The Holocaust Poetry of John Berryman, Sylvia Plath and W.D. Snodgrass

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PhD Thesis

Summary

John Berryman, Sylvia Plath and W. D. Snodgrass are each commonly associated with the poetic movement known as 'confessionalism' which emerged in the USA in the late 1950s and early 1960s. They did not, however, write works of undiluted autobiography; through close readings of their Holocaust verse, I take the poetry, rather than the lives of the poets, to be the ultimate authority on what they had to say about history, about the ethics of representing historical atrocity in art, and about the 'existential' questions that the Nazi genocide raises.

Chapter 1 offers the first sustained analysis of Berryman's unfinished collection of Holocaust poems, *The Black Book* (1948 - 1958) - one of the earliest engagements by an American writer with this particular historical subject. In my second chapter I look at some of Plath's fictionalised dramatic monologues, which, I argue, offer self-reflexive meditations on representational poetics, the commercialisation of the Holocaust, and the ways in which the event reshapes our understanding of individual identity and culture. My third chapter focuses on W. D. Snodgrass's *The Fuehrer Bunker* (1995) - a formally inventive cycle of dramatic monologues spoken by leading Nazi ministers, which can be read as an heuristic text whose ultimate objective is the moral instruction of its readers.

Finally, I suggest that while all three poets offer distinct responses to the Holocaust, they each consider how non-victims approach the genocide through acts of identification. For Snodgrass, it is important that we *do* identify with the perpetrators, who were not all that different from ourselves; for Berryman and Plath, however, the difficulty of identifying with the victims marks out the limits of historical understanding.

Introduction

Interpretation of Holocaust poetry, including the imaginative works which form the subject of this thesis, is inflected by the way that we read Holocaust testimony - something which typically involves a response to a perceived authority. As readers of testimony, we don't so much ask ourselves what we think, as what should we think, or - more strongly - what are we *required* to think. This is not simply a corollary of Holocaust piety: a sentimental inclination to regard the Nazi genocide as a case apart - even one which we have no right or ability to form opinions about. It is more a sense that the subject matter, especially when presented in firsthand accounts, challenges the foundations on which literary judgements are based (for example, undergraduates who make forthright contributions to seminars on, say, Romantic poetry or the Victorian novel, are often more reticent as they begin a course on Holocaust representation). This is largely because the reading of testimony is influenced by meta-textual criteria in a far more obvious way than with other kinds of literature: above all, the knowledge that the narrative is a record of, and part of an ongoing response to, traumatic events in the author's own life, shapes a sense of the human fate which lies behind the writing. These narratives rarely allow us to lose sight of this fact: the author and the process of authoring are frequently foregrounded, as in Primo Levi's present tense interjection in *If This is a Man* (1958), 'Today, at this very moment as I sit writing at a table, I myself am not convinced that these things really happened', or Charlotte Delbo's epigraph to *None of Us Will Return* (1965), which expresses an almost identical sentiment: 'Today, I am not sure that what I wrote is true. I am certain it is truthful.'[1] In making such statements, survivor-writers question their own hold on the past, and even the legitimacy of the methods they use to represent it; but rather than freeing readers to interpret their texts in

whatever way they like, these admissions actually bring to the fore the author's authority in what is the mainstay of interpretive activity: the struggle to establish meaning.

The experience of reading testimony (for both students and academics) does not, therefore, tally with those approaches to literature, popularised over the last few decades, which hold that textual interpretation is open and ungovernable, freeing and free. For example, this is Peter McDonald in *Serious Poetry: Form and Authority from Yeats to Hill* (2002) discussing responses to literature in general:

> 'Authority' is a chilly word, at least in literary criticism: it suggests all kinds of unwelcome things, and makes far too many assumptions. On its own, it seems to be in need of an adjective - 'monolithic', perhaps, or 'overbearing', even 'academic'. 'Authority' is something that tries to tell you what to read, or what to think, and has views about that; 'authority' says one thing is better than another, and that some things take more work than others; 'authority' is on your case.[2]

McDonald ironises the *laissez-aller* approach which characterises certain strands of literary criticism; but the same could hardly be said of responses to texts written by Holocaust survivors, where a sense of the legitimate authority of the author-witness grows precisely out of the fact that he or she very often *does* tell readers 'what to read, or what to think'. Again, *If This is a Man* is a case in point, with the poem - variously titled 'Shem×' or 'If This is a Man' - which introduces the novelised testimony outlining the demands the text will make on its readers in an even more direct fashion than the testimony itself. After describing the dehumanisation of victims in the *Lager*, the narrator asks us to 'engrave' the words of the poem (or even the testimony as a whole) onto our hearts, promising catastrophic consequences for our houses, our health and our children if we fail: a claim to authority if ever there was one.[3]

It is not only literary criticism which, in regarding authority as a 'chilly word', finds itself at odds with writing such as this. In the Introduction to their anthology *The*

Holocaust: Theoretical Readings (2003), Neil Levi and Michael Rothberg point out

some of the differences which have emerged between Holocaust studies and theory:

> Many scholars demand respect, even piety, towards the Holocaust and the Nazis' victims, while some theorists are preoccupied with transgression, play, and *jouissance*. Historians of the Holocaust understandably insist upon the distinction between fiction and reality; theory, especially poststructuralism, questions our ability to know a reality existing independently of our representations of it.[4]

Poststructuralist models of literary interpretation have had a pervasive influence across

academia, especially in reformulating the question of authority in literary interpretation;

in its critique of logocentricism, poststructuralism holds that *all* language - whatever

context it is used and interpreted in - lacks a foundation (author/ origin/ referent) on

which a hierarchy of meaning can be constructed. Yet such theorising frequently fails to

take into account the more urgent questions about truth and memory posed by the likes

of Levi and Delbo in light of the Holocaust; at its worst, it can seem like a complete

evasion of the horrific reality of a genocide which, as Holocaust scholars insist,

certainly *did* exist independently of literary representations of it. Additionally, as Levi

and Rothberg note, there is

> the problem of the intellectual heritage of theory, especially in the French form that dominated American understandings of the term in the 1980s: poststructuralism and American deconstruction are unimaginable without the influence of Martin Heidegger, Paul de Man, and Maurice Blanchot - each of whom, in one way or another, either endorsed the Nazi party or produced writings complicit with antisemitic currents of the pre-Holocaust period.[5]

In a recent interdisciplinary study, *The Holocaust and the Postmodern* (2004),

Robert Eaglestone attempts to re-evaluate this traditional understanding of theory's

problematic relation to the Nazi genocide, arguing that the authority of the witness (or,

as he sometimes phrases it, 'the other') actually *underpins* the intellectual developments

of the postmodern period. For Eaglestone, poststructuralism is the central instance of

postmodern thought - 'a still developing tradition of post-phenomenological philosophy'

which, through the work of Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida in particular, 'begins with thinking about the Holocaust'.[6] Taking his lead from Derrida's assertion that '"Auschwitz" has obsessed everything I have ever been able to think', Eaglestone holds that the poststructuralist critique of logocentricism can only be understood with reference to the Holocaust (even if it doesn't seek to *explain* it). The fact of Auschwitz is, he suggests, 'all-pervasive' in this branch of philosophy.[7]

Eaglestone's analysis of poststructuralist thought *as* post-Holocaust thought begins by highlighting how the process of 'identification' forms 'a central and major - but not always necessary - part of our experience of reading'.[8] Survivor accounts, however, open up a problem:

> We who come after the Holocaust and know about it only through representations are frequently *and with authority* told that it is incomprehensible. However, the representations seem to demand us to do exactly that, to comprehend it, to grasp the experiences, to imagine the suffering, through identifying with those who suffered.[9] (My emphasis.)

Ultimately, for Eaglestone, authority rests with the former, and not the latter, premiss - not because the latter is somehow less significant than the former, but because there are certain ways of reading that are prohibited by the genre of testimony. Drawing on Elie Wiesel's famous claim that the Holocaust 'invented a new literature, that of testimony', Eaglestone argues that this genre offers a distinct 'horizon of understanding where interpretation, text, and readership come together': one which legislates against the 'sort of reading as identification, as comprehension' which consumes, and thus normalises, the experience of the other.[10] This prohibition against identification does not mean that the experience of victimhood, or otherness, is totally lost to us. If nothing else, it persists in the form of that *authority* which tells us that the event 'is incomprehensible'.

Eaglestone examines the nature of this authority by way of the concept of 'the trace'. For Levinas, this term describes the ethical responsibility of facing another; for Derrida, it marks the unutterable place where the outside of philosophy is interred

within philosophy, where reason meets with that which is outside reason.[11] Eaglestone defines it as 'that otherness which escapes the limits of systems of thought and language but is made manifest in them'.[12] In an interview, Derrida remarked:

> The thought of the incineration of the holocaust, of cinders, runs through all my texts […] What is the thought of the trace, in fact, without which there would be no deconstruction? […] The thought of the trace […] is a thought about cinders and the advent of an event, a date, a memory.[13]

Without imposing a false 'metaphysics of comprehension' on language (which poststructuralism identifies as the way that 'Western thought […] comprehends, seizes, or consumes what is other to it and so reduces the other to itself, to the same'), the manifestation of the 'trace' in testimony is a manifestation of 'an event, a date, a memory'.[14] For Derrida, the experience of the author-witness (of 'the fundamentally fragile corporeal existence') thus constitutes an authority which is made known to us, but which cannot be schematised as it exceeds the limits of representation, of thought itself.[15] Clarifying his relation to the 'linguistic turn' in twentieth-century philosophy, Derrida explains how the authority of the trace forms the bedrock of his thought: 'there is a point where the authority of final jurisdiction is neither rhetorical nor linguistic, nor even discursive. The notion of the trace or of the text is introduced to mark the limits of the linguistic turn.'[16]

The broad centring of authority in personal experience (or in the trace of that experience) which characterises diverse methodological approaches to testimonial literature, from humanism to postmodernism (which Eaglestone anyhow regards as 'a humanism beyond humanism'), has increasingly come to extend, as Sue Vice notes, to all areas of Holocaust writing: '"Authority" appears to be conferred on a writer if they can be shown to have a connection with the events they are describing'.[17] In a sphere where readers are 'suspicious of the motives of outsiders, who might have improper reasons for choosing this subject', authority has therefore tended to be withheld from writers with no direct biographical connection to events, such as those whose work

forms the focus of this study: John Berryman, Sylvia Plath and W. D. Snodgrass.[18] This perceived lack of authority does not simply relate to matters of interpretation; it extends to the author's very right to write. In *Elizabeth Costello* (2003), J. M. Coetzee's protagonist gives a lecture which begins by covering the 'familiar ground' of 'authorship and authority', and in particular the

> claims made by poets over the ages to speak a higher truth, a truth whose authority lies in revelation, and their further claim, in Romantic times, which happen to have been times of unparalleled geographical exploration, of a right to venture into forbidden or tabooed places.[19]

It is this latter right to explore that many, including Elizabeth Costello, question in the light of the Holocaust; for these real and fictional critics, the landscapes of atrocity cannot, or should not, be imagined by those who were not there. Thus the now canonical Holocaust verse of Plath, for example, was repeatedly criticised during the 1960s and 70s, not only for what it itself said, but equally for what its author *lacked* by way of the necessary biographical and experiential credentials: 'Does any writer, does any human being other than an actual survivor have the right to put on this death-rig?', asked George Steiner.[20]

Vice observes that the tendency to source authority in the Holocaust writer's biography has had the knock-on effect of turning the relation between author and narrator into 'a central literary category' of Holocaust writing, even in works that are self-evidently fictional (in the sense that they invent narratives about actual events).[21] In the case of my three authors, the critical over-determination of this relation has been heightened by the theories of 'extremist poetry' and 'confessionalism' that were linked to their poetry when it was first published - theories which also sought to elide the gap between author and narrator. Responding to the new forms of Anglo-American poetry being written in the 1950s and 1960s by poets such as Robert Lowell and Anne Sexton, as well as Berryman, Snodgrass and Plath, which enacted a dramatic stylistic and emotional break with the dominant 'impersonal' style of modernists such as Ezra Pound

and T. S. Eliot, critics were quick to praise these authors for transmitting what they saw as the 'pathos of absolute sincerity *in extremis*'.[22] In his Prologue to *The Savage God* (1971), an account of the events leading up to Plath's suicide, Al Alvarez argued that Plath was able to tap into her psychic life to such an extent that in her verse 'she felt she was simply describing the facts as they happened'.[23] As the 'extremist' poem followed from the bringing together of the writer's self with the imminent possibility of its own annihilation, Alvarez further suggested that Plath's poems and her suicide had their origins in the same elemental self-destructiveness that had turned writing itself into a life-threatening risk. In a memorial address, he famously opined that 'the achievement of her final style is to make poetry and death inseparable. The one could not exist without the other […] Poetry of this order is a murderous art.'[24]

For critics such as M. L. Rosenthal, this newly conceived poetic 'I' was also a kind of cultural seismograph that could register the aftershocks of the destructive events of the modern era. He argued that the genuinely 'confessional' poet placed him or herself 'in the centre of the poem in such a way as to make his [*sic*] psychological vulnerability and shame an embodiment of his civilization'.[25] Such theories, where subjective, psychological truths were postulated as the ultimate indicators of historical breakdown, understandably exacerbated the worries of those who wished to prohibit the use of the Holocaust as subject matter by those who had not personally lived through it. If the relation between the author and narrator was thought to be real, as Alvarez and Rosenthal claimed, but the connection between the author-narrator and events manifestly was not, then critics were clearly going to ask whether poets such as Plath were simply equating their own suffering with that of Holocaust victims.

Theories of confessionalism, which pay scant regard to the self-conscious artistry of poetry such as Plath's, no longer carry much critical weight. As Antony Rowland points out, since the beginning of the 1990s it has become widely accepted that many of Plath's famous *Ariel* poems from October 1962 are 'dramatic monologues

primarily concerned with the proclivities of different speakers', rather than self-aggrandising outpourings.[26] However, the question of authority in Holocaust writing remains relevant to discussions of Plath's work, as it had, I will argue, a significant influence on her indirect style of Holocaust representation. Moreover, the question of *how* best to read the poems has never really been satisfactorily resolved, even as the poetics of 'confessionalism' have been broadly rejected; if anything, it is *the* ongoing problem of Plath studies. Her work has been approached from any number of angles: biographical, mythical, psychoanalytic, feminist, existential and political, to name but a few. As Neil Roberts puts it: 'Sylvia Plath's poetry is beset by narratives, mostly not her own.'[27] And so, while in some senses I will simply suggest, as do Rowland, Susan Gubar, and others, that *historical* readings of her work are also viable, and that Plath has interesting things to say about the Holocaust, I will also, of necessity, try to formulate a way of reading Plath, arguing that the only way to take Plath and her contemporaries seriously as Holocaust poets (and indeed as poets *per se*) is, following McDonald, *to take poetry seriously as an authority*.[28]

This does not simply involve doing away with confessionalism. More fundamentally, it means detaching fictional forms of Holocaust writing, such as poetry by non-victims, from factual forms such as testimony, of which, as Vice points out, 'one might more reasonably demand an authentic connection between the author-narrator and the events described'.[29] Here Eaglestone's work is again instructive, for he locates testimony's authority in its specific *genre* (it is only by way of this genre that the writer's biography, or rather the fragile 'trace' of his or her experience, is made manifest), with genre being not simply a pigeon-hole for texts, but a way of 'connecting texts with contexts, ideas, expectations, rules of argument', and thus 'a way of describing how reading actually takes place'.[30] Eaglestone's sense of authority being something that pertains to the laws of genre can be extended to Holocaust verse by non-victims - only this genre is wholly distinct from the 'new genre' of testimony; for as

fiction, the life of the person who produced the work is an irrelevance, and as poetry, it demands that we ask specific questions about its uses of history, its connections with documentary texts, and, above all, its form, which is, in McDonald's resonant phrase, 'the serious heart of a poem' where 'such "authority" as poetry bears must reside'.[31]

This focus is, after all, something that the so-called 'confessional' poets were themselves always keen to encourage. Eliot's influential essay, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', and its concept of a poem's 'significant emotion' that 'has its life in the poem and not in the history of the poet', can be detected behind Robert Lowell's contention that 'a poem is an event, not the record of an event', and Plath's exasperation with critics who did not treat 'the poem *as poem*'.[32] Berryman also addressed the question in his own inimitable manner: asked by an interviewer how he reacted to the 'confessional' tag, he replied: 'With rage and contempt! Next question.'[33] So, engaging with what these poems have to say about history and the Holocaust will centrally involve refuting the idea that they 'seem to call for biographical rather than poetic explanations'.[34] Any poem, whatever its subject, produces meaning *as poem*: a point which tends to get lost in those readings which seek to uncover some region of ultimate authority lying beyond the work itself. As McDonald observes: 'In the end, there is nothing a good poem would rather be than the words it is.'[35]

This simple but fundamental idea informs almost everything I write in this thesis, from individual passages to the structure of the work as a whole, which takes the form of a series of close readings, and avoids literary analysis based on thematic groupings: a format which often obscures primary texts by squeezing them into predetermined interpretative frameworks. Indeed, beyond the evident fact of its subject matter - and in spite of editorial attempts to schematise the genre in anthologies such as Hilda Schiff's *Holocaust Poetry* (1995) - I have no real sense of 'Holocaust Poetry' as a particularly coherent or unified movement whose constitutive features can be prised apart and analysed, as Gubar, for example, attempts to do in *Poetry after Auschwitz:*

Remembering What One Never Knew (2003), the most comprehensive study of Holocaust poetry to date. Hoping to produce a taxonomy of what she regards as a 'unique tradition', Gubar is aware of the risks involved, as she herself puts it, in 'lumping together literary men and women with quite diverse backgrounds and projects'.[36] Nevertheless, this critical self-awareness does not offset the fact that her study *creates* an artificial sense of homogeneity through devoting chapters to generalised themes, and then, of necessity, focusing only on those poems which fit its presiding schemas. The result is that established poets, such as Berryman and Geoffrey Hill, for example, receive virtually no attention, while pages and pages are devoted to the work of minor, even unpublished, authors. There are well-intentioned reasons for this: 'If no one knows about these texts, I worried, would they simply slip into oblivion?'[37] Yet how a nascent 'tradition' is formed by the least well-known, the least *read*, of its practitioners remains open to question, as does the value of writing literary analysis based on subject matter, rather than on artistic merit.

Through the alternative approach of close reading, I do not pretend to produce a pure, immanent critique of each poem; and of course I also come to these artworks with certain questions in mind, above all those concerning the representation of the Holocaust. Close reading does, however, enable a sustained attentiveness to the dynamics of the poems themselves: to their words and narratives, the interplay between their form and content, their imagery, rhythms and sounds, their cross-references and allusions. It clarifies their relationships with their literary antecedents - which arguably inform their style and content just as much as their historical subject - revealing the impact of modernism, and also how specific links began to develop in the 1940s, 50s and 60s between survivor texts and the verse of non-victims. Close reading also shows how the work of different poets writing in the same literary culture came to share similarities of focus and technique: for example, I compare Berryman's 'from *The Black Book (iii)*' to Anthony Hecht's widely anthologised '"More Light! More Light!"'. This

said, I make no broad claims about the 'Americanness' of their work, or about the 'Americanization of the Holocaust' (other than where the poems seem to demand it, as is the case with the *faux* Hollywood glamour of 'Lady Lazarus', and the Americanised vernacular of *The Fuehrer Bunker*). These poets were all fairly familiar with each other's literary output, they were all versed in the same poetic tradition, and their knowledge of history came from similar sources. But their being American is only really of relevance in as much as it links to the sense of 'separateness' from the Nazi genocide that one finds in their writing. In this, these authors are no different from poets working in any number of countries after the war (and so it matters little that Plath produced her best work while living in England), and I will draw on the writing of many non-American poets throughout my analyses and in my conclusion.

The dominant concerns of these particular poets, when it comes to the question of Holocaust representation, tend to transcend national boundaries. That is not to say that these three writers always share exactly the *same* concerns, however. The Holocaust poetry of Berryman, Plath and Snodgrass is very diverse; lacking more extensive knowledge of their work, one would be hard pushed to imagine that they are popularly grouped together as members of a single movement. This is to some degree the case because they each wrote their Holocaust poetry at very different stages in their careers; as such, these texts are not always that representative of their writing as a whole. Berryman worked on what was intended to be a long cycle of Holocaust poems called *The Black Book* during the late 1940s and, more sporadically, during the 1950s, but the poems for which he became celebrated, and which won him the Pulitzer Prize for poetry, *The Dream Songs*, were not published in any great quantities until the mid-1960s. Snodgrass began writing poems for *The Fuehrer Bunker* in the 1970s, even though it was not published in its full form until 1995; but his most important 'confessional' cycle, *Heart's Needle*, for which he also won the Pulitzer Prize, was published in 1959. It is only Plath whose main output of Holocaust poetry coincided

with a creative peak, with 'Daddy' and 'Lady Lazarus', in particular, being key works from the important October 1962 period.

Despite the evident differences in the writing of these poets, there are certain recurrent traits or themes that are common to each. And so, without going so far as to endorse Gubar's sense of Holocaust poetry as a coherent 'tradition in the making', smaller claims can be made about those aspects of their verse which illuminate how the genre of fictional Holocaust poetry works - or at least how it worked as it was approached and then imaginatively reformulated in the poetry of these writers, from the late 1940s to the mid-1990s (as Peter Middleton and Tim Woods point out, genre is a fluid concept, 'a code of practice constantly under negotiation between texts and their readers, listeners, publishers, academics and reviewers').[38] Firstly, the poetry I will look at wholly resists the kind of conflation between author and narrator that has, as Vice notes, become a standard response to Holocaust writing, and which was also a key concept in the poetics of confessionalism. Secondly, these poems are all concerned to address their distance - temporal, geographical, imaginative - from the event they portray (though this distance is approached and formulated in different ways). Linked to this, thirdly, is the confrontation with the limits of representation which is foregrounded in the work of each poet. Fourthly, acts of identification are central: not between authors and narrators, but between narrators and victims of the Holocaust in the work of Plath and Berryman (though this is an act that is always either resisted, or subjected to an internal poetic critique), and between readers and the Nazis in Snodgrass's *The Fuehrer Bunker*. Finally, as a kind of umbrella category that encompasses all of the above, the poems either overtly or implicitly respond to 'primary works' of Holocaust literature, by which I mean historical studies which document events through eyewitness accounts and analysis of surviving evidence, and texts written by survivors (poetry, essays, memoirs, diaries) and even perpetrators. Indeed, contemporary Holocaust poetry is a genre which invariably attempts to come to terms with other forms of writing: above all,

with the 'new genre' of testimony. Given that, as Peter Novick points out, early in the 1960s 'Holocaust delineation was virtually absent', but 'by the decade's end it was ever present', Berryman's *The Black Book* can be regarded as a particularly precocious attempt to represent the Holocaust in art, and it was itself a response to some of the earliest historical accounts of the Nazi atrocities that were being committed in Europe: the so-called 'Black Books', after which it takes its name (and in which, I argue, its representative poetics are specifically grounded).[39] The sources for Plath's work are harder to establish, but prose accounts such as Eugen Kogon's *The Theory and Practice of Hell* (1950), and poetic works by survivors, including Nelly Sachs and Paul Celan, seem to have influenced her. Snodgrass's *The Fuehrer Bunker* was directly based on Hugh Trevor-Roper's classic historical study *The Last Days of Hitler* (1947); it is also a response to written and verbal accounts given by perpetrators: in particular, Albert Speer's best-selling *Inside the Third Reich* (1970), and Snodgrass's personal conversations with Speer, influenced his portrayal of the Nazi minister and the direction and tenor of his verse cycle.

This thesis works by analysing instances of the interplay between specific texts and all these aspects of the genre of fictional Holocaust poetry, demonstrating how 'works define genres, bodies of knowledge, and their rules', and, likewise, how 'genres, bodies of knowledge, and their rules define works'.[40] Centrally, I will show that these poems rarely attempt to reproduce events themselves, or to offer detailed documentary accounts; even less do they seek to *explain* what happened (other than in the case of Snodgrass, whose attempts at overarching historical explanation are, I will argue, a weak point of his work); as such, they should not be judged by the criteria which we set for more 'historical' forms of writing. These poems actually assume, rightly or wrongly, that their readers know, in the broadest terms, what took place during the Holocaust; so rather than trying to reproduce facts, or to elucidate causes, what they offer instead is *a critical reflection on our reception of those facts*, asking how we might construe

meaning from them, and what kind of place they should have in art. By taking poetry seriously as an authority, we see how these works have an innate capacity to generate commentaries on their own praxis - something which was rarely exploited so regularly or so fully in other artistic media until at least the 1990s. Combining narrative with visual and sonic forms of making and breaking meaning, poems which are thought to abuse the Holocaust more commonly offer critiques of the forms of identification or appropriation that their narrators indulge in. Even themes such as commercialisation and the exploitation of suffering - not something from which poets, compared to, say, prose authors or filmmakers, have traditionally profited all that much (at least in a financial sense) - are constant preoccupations of artworks which are prone to intense self-scrutiny by virtue of their form. Before postmodernism and the rise of self-reflexive narration, poetry after and about Auschwitz had, in the work of these writers at least, already addressed the need for writing to become meta-fictional, as though talking about the Holocaust necessarily meant that poetry also had to talk about itself. This is not a testament to the self-absorbed sensibilities of poets, but rather to poetry's double vision: its way of looking outwards onto history through the internality of genre, which is to say its own specific mode of writing and reading, even of thinking.

1

The Black Book:

John Berryman's Holocaust Requiem

INTRODUCTION

In 1948 John Berryman began working on what he termed 'a suite of poems' about the Nazi Holocaust that he planned to publish as a single volume called *The Black Book*.[41] The collection was to be comprised of forty-two sections, and would be illustrated with water-colours or drawings by one of his former students, Tony Clark.[42] Berryman had a highly ambitious, almost monumental conception of what the project might ultimately achieve as both a poetic and a cultural document, going so far as to call it 'a diagnostic, an historical survey'.[43] The very title of the collection was itself a reflection of the historical import that he attached to it: the many so-called 'Black Books' that emerged during and immediately after the war were written primarily as evidentiary sources. One such book that Berryman drew on, *The Black Book of Poland* (1942), published by the Ministry of Information of the Polish Government-in-exile, was 'so named because of the black record of German barbarism from the close of the war in Poland, which ended October 6, 1939, until the end of June, 1941'.[44] It sought to offer a comprehensive account of the atrocities committed in this period, bringing together 'the most astounding collection of documents ever presented both in text and photographic

reproduction. Long after the war is over,' the editors wrote, 'this testimonial of unspeakable barbarity will stand as a monument of accusation.'[45]

For his own *The Black Book*, Berryman hoped to create a unified poetic sequence; this is underscored by the extensive notes and drafts that he made, which suggest that many of the planned poems would be created of necessity as he sought to fill in the gaps of an ordering, and ever-evolving, master narrative. Hand-written sheets make diverse suggestions as to what this master narrative might have been: for example, he describes his intention to 'parody [the] Mass of Dead', noting that the volume could take a 'Mass-form; post-Corbiﬡre style'.[46] Elsewhere he suggests a 'Requiem form', and there actually exists a plan for the sequence which is based on the structure of Mozart's *Requiem*.[47] Berryman's version, however, was to have had an extra section: in the plan this stands slightly adrift from the previous twelve parts, forming a kind of phantom coda in which the poet asks: 'And where does horror winter? I sleep, I sleep/ If all my friends burned, or I turn inside out.'[48] Furthermore, at its inception Berryman saw *The Black Book* as the first section of an even more ambitious poetic sequence that was to be based on *The Divine Comedy*: it would be a kind of *Inferno*, with *Homage to Mistress Bradstreet* and 'Scholars at the Orchid Pavilion' providing equivalents for *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso* respectively.[49]

Four sections of the collection were published in *Poetry* magazine in January 1950, and three sections were later included in the short work *His Thought Made Pockets & the Plane Buckt* (1958).[50] However, by around 1 April 1949 Berryman had stopped working on *The Black Book*; despite sporadic attempts to return to it in the 1950s, the sequence was never completed.[51] In an interview Berryman ascribed his decision to abandon the project to the emotional strain involved in writing about such distressing subject-matter, conceding: 'I just found I couldn't take it. The sections published…are unrelievedly horrible. I wasn't able at this time … to find any way of making palatable the monstrosity of the thing which obsessed me.'[52] Berryman's

inability to subject himself and his readers to unmitigated horror is wholly understandable; yet he spent many months planning, and writing lyrics for, *The Black Book*, and the long history of his work on the project suggests that his failure to complete it had procedural, as well as psychological, origins. Indeed poetic procedure and psychology seem to have become increasingly interfused as the project developed, with Berryman's inability to settle on a definite final structure (which anticipates the trouble he would have ordering *The Dream Songs* (1969)) reflecting a preoccupation with the psychology and historicity of form that may have placed internal halters on his vast outward ambition.

In his *The Life of John Berryman* (1982) John Haffenden further notes that on the day he abandoned the volume, 'Berryman wept on reading about the murder of the Polish professors in *The Black Book of Poland*'.[53] Berryman's journals, on which Haffenden based his account, are currently unavailable to scholars, but it seems that Berryman was moved by a description of the murder of professors from the University of Cracow: a passage which would have had a striking resonance with his own life and work.[54] A chapter called 'Destruction of Intellectual Classes' records a sequence of events which began on 6 November 1939, when the Cracow professors, having been gathered together by the Nazis for a meeting at which they believed they were going to discuss 'The attitude of the German Authorities to Science and Teaching', were summarily arrested. Seven of the older staff were set free, but the remaining one hundred and sixty-seven academics, along with five students who were arrested by mistake, were deported to Breslau, without being allowed to take leave of their families. From there they were sent to the concentration camp of Oranienburg-Sachsenhausen, where conditions were shocking:

> Their only food consisted of *ersatz* bread and turnip soup. The hutments were unheated; the windows were open all day, in spite of the severe frosts of that winter, 1939-40. The professors were deprived of warm clothing and compelled to wear ducks [a type of trouser made of linen or cotton]. They were not

allowed books, paper or pencils. They slept in pairs on a hard wooden bed, head to foot.

Every day they were subjected to tortures. One of the worst consisted in giving them several hot shower baths in the course of the day and then making them stand outside in the frost, in their thin ducks, for half an hour without moving. Several times a day they were summoned to roll-call and made to stand motionless at attention, being reviled and beaten. These **beatings were systematic.** Some professors were constantly bleeding from the blows they had received. Aged scholars were **struck in the face,** and if they were sick were not allowed the most elementary medical attention. Priests and professors of Jewish origin were shut up with criminals. Their treatment was even worse.

Many professors were unable to endure such sufferings and fell into a state of nervous depression. **Seventeen died,** fourteen of them in the concentration camp, the remaining three after their return to Cracow.[55]

Of the professors who survived this initial spell in Oranienburg-Sachsenhausen, the majority returned to Cracow in February and March of 1940: 'all were in a lamentable state of health, and so changed as to be scarcely recognizable.'[56] Those who were not released were either kept at Oranienburg-Sachsenhausen, or were transported to Dachau. The fate of many of the professors was unknown when *The Black Book of Poland* was published.

One can easily appreciate why these particular crimes would have made such a strong impression on Berryman; when he read about them he was himself working as an academic, teaching at Princeton University and writing a book on Stephen Crane. Reading of the deaths of these professors in the historical work after which his own was named, Berryman would also have come across, on a page facing a list of the names of 172 members of the University who were deported to Oranienburg-Sachsenhausen, a large facsimile reproduction of a poster advertising 'A REQUIEM MASS for the seventeen Professors of the University of Cracow, who died in the German Concentration Camp at Orarienburg [*sic*] or as a result of their treatment there'.[57] The dates given by Haffenden suggest that this poster may have presented Berryman with evidence of a real historical requiem that caused him doubts about his ability to produce a valid or lasting imaginative equivalent. And while this poster alone is certainly not a categorical explanation for his abandonment of the cycle (he may, of course, have read

this section more than once, and the poster might even have served as a literary inspiration), it highlights a root conflict between history and poetry, between factual occurrence and aesthetic form, that was a central concern of Berryman's when he was writing *The Black Book*.

'The Imaginary Jew' and the Real *Recovery*

Although *The Black Book* was Berryman's only attempt to devote an entire book to the subjects, Judaism and the Holocaust preoccupied him for the duration of his writing career. It is striking that both his very first success in prose, 'The Imaginary Jew' (1945), which won first prize in the annual *Kenyon Review* short story competition, and one of Berryman's final works, the novel *Recovery* (1973), which he abandoned shortly before his suicide in 1972, each take Jewish identity as a central theme, exploring what it means to be - and, indeed, what it means *not* to be - a Jew, through focusing on figurative and literal processes of identification and conversion. These two prose works evidence an abiding interest in Judaism - and not only in terms of an 'obsession' with the Jews who died in the Nazi Holocaust, but also through references to Jewish religious practice and literature, and to postwar American antisemitism - that compounds the sense in which the failure of *The Black Book* can be regarded as a definitive lacuna in Berryman's poetic oeuvre.

'The Imaginary Jew' is narrated by a young writer from the American South, an ex-Catholic, who goes to live in New York in the summer of 1941. Early in his narrative he recalls how, having been born in a part of the country where there were no Jews, he arrived at university 'without any clear idea of what in modern life a Jew was, - [*sic*] without even a clear consciousness of having seen one'.[58] He continues: 'I had not escaped, of course, a sense that humans somewhat different from ourselves, called

"Jews," existed as in the middle distance and were best kept there, but this sense was of the vaguest.'[59] However, on learning that some of his new college friends were Jews, and that they suffered social exclusion as a result, he revised his opinions; realising that antisemitism was 'deeply established, familiar, and acceptable to everyone', he thus began his 'instruction in social life proper'.[60] He adds that in later years he even developed 'a special sympathy and liking for Jews', although he remained 'spectacularly unable to identify Jews as Jews', either by name or by physical appearance.[61]

The main narrative then recounts a recent argument which took place between the narrator and a rabidly antisemitic Irishman, directly recalling an incident from Berryman's own life, when he was accosted in Union Square in New York by an Irishman who mistook him for a Jew.[62] The narrator of 'The Imaginary Jew' recollects how late one evening he walked to that same square, where a crowd had gathered to watch two men debating American intervention in the ongoing World War. One of the men, a young Irishman, 'claimed that Roosevelt was a god-damned warmonger whom all the real people in the country hated' (here Berryman introduces an opposition between the 'real' and the 'imaginary' that is developed throughout the story).[63] When he argues that Roosevelt had wanted to involve America in the Spanish Civil War to help 'the Reds' the narrator interposes, pointing out that the American policy of non-intervention had in fact benefited Franco. To this, the Irishman contemptuously replies: '"What's that? What are you, a Jew?"'[64] He continues:

> You know why Germany's winning everything in this war? Because there ain't no Jews back home. There ain't no more Jews, first shouting war like this one here' - nodding at me - 'and then skinning off to the synagogue with the profits.'[65]

At this, the perplexed narrator makes successive, and increasingly desperate, attempts to prove to the Irishman that he is not a Jew at all:

> 'Listen, I told you I'm not a Jew.'
> 'I don't give a damn what you are,' he turned his half-dark eyes to me, wrenching his arm loose. 'You talk like a Jew.'
> 'What does that mean?' Some part of me wanted to laugh. 'How does a Jew talk?'
> 'They talk like you, buddy.'
> 'That's a fine argument! But if I'm not a Jew, my talk only -'
> 'You probably are a Jew. You look like a Jew.'[66]

The narrator appeals to the crowd, but they remain impassive. When one man reluctantly agrees with the Irishman, the narrator feels 'like a man betrayed by his brother', and is left to look elsewhere for a satisfactory retort to the Irishman's inexorable logic: '"You look like a Jew. You talk like a Jew. You *are* a Jew."'[67]

Despite the apparent impossibility of rational interaction with such a mindset, the narrator believes there is more at stake than his own, singular racial identity. The point he wishes to make is not simply eristic; and so while he says he would freely admit to being a Jew if he *were* one, and that he is not *ashamed* to be called a Jew, he continues to try to convince the Irishman of his error:

> I felt that everything for everyone there depended on my proving him wrong. If *once* this evil for which we have not even a name could be exposed to the rest of man as empty - if I could *prove* I was not a Jew - it would fall to the ground, neither would anyone else be a Jew to be accused. Then it would be trampled on. Fascist America was at stake.[68]

Yet when the incensed Irishman finally asks him for the ultimate evidence of his non-Jewishness - '"Are you cut?"' - the narrator is thrown into a state of confusion and perceptual disorientation.[69] Unable to reply, he withdraws from the crowd: 'I was tired to the marrow […] Heavier and heavier appeared to me to press upon us in the fading night our general guilt.'[70]

Berryman's story concludes with a short postscript, separated from the main body of the text by a line break:

> In the days following, as my resentment died, I saw that I had not been a victim altogether unjustly. My persecutors were right: I was a Jew. The imaginary Jew I was was as real as the imaginary Jew hunted down, on other nights and days,

in a real Jew. Every murderer strikes the mirror, the lash of the torturer falls on the mirror and cuts the real image, and the real and the imaginary blood flow down together.[71]

In this conclusion Berryman outlines what would, in later years, become a conventional model for explaining the psychology of the antisemite. His assertion that the murderer 'strikes the mirror' - implying that the homicidal impulse arises when the murderer's self-loathing is projected onto an arbitrary victim who is punished instead of the self - exactly anticipates psychoanalytic accounts of the cognitive dynamics of SS men and women working in the concentration camps. This theory was advanced by Bruno Bettelheim, for example, himself a prisoner in Dachau and Buchenwald:

> The SS, by externalizing their own undesirable tendencies and projecting them into the stereotyped picture of, for example, the Jew, tried to shake off their own inner conflicts. The anti-Semite is not afraid of the comparatively insignificant Jewish individual, but of his stereotype of *the* Jew, which is invested with all that is evil in himself.[72]

However, if 'the Jew' is an imaginary concept that is projected by the antisemite, then there is a disturbing paradox at the heart of Berryman's postscript; for having been unable to prove that he is not a *real* Jew, the narrator happily adopts an imaginary Jewish identity ('My persecutors were right: I was a Jew') that is based on other people's psychologically determined perceptions of him. This is to say that after struggling to define what a 'Jew' is, in order to prove that he is not one, he comes to believe that he is 'as real' as a real Jew by accepting the imaginary definition imposed on '*the* Jew' by the antisemite.

Furthermore, Berryman's narrator is not claiming to be any old Jew; he is in fact constructing a quasi-Jewish identity through recourse to a particular figure: that of the 'Holocaust Jew'. Berryman's story begins with the narrator opining that the incident he is about to relay is of general relevance, and 'could have happened in another year and in another place. No doubt it did, has done, will do'.[73] The reference to Cain and Abel ('I felt like a man betrayed by his brother') and the epigrammatic postscript

combine to make the story sound like a creation myth of antisemitism, a Primal Scene for Hebraic victimhood. Yet the narrative makes several specific allusions to the Nazi persecution of the Jews: most obviously there is the date, which is the summer of 1941; at one point the narrator hopes to identify himself by his 'papers'; and there is also a reference to news of the 'German persecution' enacted by 'murderers and sadists' which was filtering into America.[74]

Hilene Flanzbaum has argued that in this story Berryman is suggesting 'that there is finally no physical marker of ethnicity. Rather, it is a state of mind, or - to analogize it […] to the life of the poet in the middle generation - a club one voluntarily joins'.[75] For Flanzbaum, in the post-Holocaust world 'conventional notions of blood ties in ethnic determination must be suspended', as should all traditional religious and genealogical construction of Jewishness; and it is Berryman's discovery of a radically open conception of a Jewish ethnicity that 'has no clear referent' that allows him to explore, and ultimately to exploit, newly available forms of 'metaphorical Jewishness'.[76] She argues that in the story, Berryman demonstrates a 'ready identification with Hitler's victims', with the result that the Jew becomes a 'handy trope for imagining the suffering and marginalization he [Berryman] feels in America'.[77] Similarly, James E. Young reads 'The Imaginary Jew' as an early example of how the Jew - specifically the 'Holocaust Jew' - was to become a literary 'archetype'. Yet Young sees the narrator's identification as being more restrained:

> Unlike other confessional writers who also identified literarily as Jews, and who also killed themselves, Berryman sustains a completely self-conscious awareness of the figurative nature of his Jewishness. In fact, as becomes painfully clear to him, it is precisely the point at which a figurative Jew is reified that the danger begins.'[78]

Psychoanalytic accounts such as Bettelheim's argue that it is an inner, 'imaginary Jew' that the antisemite seeks to expunge when he or she goes about murdering real Jews; thus the imaginary dominates, takes precedence over, and finally *constructs* the real.

Berryman's postscript suggests that he had much sympathy for such theorising; but, as Young points out, he also questions the applicability of this formula to a real genocide such as the Holocaust, and of drawing unqualified parallels between real and imaginary Jewish identities. Most strikingly, the narrator's closing contention that 'my persecutors were right' marks a significant *withdrawal* from the reality of his actual encounter with an individual (albeit a single member of a larger crowd), and the onset of a more paranoid - indeed *imaginary* - sense of a larger confrontation with many persecutors. One could read this as an implicit critique, by the author, of his own unreliable - or unstable - narrator; perhaps Berryman is here suggesting that there are prescribed limits to ethnic identity, and it is madness - in both a figurative and a literal sense - to transgress them.

While Flanzbaum contests, and Young upholds, the legitimacy of the Jewish identity that the narrator assumes in the story, they share the presumption that the narrator's imaginary Jewish identity is also that of Berryman himself. While such readings are always susceptible to the charge that they are founded on a category error - a failure to theorise the distinction between author and narrator - and on a failure to acknowledge the 'literariness' of the work (Berryman himself worried that the important final paragraph of the story might even have been 'a bit *too* literary' (my emphasis)), the story was, as I noted, based on a real-life incident, and anticipates the 'confessional' style of writing to which Young alludes.[79] We recall that M.L. Rosenthal defined the 'confessional' poet as a writer who places himself or herself 'in the centre of the poem in such a way as to make his [*sic*] psychological vulnerability and shame an embodiment of his civilization'; this idea seems pertinent to the language and representative logic of 'The Imaginary Jew', in which the narrator declares that the successful resolution of his own persecution might have nation-wide reverberations.[80] Berryman himself would also later come to see 'The Imaginary Jew' as a confessional work - though in a qualified sense - when, in his notes for *Recovery*, he traced the

history of his personal wish to convert to Judaism back to this text: 'In my old story ['The Imaginary Jew'], a confrontation as Jew is resisted, fought, failed - at last is given into [*sic*] *symbolically*. I identified at least with the persecution. So the 'desire' (was it?) is at least 25 years old.'[81]

Perhaps, however, this interpretation says less about 'The Imaginary Jew' than it does about Berryman's preoccupations at the time of writing *Recovery* - a novel about an elderly man's clinical treatment for alcoholism in which the narrator, Alan Severance, is often no more than a thinly veiled *alter ego* for Berryman himself. Severance is ostensibly a former 'Professor of Immunology and Molecular Biology'; but he is also a celebrated writer and renowned literary figure.[82] Many of the journal entries made by Severance throughout the novel are directly based on extracts from Berryman's notebooks (Haffenden describes the novel as being 'in large part a redaction of his [Berryman's] own hospital diary'): the passage quoted above, for example, in which Berryman traces his 'desire' to be a Jew back to the writing of 'The Imaginary Jew', finds its way into the novel in an almost identical form.[83] The original notebook entry dates to the autumn of 1970, when Berryman was being treated at St Mary's Hospital in Minneapolis, and was entertaining the idea of converting to Judaism. This is it in full:

> *All* has pointed HERE.
> I.   In my old story, a confrontation as Jew is resisted, fought, failed - at last is given into [*sic*] symbolically. I identified at least with the persecution. So the 'desire' (was it?) is at least 25 years old.
> II. PLUS after that, *The Black Book* - abandoned - obsessed - perhaps now take it up again? *My position is certain.*
> III. Horror of anti-Semitism.[84]

The extract from 'Severance's Journal' in *Recovery* reads as follows:

> *All* has pointed HERE.
> In my old story, *a confrontation as Jew* is resisted, fought, failed - at last given in to, symbolically. I [*sic*]
> So the 'desire' (was it?) is at least 25 years old.
> After that, the work on the Nazi doctors - abandoned - obsessed - perh now take it up again? *my position certain*.
> Unique horror of anti-Semitism.[85]

In such passages there is only the thinnest pretence of 'severance' between Berryman and his literary persona; to use a phrase that Douglas Dunn applied to Henry in *The Dream Songs*, Berryman's fictional *alter ego* here becomes 'as like the real Berryman as makes no difference'.[86]

If, in 'The Imaginary Jew', the young Berryman demonstrated an intellectual grasp of the ambiguity of ethnicity - a sense that, as Young puts it, 'it may always be a short step between figurative and literal Jews' - by the time he came to write *Recovery* he was ill, and fighting for what he considered to be his personal spiritual salvation.[87] As a result, he was more directly and urgently concerned with what Young calls 'the fine line between empathetic identification and actual conversion'.[88] 'The Imaginary Jew' and *Recovery* share many similarities, the most obvious of which lies in the way that their respective narrators appropriate rather speculative Jewish identities (as Holocaust victim, as believer); but this is no more than a character sketch in *Recovery*. There is also little or no association of Jews with the Holocaust in the novel (other than where *The Black Book* turns, rather facilely, into Severance's work on Nazi doctors). While Berryman writes in his diary that, when he was younger, a Jewish identity was 'given into *symbolically*. I identified at least with the persecution', when this passage is translated into Severance's journal, Berryman terminates the transcription in mid-sentence, after the solitary word 'I'. It seems that here Berryman wished to avoid comparing the fate of the Holocaust Jews with the predicament of his narrator (or indeed himself): a wealthy American alcoholic.[89] However, the novel's avoidance of the Holocaust means that those distinctions made in the short story between the 'real' and 'imaginary' elements of an assumed Jewish identity are never satisfactorily interrogated.

There is, however, at least one distinctive and original feature of the representation of identification in *Recovery* that is missing from 'The Imaginary Jew', which is Berryman's use of black humour. As he wrote to his ex-wife Eileen Mulligan

in 1971, perhaps with reference to a concluding section of the novel that was to have been called 'The Jewish Kick and the Fifth Step' (which has never been found, or else was never written): 'I worked hard to become a Jew myself last Fall in hospital - the write-up in my novel will kill you laughing.'[90] Above all, Berryman's careful *positioning* of his personal notes in the novel allows for the ironic recontextualisation of the 'conversion' material.

A noteworthy example comes when Severance alights on the actual idea of conversion. The journal entry in which Severance declares his new allegiance to the Jewish faith follows a chapter in which another alcoholic, Stack, who is in his eighth treatment, has been interrogated by Keg, the group leader. Stack has recently lost his job, and the chapter ends with Keg offering him a few home truths concerning the repressed resentments that might have been fuelling his drinking. Severance's journal entry, however, which he writes immediately after the meeting, begins, rather incongruously: '*To become a Jew* - the wonder of my life - it's *possible!* Rabbi Mandel is coming at 2:30.'[91] The juxtaposition of the previous scene, told from a third person narrative viewpoint, with Severance's self-absorbed first-person journal entry creates an excruciating comic contrast, and the apparently extempore religious conversion (along with the premature summoning of the Rabbi) tellingly undermines the outward control and bravado - and to some degree the sense of superiority - that Severance had been bringing to his treatments beforehand. As the journal entry continues, Severance's justifications for his decision grow increasingly ludicrous. Earlier he had lamented his inability to learn Hebrew, after lessons from his friend Peretz Bargebuhr came to nothing: 'I gave up. No staying power […] Same with Classical Chinese.'[92] But this failure, in Severance's desperate state, now becomes a positive advantage; to a list of the personal qualities and accomplishments that would make him a suitable candidate for the Judaic faith, Severance adds: 'my Hebrew effort - studies with Peretz Bargebuhr (write - still alive?).'[93] In such passages it is possible to detect traces of the tragi-comic

voice that had provided the foundation for much of Berryman's most successful 'confessional' poetry, not least *The Dream Songs*. Clearly here Berryman is at ease with his personal subject matter; having circumvented the Jewish association with the Holocaust - thus avoiding any kind of comparison, be it imaginary or real, between the alcoholic and the Jews *as* victims - he writes in a style that is wholly, distinctively (and sometimes almost too much) his own.

'from *The Black Book (i)*' or 'not him'

Both published selections from *The Black Book*, and all the drafts and notes that Berryman made for the collection, begin with the same poem - one which in *Poetry* went by the title of 'not him' (a quotation from the last line). When *His Thoughts Made Pockets* was published eight years later this title was removed, and the poem was called simply 'from *The Black Book (i)*'. The text of both published versions is identical:[94]

> Grandfather, sleepless in a room upstairs,
> Seldom came down; so when they tript him down
> We wept. The blind light sang about his ears,
> Later we heard. Brother had pull. In pairs
> He, some, slept upon stone.
> Later they stamped him down in mud.
> The windlass drew him silly & odd-eyed, blood
> Broke from his ears before they quit.
> Before they trucked him home they cleaned him up somewhat.
>
> Only the loose eyes' glaze they could not clean
> And soon he died. He howled a night and shook
> Our teeth before the end; we breathed again
> When he stopt. Abraham, what we have seen
> Write, I beg, in your Book.
> No more the solemn and high bells
> Call to our pall; we crawl or gibber; Hell's
> Irritable & treacherous
> Despairs here here (not him) reach now to shatter us.

This is a poem centrally concerned with ancestral lineage and inter-generational relationships: the first stanza (and thus the entire sequence of *The Black Book*) begins with the word 'grandfather', and the narrator evokes a specifically Jewish sense of descent through addressing the patriarch Abraham. The actual age of the narrator is unclear: while the final quasi-biblical lamentation implies a mature speaker, he or she has a child-like understanding of causation ('so when they tript him down/ We wept'); the diction is at first chopped, uncomplicated and abbreviated ('tript'); and the description of the anonymous 'they' who arrested the grandfather suggests that he or she has not grasped what happened exactly. As the first stanza develops, the short sentences and syntactic simplicity are retained, even as the subject matter becomes increasingly horrific. The grandfather is taken away to some kind of internment or concentration camp; but Berryman does not give us a realistic or plausible depiction of the man's life as a Nazi prisoner. Rather, the grandfather is subjected to grotesque, almost cartoonish, acts of violence, again intimating a child's-eye view of barbarity: 'The windlass drew him silly and odd-eyed'.

Narrative ambiguity is generated both by the narrator's naivety, and by the grandfather's evident inability to recount his own story before his death. He is described as 'odd-eyed', witness to a 'blind light', and the second stanza begins with a further reference to his sightlessness: 'Only the loose eyes' glaze they could not clean'. The poem's representation of 'sight', in both a physical and narratorial sense, is that of an uncertain faculty that is becoming increasingly obfuscated, with the 'loose eyes' glaze' hinting at the physical violence done to the grandfather, and also illustrating how the victim's withdrawal from the outer world prevents both narrator and reader from 'seeing' exactly what has happened to him, or understanding what inner destruction has occurred. In this way, the victim is figured in an essentially negative relation to his family and the reader; he is both 'him' and, as in the original title of the poem, 'not

him': someone whose terrible injuries and suffering are such that they place him beyond any of our familiar fields of human reference.

In this context, it is significant that the grandfather also lacks a human *language*: on his return he 'howled a night', like a wolf. However, here and elsewhere - despite this lack of a sophisticated vocabulary, and despite the literal and figurative forms of blindness that we encounter in the poem - narrator and grandfather retain the capacity to hear and make noise: the light 'sang about his ears,/ Later we heard'. Thus even as the poem fails to make clear sense visually, it does contain a certain *sonic* sense; and the sound of the poem, like the events it describes, is thuggish: 'blood/ Broke from his ears before they quit.' The metre is irregular throughout, but each line in the first stanza begins with either a monosyllable, or with a heavy, usually trochaic, beat ('Grandfather', 'Seldom', 'Later'). The end rhymes are also irregular, yet they too create specific acoustic effects. The first full rhyme is spaced four lines apart, and is relatively tame in semantic terms - 'upstairs'/ 'pairs'; but then, suddenly, the rhymes close in towards the end of the stanza, forming a macabre couplet that rhymes 'mud' with 'blood'. Equally, Berryman deliberately *avoided* certain rhymes, particularly those that would have produced an unwanted harmoniousness: drafts for the poem show that the final line of the first stanza, ending 'they cleaned him up/ somewhat', had originally read 'they cleaned him up a bit'.[95] The earlier version would have created a full end rhyme with the preceding line (which ends 'before they quit'); in its place, 'somewhat' suggests both semantic and sonic uncertainty, while interjecting a mannered Anglo-American voice which contributes to the pervasive feeling of narratorial awkwardness.

The sounds made in the poem are so extreme that they have physical effects: for example, the grandfather's howling 'shook/ Our teeth before the end'. Once again there is something slightly cartoonish about this response to the grandfather's suffering. There is also a dark irony in the reference to the family members' full sets of teeth, for the man's murder - which is only accomplished after his release from the unnamed

camp - must in fact prefigure the rapid accentuation of the Nazi persecution of the Jews, for whom the loss of teeth - through either malnutrition and disease, or as a result of the Nazi practice of extracting gold from the teeth of their victims - would become commonplace. The reference could also, much like the language that the narrator starts to use, be biblical: after the description of 'the loose eyes' glaze', the mention of teeth in the next line seems to parody the Old Testament code of 'an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth'. Perhaps it is even a rather grim allusion to Psalm 58, with its violent exhortation: 'Break their teeth, O God, in their mouth: break out the great teeth of the young lions, O LORD' (Psalm 58. 6).

These biblical allusions are reinforced by the framing narrative that concludes the poem, most obviously because of the religious figure of Abraham, who is the addressee of this complex and highly personal dirge. Given that the narrative now locates the speaker in a sort of Hell on Earth, the reference to howling that 'shook/ Our teeth' could be an allusion to a passage in the gospel of Matthew, in which a centurion demonstrates an exceptional faith in Jesus, who, in turn, tells the centurion, 'I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel' (Matthew 8. 10), continuing: 'And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth' (Matthew 8. 11-12). The suffering of the 'children of the kingdom' - namely the chosen people of Israel, the Jews - in the place of 'weeping and gnashing of teeth' to which Christ condemns them, arguably becomes, in Berryman's poem, an accomplished fact. The reader might almost infer that the Nazi genocide had scriptural origins, and that Nazi crimes were the literal fulfilment of Christ's own prophesy. Such a reading is supported by the way that all Christian ceremonies, such as its rituals of mourning, are summarily banished from the poem: 'No more the solemn and high bells/ Call to our pall'. Moreover, the narrator, a member of the tribe of the living dead who 'crawl' and

'gibber' like children, but who is clearly no longer a child (or child-like) him- or herself, specifically invokes the Old Testament tradition as represented by Abraham who, according to the passage from Matthew, remains a representative of the Jews in the 'kingdom of heaven'. As the narrator calls on the Patriarch to write in his 'Book' of the historical crimes that 'we' (him- or herself, his or her family, his or her tribe, and also the reader) have 'seen', the parallels with how testimony was recorded in historical Black Books such as *The Black Book of Poland* suggest that here Berryman was trying to provide a poetic equivalent, recording not the factual details, but the metaphysics of loss.

Such a reading of the poem's biblical allusions would suggest that the Jews are being represented as a people whose fate presents a challenge to the Christian God; and indeed the tribe of Israel actually does come to resemble the fallen angels of *Paradise Lost* in the final part of the poem, both in the possible allusion to the passage from Matthew (which describes how 'the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness'), and also directly through effects produced by the poem's form. The final clause's lineation is such that the first four words could be read as a self-description of the narrator and the rest of the Jews (whom he or she now represents, or who now speak collectively *through* him or her) as being, like Satan and the fallen angels, 'Hell's/ Irritable & treacherous', with the adjectives of the penultimate line assuming the status of nouns. The layout ensures that this false sense, or misreading, is actually retained by the reader as a more obscure 'full' meaning is developed through the last line:

> […] Hell's
> Irritable & treacherous
> Despairs here here (not him) reach now to shatter us.

A late switch to the present tense, a sense of rhythmic and syntactic urgency (the last clause is doubly enjambed, and covers three lines without being interrupted by any form of punctuation other than a short parenthesis), and the repetition of 'here here', combine

to represent the Jews' condition as being horrifically *present*. However, it is also precarious: they 'beg' Abraham that their story be told, even as they portend their own disappearance (Hell's despairs 'reach now to shatter' them); and the victim himself is enclosed in brackets, and is thus only visible in terms of grammatical and linguistic negativity: '(not him)'. Something immensely destructive is happening here; but it happens behind a veil that is at once historical, metaphysical and grammatical.

This apostrophe to Abraham - a narratorial apostrophe that could even be understood as being targeted from within the poem at Berryman himself, as a generative poet-Patriarch - is beset by paradox and self-doubt. Even the way that the narrator(s) 'beg' Abraham (or the poet) to write of 'what we have seen' in a 'Book' is undermined by the content of the poem, which constantly draws attention to the fact that we 'see' very little. In this way, the Holocaust poet highlights the representative difficulties he faces, now that he speaks of a truth whose authority does not lie in revelation - as J. M. Coetzee's Elizabeth Costello claims that it did for the Romantics - but in blindness.[96] In the final lines, the rapidly ageing speaker seems to transcend the limits of his or her fictive corporeality, as though Berryman sends him or her out as an emissary into an obscure threshold space, an interstice where he or she meets with - even *becomes* - one of those who 'crawl or gibber', finding an opening into their Hell. But as the narrator reaches this point, his or her vision of imminent annihilation warns the poet-Patriarch that even if he is able to lay the single soul of the Grandfather to rest by writing of it in his Book (the parenthesised '(not him)' suggests that the Grandfather is spared, perhaps because his death has been commemorated), there are still dead souls all around (maybe those whose lives remain unwritten) with invisible bodies and silent voices who are being destroyed by 'Hell's Despairs'. In this way, this final stanza - which refers to the Nazis' genocidal persecution of the Jews, but which also shows how that mass murder is vanishing *from within the very text which describes it* - forms a template for the entire

sequence, introducing the reader to the metaphysical and representative parameters within which Berryman would craft the volume.

'Rising Hymn'

The poem that Berryman originally positioned second in his various lists and drafts for *The Black Book*, 'Rising Hymn', has never been published, and was never really finished, or at least not in a way that the poet found satisfactory. On what appears to be the last complete typescript there are large hand-written crosses against the fourth and sixth stanzas, smaller crosses against the last lines of the second, third and fifth stanzas, and on the top of the page Berryman has scrawled the blunt directive: 'rewrite'.[97] There are, however, at least three very similar unpublished versions of the poem, with only slight grammatical and linguistic variations, and these at least give a good indication of what *type* of poem the second in the sequence was to have been, and of how the various thematic and historical concerns set out in the first poem might have been developed:[98]

> Yellow the stars & flashlights, blue
> Below a blue-legg'd girl is curled
> Beside the wire; the skin shows through
> The camps that cover half the world.
>
> Easy the night if one lies still
> Stopping one's ears and fails to mind
> Busy with one as a lover Chill
> Till memory and the day unwind.
>
> What song the sirens sing we know
> And heave each others' bodies up
> Well before dawn; all will-less go
> Who failed to sleep, not wail to sup.
>
> Who will complain when murmur must
> Such guest that instant entertain,
> Moving the spirit from its dust,
> Booted, dividing cheek and brain?
>
> Hard hard however, hard the day
> (The day is when one stands) and hard
> Yesterday is, or later, say,
> To see past the absorbing guard.

> God grant us strength until the sun
> First flashes on the frozen plain
> Signalling their day begun;
> If that time comes we'll ask again.

In all three unpublished versions the poem takes a traditional hymnal structure, using quatrains with alternate rhymes and tetrameters which are predominantly iambic. The theological associations of this particular verse structure obviously suggest a conflict between the form of the poem and its historical content - not least because the hymn is a Christian form, and the Holocaust a predominantly Jewish tragedy. Also, the hymn is traditionally used to offer thanks to a benevolent God; yet many would argue that the Holocaust offers a monumental disproof of the existence of such a deity. The sense of an internal antagonism between poetic content and what Hayden White terms 'the content of the form' is even implicit in the poem's title: 'Rising Hymn'.[99] In one sense this title simply couples the form in which the poem is written with a central schema in Christian doctrine: ascent (a schema which underpins the hymn itself, where human voices rise up, or are lifted up, to God). Stretching the religious associations of the word 'rising' a little, the title could even be taken as a reference to the Ascension: the 'rising' of Christ from Earth to Heaven. Yet the title also has a historical force of reference, above all bringing to mind the Warsaw Rising and the Warsaw Ghetto Rising (the next poem in the cycle is explicitly set in Warsaw during the Nazi occupation); also resonating with the memory of the ashes of dead Jews 'rising' into the air from the chimneys of the crematoria (this hymn is about an unnamed concentration camp), the title subtly undermines the redemptive aspect of the religious trope to which it alludes.

In this title, and in his extensive use of Christian imagery, Berryman echoes a dominant concern of *The Black Book of Poland* which, while never denying or knowingly eliding the suffering of the Jews, specifically focuses on the Nazis' destruction of a country of which ninety-three percent of its population was Catholic.[100] The book constantly draws attention to the Nazis' debasement of Catholic

establishments and iconography, and to the persecution of the Catholic clergy. The Nazi threat to Catholic practice is never regarded as implicit or solely metaphysical: it is direct and literal - a fact to which many of the photographs in the book testify. I have noted that Berryman even wrote of his intention to give his own *The Black Book* the form of a Christian Mass for the dead. This can be thought of as a problematic conceptual device, or a formal element of a metaphysical drama; yet, more simply, his use of such a form could be understood as a belated attempt to give public expression to tragic historical events through a religious form which was itself threatened by the Nazis. The *Black Book of Poland* notes that even when Priests were permitted to perform the Sunday Mass, they were 'compelled to offer a public prayer for Hitler', lamenting how the church, 'after a glorious revival of religious life during the last twenty years, has been forced to withdraw back to the catacombs'.[101] At the Wawel Cathedral in Cracow, public Mass was banned altogether:

> The German authorities eventually permitted two nominated priests to celebrate Mass in the Cathedral twice per week - on Sundays and Wednesdays. The Mass is not attended by the public but a Gestapo agent is present. The Sacristan and one Ministrant are the only persons allowed inside the Cathedral, from which they are escorted after the Mass by an armed soldier. The keys of the Cathedral and its treasury are in the hands of the German authorities.[102]

Of course the targeting of Catholic practice was never as extensive as the persecution of the Jews; yet *The Black Book of Poland* offers much evidence to suggest that the Nazi regime might have had a lasting and destructive impact on Catholicism in the occupied territories, had Hitler not been defeated. There is thus an implicit sympathy between Berryman's chosen form for a poem such as 'Rising Hymn', which is based on a mode of worship outlawed by the Nazis, and the wartime situation of both Polish Christians *and* Polish Jews - a sympathy that colours and complicates the more obvious antagonism between the historical content of the poem and the theological content of its form.

'Rising Hymn' begins by ironically describing the monochrome reality of imprisonment and death in a concentration camp in terms of a brightness that colours the universe. The reader is introduced to a world where meaning appears to be shaped by sensual impressions alone: 'stars & flashlights' are not distinguished from one another, but are instead coupled together because they are both yellow. According to Goethe's mystical tract *Theory of Colours* (1840), which Berryman is known to have read, 'yellow excites a warm and agreeable impression'.[103] This colour, suggestive of light and illumination, also implies spiritual revelation, as do 'stars', which are traditionally associated with the romantic wonder of the poet and the journey of the Magi. However, the curt co-ordinating conjunction '&' suggests that, at least to this narrator's eyes, stars and concentration camp flashlights are of equal value, and that a star-gazing romantic or religious sensibility is brought down to earth by a historical reality where poetry and metaphysics were merely artificial lights: a reality where meaning was immediate and physical, not abstract and spiritual. It is appropriate, then, that the meaning of the rest of the stanza is shaped as much by the reader's direct sensual impressions as by anything else, with the sound of the poem serving as a primary source of sense, as in the bruising, alliterative lines 'blue/ Below a blue-legg'd girl is curled/ Beside the wire'. Goethe's colour theory is again a possible source: 'As yellow is always accompanied with light, so it may be said that blue […] brings a principle of darkness with it.'[104]

This stanza bears a striking resemblance to the first quatrain of Randall Jarrell's contemporaneous poem 'In the Camp There Was One Alive', published in *Losses* (1948):

> Flakes pour to the black dead
> At Lasen, by the wire.
> The child, in his charred cave,
> Watches the shaking fire[105]

Berryman's and Jarrell's poems share a similar stanzaic form, and each makes reference to a child (the 'blue-legg'd girl' and 'the child, in his charred cave') lying by the wire at the perimeter of a concentration camp. In Jarrell's poem the child becomes the subject of a third person narrative. The consistent tone and narrative focalisation of 'In the Camp There Was One Alive' is, however, lacking in Berryman's poem; the child of the first stanza appears to become the subject of the poem, but the actual subjectivity being voiced remains ambiguous, not least because the transition from third person narration in the first stanza to first person narration in the second stanza is achieved through the awkward use of the pronoun 'one'. There is a further shift of pronoun in the third stanza; this time to the first person plural. Here Berryman uses simple language to describe, now more clearly from the girl's point of view, the fatigue of the prisoners as they are awakened for the early morning roll call. The line 'What song the sirens sing we know' alludes to a famous quotation from Sir Thomas Browne's essay *Urn Burial* (1658): 'What song the Syrens sang, or what name Achilles assumed when he hid himself among women, though puzzling questions, are not beyond all conjecture.'[106] Given the context, however, the allusion strikes a false note, and the pun on the word 'sirens' seems a little forced, especially as it is not developed in the rest of the poem, in which the predominant metaphysical schemas are not Greek or mythological, but biblical.

As with 'from *The Black Book (i)*', theological texts are central to this poem; in the ambiguous last line and a half of the third stanza, the syntax and diction even create a pastiche of religious writing: 'all will-less go/ Who failed to sleep, not wail to sup'. One usage of the word 'sup' given by the *Oxford English Dictionary* is '*to sup with our Saviour, with Jesus Christ, to sup in heaven or hell* (after Rev. iii 20): said of persons who have died or are about to die.' The fact that in Berryman's poem the dying are not able to 'sup' might thus imply that after their deaths they will not ascend to a Christian heaven. This interpretation is supported by an earlier, and slightly clearer, draft version

of the line: 'Who might not sleep and may not sup'.[107] This could, of course, be because the victims are Jews; it could also be because *no-one* could sup with the Saviour after Auschwitz, where the eruption of a living hell on earth rendered obsolete all hopes of heaven and divine justice. New Testament orthodoxies, particularly those relating to the afterlife, are also challenged in the fourth stanza, in which Christian burial rights and the idea of the ascent of the spirit come into an unholy association through a very earthly act of deliverance: the spirit is moved from the dead body, 'its dust', by being 'booted'. This provocative image is much weakened, however, by the fact that it comes at the end of a stanza-long rhetorical question that opens with the words 'Who will complain', leaving it unclear as to whether the whole stanza is ironically mocking Christian ideals of meekness and tolerance, or if it is obliquely advocating these virtues.

Opaque imagery and jumbled syntax are the norm in the middle stanzas of the poem; yet there is a sense in which the conceptual and schematic framework of 'Rising Hymn' might allow for such obscurity, if we accept that this is a poem that is fundamentally about the 'rising' of its own language. Thus, from the horrific confusion of 'stars & flashlights' in the first stanza, through the 'night' and 'Chill' of the second (which can be seen as a kind of 'dark night of the soul'), there comes a turn to God - along with the use of an appropriate language and syntax - in the third and forth stanzas. While doubt follows in the fifth stanza, which uses very simple, repetitive diction, the 'high' language of religious worship is restored for the Divine invocation of the final stanza, which begins: 'God grant us strength.'

Strangely though, this concluding stanza does not seem to draw on the Christian doctrine that provides the poem with its form and written style; instead it seems to be suggestive of a specifically Jewish religious hope, with the sun that 'flashes on the frozen plain' representing the belief that *this* world (perhaps even Auschwitz itself, which was situated on the plains of Upper Silesia) will be redeemed by the onset of the Messianic era, when humankind will be brought into a new world order. In *Basic*

Judaism (1947) - a theological text that Berryman studied - Milton Steinberg describes the Jewish dream of God's Kingdom '"shining forth" over all the world and in the eyes of all men'.[108] The awaited sun 'signalling their day begun' perhaps symbolises this day in Berryman's poem. The sudden theological transition, from a Christian to a Jewish perspective, brings to mind the critique of Christianity, and the subsequent affirmation of Jewishness, that is found in the first poem in *The Black Book*, and also in 'The Imaginary Jew' (in which an ex-Catholic assumes a figurative Jewish identity), which Berryman had completed just three years earlier.

Through the impulsive conversions described in these works, Berryman perhaps risks intimating that the Holocaust invalidates key tenets of Catholic belief, but not those of Judaism. This might strike many as a rather problematic sort of conclusion, and also one that remains fundamentally incongruous with the fact that the main religious tropes and narratives that Berryman employs to represent the Holocaust remain almost exclusively Christian (albeit that many of these tropes work ironically, or through systematic inversions). Moreover, an autobiographical reading might hold that both this poem, and *The Black Book* as a whole, fail precisely because Berryman's historical poetics are founded on a movement in his own personal faith away from Christianity and towards Judaism, to which he had long been attracted. As Young observes: 'Throughout his essays, poetry, and fiction, Berryman alternately idealizes what he perceives as Jewish traits - e.g., teetotaling, love of learning, and penchant for suffering - and then identifies with his idealizations.'[109] Such a personal apostasy would be an insubstantial and inappropriate platform on which to ground a fictional account of the atrocities that took place in the Nazi concentration camps; and even if this conversion were made in response to, or in empathy with, the suffering of the victims of the Holocaust, it could only ever lead to theologically and artistically dubious poems: those of an 'imaginary', rather than a real, Jew.

However, such an autobiographical reading, of this poem at least, is countered by Berryman's persistent use of the first person plural, which indicates that it does not simply describe a straightforward *personal* rejection of Christianity. Indeed, the narrative voice of both 'from *The Black Book (i)*' and of 'Rising Hymn' is never that of an individual 'I'; rather, the narrators convoke a collectivity, or, to be more specific, they speak on behalf of a family or a people, and seemingly with full authority to do so. These narrators act as vessels through which shared familial and historical experiences are voiced, and in doing so they approximate very closely to the narrators of the Jewish tradition, even as their narratives are channelled through Christian forms.

Classical Christian works that recount the epic journey to salvation through the archetypal narrative that we find in *The Pilgrim's Progress* and *The Divine Comedy*, for example, describe an individual's onerous upward journey towards God. These works are illustrative of a journey, or 'rising', that must be followed by every man on his own. The Jewish sense of epic poetry, on the other hand, originates in the Old Testament, specifically in the covenant formed between God and the chosen people of Israel, and concerns the trials and aspirations of a whole nation. As Stephen Spender writes:

> In the Old Testament, poetry is not an end in itself but the realization in language of a vision of life as old as the nation's history. Thus the traditional Jewish poet/prophet does not write simply as an individual artist expressing his exceptional sensibility for the benefit of other individuals. Instead, he is the voice of the people, a people for whom nationhood is religion and the individual but a fraction of the nation's millennial consciousness.[110]

Berryman's use of the first person plural, and his abandonment of the individualised narrator of the post-Whitman American tradition, suggests a representational poetics that is identifiably Jewish in character; so while he is highly dependent on theological, liturgical and literary forms that are associated with Christianity, he is also concerned to align his work to specifically Jewish narratives and ways of writing. This produces many internal conflicts within the poems, and may have paralysed a poem such as 'Rising Hymn' (which, we recall, Berryman wanted to 'rewrite'). What is important,

however, is that there are clear signs that Berryman was attempting to explore the possibility of a reconciliation between Christianity and Judaism (even those Christian forms that he does make use of in *The Black Book*, such as the hymn and the Mass, relate to modes of worship which reflect the communal basis of the faith), which was possibly the only way he felt he could formulate a palatable religious response to the Holocaust: through imagining a radically *inclusive* future theology. Referencing the hymn in its title and stanzaic structure, and using a representative form of narration that recalls the Jewish tradition, 'Rising Hymn' suggests that Berryman was exploring the many rifts *and* the many connections that emerged between Christianity and Judaism in the aftermath of the Nazi genocide.

'from *The Black Book (ii)*' or '2'

The poem that Berryman at first proposed to place third in *The Black Book* is the longest of all the completed poems, and also the most overtly innovative in its language and style. It has a complex, oneiric narrative, in which both distant and more recent elements of Polish history are mingled; it incorporates philosophical fragments and theological meditations; and it is markedly self-reflexive in its approach to historical representation. In this, the poem in many ways seems to consummate the specific aesthetic of Holocaust representation - that allusive and often arcane way of writing about atrocity and its outfall into the present, and into poetry - that Berryman adopted for *The Black Book*. Berryman himself seems to have rated the work quite highly: this poem and 'not him' were the only ones published in both *Poetry* magazine and *His Thoughts Made Pockets and the Plane Buckt*. In both publications the poem was placed second in the selections from *The Black Book* (this was presumably due to Berryman's failure to complete a

satisfactory final version of 'Rising Hymn'); and so, after originally being numbered

'(iii)' in draft versions, it came to be titled simply '2', or 'from *The Black Book (ii)*':

Luftmenschen dream, the men who live on air,
Of other values, in the blackness watching
Peaceful for gangs or a quick raid,
The ghetto nods a mortal head
Soundless but for a scurry, a sigh, retching,□
No moan of generation fear.
Hands hold each other limper
While the moon lengthens on the sliding river.

Prolong the woolen night□Solomon sang□
And never the soul with its own revenge encumber
But like a cry of cranes dies out,
Ecstatic, faint, a moment float-
ing, flying soul, or flares like August timber
In wild woe vanishing.
Blue grows from grey, towards slaughter.
(An Ashkenazi genius stoned Ivan; a sculptor.)

'Boleslaus brought us here, surnamed the Good,
Whose dust rolls nearly seven hundred years
Towards Sirius: we thank that King
As for the ledge whereto we cling,
Night in the caves under the ruins; stars,
Armbands come off, for which we could
Be glad but the black troops gather.'
So those who kneel in the paling sky & shiver.

*   *   *

Dawn like a rose unfolds□flower of parks□
Alleys of limetrees, villas, ponds, a palace
Down a deserted riverbed,
The Lazienki Gardens' pride,
Monument to a king able and callous
Who far Vienna from the Turks
Bloodily did deliver.
For foreigners, now, a sort of theatre.

One officer in black demarches here
Cupshot, torn collar by a girl unwilling
Native & blonde through the debauch
That kept him all night from his couch,
Hurts his head and from the others' howling
Drove him out for morning air.
Brooding over the water
He reddens suddenly. He went back & shot her. [111]

The poem begins by introducing the English-speaking reader to an unfamiliar foreign world through the use of an unfamiliar foreign word, one which Berryman italicises: '*Luftmenschen*'. Rather than leaving the word to stand as it is - which could suggest a direct refusal on the part of the poet to make sense, a refusal even to speak our language - the poet seems to offer a possible translation: 'the men who live on air'. '*Luftmensch*' (the plural form is *luftmenschen*) is in fact a Yiddish word (a composite of *luft*, 'air', and *mentsh*, 'human being'); the *Oxford English Dictionary* gives the single sense of 'an impractical visionary', but it also has a rather more pejorative usage, describing a person who has no definite occupation or income: someone who 'lives off air'. Berryman's translation evokes this sense of a class of people who do not earn a living in a conventional fashion; but it also modifies or adds to the sense of the word, as the men who live 'on' air could also be physically situated on top of air. The single word 'on' means that the men are attributed with both heavenly and very earthly characteristics, imbuing them with a phenomenological uncertainty that compounds and exaggerates the sense of otherworldliness which already inheres in the *OED* definition of the *luftmensch* as an 'impractical visionary'.

The *luftmenschen* in Berryman's poem are the ghetto's night-watchmen. However, the description of their 'watching/ Peaceful for gangs or a quick raid' while the 'ghetto nods a mortal head' gives a sense of their being an unearthly presence; clearly unsuitable for an actual security service, the *luftmenschen* perhaps offer the inhabitants a form of spiritual protection - of metaphysical *continuation* - by dreaming of those 'other values' that allay 'generation fear'. If this poem is set in a Jewish ghetto in the Second World War, then it is even possible that the *luftmenschen* are dead men who have returned to look over their former habitation. The sense in which these *luftmenschen* are 'men who live on air' might thus have an altered meaning and significance when we consider their association with the Holocaust; perhaps they are revenants, the ghosts of murdered Jews who, having been deported from the ghettos,

were gassed and released into the air through the chimneys of the death camp crematoria.[112] The imagery of the rest of the stanza obliquely intimates the killing process: 'a sigh, retching', 'Hands hold each other limper'. In this way, Berryman suggests a terrible new historical meaning for the word *luftmenschen*, implying that the Yiddish language has been infected with something of the duplicity of the Third Reich's particular brand of Newspeak, with all its talk of 'special treatment' and 'heaven blocks' - Berryman's observation perhaps being that in the death camps *all* Jews were turned into *luftmenschen*, and that the Jews literally became a people of the air. The meaning of the word *luftmenschen* is thus dramatically refashioned in the Holocaust context, with the original definition of 'men who live on air' giving way to a new sense of the men who died in it.

A recurrent observation made in Holocaust writing is that language cannot fully convey the horrific nature of the victims' reality. As Primo Levi put it: 'Just as our hunger is not the feeling of missing a meal, so our way of being cold has need of a new word.'[113] In Berryman's poem, the shortcomings of language extend even beyond the damaged definitions of single words: language in its entirety seems to have been thrown into a state of disorder. No word or image has a stable or singular meaning, and formal elements, such as syntax and lineation, work *against* each other, often leaving the reader unable to make even the most basic differentiation between the grammatical subject and object of a sentence. For example, it could be either the *luftmenschen* or the ghetto itself that is 'in the blackness watching/ Peaceful for gangs or a quick raid', and we do not know who the owners of the disembodied 'hands' that 'hold each other limper' are. This is very much a dream world - or rather a nightmarish world - and the oddly detached narratorial voice, and the use of ghostly half-rhyme, create a suitably narcotic atmosphere: one which ensures that the reader's sense of historic identity, action and space remains fundamentally impressionistic.

The nocturnal feel, and the imagery suggestive of spiritual bodies floating in the sky, spill over into the second stanza; but there is, at the same time, a rather bewildering switch to an entirely new narrative tone, voice and subject matter. Through this sharp break with his earlier style, Berryman draws attention to the poem's stanzaic form - the 'device' is laid bare, to borrow a concept from Russian formalism - which he uses as a principle of both continuity *and* discontinuity. Indeed the joins and rifts between stanzas come to embody the fractured philosophy of history that the poem as a whole espouses.

The first line, 'Prolong the woolen night☐Solomon sang☐', seems to quote King Solomon; yet it does not actually derive from 'The Song of Songs', as might be expected, nor indeed from any of the other biblical writings accredited to Solomon. A further discrepancy between the tone of the passage, which is heavy and prophetic, and the diction, which is rather light - 'woolen', 'faint', 'float' - means that the stanza lacks unity, making it read like some kind of scrambled metaphysical treatise, with the eccentric syntax blurring the argumentative logic of the single sentence running from the beginning of the first line to the end of the sixth. Such counteractions and internal restraints on meaning constitute the working principle of the stanza; sense still has to be construed rather tentatively, and requires a significant input from the reader, who must, above all, attend to the dynamic interaction of imagery and acoustics. So, for example, while the dominant imagery is metaphysical, and suggestive of the eventuality of transcendence, the sounding of the passage is tight, even claustrophobic, especially in the alliterative middle lines; this creates a feeling of restraint, forging a sonic hold on the staccato traces we get of the 'flying soul' that seems to be part heavenly body, part firework, an animus that 'flares like August timber/ In wild woe vanishing'.

The language of spirituality is abandoned altogether in the last two lines of the stanza, and gentle lyricism gives way to the language of atavistic violence: 'Blue grows from grey, towards slaughter./ (An Ashkenazi genius stoned Ivan; a sculptor.)' The anti-world of the ghetto, in which the dead take on characteristics of the living and the living

resemble the dead, now becomes the scene of complete moral and historical inversion; indeed, the most incontrovertible feature of the Jewish persecution - that of Jewish victimhood - is overturned, as Berryman describes in parentheses how an 'Ashkenazi genius', which is to say a Jew of East European origin, 'stoned Ivan; a sculptor'. Significantly, the victim is connected with artistic and cultural production: he is a 'sculptor', and thus crafts aesthetic objects out of the very material, stone, that his persecutor uses to inflict pain on him. But this victim is a Russian ('Ivan' was wartime slang for a citizen of the Soviet Union), which is to say a citizen of the totalitarian state that was ultimately to finish the political and social demolition job on Warsaw begun by the Nazis. This line offers a multi-pronged attack on the Polish Jews, figuring *them* as the ancient aggressors; even the reference to stoning is commonly associated with Christ's intervention in the punishment of an adulteress, where he condemned the barbarism of Judaic law by proclaiming: 'He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her' (John 8.7).

If the second stanza of the poem marks a distinct stylistic shift from the tone and voice of the first, then the third stanza effects a complete break with all that has come before. It is as if a fragment of an Elizabethan drama has inexplicably got tacked onto the poem:

> 'Boleslaus brought us here, surnamed the Good,
> Whose dust rolls nearly seven hundred years
> Towards Sirius […]'

This new speaker is like something out of *Tamburlaine*, full of the linguistic extravagance and bombast of the arch-conquistador. Given the historical context of the first two stanzas, this crusading speechification is perhaps rather grimly parodic of the Nazi drive towards Empire and *lebensraum*, but little else seems to connect these lines with the historical time and place of the preceding stanzas. There *is* a connection with Poland, however; the first crowned Polish King was called Boles©aw I Chobry, or

Boleslaus the Brave (a picture of a monument to Boleslaus the Brave that was destroyed by the Germans appears in *The Black Book of Poland*), and his ancestors were named Boles©aw II Szczodry (Boleslaus the Bold) and Boles©aw III Krzywousty (Boleslaus the Wry-mouthed).[114] These Kings ruled Poland during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, during the Piast era of Polish sovereignty, when the state undertook expansive territorial drives to the East - an era which, as Norman Davies has pointed out, is often evoked by extreme Polish nationalists as a time when the country was 'undiluted by German colonists, Jewish refugees, or Ruthenian conquests'.[115] However, there was never a King Boleslaus of Poland who took on the name of 'the Good'. It is possible that Berryman was here thinking of another famous historical 'Boleslaus': the fratricidal Czech Prince Boleslaus, whose murdered brother Wenceslas was to become the patron Saint of their country. However, as the Christmas carol recounts, it was the martyr Wenceslas, and not Boleslaus, who became known as 'the Good'. The most likely explanation for this onomastic confusion is that Berryman confounded epithets such as Boleslaus the Brave, the story of the murder of Good King Wenceslas, and the historical figure of King Boles©aw Pobozny (Boleslaus the Pious), who in 1264 inaugurated special legislation for the protection of Jews in Poland - the 'Royal Privilege' or the 'Statute of Kalisz' - which 'guaranteed to the Jews full religious and communal autonomy, including even the protection of Jews against the rule of other groups of the Polish population'.[116] Above all, this would explain the line 'Whose dust rolls nearly seven hundred years', as it approximates to the period of time separating the original enactment of the 'Royal Privilege' from its wholesale violation during the Holocaust.

The 'Boleslaus' of the poem, then, does not appear to be an exact reference to a real historical or mythological personage; while Berryman clearly draws on the names and stories associated with the historical foundations of the Polish state, he does so in a rather tangential way. This loose, dreamy concern with historical reality is again suggestive of the erratic movements of night thoughts; one feels that the poem could

still be situated in some deep, nostalgic stratum of the dream-world of the *luftmenschen*. There is, however, the sense of an awakening midway through the stanza, when these fragments of dynasties and legends, and the flamboyant, archaic rhetoric, suddenly give way to the much starker language and symbolism of the ghetto: 'Armbands come off, for which we could/ Be glad but the black troops gather.' The anachronistic quotation from the anonymous guest speaker closes with references which bring to mind the armbands that Jews living in ghettos (and elsewhere) were forced to wear, and the black uniforms of the SS - images that reconnect the reader with the original setting and historic present time frame of the poem.

The stanza ends with a single line which also seems to revert to the narrative voice and temporality of the first stanza, and which seems to affirm that the preceding passages were the thoughts or speech or dreams of the *luftmenschen*: 'So those who kneel in the paling sky & shiver.' Here Berryman develops the unsettling imagistic possibilities begun by the wordplay in the first line of the poem. The *luftmenschen* are now very clearly sky-bound, but they are still described in paradoxical terms: they 'kneel', a religious posture, but the sky - which one might connect with heaven - is 'paling'. Similarly, the figures are airborne, and thus they are presumably non-human, but they 'shiver', and so are still capable of human forms of suffering.

These first three stanzas are separated from the final two by three small stars: suitable symbols with which to indicate a break between what can be thought of as the 'night' section of the poem and the second part, which opens with a Homeric description of the beginning of a new day: 'Dawn like a rose unfolds'. The stanza is set in the Lazienki Gardens (Park □azienkowski) in Warsaw, and this is why I take the reference to a 'ghetto' in the first stanza to be a reference to the Warsaw Ghetto, as it would at least offer a continuity of place between the two parts of the poem.[117] There is, however, much to suggest that this second part is almost entirely discontinuous with all that has come before. For example, the water-bound Lazienki Palace (which is literally

'Down a deserted riverbed') and gardens were not built by any of the Kings called Boleslaus, as the reader might assume; they were built in the late 1760s by King Stanis©aw August Poniatowski, who became King of Poland in 1764. Stanis©aw August was a monarch noted for his ambition to transform Warsaw into a major cultural centre, and he hoped that the newly built palace and gardens would further this design; yet he is traditionally a rather maligned King, principally known for the rather inglorious fact that he was Poland's last monarch. His hold on power was always weak - he was crowned only as a result of the intervention of Catherine the Great of Russia, whose lover he had been - and he was eventually toppled as a result of the growing political might of the Prussians, who instigated the Partition of Poland in 1772.[118] This political fragility is not, however, reflected in Berryman's poem, whose terse description of a 'king able and callous' hardly seems to fit with the general view of Stanis©aw August. Moreover, during his reign Stanis©aw August's foreign exploits were negligible, and he had nothing to do with the deliverance of 'far Vienna from the Turks'. Berryman's reference here is to a battle which took place about eighty years before the rule of Stanis©aw August, when King Jan Sobieski finally halted the advance of the Ottoman Turks into central Europe with the successful defence of Vienna in 1683 - a battle which led to Sobieski becoming a highly celebrated King, even though the victory came at considerable cost to the health of the Polish military and state.[119] Sobieski, then, is a King who became widely regarded as being 'able and callous'; yet the palatial 'monument' to Sobieski is *not* at Lazienki, as Berryman's poem implies, but rather at Wilan∧w, on the outskirts of Warsaw, where he spent nearly twenty years building a grand palace and gardens.

Despite the slightly botched allusions to distant historical battles (it is hard to tell whether this was by accident or design), this remains an astonishingly tranquil stanza, one seemingly quite uninvolved with the historical context of the rest of the poem. There is very little in this eight-line quasi-pastoral pastiche to suggest that the

'now' of its narration is the volatile 'now' of wartime, other than the allusion to the historical defence of Vienna and the final phrase 'a sort of theatre', which puns on the word 'theatre' as a place of both entertainment and war. It is only in the final stanza, still set in the Lazienki Gardens, that Berryman makes any attempt to give a more direct fictional representation of the ever-present yet never stated subject of the poem: the Nazi occupation of Warsaw. And as he does so, he gradually abandons the whole aesthetic of grammatical and linguistic confusion and historical revisionism in favour of a much simpler writing style, and a more direct narrativisation of events. The story of a (presumably Nazi) officer's carouse, his subsequent humiliation, and his cold-blooded reaction, is relayed in a more straightforward language: a stylistic simplification which is made all the more effective and morally emphatic by the chaos that precedes it.

Anthony Hecht used a very similar, indeed almost identical, technique in his celebrated Holocaust poem '"More Light! More Light!"', which was written about two decades after 'from *The Black Book (ii)*'. Hecht's work also ends by describing the murder of an innocent Pole by a Nazi; as this death scene unfolds, his language is, again much like Berryman's, purged of archaisms and embellishments; thus a brief discussion of the poetics of '"More Light! More Light!"', and a critique of Hecht's use of historical sources (by way of recent theoretical approaches to Holocaust poetry formulated by Susan Gubar), might help to illuminate Berryman's less well-known piece.

Hecht begins by describing the death of a Christian martyr in a style that parodies the theological writings of the Renaissance - 'Nor was he forsaken of courage', 'And such as were by made prayers in the name of Christ,/ That shall judge all men' - reflecting the historical epoch in which the first section of the poem is set.[120] There is then, in the fourth stanza, a sudden leap in time and place to the Third Reich, and the language of the poem travels with it, becoming instantaneously modernised:

> We move now to outside a German wood.
> Three men are there commanded to dig a hole

> In which the two Jews are ordered to lie down
> And be buried alive by the third, who is a Pole.

Here the straightforward style and syntax suggest a kind of representative clarity; divested of rhetoric and metaphor, and using only full rhymes, the implication is that the poem now approximates to historical reality in a closer, more objective fashion. And indeed this stanza, and the horrific narrative that completes the remainder of the poem, is adapted from a survivor's account, taken from Eugen Kogon's *The Theory and Practice of Hell* (1950).

Kogon, a trained sociologist, wrote his book when the Supreme Headquarters of the Allied Expeditionary Forces (SHAEF) commissioned a study to assess the function and organisation of the Nazi concentration camps.[121] Kogon had himself been one of the first people to be arrested as an opponent of the Nazi regime, and had spent much of the war in Buchenwald, 'the first big concentration camp to fall into the hands of the western allies intact', which, as such, 'was to serve as the key to an understanding of the system behind the Nazi concentration camps as a whole'.[122] The passage on which '"More Light! More Light!"' is based describes an incident which took place in the spring of 1944 at Buchenwald, when an SS Work Detail Leader caught sight of two Jews 'whose strength was ebbing'. Kogon, drawing on an account by an unnamed eyewitness, writes:

> He ordered a Pole by the name of Strzaska to *bury* the two men, who were scarcely able to keep to their feet. The Pole froze in his tracks - and refused! The sergeant took a pick handle, belaboured the Pole and forced him to lie down in one of the ditches in place of the two Jews. Next he forced the Jews to cover the Pole with soil. They complied, in terror of their lives, and in the hope of escaping the ghastly fate themselves.
> When only the head of the Pole was still uncovered, the SS man called a halt and had the man dug out again. The two Jews now had to lie down in the ditch, while Strzaska was ordered to cover them up. Slowly the ditch was filled with soil. When the work was done, the Detail Leader personally trampled down the soil over his two victims.[123]

The episode ends when Kogon describes how, five minutes later, two more Jews from the same work detail were ordered to dig up the buried Jews; one was found dead and the other showed only 'feeble signs of life'; both were sent by the SS man to the crematorium.[124]

In *Poetry after Auschwitz: Remembering What One Never Knew* (2003), Gubar cites Hecht's poem as a key example of a genre she terms 'documentary verse'. While never reproducing the exact words of survivors, and remaining distinct from the 'poetry of witness', poets writing in this genre draw on testimonial accounts in order to serve 'as witnesses of the witnesses':[125]

> This reliance on earlier testimony, which I will term 'proxy-witnessing,' brings to mind legal venues [*sic*] of finding a way to testify for those […] who cannot testify for themselves. […] As in legislative or political representative bodies, in aesthetic representation the proxy functions as a licensed authority for an absent party. The proxy does not replace, but instead acts or speaks in the place of, another.[126]

By deploying archival material in order to arrest 'memories not yet assimilated into banal or clichéd reconstructions in public memorials and popular forms', poets such as Hecht, Gubar argues, take historical material and 'paradoxically, use their imagination to make it more palpably real'.[127] In doing so, they perform an essential mediatory function: 'poets of proxy-witnessing attempt to return what they have borrowed "sharper" than they received it. In this regard, the refreshing of testimony relies on verse.'[128]

Gubar makes much of Hecht's dependence on *The Theory and Practice of Hell*, observing that 'by repeating an eyewitness account (rather than inventing a narrative of his own devising), Hecht acknowledges that personal testimonial provides validation for those imaginative approaches to the Shoah that rest on its truth claims'.[129] But while Hecht's poem records the same shocking sequence of events outlined by Kogon - from the initial refusal by the Pole to follow the Nazi's orders, to the moment when the two Jews are buried alive - he concludes the narrative differently. Having described how 'a

riding boot packed down the earth' on the Jews' graves, Hecht adds that the Pole 'was shot in the belly and in three hours bled to death'. Kogon, however, does not actually tell us what happened to Strzaska; so here Hecht embellishes on a factual historical narrative - even as he strips down Kogon's language, removing the italics and exclamation marks, as if to suggest a reverential fidelity to factuality.

Gubar contends that this revision serves a valid poetic purpose:

> The crisis of Hecht's isolated trio contains no possibility of rescuing efforts or firsthand recounting. As if to dramatize Dori Laub's reflection on the Holocaust as a unique historical occurrence that '*produced no witnesses*', the poem's Pole is shot on top of the grave of the Jews. Burial alive is Hecht's trope for the fate of the Jews not only because so many Jewish people were literally buried alive during the Holocaust but also, as Shoshana Felman has explained, because the 'essence of the Nazi scheme' was to make the Jews 'essentially invisible' by confining them to hidden death camps, by diminishing their materiality through starvation, and by reducing their dead bodies to smoke and ashes. That the buried are alive, while the dying lie bleeding unburied: this misrule governs not the original prose but the concluding stanza of '"More Light! More Light!,"' a title that repeatedly echoes throughout the account of the episode and is used to encapsulate it as well.[130]

This justification for Hecht's alteration does not, however, sufficiently account for the fact that it is the poet himself who *creates* the historical absence - the lack of witnesses - which, according to Gubar, legitimates an art of proxy-witnessing. Gubar suggests that by figuring the Holocaust through the 'emplotment', to use Hayden White's term for the *kind* of story that is being told, of what she calls an 'illogical fable', the poet attributes a more general significance to the Pole's actions.[131] Yet by not referring to the Pole by name, by inventing a violent death for him for which there is no documentary evidence, and by using a form of emplotment which is presumably designed to *produce* the sort of 'blurring of the line between fiction and fact' that Gubar suggests characterises works of proxy-witnessing, the poet effectively replicates standard Nazi practice.[132] Hecht's decision not to name Strzaska also allows him to circumvent the most basic moral implications of his decision to invent an imaginary death for a real Holocaust victim. The 'generality' and fable-like qualities that Gubar discerns in the poem thus seem to

bear out Cynthia Ozick's suggestion that 'it is moral ease to slide from the particular to the abstract' (a cautionary sentiment which Gubar quotes with full approval when introducing her reading of Hecht).[133]

The legalistic terminology which Gubar uses to describe the work of a 'proxy-witness' who is 'appointed or authorised to act instead of another' cannot hold in the case of a self-appointed individual who only becomes the 'licensed authority for an absent party' by creating a fictional death for the witness in whose place he testifies. Her claims that the genre of 'documentary verse' exercises 'scrupulous vigilance about the specificity of particular and often eccentric experiences' is also contradicted by the representative strategies of '"More Light! More Light!"'.[134] Gubar holds that the 'poets of proxy-witness often acknowledge their belated dependence on after-the-fact accounts of extremities never in their purview,' and that 'by stressing their dependence on recalcitrantly alien eyewitness accounts, poets send readers back to such documents': Hecht, however, makes no mention of Kogon's book (he dedicates the poem to Hannah Arendt and her husband Heinrich Blǝcher).[135] Furthermore, in arguing that the use of testimonial material can transform a literary work into a documentary surrogate, Gubar does not sufficiently differentiate the project of the proxy-witness from that of the *actual* witness; for survivors have often spoken of their sense of surrogacy, of how they speak 'as witnesses of the witnesses'. Levi, for example, understood his own testimony as

> a discourse on 'behalf of third parties', the story of things seen from close by, not experienced personally. When the destruction was terminated, the work accomplished was not told by anyone, just as no one ever returned to recount his own death. Even if they had paper and pen, the submerged would not have testified because their death had begun before that of their body. Weeks and months before being snuffed out, they had already lost the ability to observe, to remember, compare and express themselves. We speak in their stead, by proxy.[136]

By describing a poet whose use of historical sources is appreciably inexact as a writer of 'documentary verse', Gubar risks obscuring the moral meticulousness of categorisations such as Levi's, and his contention that 'we, the survivors, are not the true witnesses'.[137]

In arguing for the cultural need for a poetry of proxy-witness, Gubar revisits Dori Laub's contention that the Holocaust was 'a unique historical occurrence that "*produced no witnesses*"' (or at least no 'true witnesses', as Levi puts it); as such, many of the worst crimes become dependent on those who were not there bearing witness to things they have neither seen nor experienced if they are to find a place in public memory. This imperative determines how, for Gubar, poets of proxy-witness must enact a 'poetics of anamnesis', with anamnesis being defined as 'a calling to mind; a remembering of a life before this life'.[138] The representational logic behind such a poetics does not really hold for those cases where *actual* proxy-witness accounts, such as Kogon's, already exist, and testimonial material is neither 'sharpened' nor 'refreshed' when crucial elements of its narrative are changed. However, a concept of anamnesis is readily applicable to many of the poems in Berryman's *The Black Book*, which take as their subject those unrecorded historical events where the witnesses themselves *could not have survived*. In the final stanza of 'from *The Black Book (ii)*', for example, a girl is raped by a drunken Nazi, who then shoots her: an event which is not documented historically in any of the *Black Books*, and which would not have figured in the history books even if it had happened exactly as Berryman describes. The only person with access to all the information given in the last stanza of the poem would have been the Nazi (or his drunken comrades, who would have been unlikely to testify to his act with candour); this suggests that Laub's definition ought, perhaps, to be slightly amended: rather than the Holocaust being an event that 'produced no witnesses', it was an event for which the only surviving witnesses were, very often, the perpetrators.

By describing an isolated death which forecloses the possibility of the victim's perspective ever being passed on, Berryman concurs with Terrence Des Pres's assertion

that 'we cannot *not* imagine' these fates.[139] Indeed these are the sorts of events that

demand to be imagined, being, as they are, almost totally irrecoverable other than

through fiction. Through his efforts to imagine unimaginable events, Berryman fulfils

the conceptual criteria that Gubar sets out for the poetry of 'proxy-witness'; and

Berryman, unlike Hecht, actually *does* refer the reader back to the historical source in

which his poem is grounded, through the title of his collection.

While this poem does not reproduce a specific incident for the reasons stated

above, it does seem to be indebted to a specific chapter of *The Black Book of Poland*,

entitled 'The Treatment of Women', which gives details of the generalised patterns of

Nazi abusiveness, describing the forcible abductions of Polish wives and mothers, and

the 'women hunts' that were organised in occupied cities such as Warsaw:

> During the war operations and the early months of the occupation, there were
> numerous cases of women being raped by German soldiers - cases which will
> remain forever unpunished. The German soldiers themselves have told
> witnesses, known to us, of incidents in which women were imprisoned,
> violated, and finally assassinated with a sadism that horrified even those who
> told of these crimes.[140]

After this introductory passage, there follow a number of reports of specific Nazi

assaults on women, some based on German admissions, some based on the testimony of

Poles. All of this testimony is partial and curtailed, and the catalogue of horrors listed in

the chapter has little in common with Berryman's geographically precise and subtly

psychologised description of the rape and murder of a blonde Polish girl. This particular

narrative is Berryman's own invention, even if the event he describes was an historical

norm. Through an imaginative appropriation of these incomplete or elliptic historical

accounts, Berryman adopts the retributive approach to history which informs a genuine

poetics of anamnesis, and which also underpinned *The Black Book of Poland*, which, we

recall, was to serve as a 'monument of accusation'. In Berryman's case, this approach

holds that even if such historical crimes go unpunished, they, or at least their like, will

not go unrecorded. The poetry of proxy-witness is thus, as Gubar observes, a

paradoxical form of memory, on the one hand stressing 'the disjunction between documentary sources and their own utterances so that the lacuna between "then" and "now" broadens', yet also asking us 'not to forget what we can neither recollect nor fully comprehend as we ponder what others have recalled'.[141] On a hand-written draft version of the poem, Berryman added a succinct note which encapsulates the inner contradictions of anamnesis: '<u>The Music of the Dead</u> < Life cannot even <u>remember</u>. No. Yes.'[142]

In the last line of 'from *The Black Book (ii)*', in order to render the complex duality of the form of memory found in the poetry of proxy-witness, Berryman switches from the historic present to the past tense: 'Brooding over the water/ He reddens suddenly. He went back & shot her' (a reversal of the technique used in the last line of 'from *The Black Book (i)*', where the past tense gives way to present tense narration). In this way, the very language of the poem ensures that 'the lacuna between "then" and "now" broadens'; even as the unimaginable, unwitnessed murder is given literary representation, a kind of blockade is imposed on the reader's comprehension of the central event of the poem. Before this last line, a *community of temporality* between past and present has been established through the use of the historic present, which means that, throughout the final stanza, the reader has effectively been placed alongside the Nazi, in his time and space. This remains the case right up to the point where the Nazi reddens by the water; but between that moment of shame or feared discovery and the subsequent act of murder there is a gulf that those of us who were not there cannot hope to transcend, a hiatus between cause and effect that we cannot decipher. The use of the past tense to represent the moment when the Nazi shoots the girl nudges his action into a place where we, the readers, and perhaps even the poet himself, can no longer quite reach it - the murder is placed beyond a common temporality of ongoingness and into a zone of finitude and incomprehension.

It is noticeable that in a poem such as 'from *The Black Book (ii)*', and also in Hecht's '"More Light! More Light!"', the focus is on a single murder, an isolated act of an individual's sickening cruelty, rather than on mass murder and the trans-European horrors of the Holocaust as a whole. In one sense this could be seen as a classic rhetorical strategy, with the poet encouraging the reader to infer universal conclusions from the isolated example; on the other hand, it could reflect the limits of Holocaust writing, with these narratives marking the maximum capability of an aesthetic form which can just about compass particular examples of the Nazi persecution, but not the totality of the genocide of six million victims. It is also possible that this focus on the individual is to some degree indicative of the broad epistemological biases of the postwar era, and that it again reveals the influence of the historical *interpretations* offered by the testimonial texts on which these poems were based.

Both Berryman and Hecht focus on the psychological perversions of what was, at the time, regarded as the stereotypical Nazi sadist - the brutal thug whose consciousness remained untouched by reason and light. *The Black Book of Poland* makes numerous references to the atavistic nature of Nazi crimes. For example:

> The 'New Order' which is being inflicted on Poland, and indeed on the whole of the European Continent, will be new mainly to those who have an inadequate knowledge of the Dark Ages. As far as the Jews are concerned, it is the ancient persecution writ large.[143]

Kogon also makes much of the regressiveness of the Nazi character in *The Theory and Practice of Hell*, describing the psychology of the SS in the following terms:

> It differs little from that of the Praetorian Guard in ancient Rome, the followers of Mohammed's immediate successors, the Mongol shock troops of Ghengis Khan, the Janissaries, the dervishes of the Mahdi, and similar bodies of men known from history. Only in the matter of social origins did the SS bring a modern note into the picture.
>
> Whether they were consciously attracted to SS ideals or not, the men who volunteered for Hitler's Elite Guards were without exception of a type in whom a primitive psychological mechanism was at work. Their minds were enclosed by a hard shell consisting of a few sharply fixed, dogmatic, effortless, simplified concepts underneath which lurked a flood of inchoate emotionalism.

They suffered from no internal conflicts between instinct and reason. They acknowledged no universally valid standards of conduct.[144]

As well as being characterised by a primitive and predatory psychology, Berryman's murderer shoots a 'Native & blonde' girl after some unspecified sexual humiliation. Speculation about the pseudo-sexual motivations of the Nazis, and the idea that the violence of the regime could be traced to the sexual appetites of the individual, were also common in the immediate postwar era. While the editors of *The Black Book of Poland* judiciously attribute the raping and abduction of Polish women to a deliberate policy by the Nazis to weaken resistance to the occupation, accounts such as Kogon's more commonly tend to suggest that Nazi licentiousness resulted from the degeneracy of the German mind.[145]

Berryman was thus writing the poems for *The Black Book* in accordance with broad hermeneutic frameworks that were emerging in the postwar era. These interpretations of the Nazi period predate the more contemporary focus on Hitler's regime as a social, bureaucratic and modernistic phenomenon which, following the Eichmann trial in 1961, was developed in such works as *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1963), Hannah Arendt's controversial account of the trial, and Zygmunt Bauman's *Modernity and the Holocaust* (1989). So, while on one level the narratives that Berryman and Hecht deploy seem to intimate a certain representative restraint - an inability or unwillingness to move beyond the tragedy of the individual to that of a people - these narratives actually derive from a cultural tradition which believed that the key to interpreting the Holocaust was the genocidal mentality of the individual. As such, the micro-narrative of psychological deviancy became a significant historiographical master-narrative of its time.

What is impressive about Berryman, though, especially given the short amount of time which had lapsed between the Holocaust and his poetic response to it, is that he reflects critically on this master-narrative even as he employs it in his final stanza. A

pertinent change made to the register of his diction suggests that, above all, he understood the risk of luridness. In the earliest published version of the poem, that which appeared in *Poetry*, the second line of the last stanza had read 'Cupshot, torn collar by a bitch unwilling'; when it was published in *His Thoughts Made Pockets and the Plane Buckt*, however, Berryman restored an earlier version of the line that dated back to his drafts, and changed the word 'bitch' to 'girl'. The insult can clearly be attributed to the Nazi; but by making the change nonetheless, Berryman tempered the sort of cheap *frisson* that is an habitual offshoot of psycho-sexual interpretations of Nazi criminality, and avoided any association of male violence with female sexuality (an association which Sylvia Plath would provocatively explore in poems such as 'Daddy').

It is also possible that a critical reflection on the very concept of a governing, explicatory master-narrative is in evidence in the last line of the poem, where the past tense time frame ensures that the poetic narrative is not passed off as a full historical explanation. Indeed, the line obdurately refuses any form of explanation whatsoever. In this way, Berryman ultimately seems to eschew a purely psychological understanding of historical atrocity, perhaps recognising that such explanations are themselves historical phenomena - above all, ones belonging to a contemporary world of comparative normality, making them unreliable tools with which to attempt to master the extraordinary historical crimes committed in even the outer circles of *l'univers concentrationnaire*.

The interplay between literary narrative and history is a central concern of 'from *The Black Book (ii)*'. In the overblown and rhetorical second and third stanzas, even basic names, such as Boleslaus 'surnamed the Good', suggest an implicit critique of the relation between narrative and history, as the epithet (irrespective of its historical accuracy or inaccuracy) already implies the overlaying of a grand mythology onto the past - one which will eventually come to replace the past as it really was, in all its complexity and dynamism. The passage which refers to that which 'Solomon sang', in

the second stanza, subverts the standardised, canonical narratives to which it refers in name but not in content, replacing them with something more apocryphal. In doing so, the stanza suggests that the past is not reducible to a single stable narrative; instead we catch fragments of metaphysical wisdom as they pass, like shards of lost meaning. The second 'day' section comes as a stark stylistic contrast to the rest of the poem; the language is simpler, and Berryman uses a more comprehensible syntax; but by continuing to muddle his kings and palaces, Berryman extends something of the deranged logic of the earlier dream section into the latter part of the poem. The confused historical references suggest that nothing can be retrieved from the past in its full 'presentness'; rather, the 'nightmare of history' - Joyce's phrase perfectly encapsulates Berryman's interest in the intermingling of psychology and history - is that the past is always buried beneath the narratives that we use to contain it, and, as such, it is always *elsewhere*, submerged in time and in consciousness. As a result, its return is always murky, disordered, and incomplete.

If this is Berryman's conception of historical return, then we might actually feel that by describing the Nazi's murder of the Polish girl in the past tense, he intimates that the murder he portrays is inexplicable and radically unknowable - no more 'real' than 'Boleslaus the Good', or the monument to Jan Sobieski at the Lazienki Gardens. In one sense, this is of course profoundly *true*, as this is, after all, a work of the imagination. However, this temporal shift, and the subsequent exaggeration of the gap between past and present, does not necessarily mean that Berryman questions the usefulness of this, or indeed any other, narrativisation of the Holocaust; for a stark counterpoint to this sense of obfuscation is made through the simple, anti-poetic *style* of the final stanza. Through a marked shift in representational technique, he challenges his own aesthetic of disorientation and confusion and nightmare - or at least questions the central implication of this aesthetic, which is that when the past is narrated it is always other than itself;

because here Berryman's language and style suggest that he has hit upon some kind of truth.

This stylistic production of an hermeneutic effect is brought about when Berryman's writing, like Hecht's in '"More Light! More Light!"', becomes, to use Berel Lang's terms, 'historical', rather than 'imaginative', in character. Lang has argued that historical discourse, by definition, 'stands in a direct relation to its object', claiming that its representative coherence is safeguarded by the Holocaust: 'the fact of the Nazi genocide is a crux that separates historical discourse from the process of imaginative representation and its figurative space'.[146] Yet Berryman's poem suggests the opposite; for historical discourse is what enables the poet to prise open a 'figurative space'. For Berryman, this is not a glib appropriation of documentary authority: he is not simply equating his own writing with historical accounts, or claiming a similar authenticity. The last stanza of the poem is, for the most part, still obviously poeticised: it uses a slightly odd syntax, eye-rhyme ('debauch' and 'couch'), and its diction includes neologism ('Cupshot'). Even the last line of the poem, which most closely resembles historical discourse, reflects the fact that it is a self-conscious dramatisation (or parody) of an historical style of writing through the use of the ampersand - a signature mark of Berryman's mature style.[147] This approximation to historical discourse is, however, a necessary subterfuge for a poem which uses *fictional techniques to document an historical truth*: that the individual murders in a genocide tend to take place 'outside history', unwitnessed and unwritten. By salvaging 'historical' forms of discourse from the ruins of speech through what remains a 'process of imaginative representation', the poet of proxy-witness retrieves invented memories from the ruins of the past, ensuring that consciousness of the outside of history is interred inside literature.

'the will' and 'waiting'

The selection of poems from *The Black Book* that Berryman included in *His Thoughts Made Pockets & The Plane Buckt* in 1958 does not feature two poems that were written for *The Black Book* and published in *Poetry* magazine eight years earlier. These poems, 'the will' and 'waiting' (none of the titles of the poems from *The Black Book* that appeared in *Poetry* were capitalised), have consequently been omitted from editions of Berryman's *Collected Poems*. The discarding of these works would seem to suggest that Berryman had either decided to remove them from *The Black Book* altogether, or, more likely (given the publication dates), that he felt that they were no longer the strongest representatives of a volume he had anyhow decided to abandon. Yet the rejection of this pair of poems in many ways makes them highly representative of a project whose significance is arguably to be found as much in its overall conceptual failure as in its limited individual successes. These poems are certainly more typical of Berryman's labour on the collection as a whole than those completed poems that were published in *His Thoughts Made Pockets & The Plane Buckt*, which, after several years of researching and writing about the Holocaust, numbered just three.

Both 'the will' and 'waiting' are short narrative poems told in the first person, and both offer brief character studies of individuals who have to face up to, and then in some way overcome, their fates as Holocaust victims. In 'the will' the narrator describes how a concentration camp prisoner, a 'frail vague man', takes his own life by electrocuting himself on the perimeter fence.[148] This act is not, however, portrayed as despairing, or even wholly bleak, as the man is able to reclaim control over his own life through his suicide: by killing himself, the prisoner asserts his right to live and die in the manner of his own choosing. So while the poem begins by recounting that the inmate had begun to 'whisper with himself/ At line-up, from the rear', it ends by describing how 'well beyond fear,/ He suddenly sang, sang, hanging on the wire'. In the second

poem, 'waiting', another prisoner prepares himself for some form of interrogation that he fears will involve torture, possibly through electrocution. As he contemplates the pain that he is about to experience, he struggles to establish a sense of his own reality, reflecting: 'Than tissue & ash/ I am more indistinct'.[149] Eventually, however, he seems able to theorise an approach to his fate that will allow him to transcend the pain that is to be inflicted on his body. The monologue ends with tentative resolve: 'I am almost ready'.

As the titles imply, in these poems the Holocaust becomes the setting for an interrogation of abstract philosophical concepts, such as identity and the self, providing an extreme historical context for densely imagined meditations on the ways in which the individual might resist political oppression and overcome suffering. In particular, the Holocaust experience seems to be used as a test-case for the major tenets of existentialist philosophy, especially as outlined by Albert Camus in such works as *L'Etranger* (*The Outsider*, 1942) and *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (*The Myth of Sisyphus*, 1942), in which the absurdity of the human condition, the imperative to revolt against this, and the need for the individual to create his or her own meanings in an overwhelmingly meaningless universe, are central themes. These two poems imply that the eternal nothingness of the existentialist outlook found its most extreme expression in the Nazi concentration camps; a contention that would appear to reflect the opinion of Camus himself, who is said to have told Elie Wiesel: 'I envy you for Auschwitz.' Wiesel has commented: 'Camus could not forgive himself for not knowing that majestic event, that mystery of mysteries.'[150]

In the version of 'the will' printed in *Poetry*, a sestet is followed by a second stanza of twelve lines; yet in all drafts the poem is printed as three sestets, suggesting a possible misprint in *Poetry*. The poem was most likely structured as follows:

A frail vague man, in whom our senses ached
With nothing, began to whisper with himself

> At line-up, from the rear, ☐
> We trembled for him, ☐ shook the scald that caked
> His skull, totting up phantoms that none could solve,
> Fag-end of a career.
>
> (Shadowless in a cairn, four lights. Farewell,
> The legacy trots off,
> A swimming moment of the stiff's desire
> Such decades since. Or nothing trots to tell
> Intestate once with love
> Pain brain stood up a bit out of time's mire.)
>
> He scrambled one night out
> And dodged between their lights far to the wire,
> Where he lodged. I suppose he crisped, dying in fire;
> A shot or so, a shout;
> But certainly, lifting our scalps, well beyond fear,
> He suddenly sang, sang, hanging on the wire.

The narrative begins with a description of a man who appears to be turning rapidly into one of the nameless, faceless *Muselm←nner* described by Levi in *If This Is a Man* (1958). In his autobiographical account of his imprisonment in Auschwitz, Levi recalls how those he termed 'the drowned' formed 'an anonymous mass, continually renewed and always identical, of non-men who march and labour in silence, the divine spark dead within them, already too empty to really suffer'.[151] Similarly, the concerned narrator of 'the will' describes how a man on the bottom is becoming lost to him, to his fellow prisoners, and also to himself. Unlike Levi's *Muselm←nner*, however, the drowned man of Berryman's poem stands apart from the collective body of prisoners: it is the isolated individual, rather than the broad mass of men, who seems doomed. The use of the first person plural emphasises the fact that the majority of prisoners are in a significantly better state than this man who they 'tremble for', whilst also perhaps lending a particularly Jewish sense of inclusiveness to the narration (as was also the case in 'from *The Black Book (i)*' and 'Rising Hymn'). The victim's Jewishness is also suggested by the scald that he has on his head, where a skullcap might otherwise be: a symbol of religious observance is here hideously transformed into a mark of physical pain.

It is very difficult to understand quite why, following this opening, Berryman bisects the poem's main narrative, which charts the victim's reclamation of his identity, and his rediscovery of himself as a volitional human being, with a hugely ambiguous stanza that he places in parentheses. Not only does it appear to be completely unrelated to the action of the poem; it is virtually impossible to say with any assurance quite what it relates to full stop. The reference to the 'four lights' that are 'Shadowless in a cairn' could perhaps be taken as an allusion to Plato's 'Allegory of the Cave'.[152] If this is the case, then the stanza could perhaps be read as a criticism of Plato's transcendentalism, as the explanatory logic of his parable - where knowledge is gained by tracing the appearance of shadows to their true cause, the sun - is negated: the 'lights' have become 'shadowless'. It is possible that this subversion of philosophical tradition is being conceived of as an after-effect of the Holocaust itself, and this might, in turn, link to the way that 'the legacy trots off': the metaphysical dualism advanced by Plato, who described how idealised 'forms' exist beyond the outward appearance of objects, has become untenable in the face of meaningless atrocity. The Polish writer Tadeusz Borowski made this exact point in a letter to his fiancée when they were both imprisoned in Auschwitz: 'You know how much I used to like Plato. Today I realise he lied. For the things of this world are not a reflection of the ideal, but a product of human sweat, blood and hard labour.'[153] Randall Jarrell makes a parallel critique of Platonic dualism in his poem 'In the Camp There Was One Alive', whose contemporaneity to, and similarities with, poems from *The Black Book* were noted in my reading of 'Rising Hymn'. In Jarrell's poem, however, the reference and implications are rather more obvious; he describes how 'The child, in his charred cave,/ Watches the shaking fire', but goes on to show how the Platonic celebration of philosophical wisdom is absolutely discontinuous with the situation of a dying child who 'understands/ Nothing'. The reader of Berryman's poem, on the other hand, is left to flounder in a stream of far more abstract negativity. This parenthetical stanza forms a kind of hermeneutic black hole in

which we find an obscure representation of leave-taking, before we scramble out, along with the 'frail vague man' himself, into the concluding section of the poem, leaving 'time's mire' and moving into the more comprehensible continuum of narrative.

The first four lines of the final stanza are marked by a degree of perceptual uncertainty - 'I suppose he crisped', 'A shot or so' - but this resolves in the final couplet, with the narrator's observation that 'certainly' the man 'sang, sang, hanging on the wire'. The hideous death song finds a sonic analogue in the stark internal rhymes and assonantal end rhymes ('out' and 'shout', 'wire' and 'fire') of the poet's own singing, and this link to the authorship of the poem perhaps reflects Berryman's overall celebration of self-determination, whereby the suicide asserts his right to be the 'author' of his own destiny. The only way that he is able to transcend his condition, and move 'well beyond fear', is by discovering (or rediscovering) his own will; the ultimate expression of that discovery is his decision to take his own life, rather than allowing it to be taken from him. It is, as Martin Amis puts it in his Afterword to *Time's Arrow* (1991), with reference to the death of Primo Levi, 'an act that asserts something like: My life is mine and mine alone to take'.[154]

In this poem, Berryman uses the prisoner's suicide as a means through which to discuss ontological questions and existential anxieties that were not solely limited to, or brought about by, life in the camps (but which conditions in the camps perhaps drew into much sharper focus). The suicide enables him to discuss a struggle for life that takes place internally in individuals who have never been anywhere near a concentration camp; the very title of the poem suggests that its main focus is on 'the will' as a universal aspect of human identity, and not on the particular restraints placed on it by Nazism. The poem 'waiting' is also a poem of generalisation and identification, exploring unchanging existential dilemmas by way of the heightened forms of terror inflicted on humanity during the Nazi era. If anything, 'waiting' moves even further away from a conception of the Holocaust as a unique event whose significance is

strictly limited to those individuals who were directly involved in it; indeed there is very little in the poem's narrative that directly connects it with the Nazi genocide, other than its association with *The Black Book* sequence. Berryman's concern is with the situation of all individuals who suffered persecution under the totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century; the poem's fictional brethren are thus George Orwell's *1984* (1949) and Arthur Koestler's *Darkness at Noon* (1940) and *Arrival and Departure* (1943), rather than a more historically specific and factually-orientated body of Holocaust literature. Yet in this, 'waiting' is, along with the work of Orwell and Koestler, very much of its time, as it is fairly representative of social and political responses to Nazism during the 1940s. As cultural commentators such as Peter Novick have outlined, early 'lessons' that were drawn from the Holocaust tended to stress the need to oppose all forms of totalitarianism through a kind of precautionary generalisation. It was only later, after the Cold War, that a greater cultural sensitivity to ethnicity meant that the Jewishness of the victims came to be considered its most salient feature, and the lessons of the Holocaust were reformulated in terms of the dangers of genocidal antisemitism.[155]

Berryman had written a very similar poem to 'waiting' a few years earlier, 'The Song of the Tortured Girl', which forms part of the cycle of 'Nervous Songs' published in *The Dispossessed* (1948). The poem is narrated by a girl who is imprisoned and tortured by faceless persecutors who lack any form of personal or group identity. She doesn't know why she is there, what they want from her, or even what has happened to her:

> The ceiling of that place was high
> And there were sudden noises, which I made.
> I must have stayed there a long time today:
> My cup of soup was gone when they brought me back.[156]

A division between the narrator's written self and the experiential self that is subjected to torture is also found in 'waiting', in which another nervous narrator loses their sense of their own reality, this time as they await interrogation:

Nearer, my heart, to me … My cigarette
Endures an apotheosis; I feel
More for the grey twirl than I mull or whet
God's promise … probably the butt is real.

Now I seem less so. Than tissue & ash
I am more indistinct, than fire and weed
Yielding to fire, as fire to the weed's trash:
Do pins & feathers kill? Can a root bleed?

Master my heart will nothing to my side?
Otherwhere, neither broods nor aches for me
Regitive by the iron door unterrified
Foully it leans. That hole, my mystery,

Which once its bolt, the muscle of their State,
Opened to drop me in, cannot keep shut!
Lancet intensities I anticipate!
Feathery movement twires about my thought!

The frontier posts, disfigured sphincters, spill
Invaders home; heart through the ribs returns;
How corn & wine return, transfigured, fill
Sleepy lands, our land. Ice on my brow burns,

Ebbing, blackfellow-dull, when the bolt shoots
Over the tigerish flood may I soar steady
Whither the latched starless & heartless roots
O need blindly night. I am almost ready ☐

As the narrative develops, the disintegration of the self, and of distinct categories such as inner and outer worlds, past and present, becomes so extreme that the speaker does not appear to have a concept of memory, or even of his or her own guilt or innocence. The fragmented style of the narrative reflects this temporal and ontological dissolution; in its style, the poem has much more in common with the abstract imagery and undefined menace of the middle stanza of 'the will' than with that poem's more transparent first and third stanzas.

In the first stanza, the world of physical sensation becomes enmeshed with theological texts and values: the first line parodies Sarah F. Adams's hymn 'Nearer, my God, to Thee', and the narrator's cigarette is attributed with such metaphysical importance (or unimportance) that the act of smoking it becomes a profane parody of

the Last Supper. Christianity is in fact roundly debased as a belief system: the cigarette itself 'endures an apotheosis', and is thus raised to the status of a divine object, leading the prisoner to 'feel more' for the smoke of his or her cigarette than he or she does for 'God's promise'. The cigarette is also a phenomenological benchmark, the narrator contemplating how its butt seems to possess a greater weight of reality than he or she does. Indeed, he or she is much more like the tobacco: 'indistinct' and eminently combustible. The ensuing sequence, in the first three lines of the second stanza, which suggests an exponentially increasing inflammability, emphasises the prisoner's physical vulnerability; the references to 'tissue & ash' and 'fire' evoke the burning of bodies in the crematoria of the Nazi death camps. It is through this extreme suggestibility of very banal language that the narrative becomes, at least to a degree, historicised, as though language itself has been burdened by the Nazi epoch, having acquired layers of unwanted meaning - even an entire system of dire resonances. And so what would otherwise be relatively benign nature imagery, that of 'roots' and 'weeds', is here used to suggest the crimes of the Third Reich - specifically the Nazi's horticultural approach to ethnicity and social engineering.

Zygmunt Bauman has described how gardening and medicine were the two central paradigms for the Nazi conception of statehood:

> Human existence and cohabitation became objects of planning and administration; like garden vegetation or a living organism they could not be left to their own devices, lest they should be infested by weeds or overwhelmed by cancerous tissues. Gardening and medicine are functionally distinct forms of the same activity of *separating and setting apart useful elements destined to live and thrive, from harmful and morbid ones, which ought to be exterminated.*[157]

The prisoner in Berryman's poem seems to see him- or herself in precisely these terms, as vegetal matter that will be destroyed by fire or cut from the earth, asking 'Can a root bleed?', though he or she struggles to envisage the real consequences of his or her own metaphorisation. The 'pins' and 'feathers' are the stuff of fiction (one might almost say of fantasy), and evoke the surreal, nightmarish paintings of the German artist Max

Beckmann who, in *Bird's Hell* (1938), portrayed a brightly coloured bird-person cutting the back of a naked man who lies strapped to a wooden table, while in the background a crowd of freakish bird figures makes the Nazi salute.

In the third and fourth stanzas, Berryman's eccentric, stylised narration describes the prisoner's predicament in terms of a Kafkaesque situation of entrapment; he or she seems to be locked in a prison building as a result of some indecipherable state process, awaiting a mechanised form of bodily punishment. In this expectation of his or her own elaborate vivisection, the narrator resembles a cross between the bewildered Joseph K in *The Trial* (1925) and the condemned man in *In the Penal Colony* (1919). A solitary individual, he or she becomes the target of an unwieldy authoritarian state apparatus. As the judgement of that muscular 'State' becomes imminent, the narrator begins to lose his or her mind, and their sense of the reality of an already precarious situation diminishes. Again the poem has parallels with 'The Song of the Tortured Girl', whose narrator finds herself in a situation of total disorientation, with her bafflement also testifying to the extreme illogicality of torture: '□I no longer remember what they want.□'

In 'waiting', because the narrative is so underdeveloped and the scene so minimalist, the narrator's condition of agonised expectation is made to seem representative of all people who, condemned to die, but never knowing exactly where or when, must serve their life sentences in a cold and hostile universe (and this is, of course, how many read Kafka: as a chronicler of humankind's unchanging condition). In this respect, the poem resembles 'the will', as Berryman again finds in the Holocaust experience a telling reflection of man's general affliction; yet while the narrator's situation is metaphorical and representative, the poem's diction is, as I mentioned, particularly resonant with the discourse of the Third Reich. The penultimate stanza might almost be said to constitute an anatomisation of the central figures and tropes used by the Nazi state to describe itself - particularly of the way that its governing

ideology of 'blood and soil' was founded on an Elizabethan notion of the nation as a human body. As Bauman points out, medicine and gardening were aspects of a singular metaphor that the Nazis used to rationalise their quest to sanitise Europe, aspiring to populate the land with a healthy and salubrious *Herrenvolk* that had rid itself of the disease-carrying Jewish *bacillus*. The description of invaders 'spilling home' might therefore constitute an ironic allusion to the great German retreats from the East that took place after the defeat at Stalingrad in January 1943, with military withdrawal being portrayed as a gigantic bodily retraction: the extreme outposts of the foreign campaigns are now 'disfigured sphincters' (to put it crudely, after expelling its shit the body of the Reich is left a crippled mess), while the 'heart through the ribs returns'.

Oddly enough, in this penultimate stanza the prisoner seems to describe the Nazi ideology represented by these biological schemas with something like nostalgia; there is a tone of lament as he or she tells of how the 'heart' and the 'corn & wine' that the Germans had intended to spread throughout the globe all return (although these human and arable ideals are now 'transfigured'). The homeland is described almost tenderly; the country which the narrator still calls 'our land' is 'sleepy', like a hefty organism that has recently exhausted itself in the drive for *lebensraum*; although, by contrast, the prisoner him- or herself remains, to the end, in a state of intense nervous excitement. He or she is almost feverish, exclaiming 'Ice on my brow burns', and in the final stanza, religious, political and sexual language all fuse to create a climax in which the prisoner shoots and soars skyward in some form of internal flight 'over the tigerish flood'. In a manner that recalls the syntactic drama of the poetry of Emily Dickinson, the final punctuation mark, a dash, suspends the narrative at this moment of agitated anticipation for prisoner and reader alike; action and meaning are delayed, placed beyond the terminus of the poem, ensuring that there is no end to the prisoner's or the reader's 'waiting'.

'from *The Black Book (iii)*'

The opaque imagery and narratives that we find in many of the poems written for *The Black Book* suggest that Berryman deliberately made use of a self-conscious aesthetic of anti-representation for the sequence: the poems - or sometimes just specific stanzas - are meant to describe something of the perceived meaninglessness of the Holocaust through their style. Through an occluded approach to their historical subject, they reflect the impossibility of drawing positive values and moral messages from the Nazi genocide, and the difficulty, or undesirability, of producing transparent poetic representations of the offence. However, the final poem from *The Black Book* included in *His Thoughts Made Pockets & the Plane Buckt* marks a clear departure from this anti-representational approach to the Holocaust.

The poem, numbered 'from *The Black Book (iii)*', was largely written over a decade after Berryman first began work on *The Black Book* (a hand-written draft of the poem in the Minnesota archive includes the note '16 July '58, largely remade'), which is to say several years after he seems to have given up hope of ever finishing the project, or at least in the grand form he had originally conceived.[158] Yet this is the only poem written for the collection in which Berryman makes unveiled reference to the most notorious features of the exterminatory process, particularly to the practice of mass killing in gas chambers. As the sequence finally reached what would seem to be the nadir of any journey into *l'univers concentrationnaire*, arriving at this point of absolute moral murk, Berryman's language and style become as clear as anything in *The Black Book*:

> Lover & child, a little sing.
> From long-lockt cattle-cars who grope

> Who near a place of showers come
> Foul no more, whose murmuring
> Grows in a hiss of gas will clear them home:
> Away from & toward me: a little soap,
> Disrobing, *Achtung!* in a dirty hope,
> They shuffle with their haircuts in to die.
> Lift them an elegy, poor you & I,
> Fair and strengthless as seafoam
> Under a deserted sky.[159]

The poem takes us through the phases of an execution process that was experienced by millions of victims, and which became common knowledge as accounts of the genocide circulated in the postwar years. Most of the well-known features of the journey are here: the initial dehumanising voyage in cattle-cars to a death camp, disorientation on arrival, the shaving of the prisoners' heads, undressing, and gas chambers disguised as shower rooms. This all too familiar narrative is, however, identifiably indebted to a specific primary source. The document in question is a report compiled from eyewitness accounts - given by both victims and persecutors - by Vassili Grossman, which outlines conditions in the death camp of Treblinka, and which was published in another Black Book - this one brought out just after the war - entitled *The Black Book: The Nazi Crime Against the Jewish People* (1946).[160]

Grossman's narrative, like Berryman's poem, charts the path to destruction trodden by the deportees, beginning with the moment when they arrived at the infamous fake station in Treblinka, and ending with their extermination in gas chambers. Grossman describes how, during the thirteen months that it was operational, Treblinka became a finely-oiled killing factory, a 'conveyor belt execution block', with each new train's arrival designed to coincide with the so-called 'liquidation' of the previous batch of victims.[161] As soon as the prisoners got out of the cattle-cars they were led to a square near the station, where they were immediately forced to surrender their possessions. They were then escorted into the camp through a barbed-wire fence. The men were told to remain where they were, and the women were ordered to go and undress in a nearby barracks. Grossman continues:

And again the square resounded with the word: - *Achtung! - Achtung!* It is at such a moment that the peoples' [*sic*] minds must be confused again; they must again be filled with hope, with rules of death given out as if they were rules of life. And the same voice shot out each word distinctly:

'Women and children are to take their shoes off at the entrance to the barracks. The stockings are to be put into the shoes. The children's socks are to be placed in the sandals, in the little shoes and slippers. Be neat.'

And then again:

'When going to the baths, take along your valuables, documents, money, a towel and soap … We repeat …'

Inside of the women's barracks there was a barber shop. The naked women were given hair cuts, and the wigs were taken from the old women. This death hair cut - according to the testimony of the barbers - convinced the women that they were being taken to the baths.[162]

The parallels between this passage in Grossman's account and the sixth, seventh and eighth lines, in particular, of 'from *The Black Book (iii)*' are striking: Berryman's description of prisoners disrobing as guards shout *Achtung!* at them, and then having their hair cut, before being led to the gas chambers while carrying bars of soap, all derives directly from Grossman's report. Even the evocation of the prisoners' desperate hope that they would not be killed can be traced to the testimonial document.

We recall that Susan Gubar has theorised how verse is the ideal literary form for the practice of 'proxy-witnessing', whereby poets bear witness not to events themselves, but to the depositions of the victims. In 'from *The Black Book (ii)*' Berryman used fiction as a kind of recompense for the unavoidable lack of testimonial responses to singular events that could not be witnessed. This particular poem, however, with its evident dependence on Grossman's text, engages with larger-scale events which have become known to us all. Gubar argues that poetry of this kind attempts to re-energise testimony through the 'deliberate placement of words in lines that do not necessarily accord with syntactic breaks; the use of rhythm or rhyme; the compression of a plethora of details into fewer and therefore more charged terms and images; the reaching for analogies, albeit inadequate ones; the suppression of logical, narrative links'.[163] I remain dubious of Gubar's contention that, as a result of such stylistic adjustments, poetry is able to make documentary accounts 'more palpably real', as this seems to foreclose the

critical disjunction between historical reality and aesthetic representation that has formed the definitive agon of post-Holocaust poetics. However, it is certainly the case that our understanding of source material can be radically *altered* when a poet makes innovative use of the sorts of stylistic and formal techniques that Gubar draws attention to. For example, the dramatic and acoustic elements of poetry can give documentary material a greater sense of immediacy than it has in prose; the sound of poetry can also be used to create an emotional terrain for the action described in a lyric: in Berryman's poem, the prisoners 'shuffle' to their deaths to the accompaniment of an elegiac iambic pentameter. Verse form also allows a writer to generate a more dynamic interplay of emphases; so when Berryman rhymes 'soap' with 'hope', he highlights the precise connection that the Nazis wanted the Jews to make.

Other than in the final couplet, almost all the figures and metaphors in the poem belong to the discourse and racial ideology of the Nazis themselves. As the victims leave the cattle-cars they are described as being 'Foul no more', Berryman here drawing attention to the Jews' place in the Nazi mentality as tainted and socially undesirable *Untermenschen*, while also showing how this conception of the Jew became concretised through practices such as the use of cattle-trucks, where Jews were treated like animals (like fowl). The reference to the soap that prisoners were given to hold as they were led to their deaths, and the description of how the gas would 'clear them home', also emphasise the way that the Nazis would stage their antisemitic construction of the verminous, disease-carrying Jew with astonishing literalism. For the Nazis, killing was above all a matter of hygiene (Zyklon B was originally used as rat poison). In a subtle interiorisation of this Nazi metaphor, it is not the Jews themselves, however, but rather their desperate *hope* that they would not be killed, that Berryman emotively terms 'dirty'.

It is not only what the formal elements of poetry add to documentary texts, by way of an altered focus gained through rhyme or rhythm or a fragmentation of narrative,

that can change a reader's perception of that material: what poets *leave out* in their revisions of historical documents can be just as significant, and 'from *The Black Book (iii)*' is a very good example of a poet acting as an astute editor of primary material. Through his critical selectivity, Berryman draws out particular elements from the documentary source, and these take on an added resonance when placed in a shortened poetic form; it is this process of purposeful narrative abbreviation that allows Berryman to show how the metaphors and paradigms that the Nazis employed in their antisemitic diatribes were practically implemented during the genocide itself. Another key difference between Grossman's prose report and Berryman's poem is that any form of extended commentary on events is noticeably absent from the latter. In his report, Grossman expands on the barbers' interpretation of why they thought they had to give victims the 'death hair cut' - they believed it was simply a way of convincing the victims that they were being taken to the baths - adding that the hair itself had economic value, and was sent back to Germany where it was used as raw material by the army and navy for such things as stuffing mattresses.[164] There is no explanatory or discursive equivalent in 'from *The Black Book (iii)*', and indeed a rumination on the economic and material uses that the Nazis made of the by-products gleaned from the destruction of human bodies would be improbable, almost impossible, given the limited space afforded by Berryman's chosen eleven-line elegiac form. Rather than extended explanation of, or commentary on, events themselves, what we do get in Berryman's poem, however, is a contemplation of the non-victim's *mode of relation to* these events: a self-reflective consideration of encounter that is explored primarily through the writer's control of poetic address.

The poem begins with a characteristic piece of baby-talk: 'Lover & child, a little sing.' The phrase 'a little sing' seems to introduce a song, and is therefore presumably a reference to the poem itself; the suggestion is that the unidentified 'Lover & child' are its addressees. Given the content of the rest of the poem, this 'Lover &

child' could be victims of the Nazi genocide (the line evokes the Nazi practice of separating women and children from the men on entry to the camps, as described in Grossman's report); and even if their identity is never made particularly clear, the possibility that the narrator might here be addressing the dead, along with the tenderly encoded private language used in the line, implies a certain narratorial intimacy. In the fifth and sixth lines the narrator then describes how the deaths of the Holocaust victims in the gas chambers 'will clear them home:/ Away from & toward me'. The narrator's relation to the victims is here conceived of in terms of a double movement, as though their passing away from the living somehow brings them closer to those they have left behind. The ambiguity of this relationship is reflected in the reference to a 'home', which has both domestic and theological connotations, leaving it unclear as to whether this double movement is a way of describing a relation to things past (their old lives together, perhaps), or if the dead are being conceived of as spirits whom the narrator hopes to join in the afterlife.

This representation of simultaneous loss and contact, of immediate absence and premonitions of presence, could also be understood as a meditation on the role of the Holocaust poet: even a reflection on how Berryman conceived of his own personal relation to the murdered Jews whose deaths formed the subject of *The Black Book*. The ambiguous addressivity might figure the poet's uncertain relation to historical women and children whom he feels compelled to write about, and yet with whom he fails to make complete poetic contact. In this context, it is significant that the relation between the narrator and his 'lover' has connotations of illegitimacy, even indecency, with the word 'lover' displacing the more normative 'mother'. The suggestion is that the male poet is illicitly infatuated with his own grievous subject matter.

If the poem follows an abiding trajectory of descent, plunging into the depths of history, into mass murder and the death camps, then the final three lines describe a reciprocal movement of ascent, hauling the subject-matter heavenward in a manner that

seems integrally bound to the production of the elegy itself. As the poem develops, its imagery lightens: scanning down the lines, the reader finds the diction becoming gradually more airy, with the weighty 'long-lockt cattle-cars', wrenched together with firm, brace-like hyphens, giving way to ethereal 'seafoam' and 'sky' in the final two lines. The poet wishes to 'lift' an elegy to the dead, and in a manner reminiscent of the call to flight in the opening couplet of 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' - 'Let us go then, you and I,/ When the evening is spread out against the sky' - he seems to enjoin the reader to take part in this task.[165] It is almost as though poet and reader, 'poor you & I', have become involved in a Dantean partnership of guide and pupil; and as we come out on the other side of this *Inferno* we join together to tell our tale (and thus perform the requisite task of all those who journey into the underworld).

The poem thus implicates the reader in the struggle to produce meaning - or, like a modern-day Atlas, *to hold up meaning* - after Treblinka. Yet our elegy, and our obligation to rise up as proxy-witnesses, is at the same time an impossibility, or at least a contradiction, not least because we find that there is nothing of any substance for us to hold on to. The unexpected lightness and vacuity of the imagery at the end of the poem confounds the traditional sense of the elegy as monolith; rather than lifting up monumental meaning, we find meaning itself floating away. Perhaps this relates to a trope established in poems such as 'Rising Hymn' and 'from *The Black Book (ii)*', which suggests that any narrative of ascent, when used in the Holocaust context, becomes inextricably linked to the ashes of the dead that rose into the sky through the chimneys of the crematoria. If so, then this final poem is characteristic of the way that Berryman links the taintedness of schemas of ascent to theology, here describing how the sky is 'deserted', void of elegiac commemoration and consolation and also God after the *tremendum* of the genocide.[166] Allusions to Eliot and also to Emily Brontᴊ (whose early poem 'Stars' has a first stanza ending: 'Have you departed, every one,/ And left a desert sky?') further suggest the difficulty of writing a Holocaust poem as weighty and

unprecedented as the crime it seeks to portray, leaving the poetic tradition to acknowledge its own abject insufficiency, its inability to reconfigure itself absolutely, in light of the disaster.[167]

The lightness of the past becomes the heaviest of burdens in a poem in which reader and writer are categorically unable (or unqualified) to lift even an increasingly flimsy-seeming elegy; we are 'fair & strengthless', with our fine Aryan heads of hair (the fact that the implied reader is 'fair' means that in all likelihood he or she never could have been a victim, but could have quite possibly been a perpetrator) making our attempt to raise an elegy to victims whose heads were shaved seem like an incongruous, almost obscene sort of enterprise. The gap between the two key duos of the poem - the historical 'Lover & child' on the one hand, and 'you & I' in the present, on the other - widens, and the only simile of the poem, the comparison of the 'Fair and strengthless' dyad of reader and writer to 'seafoam', confirms our ineptitude, our elegiac labour merely washing around the outermost fringes of a vast, oceanic crime. The allusion to the birth of Aphrodite, who rose from the foam of the sea, again figures the poet's obsession with history as a dubious kind of love affair, or worse: the way the word 'foam' harks back to the 'soap' that the prisoners were made to carry to the gas now makes this attraction seem almost necrophilic.

The image of 'seafoam' also brings to mind, once more, the writings of Primo Levi, and in particular his description, in *The Drowned and the Saved* (1986), of how, even after the war, the victims were overcome by the 'memory of the offence': 'The ocean of pain, past and present, surrounded us, and its level rose from year to year until it almost submerged us.'[168] In contrast, Berryman imagines a union between writer and reader which clearly presupposes that *neither partner was there*. We remember nothing and, as a result, we can only ever skim the surface of an 'ocean of pain' whose awesome depths remain hidden from us. The very fact that we have never descended in the way that Levi describes means that neither can we take it upon ourselves to represent any

kind of ascent from the depths of history, thus forestalling the elegy's implicit promise of imaginative resurrection. For Berryman, 'you & I' remain the uninitiated: those who must act as the witnesses to the witnesses, yet who must continually falter in our attempts to lift them a befitting elegy of permanence.

CONCLUSION

The handful of published poems from *The Black Book* represents a fraction of the forty-two sections that Berryman had originally planned to write; yet the voluminous notes and drafts that he made for the sequence, along with miscellaneous fragments from incomplete or rejected poems, offer tantalising clues about what other material might have been included.[169] In one hand-written draft, a motorcade heads towards a concentration camp:

> South thro' unwintering boroughs the big cars glide
> Foreign & swift; officials snug inside;
> A tinkle from a foreign orchestra
> Startles the Polish fields. Until these arrive,
> The ceremonial fires delay,
> Eight thousand bodies are & are alive.

Another hand-written lyric portrays 'the crematorium at Maidanek':

> So many bodies in a breathless space
> To dust & air! Your bloody body burns
> Three to an hour, save the bigger bones,
> Haircuts have saved the hair.

The published poems and drafts also seem to map out a provisional structure for *The Black Book*, suggesting that it might have mirrored the actual chronology of the 'Final Solution': the first poem describes the death of a 'grandfather' in the period before the

Nazi purges had reached their worst; the next involves a central precursor to the destruction, the establishment of Jewish Ghettos, and the murder of a single woman in Nazi-occupied Warsaw; 'Rising Hymn' and 'the will' are then set in labour camps; finally, the death camps and industrialised mass murder form the subject of 'from *The Black Book (iii)'*. A sort of master-narrative does emerge, then, with Berryman moving deeper into the heart of the extermination process, tracing a gradual descent as he passes through the worsening circles of an historical *Inferno*. However, his problem wasn't so much thinking up a master-narrative as confronting the kind of *meanings* that a master-narrative might yield.

George Steiner has famously claimed: 'The world of Auschwitz lies outside speech as it lies outside reason. To speak of the *unspeakable* is to risk the survivance [*sic*] of language as creator of humane, rational truth.'[170] Berryman's Holocaust sequence suggests that after Auschwitz the survival of a rational language is not a risk but a necessity, and that language itself, and also certain narrative structures (such as religious schemas of ascent and descent) have become *even more* redolent with meaning (albeit with catastrophically *inverted* meaning) than ever before. Berryman's drafts reveal that, at least on occasions, he aimed to write 'v. elaborate + rich + "obscure" stanzas' (though the inverted commas around the word 'obscure' suggests a distrust of the word, or a conviction that these so-called obscure stanzas of his are really not all *that* obscure); but he also attempts to overcome obscurity, 'to speak of the unspeakable'.[171] A central feature of both *The Black Book* sequence as a whole, and of individual poems - most notably 'from *The Black Book (ii)* - is that as their subject matter becomes increasingly horrific, their style grows more perspicuous. However, the poems also, of necessity, confront the limits of Holocaust representation, and face up to the difficulty, even the undesirability, of depicting certain events, and of adopting overarching explicatory models. While they do not wholly concur with Steiner's assessment that Auschwitz lies 'outside speech', in drawing attention to their own inner

silences, they do anticipate what Adorno would diagnose in his 1965 essay 'Commitment' as art's situation of permanent, disabling *paradox* after Auschwitz.

'Commitment' was one of the first critical works to draw out the conflict between aesthetics and ethics that exists in any work of Holocaust representation, and it continues to inform theoretical approaches to the subject to this day. In this essay, Adorno observes that any aesthetic reproduction of 'the unthinkable fate' of the victims risks turning that alien experience into something potentially gratifying, with the result that 'it is transfigured, something of its horror is removed'.[172] Yet equally, he argues, art cannot *not* confront this past: the same suffering that calls into question art's right to exist also 'tolerates no forgetting', and therefore 'demands the continued existence of art while it prohibits it'.[173] Revisiting the often misquoted and critically misappropriated 'saying' from his earlier essay 'Cultural Criticism and Society' (1951) that 'to write lyric poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric', Adorno upholds the poet Hans Magnus Enzensberger's retort - that literature must 'resist this verdict'.[174] In identifying this aporia at the heart of literature's confrontation with real suffering, 'Commitment' seems to call for a self-scrutinising and morally scrupulous form of representation (identifiably post-modernist, if not fully postmodern) which would work negatively, aspiring to document its own impossible position. Berryman's *The Black Book* can be regarded as an early indicator of the possibilities and the limitations inherent in such a vision of poetry after Auschwitz, being both driven and stalled by the antagonistic ethical imperatives which arise once historical atrocity comes into contact with aesthetic design.

2

Critical Distance:

Sylvia Plath and the Holocaust

INTRODUCTION

The poems that are collected in Sylvia Plath's *Ariel* (1965), and the so-called 'late' poems that she wrote between the winter of 1962 and her death in February 1963, are almost obsessively preoccupied with things past. In an interview with Peter Orr in October 1962, Plath remarked:

> I am not a historian, but I find myself being more and more fascinated by history and now I find myself reading more and more about history. I am very interested in Napoleon, at the present: I'm very interested in battles, in wars, in Gallipoli, the First World War and so on, and I think that as I age I am becoming more and more historical.[175]

However, Plath's self-confessed 'fascination' with history was not, in the main, taken seriously by literary critics in the years following the publication of her most important work, a central assumption being that her exploration of her personal past somehow rendered her unable to offer any real insight into 'History' proper. The legitimacy of her representation of historical events was routinely called into question by those who argued that in her work Plath only used them - and in particular historical atrocities, such as the Holocaust - as figures for her own internal pain. In her essay 'The Death Throes of Romanticism', Joyce Carol Oates made what would become an archetypal

criticism of Plath's historical imagination, when, with reference to 'Daddy', she wrote: 'Plath exhibits only the most remote (and rhetorical) sympathy with other people. If she tells us she may be a bit of a "Jew," it is only to define herself, her sorrows, and not to involve our sympathies for the Jews of recent European history.'[176] Plath's subject matter, according to Oates, is her inner life, and not the historical events which she references. Similarly, James E. Young has argued that Plath 'is not a Holocaust poet, simply because she does not write about the Holocaust. She writes about herself figured as a Holocaust Jew, among other contemporary images of suffering.'[177] Even fellow poets, such as Seamus Heaney, have accused her of sensationalism and artistic indecorum: again it is 'Daddy', perhaps Plath's most notorious poem, that proves unpalatable, Heaney observing that it is 'so entangled in biographical circumstances and rampages so permissively in the history of other people's sorrows that it simply overdraws its rights to our sympathy'.[178]

In this chapter, through a series of close readings, I will attempt to identify the specific ways in which Plath's Holocaust poetry engages with 'other people's sorrows'; but by way of introduction, I wish to take a brief look at the *Ariel* poem 'Letter in November', which offers an instructive starting point for any consideration of Plath's representation of the past; for while it does not evoke any one specific historical event, it makes highly eccentric use of the central term in this debate: 'history'. In a monologue which is identifiably set at Plath and Ted Hughes's cottage home at North Tawton in Devon, but which is not reducible to straightforward biographical readings, the narrator walks through her garden feeling 'stupidly happy':

> This is my property.
> Two times a day
> I pace it, sniffing
> The barbarous holly with its viridian
> Scallops, pure iron,
>
> And the wall of old corpses.
> I love them.

> I love them like history.
> The apples are golden,
> Imagine it —
>
> My seventy trees
> Holding their gold-ruddy balls
> In a thick gray death-soup.[179]

It seems significant that the speaker loves the 'wall of old corpses' '*like* history' (my emphasis), as one would assume that her love of the wall is *already itself* a love of history. Some sort of distinction is being made here: by using the word 'history' as a point of comparison, rather than as a synonym (Plath might have written: 'I love them./ I love history'), or even as the object of a subordinate clause ('I love them because I love history', for example), the narrator effectively intimates that the dead and history are not one and the same thing.

If we are to understand, then, quite what the speaker means by 'history', we must first try to grasp the exact nature of her love for the 'wall of old corpses' to which she compares it. Most strikingly, her insistence on her proprietary rights - it is *her* property and *her* trees - constitutes an attempt to confer legitimacy on her attachment to the wall. Such an emphasis on ownership might imply that the dead - or at least the narrator's particular emotional connection to them - are being conceived of as a form of private property. This claim, however, is denaturalised within the poem itself, through the image of the (or rather *her*) golden apples. This image alludes to the Hesperides of Greek mythology, who guarded the orchard of golden apple-trees that was given to Hera by Mother Earth, and is also used to portray the speaker's garden as a kind of Eden. Yet the description of the apples as 'golden' suggests that this is an artificial paradise: an artifice that links to the language of commercialism on which the speaker's idea of the past as property is founded. The colour gold was a particular favourite of Plath's, and it is used here, as in other poems from the *Ariel* and late periods (see, for example, my readings of 'Lady Lazarus' and 'Mary's Song'), to represent a love-object - specifically

a form of forbidden knowledge - that elicits both temptation and repulsion. This sense of taut psychological contradiction also inheres in the way that the garden is related to the human body: it is a thing to be ingested, but only as a form of sustenance that is potentially lethal (as golden apple or 'death-soup'); and it is also highly sexualised, but only through the speaker's strange 'love' of a wall of corpses that she appears to be 'sniffing', and the slightly grotesque description of the inhuman trees 'holding their gold-ruddy balls'.

So if we are to understand how Plath's speaker is conceptualising the past when she says that she loves the wall of corpses 'like history' - and we are directly exhorted to 'imagine it——' (although the syntax and lack of clear elaboration leave it unclear as to exactly *what* we are supposed to imagine, perhaps suggesting that this a form of reality, or psychology, that exceeds the possibilities of clear literary representation) - then it follows that history in some way resembles her love of the corpses. And as this love - as private property, as sustenance, and as eroticism - is conflicted and ambiguous in almost every aspect, so too must her sense of history - which we might understand, in the light of Plath's comments to Orr, as a scholarly interest in such things as Napoleon or the First World War - be conflicted. However, the dynamics of the simile - which introduces a corollary of likeness, as opposed to the metaphor's more absolute mode of comparison - equally ensure that while the speaker's love for the corpses is *like* history, they are not identical: a schism thus opens between her attitude to history, on the one hand, and her emotional bond with the wall on the other. Ultimately, history is *not the same as* her relation to the dead, who, in this poem, are not buried within the pages of literary chronicles: rather they are upright and vivified (it is easy to overlook the fact that her garden houses a wall not of statues or sarcophagi, but of *corpses!*), and their uncertain forms strangely encroach into the present, even as the speaker fails to find concrete terms to describe the way that she loves them.

In this complex simile, Plath examines how we, in the present, connect to a past which both attracts and repels us; she considers the ambiguous relation between the living and the dead, and the contemporaneity of past lives; and in her address to the reader ('Imagine it——') she indicates the role that the imagination plays in creating links to the past through art. In this way, 'Letter in November' counteracts the stock allegation that Plath had no real interest in history other than as a direct metaphor for her personal suffering. Insisting on the interconnectedness of subject and object, past and present, while simultaneously dissociating the subjective and objective categories of knowledge which contribute to historical understanding, the poem suggests an approach to the more specific references to the Holocaust that I will be examining in this chapter - references which do not betray the inadequacy of Plath's conception of history, but rather the inadequacy of the critical model (the poet's use of private emotion as subject, and historical atrocity as rhetorical figure) on which criticisms such as Young's and Oates's are founded.

'The Dead Are in Possession of a Secret…'

Critical discourses which celebrated the psychological honesty of the 'extremist' poet, and which hypothesised a mirroring relation between self and world within the 'confessional' lyric (see Introduction), were in part responsible for the way in which, for approximately a generation, from the mid 1960s to the 1980s, both positive and negative appraisals of Plath's Holocaust poems were grounded in the assumption that she was making some form of direct correlation between her personal suffering and that of the victims of the genocide. George Steiner, for example, argued in his essay 'Dying is an Art' that in her Holocaust poems 'Sylvia Plath *became* a woman being transported to Auschwitz on the death trains'. He continued:

> In 'Daddy' she wrote one of the very few poems I know of in any language to come near the last horror. It achieves the classic act of generalisation, translating a private, obviously intolerable hurt into a code of plain statement, of instantaneously public images which concern us all. It is the 'Guernica' of modern poetry. [180]

Steiner's positive assessment of Plath's work reflected his belief that only a non-victim, such as Plath, could focus on the death camps 'rationally and imaginatively'.[181] For most, however, any suggestion of equivalence between Plath's suffering and that of the women who actually were transported to Auschwitz on death trains was obscene. Irving Howe's views - and tone - are fairly representative:

> Is it possible that the condition of the Jews in the camps can be duplicated? Yes…. But it is decidedly unlikely that it was duplicated in a middle-class family living in Wellesley, Massachusetts, even if it had a very bad daddy indeed.
> To condone such a confusion is to delude ourselves as to the nature of our personal miseries and their relationship to - or relative magnitude when placed against - the most dreadful event in the history of mankind.[182]

For critics such as Howe, there was a clear absence of any reasonable 'objective correlative' between the 'personal miseries' of a girl from Massachusetts and 'the most dreadful event in the history of mankind'. As a result, Plath was widely accused of indulging in a form of Nazi fetishism which revealed little about the camps, but much about her own pathology. Writing about 'Daddy', Howe commented: 'There is something monstrous, utterly disproportionate, when tangled emotions about one's father are deliberately compared with the historical fate of the European Jews; something sad, if the comparison is made spontaneously.'[183] Alvin Rosenfeld also doubted that Plath could 'expose the atrocity of the age through exposing self-inflicted wounds'.[184]

As well as reflecting the broad impact of theories of 'confessionalism', such criticisms owe much to a concurrent debate about the status of the Holocaust as a singular historical event (for Howe it was 'the most dreadful event in the history of

mankind', for Rosenfeld 'the atrocity of the age'), and the proper place of that tragedy

in art. When, in 1962, Plath wrote poems such as 'Lady Lazarus' and 'Daddy', survivor

memoirs and testimonies (such as Anne Frank's diary) were, after more than a decade of

relative silence, beginning to appear in increasing quantities; the Eichmann trial had

meant that eyewitness accounts of Nazi crimes were broadcast to an international

audience for the first time; and a consensus began to develop among the American

Jewish intelligentsia that the Holocaust belonged to - and was thus, in a sense, *the*

intellectual property of - its victims. These cultural critics argued that the Holocaust

defied imaginative or overtly 'literary' responses: only the victims themselves could

ever describe with any authority what the event was 'really like'. Consequently, in many

critiques of Plath's Holocaust verse, her identity as a non-victim caused more

consternation than the actual content of the poems themselves: note how Howe

sardonically draws attention to the fact that she was from a 'middle-class family living

in Wellesley, Massachusetts'. Steiner, apparently revising his earlier, positive

assessment of Plath's work, also asked: 'does any writer, does any human being other

than an actual survivor have the right to put on this death-rig?'[185]

Elie Wiesel, a survivor of Auschwitz and Buchenwald, was (and remains) a

hugely influential spokesperson for this anti-representational ethos, famously arguing in

a 1986 interview that 'any survivor has more to say than all the historians combined

about what happened'.[186] For Wiesel, the Holocaust constitutes a sacrarium that cannot

be penetrated by those who were not there:

> Auschwitz cannot be explained nor can it be visualized […] The dead are in
> possession of a secret that we, the living, are neither worthy of nor capable of
> recovering […] The Holocaust [is] the ultimate event, the ultimate mystery,
> never to be comprehended or transmitted. Only those who were there know
> what it was; the others will never know.[187]

Arguing that the Holocaust was a singular historical cataclysm that is, by its very nature,

irretrievable as a form of historical knowledge or discourse, Wiesel exemplifies what

Michael Rothberg has termed an 'antirealist' approach to the Holocaust.[188] While one might assume that a 'secret' that cannot be transmitted might be forgotten, the sense of inscrutability that Wiesel evokes is in fact consistent with the innumerable attempts to 'explain' and 'visualise' the Holocaust which *have* been made in recent decades by those who were not there: in art, as in life, mystification and fascination tend to go hand in hand (though this is not to say that these attempts at representation do not themselves constitute a kind of forgetting of the 'secret'). Nonetheless, the perceived forcefulness of the antirealist position was broadly assented to by non-victims up to around the mid 1960s. Before this point, very little serious fiction was written on the subject, and even Plath herself - writing seventeen years after the death camps were abandoned by the Nazis, and despite having apparently transgressed this very prohibition against non-victim representation - remained hugely under the sway of the logic that her critics used against her. In her interview with Orr, given shortly after she had completed 'Daddy' and 'Lady Lazarus', Plath defended her right to represent events in Nazi Germany by simply stretching the definition of involvement: 'my background is, may I say, German and Austrian. On one side I am a first generation American, on one side I'm second generation, and so my concern with concentration camps and so on is uniquely intense.'[189] Plath legitimates her writing through a concept of lineage that figures the Nazi genocide as an inherited form of property: one accessible only to those raised within the confines of the (un)privileged group. The antirealist ethos advanced by writers such as Wiesel was not simply ignored or overthrown by Plath when she came to write her most contentious Holocaust poems: it remained an essential aspect of her historical poetics, even as - continuing a theme from 'Letter in November' - she questioned how much those with a proprietary stake in the past, be it small or large, could really hold on to.

Approaching the Subject

The American version of Plath's *Journals* was published in 1982, co-edited by Frances McCullough and Ted Hughes (Plath died intestate, and so Hughes became the executor of her literary estate). In her Editor's Note, McCullough outlined the rationale behind the numerous cuts that had been made to the original material, explaining that omitted passages included 'prospective poems and stories', 'ordinary commentary', 'devastating comments', 'intimacies', and, rather comically, 'nasty bits'.[190] In this note, McCullough goes on to propose a specific framework through which to interpret the relation between fact and fiction in Plath's writing:

> So here is not only her life […] but also the germs of most of her work. The interrelation is especially important in a writer whose work was so completely centered on her biographical details, though it's important to understand that the autobiography doesn't work in Plath as it does in the 'confessional' writers, but rather in a mythological sense - as can be seen most clearly in Judith Kroll's critical study *Chapters in a Mythology*.[191]

The traditional understanding of the biographical origin of Plath's verse is not contested - here we have 'the germs of her work' - but the *uses* to which she puts this material is. McCullough's reference to Kroll's 'mythological' reading of Plath's work authorises an alternative approach to 'confessionalism', and two pages later, in his Foreword, McCullough's co-editor, Ted Hughes, gives his interpretation of Plath's private mythology, marking a key intervention in a growing debate that was, and remains, at the heart of Plath studies: that of how to read the poems.

In this extraordinary piece of writing, Hughes claims that few people apart from himself were privileged enough to encounter Plath's innermost self: 'though I spent every day with her for six years […] I never saw her show her real self to anybody - except, perhaps, in the last three months of her life'.[192] However, he then offers a quasi-mystical account of Plath's development as a poet that suggests that she did, ultimately, reveal that self to the world in the *Ariel* poems. He uses the metaphor of alchemy to

describe how her early writings were 'like impurities thrown off from the various stages of the inner transformation, by-products of the internal work' until, eventually, her development was complete, and she wrote the verse that would make her name: 'When a real self finds language, and manages to speak, it is surely a dazzling event - as *Ariel* was.'[193]

By describing her poetry as a revelation of her 'real self', Hughes risked legitimating the sort of response to Plath's verse that might more normally be reserved for an encounter with a real person - which is to say the kind of reading that had already led some Plath devotees to accuse Hughes, who had had an affair shortly before Plath's death, of effectively murdering his wife. He thus qualifies his description of the absolute coming together of poet and poem by noting that in *Ariel* we see little of the 'incidental detail' or of the 'crucial inner drama' that produced the poems. Plath's final poems are, for Hughes, the voice of her real self, but the psychology and circumstances that allowed for the gestation of that self remain concealed: 'Maybe it is this very bareness of circumstantial detail that has excited the wilder fantasies projected by others in Sylvia Plath's name.'[194]

Here Hughes's categories perhaps need unpacking, in particular his use of the term the 'real self', as his metaphysic goes beyond a simple opposition of true inner self and false social self. For Hughes, the concept of Plath's real self is organically connected to the process of writing poetry; it is something more along the lines of what we might term an 'authentic poetic voice', only with the understanding that, for Hughes, the search for such a voice is an eminently spiritual affair. He notes that in his late wife there was 'a craving to strip away everything from some ultimate intensity' which he compares to 'what one reads of Islamic fanatic lovers of God'.[195] Throughout his account, Hughes figures Plath's voyage of discovery towards her real self through a traditional religious paradigm: that of self-sacrifice. He describes how in Plath he perceived 'something very primitive, perhaps very female, a readiness, even a need, to

sacrifice everything to the new birth'.[196] While the positive outcome of this drive was the final poems of the *Ariel* period, Hughes adds (echoing Al Alvarez) that 'the negative phase of it, logically, is suicide'.[197]

More recent critical responses to Plath's work have tended to question Hughes's teleological narrative of a self-destructive female creativity. In *The Haunting of Sylvia Plath* (1991), Jacqueline Rose offers a reading of Plath grounded in post-structuralism and psychoanalytic theory, and challenges the idea of the 'emergent female selfhood' that one finds in the mythological schemas proposed by Hughes and Kroll.[198] Rose's objection to this concept is both hermeneutic - it imposes a false and damaging sense of consistency on Plath's work - and linguistic, dependent as it is 'on a specific, unitary conception of language as tending, like the subjectivity it embodies, towards the ultimate fulfilment of itself'.[199] Rose notes that in another article, 'Sylvia Plath and her Journals', Hughes refers to the 'objectivity of her [Plath's] subjective mode', describing how 'the succession of images in "The Stones" […] has to be given the status of fact'.[200] She argues that by deploying such language, Hughes overlooks the multiplicity, uncertainty, and acceptance of conflict which, for her, are the predominant features of Plath's writing, while also presenting an untenable form of interpretative authoritarianism: one that becomes particularly insidious when it 'naturalises itself into the process of editing'.[201]

In contrast to Alvarez's and Hughes's suggestion that the imagery in Plath's late poems can be understood as psychological fact, Rose offers an approach to Plath and her writing, and also to its autobiographical origins, that stresses the importance of a concept of 'fantasy':

> It has been objected that writing on Plath is a fantasia with no purchase on, or even interest in, the truth. This book starts from the assumption that Plath is a fantasy. But, rather than seeing this as a problem, it asks what her writing, and responses to it, might reveal about fantasy as such. Far from being an obstacle, fantasy will appear in what follows as one of the key terms through which Plath's writing, and responses to her writing, can be thought.[202]

Rose uses the term 'fantasy' both in its proper psychoanalytic sense - in relation to sexuality and desire - and also as a corrective to the rhetoric of literary and psychological factuality deployed by a largely male tradition of Plath criticism (although it could be argued that when Rose looks to Plath's writing to 'reveal' its own constitutive fantasies, she presupposes that 'fantasy' has a knowable, factual origin beyond its literary representation: an argument which is paradoxical, depending as it does on a concept of 'presence' in the sign and in language, which is to say a formula that Rose constantly berates).

Beyond her revision of the tradition of straightforward biographical criticism in Plath studies, Rose also takes issue with Plath's supposed abuse of historical events such as the Holocaust, suggesting that those critical of her representation of historical suffering employ concepts of subjectivity and history without sufficiently accounting for the workings of fantasy in either term. She contends that the very separation of subjective and historical processes into oppositional phenomena ('I' being a subject which acts on an historical object) is erroneous, as our understanding of each concept must always be defined by, and limited to, the conditions of possibility provided by the other:

> There is no history outside its subjective realisation, its being-for-the-subject, just as there is no subjectivity uncoloured by the history to which it belongs. The division between history and subjectivity, between external and internal reality, between the trials of the world and the trials of the mind, is a false one. The distribution of opposites which has so relentlessly attached itself to Plath is the consequence of a false premiss, a false antagonism, from the start.[203]

In arguing that subjectivity and history are interdependent, Rose upholds the very relativism that critics of Plath's use of Holocaust metaphors, such as Howe and Rosenfeld, had distrusted. It was precisely these critics' point that there *was* a very real difference between the 'trials of the world and the trials of the mind', between historical victimhood and that of the contemporary subject, and that the meaning of historical

experience was *not* limited to the subjective apprehension of it. Rose, on the other hand, disregards the existence of an historical 'scene' beyond or in excess of the subjective, or fantasised, relation to it.

Rose's pre-emptive retort to criticisms of her relativist conception of history is to argue that Plath's writing constitutes a necessary revision of our *understanding* of the event, rather than an undermining of our belief in its objective occurrence. That it is a revision that we have been culturally unwilling to accept merely intimates that it is a 'deeper', more challenging truth than any we had known before (here Rose's conception of historical understanding self-consciously echoes Freud's model of repression).[204] In a chapter on 'Daddy', Rose suggests that the Holocaust can only be approached by way of the fantasies which underpin fascism. She contends (somewhat arguably) that 'fascism is in fact one of the few historical moments which historians have generally recognised as needing psychoanalytic concepts of desire and identification in order for it to be fully understood', and that 'Daddy' presents the contemporary reader with a whole series of 'fantasies which, at a precise historical moment and with devastating consequences, found themselves at the heart of our political life'.[205] These fantasies, Rose suggests, were responsible for the development of complex interrelations between Jews and their Nazi persecutors.

Plath would not have been the first writer to make such a claim. As I noted in the previous chapter, the idea of Jewish complicity (on a psychological level) with Nazi brutality had been put forward by Bruno Bettelheim, for example, in his study *The Informed Heart* (1961). Bettelheim describes how victim and executioner were inseparably linked in the dynamics of persecution, arguing that not only did the Nazis project their own undesirable tendencies onto a stereotyped picture of the Jew, but also that the victims, unable to externalise their resentment for fear of punishment, came to rationalise their situation by 'accepting SS attitudes on the racial question', with many prisoners developing 'passive-masochistic' personality traits as a result.[206] The

traditional, acceptable understanding of the one way flow of intent within the dynamic of persecution, from the oppressor to the oppressed, is contentiously reformulated by Bettelheim, and Rose argues that Plath's poem occupies similarly subversive psychological territory. For Rose, the traditional objection to Plath's Holocaust representation - that she deals with material which she has no right, or indeed ability, to use - can be overturned if we start to see her writing as an act of moral daring, risking censure and misunderstanding in an attempt to give an unacceptably comprehensive picture of 'the desire that should not speak its name'.[207]

Rose acknowledges that her reading of 'Daddy' involves a conflation of 'psychic positions which, it is often argued, if they cannot be clearly distinguished, lead to the collapse of morality itself'.[208] The exemplary expression of this counter-argument is found in Primo Levi's *The Drowned and the Saved* (1986), in his chapter 'The Grey Zone' (this passage is a response to Liliana Cavani's 1973 film *The Night Porter*):

> I am not an expert of the unconscious and the mind's depths, but I do know that few people are experts in this sphere, and that these few are the most cautious; I do not know, and it does not much interest me to know, whether in my depths there lurks a murderer, but I do know that I was a guiltless victim and I was not a murderer. I know that the murderers existed, not only in Germany, and still exist, retired or on active duty, and that to confuse them with their victims is a moral disease or an aesthetic affectation or a sinister sign of complicity; above all, it is precious service rendered (intentionally or not) to the negators of truth.[209]

Levi makes justice the ordering principle for any historical judgement (the language used in this passage is that of the courthouse: 'murderer', 'guiltless victim', 'truth'), with the actual lived relation between victims and murderers ensuring that speculation on the inner life or 'fantasies' of the victims is either irrelevant ('it does not much interest me to know') or irreverent ('a moral disease'). Rose's reversal of this logic - by which inner reality supersedes historical occurrence, meaning that *history does not exist* beyond the subjective realisation of it - is therefore, by Levi's definition, inherently unjust. Her reference to those who claim that a failure to distinguish between 'psychic

positions' can lead to the 'collapse of morality itself' consciously evokes Levi's censorious paragraph (she cites *The Drowned and the Saved* in her bibliography); but her paraphrasing of the passage contains a significant terminological oversight, as Levi's argument rests on the fact that moral collapse is brought about through the failure to distinguish between *actual* positions, not psychic ones.

Rose's work has transformed Plath criticism: her provocative chapter on 'Daddy', in particular, paved the way for a necessary freeing of interpretation from rigid biographical schemas and mythological readings. However, the moral precepts evoked by Levi - in particular his differentiation between the historically 'real' and the 'psychological' - are of central importance to Plath's work, and ought not to be lost in what Janet Malcolm has memorably termed 'Rose's bazaar of postmodernist consciousness'.[210] For while a poem such as 'Daddy' attempts to make certain psychological or historical insights, and indeed might, at times, even conflate the two categories (intimating, as Rose claims, something like the working of psychology *in* history), it constantly probes the validity - the justice even - of its own utterance, and, importantly, it retains a concept of historical truth.

Rose also argues that the issue in Plath's work is 'not whether Plath has the right to represent the Holocaust, but what the presence of the Holocaust in her poetry unleashes, or obliges us to focus, about representation as such'.[211] Yet while Plath's verse is clearly very much concerned with the psychodynamics of representation, it is inconceivable that a Holocaust poem written in 1962 could ever divorce itself from the ongoing cultural debate about *who* had the right to write the Holocaust. Critical sensitivity to the genocide's impact on the literary culture of the 1960s meant that the question of who was writing a text became inseparable from the question of what such texts could say about their historical subject. A poem written at this time was culturally obliged to validate itself, to vindicate itself, *as* art after Auschwitz. It had, of necessity, to argue its own existence into being. Consequently, a discourse about the legitimacy of

Holocaust representation by non-victims is deeply woven into the fabric of Plath's verse.

In contrast, then, to Rose's understanding of Plath's 'moral daring', I will consider how poems such as 'Daddy' incorporate a far more traditional set of moral imperatives into their representative logic, repeatedly upholding the antirealist position concerning the Holocaust's supposed inviolability, and its tendency to induce linguistic and existential paralysis. For Plath, the meaning and significance of atrocities such as the Nazi genocide is never limited to their 'subjective realisation': the inadequacy of subjectivist approaches to historical experience is, I will argue, one of the recurring themes of her work (as is shown in 'Letter in November', in which the objective term 'history' is internally divided, separated from the dead, and also from the living subject who attempts to grasp its significance). In poems such as 'Daddy', the Holocaust is represented as being both dependent on *and* irreconcilable with contemporary experience: it is made available as an object of knowledge through its being-for-the-subject (which of course, as Rose suggests, would normally make it an inescapably relative concept); but at the same time, as a writer such as Levi was always at pains to point out, historical truth is shown never to be wholly reliant on, or contingent with, the subjective apprehension of it.

'Daddy'

A rough synopsis of the narrative of 'Daddy' might read as follows: a female narrator, who has lived in a black shoe for thirty years, kills her father, even though he is already dead. She says that she has previously searched for him in Germany and Poland, and though she did not find him, the German language transported her to the Nazi

concentration camps, and she began to foster a sense of kinship with the murdered Jews. She then looks at a photograph that she has of her father standing by a blackboard, in which he is a satanic figure. She recalls that she was ten when he died, and that when she was twenty she tried, but failed, to commit suicide. Some time after that she made a model of her father, married it, and killed a vampire, who both was and was not him. Finally, some unnamed villagers dance and stamp on the dead patriarch.

This is, of course, a massively over-simplified outline of the poem's narrative; but it reveals enough of its psychological, temporal and structural artfulness (and oddness) to cast doubt on any suggestion that in it Plath simply equates her own mental torment with the suffering of the Jews. As Christina Britzolakis notes: 'The elements of caricature, parody, and hyperbole in "Daddy" are so blatant that only a very determined misreading could identify the speaker with the biographical Sylvia Plath.'[212] The poem lacks even the most basic forms of autobiographical reference (Plath's father, Otto, was a German-born teacher who died when Plath was young, and she did try to commit suicide during her adolescence, but that is about all), and to equate the author with the narrator presupposes a unified and personalised symbolic schema (of the Otto Plath = Nazi; Ted Hughes = vampire variety) that the poem itself does much to destabilise.

'Daddy' begins with a surreal stanza that stands on a par with some of Samuel Beckett's more abstract moments:

> You do not do, you do not do
> Any more, black shoe
> In which I have lived like a foot
> For thirty years, pure and white,
> Barely daring to breathe or Achoo.[213]

The first two lines present the reader with an immediate problem of addressivity: the poem is a dramatic monologue, which we at first presume is being spoken to the 'Daddy' named in the poem's title; however, in the second line we learn that the 'you' addressed by the 'I' narrating the poem is actually a 'black shoe'. It is possible that the

shoe is simply a symbol for the girl's father; but such neat symbolic readings become complicated if, as Rose observes, we read the first line of the poem with an ear out for the Germanic pronouns employed in subsequent stanzas ('Ach, du', 'Ich, ich, ich, ich'). The homophone subsequently produced between 'do' and the German word 'du', meaning 'you', creates an alternative first line that reads 'You you not you, you you not you', suggesting that the addressee, the 'black shoe', both is and is not the 'you' to whom the narrator's monologue is being spoken.[214]

This internal subversion of the poem's symbolic logic is complemented by the construction of a highly complex and disorientating time-scheme. The narrator *has lived* in the shoe for thirty years, indicating that she is middle-aged, and also implying that the time of narration coincides with a moment of long awaited liberation; yet the defiant voice of the mature versifier is undercut by the nursery rhyme aesthetic, with its repeated 'oo' sound, which creates a contrasting tone of appeasement, and a sense of inescapability and repetition. The nursery rhyme to which the poem most readily alludes is, significantly, 'There was an Old Woman who Lived in a Shoe' (a song about a woman who, as Kroll observes, 'didn't know what to do'), meaning that in the very first stanza, the narratorial 'I' is constructed through allusions to each of childhood, middle-age, and old-age, suggesting that either several different orders of time can coexist in the same 'I', or that the narrator will in fact never be free from the shoe - whatever it is or means - in which she is condemned to live.[215]

The final line and subsequent stanzas consolidate the bitchy early-teenage voice for which the poem is famous; there is something slightly preppy about someone who talks of their 'Daddy', and of how she dared not 'Achoo', even something slightly damaged. This could indicate that some traumatic childhood experience has extended into the speaker's adulthood. More extremely, one might read the entire first stanza as a recollection of a childhood spent hiding from the Nazis, making the narrator a sort of fictionalised survivor-sister of Anne Frank: the black shoe that has forced the narrator

into silence could be that of an approaching Nazi coming up the stairs, with the tapping of footsteps finding an analogue in the poem's opening iambic tetrameter. This rhythm comes to an abrupt and terrifying halt with the spondee which coincides with the naming of the very object that creates the sound, the 'black shoe': a spondee which is thus, as Antony Rowland observes, a black 'foot' of both the poem's rhythmic scheme and its imagined (or remembered) historical landscape.[216]

The association of the warping of linear constructions of temporality, and of meaning itself, with the figure of Anne Frank - a girl forced by experience into a preternatural maturity - had already been made by Plath in her journals some years previously.[217] After reading an article in *Life* magazine, she wrote:

> cremation fires burning in the dead eyes of Anne Franck [*sic*]: horror on horror, injustice on cruelty - all accessible, various - how can the soul keep from flying to fragments - disintegrating, in one wild dispersal?[218]

In the first stanza of 'Daddy', one moment of time - perhaps an imagined moment when footsteps came marching towards the secret annexe - explodes across a lifetime in 'one wild dispersal', paradoxically *enclosing* the narrator within its total and inescapable external order: an order represented by the black shoe *in which* the narrator has lived for thirty years. While the suggestion that she has lived 'like a foot' in this moment of time might suggest a journey - a chronologically structured passage through time - the black shoe unites and confuses many different temporalities, and represents a journey whose point of departure is so horrific that a liberating point of arrival can never really be envisaged. Indeed, the black shoe is essentially an image of stasis, representing futility and imprisonment within time, even total mental collapse: a pervasive sense of madness underlies the monomania and obscure symbolism of the stanza as a whole.

A further, conflicting version of time is represented at the beginning of the second stanza: 'Daddy, I have had to kill you./ You died before I had time——'. Here Plath develops the theme and time frame of the Freudian family drama, and with it the

possibility of the narrator's Electra complex, which has already been alluded to in the poem's title and in the first stanza (Oedipus translates as 'swell foot').[219] In particular, she evokes Freud's concept of the '*Nachtr←glichkeit*', or after-effect, in which patricide is accomplished imaginatively, after the fact of the father's death, with the child's inner recovery of the father forming the precondition for his second, symbolic death.[220] The narrator says that her father died before she 'had time', suggesting both that the father cheated her of the chance to be the agent of his death by dying too soon, and also that his return (and symbolic death) is dependent on her now 'having time' in a second, almost existential, sense - as in possessing time. Such autonomy over inner, psychological forms of time would imply that she has in fact successfully escaped from the black shoe - and the external temporality it symbolised - in which she was trapped in the previous stanza. Predictably, however, we are not permitted to alight on such a stable interpretation for long, as the subsequent description of the father portrays him as a dead-weight of inhuman proportions:

> You died before I had time——
> Marble-heavy, a bag full of God,
> Ghastly statue with one gray toe
> Big as a Frisco seal
>
> And a head in the freakish Atlantic
> Where it pours bean green over blue
> In the waters off beautiful Nauset.

The monolithic, ocean-straddling father stands in the way of any straightforward inner recovery of time past, and the heavy dash which precedes the anatomised description of him emphasises the chasm separating the narrator's desire for liberation from the possibility of its fulfilment.

So while the poem seems to propose certain temporal, narrative and psychological developments, they are rendered through images which imply hindrance,

and the theme of the obstructed journey is continued when the speaker recalls how her search for her father led her to the wasteland of postwar Europe:

> I used to pray to recover you.
> Ach, du.
>
> In the German tongue, in the Polish town
> Scraped flat by the roller
> Of wars, wars, wars.
> But the name of the town is common.
> My Polack friend
>
> Says there are a dozen or two.
> So I never could tell where you
> Put your foot, your root,
> I never could talk to you.
> The tongue stuck in my jaw.

Now a circular time-frame is suggested through the use of repetition and the description of war as a 'roller': this is something like a poetic rendering of the geometry and temporality of damnation, with the lost narrator circling the terraces of Dante's *Inferno* (much as in Berryman's *The Black Book*). The oppressive density of rhyme and assonance (almost every word has a phonetic equivalent in either the same line, or in a line immediately before or after it) intensifies the depiction of Poland as a place of everlasting torment. The trope of infernal decent also links to the name of the town being 'common' (there were 'a dozen or two'), and the ubiquity of the father whom she can't find ('I thought every German was you'). In these instances her journey resembles a form of Hellenistic damnation: recalling how she searched Europe for a place and a person who were everywhere and nowhere, her visit is figured as an abject exercise in futility, like the labours of the dead in Hades.

The psychological and metaphysical 'fall' that accompanied the narrator's arrival in Europe is attributed to the foreignness of the 'German tongue' (it is German, as opposed to Polish, that the girl constantly berates) which 'stuck in her jaw', cutting off her prayers to her father-God and literally preventing her from communicating with the outside world:

> It stuck in a barb wire snare.
> Ich, ich, ich, ich,
> I could hardly speak.

However, as language ensnares the narrator in a symbolic order that is profoundly alien to her, as an American brought up on the other side of the 'freakish Atlantic', she has her first real confrontation with collective European history, specifically that of the Jews. The metaphor of a 'barb wire snare' suggests linguistic entrapment by evoking an animal trap that 'shuts the trap' of the narrator, but it also obliquely intimates the capturing of the Jews (who were treated like animals) by the Nazis, and perhaps also the electric-wire fences which enclosed the concentration camps. In this way, the image reflects the poem's preoccupation with the act and imagery of suicide (also indicated by the self-despising repetition of 'ich'), foreshadowing the narrator's failed suicide bid in stanza twelve, and even her quasi-suicidal triumphalism at the end of the poem, as prisoners in camps were either shot or electrocuted if they approached the fences.

The German language - and, by implication, the buried meanings and historical associations it generates and imposes upon a speaker powerless to resist them - is described as 'obscene'. Yet it is this very language which becomes, in the seventh stanza, the elusive propelling force that the narrator's various journeys have thus far lacked:

> An engine, an engine
> Chuffing me off like a Jew.
> A Jew to Dachau, Auschwitz, Belsen.
> I began to talk like a Jew.
> I think I may well be a Jew.
>
> The snows of the Tyrol, the clear beer of Vienna
> Are not very pure or true.
> With my gipsy ancestress and my weird luck
> And my Taroc pack and my Taroc pack
> I may be a bit of a Jew.

The German language is represented as an external agency that empties the narrator of her selfhood and replaces it with a series of speculative foreign identities, such as her being 'a bit of a Jew'. Having been abducted by discourse, she is obscurely motioned towards 'Dachau, Auschwitz, Belsen' by the monotonous 'chuffing' rhythm of a poem which briefly becomes 'an engine, an engine'. The industrialised language and metaphors form a stark contrast to the 'feet' and 'toes' of the first five stanzas, and seem to stand for a very different kind of journey. The narrator's confinement in a static foot, and the disappearance of her father's foot ('I never could tell where you/ Put your foot, your root'), represent failed attempts to revisit the past through recognisably human metaphors. When a connection to the past eventually does take place, however, through the German language, it is figured as inhuman (recalling Steiner's judgement on what became of the language of Goethe and Heine after Auschwitz: 'Something immensely destructive has happened to it. It makes noise. It even communicates, but it creates no sense of communion').[221] One might infer that the narrator could not find her father's 'foot' because she attributed to him human traits, whereas the Nazi crimes to which she links him are essentially foreign to human (or humanist) forms of understanding. (There is perhaps also a sense in which, seeing as he is later figured as 'a devil', she would have done better to look for a cloven hoof.)[222] These earlier lines could again also refer to poetry itself, and to the metrical 'foot' of verse, suggesting the impossibility of a human form, such as poetry, finding an adequate 'root' (or route) through which to tap Germany's horrific past. Here an important distinction emerges between the two *languages* used in the poem; for the English in which it is written does not seem to have been brutalised or magnetised to horror in quite the way that, according to the narrator, German has. Susan Gubar has pointed out that 'English was one of the few Western languages not generally spoken by guards or prisoners inside the ghettoes [*sic*], boxcars, camps, deportation stations, gas chambers, mass graves, and law courts that constitute the settings of these [Holocaust] poems.'[223] It is perhaps this very foreignness of the

English language to the events of the Holocaust that allows the narrator to make the perception that the German language has become an inhuman 'engine' in a poem which cannot ever really get near the camps, or to the events which took place beyond the barbed wire.

The tracks of the German language lead directly to the name Auschwitz, and also, by implication, to the narrator's positioning as victim; yet this linguistic mechanicalism is starkly contrasted to the speaker's own offbeat rationalisations of her conjectured Jewish identity. She cites a 'gipsy ancestress', 'weird luck' and the 'Taroc pack' - symbols of mysticism, the irrational, and the occult - as the reasons for her part-Jewishness. While the 'gypsy ancestress' perhaps evokes the Nazi persecution of the Romanies, this imagined link between the narrator and the Jewish victims of Nazism - and this is, we recall, the source of the poem's infamy - is so tenuous as to be nonsensical. The first-person voice becomes, at this point, weirdly distracted and dreamy, and the speaker's concept of her metaphorical Jewishness appears to be extempore, being continually discarded and replaced by what seems like the next random thought, only to be returned to again, but never grasped entirely: 'I think I may well be a Jew.// The snows of the Tyrol, the clear beer of Vienna/ Are not very pure or true'; 'I may be a bit of a Jew.// I have always been scared of *you*.' The dropping of the connection at the end of a stanza, and the change of subject matter in each new stanza, suggests that the narrator cannot sustain, or even examine, the comparisons she makes between herself and the Jews.

While the narrator is 'like', or 'may be', a Jew, the lapse into direct metaphor, and with it direct identification, is noticeably avoided (though this is not because of a deliberate caution exercised by a perspicacious speaker). 'Daddy' thus circumvents the direct symbolic identification with Holocaust victims that we find in a poem such as Yevgeny Yevtushenko's 'Babii Yar', for example (first published in English in 1962, the same year that 'Daddy' was written), in which the poet-narrator visits the ravine on

the outskirts of Kiev where in September 1941, according to Einsatzkommando records, 33,771 Russian Jews were massacred in two days.[224] The narrator proclaims:

> I am
>   each old man
>   here shot dead.
> I am
>   every child
>   here shot dead.[225]

The poem famously opens with the line: 'No monument stands over Babii Yar'. By giving belated witness to crimes that would otherwise fade into oblivion, the poem itself becomes that missing monument. Conversely, in 'Daddy' no such historical responsibility is assumed: the very possibility of a non-victim identifying with the dead is undermined by the narrator's evident lack of knowledge of the historical experiences, traditions and religion of the Jews to whom she compares herself. Indeed the links between narrator and Jew in 'Daddy' are so obscure that one has to wonder if she has any idea quite what a Jew is. However, a commentary on the narrator's relation to the Jews, and on the meaning of the term 'Jew', is elaborated through Plath's precise use of poetic tools, such as repetition and rhyme, demonstrating how the critical intelligence of the poem is generated through arguments of structure and form. The word 'Jew' is used four times in two stanzas in which it forms end-rhymes only with itself (a technique for which John Lennard usefully coins the term 'autorhyme'), and with the word 'true'.[226] This use of autorhyme would imply that the word *cannot be rhymed or compared with anything other than itself*, and that there are no other 'true' equivalents for the Jewish Holocaust victims. In this way, the poem provides a structural counterpoint to the more ambiguous representation of the Jew in its lyric. Such an affirmation of the self-determination and stability of the term is enforced by the way that the word Jew is never used as a direct metaphor. As a result, it never becomes harnessed to, or dependent on, any external meaning: it is contrasted to other concepts, such as the narrator's 'I', but is never engulfed by them, and retains its autonomy as a discrete term. Even the rhyming

of Jew with 'true' comes in a line in which the latter word is used in a negative sense: 'not very pure or true'. Alluding to the Nazi myth of Jewish racial inferiority, this line suggests that the girl's connection with the Jews is itself not very pure or true.

The narrator sees her father as possessing otherworldly powers that have determined the course of her life; but as she cuts short her manic reflection on her relation to history's victims and turns her attention back to her father-God, she loses her illusions about his holiness: 'No God but a swastika /So black no sky could squeak through.' The swastika that fills the sky parodies Nazi Messianism and the Millennial Reich, alluding to the Synoptic accounts of Jesus's crucifixion, which describe how a darkness fell over Israel between midday and three in the afternoon, with the imagined absence of God recalling Christ's plea on the cross: '*Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?*' ('My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?').[227] Now the coy tone of the earlier stanzas is replaced by a terseness amplified by the use of a harsh alliterative 'k' ('swastika', 'sky', 'squeak'). The original 'oo' sound returns:

> Every woman adores a Fascist,
> The boot in the face, the brute
> Brute heart of a brute like you.

But the throbbing vowels have lost all of their former playfulness: the word 'brute' occurs three times in two short lines, like successive punches, or rather kicks. Rose has suggested that in this infamous passage Plath demonstrates that 'victimisation by this feared and desired father is one of the fantasies at the heart of fascism, one of the universal attractions for women of fascism itself'.[228] This dubious conception of the 'universal' desire of women for paternal victimisation is far more troubling than the actual lines themselves: it is questionable both as an opinion, and also as a piece of literary criticism, for it seems rather eccentric to regard the damaged narrator of 'Daddy' as a mouthpiece for the experience of all women. Moreover, the line seems more of a sarcastic rejection, rather than a straightforward repetition, of a crude and

misogynous fantasy: this is not a poem in thrall of male violence, but rather an indictment of it. In the following stanza, the daddy is figured as a devil with 'a cleft in your chin instead of your foot': the idea that his foot should ever be in his own chin emphasises the fact that the 'boot in the face' is not necessarily the secret desire of the narrator, nor of every woman, to be kicked. If any fantasy is being expressed here it is that of retributive justice, and the narrator's wish for the father's violence to be turned against himself (again one suspects the influence of Dante; specifically his law of 'counter-penalty', which is the organisational principle of the *Inferno*).[229]

As the poem speeds to an increasingly bizarre-seeming climax, the relationship between the narrator and her father - and with it the relationships between her self and her external world, her past and her present - is figured through the trope of a telephone conversation:

> So daddy, I'm finally through.
> The black telephone's off at the root,
> The voices just can't worm through.

Simultaneously suggesting connection (she is 'through') and disconnection (being 'through' can also suggest that one is finished with something), these lines reflect the fundamental ambiguity that characterises the narrator's psychological state, and her relation to her daddy. The fact that she describes more than one voice might imply that she has been hearing, and sharing with the reader, voices in her head (a continuation of the theme of madness introduced in the first stanza), in which case the absence of voices would signify a triumphant overcoming of her illness. Yet these voices could relate more directly to the polymorphous father figure, who might be expected to have as many voices as he has forms, opening up the possibility that their absence is being registered both as a liberation and a painful *loss*: the voices from the past '*just can't worm through*' (my emphasis), though in some ways she wishes that they could.

The description of the telephone being 'off at the root' refers the reader back to the fifth stanza:

> I never could tell where you
> Put your foot, your root,
> I never could talk to you.

Here the elusiveness of the daddy's 'root' suggested a self-reflexive critique on the representational logic of the poem as a whole, describing the unavailability of 'routes' to the past through the metrical 'foot' of verse. The black telephone which is now 'off at the root' might be regarded as a continuation of this conceit, representing the impossibility of full communion with the underground voices of the dead (which can't 'worm through') through poetry. The phone's failure to harmonise past and present, the hearer and the heard, is given added emphasis by the way that the word 'root' forms a tantalisingly incomplete half-rhyme with 'through'. It is as though the bad connection is not only overheard, but also *produced*, by the workings of a poetic phone which is black in colour and also, 'Daddy' suggests, in its usage.

The image of a black telephone opens up poetic 'connections' with earlier images in 'Daddy' itself, and with other of Plath's late poems. Most strikingly, it can be found in allotropic forms, and in similar contexts, in 'Little Fugue' and 'The Munich Mannequins' (the former written shortly before, and the latter shortly after, 'Daddy'), which seem to mark the inception and an extension of the self-reflexive representational poetics I have been discussing.[230] Taken together, these three poems - which share striking similarities of location, subject matter, and even coloration (each poem makes extensive use of black and white colour symbolism) - might be said to loosely comprise a kind of 'German Trilogy'.

'Little Fugue' foreshadows 'Daddy' through both its imagery and its Freudian psychodrama:[231]

> Deafness is something else.

> Such a dark funnel, my father!
> I see your voice,
> Black and leafy, as in my childhood,
>
> A yew hedge of orders,
> Gothic and barbarous, pure German.
> Dead men cry from it.
> I am guilty of nothing.[232]

The speaker's father is again a Nazi, and she conceives of a muffled connection to his, and Germany's, past through a paradoxical 'deafness' that is, in a distortion or parody of an instrumental understanding of memory, a 'dark funnel'. The image of the 'yew hedge of orders' evokes the destructive potential of language - specifically, the ironically termed 'pure' German language. It is this that causes the 'dead men' to cry; therefore the 'yew hedge of orders' could be an historical phenomenon, evoking the literal orders that were given for people to be killed. The poet-narrator can 'see' this 'voice', which she recognises from her childhood through its destructive effects, even if she cannot hear the dead men's cries; the fact that she is writing in English allows her to proclaim that, unlike her father, she is 'guilty of nothing'.

There is also a mythological dimension to the image of the yew hedge. In *The White Goddess* (1946), Robert Graves records that in Brittany there was a traditional belief that yews in churchyards spread a root to the mouth of each corpse buried beneath them.[233] Thus, in mythology, the yew tree symbolises an organic connection between the worlds of the living and the dead - a connection that T.S. Eliot draws on in 'The Dry Salvages' section of *Four Quartets* (1935-42):

> We, content at the last
> If our temporal reversion nourish
> (Not too far from the yew-tree)
> the life of significant soil.[234]

A draft for 'Little Fugue' included a stanza that came immediately before the two quoted above, which read:

> The yew is many-footed.
> Each foot stops a mouth.
> So the yew is a go-between: talks for the dead.[235]

In the final version of the poem this stanza was omitted, but Plath's representation of the yew as a 'go-between' that both 'talks for the dead' and 'stops a mouth' retains its ambiguity, and challenges Eliot's more optimistic reading of the myth as an illustration of the fecundity of the real and symbolic soil in which the dead are buried. In Plath's poem the yew is an obscure religious feature of a 'Gothic and barbarous' landscape - 'The yew my Christ, then./ Is it not as tortured?' - but the passageway it offers to the dead is severed from any redemptive Christian meaning: 'Death opened, like a black tree, blackly.' In this way, 'Little Fugue', through its reinterpretation of Breton myth, is the progenitor of 'Daddy', a work in which various roots or feet (human, metrical) promise to connect the living narrator to the dead 'you' (yew) she addresses. In both poems, however, revisiting the past sets down roots, or travels down routes, that muffle, or else cut-off completely, the voices of the dead. In particular, the language which narrator and poem alike must make use of is either a 'black telephone' or a 'dark funnel' that does not enable distant voices to 'worm through' what Eliot terms the 'significant soil' of history.

A yew tree also features in 'The Munich Mannequins', this time as part of a freakishly morbid reference (especially given the Breton legend recounted by Graves) to childless German women and their sterile wombs, in which 'the yew trees blow like hydras'.[236] The poem derides the high society of postwar Germany, and its location is particularly significant: Munich was the birthplace of the Nazi party, and it was in Munich that Adolf Hitler began his political career, making antisemitic speeches in taverns and beer-cellars in the 1920s. It was also in this city, in October 1938, that the British Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, along with other European leaders, signed the Munich Agreement, handing over the Sudetenland area of Czechoslovakia to Hitler,

who had by this time become the German Chancellor. The poem describes postwar Munich as the 'morgue between Paris and Rome'.

The poem's subject is not, however, simply the crimes of Nazism, but rather the postwar (non)memory of them in an officially 'denazified' Germany. Plath describes the childless, mannequin-like nulliparas of the city who are 'naked and bald in their furs', recalling those victims who were literally 'naked and bald', but placing them, grotesquely, in fashionable 'furs'. The poem never makes explicit reference to the dead Jews: in avoiding direct representation of the memory that the German glitterati depicted in the poem itself fails to confront, Plath becomes dependent on a strategic manipulation of the poem's internal aesthetic - above all of its black and white colour symbolism - to make it clear that the city is implicated in some moral catastrophe far more serious than a low birth-rate. The poem thus intimates its own, and Germany's, absent history through images such as the snow dropping its 'pieces of darkness', which recalls the ash created by the burning of human bodies in extermination camps, and alludes to Paul Celan's 'Schwarze Flocken' ('Black Flakes') and 'Todesfuge' ('Death Fugue'), the latter with its images of 'black milk', smoke, and graves in the sky.[237] However, rather than reproducing the musical ironies of Celan's poem - an aesthetic that Celan himself would later reject, replacing it with a more contained 'hermetic' form of writing - 'The Munich Mannequins' operates through a logic of suggestion and indirect intimation.[238] Through this allusive technique, even the poem's more cool, observational moments become doubly sinister:

> Nobody's about. In the hotels
> Hands will be opening doors and setting
>
> Down shoes for a polish of carbon
> Into which broad toes will go tomorrow.

The poem's vocabulary is made to work hard, but readers who are familiar with the events of the Holocaust, and conversant with poems such as 'Daddy', will be startled

into a disturbing series of inferences by phrases such as 'Nobody's about' (no bodies about), and a line that contains the words 'shoes', 'polish' (Polish), and 'carbon'. As Stan Smith has observed: 'Plath's language is always radically *overdetermined*, so that the same image can be charged with quite contradictory associations, conflicting emotional resonances.'[239]

The poem concludes with the repetition of, and a certain elaboration on, another favourite image:

> The thick Germans slumbering in their bottomless Stolz.
> And the black phones on hooks
>
> Glittering
> Glittering and digesting
>
> Voicelessness. The snow has no voice.

The 'black phones' again represent a mode of communication with the past that can only transmit incommunicability; as an image within the poem, and as a meta-commentary on the poem, the 'black phone' thus elaborates a paradox of representation. The tension this image creates between connection and disconnection, even between good (white) and evil (black), is heightened by the single-line break that occurs between the penultimate stanza and the last line, which makes the phrase 'glittering and digesting' syntactically ambiguous. The mise-en-page means that 'glittering and digesting' can be read independently of the word 'Voicelessness', describing the way that the black phones eat and digest some unnamed and unknown object; yet the enjambment means that the verb 'digesting' could take 'Voicelessness' as its object. This would suggest an extreme annihilation, through the doubly-negative consumption of something which was not even there; though at the same time, like all double-negatives, the logical outcome of this action is positive, as the black phones digest - and in doing so, they contain - voicelessness, making them (and thus poetry) the enabling principle for the transmission of absent historical voices. The significance of this act is

amplified in the final sentence of the poem: 'The snow has no voice'. The snow was earlier dropping 'pieces of darkness' that recalled the ashes of Holocaust victims burnt in the crematoria of death camps. The fact that the snow now has 'no voice' might suggest that the poem, the 'black phone', intrudes upon historical voicelessness, depriving the dead of their right to silence; yet the stark lineation, which renders 'Voicelessness' eminently visible, implies that this is perhaps a necessary incursion.

The oxymoronic black telephone is consistently used by Plath to complicate the normative understanding of memory as a process of recovery, drawing attention to the inevitable refashioning that occurs when we revisit historical persons and events shrouded in silence, whilst simultaneously interrogating the relation between poetry and history. The self-reflexivity of Plath's dominant metaphor registers the deficiencies of poeticising traumatic encounters with the past, and the impossibility of poetic figuration putting us in touch with history in its 'pure' form; but by suggesting that poetic language taps into the past darkly, offering a 'line' of sorts, Plath does not relinquish the possibility of encounter altogether. In 'Daddy', for example, the phone is 'off at the root', and the voices of the dead 'just can't worm through'; nonetheless, this disconnection is rendered through a poem which itself puts the narrator - and the reader - in touch with different forms of historical silence.[240]

In the final stanzas of 'Daddy' a gathering internal momentum - constructed through rhythm, recurrent autorhyme, and the quickening of a narrative which is relayed with a growing brusqueness - reaches its climax:

> If I've killed one man, I've killed two——
> The vampire who said he was you
> And drank my blood for a year,
> Seven years, if you want to know.
> Daddy, you can lie back now.
>
> There's a stake in your fat black heart
> And the villagers never liked you.
> They are dancing and stamping on you.
> They always *knew* it was you.

> Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I'm through.

Traditional mythological readings of the poem have tended to regard the exorcism of the father as prefiguring the speaker's symbolic rebirth: Kroll, for example, describes how the father is a scapegoat 'invested with the evils of her spoiled history' whose death enables the narrator to free herself from 'the false self who is in his thrall'.[241] The rhythmic emphasis on the word 'bastard' does suggest a fully achieved expression of feeling - the narrator at last declaring that she has no legitimate father - that contrasts with the ambiguity and prevarication of the rest of the poem, and the final phrase, ' I'm through', brings the previous end-rhymes (a triple autorhyme of 'you's) to a satisfying close. Yet the desperate cry of 'Daddy, daddy' complicates the outward sense of psychological and narrative resolution; and again, her being 'through' implies both a break-through - something that she's finally finished with - but also disillusionment or resignation. In its most extreme sense, the phrase could even suggest that the narrator is contemplating another suicide attempt.

Alvarez, who recalled that Plath often spoke about suicide with 'wry detachment', describes in *The Savage God* (1971) how the 'history of suicide in Christian Europe is the history of official outrage and unofficial despair'.[242] He continues:

> Blackstone [an Elizabethan legal authority] wrote that the burial [of the suicide] was 'in the highway, with a stake driven through the body', as though there was no difference between a suicide and a vampire. The chosen site was usually a cross-roads, which was also the place of public execution, and a stone was placed over the dead man's face; like the stake, it would prevent him rising as a ghost to haunt the living.[243]

This particular passage seems highly pertinent to the final stanzas of 'Daddy', in which a stake is driven through a *psychological* vampire - but perhaps only by way of the narrator's own suicide. One of Plath's most significant theoretical influences, Sigmund Freud, regarded suicide as an act of aggression that is always aimed at more than one

person: a kind of transposed murder.[244] A Freudian reading of the poem might thus hold that the stake in the heart that kills the vampire slayer's daddy is also a stake through her own heart: in this way, suicide and vampire become symbolically united, just as they were in Elizabethan times. Before this stanza, father and daughter have not come into any form of direct contact: the father has only ever been represented by massively over-determined symbols, such as an ocean-straddling statue, a sky-filling swastika, a devil-schoolteacher and a voodoo model. As a Nazi, he is a fantasised amalgam of every available stereotype: at once a Hitler (with a 'neat moustache'), the epitome of German *volk* ('your Aryan eye, bright blue'), a Luftwaffe member *and* a 'Panzer-man'. But in this final death scene, as the narrative moves into the present tense - 'They are dancing and stamping on you' - the two at last occupy a shared moment of space and time. Admittedly, he is still a vampire, a kind of inverse imago; but they 'lie back' as one.

As the narrator moves 'through', the reader, however, is simultaneously pushed back and excluded from a ghoulish family reunion whose ultimate significance remains unclear. The reference to 'the villagers' belies the fact that there has been no previous mention of either a village or villagers in the poem. The reader is perhaps made mindful of 'the Polish town' mentioned in the fourth stanza, where the narrator sought to locate her father, and which, it is implied, might be the scene of his past Nazi crimes. Yet 'the name of the town' was 'common' (like the atrocities which might have been committed there), and she never found the place she was looking for. What is clear is that even the unidentified villagers are privy to some form of knowledge, by way of their positive identification of the detested father, that escapes the reader. Plath's italicisation of the word '*knew*' in the penultimate line emphasises their familiarity with the father's real historical identity, intimating access to the 'inside' of an event denied to those who look back on it from the 'outside'.

This concluding stanza supports my reading of 'Daddy' as a poem that is centrally concerned with questions of historical knowledge - if anything, this is a poem

about its narrator's inability to get to grips with what the Holocaust actually *was* - and with issues of historical representation, above all through its exploration of the alienation of language, or at least the *English* language, from the genocide. A conceptual distance between the inside of history and the 'outsideness' of those forms of memory and discourse that return to the event retrospectively is maintained throughout a poem which constantly flaunts its own artifice. The interplay between a tragic historical subject and the poem's breezy aesthetic form allows for a 'serious' self-critique, wherein aesthetic effects generate a rigorous self-commentary: this is how 'Daddy' exposes the spuriousness of the narrator's identifications with the Jews, for example. While the poem names the locations associated with the inside of the Holocaust - and thus evokes the crimes which the narrator's father may or may not have been involved in - it never threatens to cross their borders. Repeatedly approached but never fully grasped, atrocity, like the unconscious, resists full representation, and the historical actuality of genocide remains outside the poem's representative capabilities (and indeed outside its representative aspirations).

Yet by drawing the reader's attention to the alienation of the Holocaust from the poem's stylised form, and from the narrator's consciousness, 'Daddy' is able to disclose something of the silence (a silence that it both mediates *and* produces) that lies within its margins. When representing the 'disaster' in this way, to write is perhaps, in Maurice Blanchot's formulation, 'to bring to the surface something like absent meaning'.[245] In so doing, the inside and the outside of history are brought into an uneasy co-existence by and through the event of the poem itself, held in place (which is to say apart) through counteractions of language and form. As a result, the poem occupies what Shoshana Felman, describing Claude Lanzmann's film *Shoah* (1985), has termed an 'impossible position', which is 'neither simply inside nor simply outside, but paradoxically, *both inside and outside*'. In assuming such a position, the poetic event, the 'black phone', facilitates a '*connection* that did not exist during the war and does not exist today

between the inside and the outside', and manages 'to set them both in motion and in dialogue with one another'.[246]

There is a sequence in the second part of Art Spiegelman's graphic novel about his father Vladek's survival of the Holocaust, *Maus II* (1991), which seems to illustrate precisely this need for contemporary Holocaust artworks (and especially those depicting the relationship between parents involved in the Holocaust and their children) to incorporate into their representative logic that which resists representation. In this passage, the mouse Art - an *alter ego* of the cartoonist - goes to see his psychiatrist, Pavel, who is a survivor of Terezin and Auschwitz.[247] As they talk into the night about Art's inability to tell the story of his father's experiences, Pavel grows disillusioned, doubting that anyone can ever make sense of the genocide, and questioning whether any lessons can be learnt from it. He warns Art that 'the victims who died can never tell THEIR side of the story, so maybe it's better not to have any more stories'. Art replies: 'Uh-huh. Samuel Beckett once said: "Every word is like an unnecessary stain on silence and nothingness."' There is then a frame - the only one in the entire *Maus* story - in which there are no words: neither dialogue, nor written narrative, nor any other sign denoting discourse. There is just silence as Art and his therapist sit facing each other, smoking, each seemingly deep in contemplation. In one sense this frame seems to embody Beckett's maxim, but as Young writes: 'this is not silence as an absence of words but silence as something that passes actively between two people'.[248] Their silence is given shape and meaning by the dialogue which has taken place between patient and therapist, and also by the panel provided by Spiegelman's cartoon strip format. The therapeutic and artistic framing of this silence is drawn out in the following panel when, with reference to the Beckett quotation, Art points out: 'On the other hand he SAID it'. Pavel's reply exemplifies Spiegelman's self-referential aesthetic: 'He was right. Maybe you can include it in your book.'

This exchange, and the distinction which is made between the kind of silence that is, in Young's phrase, an 'an absence of words', and the kind of silence which is more dynamic and voluble, 'something that passes actively between two people', neatly summarises the rationale behind the self-reflexive ethos of Holocaust representation advocated by writers such as Spiegelman and Plath. For both artists, there is a silence which stems, much as Pavel initially argues, from the utter incomprehensibility of the Holocaust. For Pavel, this silence, and the total absence of any suitable discourse to describe what happened, points the way to the only possible response to the Holocaust by Art (both the character and his trade). But by contrast, *Maus* and 'Daddy' insist that even if a horrific past is inaccessible in a direct or fully present form, this inaccessibility, at least, can be represented. 'Daddy' describes how the voice of the narrator's father 'can't worm through' to the present; similarly, the central event of *Maus* is Art's discovery that Vladek has destroyed his dead mother's notebooks, and with them his only chance of hearing her version of her imprisonment in Auschwitz. These works acknowledge that the authentic voices of many of those who were there (as both perpetrators and victims) are lost to us; but historical voicelessness is made visible indirectly, and in a negative fashion, in texts that constitute *necessary* stains on silence and nothingness - texts which do not represent the past as it was, but which instead explore the ways that it endures in the lives of those who came after.

'Lady Lazarus'

'Lady Lazarus' is, as Kroll has noted, a companion piece to 'Daddy'. Both poems were written in October 1962 and, along with their provocative use of Nazi imagery and their evocations of the Holocaust, they share similarities of form (the dramatic monologue),

voice (with the manic voice of 'Daddy' maturing into the twisted braggadocio of 'Lady Lazarus'), and narrative structure, each moving from an obscure birth scene or initiatory scenario towards a final, if ambiguous, point of transcendence.[249] The narrative is similarly paced in both poems; if anything, 'Lady Lazarus' achieves a slightly greater narrative speed than its predecessor, with the occasionally jarring imagery in the clustered pentains of 'Daddy' being abandoned in favour of more stark and imagistically uncomplicated tercets. The acceleration towards a final crescendo, achieved through rhythm and autorhyme in 'Daddy', is brought about in 'Lady Lazarus' through the gradual paring down of line length, until we are left with just single-word dimeters ('Beware/ Beware') in the final two lines of the penultimate stanza. As with 'Ariel', in which the horse-riding narrator is 'the arrow,// The dew that flies/ Suicidal, at one with the drive/ Into the red// Eye, the cauldron of morning', 'Lady Lazarus' is designed to be read at a gallop.[250]

   Despite its many similarities to 'Daddy', 'Lady Lazarus' nonetheless stands apart from the 'German Trilogy' of 'Little Fugue', 'Daddy' and 'The Munich Mannequins'. I have argued that these three poems can be read as Plath's chronologically developed meditation on Holocaust representation: each is set in the austere landscape of postwar Europe, and links to the others geographically, stylistically and imagistically (most obviously through the symbol of the black telephone). In this trilogy, through meticulously constructed arguments of imagery and form, a scaffolding for the reconstruction of poetry after Auschwitz is tentatively set in place. 'Lady Lazarus', on the other hand, with its razzmatazz and big top setting, offers a more straightforwardly savage critique of the artistic commodification of genocide, and of the amoral representative practices of the 'Holocaust industry'. In this poem, the scaffolding carefully erected in the German Trilogy is kicked straight back down.[251]

Like the hero of Kafka's story 'A Fasting-artist', on which, as Kroll observes, 'Lady Lazarus' seems to have been loosely based, the poem's narrator prides herself on a self-destructive theatrical act which she believes she has elevated to an art form:[252]

> Dying
> Is an art, like everything else.
> I do it exceptionally well.
>
> I do it so it feels like hell.
> I do it so it feels real.
> I guess you could say I've a call. [253]

If, for Lady Lazarus, dying is an 'art', then it is at once a cultured form of expression and also, more prosaically, a task that requires a particular skill or knack. Her suicide-show is thus a slightly tricksy activity, and when claiming that it '*feels like* hell', and that it '*feels* real' (my emphasis), she is implicitly conceding that in reality it is neither of these things (much as when the narrator of 'Daddy' states that she 'may well be a Jew'). Lady Lazarus seems wryly to accept the fact that her performance - in which she drapes herself in the material traces and mutilated body parts of the murdered European Jews - is both an art form for which she has a 'call', and also a commercial enterprise. Unifying the language of art and that of show business, the 'theatrical// Comeback in broad day' suggests both her return from the dead and also the revival of her career. Later the 'charge' for her show - and presumably also the sexual 'charge' generated by it - is mentioned four times, suggesting that she and her audience each profit from a performance that is figured as a kind of prostitution.

Al Strangeways notes that the period between Plath's first poem about the Holocaust ('The Thin People') in 1957, and the next poems that she wrote about the genocide in 1962 and 1963, saw

> in addition to the 'real-life' drama of the Eichmann trial, a number of star-studded Hollywood films - often adapted from successful books, plays, or television presentations - that brought the Holocaust to the forefront of the popular imagination, including *Judgement at Nuremberg* (1961), starring

Spencer Tracey; *Exodus* (1960), starring Paul Newman and Sal Mineo; and *The Diary of Anne Frank* (1959).[254]

Neil Roberts has gone so far as to characterise Plath's first-person narrators in terms of the film stars they most closely resemble: 'If "Every woman adores a Fascist" is Marlene Dietrich, "I guess you could say I've a call" may be Lauren Bacall.'[255] A 'big strip tease' that the 'peanut-crunching crowd/ Shoves in to see', Lady Lazarus's act is, as Roberts suggests, far from being an illicit peep-show. Rose has described how the appeal of voyeurism 'rests on exclusion, on a position that remains firmly outside'.[256] The reader is placed in such a 'voyeuristic' position when tuning-in to the private psychodrama of 'Daddy'; the point of 'Lady Lazarus', on the other hand, is to display the Holocaust as a licensed (if not respectable) public spectacle. With heavy irony, the narrator addresses her audience as 'Gentlemen, Ladies'.

Roberts also shows how Plath's 'smart-talking *film noir* "dames"' generate a complex addressivity.[257] He notes that 'explicit address is of course characteristic of the dramatic monologue, which is normally thought of as a narrative genre'.[258] In 'Lady Lazarus', however, we have a more general 'adversarial addressivity', where the narrator accosts a masculine 'enemy' who thereafter appears in several different guises, asking him to 'peel off the napkin' that covers her ghastly face.[259] This addressivity also seems to implicate the reader; indeed, if a dominant paradigm of the poem is the suspense-filled and intricately plotted Hollywood *film noir*, its readers are in for a twist that they could never have anticipated. The anonymity of the crowd who watch the show, and the poem's self-conscious understanding of addressivity as a kind of performance, mean that distinctions between the addressee of the poem ('my enemy'), the audience within the poem ('the peanut-crunching crowd'), and the poem's readership blur. As a result, readers who would more usually expect to be left on a poem's outside are implicated in its general indictment through their 'consumption' of the text. The poem turns on them. As Strangeways observes:

To apply Teresa De Lauretis's theorizing of the cinematic positioning of women to Plath's poem […] the speaker's consciousness of her performance for the readers […] works to reverse the gaze of the readers so that they become 'overlooked in the act of overlooking'.[260]

'Lady Lazarus' sets out to shock and provoke its readers through its 'adversarial addressivity', its brassy approach to a sensitive historical subject, and what Britzolakis has described as its 'patently alienated and manufactured language, in which the shock tactic, the easy effect, reign supreme'.[261] This belligerent aesthetic has led some critics, such as Helen Vendler, to criticise Plath for failing to exert sufficient control over her material:

Poems like 'Daddy' and 'Lady Lazarus' are in one sense demonically intelligent, in their wanton play with concepts, myths and language, and in another, and more important, sense, not intelligent at all, in that they wilfully refuse, for the sake of a cacophony of styles (a tantrum of style), the steady, centripetal effect of thought. Instead, they display a wild dispersal, a centrifugal spin to further and further reaches of outrage.[262]

Such criticisms bring to mind Alvarez's account of Plath reading him an earlier version of 'Lady Lazarus':

There was one line I picked on in particular:

Gentleman, ladies.

These are my hands
My knees.
I may be skin and bone,
I may be Japanese…

'Why Japanese?' I niggled away at her. 'Do you just need the rhyme? Or are you trying to hitch an easy lift by dragging in the atomic victims? If you're going to use this kind of violent material, you've got to play it cool….'[263]

This extra line mischievously probes the limits of lyric acceptability. However, by assuming a correspondence between Plath and her obviously dramatised first-person speaker, neither Alvarez nor Vendler can account for the control that *is* exercised over this particular 'centrifugal spin to further and further reaches of outrage' through the

poem's monologue form, which generates the critical intelligence of an artwork which does not necessarily advocate the flamboyant rhetoric of its speaker. The classic strategy of the dramatic monologue is to allow a narrator to reveal a truth about themselves that they had hoped to conceal: in the case of Lady Lazarus, this is the spuriousness of her concept of 'art', and the fundamental dubiousness of her atrocity exhibition, for which there is a 'very large charge'. Plath did not 'just need the rhyme', as Alvarez suggests - as though it rectified some deficiency in her original versification; but by using it - and especially in the form given by Alvarez, where it forms the fourth line in a quatrain, making it stick out from the surrounding tercets like a sore thumb - she unambiguously points out that it is *there*, it exists as an aesthetic possibility. In contrast to the poetics of 'awkwardness' that Rowland identifies in the poetry of Tony Harrison and Geoffrey Hill, Plath's point is to show that the 'not quite relevant allusion', as Alvarez put it, is in fact a very *easy* one to make.[264]

If Plath had retained Lady Lazarus's reference to her possibly being Japanese, our sense of the following line, 'Nevertheless, I am the same, identical woman', would also have been dramatically altered. Lady Lazarus cannot claim to be a victim *both* of Hiroshima *and* of Buchenwald (the reference to 'a Nazi lampshade' recollects the ornament supposedly owned and commissioned by the 'Bitch of Buchenwald', Ilse Koch),[265] and her bewildering and obviously forced attempt to suggest that they and she are 'the same, identical woman' would have disclosed the essential artifice of the metaphorical figure of prosopopoeia (the dead speaking through the poet, who acts as a vessel to allow the transmission of posthumous voices), and its rhetoric of presence, of which 'Lady Lazarus' is an ironic parody. The line would also have problematised the idea that Lady Lazarus is some kind of coherent and unified emblem of *all* historical victims: it is indeed a bewildering archetypal victim who must, with such drawling self-satisfaction - 'I *may* b*e* Japan*ese*' (my emphasis) - resort to 'dragging in the atomic victims'.

The poem's addressivity is further complicated, and historicised, when the anonymous 'enemy' turns into, or is displaced by, an 'Herr Doktor', recalling the infamous Nazi doctors, such as Josef Mengele, and perhaps also the Austrian Sigmund Freud (one can easily imagine Lady Lazarus humouring her analyst when she assures him, 'Do not think I underestimate your great concern'). Lady Lazarus describes herself as this man's 'valuable', before transforming into 'The pure gold baby// That melts to a shriek.' In figuring herself as a 'pure' symbol of suffering, Lady Lazarus duplicates the language that the Nazis used to describe their racial supremacy; much as in 'Letter in November', the word 'gold' here conveys an ideal of purity that is both a desirable and a tainted state. It suggests a need for pure representation, even the idea that representation is itself precious; but it also evokes the thieving and melting of gold - often extracted from the teeth of the Jewish victims - which was standard Nazi practice. Lady Lazarus, however, has already made reference to her 'full set of teeth': an anomaly which exposes the non-equivalence between herself and those victims whom she claims to represent - even the violence that *she* does to them.

As Lady Lazarus 'melts to a shriek', a sound, she herself disappears:

Ash, ash—
You poke and stir.
Flesh, bone, there is nothing there——

A cake of soap,
A wedding ring,
A gold filling.

Kroll suggests that here Plath is parodying a poem, 'Inventory', by G∫nter Eich, which she would have very likely known in translation.[266] Written in 1948, 'Inventory' tabulates the few possessions owned by a prisoner of war:

This is my cap,
this is my coat,
here is my shaving kit
in a linen bag

    …
This is my notebook,
this is my groundsheet,
this is my towel,
this is my thread.

Hans Magnus Enzensberger has described how, in Eich's poem, 'paralysis has itself become language', arguing that 'the poet is staking a claim to the absolute minimum that remains; to a material, spiritual and linguistic remnant'.[267] While the list in 'Lady Lazarus' has a certain structural and syllabic unity, lending it a superficial coherence, and even creating a tangible sense of the materiality of the articles described, the harmonising aesthetic effect is undermined by the actual artefacts named: the 'wedding ring' and 'gold filling' intimate that Lady Lazarus is some sort of jackdaw of history, attracted to bright, shiny objects, rather than a Benjaminian angel, possessing genuine historical insight. Moreover, the last line of the preceding stanza suggests that these are items, like 'flesh and bone' (of Lady Lazarus, of the dead), that are *not* there, or that they are merely the 'nothing' that is there.

The reference to 'a cake of soap', in particular, highlights the ambiguous physicality of these material remains, for having come to symbolise the lunatic excesses of Nazism in the years immediately after the war, it was discovered that no documentary evidence exists to prove that the Nazis ever turned their Jewish victims into soap.[268] As Gubar observes:

> That no consensus exists among contemporary historians about whether the Nazis made cakes of soap out of their victims […] drive[s] home the bitter irony propelling the poem, namely that imaginative approaches to the Shoah may distort, rather than safeguard, the dreadful but shredded historical record.[269]

Whether or not Plath knew that the soap story was unsubstantiated, the poem, with its lexicon of representative 'purity' and its magical vanishing tricks, implies that the kind of 'imaginative approaches' to the Holocaust practised and advocated by Lady Lazarus might contribute to the construction of an insidious form of anti-memory that services

the specific historical and political ideals first 'prophesied' by the architects of the final solution: the sort of thing that Himmler was talking about when he referred to the Holocaust as 'a glorious page in our history, and one that has never been written and never can be written'.[270] Indeed, Lady Lazarus becomes precisely such a (non)page in a history written by the persecutors when she says to the Nazi Doktor that she is his self-erasing 'opus'.

In the penultimate stanza, the ambitious addressivity of the poem alights on the ultimate auditors:

> Herr God, Herr Lucifer
> Beware
> Beware.

This aggressive challenge to Christianity's moral structure could be read as a parody of Nazism and its pseudo-Nietzschean ideology. Eugen Kogon observes that Hitler saw himself as the 'Messianic preincarnation' of a new era of rule represented by the Millennial Reich, noting that religious imagery was deeply ingrained in the ideology and aesthetics of party and state, and that the SS was conceived as a 'sacred order' whose insignia took the form of lightning flashes designed to resemble ancient runic characters.[271] Lady Lazarus also sees her show as being potentially threatening to existing hierarchies. Her repeated use of the prefix 'Herr' - which in German means both 'master' and 'the Lord' - to describe each of 'Herr Enemy', 'Herr Doktor', and, in a reading, 'Herr Professor', as well as 'Herr God' and 'Herr Lucifer', unites these figures, and suggests that each is a different element of one and the same order against which she rebels: patriarchy.[272]

'Lady Lazarus' concludes with a stanza which clarifies her objectives for those who were in any doubt, while at the same time triggering a deluge of possible allusions:

> Out of the ash
> I rise with my red hair
> And I eat men like air.

Gubar has noted, along with many others, the 'ironic echo' of Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan': 'Beware! Beware!/ His flashing eyes, his floating hair!'[273] Given that Britzolakis sees 'Lady Lazarus' as a parody of 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', whilst also detecting allusions to The *Waste Land*, it is unsurprising that these final lines also reference another favourite work by Eliot: *Four Quartets.*[274] This time the allusion is to the first stanza of the second part of 'Little Gidding', which ends with the couplet: 'The death of hope and despair,/ This is the death of air.'[275] In Plath's poem, as in Eliot's, the death or consumption of 'air' comes about when the dialectical framework of a Christian moral universe collapses; in 'Lady Lazarus', this airless anti-world is sketched in three swift, almost breathless, lines. The stanza also seems to allude, once again, to Celan's 'Todesfuge', in which the 'golden hair' of Margarete - namesake of Goethe's apotheosised representative of the 'eternal feminine' in *Faust* - contrasts with the 'ashen hair' of Shulamith, who is named after the princess in 'The Song of Songs' who traditionally symbolises the tribe of Israel.[276] Nelly Sachs's 'O the Chimneys' considers the impact of the death camps on traditional forms of religious belief, and concludes with a tercet which also seems to lie behind this final stanza:

> O you chimneys,
> O you fingers
> And Israel's body as smoke through the air![277]

These references add a specifically Holocaust-related dimension to Britzolakis's perception that 'Lady Lazarus is an allegorical figure, constructed from past and present images of femininity […] She is a pastiche of the numerous deathly or demonic women of poetic tradition'.[278]

Celan famously wrote that 'No one/ witnesses for the/ witness.'[279] Lady Lazarus's hubris, then, is precisely that she leaves the 'grave cave' once a decade to bear witness for the witnesses, graphically displaying the remains of the victims on her

own body. Plath's hubris, on the other hand, is not that she *is* Lady Lazarus, but rather that she seems to have no qualms about placing survivor texts in the mouth of such a flawed speaker. The poem's broad aesthetic of shock and sensationalism - with its Nazi lampshades, gold fillings and bars of soap - has led critics to question the extent to which the poem is able to repudiate the representative practices of its narrator. Drawing on Saul Friedlander's *Reflections of Nazism: An Essay on Kitsch and Death* (1993), which warns of a disturbing 'new discourse' about Nazism dominated by sensationalist images and an obsession with death, Rowland argues that Plath deploys an iconography that she cannot transcend. What he terms her 'camp poetics', which reproduce the 'exaggeration', 'artifice', and 'extremity' of the Camp movement, 'do allow for a self-conscious investigation of spectacle, but, unlike the reflexivity of awkward poetics in [Geoffrey Hill's] *The Triumph of Love*, they highlight and reflect the post-Holocaust writer's reception of "spectacular" history, rather than rigorously challenging it'.[280] Unable to undermine affected gestures of empathy or identification, the poems risk repeating them, with the result that, in Young's words, the images used in the poems 'feed on the same prurient energy they purportedly expose'.[281]

Yet by contrast, one could argue that the poem's kitschy aesthetics, and the subversive allusions to canonical Holocaust texts, only service the ends of a poem whose guiding impulse is overwhelmingly satiric. As a parody of the crass sensationalism of the Holocaust industry, and of the way that women are represented as 'deathly or demonic' by a predominantly male poetic tradition, the poem is able to question the iconography and allusions that its speaker exploits. Harold Bloom has described how 'every poet is a being caught up in a dialectical relationship (transference, repetition, error, communication) with other poets', with the 'strong, authentic poets' creating an imaginative space for themselves through

> a misreading of the prior poet, an act of creative correction that is actually and necessarily a misinterpretation. The history of fruitful poetic influence, which is

> to say the main tradition of Western poetry since the Renaissance, is a history of anxiety and self-saving caricature, of distortion, of perverse, wilful revisionism without which modern poetry as such could not exist.[282]

'Lady Lazarus' makes a 'perverse, wilful revisionism' its working mode; however, the poem challenges Bloom's positive assessment of the development of poetic tradition through misreading, by way of its speaker's cynical belief that art is simply a form of prostitution - a degrading way of making money - and by the fatuousness of her turn in attention away from the Jewish victims of the Holocaust (the subject of the poems she 'misinterprets'), and towards the many men who have wronged her. In some senses, the aggressive feminist position that she assumes in the final stanzas is not a total distortion of the concerns of Holocaust verse, and could be justified by the insight that the Holocaust was an event which was, for the most part, conceived and perpetrated by men. Here the poem arguably develops a refrain from 'Todesfuge', where 'death is a master from Germany'. However, this reading is at odds with the indirect reference to Ilse Koch, by way of the Nazi lampshade. Moreover, as with the omitted line 'I may be Japanese', where poetic form (and obvious irony) allowed for a pointed critique of the narrator's hypothesised identity as historical victim, a self-conscious undermining of Lady Lazarus's rhetoric occurs in the concluding stanza, through the *double entendre* of the last line (wordplay which mirrors the pun on being 'through' at the end of 'Daddy'). For, as Gubar points out, to 'eat men like air' is an ambiguous simile, which could mean that Lady Lazarus eats men as easily as if they were air - namely the German Herren, or 'masters', who ordered the deaths of women such as Shulamith - or that she eats men who are themselves already like air: the victimised men who, in 'Todesfuge', dug their 'graves in the air', and whose deaths Sachs laments when describing 'Israel's body as smoke through the air'.[283] Here wordplay and allusion help to unmask the speaker: as the prostitute-poet rises from the ashes in the guise of what Kroll calls a 'triumphant resurrecting goddess', we are actually left with a much less palatable taste of what Lady Lazarus's opportunistic imagination really feeds off.[284] Just as her assault on God and

Lucifer parodies Nazi aspirations, Lady Lazarus is here positioned as the victimiser, not the victimised. Through the suggestion that her strip show is an act of historical cannibalism - both at the level of its performance and its language - Plath offers a critique of her speaker in terms no less strong than those used by Jean Baudrillard when, with reference to the mini-series *Holocaust* (1978), he claimed that television produces a forgetting that 'is part of the extermination'.[285]

'Mary's Song'

'Mary's Song' is described by Tim Kendall as the end-point for many of the thematic preoccupations of Plath's late work. He notes that the 'conflict between maternal love and Christianity is most startlingly portrayed' in this poem, and also that it 'marks the culmination of her [Plath's] identification with the Jews'.[286] But while historical and theological material do come together in surprising and unsettling ways in the poem - above all, through the Berryman-esque use of Christian viewpoints and icons to portray Jewish suffering - it distinctly diverges from the voice and style of Plath's earlier Holocaust monologues. As Rowland notes, 'a restrained tone indicates the suffering of the narrator, as opposed to the camp railing of the earlier piece ['Lady Lazarus']'.[287] And far from offering any culminating authorial 'identification with the Jews', the poem presents the relations between its narrator, its historical subject matter, and its metaphysical schemas, in terms of their evident incompatibility.

The first stanza is similar to the first stanza of 'Daddy', in that it poses, through a dense economy of expression, a weird sort of conundrum that would at first seem to resist any kind of interpretative unravelling:

The Sunday lamb cracks in its fat.

> The fat
> Sacrifices its opacity.[288]

As we later learn that this is a poem about the genocide of the Jews, and because the poem makes reference to other ghostly passover scenes, the 'lamb' could be a reference to the paschal lamb sacrificed annually at the Jewish Passover. Yet the phrase 'The Sunday lamb' places it in a more overtly Christian frame of reference (Sunday being the Christian Sabbath), as does the poem's title, and the fact that Christ was *Agnus Dei* (John the Baptist calls Jesus the 'Lamb of God', and 'the Lamb' is used throughout Revelation as a symbol for Christ).[289] The possible Jewish significance of the lamb is thus, in a sense, 'passed over'. Any direct symbolic association of the lamb with a religious figure or narrative is, moreover, undermined by the fact that it is not actually the lamb that is being sacrificed here; rather it is the surrounding fat which 'sacrifices its opacity'. A lamb's fat becomes molten when cooked, and hence more transparent; but the sacrifice of the fat's opacity, and the bizarre personification, even agency, that is hinted at (the suggestion is that 'opacity' is a quality that the fat itself is reluctant to give up), only brings us to a point of *interpretative* opacity. About all that is clear is that this is not a benign evocation of Christian feeding habits, or a sympathetic representation of Hebraic ritual. Rather, there seems to be something savage going on here, something more like murder than Sunday cookery: Kendall notes the 'hissing sibilance of "Sacrifices its opacity"', and the 'mesmerised loathing in the assonantal repetition' that we find throughout the stanza.[290] The lamb does not 'crackle' in its fat, as we might expect; instead it 'cracks'.

In the second stanza, the speaker refers to a 'window, holy gold'. This could be the oven window, or a kitchen window through which the speaker is looking (kitchens and their windows are charged emblems in Plath's poetry: see, for example, 'Cut' and 'Lesbos', the latter with its portrayal of 'Viciousness in the kitchen!/ The potatoes hiss./It is all Hollywood, windowless').[291] More paradigmatically, this line perhaps

intimates a passage of meaning that is about to emerge within the poem itself: following

the opaque representation of an act of ritual violence, now, in the second and third

stanzas, a 'window' opens more clearly onto a vast panorama of human slaughter:

> A window, holy gold.
> The fire makes it precious,
> The same fire
>
> Melting the tallow heretics
> Ousting the Jews.

The description of one and the same fire 'melting' the heretics and 'ousting' the Jews

links the victims of the Nazi genocide with the victims of the Spanish Inquisition, who

were burnt at the stake, with the phrase 'tallow heretics' recalling the lamb's fat in the

first stanza (tallow is made from animal fat).[292] The 'holy gold' window looks onto a

historical continuum littered with the burnt victims of various types of fanaticism; the

suggestion is perhaps that the Jews, like the Spanish heretics, were 'ousted' in

Auschwitz in order to vindicate the belief systems of their persecutors, before being

conveniently converted into useful by-products (tallow is used to make candles and also,

ironically, soap).

Despite having become a 'burnt offering' (Plath plays on this original meaning

of 'holocaust' in the final stanza), these Jews retain a kind of substantiality, even after

their deaths:

> Their thick palls float
>
> Over the cicatrix of Poland, burnt-out
> Germany.
> They do not die.

The term 'thick palls' evokes the palls of smoke that came from the crematoria of the

death-camps, in which the dead were shrouded instead of their rightful funeral palls.

Through this pun the dead are conceived of as both an absence - those not even

accorded the dignity of a proper burial - and a kind of presence, with their smoke still

clogging the sky. The poem as a whole, and this stanza in particular, seems to have a pictorial analogue in Marc Chagall's painting *White Crucifixion* (1938), whose broad relevance to Holocaust poetry has been discussed at length by Gubar in *Poetry after Auschwitz* (2003).[293] Chagall's provocative image shows Judaic figures and scenes of destruction dotted around the glowing, central figure of the crucified Christ, and 'Mary's Song' makes extensive use of similar historical and theological juxtapositions. The 'thick palls' floating above Poland in Plath's poem are uncannily reminiscent of the spectral Jewish characters that drift through the smoke-filled heavens at the top of Chagall's canvas. However, despite the evident similarities between the two works, Plath's poem is not a direct literary response to the painting (as some of her earlier poems were to other visual works of art).[294] If anything, it is an inversion of it; for while Christ takes a central position in Chagall's picture, the centre of Plath's poetic canvas remains empty, with the poem and all its images circling about the central void of 'burnt-out Germany', which forms a thematic and structural axis ('Germany' being the sole word in the middle line of the middle stanza).

The nothingness at the heart of this poem might suggest a pervasive nihilism, even a debilitating amnesia resulting from the social unwillingness to confront the contemporary significance of the Nazi annihilation of the Jews. Poland is described as a 'cicatrix', a healed wound, intimating a suturing of past and present that is historically and morally objectionable, especially when we consider that this poem was written less than twenty years after the genocide. Yet the knowledge that the dead 'do not die', and also the fact that a cicatrix represents a kind of eternal mark of damage (or at least a scar that will never heal over), offset the possible encroachment of historical forgetfulness. In a final carbon typescript of the poem, Plath changed the line 'Over the cicatrix of Poland' to 'Over scoured Poland'; the latter version, with its play on the word 'scoured', brilliantly suggests the ineradicable contradiction of a country that has been artificially 'cleansed', but which is still being keenly 'watched-over' from elsewhere.[295]

'Mary's Song' refuses to conceive of the Holocaust as an event that has come to an end, its proper narrative temporality being the 'ongoingness' (I use this word in the special sense that Gubar gives it, as a counterbalance to the 'principle of discontinuity' that Lawrence Langer believes separates victims from their offspring and other non-victims) of the present tense.[296] In this way, Plath concurs with Claude Lanzmann:

> When does the Holocaust really end? Did it end on the last day of the war? Did it end with the creation of the state of Israel? No, it still goes on. These events are of such magnitude, of such scope that they never stopped developing their consequences.[297]

In 'Mary's Song', the consequences that develop from these events are both collective (the dead haunt entire countries), and also intensely personal to the narrator. Indeed, it is as though a necessary corollary of the assertion 'they do not die' is that she, the speaker, almost does:

> Gray birds obsess my heart,
> Mouth-ash, ash of eye.
> They settle. […]

Precisely *who* this afflicted speaker is remains unclear: she seems to be part modern-day woman in a suburban kitchen, part Virgin Mary in Paradise. What is evident, however, is that her interiorisation of the event occurs not simply because she wills it as a particularly empathetic individual (be she a domestic or a divine goddess); rather it is, following Lanzmann, a development that is a quality or characteristic of the event itself. The 'gray birds', redolent of the dead Jews in their 'thick palls', themselves 'obsess' her heart: 'to obsess' is a passive verb construction, so the heart is here figured as an object that is being obsessed over, rather than the origin of an individual emotion. This reversal of the more traditional dynamic of mourning - Mary does not mourn the dead as lost companions, but instead they actively return to mourn themselves, in her and through her - precipitates the disintegration of her individual subjectivity: the 'ash of eye' suggests a macabre covering over of the eyes of the speaker, like the closing of the lids

of the dead, and is therefore also the ash of 'I'. Through such pointed double meanings, 'Mary's Song' displays an 'ironic friction between the lyric's traditional investment in voicing subjectivity and a history that assaulted not only innumerable sovereign subjects but indeed the very idea of sovereign selfhood'.[298]

The concluding stanzas describe a crucifixion scene that has been revised and transported to an apocalyptic nuclear age, as the 'gray birds' now 'settle':

> […] On the high
>
> Precipice
> That emptied one man into space
> The ovens glowed like heavens, incandescent.

The basic narrative of the Passion is debased by a series of terminological replacements that derive from the secular language of Hollywood, NASA and nuclear technology: Golgotha becomes a 'precipice', the Ascension becomes an 'emptying', Christ becomes 'one man', and Heaven is merely 'space', and then a sinister simile for 'the ovens' (Plath may have known that the 'funnel' at Treblinka was referred to by the Nazis as 'the road to heaven', and a common euphemism for the gas chambers and crematoria was 'heaven blocks').[299] The lineation of the fifth and sixth stanzas invites the reader to infer that the human ashes that settled on the mouth and eye of the poem's speaker also settle 'On the high/ precipice' where, according to Christian doctrine, the human body of God incarnate was immortalised. The remains of dead European Jews here weigh down on the Ascension, tainting the hope of eternal salvation that Christians believe Christ offered to humankind.

A 'precipice' means both a steep rock-face and a dangerous situation, and a sense of impending disaster rings through these final stanzas of 'Mary's Song', recalling Walter Benjamin's contention that 'to articulate the past historically does not mean to recognise it "the way it really was" (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger.'[300] For Benjamin, authentic acts of historical

representation were linked to a metaphysical ideal: 'The past carries with it a temporal index by which it is referred to redemption.'[301] Plath's poem, however, suggests that the moment of danger is generated by the *demolition* of redemptive promise: in contrast to the present tense time-frame used throughout 'Mary's Song', the satirical crucifixion scene is told in the past tense.

In its pervasive scepticism, and its avoidance of consolatory narratives, 'Mary's Song' displays many of the characteristics of what Young has termed 'antiredemptory literature': a genre of post-Holocaust writing which refuses affirmatory explanations of art's purpose after atrocity, and of atrocity itself.[302] This genre is not in any way an anti-memory literature - the dead 'do not die' - but an antiredemptory work is concerned to refute the idea that any positive values or meanings can be salvaged from such memories. The final stanza does not, therefore, seek to allay the repercussions of the disaster; rather, through further switches in verb tenses, it extends them into the future:

> It is a heart,
> This holocaust I walk in,
> O golden child the world will kill and eat.

The fact that the speaker walks in 'this holocaust', and not 'the Holocaust', encourages the reader to interpret the word in its original etymological sense. Kendall notes that 'Plath underlined "holocaust" in her Webster's dictionary, along with its two definitions: "A sacrificial offering the whole of which is consumed by fire", and "Hence, a complete or thorough sacrifice or destruction, esp. by fire, as of large numbers of human beings."'[303] The poem evokes a sense of 'holocaust' that is not, now, limited to a single event that occurred in a specific place and time: it is a global condition, and one specifically rooted in the human heart. The resumption of the present tense narrative and the phrasing of the penultimate line mean that Mary either *always* walks in this holocaust, or that holocaust is a place, a realm even, that she now walks *into*. In the last line the banality of the world's evil, to paraphrase Hannah Arendt, is

rendered rhythmically through the monotony of the iambic pentameter. Again, the syntax is ambiguous here: the 'golden child' could either be a bystander being warned of the world's murderousness, or else a future victim of anthropophagy (the child that 'the world *will* kill and eat'). The unbreakable nature of humanity's genocidal mentality is emphasised by the way that the line begins with an exclamatory 'O' and ends with the word 'eat', creating a circular narrative which refers us back to the 'Sunday lamb' of the first line of the poem, which now becomes suggestively overlaid with the original sense of 'holocaust' as a 'burnt offering'. The symbolic logic of animal sacrifice and the sacramental consumption of food is thereby roundly debased, and replaced with the more brutal animus of the slaughterhouse, where the death of animals proves only that 'the world will kill and eat'.

In Robert Lowell's earlier poem 'The Holy Innocents', the nativity scene is transferred to Nazi-occupied Europe, where the 'Lamb of the shepherds' finds himself in a time when 'The world out-Herods Herod'.[304] Similarly, the Christian narratives and figures used in 'Mary's Song' suggest that the 'golden child' is Jesus, Mary's son, transported into an age of atrocity. The Christ-child is a common figure in Plath's late poems, especially those about her children (see, for example, 'Nick and the Candlestick', which ends with the line: 'You are the baby in the barn'). In 'Mary's Song', however, this 'golden child' is just another Jewish victim who, like the infant of Lowell's poem - described by Jonathan Raban as a 'Buchenwald Jesus, without dignity or divinity' - is divested of rank and purpose by the occurrence of the Holocaust.[305]

The failure of the biblical analogy is a central feature of Plath's antiredemptory approach to Holocaust representation. As Gubar notes: 'Given their implicit promise of a redemptive salvation or wisdom born of painful sacrifices […] biblical analogues fail to capture the horror of child-survivors [and] of children of survivors.'[306] Refusing to harbour any hope of salvation, poems such as 'The Holy Innocents' and 'Mary's Song' operate through a logic of inversion, where meaning is created negatively, by depriving

Christian figures and icons of their metaphysical, and even their *literary*, significance.
In *The Divine Comedy*, for example, Mary is the Queen of Heaven, a supreme matriarch
who intercedes with God for Dante, so that in the final Canto of the *Paradiso* he is able
to look into the Eternal Light and see the vision of Infinite Goodness. In this vision three
circles explain the mystery of the Incarnation and grant Dante salvation; but the purity
and overpowering *meaningfulness* of the vision is such that he simply cannot remember
it fully, or find an adequate language with which to describe it:

> From that point on, what I could see was greater
> than speech can show: at such a sight, it fails□
> and memory fails when faced with such excess.[307]

Plath's 'Mary', on the other hand, is only able to mediate a vision of personal and
universal collapse about the centre of 'burnt-out/ Germany', where events took place
that are shrouded in darkness, placing them beyond representation and memory in a
manner diametrically opposed to the illuminative excess that we find in Dante.

Another probable poetic influence on 'Mary's Song' appears to be, once again,
a work by Nelly Sachs, this time 'O the Night of the Weeping Children', with the last
line of 'Mary's Song' reproducing the formal lament of Sachs's Holocaust poem: 'O the
night of the weeping children!/ O the night of the children branded for death!'.[308] Rather
than simply being a work of retrospective mourning, Sachs's work is imaginatively
situated *within* a historical time and place from where its narrator bemoans the future
fate of the children. There is a similar disruption of chronology in 'Mary's Song' which,
while not redeeming the child's death, does at least manage to *delay* it by transporting
us 'inside' history to a moment that came before the murder of a Jewish infant who, like
Sachs's 'weeping children', seems 'branded for death'. Here Plath creates another
impossible temporality, suggesting that the only authentically antiredemptory time-
frame within which to locate our contemporary relation to the dead is that of an eternity

- again, a religious concept - in which we are confronted with the infinite expectation not of salvation, but of loss.

CONCLUSION: 'Getting There'

In my introduction I argued that 'Letter in November' figures history as an oblique category that is internally divided from itself: specifically, the study of 'History' proper is differentiated from the relationship between the living and the dead, and the past is represented as both unreachable in, *and* contemporaneous with, the present. Readings of Plath's Holocaust verse suggest that an understanding of the past as both lost and ever-present informs her representation of the Holocaust as an event which both resists and demands imaginative configuration within an aesthetic medium such as poetry; as such, it is not made known through a spurious rhetoric of representative wholeness, but through provocative monologues which highlight the deficiencies of their speakers, and through ghostly encroachments on the style and form of more lyrical works such as 'The Munich Mannequins' and 'Mary's Song' (employing what Rowland terms the 'regular irregularities of awkward poetics').[309] I have used the terms 'history' and 'Holocaust' almost interchangeably throughout my commentary; but this begs the question of the true relation between the two in Plath's work: is her representation of the Holocaust governed by considerations deriving specifically from the Nazi genocide? Or does it originate in a much broader understanding of history as a whole?

The poem 'Getting There', composed less than a week after 'Lady Lazarus', is significant in this regard, for like 'Mary's Song', it combines specific references to the Holocaust with frequent gestures of imaginative generalisation. The first-person narrator is locked in a boxcar full of injured and mutilated bodies:

> The gigantic gorilla interior
> Of the wheels move, they appal me——
> The terrible brains
> Of Krupp, black muzzles
> Revolving, the sound
> Punching out Absence! like cannon.
> It is Russia I have to get across, it is some war or other.[310]

Despite the speaker's evident disorientation, and her comment that 'it is some war or other', the reference to the German industrialist and armaments manufacturer Krupp would suggest that the backdrop to the action is the Second World War, as would the boxcar full of misplaced persons traversing Russia, which brings to mind the geographically dizzying journey that many survivors were forced to undertake after their liberation (famously described by Levi in *The Truce* (1963)). The principal themes of the poem - dehumanisation and the collapse of identity, the failure of memory, the impossibility or undesirability of factual representation - are also characteristic features of Plath's handling of the Holocaust, which she portrays as an event surrounded by silence. The wheels of the train are described as 'black muzzles' (recalling the 'dark funnel' of 'Little Fugue', and the 'black phones' of 'Daddy' and 'The Munich Mannequins') which carry their victims to an uncertain destination, and they are 'Punching out Absence! like cannon', with the capitalisation of the word 'Absence' placing graphic emphasis on a key term in the poet's Holocaust vocabulary.

Historical voids consistently emerge in Plath's Holocaust verse as both a central justification for writing and a representational restraint: the battle being fought within these works is not with the author's suicidal inclinations, but with those of history itself. Developing a central trope of Plath's Holocaust writing, 'Getting There' suggests that absence was an inherent characteristic of an event which, in Felman's terms, constituted a 'radical deception' through its assault on the capacity of survivors to bear witness. As Felman notes, it was 'impossible to testify from inside otherness, or from […] inside amnesia, or from inside deception and the delusion of coercive self-deception', and so

the Holocaust 'occurs as the unprecedented, inconceivable historical advent of *an event without a witness*'.[311] In the final lines of 'Getting There', having been reduced to a primal state of existence - 'I am dragging my body/ Quietly through the straw of the boxcars', 'Will there be fire, will there be bread?' - the narrator undergoes an unsettling metamorphosis:

> The carriages rock, they are cradles.
> And I, stepping from this skin
> Of old bandages, boredoms, old faces
>
> Step to you from the black car of Lethe,
> Pure as a baby.

The boxcar is figured as Lethe, the underworld river of forgetfulness that cleansed the memory of sin from those passing through purgatory, with the narrator unable to remember, and clearly not *wanting* to remember, anything about the experiences she has just been through. Kroll argues that this chthonic lustration forms the necessary precondition for the speaker's symbolic transcendence of history, purifying her of 'false encumbrances'.[312] Yet Plath's lines, much like Kroll's assessment of them, are in actual fact rather sinister; above all, they suggest, following Felman, that the Nazi genocide had an inherent capacity for self-erasure, for 'covering its own tracks'. Marjorie Uroff also observes that a boxcar that is a 'cradle' risks nurturing 'a new generation of killers; the pure baby who steps from it will perpetrate murder because she has forgotten the world's past history of murderousness'.[313] This said, the speaker's contention that she leaves the hell of the boxcar having been cleansed of her past remains partially unconvincing - it could even be regarded as a deliberate, desperate affectation - as her amnesiac exit is shot through with memory-traces. The claim that she is 'pure as a baby', for example - and with it the suggestion of innocence regained - is undermined by an earlier reference to the sick and the dead being gathered in a 'hospital of dolls': an image which conflates innocence and wounding, and which perhaps alludes to the Holocaust novel *House of Dolls* (1956), written by a survivor who published the work

under his prisoner number, Ka-tzetnik 135633, and whose anonymity, in turn, mirrors that of Plath's speaker.

'Getting There' clearly owes much to Marx's definition of war as the 'locomotive of history', and the metaphoric suggestiveness of the train is not limited to a Holocaust-specific frame of reference; in its relentless search for destination, and in its appetitive destructiveness that is both animalistic and mechanistic, the train also allegorises the broad teleology of modernity as a whole. Drawing on Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944), Britzolakis reads the poem as Plath's ambiguous negotiation with Enlightenment rationality, with the train representing the divided feelings of a poet who is at once critical of, and enthralled by, the drive towards mastery which, according to Horkheimer and Adorno, made the advance of the Enlightenment 'a narrative of violence which tends to annihilate otherness in the name of an implacable principle of identity'.[314] The destructive logic of 'othering' is inflicted on a speaker who is a nameless facet of a mechanised social process that she is unable to control or decipher:

> What do wheels eat, these wheels
> Fixed to their arcs like gods,
> The silver leash of the will——
> Inexorable. And their pride!
> All the gods know is destinations.
> I am a letter in this slot——

Here Plath's critique of history as an assault on the sovereign selfhood of 'the other' seems to entail an explanatory expansiveness whose meaning cannot be limited to any single event or historical period. Yet for Horkheimer and Adorno, the 'destination' of the Enlightenment project as a whole was, specifically, Auschwitz, where reason - which had sought to eradicate otherness, and to overcome irrationalities such as religion, sympathetic magic and myth - turned against itself and transformed into irrational violence. As Britzolakis puts it, the 'oppressive tendency' of the

Enlightenment's will to power 'culminates in the catastrophe of the Holocaust, in whose

wake the entire heritage of European high culture appears discredited or exhausted'.[315]

Such an understanding of the past is also advanced in 'Getting There', in which, much

as in 'Mary's Song', history is a process (its wheels 'fixed to their arcs like gods')

whose meaning is understood retrospectively, after Auschwitz, *as* holocaust:

> The train is dragging itself, it is screaming——
> An animal
> Insane for the destination,
> The bloodspot,
> The face at the end of the flare.

The specific historical period obliquely identified in the poem gives history as a whole a

final meaning which, up to that point, it did not have, becoming an endpoint, or

'bloodspot', which casts its shadow over the whole spectrum of the past, darkening all

previous eras with its suggestion that human progress - an insanity 'for the destination' -

was only ever getting *there*: to dehumanisation, to bodies packed into boxcars, to Krupp

and industrialised mass-murder, to Auschwitz.

This analysis of history is articulated through a poetic discourse whose precise

relation to the social processes it describes, however, remains vexed (a problem which

parallels the controversial use of Holocaust spectacle in 'Lady Lazarus'). As Britzolakis

points out, the 'engine' which represents the relentless, and ultimately disastrous,

progress of the Enlightenment is also one of Plath's favourite figures for poetic

language, drawing the poem and its subject into an uneasy conjunction. Contrasting it

with the equestrian imagery used in self-reflexive 'poems about poems' such as 'Ariel',

which evoke the Platonic emblem of the 'noble rider' of rhetoric, Britzolakis notes how

Holocaust poems such as 'Getting There' and 'Daddy' use the figure of the engine to

show language brutally dominating its users, acting as 'a metaphorical machine which

conveys the "I" into a historical and ideological "other" space not of its own

choosing'.[316] (Significantly, in this regard, Plath's poem 'Metaphors' actually ends with

metaphor describing itself as having 'boarded the train there's no getting off' - perhaps a 'train of association' that sets its own course, beyond the will or control of the individual, and which ultimately leads, like the ones in 'Daddy' and 'Getting There', to Auschwitz.)[317]

The question to ask of these texts is to what extent the engine metaphor reflects the praxis of the poems themselves: do they simply represent the coercive, authoritarian dimension of post-Holocaust language use, or do they possess, or willingly exploit, a kind of will to mastery over their own speakers? In one sense, 'Getting There' and 'Daddy' clearly avoid this latter hazard: by highlighting the damage done when an instrumental language turns subjectivity into a reified aspect of a violent social process, the poems are inherently reflections *on* that social process. But in another sense, as Britzolakis observes of 'Daddy', this does not offset the way in which they activate, through sound and rhythm, a 'daemonic […] or nihilistic side of the auditory imagination', where language, just like the Enlightenment rationality it would purport to critique (what 'Getting There' calls 'The terrible brains/ Of Krupp'), acts as a 'technology which violently, if exhilaratingly, wrests the body to its own ends'.[318] For as Britzolakis points out, in 'Daddy' it is 'the metrical parallelism of rhyme' that *produces* the persecutor-victim metaphor which runs through the poem, with 'you' finding a natural corollary in 'Jew'. It is the poem's own engine-like language that yokes together 'historical and subjective crisis in manifestly unstable metaphorical conjunctions'.[319] There is thus a sense in which poetic language is implicated in the creation of the victim identity of the narrator of 'Daddy', and in the 'othering' of the abject narrator of 'Getting There'. As a result, these poems could be judged to play out 'a deep complicity with the drive towards mastery that Adorno sees as central to Enlightenment', staging a '"dialectic of enlightenment" in the arena of metaphor, rhythm, and sound' by 'drawing upon the ambiguously incantatory and oral powers of

poetic language itself': the very irrational 'powers' which, according to Adorno and Horkheimer, made Auschwitz possible.[320]

For Adorno, the task of the artwork would not, however, be to resolve the contradiction of using aspects of the irrational forces unleashed when reason turned against itself *in* Auschwitz to articulate a critique of the rationality that led *to* Auschwitz: a successful work is not one which superficially overcomes social and aesthetic contradictions, but one which is able to embody them 'pure and uncompromised, in its innermost structure'.[321] Monologues such as 'Daddy' and 'Lady Lazarus' might, therefore, use incantatory rhythms and parody voodoo ritual in a way which invokes the mythic and irrational elements that Enlightenment rationality had outwardly opposed (and which were later turned against it), or appropriate a kitschy Holocaust aesthetic for a self-dramatising death show - but only when their stylistic excesses are held in check by structural and imagistic counter-arguments which point to the paradoxes or ironies of their language use. This kind of interplay between form and content, advocated by Adorno, also generates the internal intelligence of 'Mary's Song', in which signifiers of religious understanding spiral around a structural centre - 'burnt-out/Germany' - that empties them of iconic meaning. These poems all operate through a logic of self-reflexivity: they employ a metaphorical language which threatens to violate the legitimate memory of the Nazi genocide, but the comparisons between self and Jew in 'Daddy', the self-aggrandising appropriations of 'Lady Lazarus', and the discourse of religious sacrifice in 'Mary's Song', are each subjected to structural negations within the poems themselves. 'Getting There' also contains the 'threat' element: it points to the mechanicalism of its own language, shows subjectivity being appended to the instrumental logic of Enlightenment rationality, and ends with a moment of putative transcendence in which a survivor celebrates the onset of amnesia. This is not a completely reified artwork, where culture becomes indistinguishable form its object, society, as 'to say that consciousness of society is completely reified implies that no

critical consciousness or theory is possible', and ideas about the relation between the individual and society are clearly entertained in the poem.[322] However, it lacks a probing formal critique (through, say, structure, sound or allusion) of its dominant engine metaphor, and of its philosophy of history *as* holocaust, to match the ironic meta-commentaries of the earlier monologues. In this way, 'Getting There' does not clarify, but rather deviates from, Plath's more normative historical poetics; for her most 'serious' Holocaust poems articulate the specific contradictions of Holocaust representation through their form.

3

The Poetics of Regeneration:

W. D. Snodgrass's *The Fuehrer Bunker*

INTRODUCTION

Following his inglorious return to Berlin from his western command centre in Ziegenberg in January 1945, Hitler transferred his living quarters to an underground bunker beneath the Reich Chancellery; with the territorial boundaries of the Reich rapidly contracting, and the Russians closing in on the capital, the dictator now sought an escape from the constant air raids that were disrupting his sleep and distracting him from his work.[323] The bunker to which he withdrew was created by the extensive reconstruction of an old bomb shelter - a lengthy project which had been completed in the summer of 1944: the original shelter had been deepened, with a whole second tier added, and encased by a sixteen and a half feet thick shell of reinforced concrete.[324] Hitler occupied the lower, and slightly larger, of the two storeys, which subsequently became known as the Fuehrer Bunker. It consisted of eighteen small, dimly lit rooms built either side of a central passage. By April, as the German military position deteriorated even further, Hitler was also holding his twice-daily staff conferences in the bunker. Immured in this tenebrous complex, he now emerged into daylight only to walk his dog, Blondi, in the crater-filled Chancellery gardens, or to have lunch with his secretaries.[325]

For those members of Hitler's inner circle who had joined him underground, life was chaotic and strained. As Alan Bullock puts it in his biography *Hitler: A Study in Tyranny* (1952):

> The physical atmosphere of the bunker was oppressive, but this was nothing compared to the pressure of the psychological atmosphere. The incessant air-raids, the knowledge that the Russians were now in the city, nervous exhaustion, fear, and despair produced a tension bordering on hysteria, which was heightened by propinquity to a man whose changes of mood were not only unpredictable but affected the lives of all those in the shelter.[326]

Hitler continued to live an increasingly bizarre subterranean existence throughout April, deploying battalions of non-existent troops, clinging to a long-held belief that a split among the Allies was inevitable, and ordering extempore dismissals, executions and promotions, until he shot himself on April 30.

In W. D. Snodgrass's cycle of poems *The Fuehrer Bunker* (1995), a series of dramatic monologues spoken by prominent Nazis during the last days of the Reich, the tumultuous atmosphere of the bunker becomes the backdrop for a poetic exploration of the genocidal mentality, with the underground chamber standing as a central symbol for the buried histories and repressed psychological energies that the poems unearth. Oliver Hirschbiegel's compelling film *Downfall* (2005), which also retells the story of Hitler's final days in the bunker, deploys a realist aesthetic to portray key events in the fall of the Reich; while the film is a character study of Hitler and his secretary, Traudl Junge, the style means that it lacks inwardness, and viewers are left with no real insight into the main characters' past histories or motivations: the point is to show as closely as possible *what* happened, not to ask *why*. In *The Fuehrer Bunker*, on the other hand, the besieged hideout is, in the words of the fictional Goebbels, less a representation of a real historical space than a kind of 'confession booth/ Where liars face up to blank truth'.[327]

The Origins and Objectives of *The Fuehrer Bunker*

Snodgrass had long aspired to dramatise events in the Fuehrer Bunker, and to recreate the personalities of the highest-ranking, most infamous Nazis. He has commented:

> As soon as the war was over, I began reading the Nazi books and memoirs. I really wanted to know what the hell could somebody think, or feel, that would make them feel those acts were necessary. How could they even think they were possible?[328]

In the late 1940s he tried to write a play based on Hugh Trevor-Roper's investigative report into the death of Hitler, *The Last Days of Hitler* (1947). The play was never completed (by Snodgrass's own admission, at the time he 'wasn't very good'), but its grounding in Trevor-Roper's documentary report, and above all its overt theatricality, were to become central elements of the ambitious poetic cycle on which he began work in the early 1970s.[329]

Trevor-Roper has himself described the events leading up to Hitler's death as 'a carefully produced theatrical piece' consistent with the dictator's whole previous history, which had been 'consciously theatrical, perhaps even operatic'.[330] The dramatic character of the last days in the bunker was reflected in Snodgrass's chosen poetic form, what he has called an '*oratorio* or *speech cantata*'.[331] Like Dylan Thomas's *Under Milk Wood* (1954), the cycle is a kind of 'play for voices' (though Snodgrass does not make use of Thomas's dialogic technique). For this form Snodgrass has frequently registered his indebtedness to Henri Coulette's *The War of the Secret Agents* (1966), another series of dramatic monologues set in World War II and based on real-life events. Coulette's poly-voiced poem tells the story of the betrayal of a group of secret agents by the British government: sent to Paris, where many of them were eventually murdered by the Gestapo, the agents were unaware that they were being used to distract the German intelligence forces, so that the real secret agents - the 'underground beneath the underground' - would not get caught.[332]

Not only the form of *The War of the Secret Agents*, but also its themes of political intrigue and personal betrayal, influenced *The Fuehrer Bunker*. In its elaborate narrative plotting, its focus on court intrigues and rivalries, and its depiction of the downfall of flawed over-reachers, Snodgrass's volume might even be said to resemble a Jacobean tragedy. Paul Gaston has termed *The Fuehrer Bunker* 'a tragedy of evil', and Snodgrass has himself compared his technique of juxtaposing highly stylised passages with more realistic scenes to *King Lear*.[333] There are also elements of Greek tragedy in the poet's use of a formal chorus, and in his concerted exploration of the relation between political events and family life; and Snodgrass draws extensively on Freud's theoretical reading of the 'family drama' played out in Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex* to explore the unconscious motivations of his characters. In an interview with Gaston, he explained this eagerness to give military events a domestic context: 'We create our political systems and our armies in the terms that the family has set out for us. The same drives that make us make families make us make nations.'[334]

While *The Fuehrer Bunker* has been performed on the stage on several occasions, it should not, however, be thought of as a play; this is very much a verse cycle, and its drama is most elaborately performed on the page.[335] For the volume Snodgrass created what he termed 'a compendium of verse forms', whereby 'each speaker has a kind of verse form that is typical of his or her personality'.[336] The result is one of the most elaborately stylised and inventive aesthetic representations of Nazism, with the form, *mise-en-page*, and even the typography of the poems embodying the differing psychological states of the main characters. The monologues of Heinrich Himmler, for example, appear on a square grid, with each capitalised letter occupying one box, every word separated by a dot, and each line comprising exactly thirty characters. This layout suggests a telegram, and evokes the programmatic nature of the Reichsfuehrer's psyche; more extremely, the Himmler poems bear a strong resemblance to concentration camp blueprints, with their symmetrical rows of identical oblong

barracks. At the same time, there is something rather childish about the squared page, which seems to mimic the notebooks in which schoolchildren practise their handwriting and spelling. The impression of a psychology which combines infantile simplicity, heinous criminality and a kind of inhuman mechanism is reinforced by the fact that every poem is an acrostic of the alphabet, the first letters of each line progressing from A to Z in unfaltering succession. Similarly, the technocratic mind-set of Albert Speer is reflected in a form which consists of a series of right-angled triangles. As she prepares to commit infanticide, the monomania and rigid resolve of Magda Goebbels are figured through the compulsive repetitions of the villanelle. Not all the forms, however, share this structural tightness: Hitler's poems are incredibly varied in layout - including one which alternates lines of a spleen-filled interior monologue with passages from a masochist's sex manual - and the Goering poems employ an expansive, flatulent language to match the corpulency and crudeness of the real-life Reichsmarschall.

Snodgrass regards the complete cycle of *The Fuehrer Bunker*, which was over two decades in the making, as his most accomplished piece of work.[337] But despite the author's belief in the cycle, it has met with a largely hostile response from critics and readers at each stage of its long publication history. A common charge is that the volume humanises the senior Nazis, transforming moral monsters into people with feelings and personalities (a charge also levelled at Hirschbiegel's film).[338] Many also argue that by attempting to understand these murderers, one makes the first step towards forgiveness.[339] Yet these criticisms originate in precisely the sorts of biases that *The Fuehrer Bunker* purposively sets out to counteract. As Snodgrass has commented, the Nazis *were* human: 'If you desire to believe that they were *not* human, then you are guilty of exactly their worst crime, which is what they tried to do to the Jews, to believe that they were not human.'[340] For Snodgrass, those who demonise the Nazi leadership, and who believe their crimes to be wholly foreign to themselves, and to their country and culture, miss the most important lessons of the genocide: 'one of the real, basic,

terrible paradoxes of being alive [is] that your enemy *is* human and not so different from you'.[341] In the poems this observation is concretised by the fact that Snodgrass's Nazis speak a slangy American.

If readers of *The Fuehrer Bunker* were to appreciate the basic similarity between themselves and the perpetrators of genocide, then, as well as sharing the same vernacular, Snodgrass felt they would have to be brought into a hazardous, even unwelcome, *psychological* contact with evil:

> The aim of a work of art surely is to stretch the reader's psyche, to help him [*sic*] to identify with more people, with more life than he normally does. He is only going to be able to do that if you get him past his beliefs about right and wrong which keep him from seeing what ways in which he is like certain other people. And, of course, he is going to object to that when you do it.[342]

Any attempt to understand the Nazis would equally demand a deconstruction of the elaborate mythology that the murderers concocted about themselves and their party: by 'exposing these people for what they really were, not allowing them to be seen as they wanted to be seen', the cycle would reveal the human characteristics that permitted the conception and execution of inhuman acts.[343]

The overarching explanatory purpose of the cycle was also embodied in its structure, with the form of the dramatic monologue reflecting Snodgrass's conviction that individual psychology can be a determining force in history. The monologic framework meant that the speakers were 'not talking to anyone outside themselves' (the reader excepted), allowing Snodgrass to describe past actions, or to portray dimensions of character, unknown to anyone but the speaker.[344] As I noted in the previous chapter, a generic trait of the classic dramatic monologue - Robert Browning's 'My Last Duchess', for example - is that the speaker must, even when talking to some other character, give something away. Snodgrass also believed that in certain instances the monologue form could be used to create *added* levels of self-awareness: his Hitler, for example, was made 'much more conscious of his own destructiveness than he ever appeared to be'.[345]

Poetic form is thus the enabling principle of the cycle's interrogatory technique, allowing the poet to fashion a strangely unshackled form of reality in which 'the speakers say things they never would have said to anyone, perhaps not even to themselves'.[346]

History and Poetry

Snodgrass's anti-Nazi agenda is indubitable; yet the psychological realism to which he lays claim - whereby poetic technique allows historical characters to understand themselves even better than they seem to have done in reality - is frequently belied by the poems themselves, which operate more at the level of satire and vaudeville. The extravagant, instrumental form that Snodgrass uses to represent a figure such as Himmler, for example, suggests that the man was *anything but* human. Moreover, it should be noted that when crafting the volume, Snodgrass's fundamental approach to historical factuality was highly selective. While many of the events described, and even individual lines, were recorded in historical documents, he also, in his own words, 'made up some episodes'; in particular, he doubted the legitimacy of his portrayal of Magda Goebbels's promiscuity: 'I have put things in that I don't believe happened. Or in some cases I have accepted an interpretation of a character which I do not believe to be historical fact.'[347] His justifications for such alterations are poetic, not historical: 'A true fact which doesn't feel true in the poem is no good at all. The poem has to feel authentic. That is much more important than anything so shallow as documentary evidence.'[348] Clearly then, when deciding what to include or exclude, what to represent or invent, Snodgrass's principal criterion was the production of a satisfying *aesthetic* piece.

Snodgrass had always felt that the originality of, and necessity for, his project lay in its poetic form: when he started the cycle, 'more books were being written about the Nazis than just about any other thing […] But nobody was talking about them in *poems*.'[349] This was probably the case because any attempt to identify and explain the origins of historical atrocity would more normally be attempted in a medium such as prose, which demands that veracity take pre-eminence over the 'feel' of a fact, and where documentary evidence is anything but a 'shallow' concern. Yet Snodgrass believes that it is poetry, rather than prose, that is the intrinsically historical form. In a discussion of the classic works of Homer and Aeschylus, he observed: 'People want to separate history and poetry. Or history and drama. I think that the art doesn't demand that separation.'[350] Regretting poetry's dissociation from song - and with it the sense of 'epic' poetry being a memory bank for significant episodes in history - he hoped that in his volume the two would be partially reconnected.[351] What *The Fuehrer Bunker* ultimately lacks, however, at least as far as its success as a contribution to historical understanding goes, is precisely prose's formal capacity to investigate the complex sociological and economic factors that underlie historical events. The many monographs, biographies, and historical studies of Hitler and Nazism suggest that individual psychology alone cannot account for the totality of the genocide. Broader political, historical and socio-economic factors determine *why* the destructive psychological forces and 'horrifying powers' which Snodgrass associates with the Nazi period, and which he feels we 'hold […] in check only very tentatively', might erupt with such deadly consequence in one particular place and time.[352] In *The Fuehrer Bunker*, however, the rather unsatisfying assumption seems to be that genocide can break into the world merely as a result of one man's destructive volition.

The era in which the poetic saga was the only medium for the cultural expression and retention of historical data has long passed, and poetry should not be judged by the criteria we set for works of history. As the verse of writers such as

Berryman and Plath shows, poetry after and about Auschwitz has become characterised by the absolute *division* that rends it from the experience of the past as it was. If art does not demand the separation of poetry and history, then history most certainly does. Fortunately, however, this is a truth that Snodgrass seems to have stumbled on despite himself in *The Fuehrer Bunker* - a volume which, through its selective approach to historical fact, its Americanised first-person voices, and its innovative manipulation of form, actually tends to *exaggerate* the gulf between historical reality and aesthetic experience that its author had claimed to suture. In doing so, *The Fuehrer Bunker* forces us to reassess the exact nature of the relation between history and poetry.

If we accept that when its subject is an event such as the Nazi genocide, a poem does not, and indeed *cannot*, be expected to attain historical significance through its transmission of factual data, then a work such as *The Fuehrer Bunker* begs the questions: what *can* poetry tell us about atrocity? What is its function? And, by extension: can a compelling aesthetic experience ever have a serious historical purpose? In this chapter, through close analysis of the central monologues of the sequence - those of Speer, Hitler, Goebbels and Goering - I will argue that *The Fuehrer Bunker* is a work of formal and linguistic experimentation whose most important theme is the postwar survival of poetry, even of language itself. In the volume, poetry becomes the principle by which language is salvaged from political and ideological processes that had threatened to overwhelm it - a recovery that is portrayed as the necessary precondition for cultural, political and personal regeneration; and it is this, rather than any putative mimetic function, that makes *The Fuehrer Bunker* one of the most significant explorations of aesthetic possibility and purpose in the wake of the Nazi period.

Albert Speer: Forms of Not Knowing

Albert Speer, Hitler's architect protégé, and later his spectacularly efficient Minister of Armaments and War Production, is commonly portrayed as an anomalous figure within the upper echelons of the Nazi hierarchy, with his lucidity and obvious intelligence setting him apart from the obtuse opportunists, such as Bormann and Goering, who comprised the majority of Hitler's inner circle. Hugh Trevor-Roper, for example, described him as an 'extraordinary' man, 'perhaps the ablest and most interesting of all the Nazi government'.[353] When writing *The Last Days of Hitler*, Trevor-Roper drew extensively on statements that Speer made while imprisoned by the Allies after the war, and also on his defence at Nuremberg:

> His conclusions are never naïve, never parochial; they seem always honest; they are often profound. If he seems sometimes to have fallen too deeply under the spell of the tyrant whom he served, at least he is the only servant whose judgement was not corrupted by attendance on that dreadful master; at least he retained the capacity to examine himself, and the honesty to declare both his errors and his convictions.[354]

At Nuremberg the articulate and smartly dressed Speer was the only defendant to accept some degree of responsibility for those orders from Hitler that he had personally carried out. He also repeatedly emphasised his belief - to the consternation of Goering and the 'loyalist' members of the party - that all senior members of the Nazi leadership shared a 'collective responsibility' for the atrocities committed by the regime.[355] During the course of the trial, Speer even outlined a plan he had conceived to assassinate Hitler and his closest confidantes, and disclosed how, when this tentative plot became unworkable, he systematically disobeyed the Fuehrer's 'Scorched Earth' policy, which had directed retreating German forces to destroy the industry and infrastructure of Reich territory before it came under the control of the Allies.

During the twenty years of imprisonment in Spandau to which he was eventually sentenced, Speer read voraciously, and worked on his memoirs, *Inside the Third Reich* (1970), in which he detailed his intimate, but markedly ambiguous,

relationship with Hitler (famously stating that 'if Hitler had had any friends, I would certainly have been one of his close friends').[356] He also reaffirmed his unswerving penitential stance: 'it is not only specific faults that burden my conscience, great as these may have been. My moral failure is not a matter of this item and that; it resides in my active participation with the whole course of events.'[357] Following his release, *Inside the Third Reich* became an international best-seller, and Speer became a media figure. Throughout the 1970s he made frequent television appearances and gave numerous newspaper and magazine interviews in an attempt to play out the public role he had forged for himself as, in the words of Gitta Sereny, 'the one apparently sane and repentant voice from the Third Reich'.[358]

Here I quote from Sereny's probing study of Speer's character and political career, *Albert Speer: His Battle with Truth* (1995); but it is precisely Speer's self-characterisation as the exemplary penitent that Sereny questions in her book, insisting that his media profile, and his outwardly laudable acceptance of culpability at Nuremberg, were in fact an *evasion* of his personal responsibility for Nazism's worst crimes. For Sereny, neither his testimony nor his later written depositions sufficiently account for 'the specific faults' that led to his own particular moral failures. Above all, they did not reflect Speer's guilt over what the psychologist Alexander Mitscherlich has termed his *Lebenslüge*, the 'Great Lie' of his life: that from around the time of Himmler's infamous Posen speech to the Nazi Reichsleiter and Gauleiter on 6 October 1943 - which Speer may have attended in person - he undoubtedly knew that Hitler was executing his long-planned genocide of the European Jews.[359]

In *The Fuehrer Bunker* Snodgrass uses poetic form as a diagrammatic representation of Speer's turbulent psychological state during the final months of the war - as Gaston puts it, 'form becomes almost hieroglyphic, a kind of picture of the poem's content' - and Snodgrass, like Sereny, is centrally concerned with the place of the Jews in Speer's conscience.[360] The basic building block of the Speer poems is a

twelve-line stanza that has the shape of a right-angled triangle (what Snodgrass calls 'pyramids').[361] The repetition of this geometric form clearly highlights the rigidity of Speer's technocratic mind-set. In his Gaston interview, Snodgrass, who had visited Speer in 1972, pointed out that the fact that each line is slightly longer than the previous one makes the poems resemble an arrangement of steps - 'like the steps [of the bunker] Speer is going down and coming up in the poem' - while also forming an 'imitation of his compulsion for growth, for size': a compulsion that Speer had channelled into his Pharaonic architectural designs.[362] The fact that the triangles are mirrored, so that an inverted triangle sits beneath each upright one, gives the fictional Speer a touch more humanity: the lower triangles, often set in a lighter typeface, tend to contain his worries and doubts, and show a more ambiguous, perhaps even unconscious, underside to his personality. These reflected triangles also make visible his emphatically divided relationship with Hitler. Nonetheless, the overriding impression created by the structural logic of the monologues is that of a man who digests all outside information by way of the exact same cognitive pathways, regardless of its content.

There is a sudden change, however, in the fourth Speer poem, where the triangular form is unexpectedly disrupted. In the previous monologues Speer has described his subversion of Hitler's 'Scorched Earth' policy; now, climbing the bunker steps into the Chancellery garden after Hitler's birthday ceremony, and growing increasingly disenchanted with his leader, he falls into a disturbed reverie, asking: 'What was it/ Hanke saw there in the East?/ And warned me not/ to find out, not to see?'[363] The reference here is to a conversation that Speer recounts in *Inside the Third Reich*, which took place when his friend Karl Hanke, the Gauleiter of Lower Silesia, came to visit him in the summer of 1944:

> Sitting in the green leather easy chair in my office, he seemed confused and spoke falteringly, with many breaks. He advised me never to accept an invitation to inspect a concentration camp in Upper Silesia. Never, under any

circumstances. He had seen something there which he was not permitted to describe and moreover could not describe.[364]

In the retrospective narrative of *Inside the Third Reich* Speer goes on to make the connection between Hanke's oblique reference to a camp in Upper Silesia and Auschwitz; in Snodgrass's monologue, however, Speer's memory of the haunting conversation is enveloped in the silence of the place his friend was neither permitted nor able to describe, and he does not appear to pursue his enquiry to its logical conclusion. The stanza tails off: 'What/ are the Russians digging up? the sort of things I saw in the camps ☐/ forced labour, wretched conditions…' While the content of these lines suggests that Speer is unwilling to answer his own question, the syntax and layout actually imply that he has an unacknowledged or unconscious understanding of his friend's full meaning. The non-capitalisation of the definite article that follows his question 'What/ are the Russians digging up?' suggests that not only is he recalling what he had seen in other camps - the emaciated 'forced labourers' who were kept in 'wretched conditions' - but also that he is in effect answering his own question: what the Russians were digging up were precisely these 'things'. In this unwitting depersonalisation of the slave labourers, Snodgrass's Speer betrays the inhuman attitude that Speer himself admitted characterised his approach to the workers who fell under his administration:

> the desperate race with time, my obsessional fixation on production and output statistics, blurred all considerations and feelings of humanity. An American historian has said of me that I loved machines more than people. He is not wrong. I realize that the sight of suffering people influenced only my emotions, but not my conduct. On the plane of feelings only sentimentality emerged; in the realm of decisions, on the other hand, I continued to be ruled by the principles of utility.[365]

Snodgrass further intimates that Hanke's faltering testimony may have troubled Speer's conscience more than he himself wanted to acknowledge - reminding him of things he had hoped to forget, and thus engaging him in a repression that was at the root

of the Great Lie of his life - through his deviation from the triangular stanzaic structure of the previous monologues. Instead of a regular geometric shape, the layout transforms briefly into an irregular quatrain as Speer describes how his sleep has become troubled by an etching by K←the Kollwitz called *The Guillotine* (a copy hung in a hotel room Speer had stayed in during January 1945), and then disintegrates altogether as he recalls Hanke's warnings, imploding into a swimming form with no coherent structure.[366] The shape of the stanza almost resembles a cloud of smoke (a technique that William Heyen uses in his Holocaust poem 'Blue'), and thus poetic form here literally draws out a truth - that of the gassing of the Jews - which the speaker of the monologue remains blind to.[367] In the following stanza the triangular structure is reinstated; but now there is a confusing alternation between a bold and a regular typeface, and the actuality of the camp crematoria becomes horrifically implicated in Speer's everyday life: '**Time for a cigarette.**/ **He forbids us all to smoke**/ **then sends us all up the chimney.**/ (*What chimney? Where?*).' But Speer, unlike the reader, is unable to obey his own injunction - '**Idiot, use your**/ **eyes**' - and instead, as he reverts to worrying about whether or not Hitler knows of his betrayal, he consciously chooses to 'neglect his knowing'.

For Snodgrass, as for Sereny, Speer's ultimate inability to recognise his direct complicity in Hitler's plan to murder the Jews was not simply a question of a lapsed memory: it was a moral struggle, and one in which he failed. This is most strikingly demonstrated in the penultimate Speer monologue where, with the Russians descending on Berlin, and being concerned for his own safety in a newly conquered Reich, Speer flatly denies his knowledge of the genocide: the killing of Jews by gas now becomes 'our/ Enemies' propaganda', and the shootings, mass graves and medical experiments are dismissed as 'too absurd/ To think of'.[368] In this stanza a huge bold-faced triangular form is redeployed, as though to represent the clumsy triumph of willed self-delusion over those more nebulous forms of unwanted knowledge that had already seemed

psychologically and structurally precarious in previous passages: '(*What Chimney? Where?*)'.

This representation of a deep rift in Speer's psyche, of a man who has actively to fend off his innate capacity for moral self-questioning ('**I** evade my better self', he concedes), very much accords with the picture of Speer that was to emerge in Sereny's *Albert Speer*. It is even possible to see the whole of Sereny's investigative labour in that work as an attempt to help Speer break down exactly these kinds of inflexible, pyramidic structures of cognition and memory in which his genuine knowledge of the murder of the Jews had become entombed.[369] For Sereny, this was a necessary precondition for Speer's personal moral regeneration - a journey which she hoped and believed he would one day undertake; and the possibility that Speer, despite his shortcomings, might be the one Nazi who was capable of genuine remorse, even rebirth (the first line of Speer's first monologue reads, 'So/ I am/ Reborn?'), is hinted at in the final two Snodgrass poems.[370] Above all, the sudden amorphousness of these monologues suggests that at least Speer - unlike, say, Himmler - *can* change (although one might equally say 'adapt', which would suggest a sort of ingenious capacity for survival, and an altogether more bleak prognosis).

Speer's final monologue concludes with the minister reflecting - apparently for the first time - on the impact that the war has had on his family, and on the postwar life they might face, possibly in his absence: 'How will my wife, my unshaken/ wife, survive? I have seen too little/ of my children…'.[371] Up until this point, Speer's hopes of survival have tended to be scuppered by his belief that an individual's fate - and indeed history itself - is governed by a biological paradigm (implicitly suggesting the continuance of a certain type of Nazi mindset, even if he and his fellow executioners are now figured as the victims), whereby the internal maladies of the present predetermine the future. The last four of his six monologues are saturated with the fatalistic language of cancerous growth, contamination and physical contagion. In one poem, just before he

goes down into the bunker, Speer pauses in the Chancellery and remarks of an 'old schoolmate' called Paul, who, as a doctor, is able to diagnose every disease apart from his own cancer: 'he may/ Escape the guns, escape acknowledging/ What it is his cells have been preparing,/ Step, by step, in darkness, beyond all control'.[372] The implication is that Speer is himself, by deliberately 'neglecting his knowing', trying to 'escape acknowledging' a future in which his past acts (and omissions) and inner corruption will steadily infect and consume him - but this attempted evasion cannot offset the fact that at some level *he knows it.*[373]

Hitler and Goebbels: The Brat and Emperor Zero

The Hitler monologues are a series of abrasive philippics yelled at the reader by the archetypal crazed dictator. Snodgrass's Hitler is at once a psychopathic megalomaniac ('More than fifty millions. More./ Who killed as much; who ever?'), a sexual deviant (he recalls an unnamed woman's plea: '"I just can't do those…acts/ You want me to…I get no pleasure…."'), and a physical freak ('This left arm shaking, pinned down/ By the right').[374] Again, the predominant characteristics of the monologist's thought and temperament are given pictorial reflection through poetic form; but the raucous Hitler poems lack the structural coherence of the Speer monologues. Indeed, they lack shape even at the level of the sentence. Snodgrass has commented:

> It seems to me that, above everything, he [Hitler] had a mind that was exceedingly brutal and powerful, but crude, really crude. One of the ways I was trying to catch that was by letting him be much more elliptical - using chunks of language like a hammer, with less worry about the civilized side of language, grammar and syntax and so forth - letting him have the kind of simple, brutal language which a child might have.[375]

As Jack Gladney, Don DeLillo's fictional professor of Hitler studies, observes in *White Noise* (1984): 'Wasn't Hitler's own struggle to express himself in German the crucial subtext of his massive ranting autobiography, dictated in a fortress prison in the Bavarian hills? Grammar and syntax. The man may have felt himself imprisoned in more ways than one.'[376]

Snodgrass's Hitler is also a man most extravagantly imprisoned by his past. The monologues repeatedly make reference to Hitler's turbulent childhood, with the reader being encouraged to infer that his infantile relationships with his parents and siblings formed the template for his later development. To repeat Snodgrass's view (which can be regarded as a central credo of the cycle): 'We create our political systems and our armies in the terms that the family has set out for us.' The psychodynamics of this philosophy are given direct expression in an early monologue, in which Hitler's biological and political families become interfused:

> [...] Let them,
> My own half-brother, Alois, let them
>
> ...my brother-in-arms, Ernst Roehm, who
> stood against me, slip away.[377]

Alois was the son of Hitler's father, by an earlier marriage, and had his father's forename and good favour; intensely jealous, the young Hitler schemed with his mother, Klara (who preferred Adolf, her own child), and conspired against Alois, until he eventually managed to get his sibling rival thrown out of the house. Snodgrass has argued that 'being able to manipulate her [his mother] to get what he wanted with regard to the step-brother may have set the pattern that goes right through his life'.[378] In the passage above, the young Hitler's malevolent treatment of Alois - a response to familial insecurity - forms a precise precedent for his adulthood, and his handling of political insecurity. As with Alois, he recalls how he let his 'brother-in-arms', his Nazi party comrade Ernst Roehm - who led the SA in its early days, and whom Hitler had

suspected of plotting against him - 'slip away' (Roehm was shot, on Hitler's orders, in 1934).

Hitler's unusual relationship with his mother is also given sexual undertones: for example, in the same monologue in which he refers to his ousting of his step-brother, Hitler calls himself a 'brat fed sick on sugartits' and his 'mother's cake-and-candy boy'. In *The Fuehrer Bunker* this deviant sexuality becomes, like the elimination of brothers, a characteristic feature of Hitler's later life. In the most striking and bizarre of the Hitler monologues, which comes in the section dated '20 April 1945: HITLER'S BIRTHDAY', Hitler's ruminations on his past successes and his present predicament alternate with lines attributed to the legendary knight Lohengrin (The Grail already calls its wanderer!), and passages from a sex manual that outline how to perform masochistic acts involving the ingestion of faeces. Snodgrass claimed, in an afterword to an early, incomplete edition of the *Fuehrer Bunker*, that Hitler really did have coprophiliac fantasies; but contemporaneous historical sources, such as Trevor-Roper and Bullock, tend to suggest that Hitler's sex life was either an enigma, or else non-existent.[379] Historical factuality is thus a little stretched in this monologue; the explanatory strands of Snodgrass's psychological portrait of Hitler, on the other hand, are deftly woven together.

Hitler compares his bleak situation in the bunker to that of his victims. With only 'bare concrete' surrounding him, he laments that he is the 'Same as any/ Jew degenerate in Auschwitz.'[380] His direct likening of the suffering he brings on himself to that which he has inflicted on the Jews suggests a link between executioner and victims that figures the actual concentration camps as outward projections of Hitler's inner desire for self-abasement. In this way, Snodgrass conceives of the genocide of the Jews as an extreme act of transference. The poet expanded on this viewpoint in his interview with Gaston:

> Here's a quote I once used: 'A hurtful act is the transference to others of the degradation which we bear in ourselves.' In doing what he did to the Jews, he must really have thought he was deflecting to them the punishment he thought he needed. But he also made sure that *he* got punished. He ended up living on nothing but chocolate cake and injections, living an utterly insane life in the bunker, where he had absolutely no freedom, no spare hours. He finally made the bunker a kind of concentration camp for himself.[381]

Following the tenets of the Freudian theory in which Snodgrass's portrait of Hitler is deeply grounded, the dictator's sexual perversion and impulse towards self-destruction (both directly and by proxy) are, in this poem, again linked back to traumatic events in his childhood. Firstly, Hitler recalls the death of his biological brother, Edmund, when he was eleven, and refers to the fact that only he, out of his mother's four children, survived infancy. This early experience of loss lies behind his determined exhortation, 'Live on; only live'. Throughout *The Fuehrer Bunker*, Snodgrass suggests that the memory of this tragedy animated the dictator's ruthless drive towards personal and political mastery. The chorus, for example, introduces him in the first part of the cycle as a tyrant whose murderousness was an attempt to counteract the preoccupation with mortality that came about after his brother's death:

> He soon made a profound
> Discovery what his life was worth:
> One hole, deep in the ground.
> Still if enough men, for his sake,
> Passed into cold clay first, he'd make
> His name live on, renowned.[382]

Snodgrass has referred to Hitler as a man who hated being born, and has argued that this desire to attain omnipotence through annihilation pointed back to a 'shocking misview of the birth trauma'.[383] In the monologues, Hitler's relationship with his mother is made openly erotic; but his sexual fascination is mingled with biological repulsion, as he blames her parturition for the fact that he will one day have to die. In the first Hitler poem, written in the 'simple, brutal' language to which Snodgrass referred, this conflict is resolved through the extermination of the depersonalised Other:

> With my mother, my own way. She
> Rammed it down the old man's throat.
> Her open grave's mouth, speaking:
> Did I choose I should die?

> Then, then, we hacked them down like trash rats.
> All who'd learned too little. Or too much.
> In sewers, ditches, let them lay. Let them be seen.

> And this ground would devour me.
> So shall I swallow all this ground
> Till we two shall be one flesh.[384]

An obsession with incest, orality and with 'gifts' - in the Freudian, excremental sense of the word - forms the thematic glue for the diverse fragments of the fetishistic birthday monologue: 'She made a special cake for me', recalls Adolf fondly. The idea of a birth trauma, and of Hitler's conflicted loving-resentment of his mother, provides the psychological foundation for Hitler's symbolic descent into the Fuehrer bunker itself, where his perception that birth marks the introjection of death is finally resolved through a regression, whereby the tomb-like cell becomes both a 'concentration camp' and 'a kind of womb'.[385] The birthday poem ends with Hitler deciding to 'Crawl back/ Into the cave'.

Snodgrass's portrait of Joseph Goebbels is written in the same slangy, American vernacular used for the Hitler monologues, and is similarly grounded in events in the propagandist's childhood - and, in particular, his Freudian relationship with his mother. Crippled since the age of seven ('something sucks the marrow/ From your left shin'), in one monologue the Nazi Minister brands himself 'Swellfoot the Tyrant': an epithet which registers both his lameness and the Oedipal origins of his will to power.[386] He initially seeks compensation for his physical deformity through licentiousness: 'Joe the Gimp' transforms into 'Runty Joe, the cunt collector', and, as a result, he unconsciously propagates the psychodynamics of the Freudian family drama, which forbids enduring sexual attachment to the desired partner (in the first instance, the mother).[387] Goebbels's other outlet is the Nazi party, which invitingly preaches the

racial and biological supremacy of all Aryans, even of 'Clubfoot Joe'.[388] While he never

finds the answer to the psychological Sphinx of his unresolved Oedipus complex, he

realises that he has the ability to 'riddle/ Men's minds away', and becomes the

machiavellian spokesperson for a regime which he increasingly masterminds.[389] As

such, Goebbels is a kind of arch-enemy for the writer of *The Fuehrer Bunker*, with his

wilful distortion of language through propaganda presenting a paragon of misuse for the

poet who seeks to reactivate language morally, in order that it might provide a

wellspring for individual and cultural regeneration. Goebbels is *the* central figure in the

cycle: his poems begin and end the sequence (aside from the choral introduction and

epilogue), and only Himmler, who has ten monologues, comes close to Goebbels's

eleven. (Hitler has only five poems.)

Trevor-Roper has described Goebbels as 'the intellectual of the Nazi Party -

perhaps its only intellectual', with the 'Latin lucidity of his mind' and the 'suppleness

of his argument' making him an ideal preacher for the Nazi cause.[390] The historian notes

that for Goebbels, however, the life of the mind was not the gateway to any kind of

higher truth; he believed that ideas were expendable - units of 'currency, never objects

of value' - and he would manipulate them in such a way as to ensure that he could

'always prove what he wanted'.[391] In *The Fuehrer Bunker*, Goebbels is portrayed as

having a calculating, eristic streak from an early age. In one monologue he recalls how,

as a young man studying for the priesthood, he would capriciously vacillate in debates

with his peers:

> When we talked politics, I'd chose
> Whichever side seemed sure to lose;
> I'd win. Then I'd switch sides to oust
> Every credo I'd just espoused.[392]

Lacking any genuine values to hold fast to, and finding that 'no church's doctoring did

the least good/ Against this mind's sulfuric', Goebbels recounts how he eventually

abandoned his theological training and changed university eight times as he 'tried out

the full diversity/ Of heroes, lovers, fields of study,/ Beliefs.' Finally, having written 'fifty Socialist essays' that 'got turned down by the Jews', his feverish search for meaning gave way to an amoral pursuit of political power, and he turned to 'the one force left to chose:/ The far Right.'

Ironically, his subsequent political career took the outward form of a religious mission, as the new 'minister' self-consciously set about shaping the Nazi party into a sectarian version of a Christian cult, with the messianic Fuehrer serving as its public figurehead. But as he assumed yet another of his myriad public identities, Goebbels became not only a 'High Priest of Laymen', but also a 'Prince of Lies' who discerned the ideological vacuity of his own rhetoric:[393]

> I, who can't help but see how hollow
> That Fuehrer is I can't help follow,
> Create in him the eucharist they'll all swallow.[394]

A series of predictable end-rhymes here replicate sonically what Goebbels regards as the German people's fundamental gullibility, and their willingness to be drawn into the 'hollow' patterns of thought that he prescribes for them. The sardonic tone also reflects what Snodgrass has described as the 'waspish' humour and style of the Goebbels monologues - a style which was aptly intended to parody the speech of a controversial religious figure of the period: 'In a way he [Goebbels] was much like the Pope [Pius XII], although, of course, much more vicious. But, basically, both of them were crippled, so that perfection of form becomes terribly important in a poem or statement.'[395]

For Goebbels, the entire Nazi philosophy is an embittered parody of Christian salvationist narratives. As the Allies advance, Goebbels sends his 'poor old mother' away from his villa on the Wannsee, and, as is his habit in the monologues, imagines a newspaper headline: 'FAREWELL TO THE PEASANT MOTHER/ WHOSE SIMPLE FAITH INSPIRED HIM'.[396] He then quotes Christ's injunction: 'Leave both father

and/ mother and follow after me'. An orthodox Christian, such as Goebbels's mother, would interpret Jesus's call for believers to abandon their parents as a necessary precondition for enlightenment; not a rejection of the family, but the means of entry into the brotherhood of Man; but for Goebbels, the leave-taking of the one person for whom he seems to feel any genuine affection has no positive meaning, and his reference to the Gospels is entirely ironic. He says to a picture of his mother, before throwing it into a fire of the book-burning, rather than the purgative, type: 'Go. Take the time that's left you. It is right: you can believe. I doubt. I doubt.' This sacrificial scene encapsulates the way that Goebbels, in a nihilistic twist on the Satanic proposition 'evil, be thou my good', makes negation a supreme value in itself.[397] Expulsion and rejection become second nature to him; but they have no higher significance or redemptive purpose. He prays to a God whose only meaning is meaninglessness - 'Our Father who art in Nihil' - and becomes a regent figure disseminating his own brand of caustic disbelief: a 'no one/ Who's true to Nothing', a self-proclaimed 'Emperor Zero'.[398] Trevor-Roper has described how an 'essential nihilism […] had inspired the Nazi movement in its early days', adding that when, in the last days of the Reich, the party 'had nothing positive to offer any more, it was to this nihilism that it returned as its ultimate philosophy and valediction'.[399] Snodgrass's Goebbels recognises precisely this relapse into philosophic nihilism as he moves into the private lower level of Hitler's bunker:

> I come back to my first Ideal ☐
> The vacancy that's always real.
> I sniffed out all life's openings.
> I loved only the holes in things.[400]

Annihilation and nothingness form a 'first Ideal' to which Goebbels returns, an anti-value that lies behind his contempt for the German people as a whole, whom he has manipulated with apparent ease (in one monologue he compares propaganda to 'Reading preposterous folk tales/ To children'), and also his casual misogyny and

brutish sexuality; for while he goes on to claim that 'all abstractions smell', in describing his love for 'the holes in things' he has no qualms about rendering his female lovers into bloodless ciphers.[401] For Goebbels, the personal and the political conform to the selfsame negative principle, which he expresses through a pun: 'In politics, in bed,/ We learn the cant that can be said'.[402]

The cynical orator's lust for conquest, for political and sexual domination, is portrayed as an abiding and congenital character trait, and in an extension of his central perception that 'We pant for, but we're scornful of,/ What we can screw', Goebbels even likens one of his 'godless, hellfire sermon[s]' to an act of sexual mastery:

> Just last year at the Sportpalast,
> I diddled thousands to one vast
> Insane, delirious orgasm;
> Stone cold, my mind controlled each spasm,
> Teased them so high, so hot and mad
> That they'd take everything I had
> To give them. They could only roar
> 'Ja!' and 'Ja!' and 'Ja!' once more,
> Begging me: let them have it □ total war.[403]

For Goebbels, the public speech conforms to a sado-masochistic dynamic: in a protracted, and typically chauvinistic, analogy, he likens himself to a domineering male lover who 'teases' his submissive female partner, contrasting his 'stone cold' mind and icy control with the 'hot and mad' passions of the crowd. For the master rhetorician, the 'surly, bastard / Idiom' of the German language enables him to clinch what he terms his 'possession on these vermin'; meaning is offered and then deferred in a tantalising play on the frenzied crowd's expectations, until he 'let[s] them have it' in a final orgasmic triplet which climaxes with the words he believes they have all been longing for: 'total war'.

This bullying, pseudo-sexual model of communication between an ideologue and the mob is, however, subtly recast over the course of the Goebbels monologues. As military defeat becomes inevitable, and the tide of public opinion turns against Hitler,

Goebbels considers the public memory of Nazism. But rather than seeking to create a suitable rhetoric - what he has identified as an art of linguistic *possession* - he adeptly switches, in typically protean fashion, to a praxis grounded in an alternative communicative model, one of *dispossession*, wherein events are whitewashed, and language is systematically divested of its referential function, in order to create the silences which will form the precondition for an elaborate future mythology.

The propagandist knows that above and beyond anything else, the timing and manner of the death of Hitler will determine the extent to which he will be able to erase the regime's atrocities, errors and defeats from history, and so he sets out to stage-manage a theatrical finale - which is to say a drama of manifest unreality. He is content to claim only a minor role for himself, allowing Hitler the centre stage. As Trevor-Roper has observed of the bunker hierarchy: 'As a tribal chief, Hitler might enjoy a spectacular, symbolic funeral; but Goebbels, as a secondary figure, would follow him, at a decent interval, unobtrusively to the shades.'[404] In a central section of the cycle, 'IDENTITIES', members of Hitler's inner circle who have not comprehended the irreversibility of the military situation grow frantic, and urge Hitler 'to escape, fly/ South'.[405] Conversely, Goebbels understands that the Fuehrer will only promulgate Nazi ideals by dying a glorious death (or rather, by dying a death that will be *perceived* to be glorious in years to come). He sings an appropriately mythic-sounding folk song, '*Brave king, wait yet a little while…*' (his monologues are replete with such revelatory verses, nursery rhymes and quotations), and judges that 'Berlin's the place to die'. His only concern is that 'the Chief' does not 'give up hope/ Too soon', and that he holds out 'Until the Russian tanks arrive':

> Here we can say he perished with
> His front-line fighters. Then our myth
> Takes root […]

By dying the right death, Goebbels believes that Hitler will ensure that he is later reborn in a new, godly form, rising like Christ 'to reign in glory' in a time when the early Nazi conquests will inspire future fascists and 'become *their* fairy story'.

In the final, mass-suicidal section of the volume, 'WAYS OUT', which takes place in the aftermath of Hitler's death, Goebbels and his wife Magda, who has poisoned their children the previous evening, prepare to kill themselves. As they slowly but deliberately climb the bunker steps to the chancellery garden, Goebbels reflects on his legacy:

> The rest is silence. Left like sperm
> In a stranger's gut, waiting its term,
> Each thought, each step lies; the roots spread.
> They'll believe in us when we're dead.
> When we took 'Red Berlin' we found
> We always worked best underground.
> So; the vile body turns to spirit
> That speaks soundlessly. They'll hear it.

This stanza is self-consciously literary: the reference to *Hamlet* emphasises the overt theatricality of this final act of the Nazi era, and perhaps suggests that ultimately Goebbels saw his own fate as that of a tragic hero. Alternatively, he may just be enjoying one last, and characteristically sardonic, laugh at both himself and the millions of credulous Germans whom he has so easily gulled, and who may even one day be prepared to think of these last events in the bunker as tragic. Whichever interpretation we choose, Hamlet's dying words seem peculiarly apt coming from a monologist who is, throughout the cycle, as the poet has observed, 'getting closer to silence'.[406] The minister's final thoughts also contain traces of the bio-philosophy of Speer; hoping that his exit will 'infect history', he intimates that Nazism has raped the German nation and simultaneously destroyed the memory of the crime, with a pregnant silence 'Left like sperm/ In a stranger's gut'.

Snodgrass has responded to the charge that in this final Goebbels poem the Nazi makes a prophecy that *The Fuehrer Bunker* itself fulfils, arguing that what he presents

the reader with is not the rebirth of 'the mythologized Nazis at all, but the real ones'.[407]
While the author's distinction between 'mythic' and 'real' literary characters depends
on a rather unhistorical concept of 'authenticity' (see my Introduction), the poet was
clearly intent on incorporating the prophesies of Goebbels into the volume so as to
expose the propagandist's attempts to dislocate historical acts from linguistic
representation. In philosophical terms, Goebbels is a kind of extreme postmodernist, for
whom the past exists in a radically unverifiable state of flux. He does not believe that
language has any inherent relation to events, and sees history as a wholly political
concept which can be appropriated and recast in whatever manner proves expedient to
the rulers of the present, who simply 'use' the past 'when they need some lie or excuse/
To do exactly what they choose'.[408] For Snodgrass, on the other hand, one basic
objective of writing about Nazism was to expose the ideologies that shaped a genocidal
reality. The Goebbels poems are thus sites of conflict for competing historiographical
agendas, with the Nazi's revisionist proclamations, and Snodgrass's mode of
representation of those proclamations, becoming dramatically counterpointed within
each individual poem. In one crucial monologue, Goebbels argues:

> We whose lives, whose writings came
> To nothing ☐ we'll script their lives' aim.
> We failures are the texts they'll read.
> Nay-sayers who'll become their creed.[409]

By outlining Goebbels's plans for the survival of his ideas after his bodily death in
straightforward couplets, Snodgrass ironises the minister's prediction, reflecting on the
fact that Nazism has never been vindicated in the way he imagined, even as his life
becomes, as he forecasts, 'the text they'll read'. To represent Goebbels's historical
aspirations is, the monologues suggest, the *only possible way of refuting them*; only a
failure to represent these prophecies could allow for their historical fulfilment. *The
Fuehrer Bunker* thus offers its own internal rejoinders to the questions raised by the

insidious theories of communication outlined in the Goebbels poems. The monologue form, whose primary orientation is towards the disclosure of intention, combines with a straightforward language and form, and the strategic, often ironic, use of intertexts (such as the Bible, propaganda headlines and folk songs), to trace the contours of the silences that Goebbels had hoped would transform the Nazi terror into myth.

Hermann Goering: Narrative and Recognition

As the cycle draws to a close, the actions of the leading monologists start to complicate Goebbels's claim that the Fuehrer Bunker acts as a 'confession booth/ Where liars face up to blank truth'. For in their final hours, the majority of the senior Nazis manifestly *do not* confront the errors of their ways; rather they cling ever more steadfastly to the standard Reich mindset of counter-rationality and wilful self-delusion: Hitler finally poisons himself but declares he is 'winning'; Speer makes a deliberate effort to 'neglect his knowing'; Himmler, who has been expelled from the party for negotiating for surrender with Count Bernadotte of the Swedish Red Cross, considers either falling in with the refugees heading west, or joining Admiral Doenitz's successor government in Flensburg as head of police; and Martin Bormann flees the bunker while planning an incognito escape to Denmark or South America.[410] Even Goebbels himself, who habitually arrives at a far more realistic assessment of his predicament than the others, faces only a relative 'truth' in this 'confession booth': one that remains resolutely 'blank', as it can always be potentially redrawn after his death. In fact it is, somewhat surprisingly, only the Reichsmarschall Hermann Goering - who never actually enters the bunker in Snodgrass's cycle - who seems wholly capable of facing up to the reality of

the military situation, the ineradicable nature of his past actions, and the just retribution that is coming to him.

In his final monologue, dated 1 May, Goering is at his castle in Mautendorf, where he has been under house arrest and guarded by the SS ever since Bormann and Goebbels, wanting him sidelined as a potential successor to the party leadership, had accused him of trying to usurp Hitler on 26 April. He '*stands naked before a full-length bedroom mirror*' and addresses himself with typical bluntness: 'You'd featherbed your life out on some pension?/ Fat chance of that, Fat Man! You're here to die.'[411] Dismissing the likes of Speer and Funk, who at the end would 'whimper and whine repentance', Goering resolves to 'Keep some honour' by standing by his actions. He decides not to feign ignorance to the Allies, and commands himself: 'Own your own/ Decisions'. At the very least, Goering has at the end a belated dignity, even some claim to the reader's admiration; he does not attempt to escape the repercussions of his wrongdoing, and in many ways, by not 'trying to fink out on his own past', as he puts it, he shows more rectitude than any of his cohorts. That is not to say that this final Goering monologue is an errant slip into a potentially redemptive portrayal of a dubious new Hollywood staple: the Good Nazi. On the contrary, the volume routinely calls into question the partially sympathetic conclusions to which it deliberately guides its readers.

The Fuehrer Bunker is an overtly narrative work, both at the level of its individual monologues, and in terms of the cycle as a whole; but if the subject of this master-narrative is the last days of the Nazi regime, it is also, at the same time, the reader, who is subtly cajoled into self-scrutiny by a text that requires him or her to become a monitor of his or her own response. By the time we come to read this final Goering monologue, we have been repeatedly chastened, and our appraisal of the Reichsmarschall is influenced by what we now recognise as Snodgrass's didactic method, whereby our susceptibility to rhetoric, charisma and other forms of persuasion

is strategically harnessed, and then devastatingly exposed, in order to probe the specious concept of the 'cult of personality', and to illustrate how the process of narration involves a psychological engagement between reader and text that can obscure the *kinds* of meanings that are being produced. In this way, the work draws out a moral message which is not simply an historical condemnation - or not *only* an historical condemnation - but, more importantly, *a warning shot which highlights the reader's own potential culpability*.

In his seminal work of reception theory, *Surprised by Sin* (1967), Stanley Fish describes the reader of *Paradise Lost* as being 'simultaneously a participant in the action and a critic of his [*sic*] own performance'.[412] He or she is given cause to admire Satan's rhetoric, but is then rebuked for that very admiration in a 'programme of reader harassment' that leads him or her through a series of interpretative crises which have as their object 'the reader's humiliation and his education'.[413] In this way, argues Fish, Milton's subject - the fall of Adam and Eve, and the redemption promised to humankind through Christ - becomes integrated into the actual experience of reading the poem. Snodgrass's exploration of the rise and fall of Nazism is posited on the identical idea that the genocidal mentality can best be understood by drawing readers into an awareness of their own shortcomings. As key players in the drama, readers do not simply have their own capacity for moral cowardice, even evil - which Snodgrass, much like Milton, regards as 'innate and universal' - explained to them: more radically, they get to experience it firsthand.[414] The poet has noted, with regard to his use of the villanelle form in the Magda Goebbels monologues, that 'to be told that somebody is tense and repetitive is not the same thing as *experiencing* somebody's tenseness and repetitiveness'.[415] Equally, to be told that other ordinary people acted imprudently is not the same as being coerced into a series of (mis)judgements which reveal one's own capacity for moral error.

The central role that the reader will have to play in construing moral meaning in the cycle, and the Christian origins of the poet's concept of the enduring co-existence of inner good and evil, is hinted at in Snodgrass's epigraph: '*Mother Teresa, asked when it was she started her work for abandoned children, replied, "On the day I discovered I had a Hitler inside me."*'[416] This reference to the self-acknowledged capacity for evildoing of Mother Theresa ushers the volume's readers away from an attitude of casual moral complacency. The epigraph also implicitly attacks postwar triumphalism, and the self-righteousness of America's demonisation of the German nation; for much as one might wish to condemn the popular support the German public gave to the Nazis before they came to power, and the subsequent lack of organised opposition to a bellicose regime, one does so with the benefit of hindsight. As Snodgrass argued in his interview with Gaston:

> One of the things that is part of the process of maturing is admitting that at least some of the intelligent people (and some of the moral people) were on the other side. And that you might have made a choice similar to theirs, if you had been in that place at that time. To appreciate the work of art, you have to give up the judgmental sense, at least partly […] It is easy to say now that you would have voted against Hitler. But you really don't know.[417]

In a similar vein, Snodgrass has observed, with reference to Randall Jarrell's poem 'Protocols', in which dead children describe their journey to Birkenau, where they were murdered in gas chambers:

> To write this poem, you must first be willing to imagine yourself as a child in the situation - a *real* child, who might even enjoy parts of the trip. Then, you must be willing to imagine yourself a guard - this is the real test - and see how you would act. You must admit that moral weakness *could* lead you into such a position, could at least strongly tempt you. Until you are willing to admit that you share some part of humanity's baseness and degradation, you cannot write about humanity's dignity and gentleness. Of all the ulterior motives, none is more common, none more debilitating, none more damning, than the pretense to moral superiority.[418]

These passages convey the poet's belief that genuine historical understanding, and its figuration in a work of art, demand both a concerted effort of the imagination and a

withholding of retrospective moral judgements: a conviction which lies behind the more performative aspects of *The Fuehrer Bunker*, in which readers are encouraged to sympathise with a leading Nazi figure for an instructive purpose.

Snodgrass's Goering is at first presented as a charismatic, almost likeable figure; and this accurately reflects the Reichsmarschall's broad popularity in Nazi Germany before his decline into drug addiction and profligacy during the war. In his first monologue, which takes the form of an internal dialogue, he is characterised as a lovable buffoon, dubbing himself an 'April Fool', mocking his own failures as head of the *Luftwaffe*, and cutting a tragi-comic figure. As he quizzes himself, he fills in the answers to his own bizarre riddles:

> Pray, could an old, soft football be
> Much like a man in deep disgrace?
> *They don't kick back; don't even dare*
> *Look up ☐ the British own the air!*
> So, stick a needle in someplace;
> Pump yourself full of vacancy.[419]

Goering's self-parodic tone sets him apart from Hitler and Goebbels and their more hysterical language. The rhyme scheme also differs; whereas Hitler and Goebbels tend to speak in a series of clanging couplets, the *abccba* rhyme scheme in the standard Goering sestet revolves around one central couplet, after which the rhymes move further apart - the fifth line referring back to the line that preceded the couplet, and the sixth line offering a distant echo of the first - in a sonic expansion that reflects the ebullience of the Reichsmarschall's character and the rotundity of his physique. This bloated form is complemented by extreme linguistic grotesquerie:

> Herr President, can we tell apart
> An artful statesman from an ass?
> *Fat chance! One spouts out high ideals;*
> *One makes low rumblings after meals.*
> But that's the threat of leaking gas
> That all men fear! *Right ☐ that's a fart!*[420]

Potentially disturbing references to the reality of the Nazi terror and the 'threat of leaking gas' are lost in a breezy flow of anarchic put-downs, italicised exclamations and word games. Goering's coarse language and his fixation on the excreta of the lower body in many ways recall Rabelais's flatulent giants Gargantua and Pantagruel - in particular, Mikhail Bakhtin's reading of Rabelais through the concept of degradation, which he outlined in *Rabelais and His World* (1965), would seem germane to Snodgrass's technique in the Goering poems. For Bakhtin, degradation involved 'the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body'.[421] The desire to mock authoritarian figures and to debunk governing ideals permeates the Reichsmarschall's monologues, as does a preoccupation with 'the lower stratum of the body, the life of the belly and the reproductive organs'.[422] Yet while Goering brings the abstract edifice of Nazi ideology clattering down to earth with his derisive jokes and parodic riddles in true Rabelaisian fashion, his monologues lack the essential connection to *rebirth* that was, for Bakhtin, the essential counter-principle of degradation, which 'has not only a destructive, negative aspect, but also a regenerating one'.[423] Rabelais's crudely humorous style of writing - what Bakhtin termed 'grotesque realism' - focused on the lower body as the figurative site for the suspension of existing hierarchies, the overthrowing of ruling classes and official culture, and also the arrival of a second order of social being grounded in the 'laughing chorus of the market place'.[424] In contrast, Snodgrass's adoption of the Rabelaisian style offers little by way of remedy for the stink it unearths.

While the anarchic humour and playfulness of the early Goering monologues appeal to the reader, offering a start juxtaposition to the hysterical self-justifications of the other monologists, we gradually learn that the man whom Goebbels calls 'Fat Hermann' disseminates little more than hot air.[425] Having fallen out of favour with Hitler, he has lived the life of a voluptuary, becoming an 'effete aristocrat' who spends his days carousing and gourmandising in his gothic castle; however, his formidable

bodily bulk and 'glittering gear/ And costumes' cannot mask his inner vacuity, even to himself.[426] In one monologue he looks through his vast wardrobe, recalling his splendid parties and the many outfits he wore; yet when he searches for the human being beneath the outlandish public personas, he finds only emptiness. The poem ends:

> Who wears this thick flesh, layer on layer ▯
> Loose outposts of a weakening heart?
> Who seems a one-man population
> Explosion, or expanding nation;
> But at showdown gives you a start:
> He lifts his mask and no one's there.

Throughout the cycle the chameleonic minister is constantly contemplating interrogation by the Allies, and in another monologue he imagines a prisoner questionnaire that he fills in four times - but in four entirely different ways. Even the name that he gives ranges from 'Hermann von Epenstein' to 'Herr Reaktion'; his fate is initially 'Successor to the Chief', but by the end it has become 'The lime pit and the rope.'[427] These four questionnaires chart the gradual deflation of the ego and expectations of 'the Last Renaissance Man' - a change that has taken place over a period of years. The segregation of Goering's self into a multiplicity of incongruous written forms also suggests a radical relativity of truth and a jarring discontinuity between who a man is, and the written representation of that man: he could be all of these Hermann Goerings, or he could be none.

Goering's ideological corruption and spiritual bankruptcy thus shape a vacuous conception of representation, much as in the Goebbels monologues. His poems are full of puns, riddles and word games whose effect is to collapse conceptual opposites and to undermine stable linguistic meanings. In one poem, he makes a typically crude observation: 'Enemies; enemas ▯ much the same?/ *Both rid you of collected matter.*'[428] This analogy finds a point of comparison in the theoretical and physical ways in which a body - be it politic or human - can be drained of inner substance. The next riddle shows

how voids can be filled, but the principle is identical: 'Are soccerballs like an ideal?/ *You pump them full of emptiness*'.[429] At the end of this metaphor-mangling monologue, Goering asks himself 'What's left you can still depress?' and offers the reply: '*Yourself. You come down to what's real.*' But as the poems progress, and the masks of his multi-faceted personality are gradually peeled away to reveal the absence of any stable sense of selfhood, and a language stripped of its capacity for meaningful referentiality, the only reality Goering can conceive of is death. In a heavily ironic monologue, he takes a single bullet from his pocket and inserts it into his revolver; but in a pragmatic swipe at his own cod philosophy he hurls the gun at the door, observing: '*Logic doesn't go that far.*'[430]

The minister's philosophising here hints at a hermeneutic drama unfolding in *The Fuehrer Bunker* as a whole - a drama in which, as I noted, the reader plays a lead role. Again, to quote Fish on *Paradise Lost*, the reader of the cycle 'is drawn into the poem, not as an observer who coolly notes the interaction of patterns […], but as a participant whose mind is the *locus* of that interaction'.[431] While Snodgrass does not suggest that his readers are as morally and spiritually vacant as Goering, he does involve us in a Miltonic struggle with temptation and error that exposes our susceptibility to the so-called 'cult of personality', and to *narrative structures which override our ability to make sound ethical judgements*. As in *Paradise Lost*, the structural and rhetorical game-play of *The Fuehrer Bunker* compels us to re-evaluate our entire relation to the meaning-making process, both as readers who become aware of the perils of first-person narratives in which 'the mere presence of the speaker's voice may win him more sympathy than his actions deserve', and as subjects for whom narrative is, following Fredric Jameson, an 'all-informing process' that constitutes 'the central function or *instance* of the human mind'.[432] This latter, very broad definition of narrative gives the textual operations of *The Fuehrer Bunker* real ethical significance, suggesting that narrative is not only a literary experience: it is the definitive *human* experience. As the

key structural link between historical and psychological material, narrative is manipulated by the poet to dupe the reader in a way which replicates the Nazis' duping of a whole nation. The literary work becomes a kind of simulating machine which offers a textual reproduction of the narratives that were operative within the historical processes that it describes, placing the reader in a position of unique responsibility. As Snodgrass has observed, the form of the volume gives the reader an important interpretative freedom (even as the poet seeks to guide that free choice), which is 'the freedom to make a mistake. If that isn't included in it, it isn't free. The work of art […] ought to be free and freeing. At the same time it involves the possibility that, for instance, you might choose Nazism.'[433]

The 'free and freeing' aspect of a work such as *The Fuehrer Bunker* derives from the author's perception that a reader's response to literary narrative is not governed by political precepts or predetermined moral positions: deep-rooted psychological material also orders a reader's pursuit of textual meaning. As Peter Brooks observes in his study of narrative dynamics, *Reading for the Plot* (1984):

> Narratives portray the motors of desire that drive and consume their plots, and they also lay bare the nature of narration as a form of human desire: the need to tell as a primary human drive that seeks to seduce and to subjugate the listener, to implicate him [*sic*] in the thrust of a desire that never can quite speak its name - never can quite come to the point - but that insists on speaking over and over again its movement toward that name.[434]

In his study, Brooks combines traditional narratology with Freudian psychoanalytic theory in order to ask not simply *what* narrative categories exist (the focus of a formalist approach to narrative), but *how* narratives work on the reader to generate particular models of understanding.[435] A detailed exploration of the process of psychological exchange that, according to Brooks, drives narration, lies beyond the scope of this present thesis; but his conceptualisation of narration as a 'form of human desire' clearly tallies with a reading of the heuristic method of *The Fuehrer Bunker* - a work which shows how psychological energies produce meaning in literary texts independently of

moral governance, in order to draw out probing historical parallels. Brooks's definition of narration as a force that 'seeks to seduce and to subjugate the listener' also fits well with Goebbels's gleeful dissection of the erotics of the party rally, where the speaker teases an audience through a controlled exploitation of their psycho-sexual investment in his narrative.

The importance of the Goering monologues, and indeed the key insight of *The Fuehrer Bunker* as a whole, is thus to be found not so much in what the poems tell us about the Nazis (with all their absent fathers and amorous mothers), than in what the reader's response to these Nazis' lengthy monologues tells us about the all-involving process of narration. In the Goering poems, Snodgrass does not, despite his protestations to the contrary, hold up a mirror to history; if these poems hold up any kind of mirror, it is more likely to be one in which the reader sees his or her own face (much as in Denise Levertov's 'During the Eichmann Trial', where the 'witness-stand of glass' is described as 'a cage, where we may view/ ourselves').[436] These stanzas formally implicate the reader in their caustic self-assessments: they frequently take the form of dialogues, and pose riddles and questions in an incessant play of call and response. In the final Goering monologue, when the minister stands naked before a full-length bedroom mirror, the reader is not simply presented with a Nazi who is staring at himself, but with a text which is examining our own deficiencies *as* readers, actively indicting our subservient relation to narrative pathways and forms of understanding which it dictates. The suggestion is, perhaps, that if we are not vigilant, then narrative can achieve a dominance that borders on the totalitarian, making the volume both a representation of fascism and, to borrow Gillian Rose's phrase, an exploration of the 'fascism of representation'.[437]

For Brooks, 'the need to tell' is 'a primary human drive that seeks to seduce and to subjugate the listener'; in the final Goering poem, Snodgrass reverses this logic and points an accusing finger at that listener, addressing our complicity in the process of

narrative seduction. The monologue begins: 'When I speak to you, you stand to attention./ Straighten that back up. Lift up your damn head.'[438] Goering is here manifestly talking to himself, but these lines also seem to inculpate the reader; his admissions of historical guilt then fuse with the language of literary exegesis as he laments the loss of his father's 'good name' and makes the observation that 'You signed on for your *sentence*/ You're in so deep, there's no out left but in' (my emphasis). Again, the Reichsmarschall describes the textual experience of the reader; his self-chastisement is, uncannily, our own. As he stares into his mirror, the Nazi monologist thus becomes a kind of *doppelg←nger* for the troubled conscience of a reader who is also the implied addressee:

> […] you let yourself be mastered
> By someone you sucked up to □ who used your blind
> Faith, used your worst impulses, then the bastard
> Defiled your name.

In this light, the opening injunction to 'lift up your damn head' can be thought of as a statement of moral instruction for the reader of the poem: at some point we must stop reading and relate this humiliating demonstration of our internal susceptibility to narrative control to those textual configurations that subjugate us in the real world.

In some senses, the didactic objectives of *The Fuehrer Bunker* depend on its readers having an innate capacity for moral self-correction: first to perceive, and then to counteract, the way in which we have been drawn from the straight path. Snodgrass does not simply point out his readers' folly: he provides us with the means to discover it for ourselves, hoping to awaken the Mother Theresa who, as the epigraph describes, cohabits every human heart with a Hitler. Nonetheless, the poet was clearly aware of the risks involved in this strategy - particularly that of giving the reader so much freedom to misread the cycle as a partially favourable representation of Nazism. In an interview with Philip Hoy, he admitted: 'I knew perfectly well that people were going to *hate* me

for doing these poems. I didn't know *how long* they'd hate me, or *how intensely*'.[439] The incomplete version of *The Fuehrer Bunker*, published in 1977, included an afterword which outlined the degree to which the cycle rested on fact, while also offering justifications for any deviations from the historical record. When the full version was published in 1995, however, Snodgrass had removed the afterword, conceding that it was used to 'bludgeon' him.[440] In particular, the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* suggested that in this afterword Snodgrass had admitted to making the Nazis more attractive than they actually were, leading Jon Silkin to remark of this *DLB* entry: 'If I read that about someone, I'd never read another word the son-of-a-bitch wrote.'[441]

Snodgrass believed that the afterword was unnecessary as 'it wasn't possible to write anything that didn't seem like a defence'.[442] It is also the case that he had made significant attempts to offset the possibility of such misreadings in the poem itself: by withdrawing the afterword, he ensured that form remained the poem's ultimate authority. Above all, the tone of the final chorus is unmistakably accusatory, its subject matter more overtly the reader. These two short stanzas are spoken by a mock-folk character called Old Lady Barkeep, who is a kind of *Zeitgeist* for Germany under National Socialism, a cynical Mother Courage figure for the *Herrenvolk*:

> Old Lady Barkeep squealed with laughter
> When told she'd be forsaken after
>   Her people's sorry loss.
> She said, 'They're always mobs to swallow
> Lies that flatter them and follow
>   Some saviour to the cross.
>
> 'Don't kid yourself □ I don't play modest;
> As Greed and Cowardice's goddess,
>   I thrive on just such ruin.
> While humans prowl this globe of yours
> I'll never lack for customers.
>   By the way, how *you* doin'?'[443]

Drawing attention to the ubiquity of the Christian salvationist narrative that Goebbels, for one, had self-consciously exploited, and suggesting that rather than carrying any

deeper metaphysical meanings, this narrative merely satisfies basic human needs (and the Goering monologues suggest this is the case with *all* narrative), Old Lady Barkeep concludes *The Fuehrer Bunker* by expressing her fervent hope that the reader might succumb - indeed she intimates that the reader *has already succumbed* - to modes of understanding that brought about the moral paralysis of a nation, and which effectively sanctioned genocide. The ironic, combative addressivity of the final line indicates that readers, rather than directing their outrage at *The Fuehrer Bunker* or its author, would do better to direct it at themselves.

CONCLUSION

The final chorus of *The Fuehrer Bunker* suggests that to read the cycle is to suffer opprobrium: a suitable note on which to end a didactic drama whose subject matter is not simply historical calamity, but, more fundamentally, the reader's wayward moral instinct. The chastening admonitions of Old Lady Barkeep - along with various critics' failures to heed them, or to register their own implication in a volume which can be understood as a drama of identification - also highlight what is a vexed issue for any heuristic text: that of *control*, of how the poem asserts its authority. If the cycle deploys narrative both as a means to forward the plot and as a kind of textual snare, then it is vital that the poet places a series of checks on his own charismatic first person narrations. I have described how Snodgrass created a dialogic framework for the Goering monologues: close reading highlights how reflective imagery and the language of textual exegesis bring the reader into an uneasy connection with a Nazi minister - a connection that refocuses the *locus* of the drama, encouraging us to consider how our own response involves conflicting impressions and judgements. However, Snodgrass's

control of his narrative excesses is not always dependent on imagery or intricate wordplay; his poetic language is in fact, for the most part, very simple, and is designed to be read quickly, thus facilitating the narrative flow which is so central to his method. Consequently, control is more usually exerted through poetic form, which is used to provide a structural corrective to the pull of plot. In short, the dynamic, experimental forms of the monologues provide an ongoing critique of the cycle's narrative content. For example, I noted how, in a key Speer monologue, the regular pyramidic form of the stanzas suddenly dissolves into a billowing, smoky column, giving the reader a graphic illustration of a truth that Speer himself refuses to recognise: that which 'Hanke saw there in the East'. Although the Hitler poems tend to be more irregularly structured, subtle alterations in their rhythm and layout allow Snodgrass to ironise the dictator's utterance. The lineation in the last stanza of the final Hitler poem shows how form can undermine a sentiment that the poet might have otherwise risked affirming:

> I pick my time, my place. I take
> This capsule tight between my teeth…
> Set this steel cold against my jaw…
> Clench, clench…and once more I am
> Winning,
>   winning,
>   winning…[444]

The splintering of the last three words across three lines makes them fall away into nothingness, showing that rather than 'winning', the dictator is doing the exact opposite.

As I have argued, it is not Hitler, however, but Dr. Goebbels, who is the central figure in *The Fuehrer Bunker*. The ideological dogma and anti-historical principles articulated in the Goebbels monologues (above all, those which concern the transformation of the Nazi party into a mythic order, and its atrocities into silence) are the very principles *against which* the volume is written, making these poems the sites of competing representative criteria. A typical Goebbels monologue is saturated with the antagonistic tensions of a verse format in which the poet is the theoretical nemesis of his

own protagonist. Snodgrass is, however, able to deconstruct Goebbels's rhetoric without disrupting the coherence of his first person narrations by deploying formal poetic devices which offer critical counterpoints to the doctor's statements.

In one poem, in which Goebbels reflects on a birthday message that he had recorded for Hitler the previous evening, an antiphonal structure allows rhyme to sound out chimes of truth that counteract Goebbels's distortions of political reality. Even though Goebbels believes himself to be conscious of what he 'dared not say', it is in fact *poetic language* that produces a series of clarifications which emerges from just beneath that which was said, dismantling propaganda through concordances of sound:

[…] Last night I made
My final radio tirade:
A tribute for the Chief's birthday □
Just think how much I dared not say:

Never before did matters stand on
    Never before did a master abandon
A razor's edge so cruel as this;
    A nation's crazed fools to the abyss
Still, the majesty of these dark times
    Till pride, false strategy and stark crimes
Finds its true essence in our Fuehrer.
    Makes senseless ruin each hour surer.

We owe our thanks to Him alone
    If Russian tanks break stone from stone
Our own dear homeland still stands fast
    Blown down by shellburst or bomb blast
And the radiant culture of the West
    While raping, killing, laying waste,
Is not yet swallowed by the pit.
    Benighted hordes swarm over it.

If our Folk still believe in Him
    Who'd choke their lives off from mere whim
And He still stands by His deep vow,
    To strangle, starve or hang them now,
That means we've won true victory
    We've mined new depths of idiocy
Which may inspire an age unborn;
    With mad desires, blind rage and scorn

Our spirit must come to birth again
    That spurs blood lust in earthly men

A phoenix rising from its own ashes
    To finish things as this world crashes
From the rubble of temporary loss;
    Tumbling them in their burial foss.
Over the ruins that vandals burned
Our people's noble aims will have returned.
    These stunted cripples who have learned
    Nothing except how vile a death they've earned.[445]

Despite having been travestied by the lies and propaganda that were spread through the Reich, language somehow retains a capacity to critique and expose: a capacity which is dependent, however, on the Americanisation of Nazi discourse, and on poetic form, which can create subversive meanings - and indeed, as here, distinct counter-narratives - through devices such as rhythm and rhyme. In this sense, what Snodgrass frequently terms 'the music' of poetry - 'the way the words rub against one another, the way the levels of diction rub against each other' - is not an aesthetic affectation that traduces history: rather, it is the only way of exploding the silences which, as the Goebbels monologues make clear, the Nazis had hoped to plant within postwar discourse.[446] As such, the regenerative aspect of *The Fuehrer Bunker* is both moralistic (hoping to draw the reader into a greater awareness of the thin dividing line between good and evil) and linguistic. And by restoring to language its critical capacity for negation, and thus offsetting the possibility of reification, Snodgrass's volume as a whole does come to share the animating connection to cultural and social rebirth that Bakhtin discerned in the comic novels of Rabelais.

Conclusion

Much of my commentary has been concerned with representative poetics, examining how Berryman, Plath and Snodgrass each employed innovative poetic techniques to give written form to an atrocity thought by many to be unrepresentable - though this has often meant focusing on how they documented silences, with these poets frequently figuring the unrepresentability of the event, rather than the event itself, and asking questions about *how* the genocide is remembered, as opposed to recounting *what* actually happened. Taking poetic form as a work's ultimate authority, I have looked at how meaning resides in the interplay between a poem's content and its structure, and at how sonic and visual features shape sense. It does not follow, however, that by asking such questions about a poem's form, one divests these works of their human content; rather, this approach reveals the ways in which poetry offers distinct ways of thinking about, and of remembering, human lives. Poetry has its origins in mnemonics: as Don Paterson observes, rhythm and rhyme mean that, unlike other artworks, a poem 'can be carried in your head in its original state, intact and perfect […] Our memory of the poem is the poem'.[447] In the works I have been looking at, the representation of memory is wholly bound up with complex questions concerning how we identify with those whose lives shaped, and those whose lives were destroyed by, the Holocaust; to commit one such poem to memory, is thus, in a way, to remember *how* to remember.

While an overarching objective of my thesis has been to demonstrate that taking poetry seriously as an authority means doing away with the idea, popularised by proponents of 'confessionalism', that the speakers of these poems (especially those written by Plath and Berryman) are transparent embodiments of their authors, it is also

important not to lose sight of the 'existential' edge that such critics rightly noted in their work. In their preoccupation with issues of memory, identity and the extremities of experience, all three writers find in the Holocaust not a *vehicle* for self-examination but a *demand* for self-examination. In Robert Eaglestone's terms, their poems ask questions about '"who we are" and "how the world is for us" and how the event of the Holocaust has utterly changed this'.[448]

In *The Holocaust and Postmodernism*, Eaglestone argues that while all reading is grounded in the often overlooked 'day-to-day process of identification', the 'new genre' of testimony contains individuating traits which mean that its texts 'eschew easy identification and so comprehension by readers'.[449] Testimony is unique, as it disrupts the normative ways in which we consume literary texts; it does so through its imagery and style, and through devices such as interruptions and narrative frames, ensuring that incomprehensible events do not appear to be too readily comprehensible. Eaglestone quotes Primo Levi's account of an incident when a schoolboy presented him with an adventure-fuelled plan of how he should have escaped from Auschwitz. This causes Levi to reflect - though not without good humour - on the general tendency for non-victims to normalise the Holocaust, illustrating the 'gap that exists and grows wider every year between things as they were down there and things as they are represented by the current imagination fed by books, films and myths'. Levi, concerned about this slide 'towards simplification and stereotype', states that in his own writing he hoped 'to erect a dyke against this trend'.[450] Holocaust poetry by non-victims is centrally a response to testimony; the work of Plath and Berryman, for example, can be understood as respectful negotiations with the 'dykes' that emerge in testimonial texts, and the sense of distance and non-identity that they purposefully produce. Of the poets I have looked at, it is only Snodgrass (and not Plath, as many have argued) who really attempts to circumvent this impasse, asking in what ways Nazism *can* be represented, assimilated

and even normalised; and this is significant, because in *The Fuehrer Bunker* it is not the victims whom the poet wishes his readers to identify with, but the perpetrators.

In his analysis of testimony, Eaglestone focuses solely on survivor accounts. There is, of course, every reason to maintain a strict differentiation between literary works written by survivors and those written by perpetrators: they are each written for different purposes and are read in different ways; as such, they form distinct genres. But in contrast to what Eaglestone sees as the broad prohibition against identification in survivor testimony, a perpetrator account such as Albert Speer's *Inside the Third Reich* (1970), for example, which is a widely read work of perpetrator testimony from the period, consistently normalises the past (however deliberately or self-consciously). Gitta Sereny has praised the 'remarkable intelligence' of Speer's books, and the 'apparent sincerity of his moral self-examination'; it is only through the *absence* of a clearly erected dyke in this writing that 'we can find out how and why […] essentially decent and often talented men and women could become so subject to Hitler and his ideas that no doubt of him could be allowed to intervene'.[451]

This guiding idea behind Sereny's philosophical biography of Speer mirrors that of *The Fuehrer Bunker*, which, as a response to perpetrator testimony, argues that we can and should identify with people such as Speer - or at least that if we don't already, then we should be made to. In an interview, Philip Hoy drew Snodgrass's attention to Ian Buruma's contention, in *The Wages of Guilt* (1995), that in the 1960s and 1970s little was written in Germany about the Nazi leaders because of '"the fear of identification; what Germans call *Berührungsangst*, literally the fear of making contact"'. Snodgrass replied:

> I very much agree with Buruma's statement about the fear of *contact*. But even stronger, I think, is the fear of *recognition* […] In other words, it's not only the fear that bad luck, or bad morals, are contagious and may rub off, but also, and more importantly, the fear that the disease is general and innate.[452]

While Eaglestone does not address perpetrator testimony directly, the issues that Snodgrass raises come to the fore in his chapter on the debate which took place in the 1990s between the historians Daniel Goldhagen (author of *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (1996)) and Christopher Browning (author of *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution* (1992)): a debate which, according to Eaglestone, came down to fundamental ideas about how and whether we can identify with perpetrators. The suggestive titles of these two works aptly illustrate their methodologies, as Eaglestone summarises: 'for Goldhagen the human is woven utterly into - and created *by* - their culture. To explain the Holocaust involves understanding this culture then and there, not "people like us."'[453] Conversely, 'the question "What would I have done in their place?" underlies all of Browning's work because he presupposes a universal, ahistorical human nature,' as is also the case with Snodgrass.[454] Eaglestone sees these two distinct philosophies as presenting a 'proper aporia: two conflicting understandings that lead to two conflicting approaches to the past, the present, and the future, with no grounds for a rapprochement'.[455] The postmodern position, accepting that there is no way round this, would be 'to think both at once'.[456] Eaglestone values Goldhagen's methodology, as it allows for a more Foucauldian 'archaeology of Nazism', unearthing the ideologies - and thus the conditions of possibility - which govern an individual's actions in their age.[457] It is important, however, that Eaglestone retains aspects of Browning's more ahistorical humanist approach; otherwise the 'dyke' that is erected in survivor testimony could be explained in purely epistemological terms, with foreign social and ideological conditions alienating us from the experiences that these works take as their subjects. Eaglestone's focus on the laws of genre, however, presupposes the fact that survivor accounts are actually offered by people very much like us: people who we would be able to identify with, were it not for the traumatic experiences which shape their unassimilable testimony. By the same token, perpetrator accounts which do not describe

any totally alien physical or psychological state - such as, say, an ex-Nazi's genocidal hatred of Jews - but which instead recount in simple prose the disintegration of moral will within a familiar bureaucratic and technological society, comprise a different genre of writing: one which ought to prompt that impulse to identify ('What would I have done in their place?') which underpins the work of Browning and Snodgrass. As Zygmunt Bauman puts it: '*The most frightening news brought about the Holocaust and by what we learned of its perpetrators was not the likelihood that "this" could be done to us, but the idea that we could do it.*'[458]

Eaglestone's demonstration of how, conversely, dynamics of *thwarted* identification drive the reading of survivor testimony, offers a new vocabulary and interpretative framework with which to approach those imaginative works about the Holocaust - including poetry by the likes of Berryman and Plath - which consider our relation to history's victims. A concept of identification circumvents the dry objectivity that is implied when we see these texts simply as works of history; equally, it qualifies the discourse about memory which is often attached to any contemporary work - be it critical or imaginative - which takes an event such as the Holocaust as its subject. This particular discourse is potentially misleading when applied to authors who have no personal recollection of events, or else it has to be couched in paradoxical terms - as in Susan Gubar's subtitle, *Poetry after Auschwitz: Remembering What One Never Knew* (2003) - which suggests that 'memory' is not really what is being talked about at all. The fact is one can't *remember* what one never knew; but one might try to grasp it in other ways.[459]

Geoffrey Hill's 'September Song', like Berryman's 'from *The Black Book (iii)*' and Plath's 'Daddy', approaches historical victimhood through gestures of identification - though not in terms of a non-participant's 'empathetic identification', but through more oblique exclusions, through *failures* of the imagination.[460] To empathise is to find

common ground, and thus to comprehend; a poet such as Hill, however, is more attuned to that uncommon ground which separates the living from the dead:

> *born 19.6.32 — deported 24.9.42*
>
> Undesirable you may have been, untouchable
> You were not. Not forgotten
> or passed over at the proper time.
>
> As estimated, you died. Things marched,
> sufficient, to that end.
> Just so much Zyklon and leather, patented
> terror, so many routine cries.
>
> (I have made
> an elegy for myself it
> is true)
>
> September fattens on vines. Roses
> flake from the wall. The smoke
> of harmless fires drifts to my eyes.
>
> This is plenty. This is more than enough.[461]

The poem begins by memorialising the death of a ten-year-old child murdered by the Nazis, taking the form of a tombstone - though the flagrant pun in the epigraph-epitaph, where the Christian language of loss ('departed') morphs into Nazi euphemism ('deported'), already exposes something of the poem's lyric impropriety. More than simply remembering the dead child, 'September Song' wants to make contact with them: the first stanza is all about touching children. But another series of puns, relating to paedophilia ('undesirable') and social caste ('untouchable'), implies that the poem's elegiac endeavour constitutes a grave taboo violation, while 'not forgetting' is figured as a Nazi trait.[462]

The poem's queasy addressivity is rendered by an adult 'I' calling upon an infant 'you'; at every stage, however, attempts at communication are blocked, with metaphor, in particular, proving unable to connect the two worlds of 'here' and 'there', 'inside' and 'outside'. In as much as the poem has a narrator (the second stanza uses an even more overtly Nazified language, but the tone softens in the third), this narrator

seems to possess the kind of 'mind engraved with the Holocaust' described by Norma Rosen, for which 'gas is always that gas. Shower means their shower. Ovens are those ovens.'[463] In the penultimate stanza, the line 'Roses/ flake from the wall' can be read, as Antony Rowland observes, as 'a terrible metaphor for the flaking skin of burnt victims; even such a seemingly innocent signifier as "wall" is infected by the history of Nazi incidents in which "dissidents" were lined up and shot'.[464] Similarly, the negative adjective used to describe the 'smoke/ of harmless fires' only very thinly conceals its opposite: the harm*ful* fires lit at the sites of mass murder.[465] As the narrator undertakes some unidentified but clearly prosaic activity, his memory is activated metaphorically, dredging up the past through a process of association (this particular line brings to mind the scene in Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* (1985), where fires burning in a forest in present-day Israel form a suggestive backdrop for a discussion of the murder of the Vilna Jews which took place in a forest in Lithuania). Here 'smoke' provides the twentieth-century equivalent of Proust's madeleine; but the next step, the mind being flooded by things past, is missing.

Rosen has explained that as 'an analogy[-]making species', 'what we connect and how we connect it are vital keys to our understanding and can be discussed and at times corrected. That we connect is a given.'[466] Even when one's own suffering cannot approximate to that of another, 'the law of human communication is unchanged. We must still work from what we know and try to connect it to what we do not.'[467] In other words, we must somehow force ourselves to identify with the experience of victimhood. This structure or 'law' survives in 'September Song' (the speaker *wants* to connect), but in a damaged form, as the unfamiliar reality of the Holocaust, and thus the child's ultimate fate, seems to lie on the far side of language: it is a negative or reversed world that words and objects can intimate, but not recreate. As Jahan Ramazani points out, 'Hill tweaks himself with constant verbal reminders of the child's inaccessibility'.[468] Even the date of birth given in the poem's epigraph is one day before Hill's own,

offering 'a sickening reminder of their dissimilarity', and suggesting that while the child's reality existed alongside the young poet's world of comparative normality, it is now unreachable, separated by language, geography, and a small but critical lag in time.[469] Importantly, as Gubar observes, this epigraph also shows that the narrator 'knows the date of deportation', but 'nothing about the death or death date of the nameless child'.[470]

The speaker who sets out to describe the life and death of a Holocaust victim concedes: '(I have made/ an elegy for myself it/ is true)'. The parentheses exaggerate the imaginative failure, and the sense that this poem remains somehow beside the point. For the speaker, the 'smoke/ of harmless fires' is 'plenty', implying that the indirect contact of metaphor - not the thing itself, the historical reality - is all he can take. Ironically, this also suggests that a connection with the Holocaust yields a certain profit (perhaps for poetry: as Ramazani points out, 'every elegy is an elegy for elegy', and, as such, the genre becomes increasingly replete with losses); but this is only the case when the poem's language descends from its initial point of high suggestibility into cliché and banality.[471] Through this one short poem, Hill traces the verbal degeneration later noted in *The Triumph of Love* (1999): 'Nor is language, now, what it once was/ even in - wait a tick - nineteen hundred and forty - / five of the common era'.[472]

'September Song', like Berryman's 'from *The Black Book (iii)*', is a poem which would be a kind of portal, but which only opens onto absence; in both poems, the reality of the Holocaust cannot be reached through traditional gestures of elegiac commemoration. A stymied gesture of identification, 'September Song' also contains aspects of the 'black phone' motif which recurs in Plath's Holocaust verse, where language is represented as a form of communication that can only transmit incommunicability. In such poems, the urge to connect imaginatively with the experience of history's victims persists, but the line (both the metaphorical phone line and, in a sense, the real poetic line) is always dead. I have argued, following Eaglestone,

that writers of this kind of Holocaust verse pursue an aporia that emerges from the reading of testimony, as summarised by Maurice Blanchot: 'We read books on Auschwitz. The wish of all in the camps, the last wish: know what has happened, do not forget, and at the same time never will you know.'[473] Unable to accept that we will never know, these poets create speakers who are consumed by a desire for understanding - a desire which often manifests itself in attempts to identify with the victims; but identification is continually thwarted by the 'dykes' which separate survivors' accounts of the Holocaust from the understanding of those who come after. In their work, writers such as Berryman, Plath and Hill thus refuse to sanction the collapse of the two logically opposed commands identified by Blanchot. They do not resolve the apparent contradiction between knowing and not-knowing in the way that Rosen does, for example, when she argues that after Auschwitz identification is still possible ('the law of human communication is unchanged'), and in the way which also occurs when we view the Holocaust as an event that one should not even *try* to imagine or comprehend (which is often the gravamen of 'antirealist' approaches to the Holocaust). These poets suggest that testimony becomes meaningless, its message misunderstood, if *either* injunction is forgotten.

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Introduction

1.   Primo Levi, *If This is a Man and the Truce*, trans. Stuart Woolf (London: Abacus, 1996), p. 109; Charlotte Delbo, *Auschwitz and After*, trans. Rosette C. Lamont (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 1.

2.   Peter McDonald, *Serious Poetry: Form and Authority from Yeats to Hill* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), p. 1.

3.   Here I use what is by far the best translation of the poem to date: that of Ruth Feldman and Brian Swann in Primo Levi, *Collected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), p. 9.

4.   Neil Levi and Michael Rothberg, 'General Introduction: Theory and the Holocaust', in *The Holocaust: Theoretical Readings*, eds. Neil Levi and Michael Rothberg (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), p. 2.

5.   Ibid., p. 2.

6.   Robert Eaglestone, *The Holocaust and the Postmodern* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 3.

7.   Ibid., pp. 279-280. However, it is hard to see how this is true of the work of someone such as, say, Roland Barthes, who, to the best of my knowledge, had little or nothing to say directly on the matter, and for whom 'the death of the author' was a purely figurative idea. This is actually one of the few shortcomings of Eaglestone's landmark study; for even if we accept that postmodernism *begins* with thinking about the Holocaust, it is also the case that the Holocaust often gets lost in postmodern theory: both in writing which *does* address the subject, but whose substance proves inaccessible to those unable to decipher its specialised argot, and in the work of those, such as Barthes, who manifestly do not. I am not at all persuaded by Eaglestone's unsupported suggestion that *all work* influenced by Levinas and Derrida 'is, perhaps without knowing it, responding to the Holocaust' (ibid., p. 249).

8.   Ibid., p. 24.

9.   Ibid., p. 19.

10.   Ibid., pp. 15-16, p. 101 and p. 37.

11.   Ibid., pp. 283-287 and p. 4.

12.   Ibid., p. 3.

13.   Ibid., p. 279.

14.   Ibid., p. 4.

15.   Paul Gilroy quoted ibid., p. 3.

16.   Ibid., pp. 286-87.

17.   Ibid., p. 3; Sue Vice, *Holocaust Fiction* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 4.

18.   Vice, *Holocaust*, p. 4.

19.   J. M. Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello* (London: Vintage, 2004), p. 172.

20.   James E. Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 130.

21.   Vice, *Holocaust*, p. 3.

22.   Christina Britzolakis, *Sylvia Plath and the Theatre of Mourning* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), p. 2.

23.   Al Alvarez, *The Savage God: A Study of Suicide* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), p. 35.

24.   Al Alvarez, 'Sylvia Plath', in *The Art of Sylvia Plath: A Symposium*, ed. Charles Newman (London: Faber and Faber, 1970), p. 67.

25.   M.L. Rosenthal, 'Sylvia Plath and Confessional Poetry', in ibid., p. 69.

26.   Antony Rowland, *Holocaust Poetry: Awkward Poetics in the Work of Sylvia Plath, Geoffrey Hill, Tony Harrison and Ted Hughes* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), p. 34.

27.   Neil Roberts, *Narrative and Voice in Postwar Poetry* (London and New York: Longman, 1999), p. 19.

28.   Here I paraphrase McDonald in *Serious*, p. 5.

29.   Vice, *Holocaust*, p. 4.

30.   Eaglestone, *Holocaust*, p. 6 and p. 37.

31.   McDonald, *Serious*, p. 6.

32.   T.S. Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', in *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (London: Methuen and Co., 1934), p. 59; Seamus Heaney, *The Government of the Tongue: The 1986 T.S. Eliot Memorial Lectures and Other Critical Writings* (London: Faber and Faber, 1988), p. 129; *The Poet Speaks*, ed. Peter Orr (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), p. 168.

33.   Peter Stitt, 'The Art of Poetry: An Interview with John Berryman', in *Berryman's Understanding: Reflections on the Poetry of John Berryman*, ed. Harry Thomas (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988), p. 21.

34.   Rosenthal, 'Sylvia Plath', p. 75.

35.   McDonald, *Serious*, p. 16.

36.   Susan Gubar, *Poetry after Auschwitz: Remembering What One Never Knew* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003), p. 27.

37.   Ibid., p. xv.

38.   Ibid., p. xv; Eaglestone, *Holocaust*, pp. 37-38.

39.   Eaglestone, *Holocaust*, p. 102.

40.   Ibid., p. 6.

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[41].   John Haffenden, *The Life of John Berryman* (London: Ark Paperbacks, 1983), p. 206.

[42].   Ibid., p. 206.

[43].   Ibid., p. 205.

[44].   *The Black Book of Poland*, ed. Polish Ministry of Information (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1942), p. v.

[45].   Ibid., p. v.

[46].   Berryman, 'who… inherited' (MS) and 'Mass-form' (MS), University of Minnesota Libraries, Manuscripts Division, John Berryman Papers, Unpublished Miscellaneous Poetry, box 1, fol. 25, 'Black Book'. (All titles of unpublished work from the John Berryman Papers refer to the first words on the relevant loose sheet.)

[47].   Berryman, 'the resolution for Death' (MS), ibid.

[48].   Berryman, 'Mozart's Requiem' (MS), ibid.

[49].   John Haffenden, *John Berryman: A Critical Commentary* (London: Macmillan Press, 1980), p. 165.

[50].   The poems that appeared in *Poetry* were 'not him', '2', 'the will' and 'waiting' (*Poetry* LXXV, October 1949 - March 1950 (New York: AMS Press, 1950), pp. 192-96). 'not him' and '2' also appeared in *His Thought Made Pockets & the Plane Buckt* as numbered sections 'from *The Black Book*' (John Berryman, *Collected Poems 1937-1971* (London: Faber and Faber, 1991), pp. 154-56).

[51].   Haffenden, *Life*, p. 205. According to Paul Mariani, Berryman also worked on *The Black Book* in October 1954 and again in the summer of 1955 (Paul Mariani,

Dream Song: The Life of John Berryman (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), p. 287 and p. 297). He also worked on one poem, 'from *The Black Book (iii)*', as late as 16 July 1958 (see HW note on Berryman, 'Lover & child' (MS), JBP, Unpub. Misc. Poetry, box 1, fol. 25, 'BB').

[52]. Haffenden, *Life*, p. 206.

[53]. Ibid., p. 205.

[54]. Berryman's diaries are among papers given to the Library of Congress in Washington DC in 1989 by Eileen Simpson, Berryman's first wife, which will be made available to the public in 2019.

[55]. *The Black Book of Poland*, p. 452.

[56]. Ibid., p. 453.

[57]. Ibid., Picture 128.

[58]. Berryman, 'The Imaginary Jew', reprinted in *Recovery* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1993), p. 244.

[59]. Ibid., pp. 244-45.

[60]. Ibid., pp. 245-46.

[61]. Ibid., p. 246.

[62]. In an interview with *The Harvard Advocate*, Berryman commented: 'I was […] waiting to see my girl, and I was taken for a Jew (I had a beard at the time). There was a tough Irishman who wanted to beat me up, and I got into the conversation, and I couldn't convince them that I wasn't a Jew' (John Plotz et al., 'An Interview with John Berryman', in *Berryman's Understanding: Reflections on the Poetry of John Berryman*, ed. Harry Thomas (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988), p. 9). See also Haffenden, *Life*, p. 157.

[63]. Berryman, 'The Imaginary Jew', p. 248.

[64]. Ibid., p. 248.

[65]. Ibid., pp. 249-50.

[66]. Ibid., p. 250.

[67]. Ibid., p. 250.

[68]. Ibid., p. 251.

[69]. Ibid., p. 252.

[70]. Ibid., p. 252.

[71]. Ibid., p. 252.

[72]. Bruno Bettelheim, *The Informed Heart: The Human Condition in Mass Society* (London: Paladin, 1970), p. 204.

[73]. Berryman, 'The Imaginary Jew', p. 244.

[74]. Ibid., p. 246.

[75]. Hilene Flanzbaum, 'The Imaginary Jew and the American Poet', in *The Americanization of the Holocaust*, ed. Hilene Flanzbaum (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), p. 29.

[76]. Ibid., p. 30.

[77]. Ibid., pp. 18-19.

[78]. James E. Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 115.

[79]. Mariani, *Dream*, pp. 168-69.

[80]. M.L. Rosenthal, 'Sylvia Plath and Confessional Poetry', in *The Art of Sylvia Plath: A Symposium*, ed. Charles Newman (London: Faber and Faber, 1970), p. 69.

[81]. Berryman, *Recovery*, p. 241.

[82]. Ibid., p. 7.

[83]. Haffenden, *Life*, p. 402.

[84]. Berryman, *Recovery*, p. 241.

85.   Ibid., p. 73.

86.   Douglas Dunn, 'Gaiety and Lamentation: The Defeat of John Berryman', in *Berryman's Understanding*, p. 142.

87.   Young, *Writing*, p. 113.

88.   Ibid., p. 112.

89.   Although later in the novel Berryman does write that Severance and his friend Hutch 'had been through Belsen last Spring together', the Holocaust here providing a provocative metaphor for an earlier alcoholic treatment (Berryman, *Recovery*, p. 152). This only underlines the inconsistencies and unpolished nature of the surviving text.

90.   Berryman, letter of July 28, 1971, quoted ibid., p. 229, and in Haffenden, *Life*, p. 383.

91.   Berryman, *Recovery*, p. 72.

92.   Ibid., p. 40.

93.   Ibid., pp. 73-74.

94.   Berryman's *CP* prints the poem as it appeared in *His Thoughts Made Pockets & the Plane Buckt*, although there appears to be a misprint in the second stanza, where the original 'we crawl or gibber' is replaced by 'we call or gibber' (p. 155). I can find no evidence to suggest that the change was made by Berryman himself (all drafts use 'crawl'), and will therefore use the text that appeared in *Poetry* LXXV (even though the misprint does make some sense, and fits with my interpretation of the final stanza, in which the dead in Hell 'call out' to the poet).

95.   Berryman, 'THE BLACK BOOK' (TS with HW corrections), JBP, Unpub. Misc. Poetry, box 1, fol. 25, 'BB'.

96.   J. M. Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello* (London: Vintage, 2004), p. 172.

97.   Berryman, '<u>Rising Hymn</u>' (TS with HW corrections), JBP, Unpub. Misc. Poetry, box 1, fol. 25, 'BB'.

98.   In the John Berryman Papers there are two TS versions of the poem (with HW corrections) and an MS. For my analysis, I will use what appears to be the final typed version.

99.   Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (London and Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987).

100.   *The Black Book of Poland*, p. 325. Part III of the book, 'The Persecution of the Jews and the Ghetto', takes up 36 pages, while Part VI, 'Religious Persecution', which focuses on the Catholic church, is 90 pages in length (ibid., pp. 217-53 and pp. 323-413).

101.   Ibid., p. 383.

102.   Ibid., p. 338.

103.   Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Theory of Colours*, trans. Charles Lock Eastlake (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: The M.I.T. Press, 1976), p. 307. My thanks to Professor John Haffenden for apprising me of Berryman's reading of Goethe.

104.   Ibid., p. 310.

105.   Randall Jarrell, 'In the Camp There Was One Alive', *The Complete Poems* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1969), p. 405.

106.   Sir Thomas Browne, *Religio Medici: Urn Burial, Christian Moral and Other Essays* (London: Walter Scott, 1886), p. 162.

107.   Berryman, 'ii <u>Rising Hymn</u>', JBP, Unpub. Misc. Poetry, box 1, fold. 25, 'BB'.

108.   Milton Steinberg, *Basic Judaism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1947), p. 166. My thanks to Tom Rogers for this reference.

109.   Young, *Writing*, p. 113.

110.   Stephen Spender, 'Introduction' to *Abba Kovner and Nelly Sachs: Selected Poems*, trans. Michael Roloff (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), pp. 8-9.

111.   Berryman, 'from *The Black Book (ii)*', *CP*, pp. 155-56.

112.   For further discussion of this image, and its ubiquity in Holocaust poetry, see my reading of 'Lady Lazarus' in Chapter 2.

113.   Primo Levi, *If This Is a Man and The Truce*, trans. Stuart Woolf (London: Abacus, 1996), p. 129.

114.   *The Black Book of Poland*, picture 146.

115.   Norman Davies, *Heart of Europe: A Short History of Poland* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), p. 325.

116.   *The Black Book of Polish Jewry: An Account of the Martyrdom of Polish Jewry Under the Nazi Occupation*, ed. Jacob Apenszlak (USA: The American Federation for Polish Jews, 1943), p. 251.

117.   Berryman also refers to this poem as 'Warsaw' in a HW contents list in his notes for *The Black Book* (Berryman, 'THE BLACK BOOK' (TS and MS), JBP, Unpub. Misc. Poetry, box 1, fol. 25, 'BB').

118.   Stanis©aw Arnold and Marian ♦ychowski, *Outline History of Poland: From the Beginning of the State to the Present Time* (Warsaw: Polonia Publishing House, 1962), p. 70.

119.   Ibid., p. 60.

120.   Anthony Hecht, '"More Light! More Light"', *The Hard Hours* (New York: Atheneum, 1968), reprinted in *Holocaust Poetry*, ed. Hilda Schiff (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), pp. 99-100.

121.   'Publishers' Introduction to the American Edition', Eugen Kogon, *The Theory and Practice of Hell*, trans. Heinz Norden (London: W.D.L. Books, 1958), p. 2.

122.   Ibid., p. 2.

123.   Ibid., p. 95.

124.   Ibid., p. 95.

125.   Susan Gubar, *Poetry after Auschwitz: Remembering What One Never Knew* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003), p. 146 and p. 27.

126.   Ibid., p. 23.

127.   Ibid., p. 146 and p. 149.

128.   Ibid., pp. 149-50.

129.   Ibid., p. 147.

130.   Ibid., p. 148.

131.   For a full explanation of the concept of emplotment, see Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), pp. 7-11.

132.   Gubar, *Poetry*, p. 150.

133.   Ibid., p. 145.

134.   Ibid., p. 150.

135.   Ibid., p. 146 and p. 150.

136.   Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, trans. Raymond Rosenthal (London: Abacus, 1996), p. 64.

137.   Ibid., p. 63.

138.   Gubar, *Poetry*, p. 150.

139.   Ibid., p. 179.

140.   *The Black Book of Poland*, p. 105.

141.   Gubar, *Poetry*, p. 150.

142.   Berryman, 'The Black Book' (MS), JBP, Unpub. Misc. Poetry, box 1, fol. 25, 'BB'.

143.   *The Black Book of Poland*, p. 252.

144.   Kogon, *Theory*, p. 275.

145.   *The Black Book of Poland*, p. 113; Kogon, *Theory*, pp. 276-77.

146. Berel Lang, 'The Representation of Evil: Ethical Content as Literary Form', in *Act and Idea in the Nazi Genocide* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), reprinted in *A Holocaust Reader: Responses to the Nazi Extermination*, ed. Michael L. Morgan (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 349-58 (p. 353 and p. 355).

147. Although this grammatical mark is about all that does differentiate Berryman's last sentence from the bare style of actual testimony. Numerous passages in *The Black Book: The Nazi Crime Against the Jewish People* (ed. The Jewish Black Book Committee (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1946)) also end with very simple sentences describing particular tragedies and deaths. See, for example, Freda Wartman's testimony (pp. 436-41), which has paragraphs that end 'The girl went insane' (p. 437); 'He died in the revolt of May 1943' (p. 438); 'The weak and the old were shot on the spot' (p. 437); 'In those days 80,000 Jews died' (p. 439); and 'The passengers were led into gas chambers' (p. 440).

148. Berryman, 'the will', *Poetry* LXXV, pp. 194-95 (p. 194).

149. Berryman, 'waiting', ibid., pp. 195-96 (p. 195).

150. Norman G. Finkelstein, *The Holocaust Industry: Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering* (London: Verso, 2000), p. 56.

151. Levi, *If*, p. 96.

152. Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Desmond Lee (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982), pp. 316-25.

153. Jan Kott, 'Introduction' to Tadeusz Borowski, *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen*, trans. Barbara Vedder (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), p. 25.

154. Martin Amis, *Time's Arrow* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992), p. 176.

155. Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1999), pp. 257-62.

156. Berryman, 'The Song of the Tortured Girl', *CP*, p. 52.

157. Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), p. 70.

158. See Note 11.

159. Berryman, 'from *The Black Book (iii)*', *CP*, p. 156.

160. This is the only poem where Berryman seems to have drawn on this particular Black Book: presumably he read it in the interval between his abandonment of his *The Black Book* project on or around 1 April 1949 and his writing of this single poem in 1958. For Grossman's full report, see *The Black Book: The Nazi Crime*, pp. 398-413.

161. Ibid., p. 398.

162. Ibid., p. 404.

163. Gubar, *Poetry*, pp. 149-50.

164. *The Black Book: The Nazi Crime*, p. 404.

165. T. S. Eliot, 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', *Collected Poems: 1909-1962* (London: Faber and Faber, 1974), p. 13.

166. For an influential interpretation of the Holocaust as a human equivalent of the *mysterium tremendum*, the terror-mystery of God, see Arthur A. Cohen, *The Tremendum: A Theological Interpretation of the Holocaust* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1981).

167. Emily Brontӡ, 'Stars', *The Complete Poems of Emily Brontӡ* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1910), p. 4. My thanks to Andrew Mangham for directing me to this poem.

168. Levi, *Drowned*, p. 65.

169. All unpublished material comes from loose MS sheets in JBP, Unpub. Misc. Poetry, box 1, fol. 25, 'BB'.

170. George Steiner, *Language and Silence: Essays on Language, Literature and the Inhuman* (New York: Atheneum, 1982), p. 123.

171. Berryman, 'who… inherited' (MS), JBP, Unpub. Misc. Poetry, box 1, fol. 25, 'BB'.

172. Theodor Adorno, 'Commitment', trans. Francis McDonagh, in *Aesthetics and Politics*, ed. Ronald Taylor (London: N.L.B., 1977), p. 189.

173. Ibid., p. 188.

174. Ibid., p. 188. For a thorough and illuminating commentary on critical uses and abuses of this phrase, see Michael Rothberg, *Traumatic Realism: The Demands of Holocaust Representation* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), pp. 19-58.

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175. Peter Orr, *The Poet Speaks* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), p. 169.

176. Joyce Carol Oates, 'The Death Throes of Romanticism', in *Sylvia Plath: The Woman and the Work*, ed. Edward Butscher (London: Peter Owen, 1979), p. 209.

177. James E. Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 117.

178. Seamus Heaney, *The Government of the Tongue: The 1986 T.S. Eliot Memorial Lectures and Other Critical Writings* (London: Faber and Faber, 1988), p. 165.

179. Sylvia Plath, 'Letter in November', *Collected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), pp. 253-54 (p. 253).

180. George Steiner, *Language and Silence: Essays on Language, Literature and the Inhuman* (New York: Atheneum, 1982), p. 301.

181. Ibid., p. 301.

182. Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi, *By Words Alone: The Holocaust in Literature* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 214. The quotation comes from a letter to the editor of *Commentary* in October 1974

183. Irving Howe, 'The Plath Celebration: A Partial Dissent', in *Plath*, ed. Butscher, pp. 232-33.

184. Alvin H. Rosenfeld, *A Double Dying: Reflections on Holocaust Literature* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), p. 181.

185. Young, *Writing*, p. 130.

186. Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1999), p. 201.

187. Ibid., p. 211. The quotation comes from a *New York Times* interview given in 1978.

188. Michael Rothberg, *Traumatic Realism: The Demands of Holocaust Representation* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), pp. 4-5.

189. Orr, *Poet*, p. 169.

190. Frances McCullough, 'Editor's Note', in Sylvia Plath, *The Journals of Sylvia Plath*, eds. Ted Hughes and Frances McCullough (New York: Ballantine Books, 1983), p. xii.

191. Ibid., p. xi.

192. Hughes, 'Foreword', ibid., p. xiv.

193. Ibid., pp. xiii-xv.

194. Ibid., p. xv.

195.   Ibid., p. xiv.

196.   Ibid., p. xiv.

197.   Ibid., p. xiv. Plath herself gave a rather more pragmatic account of her use of autobiography in her interview with Orr, explaining how personal experience could be used as poetic material only to certain specified ends:

> I believe that one should be able to control and manipulate experiences, even the most terrifying, like madness, being tortured, this sort of experience, and one should be able to manipulate these experiences with an informed and an intelligent mind. I think that personal experience is very important, but certainly it shouldn't be a kind of shut-box and mirror-looking, narcissistic experience. I believe it should be *relevant*, and relevant to the larger things, the bigger things such as Hiroshima and Dachau and so on (Orr, *Poet*, p. 30).

While personal experience is undeniably *there*, somewhere, in the literary work, it is present only in as much as it pertains to a claim higher than that of biographical or empirical veracity, which, for Plath, is that of historical and poetic *relevance*. She acknowledges that experience is a key ingredient in her poetry; but like any other ingredient it gets 'manipulated', turned into something other than itself, as a result of a transformative creative process.

198.   Jacqueline Rose, *The Haunting of Sylvia Plath* (London: Virago, 1991), p. 144.

199.   Ibid., p. 10 and p. 144.

200.   Ibid., p. 103.

201.   Ibid., p. 103.

202.   Ibid., p. 5.

203.   Ibid., p. 8.

204.   Ibid., pp. 7-8.

205.   Ibid., p. 7 and p. 236.

206.   Bruno Bettelheim, *The Informed Heart: The Human Condition in Mass Society* (London: Paladin, 1970), pp. 196-209 (p. 197).

207.   Rose, *Haunting*, p. 232.

208.   Ibid., p. 236.

209.   Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, trans. Raymond Rosenthal (London: Abacus, 1996), pp. 32-33.

210.   Janet Malcolm, *The Silent Woman: Ted Hughes and Sylvia Plath* (London: Papermac, 1995), p. 177.

211.   Rose, *Haunting*, p. 207.

212.   Christina Britzolakis, *Sylvia Plath and the Theatre of Mourning* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), p. 123.

213.   Plath, 'Daddy', *CP*, pp. 222-24 (p. 222).

214.   Rose, *Haunting*, pp. 226-27.

215.   Judith Kroll, *Chapters in a Mythology: The Poetry of Sylvia Plath* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), p. 122.

216.   Antony Rowland, *Tony Harrison and the Holocaust* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2001), p. 22.

217.   There are many interesting parallels between Anne Frank's diary and Sylvia Plath's early journals. For example, both girls, who were each committed diarists, expressed their ambitions to be writers very early on in life; both had passionate and complex relationships with their fathers (who were both called Otto); and each had a love of glitzy movie magazines, from which Anne would tack cuttings onto the wall of the Frank family's 'secret annexe'.

[218]. Plath, *The Journals of Sylvia Plath: 1950-1962*, ed. Karen V. Kukil (London: Faber and Faber, 2000), entry for 27 August 1958, p. 414.

[219]. In a reading for the BBC, Plath described the poem as being 'spoken by a girl with an Electra complex' (Plath, *CP*, p. 293).

[220]. Rose, *Haunting*, pp. 224-25.

[221]. Steiner, *Language*, p. 96.

[222]. My thanks to Professor Sue Vice for this suggestion.

[223]. Susan Gubar, *Poetry after Auschwitz: Remembering What One Never Knew* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003), p. 61. This sentence is structured rather oddly: without wishing to sound facetious, I doubt that many 'Western languages' were spoken in 'mass graves'.

[224]. Martin Gilbert, *The Holocaust: The Jewish Tragedy* (London: Fontana Press, 1987), p. 206.

[225]. Yevgeny Yevtushenko, 'Babii Yar', trans. George Reavey, reprinted in *Holocaust Poetry*, ed. Hilda Schiff (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), p. 94. The dramatic lineation of Reavey's translation seems to both exaggerate and challenge the identifications made in the poem between narrator and victim. Contrast this to the more mundane translation by Robin Milner-Gulland and Peter Levi in the original American publication of Yevtushenko's *Selected Poems* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1962): 'And I […]/ am every old man killed here,/ every child killed here' (p. 83).

[226]. John Lennard, *The Poetry Handbook: A Guide to Reading Poetry for Pleasure and Practical Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 91.

[227]. Matthew 27. 46; Mark 15. 34-35.

[228]. Rose, *Haunting*, p. 232.

[229]. In the Eight Circle Dante meets Bertran de Born, a French lord who incited Henry the Young of England to rebel against his father, Henry II. In Hell he is decapitated, and says: 'And thus, in me/ one sees the law of counter-penalty' (Dante, *The Divine Comedy*, trans. Allen Mandelbaum (London: David Campbell, 1995), *Inferno*, Canto XXVIII, lines 141-42, p. 183).

[230]. 'Little Fugue' is dated 2 April 1962, 'Daddy' 12 October 1962, and 'The Munich Mannequins' 28 January 1963 (Plath, *CP*, p. 189, p. 224 and p. 263).

[231]. Jacqueline Rose also describes and critiques 'Little Fugue' as a 'forerunner of "Daddy"' (Rose, *Haunting*, p. 219).

[232]. Plath, 'Little Fugue', *CP*, pp. 187-89 (p. 188).

[233]. Rose, *Haunting*, p. 219.

[234]. T. S. Eliot, 'The Dry Salvages', *Collected Poems 1909-1962* (London: Faber and Faber, 1974), pp. 205-13 (p. 213).

[235]. Plath, 'Little Fugue' (draft), quoted in Rose, *Haunting*, p. 219.

[236]. Plath, 'The Munich Mannequins', *CP*, pp. 262-63 (p. 262).

[237]. Paul Celan, 'Todesfuge' ('Death Fugue'), *Selected Poems*, trans. Michael Hamburger (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1996), pp. 62-65.

[238]. As Rowland notes with regard to 'Mary's Song', 'Plath's decision to switch from campy poetics [in 'Daddy' and 'Lady Lazarus'] to a more abstract lyricism links with Celan's change of heart about "Todesfuge"' (Antony Rowland, *Holocaust Poetry: Awkward Poetics in the Work of Sylvia Plath, Geoffrey Hill, Tony Harrison and Ted Hughes* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), p. 49).

[239]. Stan Smith, *Inviolable Voice: History and Twentieth-Century Poetry* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan Humanities Press, 1982), p. 217.

[240]. In Plath's first poem about the Holocaust, 'The Thin People', written in 1957 (and the only poem she wrote on the subject before 1962), she describes how 'the thin people' come 'into our bad dreams, their menace/ Not guns, not abuses,// But a thin silence' (Plath, 'The Thin People', *CP*, pp. 64-65 (p. 64)).

241.   Kroll, *Chapters*, p. 125.

242.   Al Alvarez, *The Savage God: A Study of Suicide* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), p. 35 and p. 64.

243.   Ibid., p. 64.

244.   Rose, *Haunting*, p. 96.

245.   Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*, trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln, USA: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), p. 41.

246.   Dori Laub and Shoshana Felman, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), p. 232.

247.   Art Spiegelman, *Maus II: A Survivor's Tale: And Here My Troubles Began* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992), p. 45.

248.   James E. Young, *At Memory's Edge: After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 31.

249.   Kroll, *Chapters*, p. 118. 'Daddy' is dated 12 October 1962 and 'Lady Lazarus' is dated 23-29 October 1962 (Plath, *CP*, p. 224 and p. 247). Kroll has described the transcendence narrative in terms of a mythic ritual of death and rebirth, in which the protagonist, whom she describes as a sister to Robert Graves's White Goddess, 'attempts to die into a new phase' (Kroll, *Chapters*, pp. 118-21).

250.   Plath, 'Ariel', *CP*, pp. 239-40 (p. 240). Plath wrote 'Ariel' (27 October 1962) at the same time as she was working on 'Lady Lazarus'.

251.   'The Munich Mannequins' was written some months after 'Lady Lazarus'; however, as I noted in my reading of 'Daddy', this later poem is more veiled in its representation of the Holocaust than either of the other poems in the German trilogy: it makes no direct mention of Nazism or even the Jews. Perhaps this muting can be understood in terms of what 'Lady Lazarus' reveals about Plath's changing attitude towards Holocaust representation.

252.   Kroll, *Chapters*, pp. 154-55. 'A Fasting-artist' begins: 'Interest in fasting as an art has declined very considerably in recent decades' (Franz Kafka, 'A Fasting-artist', *Stories 1904-1924*, trans. J. A. Underwood (London and Sydney: Futura, 1983), p. 242).

253.   Plath, 'Lady Lazarus', *CP*, pp. 244-47 (p. 245).

254.   Al Strangeways, '"The Boot in the Face": The Problem of the Holocaust in the Poetry of Sylvia Plath', *Contemporary Literature*, Number 37, Volume 3, pp. 370-90 (p. 377).

255.   Neil Roberts, *Narrative and Voice in Postwar Poetry* (London and New York: Longman, 1999), p. 24.

256.   Rose, *Haunting*, p. 105.

257.   Roberts, *Narrative*, p. 24.

258.   Ibid., p. 22.

259.   Ibid., p. 26.

260.   Strangeways, '"The Boot"', p. 386.

261.   Britzolakis, *Plath*, p. 152.

262.   Ibid., p. 152.

263.   Alvarez, *Savage*, p. 32.

264.   Rowland, *Holocaust*, pp. 9-21; Alvarez, *Savage*, pp. 32-33.

265.   For a full discussion of Plath's use of Koch's lampshade as a sensationalist image, see Rowland, *Holocaust*, pp. 39-47.

266.   Kroll, *Chapters*, p. 115.

267.   Ibid., p. 115.

268.   Rowland, *Holocaust*, pp. 40-41.

269.   Gubar, *Poetry*, p. 201.

270. Ian Kershaw, *Hitler: 1936-1945: Nemesis* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2000), p. 559.

271. Eugen Kogon, *The Theory and Practice of Hell*, trans. Heinz Norden (London: W.D.L., 1958) pp. 16-17.

272. In a reading for the BBC on 30 October 1962, Plath included an extra stanza between the fourth and fifth of the published version: 'Yes, yes, Herr Professor,/ It is I./ Can you deny' (the next stanza continues, 'The nose, the eye pits, the full set of teeth?').

273. Gubar, *Poetry*, p. 201.

274. Britzolakis, *Plath*, p. 152 and pp. 154-55.

275. T. S. Eliot, 'Little Gidding', *CP*, pp. 214-23 (p. 216).

276. John Felstiner, *Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), p. 38. Rowland, Brian Murdoch, Janice Markey and Steven Gould Axelrod have all detected possible allusions to Celan (and especially 'Todesfuge') in this poem (Rowland, *Holocaust*, pp. 47-49).

277. Nelly Sachs, 'O the Chimneys', *Abba Kovner and Nelly Sachs: Selected Poems*, trans. Michael Roloff (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), p. 79.

278. Britzolakis, *Plath*, p. 154.

279. Celan, 'Aschenglorie' ('Ashglory'), trans. John Felstiner, in Felstiner, *Celan*, p. 223.

280. Rowland, *Holocaust*, p. 31 and p. 43.

281. Ibid., p. 43.

282. Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 91 and p. 30.

283. Gubar, *Poetry*, p. 200.

284. Kroll, *Chapters*, p. 118.

285. Neil Levi and Michael Rothberg, 'General Introduction: Theory and the Holocaust', in *The Holocaust: Theoretical Readings*, eds. Neil Levi and Michael Rothberg (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), p. 13.

286. Tim Kendall, *Sylvia Plath: A Critical Study* (London: Faber and Faber: 2001), pp. 124-25.

287. Rowland, *Holocaust*, p. 50.

288. Plath, 'Mary's Song', *CP*, p. 257.

289. John 1. 29 and 36. See also Kendall, *Plath*, p. 125.

290. Kendall, *Plath*, p. 125.

291. Plath, 'Lesbos', *CP*, pp. 227-30 (p. 227).

292. Rowland, *Holocaust*, p. 51.

293. Gubar, *Poetry*, pp. 57-62.

294. See, for example, 'The Disquieting Muses' (*CP*, pp. 74-76), about which Plath commented: 'It borrows its title from the painting by Giorgio de Chirico - *The Disquieting Muses*. All through the poem I have in mind the enigmatic figures in this painting' (Plath, *CP*, p. 276).

295. Ibid., p. 294.

296. Gubar, *Poetry*, p. 24 and p. 42.

297. Laub and Felman, *Testimony*, pp. 241-42.

298. Gubar, *Poetry*, p. 12.

299. Gitta Sereny, *Into That Darkness: From Mercy Killing to Mass Murder* (London: Pimlico, 1995), p. 165.

300. Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (London: Fontana Press, 1992), p. 247.

301. Ibid., p. 245.

302. Young, *Memory*, pp. 5-11.

303. Kendall, *Plath*, p. 127.

304.   Robert Lowell, 'The Holy Innocents', *Robert Lowell's Poems: A Selection*, ed., Jonathan Raban (London: Faber and Faber, 1974), p. 37.

305.   Jonathan Raban, 'Introduction', ibid., p. 17.

306.   Gubar, *Poetry*, p. 65.

307.   Dante, *Divine Comedy*, *Paradiso*, Canto XXXIII, lines 55-57, p. 538.

308.   Nelly Sachs, 'O the Night of the Weeping Children', trans. Michael Hamburger, reprinted in *Holocaust Poetry*, ed. Schiff, p. 69. (This poem is not included in the English translation of *Abba Kovner and Nelly Sachs: Selected Poems*.)

309.   Rowland, *Holocaust*, p. 175.

310.   Plath, 'Getting There', *CP*, pp. 247-49 (pp. 247-48).

311.   Laub and Felman, *Testimony*, p. 229, p. 231 and p. 211.

312.   Kroll, *Chapters*, p. 160.

313.   Kendall, *Plath*, p. 184.

314.   Britzolakis, *Plath*, p. 186.

315.   Ibid., p. 186.

316.   Ibid., pp. 185-86 and p. 188.

317.   Plath, 'Metaphors', *CP*, p. 116; ibid., p. 188.

318.   Britzolakis, *Plath*, p. 190.

319.   Ibid., p. 188 and p. 187.

320.   Ibid., p. 187 and pp. 190-91.

321.   Theodor Adorno, 'Cultural Criticism and Society', in *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The M.I.T. Press, 1990), p. 32.

322.   Gillian Rose, *The Melancholy Science: An Introduction to the Thought of Theodor W. Adorno* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), p. 48.

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323.   Albert Speer, *Inside the Third Reich*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (London: Sphere Books, 1971), p. 631.

324.   Ibid., p. 526.

325.   Ian Kershaw, *Hitler: 1936-1945: Nemesis* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2000), pp. 775-77.

326.   Alan Bullock, *Hitler: A Study in Tyranny* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), p. 785.

327.   W. D. Snodgrass, *The Fuehrer Bunker: The Complete Cycle* (Brockport, NY: BOA Editions, 1995), p. 115.

328.   Paul L. Gaston, 'W. D. Snodgrass and *The Fuehrer Bunker*: An Interview' (Part I), *Papers on Language and Literature*, Vol. 13, No. 3, Summer 1977, pp. 295-311 (p. 298).

329.   Ibid., p. 298.

330.   Hugh Trevor-Roper, *The Last Days of Hitler* (London: Pan Books, 2002), p. lviii.

331.   Philip Hoy, *W. D. Snodgrass in Conversation with Philip Hoy* (London: Between the Lines, 1998), p. 42.

332.   Henri Coulette, *The War of the Secret Agents*, in *The Collected Poems of Henri Coulette* (Fayetteville and London: The University of Arkansas Press, 1990), p. 71.

333.   Paul L. Gaston, *W. D. Snodgrass* (Boston, USA: Twayne Publishers, 1978), p. 147; Gaston, 'Snodgrass' (I), pp. 305-06.

334.   Paul L. Gaston, 'W. D. Snodgrass and *The Fuhrer Bunker*: An Interview' (Part II), *Papers on Language and Literature*, Vol. 13, No. 4, Fall 1977, pp. 401-12 (p. 403).

335. For a discussion of theatrical performances of the cycle, see Hoy, *Snodgrass*, pp. 42-44.

336. Gaston, 'Snodgrass' (I), p. 304.

337. Hoy, *Snodgrass*, p. 32.

338. William Boyd, 'Decline and fall', *Guardian*, 19 March 2005, p. 4.

339. Hoy, *Snodgrass*, p. 37.

340. Gaston, 'Snodgrass' (I), p. 302.

341. Ibid., p. 302.

342. Ibid., p. 303.

343. Hoy, *Snodgrass*, p. 33.

344. Gaston, 'Snodgrass' (I), p. 300.

345. Gaston, 'Snodgrass' (II), p. 402.

346. Ibid., p. 401.

347. Gaston, 'Snodgrass' (I), p. 309.

348. Ibid., pp. 301-02.

349. Hoy, *Snodgrass*, p. 35.

350. Gaston, 'Snodgrass' (I), p. 308.

351. Ibid., pp. 308-11.

352. Gaston, 'Snodgrass' (II), p. 404.

353. Trevor-Roper, *Last Days*, p. 66.

354. Ibid., p. 67.

355. Speer, *Inside*, pp. 687-98;

356. Ibid., p. 687.

357. Ibid., p. 696.

358. Gitta Sereny, *Albert Speer: His Battle with Truth* (London: Picador, 1996), p. 706.

359. Ibid., p. 704; see also pp. 388-407.

360. Gaston, *Snodgrass*, p. 150.

361. Gaston, 'Snodgrass' (I), pp. 304-05.

362. Ibid., p. 310, p. 305 and p. 304.

363. Snodgrass, *Fuehrer*, pp. 94-96 (p. 96).

364. Speer, *Inside*, pp. 506-07.

365. Ibid., p. 506.

366. Ibid., p. 564.

367. William Heyen, 'Blue', *The Swastika Poems* (New York: Vanguard Press, 1977), p. 52.

368. Snodgrass, *Fuehrer*, pp. 121-23 (p. 122).

369. Ibid., p. 96.

370. Ibid., p. 31.

371. Ibid., pp. 136-39 (p. 139).

372. Ibid., pp. 89-90 (p. 89).

373. In his interview with Gaston in 1977, it becomes clear that Snodgrass's representation of Speer was in a large part based on their personal meeting in Germany, with their conversation providing the poet with key passages, and also helping him to create the fictional Speer's distinctive language and phraseology. Snodgrass's account of their meeting also illustrates how he would, as a poet, deliberately blur distinctions between historically separate events, in order to produce a more compelling literary narrative:

> *WDS*: There is the episode in the Speer poem [...] about a friend of Speer who was a doctor. His name historically was not Paul; I never did know what his name was. I had asked Speer if Hitler must not have known that those men he

was ordering out to fight were already dead. He couldn't have not known that. He was ordering the same troops out to get killed for the fourth time. And Speer said what he says in the poem, 'He neglected his knowing.' That just made my head ring when he said it. And then Speer said, 'He was like my doctor, who recently died of cancer but didn't know he was dying. Even though he had told us in advance that he would die of cancer himself, when it came he didn't know what he had.'

PLG: But the death of this doctor is comparatively recent?

WDS: Yes, that's right. That is the 1970 Speer. He told me that in '72, when we were there. It is a fairly recent thing, but it is too good to pass up.

PLG: He couldn't have said it any better.

WDS: Just wonderful! And it set the tone for everything he would say from then on. He would say, speaking of himself and the Nazis, 'We were a form of cancer - of growth that has lost all limits. We all had "cancer" and were cancer and didn't know it. Neglected our knowing' (Gaston, 'Snodgrass' (I), pp. 309-10).

374. Snodgrass, *Fuehrer*, p. 180, p. 77 and p. 39.

375. Gaston, 'Snodgrass' (I), p. 304.

376. Don DeLillo, *White Noise* (London: Picador, 1986), p. 31.

377. Snodgrass, *Fuehrer*, pp. 37-39 (p. 38).

378. Gaston, 'Snodgrass' (II), p. 404.

379. Hoy, *Snodgrass*, p. 32; Trevor-Roper, *Last Days*, pp. 84-85; Bullock, *Hitler*, pp. 392-97.

380. Snodgrass, *Fuehrer*, pp. 102-05 (p. 104).

381. Gaston, 'Snodgrass' (II), p. 402. Gaston notes that the quotation is from Simone Weil.

382. Snodgrass, *Fuehrer*, p. 36.

383. Gaston, 'Snodgrass' (I), p. 297.

384. Snodgrass, *Fuehrer*, pp. 37-39 (p. 38).

385. Gaston, 'Snodgrass' (I), p. 297.

386. Snodgrass, *Fuehrer*, p. 69 and p. 114.

387. Ibid., p. 114.

388. Ibid., p. 88.

389. Ibid., p. 114.

390. Trevor-Roper, *Last Days*, p. 14.

391. Ibid., p. 15.

392. Snodgrass, *Fuehrer*, pp. 69-71 (p. 70).

393. Ibid., p. 116.

394. Ibid., p. 132.

395. Gaston, 'Snodgrass' (I), p. 304.

396. Snodgrass, *Fuehrer*, pp. 84-88 (p. 87).

397. John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, in *The Complete English Poems* (London: David Campbell, 1992), Book IV, l.108, p. 225.

398. Snodgrass, *Fuehrer*, p. 18, p. 71 and p. 88.

399. Trevor-Roper, *Last Days*, p. 4.

400. Snodgrass, *Fuehrer*, pp. 114-16 (p. 115).

401. Ibid., p. 131.

402. Ibid., p. 99.

403. Ibid., p. 99-101 (p. 99).

404. Trevor-Roper, *Last Days*, p. 189.

405. Snodgrass, *Fuehrer*, pp. 131-32 (p. 131).

406.   Gaston, 'Snodgrass' (II), p. 412.

407.   Ibid., p. 406.

408.   Snodgrass, *Fuehrer*, p. 147.

409.   Ibid., pp. 131-32 (p. 132).

410.   Ibid., p. 182, pp. 199-200 and p. 193.

411.   Ibid., pp. 197-98 (p. 198).

412.   Stanley Fish, *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in Paradise Lost* (London: Macmillan, 1967), p. ix.

413.   Ibid., p. 4 and p. ix.

414.   Hoy, *Snodgrass*, p. 38.

415.   Gaston, 'Snodgrass' (II), p. 405.

416.   Snodgrass, *Fuehrer*, p. 11.

417.   Gaston, 'Snodgrass' (II), p. 408.

418.   Snodgrass, *In Radical Pursuit* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), pp. 15-16.

419.   Snodgrass, *Fuehrer*, pp. 28-29 (p. 28).

420.   Ibid., p. 29.

421.   Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. H—lֿne Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), p. 19.

422.   Ibid., p. 21.

423.   Ibid., p. 21.

424.   Ibid., p. 439.

425.   Snodgrass, *Fuehrer*, p. 86.

426.   Ibid., pp. 124-25.

427.   Ibid., pp. 72-73.

428.   Ibid., p. 98.

429.   Ibid., p. 98.

430.   Ibid., pp. 152-54 (p. 154).

431.   Fish, *Surprised*, p. 11.

432.   Gaston, *Snodgrass*, p. 153; Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 13.

433.   Gaston, 'Snodgrass' (I), p. 303.

434.   Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 61.

435.   Ibid., p. xiii.

436.   Denise Levertov, 'During the Eichmann Trial', *Poems 1960-1967* (New York: New Directions Publishing, 1983), pp. 63-72 (p. 65).

437.   Gillian Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law: Philosophy and Representation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p.41.

438.   Snodgrass, *Fuehrer*, pp. 197-98 (p. 197).

439.   Hoy, *Snodgrass*, p. 32.

440.   Ibid., p. 33.

441.   Ibid., p. 33.

442.   Ibid., p. 34.

443.   Snodgrass, *Fuehrer*, p. 202.

444.   Ibid., p. 182.

445.   Ibid., pp. 99-100.

446.   Gaston, 'Snodgrass' (II), pp. 405-06.

Conclusion

[447]. Don Paterson, 'Rhyme and reason', *Guardian*, 6 November 2004, p. 34.

[448]. Robert Eaglestone, *The Holocaust and the Postmodern* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 2.

[449]. Ibid., p. 8.

[450]. Ibid., p. 22.

[451]. Gitta Sereny, *Albert Speer: His Battle With Truth* (London: Picador, 1996), p. 6 and p. 14.

[452]. Philip Hoy, *W. D. Snodgrass in Conversation with Philip Hoy* (London: Between the Lines, 1998), p. 38.

[453]. Eaglestone, *Holocaust*, p. 217.

[454]. Ibid., p. 216.

[455]. Ibid., p. 223.

[456]. Ibid., p. 223.

[457]. Ibid., p. 221.

[458]. Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), p. 152.

[459]. Marianne Hirsch's concept of 'postmemory', which 'is distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection', should retain its very specific application to the lives of the children of Holocaust survivors who 'grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth' (Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photographs, Narrative and Postmemory* (London: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 22). Works of postmemory include George Perec's *W or the Memory of Childhood* (1975) and Spiegelman's *Maus* (1986 and 1991). Plath's 'Daddy' might be regarded as a work of *fictionalised* postmemory - just as Jonathan Safran Foer writes a fictionalised testimony in the latter sections of *Everything Is Illuminated* (2002); but a genuine work of postmemory is primarily concerned with actual inherited memories mediated by the author's parents, and, as such, can only be established through biographical criteria.

[460]. Susan Gubar, *Poetry after Auschwitz: Remembering What One Never Knew* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003), p. 55.

[461]. Geoffrey Hill, 'September Song', *Collected Poems* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), p. 67.

[462]. Neil Roberts, *Narrative and Voice in Postwar Poetry* (London and New York: Longman, 1999), p. 77; Antony Rowland, *Tony Harrison and the Holocaust* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2001), p. 24.

[463]. Eaglestone, *Holocaust*, p. 34.

[464]. Rowland, *Harrison*, p. 26.

[465]. Ibid., p. 25.

[466]. Eaglestone, *Holocaust*, pp. 33-34.

[467]. Ibid., p. 34.

[468]. Jahan Ramazani, *Poetry of Mourning: The Modern Elegy from Hardy to Heaney* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 7.

[469]. Ibid., p. 7; Rowland, *Harrison*, p. 24.

[470]. Gubar, *Poetry*, p. 211.

[471]. Ramazani, *Poetry*, p. 8.

[472]. Geoffrey Hill, *The Triumph of Love* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1999), p. 28.

[473]. Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*, trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln, USA: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), p. 82.