractual requirements?	YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>		
Candidate Statement:			
I have considered the ethical dimensions of the above named research project, and have successfully obtained the necessary ethical approval(s)			
Ethical review number(s) from Faculty Ethics Committee (or from NRES/SCREC):	ETHIC-2019-3911		
If you have <i>not</i> submitted your work for ethical review, and/or you have answered 'No' to one or more of questions a) to e), please explain below why this is so:			
Signed (PGRS):	David J Dickson		Date: 27/9/18