

**"Estimate Your Distance From the Belsen Heap":
Acknowledging and Negotiating Distance in
Selected Works of Canadian Holocaust Literature**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vi
INTRODUCTION - "Distance Matters"	1
Distance from the Holocaust: From Individual to Cultural Trauma.....	4
"After Auschwitz": Distance from Adorno.....	9
"Shearing Away Part of the Horror": Moral and Aesthetic Debates After Adorno.....	14
Acknowledging and Negotiating Distance in Selected Works of Canadian Literature.....	17
A Note on the Texts	28
CHAPTER ONE - "His Stuttering Innocence a Kind of Guilt": A.M. Klein and the Effects of Cultural Trauma	30
Klein as a Victim of the Holocaust.....	33
"The Darkest Hour is at Hand": Klein the Editorialist	37
Klein's Early Holocaust Poetry	49
"Double-Jointed Rhetoric": <i>The Hitleriad</i>	59
"Where Shall I Seek You?": The Elegiac Meditation.....	73
"Bound to Canada": <i>The Second Scroll</i>	84
CHAPTER TWO – "Make Clear for Us Belsen": Irving Layton, Leonard Cohen, and the (R)evolution of Canadian Holocaust Literature	93
Layton's Latency: The Indirect Response to the Holocaust in Layton's Early Poetry.....	96
Layton's Revolutionary Manifesto: The "Foreword" to <i>Balls for a One-Armed Juggler</i>	101
"It Would Be a Lie": Further Contradictions in Layton's Holocaust Writing.....	106
"Deliberately Ugly": Leonard Cohen's <i>Flowers for Hitler</i>	113
"What Did You Expect?": The Banality of Evil in <i>Flowers for Hitler</i>	115
Hitler the Sadist: <i>Beautiful Losers</i>	132

CHAPTER THREE - "Beyond My Reach": Bernice Eisenstein, J.J. Steinfeld and the Burden of Second-Generation Postmemory	137
Defining the Second Generation	137
Acknowledging Distance	141
From Trauma to Postmemory	143
"The Inked-In Shapes of Line and Word": Bernice Eisenstein's <i>I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors</i>	151
"The Past Completely Vanished the Present": J.J. Steinfeld and the Danger of Acting Out	171
 CHAPTER FOUR - The "Proper Subjects of Holocaust Fiction: Cultural Distance and the Issues of Holocaust Representation"	191
"Seeds of Fascism" in Timothy Findley's <i>The Butterfly Plague</i>	199
Findley's "Defining Obsession"	203
The "Innocent Watcher": Witnessing the Holocaust in <i>The Butterfly Plague</i>	205
"We Didn't See Them": The Holocaust at Alvarez Canyon	221
Race: "This Damnable Quest for Perfection"	226
To "Live in the Terms of Today": (Meta)Fiction, Allegory, and Games in Yann Martel's <i>Beatrice & Virgil</i>	231
"The World Upside Down": The Metafictional Opening of <i>Beatrice & Virgil</i>	234
"Little Actual Fiction": Martel's Reading of the Holocaust	241
<i>A 20th Century Shirt</i> : "What's the Symbolism There?"	243
"I Needed More Distance": Henry the Taxidermist	249
<i>Games for Gustav</i> : "What Action Do You Do?"	255
 CONCLUSION – Measuring Distance in Anne Michaels' <i>Fugitive Pieces</i>	258
"Born Into Absence": Ben as Second-Generation Survivor	266
"The Role and the Responsibility of the Listener": Cultural Distance in <i>Fugitive Pieces</i>	269
Coda: "Distance Matters"	272
 WORKS CITED	278

ABSTRACT

In his 1987 essay "Canadian Poetry After Auschwitz," Michael Greenstein argues that A.M. Klein's mock-heroic poem, *The Hitleriad* (1944), ultimately fails to portray the severity and tragedy of the Holocaust because "it lacks the necessary historical distance for coping with the enormity" of the event (1). Greenstein's criticism is interesting because it suggests that in order for a writer to adequately represent the horrors of a traumatic event like the Holocaust it is "necessary" for him to be distanced from the event. While Greenstein specifically addresses historical (or temporal) distance, Canadian authors writing about the Holocaust have also, inevitably, had to negotiate their geographical and cultural distance from the historical event as well. Not surprisingly, their works tend to be immensely self-reflexive in nature, reflecting an awareness of the questions of authority and problems of representation that have shaped critical thinking about Holocaust literature for over half a century.

This dissertation examines the role that distance has played in the creation and critical understanding of representative works of Canadian Holocaust literature. It begins with an extensive analysis of the poetry and prose of geographically-distanced poet A.M. Klein, whose work is unique in the Canadian literary canon in that it mirrors the shifting psychological state of members of the Canadian Jewish community as news of the Holocaust slowly trickled into Canada. This is followed by a discussion of the Holocaust texts of Irving Layton and Leonard Cohen, both of whom experimented with increasingly graphic Holocaust imagery in their works in response to the increasingly more horrifying information about the concentration camps that entered the Canadian public conscience in the 1960s. The dissertation then turns its attention to the uniquely post-memorial and semi-autobiographical works of two children of Holocaust survivors, Bernice Eisenstein and J.J. Steinfeld, before focusing on the Holocaust works of

Timothy Findley and Yann Martel, both of whom produce highly metafictional novels in order to respond to the questions of appropriation and ethical representation that often surround works of Holocaust fiction created by non-Jewish writers. The dissertation concludes with an analysis of Anne Michaels' novel *Fugitive Pieces*—a text that addresses all three types of distance that stand at the center of this dissertation, and that illustrates many of the strategies of representation that Canadian writers have adopted in their attempts to negotiate, highlight, erase, and embrace the distance that separates them from the Holocaust.

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INTRODUCTION:

"Distance Matters"

In his 1987 essay "Canadian Poetry After Auschwitz," critic Michael Greenstein argues that Canadian Jewish poet A.M. Klein's book-length mock-heroic poem, *The Hitleriad* (1944), ultimately fails to portray the severity and tragedy of the Holocaust because "it lacks the necessary historical distance for coping with the enormity" of the event (1). While he acknowledges that Klein's poem deserves to be celebrated as the first substantial literary representation of the Holocaust in Canadian literature, he criticizes the poem's use of "satiric, Augustan rhyming couplets" which "prove inadequate to th[e] unparalleled tragedy" of the Holocaust (1). Because the Holocaust was too overwhelming to be fully understood as it occurred, Greenstein argues, it is only in the poetry of "Klein's successors," most notably Irving Layton and Leonard Cohen, "with their advantage of historical distance," that a "phenomenology of the Holocaust" develops in Canadian literature (1).

Greenstein's criticism of *The Hitleriad* is interesting because it suggests that in order for a writer to "adequately" represent the horrors of a traumatic event like the Holocaust it is "necessary" for him to be distanced, in some way, from the event. It also suggests that in order to best understand and depict the event, he cannot write about it while it is occurring, but must rather write about it belatedly—after it has occurred. Furthermore, Greenstein's criticism of Klein's "inadequate" use of "satiric, Augustan rhyming couplets" suggests that he believes there are literary forms or styles that are more "adequate" to Holocaust representation than others (1). Despite the fact that Klein adopts the 18th century poetic form of Alexander Pope's *The Dunciad* in order to examine his subject through the lens of satire—and thus creates an ironic distance

between himself and the Holocaust—Greenstein finds *The Hitleriad* "lacking" because it ultimately fails to acknowledge and depict the unprecedented nature and scale of the Holocaust.

"Distance matters," Eva Hoffman claims in her book *After Such Knowledge: Memory, History, and the Legacy of the Holocaust* (2004), and Greenstein's analysis of Klein's poem clearly demonstrates the significance that a writer's distance from the Holocaust plays not only in the creation of Holocaust literature but also in the discourse surrounding the work's critical reception (177). Hoffman's phrase is especially pertinent to a discussion of Canadian Holocaust literature which, from its beginning with Klein, has inevitably been shaped by its geographical distance from Europe and the Holocaust; and, in the generations after Klein, by temporal and cultural distance as well. This dissertation examines the presence and function of these three types of distance in Canadian Holocaust literature, and the various ways that Canadian writers have attempted to negotiate, highlight, erase, and embrace these distances.

One of the things that this dissertation will demonstrate is that Canadian Holocaust writers tend to be immensely self-reflexive in their writing about their distance from the Holocaust, and about the effect that this distance has had on the production of their literary works. Indeed, the level of self-reflexivity that a text exhibits tends to increase with the degree to which it is removed from the traumatic event. Klein's poetry, for example, reflects the shifting psychological state of geographically-distanced members of the Canadian-Jewish community at the time that the Holocaust was occurring, and as news of the Holocaust slowly trickled into Canada. Echoed in Klein's haunting poetry is the extreme sadness over events in Europe, the frustration over growing political and social anti-Semitism in Canada, and the author's own overwhelming feelings of guilt for having survived the Holocaust only as a result of being geographically removed from it—a feeling shared by an entire generation of Canadian-Jews. As

years passed and a generation of writers who grew up in Canada began to record their experiences of living with parents who were survivors of the Holocaust, temporal distance became the dominant lens through which the Holocaust was filtered. Nevertheless, by acknowledging how their parents' decision to migrate to Canada ultimately shaped their own identities and connection (or perceived lack thereof) to the Holocaust, and by commenting on an awareness of their place within a growing diaspora of "second-generation" survivors, these writers also remain immensely aware of how their geographical distance from the historical event has shaped their understanding of it. Finally, the texts of culturally-distanced (i.e. non-Jewish) writers often reveal a critical awareness of all three of these types of distance. A text like Yann Martel's *Beatrice & Virgil*, for example, makes clever use of metafiction to reflect on the difficulties that a non-Jewish, temporally-distanced, Canadian writer faces when trying to publish an experimental book about the Holocaust.

Although Greenstein's claim that distance is an "advantage" for the Holocaust writer in terms of the quality of his work, this dissertation avoids judging the success or merit of a work based on its distance from the Holocaust, while nevertheless seeing that distance as integral, even constitutive, of the writing it examines. Each work will be treated as a product of the time and place in which it was created. The reason for doing this is simple: by reading these representations of the Holocaust as intimately connected to the historical and cultural contexts of their creation, we can get a better sense of how the evolution of awareness of the Holocaust in Canada corresponds with an evolution in the attitudes of writers toward the event, and the subsequent strategies of representation that they undertake in their writing. To argue, as Greenstein does, that a writer's work "inadequate[ly]" depicts the Holocaust because it lacks distance is to ignore the fact that an understanding of an event is intimately entwined with how it

is represented (1). Klein's *The Hitleriad*, then, not only shows us how the Holocaust was understood and perceived *at the time of its creation*, but it also demonstrates the writer's struggle to find a way to speak the unspeakable, to comprehend the incomprehensible, and to find a literary form—either old or new—through which it can be represented.

This dissertation stands at the intersection of a number of discourses. It combines a discussion of the cultural context of each text with a formal analysis of the techniques and experiments that writers employ in their attempts to depict a traumatic event that they themselves did not directly experience. It also situates these works within relevant discourses of social history, literary theory, cultural theory, and trauma theory. As of yet, no work of criticism has attempted to examine a comprehensive body of Canadian Holocaust literature, leaving this area of Canadian literature largely unexplored. The work that has been done on Canadian Holocaust texts tends to focus on the works of a single author, on works within a single literary genre, or on works from a certain period of time. Rarely is distance of any kind treated as a central theme. By broadening its scope to include multiple authors, texts, and genres, this dissertation is ultimately able to facilitate a better understanding and appreciation of the role that distance has played in the evolution of Canadian Holocaust literature.

Distance from the Holocaust: From Individual to Cultural Trauma

Before I introduce the authors and texts that this dissertation discusses, and lay out the methodological framework of their analysis, it is worth outlining the main cultural, aesthetic, and psychological approaches to Holocaust writing that inevitably inform this dissertation's work. Much of this critical framework is further developed, as relevant, within each of the main

sections of the dissertation, but a general overview provides a useful way of contextualizing the dissertation as a whole.

One of the main questions that inevitably comes up in discussions of literary representations of the Holocaust that are in some way distanced from the historical event is that of authority. As Sue Vice suggests in her book *Holocaust Fiction* (2000), authority is typically "conferred on a writer if they can be shown to have a connection with the events they are describing" (4). If the Holocaust is "a sacred realm" that "one cannot enter [...] without realizing that only those who were there can know," as Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel adamantly suggests in a 1980 interview with Ellen S. Fine, then how can someone who did not witness the Holocaust first-hand possibly understand the trauma that the victims experienced and represent this trauma in their work without trivializing it? ("A Sacred Realm" 185). This question of authority—of having a right to enter and depict the "sacred realm" of the Holocaust—is obviously a problematic one for the Canadian writers whom this dissertation discusses: the geographic and temporal distance that separates them from the traumatic event seemingly undercuts any authority that might be credited to them for the "connection[s]"—even cultural ones—to the Holocaust that they might have. Nevertheless, Wiesel ultimately acknowledges that "the outsider can come close to the gates" of the "sacred realm" of the Holocaust," and the numerous strategies that Canadian authors have employed to acknowledge and negotiate the issue of authority—from poignant reflection on a shared cultural heritage in the works of A.M. Klein, to the creation of postmemorial auto/biographies in the second generation, and the heavy use of metafiction in the works of culturally-removed authors—will be highlighted throughout this dissertation (185).

The field of trauma theory can help us further negotiate the question of authority by providing a framework for understanding how someone who was not a direct victim of the

Holocaust can still be said to have been traumatized by it.¹ While the use of the term "trauma" to talk about anyone other than the victims and survivors of the Holocaust is obviously problematic, one of the benefits of the trauma and cultural theories established by Sigmund Freud, Cathy Caruth, Dominick LaCapra, and Ron Eyerman, among others, is that they allow us to understand how "the traumatic event has its greatest and most clearly unjustifiable effect on the victims," but "in different ways it also affects everyone who comes in contact with it " (LaCapra, *History and Memory* 8). In her ground-breaking book *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996), Cathy Caruth, one of the acknowledged pioneers of trauma studies, bases the notion of trauma "on both an original event and the lasting wounds produced by this event" (McGlothlin 52). By drawing heavily on Freud's analysis of Torquato Tasso's parable of Tancred and his double wounding of Clorinda—illustrated and explained in more detail in the short theoretical introduction to the chapter on second-generation writers—Caruth is ultimately able to demonstrate that the "lasting wounds" of a traumatic event affect not only the immediate victim of the trauma, but also anyone who comes into contact with that victim: "one's own trauma is tied up with the trauma of another" (Caruth 8).

Summarizing Caruth's theories, Erin McGlothlin explains that trauma "is not only the story of the individual and his own traumatic experience, but the ways in which trauma is induced by the perception of another's wound, by the existence of another's traumatic story" (McGlothlin 53). Caruth's theories, then, suggest one way that the term "trauma" can be used to describe those who experienced and were directly traumatized by the Holocaust as well as those who are merely secondary witnesses to that trauma. It is important that this not be interpreted as trivializing or belittling the uniquely unknowable trauma of Holocaust victims and survivors;

¹ Cultural and secondary forms of trauma are discussed in much more detail in the theoretical introductions to the sections on A.M. Klein and second-generation writers respectively.

rather, Caruth's reading of Freud offers a link between personal trauma and historical trauma, and demonstrates how secondary, distanced forms of trauma are inherently rooted in individual trauma.

According to Freud, Caruth, and LaCapra, there is always a time lapse, a period of latency in which forgetting is characteristic, between an event and the experience of trauma. In *History and Memory After Auschwitz* (1998), LaCapra suggests that "the traumatic event is repressed or denied and registers only belatedly [...] after the passage of a period of latency" (9). Latency is inevitable because trauma is initially incomprehensible; it "takes place too soon, too suddenly, too unexpectedly, to be fully grasped by consciousness" (Caruth 4). Thus, as Allan Young points out in his essay "Bruno and the Holy Fool: Myth, Mimesis, and the Transmission of Traumatic Memories" (2008), "trauma's meaning is completely understood only retrospectively—a condition that Freud called *Nachträglichkeit*, or afterwardness" (342). According to Young and many other cultural critics, both private and collective memories of the Holocaust reproduce this pattern of belatedness exactly.

This pattern of the repression of a traumatic event, followed by a belated awareness and retrospective understanding of the event's "meaning," is one of the defining characteristics of cultural trauma, and manifests itself quite extraordinarily in the canon of Canadian Holocaust literature. According to Young, "the return of the oppressed" awareness of the Holocaust, at a cultural level, did not occur in Canada and the United States until "the early 1960s, with the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem [...]. Previous to the trial the Holocaust did not exist [...] as a discrete, knowable trauma" for anyone who was not a direct victim (342). Like the secondary forms of trauma that Caruth identifies in her interpretations of Freud, "Cultural Trauma is rooted in an event or a series of events, but not necessarily their direct experience. Such experience is

mediated, through newspapers, radio or television [...] which involve spatial as well as temporal distance between the event and its experience" (Eyerman 62). Cultural trauma, then, is inherently mediated, inherently secondary in nature, and inherently belated. If this dissertation makes a point of examining the cultural context of a text's production, it is precisely because, as Eyerman argues, cultural trauma "must be understood, explained, and made coherent through public reflection and discourse" (62).

Although it does not refer specifically to theories of cultural trauma and collective latency—these are, after all, relatively new concepts in trauma theory and cultural studies—Franklin Bialystok's book *Delayed Impact: The Holocaust and the Canadian Jewish Community* (2000), allows us to connect Eyerman's culture-based trauma theories to the belated awareness of the Holocaust in Canada, and especially to the post-Holocaust experiences of the Canadian Jewish population. Bialystok argues that one of the key consequences of being geographically-distanced from Europe is that the Holocaust had a "delayed impact" in Canada. Though Canadians were aware of the tragedy not long after it unfolded, he argues, they were not able to "comprehend the enormity of the Holocaust" until exposed to the unprecedented revelations about the concentration camps that came about as part of the televised Eichmann trial in 1961 (245). For Canadian Jews, "what had happened was tragic," Bialystok points out, "but it happened over there, it was not part of [their] world" (246).

There is something quite familiar about this sense of a "delayed" historical and cultural impact in Canada. Indeed, Canadian cultural producers have always been acutely aware of being "broken off," to borrow a phrase Northrop Frye uses to describe his idea of an inherent belatedness in Canadian history and culture in his "Conclusion" to *A Literary History of Canada* (138). As a whole, Canadian literature has always been haunted by this sense of belatedness—a

sense of "being too late," of Freud's "afterwardness"—and this makes it a dynamic space for thinking about similar patterns of traumatic latency. It is through the idea of a cultural belatedness that we can begin to understand the radical shift in Holocaust thought and representation that occurs between A.M. Klein (writing while the Holocaust is happening and documenting and disseminating information about the Holocaust as it becomes available in Canada), and Leonard Cohen (writing during the televised Eichmann trial). Both *Flowers for Hitler* (1964) and *Beautiful Losers* (1966) are revolutionary not only because Cohen experiments with new literary forms and techniques, but also because he assimilates into his writing so much of the new and horrific information about the Holocaust—as well as a new way of thinking about the nature of evil—that was publicly revealed, and culturally dispersed, for the first time during the Eichmann trial. Cohen's work, perhaps more than anyone else's, illustrates the usefulness of cultural trauma theory for understanding the effects of secondary forms of trauma.

"After Auschwitz": Distance from Adorno

As direct access to the Holocaust becomes more and more impossible, the question of what constitutes an appropriate representation of the event becomes increasingly important. Questions of legitimacy, of authority, and of an "adequate" representation of a traumatic event, to borrow Greenstein's phrase—of an ethics of Holocaust representation, in other words—have always been an issue for any writer attempting to artistically represent the Holocaust, no matter how distanced from the event itself he is. Indeed, anyone who writes about the Holocaust inevitably does so under the shadow of Theodor W. Adorno's 1949 essay "Cultural Criticism and Society" (first published in English in 1955). The essay contains one of the most influential and

impedimental statements surrounding the issue of Holocaust aesthetics and ethics: "To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric" (34).

Critics have debated the meaning of Adorno's statement, and its implications for artistic representations of the Holocaust—"poetry" in the broadest sense of the word—since the moment the essay was published. Indeed, almost every survey of Holocaust literature, and every essay or book-length study about the ethics of writing about the Holocaust, begins with an acknowledgement and discussion of Adorno's "after Auschwitz" dictum—which is almost always taken out of the context of the rest of the essay in which it appears. The conventional (mis)interpretation of Adorno's statement, as summarized by Vice, is that it is "unacceptable to gain even aesthetic or readerly pleasure from a work of art that treats the Holocaust: no aesthetic representation is appropriate" (5). It is easy to assume that Adorno is simply saying that it is forbidden to write poetry after Auschwitz. Indeed, many critics limit their interpretation of Adorno's statement to this simplified reading precisely because it is easier to generalize than it is to try to unpack what Adorno is actually saying. While this simple interpretation is partially true, it only scratches the surface of Adorno's argument. A more thorough reading of Adorno's essay as a whole is required in order to understand the full intent and implications of the statement.

It is important to remember that "Cultural Criticism and Society" is not specifically about poetry, but about the practice of cultural criticism as a whole (of which poetry is but one form). Earlier in the essay, Adorno asserts that "the traditional transcendent critique of ideology is obsolete" (32). He goes on to explain that "there are no more ideologies in the authentic sense of false consciousness, only advertisements for the world through its duplication and the provocative lie which does not seek belief but commands silence" (33). In his 2014 article, "Gaza: Poetry After Auschwitz," Hamid Dabashi, Professor of Iranian Studies and Comparative

Literature at Columbia University, offers a succinct summary of this difficult portion of Adorno's argument: "we have," Adorno is saying, "hit a narrative cul-de-sac in our critique of ideology, for we are integral to that ideology. The insularity of that ideology has now metastasized into shades upon shades of advertisements, which engulf and transmute the very nature of our critical faculties" (Dabashi). This is still quite dense, but slightly more accessible. Adorno goes on to criticize "the total society," which, according to Dabashi, is "a society where everything, including cultural criticism, has been brought into being, concretised, the critic and the subject of his or her criticism indistinguishable" (Adorno 33; Dabashi). "The more total society becomes," Adorno argues, "the greater the reification of the mind and the more paradoxical its effort to escape reification on its own" (Adorno 33). Adorno's concern is that cultural criticism runs the risk of being integrated into what he calls a "culture industry"—an industry that cultural criticism itself is complicit in creating, advertising, and perpetuating, and in which every *thing*, including cultural criticism itself is being "reified," or objectified, and stripped of what makes it unique and important (19).

It is at this point that Adorno makes his famous statement about poetry "after Auschwitz":

Even the most extreme consciousness of doom threatens to denigrate into idle chatter. Cultural criticism finds itself faced with the final stage of the dialectic of culture and barbarism. To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric. And this corrodes even the knowledge of why it has become impossible to write poetry today. (34)

Placed within the context of his critique of cultural criticism as a whole, we can understand Adorno's argument to be, as Efraim Sicher explains in her 2005 book *The Holocaust Novel* (one

of few surveys of Holocaust literature that offers more than just the simple reading of Adorno's statement), that because "Auschwitz was the synecdoche for reification in a waste-producing society that built a factory for death," it would be "barbaric" for a work of cultural criticism—including, but not limited to, poetry and other forms of art—to persist in the creation of representations of the very culture that ultimately produced Auschwitz (xv). Put simply, and I again defer to Dabashi's abilities to summarize a complex argument quite succinctly here, "you cannot save a society via a cultural critique that in its critical language continues to exacerbate that reification" (Dabashi). To write poetry "after Auschwitz," then, is to paradoxically participate in the perpetuation of the barbaric culture that created the concentration camps, and to participate in the process of reification—a process that, like the Holocaust itself, ultimately has the stripping away of individual characteristics and identities of human beings by turning them into *things* at its core—that ultimately renders criticism of that culture impossible: "Absolute reification [...] is now preparing to absorb the mind entirely," Adorno concludes after uttering his famous dictum, and "critical intelligence cannot be equal to this challenge as long as it confines itself to self-satisfied contemplation" (34).

It is important to note that Adorno attempted to clarify his original statement at the start of Part III of his *Negative Dialectics* (1966). Many critics have seen this revision as a retraction of his earlier statement, but, in many ways, it merely revises and reiterates his key points:

Perennial suffering has as much right to expression as a tortured man has to scream; hence it may have been wrong to say that after Auschwitz you could no longer write poems. But it is not wrong to raise the less cultural question whether after Auschwitz you can go on living—especially whether one who escaped by accident, one who by rights should have been killed, may go on living. His mere

survival calls for the coldness, the basic principle of bourgeois subjectivity, without which there could have been no Auschwitz; this is the drastic guilt put on him who was spared. (*Negative Dialectics* 362-363)

The original statement makes it quite clear that "poetry after Auschwitz is directly complicit with the culture that produced Auschwitz. And this complicity in culture, and in the barbarism that culture has proved itself to be, cannot be articulated or even known;" it is "a complicity that subsumes even the knowledge of its manifestations" (N. Mandel 221). Thus, despite the fact that Adorno confesses that his original statement "may have been wrong," "it is important to note that Adorno's 'retraction' reinforces this complicity rather than effaces it" (221).

Adorno's statements inarguably pass moral judgment about the ethics and limitations of artistic depictions of the Holocaust. But what is *not* included in these statements is the implicit argument—often (mis)attributed to Adorno—that any attempt to represent the Holocaust artistically inevitably runs the risk of trivializing the horrific events and thereby doing a great injustice to its victims. This misreading has also been extended to include the argument that because it is impossible to know what happened during the Holocaust, it is ethically irresponsible ("barbaric," even) for someone who was not there to try to represent it artistically. Indeed, Adorno's revision of his original statement—particularly his acknowledgement that "perennial suffering has as much right to expression as a tortured man has to scream"—allows us to move beyond the question of whether the Holocaust *should* be represented in literature, to one of *how* it should be represented (*Negative Dialectics* 362).

Nowhere does Adorno say that artists should be silent about the Holocaust; rather, his main argument is that old modes of representation (cultural criticism *before* Auschwitz) are inadequate and misleading about the world that produced the Holocaust. It is quite fitting, then,

that Adorno's statements can help us recognize and appreciate the fact that many of the Canadian writers who have written about the Holocaust—Layton, Cohen, Martel, Bernice Eisenstein, and Anne Michaels, in particular—are precisely those writers who have most explicitly challenged and questioned received understandings of art in their work and who seek to experiment with new, unconventional ways of representing the horrors of the Holocaust. As this dissertation will demonstrate, there can be no thinking about the Holocaust without thinking about the nature and function of art itself, especially in terms of its relationship to history and trauma—this is a point that Adorno stresses throughout his work, and that Canadian Holocaust writers are immensely self-reflexive about in their Holocaust texts.

"Shearing Away Part of the Horror": Moral and Aesthetic Debates After Adorno

One of the lasting results of the long legacy of (mis)interpretation that followed from Adorno's statements has been that critics of Holocaust literature have often evoked Adorno's "no poetry after Auschwitz" statement to justify their own attempts to impose moral and aesthetic limitations on Holocaust art. The result of this perpetuation of a perverted interpretation of Adorno's original statement, Lawrence Langer argues in his book *The Holocaust and the Literary Imagination* (1975), is that the "apprehension that art's transfiguration of moral chaos into aesthetic form might in the end misrepresent that chaos and create a sense of meaning and purpose in the experience of the Holocaust (and hence, paradoxically, a justification of it in aesthetic terms)" is one that still haunts writers today (2). Indeed, this apprehension stands at the center of Martel's self-reflexive critique of his own Holocaust work in *Beatrice & Virgil*.

Taking this concern about the aesthetic justification of the Holocaust through artistic representation one step further, many critics, including Irving Howe in his influential essay

"Writing and the Holocaust" (1988), argue "that the representation of a horrible event, especially if in drawing upon literary skills it achieves a certain graphic power, could serve to domesticate it, rendering it familiar and in some sense even tolerable, and thereby shearing away part of the horror" (180). For critics like Howe, the idea of "drawing upon literary skills" and literary tools—particularly tools like metaphor and simile that have the potential to reduce the tenor of the Holocaust to the vehicle of the commonplace—is to diminish the significance and ineffable magnitude of the Holocaust.

In his 1981 book, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace: A Philosophy of Art*, Arthur C. Danto expresses similar sentiments about the risk of making the Holocaust seem commonplace by creating art out of it. Ethics and aesthetics clash for Danto: "There would be cases in which it would be wrong or inhuman to take an aesthetic attitude," he explains; "there are things it would be almost immoral to represent in art, precisely because they are then put at a distance which is exactly wrong from a moral perspective" (22). That this statement stands in direct contrast to Michael Greenstein's criticism of Klein's *lack* of distance when writing *The Hitleriad* demonstrates just how contentious and divisive critical discussions of Holocaust aesthetics have become. Danto turns to the playwright Tom Stoppard to support his argument: "[he] once said that if you see an injustice taking place outside your window, the least useful thing you can do is to write a play about it" (22). Added to Adorno's moral and aesthetic challenges to the Holocaust literature, then, is Danto's question of usefulness.

Fred Emil Katz provides a much more positive opinion about the usefulness of Holocaust art when he states that "speaking about the Holocaust is, at best, a step in the direction of comprehension, where full comprehension is inherently impossible" (*Ordinary People* 23). Indeed, as this dissertation will demonstrate, it is only through writing about the Holocaust

experiences of their parents that members of the second generation can begin to understand how the Holocaust has affected their own lives. Despite the fact that Danto and Katz agree that artistic representations of the Holocaust can never completely capture the experience of the Holocaust for a distanced reader, Holocaust writing is nevertheless important and useful in the very fact that it at least *attempts* to represent the event, and in doing so, also attempts to increase our understanding of it. "The Holocaust is speakable," asserts Berel Lang; "it has been, will be [...] and, most of all, ought to be spoken" (18).

After it became widely accepted that the Holocaust not only could, but also should be written about, new challenges and obstacles faced writers attempting to create literary representations of the event. Perhaps the greatest challenge confronting contemporary writers is to adapt Ezra Pound's famous modernist dictum "make it new" to the Holocaust, for now that this atrocity has become a popular subject for both writers and readers, it runs the risk of becoming over-written. As Howe warned, Holocaust art has become so abundant that it risks domesticating the catastrophe—turning it into a commonplace. In his 1962 article, "The Concentration Camps," A. Alvarez argues that not only have representations of the Holocaust become commonplace, but they have also outstayed their welcome: "no one, we are repeatedly told, wants to hear any more about the camps. They have already provoked enough morbidity and sensationalism and paranoia" (70). Alvarez contends that the Holocaust has become too popular of a subject, and the inevitable result of this is that artistic representations of the event run the risk of desensitizing, and potentially even boring, audiences. Though works of Holocaust art still have the potential to affect viewers emotionally, the risk of being over-exposed to representations of the Holocaust is that the distanced event, paradoxically, becomes too familiar, too common, the results too predictable, and thus loses meaning. Indeed, there are multiple images, tropes, and themes that

have been so over-used in artistic representations of the Holocaust that they have become cliché: "the death trains and the journey to the camps; music as accompanying the misery; the focus on small things, often on what is left from the crematorium or the gas chambers; the shoes, ashes, and the smoke from the chimneys" (Volkmann 218).

At the heart of this dissertation lies an appreciation of how Canadian writers have attempted to defamiliarize the clichéd images of the Holocaust—to make the Holocaust new, to make it "live in the terms of today," as Yann Martel puts it in an interview about his novel *Beatrice & Virgil*—by experimenting with anti-absorptive, anti-aesthetic, and genre-bending methods of representing the Holocaust (Martel, "Interview"). For LaCapra, "post-traumatic writing" is characterized by "experimental, gripping, and risky symbolic emulations of trauma," so it is not surprising, then, that the Holocaust texts discussed in this dissertation often resist simple generic classification (*Writing History, Writing Trauma* 105). By not limiting its focus in terms of form and genre, this dissertation avoids the need to falsely categorize texts that blur generic boundaries, and ultimately demonstrates that the attempt to depict the horrors of the Holocaust in new and "adequate" ways often leads to the creation of hybridized literary forms like the documentary poem, the graphic novel, and the postmemorial auto/biography.

Acknowledging and Negotiating Distance in Selected Works of Canadian Literature

This dissertation begins with an analysis of the Holocaust texts of three Montreal Jewish-Canadian writers: A.M. Klein, Irving Layton, and Leonard Cohen. Reading the works of these authors through the lens of Eyerman's theories of cultural trauma and Bialystok's idea of the "delayed impact" of the Holocaust in Canada, the dissertation examines how Klein, Layton and Cohen assimilate new information about the Holocaust into their texts as this information

becomes available in Canada. Indeed, the imagery that these writers used, the formal experiments that they undertook, and the attitudes that they expressed in their writing, all changed dramatically as new information about the Holocaust became available in Canada. This approach helps reveal not only how geographical distance has affected the representation of the Holocaust in Canada, but also how these representations have evolved from Klein's mock-epic portrayal of Nazi leaders as monsters in *The Hitleriad*, to the disturbing images of mutilated bodies in Layton's "Whom I Write For," and the carnivalesque, pornographic cameo appearance of Hitler in Cohen's *Beautiful Losers*.

I begin with a discussion of Klein's editorial work for *The Canadian Jewish Chronicle*, and various other publications, in which he documented the growing persecution of Jews in Europe in the late 1930s. I suggest that Klein's focus on a combination of editorial work and poetic experimentation at this time demonstrates an awareness of his role as a disseminator of important information about the Holocaust to the Canadian Jewish community. I then offer a detailed, and well overdue, re-reading of *The Hitleriad*—one which resists criticizing the poem's formal and stylistic shortcomings, and instead focuses on its importance as the first attempt to represent the horrors of the Holocaust by a Canadian author *as it was occurring*.

This section then turns its attention towards a number of Klein's later Holocaust poems, as well as his semi-autobiographical novel *The Second Scroll* (1951)—works that incorporate images and information associated with the Holocaust that became available in Canada only in the years after the war. The movement away from the mock-heroic tone of a long poem like *The Hitleriad*, and towards the lamenting and tragic tone of his later poetry and prose, demonstrates a growing awareness of the severity of the Holocaust on Klein's part. Klein's experimentation with the ever-growing vocabulary and imagery of the Holocaust was cut short, however, as he

suffered increasingly from depression and eventually succumbed to silence, "as if in obeisance to Adorno's prophetic caveat" (Greenstein 1). Part of this descent into silence was the result of a growing feeling of "a kind of guilt," as Klein puts it in his 1947 poem "Meditation Upon Survival," for having survived the extermination of millions of European Jews as a result of being geographically removed from the event (18). This sense of "survivor guilt," as Caruth calls it, is common among victims of trauma who have "survived, precisely, without knowing" the traumatic event (64). That he survived "without knowing" is what causes Klein to feel guilty—guilty for living when so many other Jews have died, and guilty for knowing that, despite his best intentions and efforts, he will never know precisely what the victims of the Holocaust suffered and thus can never hope to adequately depict the Holocaust in his writing.

A similar sense of "survivor guilt" pervades much of Layton's poetry and prose, but, unlike Klein, Layton refuses to fall into silence. Rather than silently lament "[his] murdered kin," Layton chooses to "tongue" their "direst curses /.../ till the sun turns black in the sky" ("To the Victims of the Holocaust" 23-24). In fact, as more and more brutal information about the Holocaust became available in Canada, Layton experimented with more and more brutal imagery in response. Similarly, he casts aside Klein's rhyming couplets—the "delicious archaisms" of poems like *The Hitleriad* that he derides in his "Foreword" to *Balls for a One-Armed Juggler* (1963)—and experiments with a more suitable free-verse form in an attempt to depict and work through the psychological complexities of the Holocaust and to "make clear for us Belsen" (xviii). This dissertation treats Layton as a revolutionary figure in Canadian Holocaust literature. Because of his refusal to be silent, and his desire to sound a "note of protest and indignation [which] has never before been heard in English poetry or in any other European literature," as he

puts it in the "Foreword" to his 1976 collection, *For My Brother Jesus*, Layton ultimately inspired future generations of Jewish and non-Jewish Holocaust writers in Canada (xv-xvi).

Next, this dissertation examines two important works, published in the mid-1960's, by Leonard Cohen: the collection of poetry entitled *Flowers for Hitler*, and the novel *Beautiful Losers*. Both of these texts are direct responses to Layton's "Foreword" to *Balls for a One-Armed Juggler*, which poses a question that would mark the beginning of a revolution in Canadian Holocaust literature: "where is the poet who can make clear for us Belsen?" (xviii). "To appreciate the enormity of the filth, irrationality, and evil" in the world, Layton suggests, the poet must "descend from one level of foulness to another" (xviii). Layton's "Foreword" is a call-to-arms for Canadian poets—a challenge to overcome ineffability, to honour Adorno's injunction against poetry from within poetry itself, and to experiment with new poetic forms, and "filth[y]" and "foul" images and language, in order to "encounter head-on the realities of twentieth-century evil" (xviii).

A year after Layton's influential "Foreword," Cohen heeded his mentor's call-to-arms by publishing *Flowers for Hitler*, a text that experiments with various modes of representing the Holocaust and attempts to work through the event by experimenting with new and innovative images, poetic styles, and forms. Although a number of critical articles have been written about the depictions of the Holocaust in *Flowers for Hitler*, no critic has examined the work in light of the Eichmann trial, which took place during the text's composition, nor connected it directly to Hannah Arendt's theory of the banality of evil which it spawned. As part of his exploration of the "delayed impact" of the Holocaust in Canada, Bialystok claims that the Eichmann trial "did more to raise awareness of the catastrophe in the general public than any event up to that time" (105). The trial had "a profound influence" on Canadian understanding of the Holocaust, particularly in

terms of "how to talk about it" (108). Letters in the Leonard Cohen archives at the University of Toronto show that Cohen was aware of Arendt's theory of the banality of evil, as developed in her 1963 response to the Eichmann trial, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, and that he used this model as his inspiration for *Flowers for Hitler*, published one year after Arendt's text. By making the connection between Cohen, Arendt, and the banality of evil, and supporting it through close readings of Cohen's poetry, this section explores the ways that Cohen's Holocaust poetry responds to new information and new ways of thinking about the Holocaust and the nature of evil.

After considering Cohen's Holocaust poetry, the chapter turns to a brief examination of a scene in *Beautiful Losers* in which Hitler is depicted engaging in sadistic, sexual behaviour with two of the book's main characters. In his book *Selling the Holocaust* (2000), Tim Cole argues that after the Eichmann trial "the Holocaust ceased to be a taboo" (63). I suggest that Cohen decontextualizes and denaturalizes the Holocaust in the novel; he attempts to bridge his historical and geographical distance from the event by disengaging Hitler and images of the Holocaust from their specific historical, geographical, and cultural loci, and exploits the Holocaust in order to create a work in which, as Norman Ravvin suggests in his article "Writing Around the Holocaust: Uncovering the Ethical Centre of *Beautiful Losers*" (1993), "the Holocaust exists not as a particular event to be limned, but simply as a handy metaphor that stands in for numerous other kinds of extremity and human suffering" (28).

Ravvin's comments indicate how *Beautiful Losers* can be seen to universalize the Holocaust. This occurs "when the historical specificity of the Nazi persecution of the Jews is compromised or neglected" and the Holocaust essentially becomes an archetype "evoked as a symbol of ultimate evil or ultimate suffering" (Weissman 12). This is exactly what Cohen

achieves in his decontextualizing of the Holocaust in *Beautiful Losers*: the type of evil that is embodied in figures like Hitler, and that leads to traumatic events like the Holocaust, is presented in much the same way as it is in *Flowers for Hitler*—as banal, universal, and inherent in everyone. This dissertation, then, will demonstrate how Cohen simultaneously portrays the Holocaust as typical and instructive, while also remaining conscious of its particularity.

Though quite different in their representational strategies, both Layton and Cohen demonstrate what I argue is one of the key representational strategies in Canadian Holocaust literature: a desire to bridge the historical and geographical distance between themselves, their readers, and the traumatic event itself. For both authors, this involves the creation of what Charles Bernstein calls "anti-absorptive" texts (29): to best represent the Holocaust, and the kind of human evil that led to it, Layton and Cohen purposefully discomfort their readers through the use of shocking and blunt Holocaust imagery, as well as jarring stylistic and formal experimentation. This strategy produces an affective response in the reader that ultimately makes him more aware of the Holocaust as a viscerally traumatic experience, thus partially bridging the physical gap that historical and geographical distance has created between reader and subject.

The third chapter of the dissertation explores the writing of Canadian second-generation survivors of the Holocaust. No one has explored the unique characteristics of second-generation trauma in more detail than Marianne Hirsch, and her concept of "Postmemory" has been adopted by many critics as the most effective way of thinking about how temporal distance and belated witnessing shape the experience of the second generation. "Postmemory," Hirsch explains in her article "Surviving Images: Holocaust Photographs and the Work of Postmemory" (2001), "characterizes the experiences of those who [...] have grown up dominated by the narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are displaced by the powerful stories of the

previous generation, shaped by monumental traumatic events that resist understanding and integration" (12). Postmemory is both a memory removed (generationally distanced) from the source, and a personal interpretation of history. Not only do second-generation writers struggle to understand their parents' traumatic backgrounds, but they also attempt to cope with their own trauma—not caused by the event itself, but by their distance from it: their "physical absence and/or non-being at the time of the trauma" (18). The term "Postmemory," then, ultimately describes a form of memory that cannot possibly be "mediated through recollection," but must rather be explored "through an imaginative investment and creation" (19).

After reading Bernice Eisenstein's *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* (2006), it becomes clear that this text, like its American antecedent, Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (1986), resists defining labels by combining elements of "documentary art, pictorial literature, novelized comic or cartoon, graphic novel, oral history, biography, autobiography, ethnography, vehicle for testimony, and medium for memory-work and 'working-through'" (LaCapra, *History and Memory* 143). This chapter discusses Eisenstein's use of a combination of images and text to create a remarkably self-reflexive metaphor for her frayed and "blurred" relationship to her parents. The shadowy images that appear throughout the book function as metaphors for her fleeting, fuzzy awareness of how the Holocaust has affected her family: "Crisp lines" are impossible for Eisenstein, as she does not know her parents and their experiences fully. As Hoffman puts it, the second generation has "inherited not experience but its shadows," and those shadows literally fill this book (66).

Eisenstein's text raises many questions about the ethics of imaginatively recreating a traumatic experience that one did not witness firsthand. She fears that as a result of her historical and geographical distance from her parents' experiences, she will be unable to properly portray

the suffering that they experienced: "I worry that they will be angry with me and think I have stolen their souls that have already been stolen away" (19). The book ends on a profoundly sad note as Eisenstein laments the ultimately unbridgeable distance between herself and her parents: "I will never be able to know the truth of what my parents had experienced. It is beyond my reach [...] to know the full extent of their loss" (178). Nevertheless, Eisenstein acknowledges the need to continue in her struggles to understand the trauma that her parents suffered during the Holocaust because she knows that this is the only way that she can ever hope to understand how the Holocaust has shaped her own identity: "even though the past was something my parents tried to keep at a distance from their children, out of harm's reach, it inevitably shadowed the landscape in which we would grow" (27).

This section then turns to the short stories of J.J. Steinfeld, an author who supports Melvin Jules Bukiet's claim that even when second-generation writers claim to be writing fiction, "their pages usually bestride memoir" in their depictions of the psychological damage caused by the silence of their parents, and the overwhelming, and often competing desires to either over-identify or completely dis-identify with Holocaust victims (21). Whereas Eisenstein's book emphasizes the positive, therapeutic role that her art plays in the very intimate and personal process of working through the trauma of her parents' Holocaust experiences, Steinfeld's characters (much like Layton's) often prefer violence to therapy, revenge to forgiveness: they "fantasize about burning, shooting, or otherwise destroying Nazis, German sympathizers, Holocaust deniers, and locations that serve as gathering spots for anti-Semites" (Berger, *Children of Job* 76). In stories like "Dancing at the Club Holocaust" and "The Chess Master," for example, Steinfeld emphasizes the positive role that violence—at least at the imaginative level—can play in helping the author work through both primary and secondary forms of trauma. Though a

written text cannot actually cause physical pain, the process of imaginatively creating violent encounters and revenge fantasies between former Nazis and Holocaust survivors provides an artistic and therapeutic outlet for both Steinfeld and his characters.

The fourth chapter of this dissertation begins with an analysis of Timothy Findley's 1969 novel *The Butterfly Plague*. Findley's interest in the First and Second World Wars, along with his fascination with the aesthetics and allure of fascism have been well documented in the literary criticism that surrounds his work. Findley believes that fascism is driven by a "misguided human drive for perfection," and this is one of the main themes of *The Butterfly Plague* (Brydon viii). Through a clever juxtaposition of the early years of Nazi Germany with the Hollywood film industry in the 1920s and 30s, Findley demonstrates that Nazi Germany and early Hollywood films both evoke and perpetuate artificial ideals of physical perfection, racial purity, and national pride in an attempt to both mask and justify the ugly horrors that are the inevitable by-products of these ideals. In this way, Findley uses the context of a specific historical event—the Holocaust—to bridge the temporal and geographical distance between Nazi Germany and early (and contemporary) Hollywood, and to demonstrate that many of the "misguided" ideals that stood at the heart of Nazi Germany are still very much present in contemporary society.

Furthermore, Findley uses his main character, Ruth, to explore his own position as an outside, secondary witness to the Holocaust. Findley calls Ruth an "innocent watcher" in his novel's "exploration of evil," and she is characterized by her inability to process and understand the implications of the events that are happening around her—the persecution of the Jews that she meets in Europe, her family's downfall, and her own increasing mental instability (*Inside Memory* 107-108). That Findley chooses to focalize the early history of Nazi Germany leading up to the Holocaust through an innocent, child-like, and naïve witness is a self-reflexive,

metafictive acknowledgement of both the well-documented inability of North Americans to understand exactly what was occurring in Germany during the Second World War until it was far too late to do anything about it, as well as the disorganized, belated response to it that eventually did occur.

In keeping with my argument that the level of self-reflexivity that a text demonstrates tends to increase with the degree to which it is removed from the traumatic event, the next text that my dissertation examines is both one of the most recent works of Holocaust literature in Canada, and by far its most self-reflexive. Yann Martel's *Beatrice & Virgil* is an intricately-woven, highly metafictional meditation on the difficulty of writing about the Holocaust in new and experimental ways. The book is structured around multiple, often interlaced, narrative strands. The first documents the attempts of an author named Henry—whom the reader quickly realizes is a surrogate for Martel himself—to create a book that features both an experimental, allegorical representation of the Holocaust and an essay about the very ethics of doing so. When the book is completed, it is almost immediately rejected by Henry's publishers who see the book as nothing more than an unpublishable mess.

The first strand also combines fiction and self-criticism to tell the story of Henry's conflicted relationship with a taxidermist turned playwright who is eventually revealed to be a former Nazi. Embedded within this strand is a play, taking the form of an animal allegory, written by the taxidermist. This second strand, based on a play that Martel had written a few years before the eventual publication of *Beatrice & Virgil* as an example of his desire for an anti-realist, non-historical representation of the Holocaust, forces the reader to confront the question of what it means to read or write a story *about* the Holocaust, and in doing so ultimately acknowledges the limitations of allegory as a representational tool. Finally, the book's third

strand—its most effective in illustrating Martel's goal to make the Holocaust "live in the terms of today"—consists of a series of short ethical dilemmas that attempt to put the reader in the shoes of a Holocaust victim, and in doing so bridge the distance between the historical event and his contemporary reader (Martel, "Interview").

The concluding section of this dissertation discusses Anne Michaels' poetic novel *Fugitive Pieces* (1996). I will not be offering a radically new reading of the text in this conclusion; rather, my intent is to provide a close reading of Michaels' work, focussing on her awareness and depiction of the kinds of distance that this dissertation discusses, as a way of summarizing the major themes and problems that have been developed and explored throughout my own work. The protagonist of the first part of the novel, Jakob Beer, is haunted by the trauma of an event that he witnessed from a distance, but that nevertheless has had an immediate effect on his life and identity: "I did not witness the most important events of my life" (Michaels 5). As Jakob struggles to come to terms with this traumatic event, he also becomes the victim of an overwhelming sense of survivor guilt. He moves to Toronto, begins to translate Holocaust memoirs, becomes a poet, and struggles to move out of silence and incorporate the Holocaust into his poetry.

The second part of Michaels' novel is told from the perspective of Ben, a Canadian professor of Jewish descent who was born in Canada to survivors of the Holocaust. I focus on how Michaels depicts the burden of generational and geographical distance in Ben's life, and his attempts to work through and represent his parents' traumatic experiences in order to understand how they have shaped his own identity as a second-generation survivor. Interestingly, in many of the interviews that followed the book's publication, Michaels made it clear that although she had no strictly autobiographical connection to the Holocaust or motive for writing the book, it

provided her with a chance to depict the trauma of being part of the post-Holocaust, post-memorial generation: "It was the immediate history that my own life—the life of my generation—rose from" (qtd. in Grimwood 109). Michaels' fictional representation of the Holocaust, then, offers an important exploration of many of the ethical and representational problems that stand at the heart of this dissertation. By focusing on Jakob's need to experiment with different modes of representation, as well as Ben's need to experiment with different ways of working through his family's Holocaust trauma, Michaels' novel offers a profound summary of this dissertation's discussion of how Canadian writers have attempted to negotiate, highlight, erase, and embrace the historical, geographical, and cultural distance that separates them from the distant event of the Holocaust.

A Note on the Texts

The texts that this dissertation examines were chosen because they represent the various types of distance that Canadian Holocaust writers have had to negotiate. This dissertation makes no claim to provide an exhaustive treatment of Canadian Holocaust writing. One of the great challenges of having to choose representative authors and works, of course, is that some important texts inevitably get left out. Indeed, this dissertation's lack of a section on Mordecai Richler, for example, may seem quite surprising. This was not an oversight on my part—in fact, I purposefully chose to leave Richler out because he is the *only* Canadian writer whose Holocaust texts have already been extensively explored in a book-length study. Rachel Feldhay Brenner's *Assimilation and Assertion: The Response to the Holocaust in Mordecai Richler's Writing* (1989), offers a thorough examination of Richler's treatment of the Holocaust in his semi-

autobiographical novels, and I ultimately found that I had very little of value to add to Brenner's excellent analysis.

While priority has been given to texts and authors that have proven the most useful for illustrating the effects of various types of distance, I have also endeavoured to include authors who have fallen out of the critical eye in recent years (Klein and Findley, for example), and texts that deserve a renewed look and a fresh approach (*The Hitleriad*, *Flowers for Hitler*, *The Butterfly Plague*). It is my hope that this dissertation's focus on distance will shed some new light on these texts. I have also privileged authors whose Holocaust texts have not yet received much critical attention at all (Eisenstein, Steinfeld, Martel).

In almost every case, I have privileged close readings of texts above all else. Where I have tried to apply relevant theoretical concepts and discussions, I have done so only where the theory supports my readings of the text. I acknowledge that there is additional work to be done in terms of reading these texts through more advanced trauma, cultural, and literary theories, as well as through the works of individual theorists like Giorgio Agamben, Robert Eaglestone, Lawrence Langer, Georg Lukács, Paul Ricoeur, etc., and further work emerging from this dissertation will endeavour to do so.

CHAPTER ONE:

"His Stuttering Innocence a Kind of Guilt": A.M. Klein and the Effects of Cultural Trauma

From the early years of Hitler's rise to power in Germany to the liberation of the Nazi concentration camps in 1945 and the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, few Canadians outside the realm of politics had a greater knowledge of the systematic persecution of the Jews in Europe—as it was happening—than A.M. Klein. Indeed, in his position as public relations consultant and speech writer for Samuel Bronfman, the president of the Canadian Jewish Congress,² Klein was made privy to political documents and official correspondence that gave him an intimate knowledge of the escalating horrors in Europe. Klein had already established himself as a successful poet and journalist before he began to work with Bronfman, but it was during his time with the Canadian Jewish Congress that he truly began to embrace his role as a disseminator of important information about the Holocaust to the Canadian Jewish community. Not surprisingly, his growing contributions to the Holocaust awareness of the Canadian Jewish community corresponded with the development of one of his primary poetic themes: "the relationship of the creative individual to the community in which he is rooted" (Pollock, Mayne and Caplan, "Editor's Introduction" xi). Clearly, the relative "closeness" to information about the Holocaust that Klein's work with the Canadian Jewish Congress provided makes him a unique figure in terms of thinking about the early stages and development of Holocaust awareness in Canada, and the role that geographic distance has played in representations of the Holocaust in Canadian literature.

² The Canadian Jewish Congress was originally founded in 1919 "to aid Jewish victims in the aftermath of the First World War," and was "revived in the late thirties to deal with the problem of Jewish refugees from Germany" (Caplan 83).

According to Desmond Pacey, "the war and immediate postwar years [...] were the most productive and 'engaged' years" of Klein's life; this is not surprising considering that Klein's output at this time was guided by dual desires (273). On one hand, we see in Klein's journalistic work of this period an overwhelming need to disseminate information about the treatment of the Jews in Europe as it became available in Canada. Through Klein's editorials we get an understanding of what, exactly, was known about the Holocaust in Canada, and when, approximately, it was known. The Canadian Jewish community that Klein was part of "was isolated, far from the horror [...] removed by space, time, and experience from the event" (Bialystok 15). Klein's goal, then, was not only to educate his Canadian Jewish readers about the horrors that their distant European counterparts were experiencing, but also to warn them that these atrocities were the direct result of the kind of anti-Semitic attitudes and political apathy that plagued the supposedly advanced and civilized societies that were much *closer* to them—including Canada. His editorials are full of scathing attacks on political and religious organizations in Canada and other Allied countries that refused to help the Jewish victims. Indeed, Deborah E. Lipstadt's book *Beyond Belief: The American Press and the Coming of the Holocaust* (1986) begins with the assertion that "during the 1930s and 1940s America could have saved thousands and maybe hundreds of thousands of Jews but did not do so" (1). This anti-immigrant—one dare even say anti-Semitic—attitude toward the European Jews is the chief target of Klein's editorials.

On the other hand, Klein's *poetic* work of this period documents his own struggle to apprehend the immensity of the Holocaust, as well as a need to work through and come to terms with an overwhelming sense of guilt created by the distance that separates him from his persecuted and increasingly vanishing European brethren. Throughout his career, Klein was

troubled by the question of the poet's function within his community, and we see in his poetry of this period an awareness of "the responsibility of the North American poet" to "become the keeper of Jewish cultural legacy" and to "respond to his people's immediate emotional needs in the wake of the European Holocaust" (Brenner, *Father of Canadian Jewish Literature* 13-14).

Not surprisingly, his poetry of the period is also marked by a growing awareness that the distance that separates the North American poet from the events in Europe is ultimately insurmountable. In many of his poetic works—and it is certainly worth noting here Louis Dudek's claim that Klein is "the most autobiographical poet [...] in Canada" (67)—the artist figure, removed from the Holocaust by geographical distance, attempts to come to terms with the event by evoking and reaffirming his Jewish cultural heritage, and by literally (and literarily) attempting to put himself in the place of his European brethren. Paradoxically, it is only by attempting to take the place of the victim that the Diasporic Jewish poet can understand just how far removed from the experience of the Holocaust he truly is. This is a humbling awareness for Klein, and it is the root of much of the guilt expressed in his poetry. One wonders whether it is also, perhaps, the root cause of the depression and silence to which Klein ultimately succumbed at the end of his writing career. It was only with the liberation of the camps that the true magnitude of the horrific events perpetrated behind their walls was revealed, and this news, along with the massive number of horrific photographs and survivor interviews that came with it, shocked and overwhelmed Klein, as it did much of the Canadian Jewish community. The Holocaust remained one of the main subjects of his journalistic and creative writing in the late 1940s and early 1950s, but his early invective was replaced with lamentation and helplessness, and the desire to understand and come to terms with the Holocaust ultimately gave way to an

acknowledgement of the impossibility of doing so. After the publication of *The Second Scroll* in 1951, Klein fell into almost absolute silence on the subject.

Despite the somber end to Klein's artistic and public career, it is worth noting that in all of his writing about the persecution of European Jews and the Holocaust—from his coverage of early singular instances of persecution like *Kristallnacht*, to the liberation of the concentration camps—Klein remained wholly committed to the idea of Zionism and believed that the suffering of his people would ultimately come to an end through the creation of the state of Israel. "One has to suffer to earn Jerusalem" (28), Klein writes in *The Second Scroll*, and although he eventually conceded that the experience of the Holocaust ultimately lay beyond his understanding, he nevertheless continued to find comfort in the idea of "man loyal to his human brotherhood" (*The Hitleriad* 758).

Klein as a Victim of the Holocaust

In his 1986 article "Auschwitz, Hiroshima and the Shaping of A.M. Klein," J.J. Healey raises interesting questions about the effects of a traumatic event on an individual or group that does not experience it directly. "Klein underwent the Holocaust," Healey asserts; "it is not a question of saying Klein was not *there*. What *there* means is open to wide interpretation" (12). It is important to note that by saying Klein "underwent" the Holocaust, Healey is not arguing that Klein's experience of the event is in any way physically or mentally similar to that of his European brethren—to do so would be absurd. Rather, by placing Klein in the role of "observer as sufferer," Healey is suggesting that trauma can exist at a social and cultural level—that we can think of trauma as affecting not only individual victims of a horrific experience, but social collectives as well (12). Despite Klein's geographical distance from the Holocaust, then, we can

still think of him as a victim—he suffers even though (perhaps even because) he only observes the event indirectly. Contemporary trauma theorists call this "cultural trauma," and it is through this theory that we can begin to read Klein as a victim of the Holocaust, and better understand where his sense of guilt over surviving the Holocaust comes from.

Neil J. Smelser defines cultural trauma as "an historical event with penetrating if not overwhelming significance for a society [that] will also constitute a major situation to be coped with on the part of many individuals in the society, even if it does not constitute a personal trauma for them" (48). Cultural trauma, then, invites us to extend the conventional definitions of traumatization and victimization (Freud, Caruth, LaCapra, et al.) beyond personal and private involvement in a catastrophic event and towards an understanding of how these events affect entire social, cultural, and religious communities. Through the lens of cultural trauma, the trauma associated with the Holocaust exists on multiple levels at once, and includes not only the intimate suffering of individual victims, but also the public, social, and cultural suffering of the entire global Jewish community.³ In his writing, Klein constantly attempts to bridge the distance between the European and Canadian Jewish communities by using terms like "brothers," "kin," and "brethren" to describe his European counterparts, providing an excellent example of how an individual who closely identifies with a traumatized group can be said to have been traumatized by the event regardless of geographical or temporal distance. The Holocaust, then, can be said to have traumatized not only the European Jews who were directly affected by it, but also, and in a profoundly psycho-social way, the many Jewish (and non-Jewish) communities around the world who were forced to bear witness to the event from a distance. The collective identity, cultural

³ By virtue of its definition, "cultural trauma" can also be used to discuss the trauma and suffering of non-Jews as well. This obviously includes bystanders and temporally and culturally-removed individuals, but also perpetrators and sympathizers as well.

heritage, and religious roots that the Canadian Jewish community shares with European Jews, alongside the ultimate threat of the complete annihilation of this identity, are what makes the Holocaust a shared cultural trauma for Canadian Jews. Because of his close cultural, religious and social connections to his European ancestors and kin, Klein's relationship to the Holocaust, as a Canadian Jew, is markedly different than that of a non-Jewish Canadian.

A strong social and cultural identification with a persecuted group from which one is distanced, is the defining marker of cultural trauma. According to Ron Eyerman, it is precisely the kind of geographic and temporal distance that separated Klein from the Holocaust that makes cultural trauma distinct from individual psychological or physical trauma: "cultural trauma [...] is rooted in an event or series of events, but not necessarily their direct experience. Such experience is mediated, through newspapers, radio or television, for example, which involve a spatial as well as temporal distance between the event and its experience" (62). Eyerman's definition of cultural trauma is interesting when applied to Klein—and Layton and Cohen as well—for two reasons: first, it reminds us that direct experience is not a prerequisite for trauma. In fact, cultural trauma is "a muted dosage or form of trauma that [...] at some degree of distance allow[s] for critical thought and working through" (LaCapra, *History and Memory* 107). Second, Eyerman's statement points out that the experience of a traumatic event at the cultural level is necessarily a mediated one. Klein did not receive information about the Holocaust through direct witness and experience, but rather through carefully-worded political reports and internal correspondences. What makes his situation even more unique, though, is the way that he himself becomes a mediator of this already mediated form of trauma: through his journalistic and literary interpretations and representations of the already distant traumatic event, Klein passes cultural trauma on to his Canadian Jewish community. There are multiple layers of direct and indirect

cultural traumatising at work here, as Klein, the victim of an already second-hand trauma, essentially traumatizes the rest of his community through the news that he delivers in his editorials and literary work. For Klein, this indirect traumatization of the Canadian Jewish community is the necessary first step towards generating empathy, awareness, understanding, and mourning.

As Klein reveals in his poem "Meditation Upon Survival," this secondary and mediated form of cultural trauma naturally leads to a frustrating and overwhelming sense of "a kind of guilt" (18). This guilt, which Ellen S. Fine associates with feelings of exclusion, and calls "the guilt of nonparticipation," is characterized by "a sense of regret for having not been there," and stems precisely from having survived the trauma of the Holocaust only as a result of being geographically removed from the event ("Transmission of Memory" 192, 187). This sense of "survivor guilt" is common among victims of trauma who have, as Caruth puts it, "survived, precisely, without knowing" the traumatic event (64). Klein's only real knowledge of the Holocaust is indirect, and part of the trauma of the Holocaust for him is the very fact that he knows so little about it. That he survived "without knowing" the event is the cause of Klein's guilt—a guilt for living when so many other Jews have died, and a guilt that comes from knowing that, despite his best intentions and efforts, he will never know precisely what the victims of the Holocaust suffered and thus can never hope to adequately depict the Holocaust in his writing.

There is also a sort of catch-22 associated with this feeling of guilt: if, on one hand, Klein is driven by the desire to report the horrors of the Holocaust, to outspokenly criticize Allied governments for not helping the Jewish victims, and to champion the founding of Israel as a sort of compensation for the suffering of the Jewish people, his emotions are ultimately tempered by

a sort of "melancholic sentiment" that accompanies this feeling of guilt and suggests that "in working through the past in a manner that enables survival or a reengagement in life, one is betraying those who were overwhelmed and consumed by their traumatic past" (LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* 22). This guilt, then, is a form of trauma in itself, and it is one that, unlike the primary traumatic experience, remains exclusive to the secondary witness and victims of cultural trauma.

"The Darkest Hour is at Hand": Klein the Editorialist

Although Klein is predominately known as a poet, his prose works—primarily in the form of editorials, articles and book reviews written for *The Judaen*, *The Canadian Zionist*, and *The Canadian Jewish Chronicle*—offer significant insight into the historical events that shaped the lives of the Canadian Jewish community. As early as 1928 Klein began using these outlets as a way to warn readers about the increasingly visible and violent anti-Jewish demonstrations of the Nazi Party in Germany. As one decade ended and a new one began, growing global anti-Semitism, the rise of Hitler, and the Nazi threat to world peace became the chief subjects of Klein's editorials. Indeed, Klein's editorial work became his primary focus during the late 1930s and early 1940s, far surpassing his poetic output. As Zailig Pollock argues, the early 1930s saw a distinct shift in Klein's writing away from poetry and towards prose: "unwilling to abandon his convictions that a true poet must play a central role in his community, yet no longer able to define that role in the face of the increasing social disintegration which he saw all around him, Klein temporarily abandoned poetry," and made journalism his primary focus (*Story of the Poet* 76). As the persecution of European Jews intensified, Klein considered it "his role to judge events, and to warn as well as to sustain" his Canadian Jewish community, and he clearly felt

that he could accomplish this more directly and effectively through journalism (Healey 9). Not surprisingly, though, the feelings of helplessness, dread, and "the guilt of nonparticipation" that had already crept into his poetry continued into his editorials (Fine, "Transmission of Memory" 192). As his friend David Lewis recollected at the 1974 Klein Symposium at the University of Ottawa, there was "a visible development in [Klein's] spirit from the sometimes boisterous, always jovial adolescent and university student to the sadness and heartbreak of the '30s with the advent of Hitler [...] the Holocaust hadn't yet started but was threatening. And the way in which the Jewish people were being treated in Germany even before the War [caused] a change of mood in the man—almost a desperation" (qtd. in Pollock 53).

In an essay published on August 5, 1932, entitled "The German Elections," Klein comments on the recent German election that saw Hitler's National Socialists achieve the majority of votes and become the governing political party in Germany. Although he seems to sympathize with the German voters who sought radical change by electing Hitler, Klein nevertheless takes the opportunity to place the blame for Hitler's rise on other countries. Invoking the Treaty of Versailles, Klein calls Germany "a Nation victimized [...] and burdened with the debts which visit the sins of the fathers upon the third and fourth generations" (29). He further claims that "the overwhelming success of German Fascism was caused, it seems, by the despair of an oppressed people," and compares the rather trivial "oppression" that has been visited on the German people as a result of the Treaty of Versailles with the history of oppression that has plagued Jewish history (30). The rather bitter irony exemplified in this essay is quite characteristic of Klein's early essays and editorials about the rise of the Hitlerites, and he continues to incorporate it into his writing up to and including his ultimate and rather

controversial use of irony and satire in his longest poem about the Nazi party, *The Hitleriad* (1944).

Bitter irony aside, however, "The German Elections" also marks the first of Klein's attempts to warn his Jewish community that the Nazi party, and the threat to Jewish culture that the party represents, should be taken very seriously. In *Beyond Belief*, Lipstadt explains that the majority of North Americans—including North American Jews—often dismissed the severity of the anti-Semitic attitudes and practices of the newly-elected Nazi party as being "propaganda" and, thus, "beyond belief" (85). Klein struggles to counter these attitudes of disbelief by asserting that it is a "matter of certainty" that "the fate of the Jews in Germany is not a happy one" ("The German Elections" 30). It is interesting that although "the darkest hour [...] is at hand" for German Jews, Klein is not yet able to understand how their trauma will affect the Jewish community in Canada (33). The traumatic experiences that are beginning to affect the Jews of Europe have not yet had an impact in Canada—they have not yet been mediated into cultural trauma. This is an excellent example of what Franklin Bialystok has so aptly called the "delayed impact" of the Holocaust in Canada. The persecution of Jews was still taking place "over there"—at a geographical distance from Klein and the Canadian Jewish community—and the implications of this trauma on Jewish culture in general were not yet appreciated.

In November 1938, Klein became the editor of the Montreal-based *Canadian Jewish Chronicle*. He would hold this position until 1955, a "term of editorship [that] coincided with the most terrible and most glorious years in modern Jewish history" (Caplan 81). Although Klein had already been reporting "the terrible events which were overtaking the Jews of Europe [...]" his new role as editor of the *Chronicle* demanded of him a more intense scrutiny of the events than ever before" (Pollock, Mayne and Caplan, "Editor's Introduction" xiv). The persecution of the

Jews in Europe became the main topic of a staggeringly impressive number of Klein's editorials over the next several years, and he used his position as editor of the *Chronicle* to circulate information to the Canadian Jewish community at a much more frequent rate than he was able to before. The majority of Canadian Jews could now credit their growing awareness of what was happening to their European counterparts to Klein. Indeed, it is certainly not a stretch to argue that, with the help of the *Chronicle*, Klein played a larger role in the dissemination of information about the Holocaust in Canada than anyone else in the country.

It is an interesting coincidence that *Kristallnacht*, the first politically organized outbreak of violence against the Jewish people in Germany and Austria, occurred on the same week that Klein became the editor of the *Chronicle*. Not surprisingly, it also became the subject of the first editorial, "Vandal and Victim" (18 Nov. 1938), that he wrote for the newspaper. Lipstadt argues that it was only after the German invasion of Austria in March of 1938, and *Kristallnacht* a few months later, that the North American press truly began to respond "to Germany's behavior with increasing horror" and that the "official and popular attitude toward Germany hardened" (86, 98). This hardening was not enough to please Klein, though, and he criticizes Chamberlain's policy of appeasement towards Germany, and urges opposition to Germany's expansionism: "to co-operate in the extension of the influence in Europe of this citadel of barbarism [...] is to betray the interests of humanity" ("Vandal and Victim" 36). It is, however, his portrayal of the Nazis that is the most striking element of this editorial, and the most important for a consideration of how Klein depicts the Holocaust in his literary works. In calling *Kristallnacht* a "saturnalia of bestiality," and the Nazis "a source of pestilence which deserves quarantine," Klein begins the process of dehumanizing the Nazis that will continue in his writing until its ultimate manifestation in *The Hitleriad* (35, 36). The editorial is meant to function as a wake-up call for

the Canadian Jewish Community, and Klein pointedly addresses the North American Jews, "happily situated in a free country on this side of the Atlantic," in the final paragraph (36-37).

The final paragraph of the editorial is a rallying cry—both an acknowledgement of the distance that separates North American Jews from the European victims of the Nazi party, and a promise to remember their plight and fight for an end to their persecution: "it is our duty, in this our hour of sorrow, to manifest to the world at large [...] that our brethren in Germany are not utterly forsaken, and that not in silence and submissiveness do we accept the cruel fate that barbarians have visited upon them" (37). Fearful that the insufficiently traumatized Canadian Jew may become passive, or even apathetic, towards the persecution of his European kin, Klein uses this editorial to hand the Jew "on this side of the Atlantic" his marching orders: do not be apathetic, do not be complacent, and do not forget.

As "Vandal and Victim" demonstrates, one of the most significant concerns of Klein's editorials is the apathy and complacency of North America and other Allied nations towards the suffering of the European Jews. For a man trying to bridge the immense geographical distance that separates him from his European counterparts, this unwillingness to assist the European victims was beyond reproach and completely impossible to understand. At home, the Canadian government under Mackenzie King was consistently refusing to help the suffering Jews of Europe, and Klein continued to both criticize the government and appeal to it for help throughout the early 1940s. In the aptly titled "The Mystery of the Mislaid Conscience" (17 July 1942), for example, he laments that against the atrocities of the Nazi party the world "has remained silent, an uncomfortable silence which is eloquent of nothing so much as of a sense of its own guilt" (153). As Irving Abella and Harold Troper argue in their 1983 book *None is Too Many: Canada and the Jews of Europe 1933-1948*, "the Jews of Europe were not so much trapped in a

whirlwind of systematic mass murder as they were abandoned to it," and it is precisely this kind of neglect at the hands of western governments that Klein was critical of (xxi).

Klein goes on in this editorial to document the most recent tragedies that have beset the European Jews: "To-day the cables bring reports of the pogrom which lasted for two days in the city of Lemberg. Yesterday Slovakia—Nazi-dominated—boasted across the airwaves that it would soon be *Judenrein* ["free of Jews"] [...] A month ago, the world heard of the holocaust in Kiev where four thousand Jews were destroyed" (155). Klein himself had been involved in the dissemination of information about these events in Canada, but he laments the fact that these atrocities seem to fall on deaf ears: "we recount these atrocities as if they were the items in a Cook's Tour Catalogue, the peregrinations of murder [...] they are relegated to a footnote, a small item in the back page, these which should furnish the headlines of the day" (155). Klein seeks a "thunderbolt of invective" in response to these events rather than the general apathy that they seem to be met with (155). He seeks "the keepers of the world's conscience, its intellectual leaders, guardians of the progress of the ages, and [...] the as-yet-unuttered *J'accuse* of our generation" (155). One senses, here, Klein's growing frustration over his own seemingly futile attempts to draw attention to the plight of the European Jews and to growing Canadian—especially French-Canadian—anti-Semitism and support for Hitler. One angry Canadian Jew and his newspaper can ultimately do very little against the persecution of the Jews in Europe and the growing anti-immigrant policies of North American governments, and Klein is left to wonder, as he does in "Will the World Accept the Challenge?" (5 March 1943), if the world will "stand by—even a world at war—while an entire people, helpless and unarmed, is systematically and ruthlessly exterminated" (182). An "inaudible whisper" seems to be the only response (182).

That Klein felt obligated to remind Canadian Jews that the distance and lack of specific knowledge that separates them from their European counterparts should not lead them to ignore their suffering is particularly evident in "The Issue is Clear!" (8 September 1939). In this editorial Klein explains that the persecution of the Jews at the hands of the Nazis has not only been considerably more violent than most Canadians can imagine, but it has also been much more widespread. Indeed, for the first time in his editorials, Klein here suggests that Hitler may have a much larger goal than the destruction of the Jews of Germany:

For six years the Nazis have carried on a relentless war against our people, a war directed against the defenseless, inspired by no reason save the instincts of savagery, and conducted without let-up, without restraint, without quarter [...] its objective has been shouted from the roof-tops and has been echoed across the world—the utter destruction, the complete annihilation of Jewry. (60)

Klein is speaking directly to his Canadian Jewish readers here, and he is warning them that even the geographical distance between Canada and Europe is not enough to protect Canadian Jews from the hate of Hitler. It is precisely because Hitler poses such an immense threat to global Jewry that Klein reminds the Canadian Jew that he must not be apathetic:

They cry to us across a continent and an ocean, to us who by accident find ourselves here in a land of freedom [...] they cry to us from the darkness of the concentration camps at Dachau, from the ghettos of Prague, from the encampments of refugees [...] the issue is clear! Clear is the answer of Canadian Jewry. Every effort will be bent, every ounce of energy will be spent, every sacrifice will be made, to see to it that we [...] emerge victorious. (61)

This call to arms is also accompanied by an assurance that one of the most important roles that the Canadian Jewish bystander of the Nazi atrocities can perform is that of remembering. After hearing about events like the systematic rounding up and murder of the Jewish population of the Czechoslovakian village of Lidice in 1942, and the murdering of Jewish children and their teachers in the Medem Sanatorium in Poland in the same year, the most important thing that the Canadian Jewish population can do, according to Klein, is "engrave these incidents upon the tablets of our memory, to put before us ever and without interruption the sacred duty of avenging these and other innocents, and to labor incessantly to wipe out this abomination from the face of the earth" ("The Slaughter of Children" 177). Interestingly, Klein's insistence that the distanced victim of a traumatic event (in this case, the Canadian Jew who is a victim of the cultural trauma of the persecution of Jews in Europe) can take on the task of remembering an event that he did not actually witness creates an interesting paradox that challenges the traditional view of trauma as being ultimately un-rememberable. Although the secondary witness cannot possibly remember what it felt like to be one of the Nazi's primary victims, it is his very distance from the event that allows him to serve as a witness to the trauma at a cultural level. Indeed, Klein's own efforts to educate his Canadian readers and help the suffering of his European brethren enter into cultural and collective memory through his writing, demonstrates how only being able to witness the persecution of European Jews from a distance is not entirely a helpless position. Klein reminds his readers that there is much that they can do—as witnesses to, and survivors of, the cultural trauma of the Holocaust—to help ensure that the bonds between Canadian and European Jews, and between Canadian Jews and their Jewish heritage, do not disappear.

The most effective way to counter the potential for apathy towards the Holocaust from his Canadian readers is to document the atrocities of the Holocaust in as much detail as possible. By doing so, Klein urges the readers of his editorials into action in the forms of protesting the government for assistance, mourning the dead, or working towards committing the Nazi atrocities to the collective Jewish memory. Lipstadt argues that much of the early news of Nazi persecutions and the concentration camps was met with skepticism in North America, and popular opinion was "that the situation could not be *as* bad as the reporters contended" (16). By the spring of 1942, the death camps were being covered in the back pages of newspapers and "in the next eighteen months the specifics of the 'final solution' were unveiled to the Allies" (Bialystok 25). The primary reaction of Canadians—Canadian Jews included—was a combination of incomprehension, incredulity, and a small dose of guilt. Thus, to help prevent the Canadian Jewish population from slipping too far into feelings of apathy, Klein evokes the persecution of the European Jews in as much graphic detail as possible. The rather vague hints of the "barbarism" and "bestiality" of Nazism that mark his earliest editorials on the subject are replaced with concrete facts, dates, place names, and events. In "Polish Jewry" (3 November 1939), Klein reports that

over a million and a half Jews in German Poland are undergoing slow but sure starvation [...] those who are not perishing of starvation, are succumbing to disease, and those who perchance escape both of these fates, usually find themselves among the summarily shot. Executions take place without trial or accusation; it is an orgy of murder, in all its forms. (64)

As the man responsible for the dissemination of this information, Klein claims that it is his duty to be as honest and truthful in his representations as possible: "we who receive these

communications become more and more convinced with every report that our duty is clear and unambiguous" (64). Indeed, Klein argues that the very magnitude of the atrocities in Europe demand documentary treatment: "the imagination of the most macabre author could hardly conceive fictions more horrible than the facts" (64). Thus, Klein devotes entire editorials to the coverage of specific atrocities: the invasion of Poland, the elimination of the village of Lidice, and the murders of children in Poland, for example. Similarly, cattle cars are mentioned for the first time in "The New Order: Murder and Ransom" (27 November 1942): "others are packed into cattle-cars, sent to unknown destinations, where, those who are still alive after the foodless, airless travel, are taken out and shot" (174). Klein's reportage is brutal and blunt, and purposefully so. In order to prevent the apathy of Canadian Jews, in order to help them commit this traumatic information to collective and cultural memory, and in order to warn them that the distance that separates them from these atrocities may not be as large as they imagine it to be, Klein uses his editorials to educate and inform, shock and warn.

As the information about the Holocaust and its perpetrators that was slowly becoming available in Canada became increasingly overwhelming in its staggering enormity, and, resultantly, frustratingly difficult to trust, Klein sought new methods of representation, continuing to incorporate brutal and blunt imagery into his editorials, but also beginning to experiment with satire. In "Where's Adolf?" (17 November 1944), Klein offers a clown-like and satirical portrayal of Hitler that is reminiscent of his long poem *The Hitleriad*, also published in 1944.⁴ It is accompanied, however, with a remarkable degree of bitterness and anger that is absent from the long poem. Echoing the cartoon "Where's Joe?" beer advertisement that was popular at the time, Klein asks "Where's Hitler?" The expected response of "Gone for a beer"

⁴ It is reminiscent, too, of Cohen's depiction of Hitler in *Beautiful Losers*.

that inevitably explains Joe's absence, is replaced, in a rare example of black humour in Klein's writing, with "gone for a bier" (225). Contemplating the possible implications of a six-month period towards the end of the war in which Hitler, undoubtedly realizing his impending downfall, was rarely seen or heard from, Klein plays off reports of the Fuehrer's death in the media: "The Fuehrer is dead, the Fuehrer is dying, the Fuehrer is about to die" (225). By suggesting that "the desirable prospect" of Hitler's death has recently been "conjugated in all its tenses" by the media, Klein ultimately warns his Canadian readers about the importance of questioning the reliability of their sources of information about events in Europe (225). Though Klein himself is unable to explain Hitler's absence, he cannot help but express his doubts (and hope) about "a mistaken jubilee": "the natural and premature death of Adolf Hitler would be a grave misfortune of poetic justice [...] His personal presence is required for the last scene" (225). Finally, citing rumours that Hitler was suffering from a throat tumor, Klein bitterly suggests that there would be a remarkable irony "in the fact that the first personal affliction to come upon the author of this holocaust should come in the form of a punishment against that organ which was his principle instrument for capturing power. This, indeed, is poetic justice with a vengeance" (225).

The end of the Second World War and the commencement of the liberation of the concentration camps did little to change Klein's bitter tone and his sarcastic portrayal of the Nazis. He does, however, take a brief interlude to breathe a sigh of relief in "Reflections on V-E Day" (11 May 1945). Documenting the slow arrival of the news of the end of the war in Canada, he suggests that it ultimately "lift[ed] us from the depths of despair":

Not with surprising suddenness did it come; it did not come—as in the dark days we hoped it would—as a miraculous flash on a radio, a startling announcement [...]. By installments, with forewarnings, parcelled in rumours, it finally arrived,

and even then was only quasi-official: *The Nazis had surrendered, unconditionally.* (236)

He acknowledges the fact that the Holocaust was a cultural trauma, and reminds his Canadian readers, that they, too, were Hitler's victims: "his intentions were never concealed—he meant to make the whole world the scene of his totalitarian iniquity. Every Jew felt the Nazi tentacle stretch out to reach him, personally" (236).

As increasingly graphic details of the 1945 liberation of the concentration camps began to arrive in Canada, Klein's journalistic tone became increasingly somber and meditative. In perhaps his best known editorial, "The Jews of Europe" (3 August 1945), Klein is the disseminator of information and images that he would rather not have to share, but nevertheless feels compelled by duty to do so. He confirms that "the Nazi program for Jewish annihilation was by no means over-estimated" (243), laments that "a generation, and more, has been wiped out" (244), commends journalists like himself for disseminating information across the world, and criticizes the apathy and blindness of his country and his people to the events in Europe:

For the past six years, while the press was full of a detailed description of the methods adopted by the Nazi extermination squads to encompass the destruction of European Jewry, while the Nazis themselves openly flaunted the murder-blueprints they had prepared, and while reporters standing upon the abandoned scenes of Gestapo atrocity sent accounts of the number of containers of human ashes they had discovered in the macabre buildings, the quantity of gold torn from the teeth of Jews about to be cremated, while all this was being attested, both as to place and as to time, as to method and as to result, Jews, and all civilized beings, secretly entertained a hope, a wish, a concealed but cherished incredulity. It can't

be as bad as it's described! Inhuman monstrosity could not possibly go to such lengths!" (243)

It could, and it did. And in "The Herrenvolk" (3 May 1946), one of the last editorials that he wrote specifically about the Holocaust, Klein references the now infamous number of murdered Jews—six million—that had only recently entered circulation, and laments the fact that because of a continuing lack of support for Jewish refugees, so many of his people—Holocaust survivors amongst them—*continue* to suffer even after liberation. Because so many countries, including Canada, continued to uphold stringent policies against accepting Jewish refugees or providing humanitarian aid after the liberation of the camps, Jewish survivors of the concentration camps, many of them already weak, emaciated, and impoverished, were quite often left to fend for themselves. Once again, the European Jew—now freshly "liberated"—was ultimately abandoned to his own fate, and as the overwhelming sense of guilt that Klein felt increased, he turned to poetry as an outlet for his emotions.

Klein's Early Holocaust Poetry

Not surprisingly, Klein's poetic work of this period explores many of the same themes as his editorials. However, where the main goal of the editorials is to educate and warn the Canadian Jewish Community about the events in Europe, Klein's Holocaust poetry is typically much more introverted and personal in nature—instead of focusing on the impact of the Holocaust on the larger Jewish community, Klein's poems tend to explore the impact of the traumatic event on the individual. More explicitly, his poetry focuses on the role of the individual who is geographically distanced from the persecution of his European kin, and on the

helpless guilt that comes from being a bystander to the mass destruction of an entire cultural group to which he belongs.

Klein's first volume of published poetry, *Hath Not a Jew*, is a veritable anthology of Jewish themes and concerns. Although it was not published until 1940, it contains poems that were written at the very beginning of his writing career—during his undergraduate days at McGill in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Drawing widely on Jewish history and important personalities in Jewish culture, as well as Jewish folklore, mythology, and Zionism, *Hath Not a Jew* is, for the most part, a celebration of the Jewish traditions and heritage that link Canadian Jews to their European kin. Beneath this celebratory tone, however, is an undercurrent of nostalgia and despair over a long and tragic history of Jewish persecution and a growing concern over a resurgence of anti-Semitism in both Europe and Canada. One poem in particular, "Sonnet in Time of Affliction," originally composed in 1929 at a time when the Nazi party was only starting to merit serious attention and concern in Germany, provides an interesting prophetic vision of the uncomfortable position that Klein would later find himself in when the Nazi persecutions of European Jewry began in earnest a few years later. In the final lines of the poem Klein acknowledges that as a Jew living in the comfort and safety of Canada he is ultimately separated from his European brethren who are facing increasing persecution: "And woe to me, who am not one of these, / Who languish here beneath these northern stars" (13-14). As early as 1929, then, we see distance creating a sense of guilt and futility in Klein: "as a Jew living in Canada he is reduced to commenting on the struggle, frustrated by his inability [...] to join his people" (Golfman 15).

Though Klein's lengthy dramatic monologue, "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage" (1938), may seem to contradict the argument that Klein had turned away from poetry and was focusing

exclusively on journalism during the late 1930s and early 1940s, many critics, including Pollock, consider the poem to be little more than "a collection of versified editorials" (*Story of the Poet* 95). Klein uses the speaker of the dramatic monologue as his mouthpiece, repeating and rephrasing many of the arguments and subjects in his poetry that he had already introduced in his earlier editorials. But the poem is, nevertheless, a unique anomaly in terms of Klein's writing at the time, and its importance lies in the fact that it indicates a desire on Klein's part to begin to experiment with ways to represent the persecution of the European Jews through poetry. Experimentation with hybrid forms is one of the most common practices among artists attempting to find a way to work through and represent traumatic experiences in their writing, and this poem provides a hint that Klein may have believed that the most effective way to represent the Holocaust in poetry was to combine his two great talents and lend his poetry a journalistic tone.

Echoing Klein's sentiments in his editorials "Vandal and Victim," and "The Mystery of the Mislaid Conscience," the first thirty-five lines of the poem are an allegory of the plight of Jewish refugees and a condemnation of "the supposedly civilized nations of the world" which remained indifferent to the catastrophe that was beginning to overwhelm the Jews in Europe and refused to "receive the many thousands of Jews seeking refuge from Germany" (Caplan 74). The "bewildered" (9) Jewish speaker of the poem laments his inability to "sit down to rest my bones, and count my sores" (20), because "the asylum doors" (17) have all "been shut, and barred, and triple-locked" (16). Klein's speaker has an obvious counterpart in the melancholic and world-weary young man of Lord Byron's long narrative poem of the same name. Indeed, Klein draws on the Byronic hero's disenchanted response to post-Revolutionary society to shape his own

speaker's disillusionment and melancholy regarding the indifference of nations towards the plight of the Jews.

The next section of the poem—lines 36-119—discusses the Nazi-party and their particularly perverse brand of anti-Semitism. As they were in "Vandal and Victim," the Nazis are again associated with wild animals and monsters—a perversion of humanity and religious doctrine—as the swastika is portrayed as "a cross with claws" (49). Hitler's powers of oration and the anti-Jewish sentiments that are characteristic of his early public rallies and speeches are documented in "the mustached homily, the megaphoned hymn" (51). The humour quickly dissipates from Klein's tone, though, and after suggesting that the word "fellowman" is "archaic" (68) because it fails to accommodate the pure hatred that the Nazis feel for the Jews, he challenges them to explain the roots of this hatred: "expound / Wherefore you deem me that foul mote in your eye, / That bone in your throat, that ugly scab, that plague, / That in your gospels, you so character / Me and my kin, consanguine and allied?" (69-73). Jewish stereotypes are examined as he continues to try to understand why the Nazis hate the Jews, asking if it is "my wealth" (74), "my thoughts," or "my father's heresy, his obstinate creed?" that "is the sword between us?" (86-87). Finally, Klein calls upon European history to show just how irrational and incomprehensible the Nazi hatred of Jews truly is:

To wit, an alien? And *that* is false.

For on occasion and in divers lands

I have sojourned, set up abode with you,

Drank the same drinks, partook of the same food,

Applauded the same music, uttered the

Very same language, thought a similar thought,—

And still you have sneered *foreigner*, and still

Your hate was great, as reasonless hatred is. (105-112)

The focus of these lines is on foreignness and the invention of a Jewish construct through illogical stereotyping.

Klein's poem predates Jean-Paul Sartre's seminal book *Anti-Semite and Jew* (1944) by fifteen years, but anticipates Sartre's claim that the illogical nature of anti-Semitism has its roots in "a subjective taste that enters into combinations with other tastes to form a personality, and an impersonal and social phenomenon" which can only be expressed and justified through fabricated "figures and averages" that are both "dangerous and false" (5). "If the Jew did not exist," Sartre argues, "the anti-Semite would invent him" (13). To reduce Sartre's complicated argument in *Anti-Semite and Jew* to its basic principles, the anti-Semite's determinist vision of the human posits social legitimacy as a product of nature, or race. The Jew, according to Sartre, is defined as the necessary other for the anti-Semite's particularism and quest for legitimacy, and is annihilated in the very process of being constructed, invented and abstracted. The Jew, then, is an invention of the anti-Semite's desire for legitimacy and power—his identity is wholly determined by his social context and identity vis-à-vis the anti-Semite. The invention of a Jewish construct through illogical stereotyping is precisely the focus of Klein's poem. Anti-Semitism resists logic and understanding, and Klein struggles to come to terms with the sheer magnitude of it.

In the third section of the poem, Klein portrays prayer and fasting as the typical responses of his ancestors to affliction:

In such sad plight, in such sore case,

My sire would turn his bearded face

Upwards, and, fast or festive day,
 Would don his prayershawl, and pray. (120-123)

The extreme violence through which the Nazi hatred of the Jews has begun to manifest itself, though, exposes the limits of prayer and fasting. The contemporary Jew can no longer find comfort in prayer in the face of such extreme persecution. Lines 163-164 also rule reciprocal violence out, so the speaker is left to ponder what an appropriate reaction to the kind of modern day anti-Semitism that the Nazis represent would be:

What, now, for me to do?
 Gulp down some poisoned brew?
 Or from some twentieth story take
 My ignominious exit? Make,
 Above this disappearing Jew,
 Three bubbles burst upon the lake?
 Or dance from a rope upon the air
 Over an overturned chair? (146-153)

The speaker refuses suicide as an option, seeing it as an "ignoble end," and as essentially assisting the Nazi desire to eliminate the Jewish people (154). Klein reminds his reader that there is no sense in becoming complacent or apathetic in the face of persecution because, as he explains in the fourth and final section of the poem, the Jewish race has endured persecution in the past and will continue to endure in the present:

Weaponless, blessed with no works, and much abhorred,
 This only is mine wherewith to face the horde:
 The frozen patience waiting for its day,

The stance long-suffering, the stoic word,
 The bright empirics that knows well that the
 Night of the cauchemar comes and goes away,—
 A baleful wind, a baneful nebula, over
 A saecular imperturbability. (165-172)

In light of the Holocaust, these final lines, and the need for patience that they preach, seem incredibly short-sighted and naïve, but it is important to remember that Klein wrote this poem in 1938. Nazi anti-Semitism was still in its youth, and its full violent wrath had yet to manifest itself. Although "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage" is ultimately not one of Klein's most impressive poems, it does mark his first direct response to the threat of Nazism in his poetry, and "its final section, with its affirmation of faith in the continuity of the Jewish tradition, is important as an indication of the direction of much of his work over the next few years" (Pollock, *Story of the Poet* 96).

Although he made it clear in his editorial "Polish Jewry," that the magnitude of the Nazi atrocities exceeded the limits of the imagination—"the imagination of the most macabre author could hardly conceive fictions more horrible than the facts" (64)—Klein nevertheless continued to experiment with the literary depiction of Nazi atrocities in a number of poems written in the early 1940s. Searching for spiritual and religious consolation, a means through which he could re-connect with his Jewish roots during this time of threat, and "having in mind the centuries-old custom among pious Jews to recite psalms in times of suffering and distress," Klein began work on "a modern sequel or appendix to the 150 psalms of the Bible, beginning at number 151 and ending at 200" (Caplan 88). With the exception of only a few, the psalms were not widely popular when they were published, nor are they presently often read or studied, but they seem to

have offered Klein a chance to privately meditate on his Jewish heritage in a poetic form while publicly documenting the atrocities in Europe in his editorials.

Klein's best-known poem about the Nazi persecutions of this time, however, is undoubtedly "In Re Solomon Warshawer," which was written in 1940 and published in his 1944 book *Poems*. Like "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage," this poem is built around a series of speeches spoken by a Jewish victim of the Nazis. Klein's background as a graduate of the Université de Montréal's law program and as practicing lawyer until his retirement from law in 1956, manifests itself in the poem as it is presented in the form of a legal deposition against a poor Jewish "man for hire" (21) "who has been apprehended by the S.S. after being harassed by a hostile crowd" (Pollock, *Story of the Poet* 96). The Jew's voice, presented on the page in italics in order to juxtapose it against the testimony of the unsympathetic narrator, echoes the questions about the unknowable source of Nazi hatred that appear in "Childe Harold": "*Whom have I hurt?*" the speaker asks, "*I tell you I have done no wrong! /.../ I am beard and breathlessness, and chased enough. / Leave me in peace, and let me go my way*" (13-19).

Despite being mocked by the crowd and further persecuted by a "S.S. man," the Jew regards his attackers with a "*pitying eye*," and evokes "*Armada'd Spain [...] / And Russia's last descended Romanov*" alongside the civilizations of Babylon, Egypt, Greece, and Rome as examples of tyrannical and militant civilizations—like WWI Germany—that were mighty for a brief period of history before being "*disinterred*" and "*unresurrected*" (69, 79-80, 89). All of these civilizations have persecuted Jews, "*they all have wished, and more than wished, me dead*," but the man points to his very existence as proof that the attempts to exterminate the Jewish race have always failed: "*And now, although I do walk raggedly, / I walk, and they are echoes to my tread!*" (93). The swastika is once again imagined as a "*claw*" (150), and Hitler and

his skills of oration are portrayed in much the same bestial fashion as they are in Klein's earlier poetry and editorials, with an element of satanic characterization thrown into the mix through comparisons with Asmodeus, the Talmudic king of demons:

He, the unspeakable prince of malice!
Usurper of my throne, pretender to the Lord's!
Wicked, demoniac, lycanthropous,
Leader of hosts horrific, barbarous hordes,
Master of the worm, pernicious, that cleaves rocks,
The beast that talks [...]. (138-143)

Hitler "*counsels hate*" the Jewish man claims towards the end of his speech (149); and, as if to exemplify this concretely, his speech is interrupted after he is presumably struck by the S.S. man and collapses into unconsciousness:

Upon his charnel-throne, in bloodied purple,
/.../ Asmodeus sits;
And I—
 At this point the S.S. men departed.
 The Jew was not revived. He was carried and carted,
 and to his present gaoler brought [...]. (154-161)

These final lines are literally quite staggering. The violent interruption of the Jewish man's speech at the hands of the S.S. officer, and his subsequent descent into the silence of unconsciousness, is presented on the page in a way that jars the reader and violently demands his attention. The very form of the poem, then, captures the violence that Klein is depicting and that he had been writing about in his editorials before writing this poem. Through his

experimentation with poetic form, Klein has found a way not only to document the violence that European Jews have been experiencing, but also to make the reader feel a small fraction of that violence. This strategy of discomforting the reader stands at the heart of Klein's experiments with form in *The Hitleriad*.

The final lines of "In Re Solomon Warshawer" are shocking for a different reason as well. If the Jewish man's speech is read as a statement of defiance against the Nazis, drawing support from examples of how his people have survived persecution in the past, then the very fact that this speech is interrupted just before its likely climax perhaps suggests that Klein is beginning to have his doubts about the chances of the Jewish race surviving this specific example of persecution. One senses that the words that would follow the interrupted "*And I—*" would be the man's ultimate moment of defiance. The words are, however, cut off by the very agent of trauma that the speaker has been rallying himself against. The man is carried away by his captors, and put on trial in a rather Kafkaesque manner simply for being a Jew. His words of defiance are not the final words of the poem, and although his speech indicates that he believes his people will survive Nazi persecution just as they have the persecutions of the past, the poem ends with him battered, captured, and now a further victim of legal persecution. The silencing of the speaker is a horrifically violent act—one that ultimately represents the plight of the poet: silenced by the unspeakable horrors of the Holocaust, the final lines of the poem suggest that, at this point, the violence may be too ineffable for the poet to describe in words.

It is hard to imagine, however, that Klein would intend for "In Re Solomon Warhawser" to be a poem of despair—hard to believe that he could so easily give up the hope of salvation for the Jewish people that he has so fondly championed in the past. Instead, the poem can be read as an allegory of the Canadian Jewish experience of the Holocaust. Indeed, the defiant words of the

Jewish man in the poem are very similar to the words and attitudes expressed by Klein in his earlier editorial works. That the poem is framed by the disposition of an unsympathetic bystander furthers this argument. Klein is the very model of the Jewish man attempting to rally support for his people, and draw attention to the violence that is affecting them, despite the apathy of those standing by and witnessing the suffering from a distance. The Jewish man in the poem is an example of the kind of perseverance and stoicism that Klein seeks in his readers. He reminds his persecutors that although his people have been the victims of violence in the past, they still live on; and, despite the violence at the end of the poem, the man himself still lives on. The Jew who remembers—the Jew who remains loyal to his roots and champions the survival of his people amid persecution—is precisely the Jew that Klein wants his Canadian readers to be. And if the only violence that his readers fall victim to is the formal disruption of the poem, then they can consider themselves lucky.

"Double-Jointed Rhetoric": *The Hitleriad*

The Hitleriad has never been a popular poem. Originally written as a hundred-line poem in 1942 and considerably expanded to nearly eight hundred lines in 1943, the poem was met with scathing reviews when it was first published in 1944, and, with only the rare exception,⁵ continues to be either ignored by critics or approached with disdain and mockery in discussions of Klein's work. Nevertheless, the poem marks an important hallmark in Canadian literature: it is one of the first Canadian poems about Hitler and the Nazi atrocities to raise questions about the appropriateness of techniques of representation. It is a poem that uses surprising—and possibly

⁵ Rachel Feldhay Brenner's discussion of the text in her article "A.M. Klein's *The Hitleriad*: Against the Silence of the Apocalypse" (1990), and her book *A.M. Klein: The Father of Canadian Jewish Literature* (1990), are significant exceptions, and Brenner's article provides an excellent close-reading of the poem.

ill-conceived—tactics of representation in order to provoke a response. If Klein's goal is to educate his Canadian Jewish readers and prevent them from becoming apathetic about the atrocities facing the European Jews, then provoking a reaction—either positive or negative—is certainly not a bad thing.

The Hitleriad has suffered from an astonishing number of negative comments and reviews.⁶ Almost all of the poem's reviewers are appreciative of the poem's ambition, but ultimately critical of either the poem's clownish depiction of Hitler or Klein's decision to model his poem on 18th century mock-epic forms. Brian Trehearne calls the poem "Klein's best known failure in poetry," and points to "the curious clash [...] between Klein's Augustan satirical remoteness and the evident sense of outrage and horror that motivates his response" as the poem's main problem (*The Montreal Forties* 123). Likewise, M.W. Steinberg suggests that "the poem fails primarily because no amount of rhetorical sarcastic sneers and name-calling, no collection of insults or invective [...] can convey adequately the shock that came from the recognition of the possible extent of human depravity" (15). Louis Dudek famously nicknamed the poem "The Hilariad," and Pollock considers the poem to be "without a doubt, the least successful of Klein's major works" (Pollock, Mayne and Caplan, "Editor's Introduction" xv). The poem, when read in light of the Holocaust, is "trivializing," Pollock argues, and it is hurt "by Klein's understandable inability to identify in any way with the characters he is satirizing" (xv).

One of the major themes that comes across in these reviews is the idea that, as Michael Greenstein succinctly puts it, "*The Hitleriad* [...] lacks the necessary historical distance for coping with the enormity of the Holocaust" (1). This is a common criticism of the poem, but also an incredibly difficult one to understand. How could a poem that was written *while* the Nazi

⁶ Many of these reviews—both negative and positive—can be found collected in Tom Marshall's book *A.M. Klein: Critical Views on Canadian Writers* (1970).

atrocities are actually occurring possess historical distance? Indeed, as one of the first writers experimenting with the representation of the Nazi atrocities *as they were happening*, Klein's work needs to be judged outside the normal parameters that critics typically apply to literary representations of trauma.

Interestingly, there is a converse argument to Greenstein's that is made in discussions of more recent Holocaust literature concerning the effects of *too much* distance. As Sue Vice explains, "the more personal distance there is between author and subject, the more 'invented' the work" is perceived to be (4). This creates an impossible paradox for the writer: on one hand, if he lacks historical distance from the traumatic event then he cannot possibly hope to create a work that will, in Greenstein's words, properly convey "the enormity" of the event (1). This ultimately suggests, perhaps unintentionally on Greenstein's part, that no amount of distance can ever be enough to properly grasp the event. On the other hand, as Vice points out, if too much distance separates the writer from the event, then the writer opens himself up to accusations of "invention"—an idea that is discussed in much more detail in the fourth chapter of this dissertation. If the Holocaust artist is ultimately aiming for verisimilitude in his work—and both Greenstein and Vice assume that this is always desirable to readers—then both a lack of distance and an excess of distance make proper representation an impossible task. By failing to appreciate Klein's poem as a document of events as they were happening, and insisting instead on a desire for a poem that presents the "enormity" of the Holocaust (an impossible task to begin with), the comments of many critics strip the poem from its historical context and fail to give Klein the credit he deserves.

One of the most controversial elements of the book relates to Klein's decision to combine multiple poetic forms, styles and structures. These include the sonnet, blank verse, *terza rima*,

invective, satire, parody, meditation, and journalism. This hybridization of literary forms and styles is one of the touchstones of experimental representations of traumatic events, and, as Noreen Golfman explains in her book *A.M. Klein and His Works* (1991), "testif[ies] to the degree to which Klein recognizes the need to experiment with his subject" (30-31). By suggesting through his experimentation that the atrocities of the Holocaust cannot be easily represented in any one literary form or style, Klein, in turn, ultimately demonstrates how incomprehensible, uncategorizable, and illogical the Holocaust truly is.

Klein's decision to model the overall form of *The Hitleriad* after Pope's *The Dunciad*, an 18th century mock-heroic satire, is the subject of much of the negative criticism of the poem. This is curious, because, in many ways, satire is appropriate for Klein's project. In his essay "Satire, Lampoon, Libel, Slander," Michael Seidel suggests that there are "certain attitudes and gestures of verbal oppositions [that] mark satire—tirade, derision, disdain, mockery, belittlement, sarcasm, and irony" (33). All of these are present in *The Hitleriad*. Seidel also argues that *The Dunciad* "is a monumental instance of how the scope of satire expands in the early eighteenth century to absorb virtually everything modern society can display or produce," and what the poem ultimately presents us with is a "spectacle of cultural rot" (51). This summarizes Klein's project in *The Hitleriad* quite nicely—the poem shows its reader precisely what kind of "cultural rot" twentieth-century society has produced. Gretl K. Fischer, however, points out the limits of satire by arguing that the persecution of Jews in Europe by Hitler and the Nazis, "does not lend itself to satirical treatment; for satire cannot do without an element of the ridiculous, and the activities of the Nazi leaders defy laughter, no matter how bitter" (157).

In a letter to James Laughlin, the publisher of *The Hitleriad*, Klein justifies his choice of style: *The Hitleriad* "is a latter-day attempt to revive (and modify) an old technique, and apply it

to the contemporary event. Augustan verse, I know, has long been out of fashion [...] but to-day, the poetry of wit and wrath finds mightier themes" (102). The "wit" in the poem is ironic; the "wrath" is not. By portraying Hitler through wit and sarcasm, Klein is ultimately doing the same thing that he is doing by using the sonnet form in the poem: he is drawing the reader's attention to the very incongruity—the archaic and unsuitable nature—of the portrayal. As Miriam Waddington explains, "by calling attention to the past, the use of archaism emphasizes the present [...] with all its differences from the past; and it often does so ironically" (113). Klein's use of satire, then, serves "primarily to organize the reader's critical awareness of his own contemporaneity and to emphasize his consciousness of his own and his era's uniqueness" (113). For the Jewish Canadian reader, the use of an archaic English literary form also serves to highlight the distance that separates Canada and Europe. It is also important to keep in mind that *The Hitleriad* is very much a mock-epic, and in keeping with Pope's numerous examples of this style of poetry, Klein juxtaposes the trivial with the unimaginably terrible. The light, witty verse style is meant, paradoxically, to draw our attention to the seriousness of the subject. Similarly, the humanism, moral order, rational thinking, and faith in civilization that are typically associated with "Augustan" poetry are juxtaposed against the "moral regression to the 'dark age' of Nazism" (Brenner, *Father of Canadian Jewish Literature* 67). Klein's poem about Nazi anti-Semitism, then, is ultimately anti-humanist, anti-Augustan, anti-Enlightenment, and, as Charles Bernstein would have it, anti-absorptive.

An anti-absorptive text, Bernstein explains in "Artifice of Absorption," is one that purposefully repels and discomforts its reader, that turns earlier literary styles against themselves, and that distances the reader at both formal and thematic levels. T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* is one of the prime examples of an anti-absorptive text in Modern literature: it uses

multiple languages, a myriad of allusions to often obscure literary texts, and formal disjunction to alienate the reader from the text at the very same time as it delivers its theme of the alienation of man in modern society. Klein experiments with various literary forms and styles in the *The Hitleriad* for the exact same reason. Literary works about traumatic events like the persecution of the European Jews that are "unaccommodating to the reader may be more successful in conveying the disruption and unease that the subject demands than more seamless, aesthetically pleasing work" (Vice 161). Additionally, the anti-absorptive text will not let the reader forget that he is engaged in the act of reading. One effect of this is to make the reader aware of the distance that separates him from the subject that he is reading about. This separation between reader and subject—manifested in the physical separation between the reader and the pages of the book and in the poem's many intertextual allusions—allows Klein to re-create, at a textual level, a sense of the distance that ultimately separates the author himself from the subject. By using these methods to provoke a reaction to the formal elements of his work—either positive or negative—Klein ensures that his readers at least remember the poem and its contents, and, subsequently, he ultimately furthers his goal of educating his readers and leading them away from complicity.

There is a danger in focusing solely on the questions of aesthetics that *The Hitleriad* raises and ignoring the poem's content. Indeed, this is the trap that most of the poem's critics have fallen into. "To concentrate on the poetics [...] over the substance" of a controversial work like Klein's, James E. Young suggests in his book *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust* (1988), "risks displacing the events under discussion altogether" (3). In an attempt to counter the negative criticism of the poem, Waddington reminds her readers that "in retrospect, of all Canada's wartime poets, Klein was the only one who responded poetically to a historical event at

the time it was actually happening," and it is for this reason that it is absolutely crucial that Klein's poem be recognized—and even celebrated—as being, in part, a documentary poem (84).

The documentary poem had recently emerged as a popular genre at the time that Klein began to write *The Hitleriad*, and Dorothy Livesay argues that in the poem "there are echoes" of E.J. Pratt's "style" ("The Polished Lens" 37).⁷ Livesay characterizes the documentary poem as "a conscious attempt to create a dialectic between the objective facts and the subjective feelings of the poet," and she argues that it is always "based on topical data but held together by descriptive, lyrical, and didactic elements" ("The Documentary Poem" 267, 269). Like so many of Klein's early editorials, *The Hitleriad* documents the rise of Hitler and the Nazis, examines Hitler's powers of oration, describes specific atrocities, and reproaches the Allied nations for their apathetic bystanding. It combines education and invective, and concludes with a prophetic vision of Jewish harmony and peace. And, most importantly, it shows us what, exactly, was known about Hitler's persecution of the Jewish people in Canada at the time it was written. Indeed, many critics have criticized Klein for offering only a cursory depiction of the Holocaust in *The Hitleriad*. Concentration camps had been established as early as 1933, and were beginning to be used for extermination in 1941, a year before Klein began work on the poem; but the exterminations were kept out of sight, and like so many other facts about the Holocaust, the details of the "final solution" took a long time to cross the ocean. While there may also be "a humble acknowledgment of his inability to recreate the Holocaust through imagination" at play here (Brenner, *Father of Canadian Jewish Literature* 79), it is most likely that Klein simply did not yet have a sense of the magnitude or extent of the destruction that the concentration camps represented: "when the full extent of the Holocaust was revealed in 1945, Klein was stunned at

⁷ Many of Pratt's most famous documentary poems had already been published, including *The Titanic* (1935) and *Brebeuf and his Brethren* (1940).

the devastation" (Caplan 114). Thus, the dramatic change in tone of Klein's Holocaust poetry after *The Hitleriad*—particularly in "Elegy"—is a response to the knowledge that was not available to him at this time.

The Hitleriad opens with the conventional opening pattern of an epic: an invocation, statement of purpose and a list of epic questions. That the opening "Heil heavenly muse" invocation closely echoes the opening of Milton's *Paradise Lost* is quite appropriate as both poems document a "fall from grace to sin" (5). This Miltonic opening also prepares the reader for the irony of the rest of the poem: whereas Milton draws on the Holy Spirit as his "heavenly muse," Klein goes on to explain that the subject and muse of his poem is Hitler, and that, as we see in his editorials, he feels compelled by duty to document Hitler's atrocities: "Adolf I sing but only since I must. / I must!" (11). Pollock explains this duty extends beyond the mere writing of a poem: "it is his duty to defend the values of tradition and community against the forces of history that would seek to destroy them, and it is in Hitler that these forces find their most absolute embodiment" (110). The poet stirs himself to action with the second "I must!" and continues to do so by reminding himself that he is "the grandson of prophets" (20). Cleverly punning on the word "dictate," he invokes "anger" to take him "in its grasp; let hate, / Hatred of evil prompt me, and dictate!" (20-23). Klein calls on the muses, then, to dictate a poem about the dictator, acknowledging, perhaps, the limitations of his own abilities to represent Hitler's atrocities in poetic form. Finally, Klein ends the first section of the poem by informing the reader—as if anticipating the negative reviews of his critics—that this is a documentary poem, meant to describe the Nazi atrocities that have already occurred, and that are presently occurring: "Oh, even as his truncheon'd crimes are wrought, /.../ And even as his doom still seems in doubt, / Let deeds unspeakable be spoken out" (28, 30-31). Klein knows that he is a disseminator of

information about the Nazis in Canada, and his goal in this poem is to attempt to describe the ineffable horrors of Nazi persecution—to "speak" for the victims who cannot speak for themselves, and to document this information "while the spilt blood is still body-hot" (29).

The rather contradictory portrayals of Hitler that make up the second part of the poem have been the subject of much critical debate. At the beginning of this section, Klein seems to anticipate Hannah Arendt's theory of the banality of evil, developed in her 1963 book *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, when he describes Hitler's face as being "like any other face / Among a sea of faces in a mob— / A peasant's face, an agent's face, no face / At all [...]" (43-46).⁸ The banality of Hitler's appearance is what prompts the speaker to doubtfully ask, with a playful allusion to Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus*, "is this the face that launched the master-race / And burned the topless towers of Rotterdam?" (41-42). This desire to see Hitler as nothing more than just a banal man appears earlier in the poem when Klein comments on Hitler's "little brain" (26), and is echoed throughout the poem as he "ridicules Hitler's lack of education, [and] his ambition to become a great artist" (Brenner, "Against the Silence" 228). This portrayal of Hitler as ordinary—even less than ordinary—is effective for at least two reasons: it at once suggests that, despite his power, Hitler is ultimately a pusillanimous human being, and it also reminds the reader that seemingly normal people are capable of incredible acts of evil.

It is one of the poem's greatest weaknesses that only two lines after this description of Hitler's face as being "like any other face," and without any sort of reason for a sudden change of thought, Hitler is suddenly presented as a perverse clown, with distinguishing characteristics that ultimately set him apart from just "any other face":

⁸ Interestingly, Klein also precedes and anticipates Susan Sontag's discussion of the fascination of Fascism in his portrayal of Hitler's rhetorical skills as an orator, and Saul Friedländer's idea of a "new artistic discourse" that juxtaposes kitsch and death in his portrayal of Hitler as a clown-like figure—both of which will be discussed later in this dissertation.

The forehead villainous low, the eyes deepset—
 The pervert big eyes of the thwarted bed—
 And that mustache, the symbol of the clown
 Made emperor and playing imperial pranks. (48-51)

This depiction of Hitler runs the risk of trivializing Hitler and the Nazi atrocities if it is not read as yet another example of Klein's experiments with irony. In part, Klein is playing with an already developed and popular iconography of Hitler: "on the eve of the war he had applauded [Charlie] Chaplin's intention to treat the Fuehrer mockingly in *The Great Dictator* [1940]" (Caplan 114). Indeed, Hitler and his accomplices were often portrayed as buffoon or clown-like caricatures in short films, songs, and political cartoons released and published at the start of the war.⁹ By exposing Hitler as a clown who is evil, Klein is ultimately commenting on his banality and weaknesses—on the ridiculous physiognomy and hyperbolic personality that seem to contradict his power and persuasion. Conversely, however, Klein may be warning his reader that although Hitler may look clownish and humorous, his wrath and hate of Jewry are nothing to laugh at. One gets the sense, however, that had Klein been aware of the extent of the Holocaust while writing this poem, he might not have felt comfortable with portraying Hitler in this way.¹⁰ This is, after all, "the moustache that brought Europe down, / And rolled it flat beneath a thousand tanks" (52-53).

After further ridiculing Hitler by pointing out that his figure is far from that of the ideal Aryan that he so vehemently champions—"not blond, / Nor is he tall" (64-65)—Klein begins the

⁹ One of the best examples is Walt Disney's short film *Der Fuehrer's Face* (1943) which is readily available for viewing on YouTube. Originally titled *Donald Duck in Nutzi Land*, the film was renamed after an incredibly popular song of the same name that had been recorded in 1942 by Spike Jones and was eventually incorporated into the film. It is also notable for its echoes of Chaplin's 1936 film *Modern Times*.

¹⁰ Chaplin expresses the same sentiments in his 1964 autobiography.

task of emphasizing the documentary elements of the poem: "The dossier, then; the facts, the untampered text: / Let *this* world know him, ere he goes to the next!" (72-73). Over the next few pages, while maintaining his sneering sarcasm and belittling tone, he documents Hitler's birthplace, his father's profession, his early passion for art and failed attempts to get into art school, and his cowardly involvement in the First World War. In the eleventh section of the poem, Klein does what every good journalist should do—he refers his reader to a primary source for more information and to support his claims: "Go to *Mein Kampf* if you would know his trade, / And there learn how a people is unmade, /.../ There the rules, / (Transparent unto all, save fools)" (226-227, 230-231). The next two verse paragraphs begin with the commands to "Learn" and "Read," reminding the reader that Klein's main objective is to educate (241, 252). Even in the act of summarizing the contents of Hitler's manifesto, Klein urges his reader to further educate himself, to be wary of rhetoric, and to avoid complacency. Indeed, after commenting on Hitler's skills as an orator in the previous section of the poem, Klein turns his focus to Hitler's rhetorical skills by commenting on the "double-jointed rhetoric" that Hitler uses to turn "men's minds" (242-243).

There is a fascinating parallelism being tentatively explored here between Hitler and the poet. Indeed, traces of it have already been suggested in the pun on the word "dictate" in the first section of the poem (23). This is an excellent example of what Ron Rosenbaum, in his book *Explaining Hitler: The Search for the Origins of His Evil* (1998), calls "self-portraits in the negative" (xxv). Rosenbaum explains that "the shapes we project onto the inky Rorschach of Hitler's psyche are often cultural *self*-portraits in the negative. What we talk about when we talk about Hitler is also who we are and who we are not" (xxv). Both men have the power to persuade through rhetoric, and Klein's own project of using past literary styles and forms ironically,

throughout the poem, is nicely captured in that phrase "double-jointed." What, then, is the difference between the two men? Pollock suggests that "Hitler's power over the German people is a terrible perversion of the ideal relationship with community which is at the heart of Klein's sense of himself as a poet" (*Story of the Poet* 111). Whereas Hitler's goal is the complete extermination of the Jewish race, Klein's goal is to educate his readers—to raise them out of apathy and into acts of memory and mourning so that that very extermination cannot take place.

The poem continues with a parody of the convention of the "epic catalogue" that Milton uses to list Lucifer's accomplices in *Paradise Lost*. Klein provides a list of Hitler's "henchmen" and their positions within the Nazi party in the twelfth section of the poem (305). Goebbels, Rosenberg, Goering, and Ribbentrop are singled out as Hitler's primary assistants, but the poem also lists the names of Himmler, Heinrich, Streicher, Hoffman, Hess, and Roehm, among many other now familiar names. The goal here is to list the occupations of these men so that their roles in the persecution of the European Jews will not be forgotten. Klein attempts to bridge the distance that separates the European and Canadian Jews by bringing the names of these men into Canada. It is no longer anonymous German soldiers who are committing these atrocities, but real men with real jobs and real families. In the fifteenth and sixteenth sections of the poem, Klein exposes and criticizes the German politicians, businesses and lawmakers who either supported the Nazis or at least had the decency to ignore them: "each in his fashion, and for personal sake / Led Germany to Hitler's stake. / Yes, let it be told, let it be written down" (441-443). Klein then turns his criticism towards the Allies who ignorantly and belligerently pushed the German people to elect the Nazi party—as he has already discussed in his editorial "The German Elections"—by creating the League of Nations ("the wise Wilsonian league"), penning the Treaty of Versailles, and demanding reparations from Germany after the First World War.

Finally, before the poem takes a drastic turn in its tone and subject, and in what is unarguably the poem's most interesting section, Klein enhances the documentary element of his poem by describing the images of Nazi rallies and atrocities recorded and projected on a series of newsreels. These newsreels had begun to arrive in Canada at the time that Klein was writing this poem, and it is clear that he saw them as an ideal way to educate the Jewish Canadian masses. It should be noted, however, that it was not until the concentration camps started to be liberated in 1945 that the true magnitude of the Holocaust was captured on film. The "historic film[s]" that Klein refers to in this part of the poem presented, rather, images of the invasion of Norway, Poland, and Holland, and air raids in France and London (594). Klein uses the language of the cinema to create a sort of screenplay, celebrating film—with its use of "montage" and "closeup"—as an exciting new documentary tool to help shorten the distance between Canadian Jews and their European counterparts (611, 614).

The tone of the last three sections of *The Hitleriad* (XXV-XXVII) is radically different from that of the rest of the poem. The satire stops, the sarcasm stops, and the blame stops. It is replaced, instead, with an impassioned plea to never forget the victims of Nazi persecution and their trauma, and a restorative vision of justice served and "brotherhood" reclaimed (758). Klein repeats the argument that he has made numerous times in his editorials that the Jewish people will ultimately be recompensed for their suffering:

Himself, in His good time, the Lord of Hosts,
 The slowness of His anger moved at last,
 /.../ Will rise, will shine, will stretch forth His right hand
 And smite them down, the open impious mouth,
 The tongue blaspheming, silenced, in the dust! (688-693)

Justice will come at the hands of God, then, and in the meantime, the Jewish people need to listen to their murdered kin. In this section, we see Klein beginning to incorporate and work through the news of the gassing and burning of Jews in concentration camps, and this, more than anything else, explains the change of tone that has occurred:

Let them come forth, those witnesses who stand
 Beyond the taunt of perjury, those ghosts
 In wagons sealed in a forgotten land,
 Murdered; those phantoms the war-tidings boast,
 Those skeletons still charred with the Gestapo brand!
 Let them come forth and speak, who lost their speech
 [...] In ghetto-yard, and on the Dachau floor—

Let them accuse now, who did once in vain beseech! (702-711)

The repeated cries to "let them speak" and "speak out" that occur throughout this part of the poem suggest Klein's awareness that his desire to "let deeds unspeakable be spoken out," articulated in the Miltonic statement of purpose of the poem's opening lines, is not enough (31). As a distant bystander of the Nazi atrocities, Klein lacks the immediacy and veracity that the Nazi's victims possess. Of course, the dead cannot speak, so he hopes that it is "from [...] witnessing" that "the anger of the world will burst," and the apathetic nations will finally begin to act (727-728). And when this happens—when Man "don[s] his godliness" and "not the grim vulture of the brood / Its talons dripping blood,"—then the horror of Nazi persecution will end, and Man will be "loyal to his human brotherhood" (747, 753-754, 758).

It is unfortunate that Klein's poem was met with such poor reviews and harsh criticism when it was published in 1944. Indeed, Klein was remarkably pleased with the poem when he

finished it, and "he spoke of it proudly as one of the very best things he had ever written" (Caplan 111). He believed it would be a popular poem because of the topicality of his subject and his experimentation with the poem's formal and stylistic elements: "'I do think,' he wrote [James] Laughlin on August 4, 1944, 'That apart from poetic merit, perhaps because of poetic demerit, *The Hitleriad* has great potentialities for large-scale distribution'" (qtd. in Waddington 81). Klein believed that his experimentation—the "poetic demerit" of his work—provided him with revolutionary new ways of presenting the horrors of Nazi Germany. His eagerness and expectations of the poem proved unrealistic, however, and Klein was left disappointed by the fact that he could not find someone to publish the book. Pollock explains that "in the harsh economic climate of the Depression there was little interest in publishing books of poetry, especially modern poetry" in Canada (*Story of the Poet* 77). Klein subsequently turned to American publishers, and tried to get it printed in *Reader's Digest* and *Life*—two of the most popular magazines of the time—but was refused. The book was finally published by an American company called New Directions—a relatively small press committed to publishing experimental writing—and had a considerably smaller print run than Klein anticipated. Despite his pleading in the poem for people to listen to the voices and the stories of the Nazi's victims, Klein ultimately had a hard time getting anyone's attention.

"Where Shall I Seek You?": The Elegiac Meditation

Klein's frustration over his efforts to get *The Hitleriad* published—his failure, as he felt it, to help the voices of the victims of Nazi persecution "speak out" and be heard—is reflected in the fact the Holocaust is noticeably absent from his next major book of poetry, *The Rocking Chair and Other Poems* (1948). The poems that appear in this volume are often referred to as his

"Quebec" poems, and are well known for both their intensely detailed portraits of Québécois life, and the conspicuous absence of Jewish culture, themes, and subjects—including the Holocaust—from them. There is, indeed, something quite ironic about this almost total disappearance of Judaica from Klein's poetic work at this time: as Trehearne suggests, "the Jewish people, their language and traditions, the massive violence done to them, face an eclipse as sudden in Klein's poetry as in Europe" (*The Montreal Forties* 124). The Holocaust is never mentioned in the Quebec poems, but nevertheless "haunts his elegiac meditations on the struggle for survival of a community whose very existence is threatened by historical forces beyond his control" (Pollock, *Story of the Poet* 182-183). The ethical questions of "universalizing" the Holocaust that are explored in later chapters of this dissertation are never asked about Klein's work—particularly because the Holocaust had yet to enter into public consciousness, let alone achieve status as an allegory for universal suffering—but the substitution of the cultural trauma of the Holocaust for the cultural trauma of the Quebec Jewish population is nevertheless a remarkable feature of this collection.

In "Political Meeting," for example, "the intimate connection between the Holocaust and Klein's portrayal of Quebec is clearest" (Pollock, *Story of the Poet* 189). Camillien Houde is the "The Orator" of the poem (18), and in his opposition to Quebec's role in the war against Hitler, he becomes a symbol of the "body odour of race" (40) and antisemitism in Canada that ultimately mirrors "the kind of forces which made the Holocaust possible" (Pollock, *Story of the Poet* 189). Klein bridges the distance between Europe and Canada, and continues his project of countering Canadian ambivalence towards the Holocaust, by demonstrating that the kind of anti-Semitic attitudes that led to the Holocaust were—and are—just as present in Quebec as they are in Nazi Germany. Furthermore, because Klein's tone and attitude towards the Holocaust seem to

change so much during this period, one also gets the sense that the news about the Holocaust that was arriving much more regularly in Canada in 1944, and that was becoming significantly more graphic than it had been during the composition of *The Hitleriad*, was simply too overwhelming for Klein to process: "in that period in which the news of the Holocaust became inescapable for Klein and penetrated his mind with the utmost violence, a sudden silence about his own shattered people changed his poetry utterly" (Trehearne, *The Montreal Forties* 124-125).

For the moment, poetry seemed to have reached its limits, in Klein's mind, in terms of how successfully it could represent and convey the atrocities of the Holocaust. The difficulty surrounding the publication of *The Hitleriad*, and the subsequent, and almost immediate, outpouring of negative reviews that it was met with, caused Klein to become disenchanted about the role of the poet in society. Indeed, one of the first poems that Klein started working on after *The Hitleriad* was his famous "Portrait of the Poet as Landscape" (composed between 1944 and '45 and published in 1948), in which he laments the fact that "from our real society" the poet "has disappeared; he simply does not count" (15-16). Undoubtedly drawing on W.H. Auden's 1940 poem "In Memory of W.B. Yeats," Klein depicts the modern poet as being "incognito, lost, lacunal," and his voice as being "ignored" (28-29). It is important to note, however, that although Klein felt that his poetic depictions of the Nazi atrocities were ultimately falling on deaf ears in Canada, he did not descend into absolute silence on the subject. Indeed, he continued to see it as his duty to document the atrocities in his editorials. In the wake of *The Hitleriad*, then, there is a similar shift away from poetry and back towards journalism as occurred earlier in Klein's career. There exists, in Klein's mind at least, a sense that the Holocaust demands a more journalistic form for its truest representation—and a sense that poetry, even (especially?) experimental pseudo-documentary poetry like *The Hitleriad*, just does not have the authority to effectively

represent the facts in such a way as to motivate action. He was also becoming aware of the fact that his poetry simply did not have the same size of audience as his journalism.

Klein's 1946 poem, "Meditation Upon Survival," marks a significant change in his approach to the Holocaust: rather than attempt to document the persecution of the European Jews through the kind of pseudo-documentary style that is found in *The Hitleriad*, Klein chooses instead to provide a more lyrical account of his own emotions. There is no greater expression of Klein's feelings of guilt over the distance that separates him from the victims of the Holocaust, and the very survival that this distance ensured, than in "Meditation Upon Survival." The feelings of guilt and sadness that are expressed in the poem demonstrate that Klein not only understands the necessity of thinking about the Holocaust as a cultural trauma, but that he also sees himself as a victim. Indeed, the first lines of the poem indicate that Klein has begun to internalize the Holocaust—to make the event, and its victims—part of himself. The "unexpired six million circuits" of the dead "run plasma through [his] veins," and use his "body [as] a bed" for their "nightmares" (3, 2, 4). The distance separating Klein and his European kin is temporarily erased as they, quite literally, become one and the same, and he feels their suffering in his blood. This very process of attempting to bridge the distance between himself and the Holocaust by internalizing the suffering of the victims, however, is what, paradoxically, makes him realize that the distance is ultimately unbridgeable. His feeling of being "inspirited" by the victims simultaneously leaves him feeling "dispirited" (5). He feels cut off from the victims despite being constantly haunted by them. Subsequently, this reminder of the distance that actually *does* separate him from the victims of the Holocaust, causes him to "grow bitter" at the "false felicity" that his survival represents (8). He labels himself "the spared one," and, in one of his most striking instances of anger and despair in all of Klein's writing, he suggests that the guilt

that this title brings him leaves him "almost [...] wish[ing] / for the centigrade furnace and the cyanide flood" (9-10).

No amount of wishing can put Klein directly in the place of the victims of the Holocaust, so he "continues to live" with the guilt of his survival (11). In much the same way as he did in "In Re Solomon Warshauer," Klein depicts himself in "Meditation Upon Survival" as a

frightened, tattered, hysterical man
 run to a place of safety—the whole way run—
 whose lips, now frenzy-foamed, now delirium-dry,
 cry out the tenses of the verb to die,
 cry love, cry loss, being asked: *And yet unspilled*
your own blood? Weeps and makes
 his stuttering innocence a kind of guilt— (12-17)

Klein, the Jew in a "place of safety," had made the persecution of the European Jews the topic of his "frenzy-foamed," and "delirium-dry" words for the past decade. He has experimented with the "tenses of the verb to die," in his editorials and poetry, and he has "cr[ied] love, cr[ied] loss." But words are no replacement for experience, and his "innocence"—the very distance that separates the direct experience of the Holocaust from the secondary nature of cultural trauma—has left him feeling "a kind of guilt" at having survived while his European counterparts have not (17).

Pollock calls the beginning of the third stanza of "Meditation Upon Survival" Klein's "most explicit and disturbing statement of the metaphor of re-membering" (*Story of the Poet* 8). Punning on the word "member," Klein suggests that he has become a "severed head / which breathes, looks on, hears, thinks, weeps, and is bled / continuously with a drop by drop longing /

for its members' re-membering" (23-25). There is much going on in these lines. By calling himself a "severed head," Klein imagines himself as removed—dis-membered is an appropriate word—from the rest of Jewry. His distance in Canada has quite literally severed him from the experiences of the larger Jewish community. This is a lamentable state, and causes Klein to long for a "re-membering" (or, in this sense, a reconnection) with his Jewish heritage and culture, and with his murdered European kin. As Pollock points out, however, "these dismemberments are beyond the power of any poet, of any act of the imagination, to re-member" (*Story of the Poet* 199). One cannot re-member—or re-represent in writing, as the case may be—what one did not experience. At the same time, these lines can also be read as a reaffirmation of Klein's belief that the Jewish people, and its disparate membership across the world, will ultimately be granted peace from persecution, and a "re-membering" of its "members" will occur, in compensation for their suffering. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, these lines can be read as a reaffirmation of Klein's duty to live, and to document and testify what he knows about the Holocaust. The "severed head" continues to bear witness to the suffering of the rest of the body—it "breathes, looks on, hears, thinks," and "weeps" (23-25). Paradoxically, it is only as a result of being distanced from the experience of the event that Klein is able to begin the task of committing the trauma of the Holocaust to cultural memory—by "re-membering" the fallen "members" of his shared culture and race. This is, after all, the only thing that this particular "curio" can do (31). As "the lone survivor of an utterly annihilated people"—as he portrays himself in the final stanza—Klein is left to pick up the pieces of his fallen people and "re-member" them to the best of his ability (Pollock, *Story of the Poet* 198).

In many ways, "Meditation Upon Survival" is a condensed version of "Elegy," Klein's much longer contemplation of his status as a survivor of the Holocaust, and the guilt associated

with this status. Written in 1947, "Elegy" was first published as the "Gloss Beth" section of his 1951 novel *The Second Scroll*—a poem written by the narrator of the novel in memory of his Uncle Melech, whom he presumes has been murdered by the Nazis. It is, however, important to read this poem in its original historical context, and to consider it as an intermediary between the image of a "members' re-membering" in the form of the establishment of a Jewish state that Klein longs for in "Meditation Upon Survival," and the ultimate reality of the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 that is celebrated in *The Second Scroll*. The danger of reading it solely through *The Second Scroll*, is that we can forget that it is a poem written *prior* to the establishment of Israel. Indeed, what makes this poem different from "Meditation Upon Survival," Pollock argues, is history: "in the year or two that separates them, the establishment of a Jewish state [...] has come to seem a real possibility, and, as a result, Klein can begin to see the Holocaust as leading to something beyond itself" (*Story of the Poet* 203). The ever-deepening despair, longing, and uncertainty in the future after the Holocaust that are expressed in "Meditation" are here replaced by a glimpse of future happiness, "though he is not yet able to see the shape it will take" (200).

That Klein chose to simply title this poem "Elegy" is quite significant—the poem both upholds the conventions of traditional elegy, and, in its efforts to elegize six million victims, exposes its limitations. In keeping with Klein's experimentation with poetic forms in his other Holocaust poems, it is fitting that this poem is at once both an elegy and an anti-elegy. Like all elegies, Klein's poem describes an experience of loss and subsequent search for consolation. It does so, predominately through what Peter M. Sacks, in his book *The English Elegy: Studies in the Genre from Spenser to Yeats* (1985), calls "elegiac questioning" (21). Sacks suggests that elegiac questioning "is marked by significant use of repetition," and that this repetition mirrors

the psychological responses to trauma documented in Freud and Caruth, among others (23). The elegy, then, can be considered to be a "working through" of a traumatic experience, and the elegist, by extension, a victim of trauma. Sacks goes on to explain that

one obvious function of elegiac questioning is to set free the energy locked in grief or rage and to organize its movement in the form of a question that is not merely an expression of ignorance but a voicing of protest [...]. More significantly, when the question is addressed to someone else, the mourner succeeds in shifting his focus from the lost object or from himself and turns outward to the world. (22)

This is all at work in Klein's poem. The speaker's repeated question—"Where shall I seek you?"—is posed, at the most basic level, directly to the speaker's murdered cousin ("Elegy" 3). Unable to identify his cousin in the cloud of collective ashes of the Holocaust victims, Klein contemplates the difficulty that this will pose for his attempt to mourn his family member. The question also embodies Klein's own difficulties in attempting to re-connect with his Jewish heritage and culture in the wake of the Holocaust—how can the poet even begin to mourn the victims of the Holocaust when distance has made him feel so detached from his people?¹¹ Additionally, the repeated question also forms a sort of protest—the destruction of the Jewish victim has been so definitive that the act of mourning falters at the uncertainty of what remains to be mourned.

There is, however, one aspect of this elegiac questioning that separates Klein's poem from its predecessors. Sacks suggests that "by elegiac questions which often impugn others, the mourner may stave off that self-directed anger. He may thereby also deflect the closely related

¹¹ There is an analogy to be made here with Milton's *Lycidas*, who, lost at sea, is also missing from the ceremonies of remembrance.

element of mourning—guilt" (22). This is not at all the case in Klein's poem. Indeed, blame and guilt can be found throughout, from the guilt felt by the speaker who is unable to overcome the distance that separates him from his murdered kin, to the blame placed on the Nazis and their relentless persecution of the European Jews, as well as on the countries who refused to help the Jews and relieve their suffering. All of these targets prevent the speaker from "seek[ing]" an understanding of the Holocaust.

Sacks' book ends with a discussion of contemporary elegy and he argues that one of the conventions that is often challenged in modern elegies is the ritual of consolation. The contemporary elegist is generally quite skeptical of the possibility of consolation after a traumatic event. Klein, however, seems to be an exception to this rule—he finds consolation in the idea of a "Towered Jerusalem and Jacob's tent / Set up again," and though this new Jerusalem cannot bring back the victims of the Holocaust, it does provide Klein with hope that their suffering will not have been in vain and that it will never occur again (163-164). Finally, and perhaps most significantly for thinking of Klein as both a disseminator of information about the Holocaust in Canada, and as a poet experimenting with ways of representing the atrocities in Europe *as they happen*, Sacks suggests that, unlike earlier examples of the form, contemporary elegies tend to "have a frighteningly raw and immediate feeling, as if their speakers were fighting not just for an aesthetically acceptable form of consolation but for their own literal survival" (314). This is precisely what we find in Klein and his working through of the cultural trauma of the Holocaust, and it is precisely what makes his work so powerful.

The poem begins with both an assertion of Jewish tradition through the act of naming and a return to the theme of survivor guilt that Klein explored in "Meditation": "Named for my father's father, cousin, whose cry / Might have been my cry lost in that dark land – / Where shall

I seek you?" (1-3). The speaker longs to identify with his dead cousin, who, being named after the poet's grandfather, represents Jewish heritage through his lineage. He attempts to "seek" and "forge again the links" with his murdered kin, but ultimately finds this to be an impossible task (Trehearne, *The Montreal Forties* 127). The Holocaust has turned his people to "ash," the "flotsam of flame," and "martyr-motes" that have been scattered by the wind (4, 7). All that is left for the speaker to do is to walk "through a powder of ghosts [...] through dust / Seraphical upon the dark winds borne; /.../ Through clouds of cousinry transgress, / Maculate with the ashes that I mourn" (9-13). The figure of the poet who is "isolated, but never alone, as he is haunted by the inescapable presence of his absent people" is similar to the "curio" of the "Last Jew" that concludes Klein's "Meditation" (Pollock, *Story of the Poet* 200). The ash that is all that remains of his people surrounds him like a cloud, even as it paradoxically denies him the possibility of identifying with the dead. Standing among his "sundered cindered kin," the speaker again acknowledges the horrific and absolute destruction of his people when he again asks "where shall I seek you?" (20, 14). The usual physical markers and monuments of death are denied the victims of the Holocaust: "there's not anywhere / A tomb, a mound, a sod, a broken stick, / Marking the sepulchres of those sainted ones / The dogfaced hid in tumuli of air" (14-17). The speaker's cousin, as well as every other victim of the Holocaust, then, is paradoxically both nowhere to be found and "everywhere!" (18).

The speaker goes on to contemplate how the death of his cousin "bespeak[s]" the death of other Holocaust victims—an elegy for one man becomes an elegy for six million (20). He lists individuals, like "Miriam murdered for her hair," who "have been mocked in death by the grotesque dismemberment of their bodies" (Klein 24; Pollock, *Story of the Poet* 49). The images are graphic and they are shocking; Klein the journalist and disseminator of information about the

Holocaust in Canada is still very much at work here. From the named, he turns to the "nameless," and contemplates the "tattoo'd skin," and "gaunt skull-shaven" faces of victims and survivors (25, 27). Once again trying to connect to his people, he states that "the faces are my face!" and argues that his cousin's death has ultimately bridged the distance between Europe and Canada by making the horrors of the Holocaust a reality for Canadians: "You bring them, jot of horror, here to me, / Them, and the slow eternity of despair / That tore them, and did tear them out of time" (29, 30-32). This passage nicely demonstrates the transmission of trauma across geographical boundaries and helps us understand how Klein can be said to have been traumatized by an event that he was physically removed from: through the death of his cousin at the hands of the Holocaust, Klein has himself become a victim of the Holocaust.

The next stanza begins with the very direct and devastating phrase "a world is emptied" (44). Klein then goes on to catalogue a destruction of Jewish civilization and culture—from the synagogues that have been turned to "rubble," to the academies, "bright once with Talmud brow and musical / With song," now "silent, dark"—culminating in a lament that now there "is nothing, nothing" (48-51, 61). As Pollock explains, "the very act of imaginatively re-membering this world brings home all the more powerfully the fact that it is gone forever: where it once was, 'there is nothing, nothing.' All that remains is whispers, silence, echoes" (*Story of the Poet* 202). The buildings and monuments of Jewish culture and accomplishment have been torn down, and in their place concentration camps have been erected, "these pylons of the sinister sigh, / The well-kept chimneys daring towards the sky!" (Klein 82-83). Klein asks God to pass a "vengeful eye" over these buildings and the "manshaped loaves of sacrifice" that they represent (81, 87). He seeks justice, revenge, and compensation for the suffering of his people, and, in what Pollock calls the "hysterical" section of the poem, calls on God to punish the Nazis: "As thou didst do to

Sodom, do to them!" (202). Anticipating the macabre tones of Layton's work, the death he has in mind for the Germans is one as slow, painful, and perverted as the atrocities that they committed on his European kin.

Left helpless, abandoned, and almost completely destroyed in the wake of the Holocaust, there is nothing for the Jewish people to do but pray for the Lord's "promise and [...] pity" that "this people to its lowest brought" will be "Preserve[d]!" (149-151). The poem ends with the poet's voice emerging, as it did at the beginning of the poem, from a cloud of ashes. Speaking on behalf of both his murdered kin and the survivors of the Holocaust in Europe and the Diaspora, Klein begs his Lord to "Hear me," and to end the persecution of the Jews, to bring peace to his people, and to "renew our days" (156, 164). He imagines "Towered Jerusalem and Jacob's tent / Set up again," and champions this new Jerusalem as a symbol of Jewish unity and an anchor of Jewish faith and culture (163-164).

"Bound to Canada": *The Second Scroll*

The Second Scroll is the culmination of Klein's experimentation with hybrid literary forms for representing the Holocaust. Responding to its combination of prose, poetry, fiction, history, epistle, autobiography, Biblical commentary, and documentary journalism, Desmond Pacey called the book "a strange farrago, called a novel" (Pacey 288). Indeed, when it was first published in 1951, the book "challenged the accepted boundaries of the Canadian novel" with its "striking departure from the traditional Canadian linear narratives written in largely discursive prose with clearly defined plots and a strong sense of closure" (13). That Klein also deliberately modelled his writing style, verbal play and use of simile and metaphor after James Joyce, whose *Ulysses*, according to Norman Ravvin, "fascinated" Klein in the late 1940s and early '50s, makes

it easy to understand why this text was so revolutionary in Canada ("Countering the Concentration Camp World" 51).

The Second Scroll takes place between 1917, with the beginning of Russian pogroms against the Jewish people, and 1949, a year after the establishment of Israel. The pattern of exile, exodus, and return that shapes the novel is modelled on the history of the Jewish people outlined in the Old Testament (the "first scroll"). The novel, then, is both a revolutionary updating of the Old Testament in light of the Holocaust, and a reminder that history is ultimately cyclical in nature. Not surprisingly, the pattern of exile and redemption that is explored in the novel is also mirrored in the naming of the novel's five chapters after the books of the Old Testament; and, in the tradition of the Torah, which comprises not only the Old Testament, but commentaries on it, each chapter of Klein's novel is accompanied by a "gloss."

Just as revolutionary as its structure, however, is the book's content. Indeed, *The Second Scroll* is very much a book about distance and how it affects a bystander's response to traumatic events. At its most basic level, the book tells the story of a young Canadian Jewish poet who travels to the newly-established state of Israel in order to create an anthology of Hebrew poetry and search for his uncle, Melech Davidson, a survivor of the Holocaust. Much of the novel is made up of letters from Uncle Melech to his family in Canada, and it is through these letters, and the vicarious, second-hand experience of trauma that they represent, that the unnamed narrator learns about the persecution of Jews in Russia and Europe. In this sense, then, the book is a remarkably self-reflexive and autobiographical portrait of the Jew who is separated from the atrocities by geographic distance. It allegorizes Klein's own desire—previously expressed in his editorial and poetic works—to understand and accept his role as a vicarious witness, and his

ultimate inability to "actually feel the horror [...] to witness the Holocaust as if one were there" (Weissman 4).

"Genesis," the first chapter of *The Second Scroll*, offers two quite opposing attitudes towards Uncle Melech through the eyes of his Canadian family. As a young man, Melech was legendary for "his Talmudic exploits" and his devotion to his Jewish heritage (18). After witnessing a pogrom in Ratno, however, Melech, "the renegade," turns away from his heritage and towards Communism, alienating himself from his family and ensuring that "even the mention of that person's name" brings the narrator's father "to an oblique deliberative ominous knuckle-combing of his beard, [and] a sombre knitting of his brow" (17).

The first letter that arrives from Melech in the novel is the one detailing the pogrom at Ratno. Interestingly, Melech, like Klein himself, is a disseminator of information about the persecution of the Jewish people to Canadians. Much like Klein's early editorial work and poetry about the persecution of Jews in Europe, Melech's letter is written to inform, and to warn. The letter, then, becomes a trope for the belated arrival of information about the events in Europe to Canada. There is a further autobiographical element at work in this chapter: Klein himself was born in Ratno in 1909, and was brought to Canada as an infant the following year. Furthermore, Ravvin suggests that "news of 'a pogrom in Ratno,' where Klein was born, may well have reached his family in Montreal, as it reaches the narrator" ("Countering the Concentration Camp World" 66). Ravvin also points out that "this episode in the novel is introduced in a notably personal way, as the reader is directed to the poem entitled 'Autobiographical,' the novel's first gloss, for an account of the effect of such news on the narrator's family" (66). Similar to "Elegy," which appears as the novel's second gloss, Klein originally wrote "Autobiographical" in 1942, well before it was published in *The Second Scroll*. In the novel, Uncle Melech's reports of the

atrocities at Ratno in his letter are confirmed by "two strangers" who "had been in Ratno at the time of the pogrom" and "spoke with a great and bitter intensity" (22). In "Autobiographical," Klein writes about learning about the pogrom from "two strangers, come / Fiery from Vohynia's murderous hordes— /.../ And I too swear revenge for that pogrom" (96). In both cases, news of the atrocities arrives in Canada belatedly and second-hand.

The "Exodus" chapter of the novel, set eight years after the first chapter, begins with a celebration of Israel—that seemingly elusive goal that Klein had been hoping for and championing for years. The narrator's voice in this section, perhaps more apparently than anywhere else in the novel, echoes Klein's own:

My life was, and is, bound to the country of my father's choice, to Canada; but this intelligence [of the creation of Israel] issuing as it did, from that quarter of the globe which had ever been to me the holiest of the map's bleeding stigmata, the Palestine whose geography was as intimately known as the lines of the palm of my hand, filled me with pride, and exaltation [...] I was like one that dreamed.

(28)

Excited at the prospect of travelling to Israel to compile an anthology of Israeli poetry (Klein himself travelled to Israel in 1949 on behalf of *The Canadian Jewish Chronicle*), the narrator provides an interesting example of his inability to understand the immensity of the Holocaust and the history of Jewish suffering when he jokes, while receiving pre-travel vaccinations at a doctor's office, that "one has to suffer to earn Jerusalem [...] sacrificed I was, accordingly, against small-pox" (28-29). Beginning on the very next page—immediately after this wise-crack about the suffering of the Holocaust—Klein engages in the most sustained use of graphic Holocaust imagery in any of his works. The narrator receives a letter, addressed to his now

deceased parents, in which Uncle Melech recounts in graphic detail his survival of the Holocaust: "Today I write as one who having fled from out a burning building runs up and down the street to seek, to find, to embrace the kinsmen who were with him in that conflagration and were saved. And we were all in that burning world, even you who were separated from it by the Atlantic—that futile bucket" (30). Melech bridges the distance between Europe and Canada by suggesting that the Holocaust has affected all of Jewry—the "burning world" of the Holocaust has no boundaries. Over the next half dozen pages, the reader learns that Melech was in Kamenets when the Jewish community was annihilated. Regaining consciousness while covered in bodies in a communal grave, Melech cannot help but feel guilt over surviving while so many others have died: "even now I do not know how it happened or by what merit it was I who was chosen, out of the thousands who perished, to escape all of the strange deaths that swallowed up a generation" (30). He goes on to echo, verbatim, Klein's words in "Meditation Upon Survival":

At times I feel—so bewildered and burdened is my gratitude—that the numbered dead run through my veins their plasma, that I must live their unexpired six million circuits [...] then do I grow bitter at my false felicity—the spared one!—and would almost add to theirs my own wish for the centigrade furnace and the cyanide flood. (30)

Both Melech and the narrator, then, become surrogates for Klein's emotions despite their differing placement in terms of their distance and temporality vis-à-vis the events of the Holocaust. Finding himself the sole survivor of the massacre at Kamenets, Melech feels a sense of duty towards his fallen brethren. By giving his own voice, sense of duty, and feelings of guilt to Melech—and by breaking down the boundaries between autobiography and fiction, in much

the same way as writers of the second generation will do—Klein ultimately demonstrates his own status as a victim of the Holocaust.

The letter from Uncle Melech that appears in the second chapter was written from a refugee camp in Bari while he was waiting to depart for Israel, and the "Leviticus," "Numbers," and "Deuteronomy" chapters that follow document the narrator's attempts to track his uncle down in Bari, Rome, Casablanca, and finally Israel. By the time he reaches Israel in the final chapter, the narrator learns that he is once again too late, and that Uncle Melech has been murdered by Arab terrorists and his body burnt beyond recognition: "Across the continents I had looked and searched for my kinsman, and now that I had found him—I would not ever look upon his face. Forever would I have to bear in my mind my own conjured image of Uncle Melech" (91). No line in the book better depicts the elusiveness of the Holocaust for the Canadian Jew. Melech, in as much as he represents a direct experience of the Holocaust, constantly lies beyond the narrator's reach and understanding: "I was missing him by an arm's length" (78). Because of the distance that separates them, the narrator will never truly know his Uncle, just as Klein can never hope to truly know the Holocaust. But Uncle Melech's letters survive, and they are vivid symbols of both the importance and the limitations of secondary witnessing. After so many attempts to work through the distance that separates him from the Holocaust in his editorial and poetic works, Klein, through his narrator, has finally come to terms with the impossibility of ever completely bridging this gap.

The horror over the Nazi persecution of European Jews alongside the hope of redemption through the establishment of a Jewish state that appears in Klein's editorial and poetic works from the late 1930s onwards all cumulates in the "Gloss Gimel" that accompanies the "Leviticus" chapter. Taking the form of an excerpt from one of Melech's letters, the text is, once again, based

on a work that Klein had written before publishing *The Second Scroll*. After his own trip to Rome and Israel in 1949, Klein wrote an essay entitled "A Jew in the Sistine Chapel," in which he contemplates Michelangelo's frescoes on the roof of the Sistine Chapel in light of the Holocaust. For both Melech and Klein the images become an allegory of the Holocaust and of the subsequent creation of Israel. The scenes of the Flood and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah remind Melech of the "scattering of limbs [and] cairns of cadavers" that he witnessed firsthand in Kamenets (106). Melech, like Klein, rails against the persecutors who would "be like gods [...] in destructions. To kill wantonly, arrogantly, to determine that another's term is fulfilled—with impunity do these things and be deemed therefore gods" (107). The "leukemia of ash," the "cattle issued from [...] cattle-cars," and the "sheep to slaughter led" of Michelangelo's (aptly called "the poet" by Melech) paintings remind Melech of the "recent furnaces and holocausts" that he himself has experienced (108). If Michelangelo's Biblical images remind Melech of suffering and despair, they also remind him that the Jewish people will ultimately not be forsaken: "it is a covenant" (112). In the end, "Gloss Gimel," and the novel as a whole, offer "a moving vision of national rebirth [...] and celebration of homeland, of rituals and the adornments of faith, affirming in the wake of the Holocaust that Jewish life will in fact continue to flourish" (Ravvin, "Countering the Concentration Camp World" 77).

It is quite unfortunate, given the celebratory tone of the novel's depiction of the newly-established state of Israel, that Klein was left disappointed at the critical reception and general apathy that greeted his novel after its publication. Like *The Hitleriad*, *The Second Scroll* fell on mostly deaf ears. There are many reasons for this, but chief among them is the fact that, in Canada, and despite Klein's best efforts, the enormity of the Holocaust, and its implications for Jewish culture around the world, were still not fully understood. As Bialystok explains, in the

1950s "it was recognized that the event was a tragedy of unparalleled proportions in modern times, but Canadian Jews were removed from the calamity [...] simply put, the Holocaust was not part of their world" (7). Distance strikes again. When Canada once again opened its doors to survivors, assimilation became the primary goal of refugees, and they tended to settle in isolated communities and keep to themselves: "most survivors were not prepared to talk and most Canadian Jews were not willing to listen" (8). Ironically, but perhaps also appropriately, "after the war, Canadian Jews sought to distance themselves from their European background" (7). It was in the midst of this ambivalence towards the Holocaust—Bialystok calls it an "amnesia" that prevented the event from entering the public consciousness until the 1960s—that *The Second Scroll* appeared, and it simply could not compete for attention (6). There would be no more celebration of Israel in Klein's writing. And, as news of the Nazi atrocities continued to grow more and more terrifying, Klein ultimately found himself growing more and more silent.

* * *

Klein wrote about the Holocaust for the final time in an undelivered memorial address entitled "In Praise of the Diaspora" (1953). Bitterly contemplating what he perceives to be his own failure to properly educate Jewish Canadians about the immensity and significance of the Holocaust, and perhaps taking some of the criticism of works like *The Hitleriad* to heart, he asks

Is there anywhere a Jeremiah with a tongue so bitter and heart so clenched that his words would not issue feeble, inadequate, mocking, in the face of annihilation so widespread and wanton? Who is there who can descry, amidst the impalpable of the human spirit, the true measure of this vast anonymous loss? (464)

His conclusion is tragic, given the effort that he had previously put into documenting the Holocaust to the Canadian Jewish community as it unfolded: "there is, indeed, no voice to utter such catastrophe; wailing is vain, and clamour almost obscene" (464). Silence, then, was the only option left to Klein, and, "unable to face the conflicts within himself and the darkness of our time, he fell silent" (James 137).

CHAPTER TWO:

"Make Clear For Us Belsen": Irving Layton, Leonard Cohen, and the (R)evolution of Canadian Holocaust Literature

Irving Layton's review of Klein's *The Hitleriad*, published in the 1944 issue of *First Statement*, is absolutely brimming with praise. Layton calls the poem "an important book, a landmark in our rapidly growing literature," and he champions his mentor as "Canada's most versatile poet" (22). He writes that the poem is "extremely cunning in its versification," and applauds Klein's biting satirical characterizations of Hitler and other Nazi leaders for being "done with a hatpin in one hand and a bottle of sulphuric acid in the other" (22, 23). "In order to write about the Nazi leaders at all," Layton suggests, "one must first set about humanizing them, and this Mr. Klein does by endowing them with human characteristics, albeit of the unpleasant kinds" (24). This is surprisingly high praise for a poem that, as documented in the previous chapter, received an astonishing number of negative reviews following its publication.

More surprising, however, is the abrupt reversal in Layton's own attitudes towards Klein's representations of Hitler and the Holocaust that occurred shortly after his initial praise of *The Hitleriad*. In a review of Klein's *Poems* (1944), published less than a year after his glowing review of *The Hitleriad*, Layton retracted his praise of Klein's work by suggesting that "to know God, one must also have known Satan, [and] Klein gives no evidence of having ever been within a hundred yards of that versatile gentleman. A brisk encounter with the latter might have injected a deeper note into some of [his] verses" (26). Gone is Layton's preference for a "humaniz[ed]" depiction of Hitler and the Holocaust, and in its place is an emphasis on the need to depict the seemingly inhuman—or "Satan[ic]"—levels of evil that the Holocaust represents. Similarly, Layton is clearly pointing towards *The Hitleriad* when he suggests, in the influential "Foreword" to his 1963 collection of poetry, *Balls for a One-Armed Juggler*, that "lines hopping with half-

rhyme, slant rhyme, and internal rhyme, have become delicious archaisms" when it comes to depicting the atrocities of the Holocaust in poetry (xviii).

These statements from Layton, spanning the most prolific period of his career—yet also, surprisingly, the period in which he is the most silent about the Holocaust—provide a fascinating glimpse of the contradictory attitudes that characterize his writing and thinking about the Holocaust. They also demonstrate the intense "pressure" that Layton felt at this time to formulate and promote "an adequate response to the Holocaust"—both in his own poetry and through his criticism of the Holocaust texts of other poets (Essert 65). It says quite a bit about the popular critical perception of Layton's personality and his work that we are not surprised to find contradictory viewpoints like these in his writing. Indeed, many critics have drawn attention to what Eli Mandel calls Layton's "complex and shifting" personal and poetic "*personae*," and to what Brian Trehearne identifies as the "manifold Laytonic voices" that populate his work (E. Mandel, *Irving Layton* 17; Trehearne, "Introduction" xvii). These frequently contradictory voices most often manifest themselves in the space between Layton's poetry and his highly provocative prose work—particularly the "Prefaces" and "Forewords" to his own volumes of poetry. Quite often, Layton "prefaces" a volume of poetry with what Eli Mandel calls "high rhetoric and outrageous arguments," but the "resolutions" of these arguments "remain less evident in the poems" (*Irving Layton* 18, 54). My personal solution for dealing with the shifting, contradictory, "manifold" voices of Layton's work is to think of him as a poet "in progress"—as a writer who is constantly struggling and experimenting with ways of articulating and representing his evolving attitudes towards the function and ethics of poetry, the role of the poet in society, and the need to create new forms of poetry to depict contemporary horrors (Trehearne, "Introduction" xvii).

Nowhere is this struggle more evident than in Layton's conflicting attitudes towards a poetic aesthetics of the Holocaust.

In this chapter, I want to contextualize Layton's seemingly confused and contradictory attitudes towards the ethics and aesthetics of Holocaust representation by foregrounding the geographical and temporal distance that separated him from the atrocities in Europe, and that ultimately defined his status as vicarious witness. Doing this will provide a better understanding and appreciation of how Layton's inconsistent and constantly evolving attitudes towards the representation of the Holocaust in poetry ultimately reflect a necessary—even inevitable—part of his own personal attempts to come to terms with a traumatizing event that he did not personally experience. Indeed, when he wrote in his "Foreword" to *Balls for a One-Armed Juggler* that "there is no poet in the English-speaking world who gives me the feeling that into his lines have entered the misery and crucifixion of his age," he was being as critical of himself as he was of other poets (xviii). More importantly, it is also my intent to champion Layton as a catalyst for dramatic revolution in Canadian Holocaust poetry, and to illustrate this (r)evolution by looking not only at Layton's own experimental representations of the Holocaust, but also at how his attitudes helped to shape the poetry of his friend and colleague, Leonard Cohen.

Though Layton was quite hesitant and tentative in terms of experimenting with representations of the Holocaust in his own poetry, the importance of his "Foreword" to *Balls for a One-Armed Juggler* as a call-to-arms for Canadian poets—as a challenge to honour Theodor Adorno's injunction against poetry from within poetry itself, and to experiment with new poetic forms, and "filth[y]" and "foul" images and language, in order to "encounter head-on the realities of twentieth-century evil"—cannot be overemphasized (Essert 65; Layton xviii). Layton is a crucial bridging figure between the early Holocaust experiments of Klein and the significantly

later Holocaust texts of Cohen. His call for a shift in the aesthetics of Holocaust representation in Canada, alongside his own, tentative experiments with the kind of "filth[y]" and "foul" imagery that he champions, mark an important juncture in the (r)evolution of Canadian Holocaust literature (xviii).

Layton's Latency: The Indirect Response to the Holocaust in Layton's Early Poetry

Between his criticism of Klein's poetry in the mid-40s and the earnest beginning of his own poetic experiments with the Holocaust in the mid-60s, there exists a rather profound and confusing period of almost total silence on the subject of the Holocaust in Layton's work. Given the fact that Layton's poetry typically features "an assertive poetic persona who does not hesitate to comment on humanity and its failings," as Emily Essert puts it, "Layton's poetic silence on the Holocaust" during this period is "a loud one" (65). Indeed, as many critics have observed, not only is there a distinct lack of poetry directly addressing the Holocaust during this period, but there is also a distinct lack of Jewish content in general in Layton's work at this time. While one can only speculate about the cause of this belated response to the Holocaust on Layton's part, it is interesting to note that his almost twenty-year silence on the subject corresponds precisely to a period of latency or amnesia towards the Holocaust that was evident throughout Canada during the late 40s, the 50s, and the early 60s. As Franklin Bialystok explains in *Delayed Impact*, "the decade of the 1950s [...] was virtually devoid of a communal consciousness of the Holocaust in Canada" (6). This temporal amnesia towards the Holocaust—partly cured by the televising of the Eichmann trial in 1961—was directly caused by the geographic distance that separated Layton and the Canadian Jewish community from the events in Europe. Knowing that, as Bialystok argues, "Most Canadian Jews did not want to know what happened, and few survivors had the

courage to tell them," we can perhaps begin to understand why Layton did not write poetry explicitly about the Holocaust in its immediate wake (7).

Another factor that undoubtedly played a role in Layton's belated arrival to the Holocaust as an explicit subject in his poetry is the distance that the poet created between himself and his Jewish heritage. In *Irving Layton: A Portrait* (1985), Elspeth Cameron explains that Layton "spent a good deal of his time," in his youth, "disclaiming his Jewishness and proclaiming himself an atheist" (416). Unlike Klein, "Layton was not involved in the complex internal politics of the Jewish community" (416). The result of Layton's "reject[ion] of the dogma of orthodox Judaism," Francis Mansbridge suggests in *Irving Layton: God's Recording Angel* (1995), is that "Jewish concerns were not foregrounded in his poetry" at this time (114).

As my reading of Klein vis-à-vis the theories of Freud, Caruth, LaCapra, and Eyerman in the preceding chapter suggests, we can also think of Layton as a victim of the cultural trauma of the Holocaust. In doing so, the emphasis that trauma theory places on the way that both primary and secondary forms of trauma follow a pattern of the repression of a traumatic event, and a subsequent period of latency before an inevitable, but belated, awareness of it, can help us further justify this period of silence. Though he did not experience the traumatic event itself, Layton is a victim of the impact of the Holocaust on Jewish culture in general, and a victim of the burden that he eventually places on himself of having to speak on behalf of the murdered six million. As a distanced, vicarious witness to the Holocaust, already struggling with his relationship to his Jewish heritage, Layton was undoubtedly troubled by the ethical questions surrounding artistic representations of the Holocaust. As Bialystok puts it, if the victims of the Holocaust themselves "could not comprehend the event," "how could Jews in the 'warm safety of North America' grasp the enormity of the catastrophe?" (29).

Though I have claimed that the Holocaust is *relatively* absent from Layton's work of the late 40s, the 50s, and the early 60s, there are, nevertheless, a few important examples of the poet attempting to work the subject into his poetry during this time, suggesting that he felt, to some degree, "compelled [...] to try to write a poem about the Holocaust" (Essert 66). In her 2013 essay "Cruel Creatures: Layton's Animal Poems as a Response to the Holocaust," Essert points out "several oblique references" to the persecution of the Jews in Europe in Layton's early poetry, including "the mention of the pogroms and invalidated ration-books" in "Jewish Main Street (1945), and "the allusions to the long history of Christian persecution of Jews (the 'torquemadas stirring in the frosty veins')" in his 1951 poem "Gothic Landscape" (66).

Layton's most significant early attempt to represent the Holocaust in his work appears in his 1952 poem, "Ex-Nazi." Here, Layton "attempts to come to terms with the psychological complexities" of the Holocaust by dramatizing an encounter between the poet and his neighbor, a former Nazi (Greenstein 2). Though Essert, like many critics, considers the poem to be "incongruous and unmotivated," the poem is nevertheless important because it marks Layton's first attempt to self-reflexively examine the distance that separates him from the Holocaust (67). Beginning with the speaker playing an imaginary game of "blind man's bluff / With scarred bushes" (1-2), the poem "dramatizes" what Greenstein calls "the hide-and-seek relationship between [the speaker] and his neighbour, poet and Ex-Nazi, victim and victimizer, in order to comprehend the latter's guilt" (2). In the midst of his game, the speaker is both surprised and bothered by the arrival of an "unguessed-at pole" (read: Pole), who appears as "spooky as an overturned ambulance" (3-4). The atmosphere that the man's arrival creates is hostile at best, and he is described as "a sick anti-semite," with his veins "full of pus" (5, 8). The poem concludes with a profound image of the historical, cultural, and traumatic distance that separates the two

men: "Between us the pale dust hangs / Like particles / Of sacrificial smoke" (23-25). Hidden in the hanging dust is an unforgiveable guilt—a guilt that cannot be diminished by time. Despite the "surrealist elements [that] complicate the message," the poem is a meditation on the impossibility of forgetting and forgiveness (Essert 67).

Essert characterizes Layton's earliest attempts to incorporate the Holocaust into his poetry as "unsuccessful" due to the fact that they "seem to raise problems that they are incapable of solving directly" (68). She also suggests that it is perhaps "because of these unsuccessful attempts" that "it would be more than a decade before Layton's poetry made obvious reference to the Holocaust again" (68). It would, however, be negligent to suggest that Layton abandoned the Holocaust in the 1950s completely. Indeed, Essert argues that Layton frequently "depict[s] human violence toward animals," in his poetry of the 50s, "in order to address the moral or philosophical question posed by" the Holocaust (65). Essert's reading of poems written during this period that depict animals as innocent victims to the violent whims of humans—including "Paraclete" (1954), "the Bull Calf" (1956), "Cain" (1958), and "For Mao Tse-Tung: A Meditation on Flies and Kings" (1959)—is convincing given her placement of these poems within the context of Layton's "frequent use of metaphorical language that blurs the boundary between humans and other animals" in his early poetry (68). In these poems, Essert suggests, "animals stand in for the wounded humans whom Layton cannot yet conjure. They allow him to represent the rottenness and violence at the core of human nature, and thus suggest a kind of explanation for the Holocaust and similar atrocities" (75). In his use of animals, then, Layton—anticipating similar experiments with animal imagery/allegory in the works of Timothy Findley and Yann Martel—ultimately highlights his distance from the Holocaust, foregrounds his inability to imagine the unimaginable, and experiments with ways of depicting the sheer

violence, cruelty, and bestiality that stood at the heart of Nazi Germany's attempts to demonstrate superiority over another race by manufacturing its destruction. Layton experiments with the boundaries of what is acceptable in Holocaust poetry, and by substituting animal victims for human ones, he ultimately "demands a reconsideration of what it means to be human, because, while animals may be vicious, only the human animal attempts to deny its ferity, and only the human can be so malicious as to kill without motivation" (81).

Though Layton continued to use scenes of violence towards innocent animals as a means of expressing man's innate evil and cruelty towards other humans throughout his career, it quickly became clear to the poet that a new approach to the Holocaust was required. To that end, Layton's 1956 poem, "The Improved Binoculars," marks an important phase in the poet's ability to articulate and demonstrate both an understanding of how his own distance from the Holocaust has shaped his thinking about the event, and his need to experiment with new ways of representing it in his own work. Though not explicitly about the Holocaust, the poem's evocation of "an agent kick[ing] charred bodies," and of the petty and selfish behaviour of "the rest of the populace" towards the suffering of the innocent victims of a fire strikes a resonating chord (4, 13). The poem echoes W.H. Auden's "Musée des Beaux Arts" in the poet's voyeuristic fascination with the reactions of other people to traumatic events and the suffering of others. Despite—or, even better, in spite of—the death and destruction that surround them, "the rest of the populace," "dignitaries" and all, persist in their petty and egocentric ways, taking a keen pleasure in witnessing the suffering of the victims of a fire (13, 10). "Their mouths" are "distorted by an unusual gladness," Layton writes, as they ask "only for more light with which to see / their neighbour's destruction" (16-17). Undoubtedly embedded in this description of eager, illuminated bystanding—much as in Klein's editorial work—is a critique of the apathy,

complacency, and unwillingness to help demonstrated by the Allied nations, including Canada, in the years during and after the Holocaust.

Particularly interesting, however, is the poet's positioning quite literally above and beyond the behaviour of "the rest of the populace": he watches the scene from the top of a hill, and through a pair of binoculars (13). The poet is self-reflexive about his distance from the traumatic event, then, while also acknowledging that he, too, is captivated by the suffering that he is watching, and thus complicit in its perpetuation.¹² Nevertheless, his particular perspective is unique because it grants him the ability to witness not only the impact of the event on its immediate victims, but also the secondary reaction to this trauma. Indeed, through the poem's Audenesque focus on man's indifference towards the suffering of others, Layton ultimately offers an example of how poetry can function—post-Holocaust, post-Adorno—as cultural criticism. I have already argued that distanced representations of the Holocaust tend to be highly self-reflexive in nature, and I want to suggest that this poem marks Layton's awareness that self-reflexivity is an important, even imperative, tool—a set of "improved binoculars"—for mediating this distance (18). Not surprisingly, many of the Holocaust poems that Layton wrote after "The Improved Binoculars" feature self-reflexive elements.

Layton's Revolutionary Manifesto: The "Foreword" to *Balls for a One-Armed Juggler*:

The "Foreword" to Layton's 1963 collection of poetry, *Balls for a One-Armed Juggler*, marks a revolutionary change in Layton's attitudes towards the Holocaust. It is also one of the

¹² In "Layton as Ethical Subject: The Later Poetry and the Problem of Evil" (2013), Trehearne acknowledges that the poem "anticipates such problems of stand point" in Layton's Holocaust poems, but he reads "the persona's distant placement" as being "clearly associated with [a] disturbing *lack* of ethical engagement" on the poet's part (30). Despite his distance, then, the speaker is ultimately no better than "the rest of the populace" in his fascinated witnessing of someone else's suffering ("Improved Binoculars" 13).

best examples of how his prose often provokes with a vigour and a certainty that his poetry just does not seem to be able to match. The "Foreword" begins by warning poets that they must be able to "imagine the worst," in order to "apprehend the enormity of the filth, irrationality, and evil that washes in on us from the four corners of the earth" (xviii). He then challenges poets to overcome ineffability and silence on the subject of the Holocaust, to stop "muttering their favourite incantations before nature, death, love," and to experiment with new poetic forms, and "filth[y]" and "foul" images and language, in order to "encounter head-on the realities of twentieth-century evil" (xviii). In short, Layton asks poets to experiment until they find their own pair of "improved binoculars," and are thus better armed to provide new insight "into the absolute evil of our times" (xviii).

Layton goes on to criticize "the major poets"—Klein included—who have made feeble attempts to depict evil in their works, but who have, nevertheless, proven themselves to be little more than "children lost in a painted forest, making as much noise as they can to attract attention," but ultimately ignored (xix). He also disdains the poets who write about the Holocaust without any emotional attachment or poetic experimentation—the poets who "absent-mindedly continue bringing posies into the swept courtyards of Auschwitz and Belsen; all of them intent on proving how sensitive they are, how perceptive, how erudite and archetype-crammed" (xix). His choice of the phrase "archetype-crammed" is particularly interesting, as it reiterates Laurenz Volkmann's claim that there exists "a range of central motives" and archetypes, established in artistic representations of the Holocaust, that are so overused and "crammed," that they have essentially become cliché and lost much of their meaning: "the death trains and the journey to the camps; music as accompanying the misery; the focus on small things, often on what is left from the crematorium or the gas chambers; the shoes, ashes, and the smoke from the chimneys" (218).

"The truth is this," Layton argues, "the poets have swapped roles with entertainers and culture-peddlers" (xix). This is, of course, the exact same claim about poetry as a tired form of cultural criticism that Adorno made in "Cultural Criticism and Society." Ultimately, Layton uses his "Foreword" to articulate the need for a poet who "can make clear for us Belsen"—someone who can defamiliarize and refresh old tropes, reject "ninety-nine per cent of the world's literature of the past," and "learn again to address himself to the moral and psychological dilemmas of his time" by finding new, anti-absorptive, anti-aesthetic, and (dis)engaging ways to write about the event (xviii, xxi).

One would think that a collection of poetry that is prefaced with a question—"where is the poet who can make clear for us Belsen? (xviii)—would provide an answer through a sort of "here I am!" demonstration of the poet's own abilities to depict the Holocaust in new and innovative ways. But what makes *Balls for a One-Armed Juggler* an immensely frustrating volume is that, as Milton Wilson argues in his 1964 review of the collection, "the book doesn't sufficiently fulfil the prophecies made with such vigour in what is surely his best piece of prose since the foreword to *A Red Carpet for the Sun*" (376). Indeed, as Essert observes, *Juggler* only contains "two poems which reference the long history of Jewish persecution ('History as a Side of Ham' and 'Soren Kierkegaard'), and two poems that name sites of mass murder ('For My Friend...' and 'Le Tombeau de la Mort')" (74). The book's lack of poems explicitly about the Holocaust leaves the reader contemplating the severity of Layton's question even more: "Where is the poet who can make clear for us Belsen?" While a strong answer would come just a year later with the publication of Cohen's *Flowers for Hitler*, the first extensive and sustained collection of poems in Canada explicitly about the Holocaust and the nature of 20th century evil,

it is important to acknowledge that Layton does, indeed, take a few tentative steps of his own towards a treatment of "the misery [...] of our age" in *Balls for a One-Armed Juggler* (xviii).

According to Essert, poems like "Therapy," "Still Life," "Ambiguities of Conduct," "Butterfly on Rock," and "A Tall Man Executes a Jig," can be read as continuations of Layton's attempts to "represent the rottenness and violence at the core of human nature" through the use of animals as stand-ins for victims of the Holocaust (75). Of particular interest to Layton's self-reflexive approach to his own poetics of the Holocaust is the way that both "Still Life" and "Ambiguities of Conduct" feature speakers who are engaged in thoughtful discussions about the nature of art before they "carelessly and without motivation" turn and "kill an animal (a bird and an insect, respectively)" (76). The title of the first poem, Essert observes, "suggests the possible cruelty within art itself: that is, its capacity to still (stop) life" (76). The poem demonstrates Layton's awareness of the ethical and moral implications of artistic works that take death, suffering and human cruelty as their primary subjects, and the crushing of a linnet with a stone offers the poet an additional chance to ponder the interconnected nature of life and death, "artistic construction [and] reality" (76). In "Ambiguities of Conduct," the speaker comments on the "sizzle" (16) and "scream" (17) of a dying insect, burned by his friend's "deliberately flicked" cigarette (11). These poems can be read as responses to the Holocaust, Essert concludes, because "Layton writes animals as victims" in an attempt to demonstrate how "humans often kill [...] in a futile attempt to assert their superiority" (76-77).

Finally, it is not surprising that Layton's most explicit discussion of the Holocaust in *Balls for a One-Armed Juggler* appears in a poem that also stands as one of his most radical and (in)famous attempts to incorporate "filth[y]" and "foul" Holocaust imagery into his own work ("Foreword" xviii). As the title suggests, "Whom I Write For" is an immensely self-reflexive

poem. It is also a meditation on the ethics of Holocaust representation, and an exploration of the responsibility of the poet to address the atrocities as honestly and brutally as possible in his work. Indeed, it is in the brutal, anti-absorptive imagery of this poem that Layton comes closest to fulfilling the challenge that he sets out in the "Foreword" to *Balls for a One-Armed Juggler*.

"When reading me," Layton writes, "I want you to feel / as if I had ripped your skin off" (1-2). The poem continues in this vein for another forty-eight lines, revelling in descriptions of violent acts of destruction, and intense personal suffering, while at the same time barbing "the fraternity of lying poets"—the "toadies and trained seals"—who shy away from creating this kind of poetry (16, 17). "I write for the gassed, burnt, tortured, and humiliated everywhere," Layton acknowledges, and it is only through the use of

words fierce and jagged enough
to tear your skin like shrapnel;
Hot and searing enough to fuse
the flesh off your blackened skeleton;
Words with the sound of crunching bones or bursting eyeballs;
or a nose being smashed with a gun butt;
Words with the soft splash of intestines
falling out of your belly [...]

that Layton can begin to represent the violent suffering, degradation, and murder experienced by the victims of the Holocaust (39-46). This poem provides a vivid illustration of Sue Vice's claim that texts that are "unaccommodating to the reader may be more successful in conveying the disruption and unease that the subject demands than more seamless, aesthetically pleasing work" (161)—although the word "unaccommodating" may be a bit of an understatement for a poem in

which the speaker explicitly tries to make you "feel as if [he] had slammed / your child's head against a spike" (Layton 7-8). In this poem, Layton wants his reader to feel pain. But it is a pain that, beyond his use of violent imagery and jarring structural elements to create an anti-absorptive Holocaust text, ultimately cannot be experienced by the reader any more than Layton himself can actually experience the pain suffered by the victims of the Holocaust. This self-reflexive poem, then, not only attempts to make its readers intensely uncomfortable, but it also seeks to justify this strategy as a necessary step in the process of beginning to "apprehend the enormity of the filth, irrationality, and evil that washes in on us from the four corners of the earth" ("Foreword" xviii).

"It Would Be a Lie": Further Contradictions in Layton's Holocaust Writing

According to Cameron, Layton began to re-establish his bonds to his Jewish heritage, and to "acquire what might be called the heritage of the Holocaust," with the publication of *Balls for a One-Armed Juggler* (416). Just as Layton's relative silence about the Holocaust throughout the 1950s corresponds to a more general national silence, his growing interest in the Holocaust in the early 60s reflects—or at least parallels—an expanding awareness of the Holocaust throughout Canada. Bialystok argues that after twenty years of cultural "amnesia," a major change took place in the 1960s "so that a collective memory of the Holocaust gradually emerged" in Canada (8). The main catalyst for this change—in Canada and throughout the world—was the televising of the trial of Adolf Eichmann in 1961. Bialystok argues that the Eichmann trial "did more to raise awareness of the catastrophe in the general public than any other event up to that time," and that "the evidence was of overwhelming significance" because "most of the television viewers knew little about the specific details of the Holocaust" (105). The Eichmann trial ended two

decades of Holocaust "amnesia" and ignorance in Canada, and, as a result, the event became a topic of interest and fascination for many Canadians. Though one hesitates to go so far as to suggest that Layton's "abrupt about face" towards the Holocaust and his Jewish heritage were motivated by the potential for commercial success as a result of the nation's growing interest in the Holocaust, Cameron quite rightly suggests that this argument cannot be ignored when she observes that during this period Layton realized that "the Holocaust posed endless market possibilities" (416). Regardless of his motivations, the previously "amnesiac" audience for Layton's work—the audience that, as Bialystok has said, just simply "did not want to know" about the Holocaust—was suddenly awake and paying attention (7).

Though the kind of discrepancies and flat-out contradictions between theory (prose) and practice (poetry) that plagued Layton's early responses to the Holocaust are still very much present in his work after *Balls for a One-Armed Juggler*, there is one significant example that has yet to be addressed in the impressive body of criticism that surrounds Layton's Holocaust writing. In 1966, well into his period of experimenting with new forms and anti-absorptive methods of depicting the Holocaust, Layton created a stir in Canada, and especially in the Jewish community, by reporting in both a series of letters to the *Montreal Star*, and in an essay for *Macleans*, that, after touring Germany for a period of three weeks on a reading tour, he was prepared to announce that "the world had nothing to fear any longer from the Germans and ought to forgive them for past events" (Cameron 386). In an article entitled "Visitor to Germany Thoroughly Convinced Nation's Abhorrence of Hitlerism Sincere," published in the May 19, 1966 edition of the *Montreal Star*, Layton blames the "bamboozlement, disillusion, and remorse" of the German people, following WWI, as the main causes of Hitler's rise to power, and seems to justify the Holocaust as an inevitable product of "Germany's terrible fate to be selected by history

as an object lesson to mankind on the dangers inherent in a technological civilization" (105). "No one who has seen it can doubt for an instant the sincerity and determination of the German people to learn from the mistakes of the past," he claims, and "those who preach continuing mistrust of Germany are neither wise nor just" (105). Finally, in an article entitled "A View of Germany," from the November 19, 1966 edition of *Macleans*, Layton appropriates the language of Klein's 1932 editorial, "The German Elections," when he asserts that he does "not believe children should be made to pay for the sins of their fathers," and suggests that "Germany's message is plain—she wants to be credited for her postwar achievements, not blamed in perpetuity for the crimes of her past" (117, 118). "There are many [...] who preach continued vengeance and hatred," Layton concludes; "such a policy I regard as both wicked and foolish" (123).

The pro-German stance of these articles infuriated many of Layton's Jewish readers, particularly since the neo-Nazis of the NPD party in Germany made large gains in the election that followed Layton's return to Canada. More troubling, though, is the fact that the attitudes expressed in these documents outright contradict the attitudes towards Germans and the Holocaust that Layton had expressed in every single poem about the Holocaust that he wrote before his trip. The sinister portrayal of his neighbour in "Ex-Nazi," for example, stands in direct contrast to his patient desire to let "a disillusioned Nazi [...] unburden himself" during his trip to Germany ("Visitor to Germany" 104). A similar contradiction is found in Layton's portrayal of an elderly German woman in his 1964 poem "Das Wahre Ich."¹³ "She tells me she was a Nazi," Layton writes; "she tells me this, her mortal enemy, a Jew. / We are twenty years removed from the war" (1, 4-5). After politely accepting a biscuit from the woman, Layton comments on the

¹³ It is interesting to note that "Das Wahre Ich" is the only poem from *The Laughing Rooster* (1964) to explicitly address the Holocaust. It was published one year after the "Foreword" to *Balls for a One-Armed Juggler*.

"terrible stillness" that "holds us both / and stops our breath," and he confesses to wondering whether "at this moment [...] she see[s] my crumpled form against the wall, / blood on my still compassionate eyes and mouth" (15-16, 18-20). The poem seems to suggest that forgiveness is impossible as long as there is even the potential—even a suspicion of the potential—that history and hatred can, in fact, repeat themselves in the mind of an old woman. Indeed, Rachel Feldhay Brenner suggests that the overriding message of Layton's Holocaust poems of this period is one of "vehement hatred," and a desire to demonstrate that "even the post-war generation is capable of the same kinds of bestiality as exhibited by the generations of their parents" (*Assimilation and Assertion* 183). This is the exact opposite message of what he argues in "A View of Germany" about his German reading tour when he suggests that he does not believe that "children should be made to pay for the sins of their fathers" (116). That the title of "Das Wahre Ich" translates to "the true self," or "the real self," suggests that these poems represent a more genuine attitude towards the impossibility of forgiveness after the Holocaust than is found in his prose.

One *could*, perhaps, argue that Layton's trip to Germany was an eye-opening experience; that the attitudes he espouses in his letters to the *Montreal Star*, and in his passionate essay in *Macleans*, are, in fact, demonstrative of a new, open-minded approach to history and the Holocaust that suggests he has evolved away from the attitudes of the poems that were written before his trip. He certainly sells it this way. However, Layton's best-known Holocaust poem, "Rhine Boat Trip," published in 1976, *after* and in response to this trip to Germany, completely opposes the attitude of forgiveness that Layton promotes in these articles. Like "Ex-Nazi" and "Das Wahre Ich," "Rhine Boat Trip" suggests that regardless of the amount of time that has passed since the Holocaust, Germany can never be forgiven.

As a boat sails along the Rhine river, the poet draws the reader's attention to the picturesque German landscape and the mythological and cultural symbolism that it embodies: "the castles" (1), "the clusters of grapes / in the sloping vineyards" (4-5), and "the tireless Loreli" (8). The poet undercuts these picturesque images, though, by demonstrating how they disguise the reality of "the ghosts of Jewish mothers / looking for their ghostly children" (3-4), "the myriads of blinded eyes staring at the blinded sun" (7-8), "the crimson beards of murdered rabbis" (11-12), and "the low-wailing of the cattle cars / Moving invisibly across the land" that can be heard above the singing of the Lorelei (15-16). As Greenstein explains, "the memory of the slaughtered six million pervades" the poem, and "beauty is marred through the perspective of recent history" (4). The German landscape—the whole world, in fact—remains haunted by the Holocaust. Again, this stands in stark contrast to Layton's descriptions of his trip to Germany. In one of his letters to the *Montreal Star*, Layton writes about a different boat trip, and "the encouraging signs of change and development" that are "as much a fact of present-day Germany as the Elbe itself and the peaceful white sails I see in the sunlit afternoon" ("Visitor to Germany" 106). More surprisingly, in his *Macleans* essay, Layton states that as he travelled through Germany "the ghosts of Nazism faded and finally disappeared into the ordinary homes, and the faces of ordinary people who sometimes waved as we sped by [...] Nazism, which so long ago appeared invincible, is dead and little or nothing remains of its evil dream" ("A View of Germany" 117).

Though this idea that the ghosts of the Holocaust have disappeared from the German landscape is contradicted in "Rhine Boat Trip," it does, at first glance, appear to be supported in another poem that Layton wrote in response to his trip to Germany: "At the Belsen Memorial." When Layton claims that "it would be a lie / to say I heard screams / I heard nothing" (1-3), and

"it would be a lie / to say / emaciated ghosts / of little children / brushed against me" (18-21), he seems to be contradicting the images of the ceaselessly haunting "ghosts of Jewish mothers / looking for their ghostly children" that he writes about in "Rhine Boat Trip" (3-4). Interestingly, he also contradicts a passage in one of his letters to the *Montreal Star* in which he says that "at the Belsen Memorial the emaciated ghosts crowd around the grass-covered mounds" ("Visitor to Germany" 105). Clearly, contradiction begets contradiction in Layton's work of this period. "At the Belsen Memorial" can also be read as one of Layton's truly self-reflexive poems about his relationship to the Holocaust. His visit to the Memorial acts as a catalyst for a contemplation of the distance that separated him from the traumatic event: "It would be a lie / to say" that he heard screams, because, as a vicarious witness, he did not (1-2). The monument, in this case, becomes a symbol that both links Layton to the victims of the Holocaust, but also reminds him of his distance from their suffering. It also reminds us that all the vicarious witness can do is hint at what the Holocaust might have been like. To do anything else would "be a lie."

How do we justify or contextualize Layton's desire to forgive Germany for the Holocaust when his poems—written both before *and* after this trip—suggest that he really has no desire to do so? How do we make sense of these "manifold Laytonic voices" that push in opposite directions? (Trehearne, "Introduction" xvii). A pessimist might suggest that Layton's 1966 letters to the *Montreal Star* and his article in *Macleans* are nothing more than a diminishing poet's cry for attention. As many critics suggest, by the 1960s, Layton was very much aware that his status as one of Canada's major poets was dwindling. Indeed, Cameron suggests that Layton's downfall began with the publication of Cohen's *Flowers for Hitler* in 1964 (369). Cohen answered Layton's call-to-arms for a revolution in Holocaust poetry almost immediately, while Layton himself continued to struggle to work the Holocaust into his own work. More likely—and this is

the approach that I prefer—Layton published these letters and the article in *Macleans* to re-awaken awareness of the Holocaust in Canada. The letters are meant to provoke the reader, to help him avoid becoming one of "the blind, the deaf, and the dumb / [...] amnesiacs" that Layton laments living amongst in "To the Victims of the Holocaust" (16-17).

This is, I think, the only way to make sense of these contradictions, because nowhere in his Holocaust poetry does Layton suggest that Germany should, or could, be forgiven for the Holocaust. Indeed, in his 1969 poem "After Auschwitz"—written three years after his book tour—Layton provides one of the most clear and succinct summaries of his attitudes towards Germany. The poem begins with Layton telling his son not to "be a waffling poet," and to "let each word you write / be direct and honest / like the crack of a gun" (2-5). This is an incredibly self-reflexive passage: Layton himself is a "waffling poet" when it comes to the Holocaust, and the contradictions between his prose and poetry on the subject have ultimately prevented his own "direct and honest" message about the Holocaust from being heard. The poem concludes with a remarkably unambiguous image that puts to rest any thought that Germany can be forgiven for the Holocaust:

Despite memorial plaques
of horror and contrition
repentance, my son,
is short-lived
An automatic rifle
endures
a lifetime. (22-28)

Direct. Honest. And with absolutely no room for contradiction.

"Deliberately Ugly": Leonard Cohen's *Flowers for Hitler*

A year after Irving Layton used his "Foreword" to *Balls for a One-Armed Juggler* to call for a revolution in the representational poetics of the Holocaust, and to criticize the poets who "absent-mindedly" bring "posies into the swept courtyards of Auschwitz," Leonard Cohen published *Flowers for Hitler*—an experimental collection of po(e)sies filled with the kind of "filth[y]" and "foul" imagery and horrifying information about the Holocaust that only became available in Canada as a result of the televising of the trial of Adolf Eichmann in 1961 (xviii). While many critics correctly view the publication of *Flowers for Hitler* as an immediate response to Layton's general demand for a new poetics of the Holocaust, it is also important to note that Layton issued a much more personal challenge to Cohen in the form of a letter written in May 1962: "My style is changing," Layton writes, "I want to get Buchenwald into my poems. The poets are still acting like superannuated clergymen. It's up to you and me to change things" (*Wild Gooseberries* 154). As previously demonstrated, the few poems that Layton did write on the subject of the Holocaust are as complex and profound as they are frustratingly contradictory. Nevertheless, they cast aside Klein's rhyming couplets, and experiment with a more suitable free-verse form in an attempt "to come to terms with the psychological complexities in the aftermath of the war" (Greenstein 2). In his letter, Layton challenged Cohen to follow in his footsteps—to find a new way to write about the Holocaust—and, with *Flowers for Hitler*, Cohen replied.

Critics have not been kind to *Flowers for Hitler*. Indeed, as Ira Nadel puts it, the publication of the book was "marked by acrimonious debate, beginning with disagreements over the value of the poetry" (64). "The title and the so-called 'gas chamber' poems, works that deal with the Nazis and the Holocaust," Nadel observes, "received the most severe criticism" (120). Seemingly frustrated by its lack of aesthetic appeal, and sickened by its grotesque use of

Holocaust imagery, Stephen Scobie characterizes the poems in the book as "deliberately ugly, disjointed, clumsy, [and] surrealistic," which is typical of the reactions of most critics (44).¹⁴ Indeed, Cohen's experimentation with the kind of "filth[y]" and "foul" poetics that Layton demanded is precisely what critics seem to dislike the most about the book. "In *Flowers for Hitler*," N. David Greyson writes, "Leonard Cohen vomits on the street, and then bids us gaze at his vomitus. I acknowledge that he does vomit artistically, but with excess acidity" (1).

Cohen was far from surprised at this reaction to his work. Indeed, letters that he wrote to Jack McClelland during the book's production seem to anticipate the negative reviews that it would ultimately receive. "You will have the Hitler poems in two weeks," Cohen writes on 4 July 1963; "I forgive you in advance for rejecting them. They are not pretty and no one will give them for Christmas or even Chanuka gifts. They will speak to nobody because nobody enjoys my grotesque kind of health. I would rather have read these poems than have written them" ("Letter to Jack McClelland"). Nevertheless, Cohen could not help but emphasize the importance of this new collection: "I know this book is a masterpiece," he writes in September 1963, "[but] my sounds are too new, therefore people will say: this is derivative, this is slight, his power has failed. Jack, there has never been a book like this, prose or poetry, written in Canada" ("Letter to Jack McClelland"). Cohen's "new" and "derivative" "sounds," along with his relentless use of "ugly" imagery throughout *Flowers for Hitler*, ultimately answer the question that Layton asks in his "Foreword" to *Balls for a One-Armed Juggler* about whether there is a poet who would be willing and courageous enough to write about the Holocaust in new, anti-absorptive, and anti-

¹⁴ Numerous critics have noted that Cohen's title is a reference to Charles Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs Du Mal* (1857). By alluding to Baudelaire's title, Cohen places himself within a tradition of incorporating the "deliberately ugly" into poetry.

aesthetic ways. It is precisely because *Flowers for Hitler* is so "ugly," and so full of "excess acidity," that it is such an important text in the (r)evolution of Canadian literature (Greyson 1).

"What Did You Expect?": The Banality of Evil in *Flowers for Hitler*

Despite Scobie's claim that the poems in *Flowers for Hitler* are "disjointed" and "clumsy," they nevertheless share a thematic link that intimately connects them to the belated acknowledgement and understanding of the Holocaust in Canada (44). According to S. Lillian Kremer, the trial of Adolf Eichmann, and the subsequent intellectual debate aroused by Hannah Arendt's exploration of the banality of evil in a series of articles in *The New Yorker*, and finally in book form as *Eichmann in Jerusalem* in 1963, became "stimuli" for a "revived literary interest in the Holocaust" in North America (Kremer 576). The fact that the majority of the poems that appear in *Flowers for Hitler* were written during the time of the trial, with the book itself being published in 1964, together with Cohen's obsessive fascination with artistic representations of contemporary culture and politics, suggests that Cohen's writing was undoubtedly influenced by the Eichmann trial and by Arendt's theories.

Indeed, it is my belief that Cohen was so deeply informed by Arendt's theory of the banality of evil—a theory that challenges how we think about the "evils" of the Holocaust and its perpetrators from a distanced perspective—that it needs to be read as the central theme of *Flowers for Hitler*. Although the text may initially appear to be a random collection of obscene and surreal poems, it is, rather, an elaborate, clever, and prolonged exploration of Arendt's theory. Furthermore, that Cohen experiments with such a variety of poetic forms and images in this text is a demonstration of the need "to create new ways of looking while we are looking at

ordinary behaviour" (Katz, *Ordinary People* 4-5). Like Layton, Cohen experiments with a new, "ugly" aesthetics of the Holocaust in response to new ways of thinking about evil.

According to Susan Neiman, Arendt's theory of the banality of evil is "the twentieth century's most important philosophical contribution to the problem of evil" (271). For Arendt, Eichmann embodies

the phenomenon of evil deeds, committed on a gigantic scale, which [can]not be traced to any particularity of wickedness, pathology, or ideological conviction of the doer, whose only personal distinction was perhaps extraordinary shallowness. However monstrous the deeds were, the doer was neither monstrous nor demonic [...] it was not stupidity [that caused the deeds] but a curious, quite authentic inability to think. ("The Banality of Evil" 265)

"Charged with fifteen counts of crimes against the Jewish people, against humanity, and of war crimes," Eichmann was the "former head of Department IV-D-4 of the SD responsible for Jewish Affairs and Deportations" (Bergen 39). Throughout his trial, Eichmann persistently asserted that he had not committed any crimes, "he had only obeyed, as any law-abiding citizen must, lawful orders" (40). He was, in his own opinion and in Arendt's, a thoroughly ordinary bureaucrat. Arendt ridicules the judges who "did not believe him, because they were too good, and perhaps also conscious of the very foundations of their profession, to admit that an average, 'normal' person, neither feeble-minded nor indoctrinated nor cynical, could be perfectly incapable of telling right from wrong" (*Eichmann in Jerusalem* 26). "It was the discovery that there was nothing to discover," James Waller states, "that turned the Eichmann trial into such a shocking experience" (96).

Through Eichmann, Arendt locates evil in the ordinary man—in Everyman. In *Becoming Evil: How Ordinary People Commit Genocide and Mass Killing* (2002), James Waller demonstrates precisely how disruptive this theory was to the tradition of thinking about evil as a "product of strong passions—pride, ambition, envy or hatred," during the Enlightenment, and as growing "less out of dark passions and more from unjust social conditions," in the 19th century (98). In both cases it was assumed "that evil deeds presuppose evil intentions and evil motives, and that the degree of evil manifested in the deeds corresponds to the degree of wickedness of the motives" (R. Bernstein 219). Richard J. Bernstein points out that Immanuel Kant, in introducing his concept of radical evil, "distinguished three degrees of evil. The first is due to the *frailty* of human nature, the second to *impurity* ('mixing immoral and moral motivating causes'), and the third—the most extreme—to the *wickedness* of human nature or the human heart" (220). Kant's notion of radical evil is compatible with Arendt's banality of evil, and Arendt identifies all three degrees of evil in Eichmann—the inability to think (*frailty*), combined with the argument that he was only obeying orders and thus not responsible for his crimes (*impurity*), and a variety of evil that is inherent in all of mankind (*wickedness*).

It is worth noting that Arendt's own thinking about the nature of evil evolved as a result of the Eichmann trial. In her 1951 book *The Origin of Totalitarianism*, Arendt's central thesis is "that the evil of [Totalitarian] regimes is a peculiar phenomenon of the twentieth century, qualitatively distinct from anything that had preceded it in history, including the worst tyrannies of the past" (Allison 86). This evil was fuelled by the desire to commit evil deeds—a desire that Arendt interpreted as a unique product of modernity. Twelve years later, this thesis changed radically. In *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, the Nazi atrocities are no longer representative of an evil confined to the twentieth century, and "instead of viewing them as stemming from inhuman,

diabolical motives, Arendt now sees Eichmann's crimes [...] as essentially motiveless" (87). "By rejecting the notion of diabolical motivation," Henry E. Allison notes, "Arendt came closer to the genuinely Kantian concept of radical evil than she was in her earlier work, in which she embraced the concept, if not Kant's understanding of it. Radical evil does not refer [...] to a particularly great or deeply rooted demonic evil. It refers rather to the root of *all* moral evil, whatever its extent" (87). To qualify, and clarify, this statement, Allison concludes that "between the 'monstrous deed' (the appearance of radical evil) and the 'commonplace doer' (the banality of evil) there is no contradiction" (144).

Not surprisingly, Arendt's theory of the banality of evil was initially challenged by many critics who felt "that it diminished the significance of the Holocaust" (R. Fine 144). By locating evil in a "normal" man, Arendt offended a number of Holocaust victims who "felt there was nothing 'ordinary' about their experiences," and she was widely accused of excusing the atrocities and blaming the victims (Katz, *Ordinary People* 20). Despite these challenges, Arendt's theory became remarkably influential. Indeed, as mentioned earlier, Kremer claims that the theory is responsible "for revived [...] literary interest in the Holocaust" (576). Robert Fine shares this opinion, suggesting that "with the Eichmann trial, the wall of silence which so often surrounded victims of the Holocaust during the 1950s was increasingly broken" (144). Not only did Arendt's theory provide writers with a new way of approaching the topic of evil, but it also served as a reminder of the ubiquitous nature of evil—as a reminder "of the kind of society we have created, and what we are capable of" (Alvarez, "The Literature of the Holocaust" 25).

That Cohen was aware of Arendt's theory is easily proven. In July of 1963, while in the middle of writing and preparing *Flowers for Hitler*, Cohen wrote a letter to his sister Esther asking her for help:

Could you do me a favour? In one of your magazines, *Atlantic* or *Harpers*, there was an article on concentration camps. I don't know what month, but it was in your room when I was staying with you. In the piece there was a quote from one of the inmates, something like: "Take care that this does not happen in your homes." I'd like to have that exact quote and the speaker to use as the motto for OPIUM AND HITLER.¹⁵ ("Letter to Esther")

This letter, along with Alvarez's article "The Concentration Camps," presumably torn out of the December 1962 edition of *Atlantic Monthly*, and mailed to Cohen by his sister, appear in the Leonard Cohen archives at the University of Toronto's Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library.

The quotation that Cohen refers to in this letter, which did, in fact, become the epigraph to *Flowers for Hitler*, is from Primo Levi's 1947 text, *If This is a Man*: "If from inside the Lager, a message could have seeped out to free men, it would have been this: take care not to suffer in your own homes what is inflicted on us here" (*Flowers for Hitler* 11). Articulated well before Arendt's theories were developed, Levi's statement is a warning to the world not to let the conditions that led to the Holocaust develop at home. The implication is that the same evil that created the concentration camps can be found anywhere: only under the right historical conditions does it lead to a catastrophic event like the Holocaust, but it is always present. According to Alvarez: "the force of Primo Levi's warning is to deprive us of the easy ways out—shock and indignation. The more we know of the camps, the more they seem like a mirror thrust into our faces" ("The Concentration Camps" 72).

That Cohen first encountered both the quotation from Levi's work and Arendt's theory of the banality of evil in Alvarez's article nicely demonstrates Ron Eyerman's claim that for

¹⁵ "Opium and Hitler" was the working title of *Flowers for Hitler*.

geographically and temporally distanced witnesses, cultural trauma is often "mediated, through newspapers, radio or television" (Eyerman 62). "The Concentration Camps," then, should be read as a significant primary source for Cohen's preparation of *Flowers for Hitler*. To say that Cohen's collection is entirely inspired and shaped by Alvarez's article would be an overstatement, but to ignore the significance of it, especially considering the fact that he read it while in the process of writing *Flowers for Hitler*, is to ignore its importance as a primary source. Not only did the article provide him with the epigraph for his book, but it also played a significant role in shaping his approach to the Holocaust, and the topic of evil, in the volume.

There are two poems in particular that draw heavily on Alvarez's article on "The Concentration Camps," and that demonstrate the influence that Arendt's theories had on Cohen's thinking about the form of evil associated with the Holocaust: "All There is to Know About Adolph Eichmann"¹⁶ and "It Uses Us!" In reference to the media's depiction of Eichmann during his trial, Alvarez identifies an "anxiety" or desire "to picture Eichmann as a monster" because doing so helps us further distance his behaviour from our own:

It is easier than believing him guilty *while accepting his defence*. For if he were simply an administrator who obeyed orders and ran his corner in destruction as efficiently as he could, then his crimes could not be shrugged off as the psychopathology of a particular man or a particular moment in history. Instead, they would look like the psychopathology of every day life now. (72)

Similarly, in response to this desire to portray Eichmann as a monster, Cohen creates a blazon of banality in "All There is to Know About Adolph Eichmann" that illustrates just how "normal" the man is:

¹⁶ The misspelling of Adolf Eichmann's first name as "Adolph" is Cohen's own.

EYES:Medium

HAIR:Medium

WEIGHT:.....Medium

HEIGHT:.....Medium

DISTINGUISHING FEATURES:None

NUMBER OF FINGERS:Ten

NUMBER OF TOES:Ten

INTELLIGENCE:Medium

What did you expect?

Talons?

Oversize incisors?

Green saliva?

Madness? (1-13)

Finding a complement between form and content, Scobie praises the poem: "the flat, factual, anti-poetic arrangement of the poem reflects the prosaic nature of the real Eichmann as against the poetic extravagance of oversized incisors, green saliva, and madness" (51). Eichmann's "passport" reveals no distinguishing characteristics, and the result of this emphasis on his banality, according to Sandra Wynands, is that the poem makes the reader aware of "potential recurrence: if neither the protagonists nor the circumstances were extraordinary, the implication is that a disaster similar to the Holocaust can repeat itself at any time" (Wynands 202).

That Wynands chooses the word "passport" to describe the form of this poem is interesting. Included in Gideon Hausner's book *Justice in Jerusalem* (1966) is a copy of a fake Argentinean identity card that Eichmann, or Ricardo Klement as he was known as in Argentina,

was issued while in hiding after the war. The description of Eichmann provided by this card, just like the poem, reveals just how "medi" (medium) Eichmann really was. "What did you expect?" Cohen asks at the end of the poem, "Talons? / Oversize incisors? / Green saliva? / Madness?" (9-13). These are exactly the characteristics that Hausner confesses he expected—hoped is perhaps a better word—to find in Eichmann: "I almost felt like searching him for fangs and claws. For externally there was little to indicate his nature" (309).

Hausner's book was published in 1966, two years after *Flowers for Hitler*, so it cannot possibly be a primary source for the poem. Nevertheless, that Cohen's diction comes so close to echoing Hausner's description of Eichmann points to the desire of the larger public to see Eichmann as a monster. Indeed, Hausner's characterization of Eichmann as a monster throughout the trial was well publicized, and it was exactly these descriptions of Eichmann, further perpetuated by the media, that Arendt sought to amend when she described "the man in the glass booth built for his protection" as "medium-sized, slender, middle-aged, with receding hair, ill-fitting teeth, and nearsighted eyes" (*Eichmann in Jerusalem* 5). "A monster with 'talons' and 'oversize incisors,' or a man stricken with 'madness,' Wynands explains, "would have implied the comfort of the utterly extraordinary; a case of one in a million" (202). Instead, Cohen's poem, like Arendt's book, leaves the reader with an uncomfortable sense of the utterly banal: "the trouble with Eichmann was precisely that so many were like him, and that the many were neither perverted, nor sadistic, that they were, and still are, terribly and terrifyingly normal" (*Eichmann in Jerusalem* 276).

This emphasis on the shocking normality of evil is repeated in "It Uses Us!" where Cohen incorporates Alvarez's observation that "the more we know of the camps, the more they seem like a mirror thrust into our faces" ("The Concentration Camps" 72). After inviting the

reader to "come upon [a] heap" of burned bodies that has been "exposed to camera leer," the speaker contemplates the faces of the "leaders" who have caused this terrifying spectacle (1-2, 9). In doing so, he discovers that "our leaders' faces" are ultimately no different than his own: "In my own mirror," he explains, "their eyes beam at me: / My face is theirs, my eyes / burnt and free" (9, 12-16). Through the reflective—and self-reflexive—imagery of this poem, the speaker realizes that there is no difference between the false ideologies of "our leader's faces" and his own beaming eyes. He is as inherently evil and corrupt as they are. The ubiquitous and banal nature of evil allows Cohen to cast himself as both Nazi and Jew in this poem, both "victimizer and victim in *l'univers concentrationnaire*" (Greenstein 8).

An additional parallel between "It Uses Us!" and Alvarez's article can be seen in the way that both texts provide similar readings of the tourist phenomenon of the concentration camps. "Among the documents in glass cases, the photographs, statistics, and scale models of the gas chambers," Alvarez observes, "the instruments of torture are discretely displayed" ("The Concentration Camps" 69). When Alvarez was writing, Holocaust museum displays attempted to create an official history of the Holocaust by measuring human lives out in statistics and synecdoche: "behind vast plate-glass windows are mountains of human hair, suitcases, spectacles, artificial limbs" (69). These displays attempted to define and illustrate "evil." In doing so, however, they provided little more than false constructions loaded with political ideology.¹⁷ In "It Uses Us!" Cohen calls these ideological constructions the "museum ovens of / a war that Freedom won" (23-24). "Don't believe everything you see in museums," Cohen urges in "A Migrating Dialogue" (25). It is the "discretely displayed" instruments of torture, the hidden,

¹⁷ Holocaust memorials have changed significantly since the early 1960s. No longer designed to displace or remake memory, these memorials and museums now "invite the collaboration of the community in an act of remembrance," and their primary goal is to "reassemble, teach, and memorialize events" (J. Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust* 189, 184).

unsymbolic, elements of the concentration camps that ultimately represent the real evil of the Holocaust (Alvarez, "The Concentration Camps" 69).

Despite the direct references to the Holocaust and its perpetrators that appear in "All There is to Know About Adolph Eichmann" and "It Uses Us!," Cohen, like Layton, rarely "tackles [the] subject [of the Holocaust] head-on" in *Flowers for Hitler*, but rather resorts to "indirect routes of symbolism and surrealism" (Scobie 45). This is an important point to make before moving on to a discussion of a few of the other poems that appear in the volume. Indeed, that a book entitled *Flowers for Hitler* makes direct reference to the Holocaust only a few times has been problematic for many critics.¹⁸ Nevertheless, I think we can best understand how the singular event of the Holocaust informs the larger exploration of evil that stands at the heart of the collection by borrowing a phrase from Norman Ravvin's discussion of *Beautiful Losers* in "Writing Around the Holocaust," and thinking of the Holocaust as the collection's "ethical centre" (22). Instead of writing poems explicitly *about* the Holocaust, Cohen creates poems that are "interlaced with traces of the Holocaust as the ultimate proof of the ubiquity of evil" (Volkman 234). In doing so, he presents "a world full of evil in all its forms, from the mental to the terrifying" (Ondaatje 36). Thus, the "images of Nazi leaders and concentration camps" that the title of the volume leads readers to expect "are interwoven with the stuff of popular culture, particularly erotica and drugs" (Volkman 226). Not only does evil appear in the text in the form of Holocaust imagery, but it also manifests itself in the forms of insatiable lust ("The Hearth"), corrupt governments ("Portrait of the City Hall," "The Only Tourist in Havana"), domestic violence ("The Failure of a Secular Life"), disease ("I Wanted to Be a Doctor"), drug addiction and withdrawal ("Indictment of the Blue Hole"), trauma and nightmares, paranoia,

¹⁸ According to Volkman, "a simple arithmetical approach reveals that of 95 texts [...] merely four deal with the Nazi or Holocaust theme in an obvious manner" (227).

environmental damage, invalidity and obesity ("The New Step"), and colonialism ("To The Indian Pilgrims"). "The effect," Laurenz Volkmann explains, is "one of a universal message about the ubiquitous nature of human suffering, pain," and evil (226).

Cohen first demonstrates his strategy of interlacing "traces of the Holocaust" into his poems in order to develop the larger theme of the universal nature of evil with "A Note on the Title," a concrete poem that appears on the inside cover page of *Flowers for Hitler* (234):

A
 while ago
 this book would
 have been called
 SUNSHINE FOR NAPOLEON,
 and earlier still it
 would have been called
 WALLS FOR GENGHIS KHAN. (1-9)

By comparing Hitler to Napoleon and Genghis Khan, Cohen "implies that evil is relative, part of a historical continuum" (Greenstein 6). The shape of the poem—which I have tried to capture on this page—further illustrates this point: it is, among other things, shaped both like the civic building that houses the corrupt governments of "Portrait of a City Hall" and "Business as Usual," as well as the little church" of the poem "Folk" (5). In this poem the advantages of historical distancing can be fully appreciated, as Cohen is able to place the Holocaust in its larger historical context, and in doing so makes it clear that the depiction of evil in this volume has no temporal boundaries. *Flowers for Hitler*, then, is not as much *about* the Holocaust as it is an analysis of the human nature that produces evils like the Holocaust: "[whereas] Klein refers

specifically to Nazi crimes, Cohen seems to use these as pretexts for a more generalized probing of the evils of modern society" (6).

In "What I'm Doing Here," Cohen turns his probing of evil inwards by "making himself the sacrificial guinea pig," and revealing "the inherent evils in himself" (Ondaatje 36):

I do not know if the world has lied

I have lied

I do not know if the world has conspired against love

I have conspired against love

The atmosphere of torture is no comfort

I have tortured

[...] I refuse the universal alibi. (1-6, 14)

Cohen confesses, here, to having committed a variety of evil acts. Importantly, however, he refuses to adopt "the universal alibi" that he undoubtedly associates with Eichmann's insistence that he was only following orders when committing his own sins. Unlike Eichmann, Cohen takes full responsibility for his actions. Furthermore, his choice of words like "lied," "conspired," and "tortured" is significant, as these words can apply not only to large-scale evils like the Holocaust, but also to domesticated and commonplace evils like affairs and small white lies. Cohen's point is that we each possess these forms of evil: "each one of us has tortured, lied, killed, conspired against love. We all carry our own private Hitlers" (Ondaatje 37). Indeed, after confessing to his own evils, Cohen waits "for each of [us] to confess" our own sins (15-20, 22). He asks us to acknowledge the evil that is within us, and his confession—alongside his refusal of "the universal alibi" (14)—demands that we accept "personal responsibility for evil as the natural corollary of being human" (Djwa 96-97). Cohen's demand draws on Arendt's theory of the

banality of evil to leave the reader with the insight that the evil that takes place on a horrendous scale in events like the Holocaust is of the same source as the more private forms of evil that take place in people's homes.

While "On Hearing a Name Long Unspoken" does not make direct reference to Hitler and the Holocaust, both are implied in the poem's exploration of evil. The poem urges the reader to learn from history, contemplate the distance that separates him from the Holocaust, and acknowledge the banality of evil:

Listen to the stories
men tell of last year
that sound of other places
though they happened here. (1-4)

The poem breaks down the temporal and geographical boundaries of evil, then demands that history be listened to:

Listen to a name
so private it can burn
hear it said aloud
and learn and learn. (5-8)

If "burn" is interpreted not only as a reference to the painful effect of hearing Hitler's name, but also as a reference to the extermination camps, then this stanza becomes a plea to learn from the Holocaust, and Hitler's name is the name that is so private it can barely be spoken. When not spoken aloud (or about), the poem suggests, a name like Hitler's, and events like the Holocaust, can be damaging. To speak the name, however—to write about it in poetry as Cohen does—is to

bridge the distance between the historical event and the contemporary reader, and to encourage readers to learn from it.

Oddly, the next stanza of the poem is the only one that most critics have deemed worthy of attention. In it, Cohen compares history to a needle containing a drug that causes sleep:

History is a needle
for putting men to sleep
anointed with the poison
of all they want to keep. (9-12)

Although this is a complicated stanza to interpret, it fits nicely with the idea that the Holocaust needs to be remembered. Man's primary view of history, Cohen explains, is filled only with things "they want to keep" (12). It excludes atrocities like the Holocaust and, as a result, is poisonous. A parody of this history lesson occurs in *Beautiful Losers* as "F.'s Invocation To History in the Middle Style":

History is a Scabbie Point
For Putting Cash to sleep
Shooting up the Peanut Shit
Of all we need to keep. (201)

Here the history that people "want" to keep in the original stanza becomes a "need" as F., the narrator of Cohen's novel, describes history as a burden he cannot carry any longer. History is a paradox: exclude atrocities like the Holocaust and it becomes a poison; include the Holocaust and it becomes a burden. The message of the poem, however, is that despite the burden, blemishes on human history like the Holocaust must be acknowledged, and names like Hitler's must be spoken.

Similar to "On Hearing a Name Long Unspoken," "A Migrating Dialogue" contains one of Cohen's gestures towards the burden of history and the dangers of forgetting:

I believe with a perfect faith in all the history
 I remember, but it's getting harder and harder
 to remember much history. (44-46)

The poet can only "believe" what he "remembers": an interesting commentary on the ethics of second-hand witnessing, and a reminder that vicarious, distanced witnesses to the Holocaust had a hard time believing what they were being told about the Holocaust. Nevertheless, the consequences of forgetting are devastating:

There is a sad confetti sprinkling
 from the windows of departing trains.

I let them go. I cannot remember them. (47-49)

This poem, then, offers a self-reflexive exploration of the function of the poet in relation to an event that he did not witness firsthand. Unlike Klein, who seeks so desperately to speak on behalf of the ghosts of his murdered brethren, Cohen acknowledges that he cannot elegize them in his poetry because he "cannot remember" the victims of the Holocaust. Instead, he "let[s] them go," and experiments with new ways of representing their suffering. In a way, then, the apologetic tone of this poem ultimately justifies Cohen's use of disturbing, "ugly," and hence memorable, images in his poetry.

By far the "ugliest" poem in the collection in terms of its use of shocking imagery, "A Migrating Dialogue" examines modern society as a catalyst for evil. Here, icons of contemporary Western culture are "listed as collaborators in the Nazi Crimes" as Cohen attempts to prove that "no peculiarly German form of authoritarianism or mentality produced the Holocaust but rather

Western culture as a whole, including exponents of ostensibly 'innocent' popular culture such as children's comics" (Wynands 203):

Wipe that smirk off your face.

Captain marvel signed the whip contract.

Joe Palooka manufactured the whips.

Li'l Abner packed the whips in cases.

The Katzenjammer kids thought up experiments. (15-19)

With its suggestion that even comic strip characters are implicated in evil, this poem comes dangerously close to trivializing the horror of the Holocaust, as both Danto and Steiner warned the over-writing of the Holocaust would do. It ultimately resists this accusation, however, in the way that it uses references to popular culture in order to implicate the West in the manufacturing and propagating of banal evil.

The poem also contains one of Cohen's most disturbing uses of Holocaust imagery:

Peekaboo Miss Human Soap

It never happened.

O castles on the Rhine.

O blond SS.

Don't believe everything you see in museums. (21-25)

Here, Cohen presents a series of voices that represent a dialogue of Holocaust thinking. In the phrase "O castles on the Rhine" there is a haunting echo of Layton's "Rhine Boat Trip."

Particularly relevant, however, is the thinking that attempts to cover up the reality of the Holocaust: "It never happened" (22). By pointing to the existence of these Holocaust-denying sentiments, Cohen argues that poetry must avoid covering up and suppressing historical truth.

But what is one to make of the line "Peekaboo Miss Human Soap"? Not surprisingly, there is no single line in *Flowers for Hitler* that has received as much critical attention as this one. With this line, argues Volkmann, Cohen has positioned himself "on a thin line between the tasteless or inadequate and the shocking and unsettling" (Volkmann 233). A clearly disturbed Wynands criticizes Cohen for combining "the blunt statement of historical fact with a disrespectful way of presenting it" (205). Disrespectful or not, the line is so shocking to readers and critics, and thus so effective, because it is so blunt. It forces both the reader, and the Holocaust-denying voices of the earlier lines, to stop hiding—playing "peekaboo"—from the horrors of the Holocaust and to confront them head-on. Sandra Djwa provides the most interesting interpretation of the line when she argues that this is an example of Cohen "filtering" evil "through the comic mode" (102). "At first glance," Djwa argues, "Cohen appears to be having a nasty laugh at the expense of Jewish suffering. But on closer inspection it might be suggested that this is an attempt to come to terms with a painful experience. Through the mode of black humour it is possible to see the selection of a "'Miss Human Soap' as the fun and games of an absurd world" (103).¹⁹ Indeed, echoing Adorno's criticism of an industry of culture, Cohen's line suggests "a necessary link between the horror of the concentration camp and the bland methods of the materialist world [...] in which we all have a part" (159). Cohen supports the argument that everything, even a Miss Human Soap, is a product of humanity, and thus implicated in human evil.

¹⁹ An interesting parallel exists in the *Games for Gustav* section of Martel's *Beatrice & Virgil*.

Hitler the Sadist: Cohen's *Beautiful Losers*

Both the exploration of "the fun and games of an absurd world," and the focus on the banality of evil that Cohen initiates in *Flowers for Hitler*, are continued in his 1966 novel *Beautiful Losers* (Djwa 103). There is no better summary of the novel than Dennis Lee's introduction to the text in his book *Savage Fields: An Essay in Literature and Cosmology* (1977). "*Beautiful Losers* needs little introduction," Lee says, because "after a decade of notoriety, everyone knows it is about three spacey people in Montreal during the 1950s, and 60s [...] and everyone knows it is funny, dirty, lyrical, trendy, self-indulgent, [and] often incomprehensible" (63). The novel is one of the most controversial works in the Canadian literary canon, and it has been championed by critics—namely Linda Hutcheon—as the first Canadian postmodern novel. While all of the elements that Lee lists have been the subject of both celebration and condemnation at the hands of critics, no element of the text has undergone more scrutiny than its "dirtiness." To put it bluntly, the book is full of graphically excessive and degrading scenes of rape, anal sex, sado-masochism, and mechanical self-stimulation. Not surprisingly, it is this gratuitous sexuality that often turns readers off of the book, and although critics tend to differ in their opinions about why Cohen includes so much "filth" in his novel, they almost all agree that *Beautiful Losers* is an excessively pornographic text.

Interestingly, the structure of the novel has been compared to the structure of pornographic films. Pointing to the novel's lack of a coherent plot in his article "Pornographic Sublime: *Beautiful Losers* and Narrative Excess" (1999), Robert David Stacey argues that, like a pornographic film, Cohen's novel "does not tell a story, [rather] it presents a series of sexual acts," or what he also calls "set pieces," "without any organic relation between them" (225). That the text should be read as nothing more than a series of relatively unconnected flagrantly sexual

"set pieces" seems appropriate, considering the main character, F.'s, constant reminder to readers to "connect nothing" (20). It is one of these pornographic "set pieces" that I want to discuss in the final part of this chapter, because, in many ways, it both provides a culminating illustration of my discussion of Layton's and Cohen's increasingly excessive experimentation with "ugly" Holocaust imagery and the banality of evil in their works, and it points forward to Timothy Findley's controversial linking of fascism and desire in *The Butterfly Plague*.

Hitler's cameo appearance at the end of the novel marks the most "prolonged and startling use of the Holocaust than any appearing in [Cohen's] other writings," and it leaves most critics wondering what is to be made of this "almost cynical, at least flippant usage of the Hitler persona with all the usual references to Auschwitz and Nazi brutalities in the context of an exotic sadomasochistic encounter" (Ravvin, "Writing Around the Holocaust" 23; Volkmann 232). Hitler, a waiter at an Argentinian hotel occupied by F. and Edith, arrives at the tail end of a scene of intensely graphic lovemaking between the novel's two main characters, and announces his presence with "a professional knock on the blond door" (*Beautiful Losers* 193). He is wearing an "old raincoat and moustache, but underneath he [is] perfectly nude" (193). He notices F. and Edith's "reddened organs," and begins "to fondle them with great interest" (193). At this point, Cohen begins to incorporate grotesquely fetishistic images of the Holocaust into the passage: Hitler makes F. and Edith "kiss the whip," and after their sexual act is over, he takes them into a shower where "he lather[s] them from head to foot, proclaiming all the while the special qualities of the soap, which as you must now understand, was derived from melted human flesh" (194).²⁰ As Hitler prepares to leave, he puts on his raincoat "and spen[ds] some time before the full-

²⁰ "Peekaboo Miss Human Soap"

length mirror playing with his moustache and slanting his hair across his forehead in just the way he liked" (194).

Hitler's appearance in *Beautiful Losers* has received a great deal of critical attention, but it is very rarely connected to Cohen's exploration of the banality of evil in *Flowers for Hitler*. Lee reads Hitler's cameo appearance at the end of *Beautiful Losers* as an invocation of the "demonic realities of our era [...] de Sade and Hitler as normative men" (85). Here, without referring directly to Arendt, Lee asks the reader to interpret the "clinical, power-tripping, spoofingly pornographic, repentant, [and] lip-smacking" Hitler as an embodiment of the banality of evil (85). If we take Lee at his word, Cohen presents us with a Hitler who is, in effect, an embodiment of exactly what Danto and Katz warned that artistic representations of the Holocaust would create: a domesticated evil. Indeed, F. and Edith hardly seem surprised by Hitler's appearance at their door, or by his actions. As obsessed as he is with providing his own form of grotesque, sadomasochistic pleasure—physical for F. and Edith, voyeuristic for the reader, and all seemingly normal within the context of the novel—Hitler's existence in the text seems to be little more than a direct, barbaric reply to Adorno. Furthermore, appearing after a particularly graphic scene of lovemaking that has seen Edith ravished, and humiliated, at the hands of the "Danish Vibrator," Hitler's actions seem disturbingly "normal" within the context of the graphic violence of the rest of the novel (260). This is problematic, especially as this scene with Hitler represents the final degradation of Edith's humanity—she cannot recover and eventually commits suicide. Hitler, in the historical context of the Holocaust, may not have been a "normative" man, but decontextualized as he is here, he becomes very much an embodiment of the horrifying potential of banal forms of evil.

As troublesomely disturbing and graphic as Cohen's experimentation with the banality of evil in this scene is, it is not surprising that critics have voiced their displeasure. In "Writing Around the Holocaust: Uncovering the Ethical Centre of Beautiful Losers" (1993), Norman Ravvin warns that "there is a risk that such figurative use of the Holocaust tells us nothing about the particular event, but instead obscures and diminishes the victimization visited on the Jews of Europe by the Nazis" (28). Ravvin concludes this echo of Adorno's sentiments by stating that "Cohen leaves himself open to this kind of criticism by choosing to allude to the Holocaust almost casually, using a tone that is routinely off-handed and ennui-ridden" (28). Ravvin accuses Cohen, rightly, of exploiting Holocaust images in this passage, and is further troubled by the fact that "Cohen's method of dealing with this material is unorthodox and provocative in the extreme, as he introduces the subject without providing any explicit polemical context by which the reader might gauge his attitude toward the Nazi genocide" (29). From an aesthetic and moral point of view, then, it is the very fact that Cohen exploits images that have no other referent than the atrocities of the Holocaust, images that "mean so much," as Stacey puts it, that this passage is so disturbing (231). "Experimentation with excess" is what Ravvin calls Cohen's grotesque and surreal exploitation of these images (30). In order to represent the full significance of this passage, and to place it within the context of Cohen's depictions of the banality of evil in *Flowers for Hitler*, I would qualify Ravvin's statement by changing it to "experimentation with excessive normalcy"—experimentation with excessively disturbing imagery, yes, but also with making these disturbing images seem excessively normal, excessively banal. By demonstrating that we all have the capacity for great evil within us, *Beautiful Losers*, like *Flowers for Hitler*, ultimately invites the reader to bridge the gap between the past of the Holocaust and the evils that exist in our present society.

Alvarez suggests that if the concentration camps "were simply playgrounds for sadists who in another society would have been locked away, then they are an aberration best forgotten, for they prove only that our sickest fantasies can be acted out. The Eichmann affair has shown that they were not" ("The Concentration Camps" 69). Throughout both *Flowers for Hitler* and *Beautiful Losers*, there is an awareness that the "sickest fantasies" that lead to events like the Holocaust are to be found in everyone (69). This is troubling news for those who would rather not think of evil as something banal, inherent and commonplace. Indeed, in his 1961 poem "Lines From My Grandfather's Journal," Cohen acknowledges that "it is painful" for most people "to estimate [their] distance from the Belsen heap" (82). Through their study of evil as essentially banal, commonplace, and inherent in everyone, *Flowers for Hitler* and *Beautiful Losers* challenge readers to estimate their own distance from the Holocaust—to understand that, in our capacity for violence towards other humans, and our self-centred worldviews, we are, perhaps, closer to the evil that the Holocaust represents than our temporal, geographic, and cultural distance may lead us to think.

CHAPTER THREE:

"Beyond My Reach": Bernice Eisenstein, J.J. Steinfeld and the Burden of Second-Generation Postmemory

In her graphic novel *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* (2006), Bernice Eisenstein writes about growing up in Canada as the daughter of survivors of the Holocaust, an experience that, she discovers as an adult, has profoundly shaped her relationships, her identity, and her world view. Reflecting on the paradox of being born *after* the Holocaust, yet nevertheless possessing a personal identity that has been immeasurably shaped by the event, Eisenstein summarizes the sentiments of many writers of second-generation Holocaust literature when she reflects that "without the Holocaust I would not be who I am. It has seared and branded me with its stippled mark on my forearm and pulled me into its world, irrevocably, as its offspring. The collective memory of a generation speaks and I am bound to listen, see its horrors, and fuel its outrage" (25).

Eisenstein's text is a recent and important example of a branch of Holocaust literature that was brought to prominence with the 1979 publication of Helen Epstein's *Children of the Holocaust: Conversations with Sons and Daughters of Survivors*, a text that is often celebrated as "the Bible of the second generation" (Berger and Berger 7). In the thirty-five years that have passed since Epstein's ground-breaking collection of interviews and personal memoirs was published, second-generation Holocaust literature has become a distinctive international genre and has become the subject of increasing commercial and academic interest.

Defining the Second Generation

The term "second generation" was originally created by psychologists, sociologists, and historians to discuss the children of Jewish Holocaust survivors, and their distant—yet inherited

and intensely personal—relationship to the Holocaust. The term was first applied to literary works by Alan L. Berger, who, in 1997, published *Children of Job: American Second-Generation Witnesses to the Holocaust*, the first major survey of second-generation Holocaust writing. For Berger, second-generation texts are created out of "a desire on the part of the second-generation witness to 'make sense' of the Holocaust [...] to master an unmasterable trauma" (14-15). "Witnesses once removed" from the trauma of the Holocaust, second-generation writers are, nevertheless, "intimately connected to the Holocaust by both a physical and psychic umbilical cord" (Berger and Berger 2). The image of an umbilical cord that connects the child to the parents, and that plays such a crucial role in the shaping and formation of the child before birth, is a fascinating and useful metaphor for understanding how the Holocaust trauma of the parents can be passed on to the child. For the second generation, writing about the Holocaust ultimately means confronting "the eternal *presence of an absence*" (1). As children of survivors, the Holocaust is an inherent part of their identity—it is a constant presence despite the fact that it is, obviously, absent from their own experiences. Though one can certainly say that authors like Klein, Layton, and Cohen also confront the "presence of an absence" in their work, it is the idea of being *formed* by the traumatic experience that makes the experience of the second generation unique, and that ultimately distinguishes the trauma of those who were alive at the time that the Holocaust was taking place, from those who came after it.

Finding Berger's focus on writings created solely by the children of survivors too restrictive, Efraim Sicher greatly expanded the term "second generation" in her edited collection of critical essays, *Breaking Crystal: Writing and Memory After Auschwitz* (1998). Sicher uses "the broadest possible view" of the second generation, in order to account for the fact that "the phenomenon of the Holocaust is a nagging absence in the personal history of those who were not

there and a 'trace' in public memory" (7). For Sicher, then, one does not need to be the child of survivors to have been affected by the Holocaust—it has left a "trace" in both the private and public consciousness. It is the legacy of survival that is important in second-generation texts, regardless of whether or not the writer's family had a direct experience of the Holocaust. This broadening of the term "second generation" paved the way for a number of anthologies that updated and continued the process of second-generation canon formation begun by Berger.

Sicher's broad view of the second generation was adopted by Alan and Naomi Berger in their book *Second Generation Voices: Reflections by Children of Holocaust Survivors and Perpetrators* (2001), and, as a result, this anthology brings together texts by writers, clinicians, literary critics, and historians. Even more importantly, with the inclusion of texts by and about the children of perpetrators in this anthology, the term "second generation," which had previously only been used to talk about the children of survivors, expanded once again. Within a span of only a few years, Alan Berger's use of the term jumped from one end of the spectrum—the restrictive—to the other end—the all-inclusive.

The most recent critical survey of second-generation literature—and one of the most definitive—is Marita Grimwood's *Holocaust Literature of the Second Generation* (2007). Aligning herself with Sicher, Grimwood takes "a broad view of the second generation, in which the exact nature of this link varies from writer to writer" (3). She goes on to explain that some of these writers "have parents who were in concentration camps, while others are painfully aware of the fate of more distant family members who failed to escape. For others again, it is a more general sense of how the events of the Holocaust have shaped the consciousness of later generations and communities that forms the focus of their work" (3). This is the broadest application of the term "second generation" that has yet been put forward, and, in many ways, it

is almost too open-ended. By allowing us to apply the term to basically anyone born into the generation following the Holocaust—including what I have been calling culturally distanced, or non-Jewish, writers—Grimwood's use of the term provides a way of understanding the psychological and sociological impact of a traumatic event on anyone who comes after it, regardless of their personal connection to the event. This can provide useful insight, especially through the lens of cultural trauma theory, but the problem is that the term no longer provides a clear demarcation between those whose identities have been shaped and formed by the Holocaust experiences of their parents, and those who have no cultural connection to the Holocaust, but have, nevertheless, chosen to write about the Holocaust because they have a "general sense" of how the Holocaust has affected later generations and communities (3). One gets the sense that Grimwood is using the term as a simple demarcation between those who were direct victims of the Holocaust, and those who come after. The danger of using the term so broadly is that the works of children of survivors are conflated with the works of Jewish children whose parents were not directly affected by the Holocaust, as well as non-Jewish writers, and the unique characteristics and representational difficulties of these distinct groups are ultimately obscured. By treating Anne Michaels' *Fugitive Pieces* (1996) as a work of "second-generation" writing, for example, Grimwood is ultimately unable to do anything more than gloss over the representational and ethical challenges that Michaels explores in the book. The book *does* have a character who is a child of Holocaust survivors, but it also has a character who survived the Holocaust himself, as well as a non-Jewish artist figure who battles with the ethical difficulties of representing the Holocaust from a culturally-distanced perspective. Add to that the fact that Michaels herself is not Jewish, and one can see how categorizing this text as "second-generation" is both remarkably arbitrary and limiting.

To that end, this chapter will limit its use of the term "second generation" to texts written by children of survivors of the Holocaust. The texts discussed in this chapter stand at the intersection of two discourses that are critical to an understanding of second-generation writing. The first of these is the legacy of trauma and the psychoanalytic discourse that has grown out of clinical trauma studies. The second is rooted in literary criticism and is concerned with the formal and generic characteristics of second-generation texts. Accordingly, the order that texts are discussed in this chapter engages both discourses and emphasizes various levels of personal connection to the Holocaust. After a brief theoretical introduction that lays the groundwork for thinking about the unique characteristics of second-generation trauma, the chapter examines one of the most personal and autobiographical Canadian second-generation texts, Eisenstein's *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors*. It then considers a representative collection of the short stories of J.J. Steinfeld—stories in which the author's personal experiences and autobiography play only a minor role and give way, instead, to an exploration of a multitude of different ways that the second-generation works through and acts out in response to their inherited trauma of the Holocaust.

Acknowledging Distance

One of the most prominent aspects of second-generation texts is an overwhelming awareness of the temporal distance that separates the second generation from the traumatic experiences of the survivors and victims of the Holocaust. These writers are "marked by an unlived narrative, of carrying the trace of the Holocaust past within the present" (McGlothlin 8). The second generation suffers, then, from what Grimwood calls a feeling of "belated latency," caused not only by the trauma of the Holocaust, but also by "their physical absence and/or non-

being at the time of the trauma" (Grimwood 18). The effect that this physical absence and temporal distance has on the second generation, particularly the children of survivors, is best illustrated in Nadine Fresco's haunting metaphor of "phantom pain" (8). According to Fresco, the second generation "are like people who have had a hand amputated that they never had. It is a phantom pain, in which amnesia takes the place of memory" (Fresco 8). Elaborating on this metaphor, Erin McGlothlin explains that

just as the pains cannot be traced to their cause, the trauma of the second generation is essentially divorced from the Holocaust experience that engendered it [...] The event that has marked the second generation [...] is inaccessible, yet the mark of that experience remains and, like the phantom pain, continues to haunt its bearer. (McGlothlin 10)

It is their attempts to acknowledge, mediate, and work through this pain and distance—the pain of a distance, in part—that writers of the second generation demonstrate in their writing, and it is the very inaccessibility of the Holocaust that leads to one of the most common characteristics of second-generation writing: that it "does not represent the Holocaust so much as respond to its effects in the present" (Grimwood 3). These texts do not attempt to depict the graphic realities of the concentration camps in the same way that the writings of Irving Layton and Leonard Cohen do; rather, they are more interested in the continuing aftermath of the Holocaust for the second generation. Speaking as a second-generation survivor and writer, Eva Hoffman explains in her book *After Such Knowledge: Memory, History, and the Legacy of the Holocaust*, that "we view the events that constituted the Event from a very long distance—temporal, cultural, geographical," and it is in the best interests of second-generation writers to "acknowledge the distance at which we stand from the event," since it is from that distance that "we have to start, if

we want to further the reach of our knowledge and sympathies" (153-154, 180). Clearly, she asserts, "distance matters" (177).

From Trauma to Postmemory

It is evident that the discourse that surrounds the Holocaust writings of the second generation is unavoidably caught up in questions of temporal distance and the intergenerational transmission of memory and trauma. Not surprisingly, just as it was with Klein's geographically-distanced, culturally-traumatized status, one of the most hotly debated issues pertaining to the discussion of second-generation texts has to do with the use of the term "trauma"—a term that has been so over-used in recent years that it seems to have little meaning anymore. Indeed, many critics, like Grimwood, ask whether the term can be applied to the second generation, as it so often is in critical discourse. "Can the children, and other descendants, of Holocaust survivors be said to be traumatized?" Grimwood asks (8). If so, "what is the nature of that trauma?" (8). If not, then how can we explain the psychiatrically proven fact that "children growing up with relatives who have direct experience of, say, the Holocaust, might themselves present symptoms which are in some ways symptoms of trauma," and similar to the symptoms of their parents? (8). The viewpoint shared by the majority of critics, including Grimwood, is that "in their works, children of survivors tend to address the issue of growing up with the profound sense that their parents' experiences are inescapable and somehow their own" (8). But does this mean that members of the second generation are, themselves, traumatized by the Holocaust?

At the start of her ground-breaking book *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (1996), Cathy Caruth draws heavily on Freud's analysis of Torquato Tasso's parable of Tancred and his double wounding of Clorinda to help explain "the way in which one's own

trauma is tied up with the trauma of another" (Caruth 8). In the third section of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* Freud turns to Tasso's poem *Gerusalemme Liberata* to illustrate his theories of "traumatic neurosis" and "the compulsion to repeat—the manifestation of the power of the repressed" (Freud 19, 20). Freud is especially interested in the way that Tasso's parable demonstrates the "perpetual recurrence of the same thing," which he characterizes as "a *passive* experience, over which he has no influence, but in which he meets with a repetition of the same fatality" (22). Freud offers this summary of Tasso's parable:

Its hero, Tancred, unwittingly kills his beloved Clorinda in a duel in which she is disguised in the armour of an enemy knight. After her burial he makes his way into a strange magic forest which strikes the Crusaders' army with terror. He slashes with his sword at a tall tree; but blood streams from the cut and the voice of Clorinda, whose soul is imprisoned in the tree, is heard complaining that he has wounded his beloved once again. (22)

For Caruth, Tancred's wounding of Clorinda represents "the way that the experience of a trauma repeats itself, exactly and unremittingly, through the unknowing acts of the survivor and against his very will" (Caruth 2). Tasso's story, then, is an excellent dramatization of Freud's "compulsion to repeat" that "emerges as the unwitting re-enactment of an event that one cannot simply leave behind" (Freud 20; Caruth 2).

Caruth, however, takes the parable a step further, focusing on what she claims are the broader, "unarticulated implications" of the story (3):

For while the story of Tancred, the repeated thrusts of his unwitting sword and the suffering he recognizes through the voices he hears, represents the experience of an individual traumatized by his own past—the repetition of his own trauma as it

shapes his life—the wound that speaks is not precisely Tancred's own but the wound, the trauma, of another [...] We can also read the address of the voice here [...] as the story of the way in which one's own trauma is tied up with the trauma of another, the way in which trauma may lead, therefore, to the encounter with another, through the very possibility and surprise of listening to another's wound.

(8)

Tasso's story, then, "is not only the story of the individual and his own traumatic experience, but the ways in which trauma is induced by the perception of another's wound, by the existence of another's traumatic story" (McGlothlin 53). Insofar as the tale of Tancred and Clorinda can be read as a parable for psychoanalysis itself, and the way that exposure to primary trauma can create a secondary, distanced form of trauma, it also hints towards the role that second-generation witnesses play in the listening, recording, and working through of "the traumatized voice of another" (53).

Caruth's theories, then, suggest one way that the term "trauma" can be used to describe both those who experienced and were directly traumatized by the Holocaust, as well as those who are witnesses to their trauma—the second generation. It is imperative to emphasize, however, the crucial fact that second-generation "trauma does not consist of the Holocaust experience," but is rather "caused by being raised by a traumatized Holocaust survivor" (Van Alphen 482). The trauma of the second generation is thus not the trauma of the original event, but rather a product of the effects of a vicarious witnessing of a survivor's ongoing suffering. It is for this reason that second-generation texts tend to not be about the Holocaust itself, but rather about the psychological effects of the Holocaust on its survivors and their offspring, and on the process of trying to piece together and imaginatively re-create the Holocaust experience.

In *The Holocaust and the Postmodern* (2004), Robert Eaglestone lists a few of the most common psychological characteristics of the second generation that manifest themselves in their literary works: "the children of survivors write about their lives overshadowed by the memory of the Holocaust: the symptoms of this include [...] feelings of envy, anger, exclusion, [and] a desire for solidarity" (96). Feelings of guilt and subsequent depression are also common psychological motifs: "guilt for not being good enough. Guilt for growing up in easier circumstances. Guilt for feeling anger towards one's parents. Guilt for inflicting pain on a survivor" (Hass 41). There is, of course, also a variety of guilt—easily the most tragic—that Ellen S. Fine associates with feelings of exclusion, and calls "the guilt of nonparticipation" ("Transmission of Memory" 192). Characterized by "a sense of regret for having not been *there*," Fine's "guilt of nonparticipation" is akin to the survivor guilt that manifests itself in the later, elegiac poetry of A.M. Klein.

Furthermore, second-generation writers face the unique burden of having to understand and work through their parents' trauma and experiences before they can even begin the work of better understanding their own identity. This is complicated by an atmosphere of silence that is often said to permeate survivor households: parents are often described as being torn between a strong desire to tell their children everything, and an even stronger desire to protect their children from memories that might, in fact, expose their own traumatic suffering and vulnerability. Not surprisingly, members of the second generation also often write about being torn between "two irreconcilable desires, namely, to connect to the legacy of [their] parents' Holocaust memory and to search for a viable identity of [their] own apart from this memory" (McGlothlin 2).

No one has explored the unique characteristics of second-generation trauma in more detail than Marianne Hirsch, and her concept of "Postmemory" has been adopted by many critics

as the most effective way of thinking about how temporal distance and belated witnessing shape the experience of the second generation. "Postmemory," Hirsch explains in her article "Surviving Images: Holocaust Photographs and the Work of Postmemory" (2001), "characterizes the experiences of those who [...] have grown up dominated by the narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are displaced by the powerful stories of the previous generation, shaped by monumental traumatic events that resist understanding and integration" (12). The "post" in postmemory has been a point of contention for many critics, but it is undoubtedly rooted in Hoffman's explanation of how the Holocaust has "crucially informed [the] biographies and psyches" of the second generation, despite the fact that they did not experience the events of the Holocaust firsthand: "we did not see them, suffer through them, experience their impact directly. Our relationship to them has been defined by our 'post-ness' and by the powerful and mediated forms of knowledge that have followed from it" (25).

The term "postmemory," then, is "meant to convey its temporal and qualitative difference from survivor memory, its secondary or second-generation memory quality, its basis in displacement, its vicariousness and belatedness" (Hirsch, "Surviving Images" 9). For not only is it appropriate to speak of the presence of trauma in the second generation, it may even be within the second generation that the narrative of trauma manifests itself most fully (and can, therefore, be best understood):

If indeed one of the signs of trauma is its delayed recognition, if trauma is recognizable only through its after-effects, then it is not surprising that it is transmitted across generations. Perhaps it is only in subsequent generations that trauma can be witnessed and worked through, by those who were not there to live

it but who received its effects, belatedly, through the narratives, actions and symptoms of the previous generation. (12)

Because second-generation writers have no direct connection to the Holocaust, their literary works simply cannot be built on memories of the event. Instead, second-generation writers "re-member" the trauma of the Holocaust through "the stories, images, and behaviour among which they grew up [...]. These experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and effectively as to *seem* to constitute memories in their own right" (Hirsch, "The Generation of Postmemory" 106-107). The second generation's connection to the Holocaust is "not actually mediated by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation" (107). Children of survivors often turn to writing as an outlet for attempting to negotiate and acknowledge their temporal distance from the Holocaust, and to come to terms with their inability to know and fully remember the event. This is a central theme in Eisenstein's work and in many of Steinfeld's short stories.

For many members of the second generation, then, writing functions as a form of therapy, a way of working through the effects of an event of which they have no firsthand experience. In *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (2001), LaCapra describes second-generation writing as "a means of bearing witness to, enacting, and to some extent working over and through trauma" that has been "transmitted from intimates" (105). For second-generation writers who attempt to better understand their parents' lives in order to better understand their own, "these processes are crucial for laying ghosts to rest" (90). It is important to note, though, that working through, of course, does not mean *getting over* the Holocaust, and rarely is this more evident than in the writings of the second generation who attempt to understand events that, due to their temporal distance, are ultimately impossible for them to ever fully know.

According to Hirsch's theory, then, because they attempt to come to terms with a traumatic experience that can never be known, all works of second-generation writing are in some ways necessarily imaginative. LaCapra argues that second-generation writers engage in "a kind of virtual experience through which one puts oneself in the other's position while recognizing the difference of that position and hence not taking the other's place" (78). The writer must *imagine* the experiences of the traumatized victim, while at the same time acknowledging the distance that separates his imaginative experience from the victim's real one. The result of identifying and sympathizing with the victim of a traumatic event in this imaginative way is what LaCapra calls "empathic unsettlement" (41). This "virtual" experience of the second-generation writer allows him to come "as close as possible to the experience of traumatized victims without presuming to be identical with it" (106). There is, of course, a danger of over-identifying with the other—of failing to acknowledge the temporal distance that separates the second-generation writer from the Holocaust victim and "unsettling" oneself too much. Steinfeld explores the destructive consequences of this over-identification in his stories. The result of over-identifying is that one becomes overwhelmed and consumed by the tragic past and essentially becomes a surrogate victim as a result of a failure to acknowledge that the trauma suffered by the Holocaust victim is not, in fact, one's own. This process, which LaCapra calls "acting out," and which stands in direct contrast to working through, will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter (*Writing History, Writing Trauma* 148). Working through, then, is a process that involves being responsive to the traumatic experiences of others, being aware of temporal distance, and being self-reflexive about imaginative attempts to come to terms with trauma.

Furthermore, as will be discussed below, imaginatively working through second-generation trauma typically involves experimenting with literary forms and styles in order to find new ways to represent a unique form of trauma. As LaCapra explains, second-generation works typically "have stylistic effects or, more broadly, effects in writing which cannot be reduced to formulas or rules of method" (41). Imagination and invention, then, are frequently used by second-generation writers to compensate for the temporal distance and absence of first-hand memory that defines their connection to Holocaust survivors—to imagine the unimaginable. Thus, even when second-generation texts claim to be memoirs, biographies, autobiographies, or family histories, they are always, in some ways, "as 'constructed' as fictional narratives" (Grimwood 29).

Not surprisingly, one of the key characteristics of second-generation texts is that they are often "exiled [...] from a fixed genre" (Eaglestone, *Holocaust and the Postmodern* 98). Indeed, as is the case with the rest of the texts that this dissertation discusses, whenever distance makes direct testimony impossible, generic exploration becomes necessary. The blurring of conventional genres that second-generation works exhibit at the formal level parallels the blurring of memories, identities, and traumatic experiences that they depict. Eisenstein's *I Was a Child of the Holocaust Survivors*, for example, is at once a cartoon, graphic novel, oral history, biography, and autobiography that explores both the psychological trauma of growing up as a child of Holocaust survivors and the issues of appropriation and proper representation that face second-generation writers who attempt to narrate and record their parents' stories. Similarly, J.J. Steinfeld's short stories demonstrate Jules Melvin Bukiet's claim that even when second-generation writers claim to be writing fiction, "their pages usually bestride memoir" in their depictions of the psychological damage caused by silence and the overwhelming, and often

competing desires of the second generation to either over-identify or completely dis-identify with their Holocaust victim parents (21).

"The Inked-In Shapes of Line and Word": Bernice Eisenstein's *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors*

The cover of Bernice Eisenstein's graphic novel, *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors*, seems simple enough: a young girl, holding a doll, stands below the book's title and above the author's name. The image leads the reader to assume that the book is an autobiography: the illustration is of the author, and she is undoubtedly both the "*child*" and the "*I*" of the book's title. A closer inspection, however, reveals that the image is much more complicated: the shadow that juts out from behind Eisenstein's figure is not her own; nor is it created by a single figure, but by two: the silhouettes of Eisenstein's parents, the Holocaust survivors of the title. Thus, even before opening the book, the careful reader is made aware that while the *title* suggests that this is primarily a book about a child of Holocaust survivors, the *image* reveals that it is also, necessarily, the story of her survivor parents. The book is both autobiography and biography. Grimwood calls these texts "relational auto/biographies," a hybrid form of writing "whereby the child of survivors writes her parents' life story both within and alongside her own" (24). The seemingly simple cover offers a profound image of the second-generation experience of growing up in the shadow of survivor parents. Indeed, the cover is a beautiful illustration of Hoffman's claim, in *After Such Knowledge*, that the second generation has "inherited not experience but its shadows" (66). It is also a perfect visual metaphor for a book that juxtaposes evocative text and haunting illustrations, combines multiple literary genres, and blurs temporal boundaries in its examination of the way distant survivor memories continue to exert a profound influence on the present.

There is no doubt that Eisenstein's book is heavily influenced by American cartoonist Art Spiegelman's celebrated graphic novel *Maus: A Survivor's Tale*.²¹ Both books tell the story of a child of survivors who struggles to come to terms with the traumatic experiences of his/her parents and the effects of having grown up in a survivor household that was dominated by silence and secrecy. Both texts are narrated from the perspective of an adult, and both Artie and Eisenstein (who function both as narrators and characters within the texts) become preoccupied with the need to work through their parents' stories, by recording and rendering them in art, in order to understand how the Holocaust has shaped their own lives and identities.

Furthermore, both *Maus* and *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* resist generic classification, and, as a result, the narrative voice within each book is multifaceted. LaCapra's description of *Maus*, in his book *History and Memory After Auschwitz*, can be easily applied to its Canadian counterpart: like Spiegelman, Eisenstein plays the roles of "artist, cartoonist, novelist, historian, biographer, autobiographer, ethnographer, secondary witness, memory-worker, modernist, post-modernist, interviewer, and interviewee" in her book, and the text itself is a hybrid of "documentary art, pictorial literature, novelized comic or cartoon, graphic novel, oral history, biography, autobiography, ethnography, vehicle for testimony, and medium for memory-work" (145). Also, like *Maus*, Eisenstein's book eschews a linear narrative in favour of a more organic structure. The text is organized around memories and anecdotes rather than a traditional narrative structure. The book's images often function independently of the text—rather than simply illustrating it. The overall effect is one of a stream-of-consciousness mirroring of the internal psychological process of thinking, remembering, and imagining. Words serve as catalysts for images, and images act as starting points for memories.

²¹ Originally published in two parts, "My Father Bleeds History" (1986), and "And Here My Troubles Began" (1991), Spiegelman's text is now most often sold as a single volume that combines both parts.

Perhaps the most important element that Eisenstein's book shares with *Maus* is its multiple levels of narration. Indeed, *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* operates on at least three different narrative levels, and the weaving together of these multiple strands into a single narrative parallels the second-generation process of weaving together the strands of traumatic memories and fragmentary anecdotes that Eisenstein receives from her parents. The first, and most important, narrative level is the autobiographical, and it corresponds to Eisenstein's primary desire to explore her relationship to her parents, understand the psychological effects of growing up in a survivor household, trace the intergenerational transmission of trauma and memories, and come to terms with the role that the Holocaust has played in the shaping of her own identity. The second level—the biographical—consists of the results of Eisenstein's attempts to piece together the shards of her parents' memories. Through the use of interviews and quotations, and the necessary process of what Hirsch calls "imaginative investment, projection, and creation," Eisenstein narrates what little she can of her parents' Holocaust experience ("Surviving Images" 107). This level is intimately connected to the first level because without knowing what the Holocaust has done to her parents, Eisenstein cannot hope to understand what it has done to her. Finally, the third level of narration struggles self-reflexively with the other two levels, and calls into question the various processes of imagining, reproducing and representing that working through and narrating her parents' stories necessitates. At this level, the text stresses its own textuality, and is very self-reflexive about both its own creation and its function as a medium for working through the various levels of trauma associated with the Holocaust.

"Without the Holocaust, I am lost in memory" states a young Eisenstein, on the first page. She is drawn perched atop a mound of Yiddish words, and posing in the contemplative style of Rodin's "The Thinker" (11). Indeed, memory is the first major theme that the book explores. The

memories that Eisenstein examines in the book, however, are often not her own; rather, they are memories that have been passed down to her from her parents—a few precious fragments of Holocaust experience that have escaped the overwhelming silence that dominates survivor households. Indeed, it is this silence—which is the product of both a desire on the part of the parents' to avoid having to relive, recount, and repeat the trauma of the Holocaust, alongside the urge to protect their children from the horrors—that ultimately creates and reinforces the gap of Holocaust knowledge and understanding between parent and child—a distance between generations.

Hearing about the Holocaust only through fragments of her parents' conversations with survivor friends, Eisenstein quickly learns that the Holocaust is not something to be talked about in her household: "from early on, I knew the past was something not to be ventured into" (36). Furthermore, Eisenstein admits that when she *did* try to ask her parents about the Holocaust, the obvious emotional trauma that it produced in them left her feeling both guilty and all the more curious: "I had learned from the handful of times I had asked. My father could only begin to answer with a few willing words and then stop. He would cry. Sitting in silence beside him, I did not want to make him go further. I was left to find the pieces of his past, led by the wish to have more" (36). This desire "to have more" of the Holocaust, to learn about it and understand why it upsets her father so much, turns into a full-blown obsession for Eisenstein—an addiction to what she comically calls "H."

If history is a drug—as Cohen suggests—"H" becomes Eisenstein's drug of choice. The young Eisenstein has been led by her parents' snippets of memory into "an opium den," where she has innocently "been given [her] first taste for free" (20). "I have only just glimpsed its power," she continues, "scanning the trail of needle marks on the left forearms of each person in

the room" (20). The metaphorical and imagined quality of the needle marks that Eisenstein associates with her own injections of Holocaust awareness ("H") becomes a symbol of the distance that separates her from the actual events of the Holocaust as they are conflated with the all-too-real needle marks of Holocaust experience—the concentration camp identification numbers that were tattooed onto the left forearms of Holocaust victims. Her parents' silence, and their attempt to protect her from knowledge of their trauma and suffering, have caused Eisenstein to literally crave information about the Holocaust. "My parents don't even realize that they are drug dealers," Eisenstein argues, because "they could never imagine the kind of high H gives" (20). Here, again, Eisenstein's attachment to the Holocaust is perceived in purely metaphorical terms. Because she lacks both the immediate physical and traumatic connections that constitute her parents' relationship to the Holocaust—because she is temporally removed from the event itself—Eisenstein's belated exposure to the Holocaust is capable of producing a "high" that has its roots in her excitement over the fact that, as she learns more and more about the Holocaust—as she keeps injecting herself with "H"—she is also able to begin the process of piecing together the various fragments of her parents' (and her own) stories.

Eisenstein's truncation of the word "Holocaust" down to simply the letter "H" provides a fascinating example of the distance that characterizes her relationship to the event—her "post-ness," to evoke Hoffman's term (25). Because she has no direct experience of the event, or of her parents' personal trauma, she can only imagine what the Holocaust was like. Through metaphor, knowledge of the Holocaust, and its effects on her parents, becomes a drug—"H"—something desirable, something addictive, but also something quite harmful in the way that it will only ever provide a partial, fleeting understanding of the whole. Indeed, by shortening the name of the

event—the Holocaust—down to one letter—H—Eisenstein provides a visual metaphor for her own truncated, fragmented, and partial knowledge of the event.

This use of metaphor to talk about the Holocaust extends throughout Eisenstein's book—a constant reminder to the reader that an outsider can never fully know the Holocaust, but must settle instead for an occasional hit of "H." One of the most profound metaphors that Eisenstein uses to capture the preciousness of the few fragments of her parents' Holocaust experiences that have been shared with her is that of a rare piece of jewellery. Holocaust memories, she suggests, are like a golden ring that is passed down through the generations—they are rare, precious, fleeting, and always at risk of being lost. It is certainly no coincidence, then, that the first Holocaust memory that Eisenstein claims was passed down to her from her mother centers around a real golden ring—a ring that ultimately binds Eisenstein and her parents together, despite the distance that characterizes their individual relationships to the Holocaust. Eisenstein explains that when her mother was in Birkenau, she

would be marched daily with other female prisoners to a section of the camp named after a country for the abundance it held. For a short while, my mother worked there, in "Canada," in one of the many storehouses. It was a place where the confiscated possessions of Jews were sorted [...] inmates became archaeologists, cataloguing the remnants of their dying culture. (14)

Surprisingly, the first memory of the concentration camps that Eisenstein's mother shares is a relatively happy one. In his book *Imagining the Holocaust* (1999), Daniel R. Schwarz explains that the phrase "Canada" was used to designate "well-being in camp [...] specifically for the privileged few who unloaded the transports of people heading for the gas chambers and thus [could] take some of the prisoner's possessions" (131). Eisenstein prefers the view that the people

working in "Canada" were "privileged" not because they could steal the possessions of others, but because they were preserving the artifacts of a vanishing Jewish culture. Of course, by being put to work, these women were also "privileged" because they were spared the gas chambers, and they thus came to think of "Canada" as a place of safety and asylum.²² Her mother confesses, however, to putting on a confiscated coat to keep warm while working, finding a golden ring concealed in one of its pockets, and then hiding that ring in her own shawl and stealing it out of "Canada." Shortly after Liberation, Eisenstein's mother presented the ring to her father, and, after her father's death, the ring was then presented to Eisenstein: "so, from a stranger to my mother, to my father, as her gift to him, then to me, I wear the ring as a bittersweet inheritance" (16).

For the Eisenstein family, the ring provides a connection stolen out of the disconnection of the Holocaust. Like her mother's memories, the ring holds, for Eisenstein, "all that I have come from," and, after her father's death, she realizes that "the ring that I wear [...] replac[es] [his] absence with memory" (16). The ring, then, functions in the book as a symbol of second-generation postmemory—of inherited, even stolen memory—and as a metaphor for the process of handing down Holocaust memories between generations. It also symbolizes the bonds, both physical and mental, that join the lives and identities of Holocaust survivors and their children.

Because the memories of the Holocaust that come from her parents are so rare and fragmentary, Eisenstein turns to additional secondary sources in her attempts to learn more about the Holocaust. In fact, the process of supplementing her parents' memories with exterior sources of information—of, paradoxically, turning away from the parents in order to better understand their experiences—is a common experience for members of the second generation. On two facing pages of her book, Eisenstein uses a combination of words and images to demonstrate the

²² There is, of course, great irony in this image of "Canada" as a desirable place of sanctuary considering Canada's anti-Jewish immigration policies during the war.

particular importance that books have had in shaping her knowledge of the Holocaust. The prose on the right hand page opens with the sentence "there were no books or paintings lining the rooms in the home where I grew up" (88). The image on the left-hand page, though, fills the void of these absent books retrospectively by supplying an ideal inventory of reading material, including Primo Levi's *The Drowned and the Saved* (1986), Elie Wiesel's *Night* (1960), Melvin Jules Bukiet's *Nothing Makes You Free* (2002), and Eva Hoffman's *After Such Knowledge* (2004). Because information about the Holocaust is practically non-existent in her household, Eisenstein seeks out information about the event from outside sources, and she soon discovers that there is "no end to the dealers" she can find "for just one more hit," once again evoking the metaphor of the Holocaust as a drug. She finds her hit of "H" by going "to the cinema, to the library," and "in reels of film, along with printed pages from books" (20). They are, however, only more fragments of the Holocaust experience—more pieces of the ultimately unbuildable puzzle of her parents' traumatic experiences. Once again, the drug "H" becomes a way of highlighting the second generation's distance from the Holocaust as well as the process of postmemorial re-creation: Eisenstein's addiction to learning more about her parents and their experience of the Holocaust causes her to turn to historical documents, other survivors' testimonies, and works of fiction and film in order to supplement the few memories that have been passed down to her by her parents. It is only with the help of these alternative supplementary narratives that Eisenstein can begin the process of imagining what her parents' experiences of the Holocaust might have been like, but because these are secondary narratives, the puzzle of her parents' lives will forever be incomplete.

Eisenstein's parents, who have tried to protect their children (and themselves, presumably) from the horrors of the Holocaust by repressing their own stories, have a hard time

understanding her addiction. Visibly upset after having watched the 1982 film adaptation of William Styron's controversial psychosexual novel *Sophie's Choice* (1979), Eisenstein visits her father who, noticing the effect that the film has had on her, cannot understand why she would want to expose herself to the Holocaust in this way: "why would you want to see something that did this to you?" (21). In a way, Eisenstein's father's question demonstrates one of his own reasons for not discussing his Holocaust experiences in great detail with his daughter: like any addictive drug, the high that "H" provides is unequal to the harm that it can cause. Having tried to suppress the Holocaust, to bury its trauma in silence, Eisenstein's father questions the logic of unearthing the traumatic past, of wanting to learn about something that can only cause pain for everyone involved. Her father is ultimately unable to appreciate that her desire to learn about the Holocaust is based, above all else, in her desire to understand how it has affected him—how it has shaped his life, and how, in turn, it has shaped her own. And this is one thing that Eisenstein makes clear in her narrative: her addiction to "H" differs from most drug addictions in that it is not, exclusively, solipsistic. Her goal is to bridge the temporal and psychological distance that separates her from her parents.

When her father asks her why she would expose herself to traumatic books and films about the Holocaust, and the pain that they cause, a young Eisenstein has a hard time explaining to him that she does so in order to get closer to him. The older Eisenstein who authors the book, however, is about to articulate her earlier interest in these secondary sources of Holocaust information, and her explanation is touching in its desire to bridge gaps, but also tragic in its awareness of just how big and unbridgeable those gaps ultimately are: "I wanted to see a replication of Auschwitz and be able to imagine my mother and father standing in the background among the other starving inmates. In that way, I thought, I could find them" (21).

Quick to realize that secondary memory can never substitute primary memory—that her parents' memories and their own personal experiences of the Holocaust cannot, actually, be "found" in films and books—Eisenstein nevertheless continues the process of working through the trauma of the Holocaust, and it is this process that the book highlights in its first and primary narrative strand. Eisenstein is aware that although she will never be able to know her parents' Holocaust experiences, she can always bring herself closer: "it's not a matter of arriving at the deepest roots of knowing, but just going from one level to the another, understand[ing] a little more than before" (82). By working through the Holocaust in this way, Eisenstein hopes to be able to "bear witness" to her parents' lives of "sorrow and loss," and it is this that she attempts to do in the book's second narrative strand (38).

Interestingly, the second narrative strand—the biographical—plays only a minor part in the book as a whole. Like many second-generation works, Eisenstein's text is much more focused on the *process* of bearing witness to the trauma and suffering of Holocaust survivor parents than it is on the results of that process. As Eisenstein confesses in an interview with Ellen Seligman, although she had originally planned to write a book about her parents' Holocaust experiences, she quickly came to realize that because so few memories had actually been passed on to her, and because so much of her own knowledge of the Holocaust comes from secondary sources, the book would ultimately have to be primarily about herself: "eventually I understood that I could not avoid myself, my own feelings about their lives, what they had gone through, and what that meant to me" (Seligman 8). Nevertheless, Eisenstein does, occasionally, narrate the few biographical fragments she has of her parents' lives and their Holocaust experiences. With the rare exception of a few non-traumatic concentration camp stories, like the one about her mother's work in "Canada," none of the stories that Eisenstein recounts in her book are related to

the Holocaust. Eisenstein provides facts about her parents' births, and shares what she has been told or has managed to find out about their lives before the Holocaust, their marriage after the Holocaust, and the birth of their two children. The reader is left, then, with a sense of just how immense the hole in Eisenstein's knowledge of her parents' Holocaust experiences actually is.

What does emerge from her narration, though, is a sense of just how traumatic the Holocaust was for her father. Suffering from ill health and addicted to gambling, her father's post-Holocaust life illustrates a psychological descent into depression, denial, and silence that ultimately dominates his household. As a result of not being able to understand the source of her father's trauma, and of his withholding of any information that might help her understand, Eisenstein can do nothing but speculate about her father's post-Holocaust life and psychological state: "What thoughts filled his mind during all those years as a kosher butcher, in his shop and when he drove a truck to make deliveries to neighbouring homes? Did he daydream himself into his youth, with his parents and siblings, in Miechow, before the war? Would he allow the silence of remembering what he could not voice to take him out of his routine [...]?" (41-42). Ironically, it was during this time in their lives that Eisenstein was physically closest to her father, and yet, as her narrative shows, his psychological trauma kept the two of them far apart.

Not surprisingly, the book's most extensive biographical section occurs towards its end when Eisenstein provides a transcript of an interview that her mother gave—one of the most prolonged and detailed discussions of her Holocaust experience: "in 1995, my mother agreed to be taped while answering questions posed by an interviewer, for the Archives of the Holocaust Project, which had been initiated by Steven Spielberg's Shoah Foundation" (100). Still not able to personally share her experiences with her own daughter, Eisenstein's mother gives her a copy of the video, "a tape," Eisenstein says, "that I watched, and watched again in order to be able to

write my mother's story as she told it," and that is exactly what she does in the dozen pages that follow (100). To her credit, Eisenstein does not try to narrate this section; instead, she simply provides a transcript of the interview, allowing her mother's voice—a voice long silenced, we learn, by her husband's insistence that she not talk about the Holocaust to her children—to tell her own story.

In short, terse sentences, Eisenstein's mother recounts her experiences in a crowded ghetto in Bedzin, her transfer to Auschwitz-Birkenau in a cattle car, and the terrifying process of being stripped, shaved, and tattooed that greeted her there. She tells familiar stories of the "soup made of water and weeds" that gave inmates dysentery, and the lice and typhus that made their lives even more miserable (107). Among the more unique and personal observations that she makes are her references to the "white lies of hope" that she suggests inmates held on to in the camps, and the "closeness" that she felt with her immediate group because they were all from the same place (106). She ends her testimony by explaining how she hid under clothing in a warehouse—presumably "Canada"—so that she would not have to go on a forced march, and the subsequent arrival of Russian troops, four days later, and their rather incomprehensible—and uncomprehending—assurances that "you are free. Go home" (110). The narrative has holes in it, and often shies away from overly-graphic descriptions of the concentration camps, but it goes a long way towards reconstructing the puzzle of Eisenstein's mother's Holocaust experience. Only by collecting and recounting the very few scraps of memory and testimony that her parents have provided can she attempt to piece together and come to an understanding of their experiences; and only then, in turn, can she begin to understand how the Holocaust has shaped her own life.

What makes *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* such a unique second-generation text, especially among Canadian examples, is its self-reflexivity. This is a book that is very much

aware of its genre-bending status, its role as a vehicle for working through Holocaust trauma, and the questions of authenticity and representation that it provokes. The book's third narrative strand grapples with the connections between the other two strands, and comments on the politics of imagining, reproducing, and representing Holocaust trauma in general and second-generation trauma in particular.

The book is particularly self-reflexive about its use of drawings to imaginatively fill in the blanks that Eisenstein's parents' fragmented memories have left her with. The very act of drawing her parents is a therapeutic one—an act of working through the Holocaust that goes a long way towards bridging the distance between generations. Like Spiegelman before her, Eisenstein uses an intertwining of words and pictures—what she calls "the inked-in shapes of line and word"—to flesh out and illuminate her parents' Holocaust experiences, and to extend a sharp physicality to the few fuzzy fragmented memories that have been handed down to her by her parents (36). Her shadowy images, then, are suitable metaphors for the shadows of her parents and their Holocaust experiences that she possesses. "Crisp lines" are impossible for Eisenstein, as she does not know her parents and their experiences fully. As Hoffman puts it, the second generation has "inherited not experience but its shadows," and those shadows literally fill this book (66).

When asked by an interviewer about how the book began to take shape in her mind, Eisenstein reveals that it began with the images, and that the images played an immense role in her process of working through her parents' trauma: "About five years ago, I began to do portraits of my father, sometimes in pen and ink, a sketch, and then I'd do an oil painting. I found that while involved in capturing his likeness, his physical semblage, the process kept me closer to my father, as I remembered him, and how I had missed him since he had died" (Seligman 3).

She draws her father, then, to erase the temporal distance that separates them—to bridge the gap between past and present—and the result of this is that it takes her "closer to trying to put [her] father together" (3). "When a drawing was done," she concludes, "I felt that it contained the experience of memory, where the motion of time dissolves" (5). Her drawings, then, allow her to metaphorically slow down time, to capture her parents in a fixed moment, to re-create, imaginatively, their Holocaust experiences, and to lend those experiences a physicality and tangibility—even if only in shadows—that is a crucial part of coming to terms with the experiences and the memories that she has inherited.

One of the more interesting and unique ways that Eisenstein uses images in the book is by creating cartoon re-drawings of some of the iconic photographs of liberated prisoners in Buchenwald taken by Margaret Bourke-White. According to Hirsch, there is, among the second generation, "a striking repetition of the same very few images, used over and over again iconically and emblematically to signal" the Holocaust ("Surviving Images" 7). Bourke-White's famous images are often evoked in second-generation texts and "in displacing and recontextualizing these well-known images in their artistic work," the postmemorial generation uses them as "helpful vehicle[s] of working through a traumatic past" (9). By employing the personal medium of drawing, Eisenstein reclaims the world of her parents' experiences as a significant part of her own identity, and because photographs have what Roland Barthes calls "evidential force," they provide an "integral link" to the Holocaust for the second generation who, "in their desire for memory and knowledge, are left to track the traces of what has been there and no longer is" ("Surviving Images" 14).

Eisenstein explains that while her father was still alive, she "searched to find his face among the documented photographs of survivors of Auschwitz—actually, photographs from any

camp would do. I thought that if I could see him staring out through barbed wire, I would then know how to remember him" (16). Eisenstein's obsession with Holocaust photographs reflects her overwhelming desire to bridge the distance between her parents' Holocaust memories and her own postmemorial status. Thus, Eisenstein recontextualizes real photographs of the concentration camps in an attempt to see "the anonymous image through the lens of [her] own familial drama" (Hirsch, "Surviving Images" 10). In doing so, she draws the reader's attention to her project of bringing her parents' traumatic experiences to life with images that are both invented and yet as accurate as she can possibly make them.

Like Spiegelman in *Maus*, Eisenstein re-creates Bourke-White's famous image, taken in April 1945, of the survivors of the newly-liberated Buchenwald concentration camp staring out at the Allied rescuers from behind a barbed wire fence: "I want to find my father's and my mother's eyes, looking out from behind barbed wire," she continues, "you know, like in the famous photo that Margaret Bourke-White took, the one in *Life* magazine, with all the concentration camp victims. I want to compare those eyes to the ones I know" (24). Eisenstein's adaptation of Bourke-White's image is different from Spiegelman's, however, in that it denies her the recognition of her parents' experience that she yearns for. Whereas, Spiegelman draws his father into the photo and labels him with an arrow marked "Poppa!" the figures behind the fence in Eisenstein's image are blurry and unrecognizable. The blurred figures ultimately represent her inability to find her parents in the photographs, and thus point to the limitations of her project of re-creating her parents' Holocaust experiences through imagination and drawing. She had hoped to find her parents in these photographs, because doing so, she believes, would help her know their Holocaust experiences better. It is not that easy, though, because, as Hirsch explains, "historical photos from a traumatic past authenticate the past's existence [...] but, in their flat

two-dimensionality, they also signal its unsurmountable distance" ("The Generation of Postmemory" 116). While iconic photographs *do* help Eisenstein understand the Holocaust better, they do not help her understand her parents' unique and individual experiences and trauma. Eisenstein uses this iconic photograph, then, to point out the very real limitations of the postmemorial imaginative endeavor—the photograph ultimately shows her inability to imagine her parents' Holocaust experiences other than by way of these repeatedly circulated and already iconic cultural images.

Eisenstein also draws on another famous image of the Holocaust: the gate of Auschwitz. Immortalized in numerous photographs, this gate has quite literally become a symbol of the distance between the first and second generation. In Wiesel's famous words, "the Holocaust is a sacred realm. One cannot enter this realm without realizing that only those who were there can know. But the outsider can come close to the gates" (qtd. in Fine, "A Sacred Realm" 69). The gate appears numerous times throughout the book—as do images of victims behind barbed wire—offering a constant visual reminder of Eisenstein's (and the reader's) outsider status. The gate separates Holocaust *knowing* from Holocaust *imagining*, the first generation from the second generation, and Holocaust experience and memory from Holocaust postmemory.

Eisenstein has claimed that the very practice of drawing images bridges temporal distance; therefore, it is not surprising that past and present often coexist on many of the book's pages. Throughout the book, the past is revealed to be constitutive of the present, so it is only appropriate that Eisenstein "uses images and text in combination to restore some degree of wholeness and tangibility" to the Holocaust memories that she has inherited (Harris 130). "Drawing, using it as language, is more innate to me," Eisenstein explains, "but I found that writing was needed as well since neither one alone seemed capable of complete expression. I

don't have just one position that I look out from" (Seligman 7). The combination of text and images that makes this book so unique then, is part of Eisenstein's desire to "erase the linear quality of time in order to see something more completely" (13). Often, one of the most effective ways that Eisenstein uses images and text to bridge temporality is by having adult words come out of the speech balloon of a young Eisenstein. In an image of her aunt Jenny and cousin Michael, a young snow-suited Eisenstein reveals biographical information about her aunt and cousin that she cannot possibly know because the events have yet to take place: "Isn't she beautiful, my aunt Jenny? You can't tell that she has only one arm. Maybe that's why Michael is holding mine [...]. Michael grew up to have Crohn's and a colostomy, and Jenny never tired of worry. But just listen to her sing a long-forgotten Yiddish song" (55). A strange juxtaposition is created here, as the song is "long-forgotten" to the grown-up Eisenstein drawing this image and speaking her own words in the text, but it is clearly not for the Jenny of the past who inhabits the image and sings the song in her beautiful voice. "If I put adult words into the speech balloon for a younger self," Eisenstein explains, it was the way in which to create more layers in order to understand where ideas and thoughts and feelings came from, and how they build on top of one another. Putting adult words into a younger self allowed me to show how ever present the past is" (Seligman 13).

Throughout the book, Eisenstein uses both images and text to self-reflexively comment on the critical issues of representation, appropriation and authenticity that often plague second-generation works. She is very much aware, for example, that, like all works that discuss the Holocaust, her project and its commercial success are necessarily predicated on the trauma, loss, and destruction of others. The question of adequate, ethical representation is one that quite literally haunts Eisenstein throughout the book. On the opposite page of her re-creation of

Bourke-White's photograph of the liberation of Buchenwald, Eisenstein draws herself contemplating the ethics of trying to represent the victims of the Holocaust in this way: "I worry that they will be angry with me and think I have stolen their souls that have already been stolen away. Can I be trusted to look into my heart and find theirs?" (19). Eisenstein worries about the ethics of representing an event that she did not experience, and of bringing back to life, through her text and images, people she never met. While this is a problem that is ultimately impossible to escape, Eisenstein does offer herself some comfort—and an answer to anyone who would accuse her of mis-representation—in the words that she prints about the shadowy figures in her drawing: "Trust, Shmust! We're ghosts [...] It's enough just wanting to speak our names" (18). The figure of the ghost as a trope for haunted memory is common in Holocaust literature, and a few examples have already been discussed in this dissertation. Unlike the angry and defiant ghosts of Klein's later poetry, and the ceaselessly lamenting ghosts who haunt Layton's trip down the Rhine, Eisenstein's ghosts seem quite benign. Indeed, through the combination of ghostly images and text on the page, Eisenstein has found a way to comprehend and even speak with her ghosts—to bridge the distance between her and the victims of the Holocaust—and they have exhorted her, above all else, to remember them.

Despite the fact that Hirsch claims that an element of imaginative investment is essential to any second-generation work—that, as a result of the fragmented nature of postmemory, one necessarily needs to re-create and imagine what one cannot know—there will always be critics who accuse second-generation writers of fictionalizing or mythologizing the Holocaust experiences of their parents. In response to this, Eisenstein purposefully *over*-imagines her father's experiences in the concentration camps in order, paradoxically, to highlight just how little she knows and how important the imaginative process is. In one particular fantasy,

Eisenstein remembers that her father used to love watching Westerns and imagines him as the hero in one: "alone, out of the Easter, he rides in Auschwitz, slowly passing through the archway. He gets off his horse and ties it up to a barbed wire [...] 'Yup, it's time to *arbeit* and finally *macht* everyone *frei*" (49). The sheriff's star adorning her father's breast acquires further resonance as a star of David, and enhances this fantastical role as a protector and savior of the Jews. This playful mythologizing of her father is meant to draw the reader's attention to the fact that, for the second generation, imagination is the only way to fill the blanks of memory. The second-generation's knowledge of the Holocaust ends at the gate, but by imagining her father as a heroic cowboy who rescues the inmates of the concentration camp and shows them the way through the gate, Eisenstein provides a poignant commentary on the role that imagination inevitably plays in the *working-through* process that the second generation engages in. Although the kind of memory *arbeit* that Eisenstein and the second generation engage in can never *macht* them entirely *frei* of the traumatic experience of growing up in a survivor household, it can, nevertheless, bring them closer to an understanding of their parents' traumatic experiences, and, subsequently, lead them to an understanding of how those experiences have shaped their own lives.

I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors leaves the reader with the sense that, to some extent, Eisenstein has found some degree of freedom from the terrifying grip of her parents' Holocaust experiences through the *working-through* process intimately connected to the very creation of her book. Nowhere is this more evident than in Eisenstein's incorporation of a photograph of her mother, posing with her grandmother and aunt, into the book. Rather than incorporate the photograph itself, as Spiegelman does with a photograph of his father in *Maus*, Eisenstein chooses to draw the photograph instead. Starting in the upper-left-hand corner, the

photograph crosses the gutter of two facing pages. At the bottom right-hand corner of the second page—outside of the painting of her mother—Eisenstein draws herself, holding a pencil, pen and paintbrush and commenting on her drawing. "I will never be able to know the truth of what my parents had experienced," Eisenstein admits at the very end of her book, "it is beyond my reach [...] to know the full extent of their loss" (178). The concentration camp tattoo that Eisenstein's mother displays in the photograph/drawing is a strong metaphor for the distance that separates generations—it signifies all that remains unknown to Eisenstein, all that keeps her outside of the experience shared by the women in the photograph. Yet this image reminds us that drawing is a highly personal medium, and that even though photographs highlight the insurmountable distance of the past, the process of re-creating and re-presenting the photograph ultimately, paradoxically, allows Eisenstein to bridge that distance. By quite literally putting herself on the same page as her relatives, Eisenstein demonstrates how intertwined the lives of Holocaust survivors and those of their children really are. As the cover of the book reminds us, the postmemorial auto/biography is just as much about the second-generation Holocaust survivor as it is about the first, and in order to understand how the Holocaust has affected their own lives, the second generation must first begin the ultimately unending process of attempting to understand the Holocaust experiences of their parents. Only in this way can distance be negotiated, and the child of Holocaust survivors begin to emerge from the shadow of the Holocaust. "My place for revealing what [the Holocaust] has meant to me," Eisenstein concludes, "is written and drawn around their truth" (Seligman 4).

"The Past Completely Vanished the Present": J.J. Steinfeld and the Danger of Acting Out

J.J. Steinfeld is undoubtedly Canada's best known second-generation writer. He has published two novels, nine short story collections, numerous poetry and prose chapbooks, and over two hundred short stories and nearly four hundred poems have appeared in anthologies and periodicals. He has also written over forty one-act and full-length plays that have been performed in Canada and the United States. He is as prolific in his Holocaust writing as he is unapologetic in his defense of it, and what sets Steinfeld's work apart from most other second-generation writers in Canada is the persistent "unfocused rage" of his protagonists (McGlothlin 1). Whereas Eisenstein's book emphasizes the positive, therapeutic role that her art plays in the very intimate and personal process of working through the trauma of her parents' Holocaust experiences, Steinfeld's characters (much like the human protagonists of Layton's animal poems) often prefer violence to therapy, revenge to forgiveness: they "fantasize about burning, shooting, or otherwise destroying Nazis, German sympathizers, Holocaust deniers, and locations that serve as gathering spots for anti-Semites" (Berger, *Children of Job* 76). Though these two methods of approaching the trauma of the Holocaust and understanding its impact on the second generation seem to be at odds, it becomes quite obvious after reading only a few of Steinfeld's short stories that he shares Eisenstein's belief that it is only through imaginative re-creation that the second generation can attempt to acknowledge and understand the distance that separates them from the traumatic experiences of their parents. Thus, his depiction of how the second generation copes with Holocaust trauma, though notably less autobiographical, is just as relevant and honest as Eisenstein's. Indeed, what makes his work so powerful and unique amongst second-generation texts is the way that he plays violence off against the more predictable need for recuperation and healing in survivor families. As Layton does in many of his poems, Steinfeld emphasizes the

positive role that violence—at least at the imaginative level—can play in helping the author work through suffering. Though a written text cannot actually cause physical pain, the process of imaginatively creating violent encounters and revenge fantasies between former Nazis and Holocaust survivors, for example, provides an equally artistic and therapeutic outlet—for both Steinfeld and many of his characters—as Eisenstein's drawings.

Steinfeld was born a short while after liberation in a Displaced Persons camp near Munich, Germany on December 11, 1946. Both of his parents were Polish Jews, and his mother had been in Auschwitz before liberation, while his father had survived in hiding. Steinfeld himself is quite reclusive; he rarely provides interviews, and he never talks about his family's relationship to the Holocaust. His silence about his parents' Holocaust experiences, and about how these experiences have shaped his own identity, is undoubtedly connected to his father, whose own silence, Steinfeld admits, dominated the post-war household (Berger, *Children of Job* 75). It is impossible, then, for the reader to ever know how much of Steinfeld's own family history or personal trauma is reflected in his writing. Although Grimwood asserts that writers of second-generation fiction "are clearly—inevitably—drawing on their own experiences to some extent," it is crucial that the reader of Steinfeld's stories avoid the popular tendency to read second-generation works autobiographically, or to pathologize Steinfeld based on the violent actions and emotions of his fictional characters (49). This is hard to do, especially as second-generation texts typically invite this kind of autobiographical reading. Whereas the very title and cover image of Eisenstein's *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* marks the book as an auto/biographical hybrid, Steinfeld makes it plainly clear, at the beginning of his most well-known book *Dancing at the Club Holocaust* (1993), that "all the characters in these stories are fictitious, and not based on anyone living or dead" (iv). A similar note appears in all of his

books—a reminder that above all else this is second-generation *fiction* we are dealing with, and not memoir, or even Eisenstein's unique brand of auto/biography.

Significantly, unlike Eisenstein and most other second-generation writers, Steinfeld uses his stories to depict a spectrum of second-generation responses to the Holocaust rather than his own private one. Indeed, his desire to depict a range of responses to, and strategies for coping with, the trauma of the Holocaust from the perspectives of multiple second-generation survivors is evidenced in the fact that *Dancing at the Club Holocaust* is dedicated to all "Holocaust survivors and their families" (v). Nevertheless, there are certain characteristics common to all of his short stories about the Holocaust. All of his protagonists are children or grandchildren of survivors. Many of them are writers, artists, professors or graduate students, and they all "struggle with what it means to be a privileged North American Jew in the shadow of the destruction of millions of people" (Baum 105). Auschwitz casts a heavy shadow over the protagonists' lives, and the fact that these stories often "take place in Canadian provinces with few Jews emphasizes the extent to which the characters bear their burdens alone, unable to share their experiences with those around them" (95). More importantly, and again uncharacteristically among second-generation texts, the protagonists in Steinfeld's stories "tend to be empathetic of their parents' suffering to a degree that leads to over-identification" (Rowland-Klein and Dunlop 364).

Furthermore, Steinfeld's characters (and it is important to distinguish between characters and author here) are often psychologically crushed under the weight of their inherited Holocaust memories, and rather than attempt to work through their trauma they instead engage in what LaCapra calls "acting out," a process that occurs when "one relives (or acts out)" the past "as if there were no difference between it and the present" (*Writing History, Writing Trauma* 45). As I

argued earlier, working through second-generation trauma involves an awareness and acknowledgement of the distance that separates the Holocaust experiences of the first generation from the postmemorial belatedness of the second generation. To repeat Hoffman's claim, it is in the best interests of second-generation writers to "acknowledge the distance at which we stand from the event," since it is from that distance that "we have to start, if we want to further the reach of our knowledge and sympathies" (180). While the bridging of the past and present is presented as such a desirable part of the working-through process in second-generation texts—think of Eisenstein quite literally painting herself into a family photograph—the process becomes tragic when one fails to acknowledge and maintain the distance that separates the two generations. "Stand too close to the horror," Hoffman argues, "and you get fixation, paralysis, engulfment" (177), and that is exactly what happens to many of Steinfeld's characters. The second-generation victim cannot possibly begin to work through and understand how the Holocaust has shaped his *own* life if "the distance between here and there, then and now, collapses," and Steinfeld's protagonists are often caught on the brink of this awareness (LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* 89). Steinfeld's stories, then, often function as warnings against over-identification, and the characters, often artistic figures, who learn to acknowledge the distance that separates them from their parents and use their imaginations to re-create, rather than re-enact, their parents' Holocaust experiences, are the ones who are best able to understand how the Holocaust has shaped their own lives and identities as children of survivors.

Nowhere in Steinfeld's stories is the inability to acknowledge generational distance more clear than in his best-known and most frequently published short story "Dancing at the Club Holocaust." The story begins with its second-generation protagonist, Reuben, who is obsessed with his mother's death and the suffering that she endured at the hands of the Nazis during the

Holocaust, telling his psychiatrist about a Club that he occasionally frequents in New York City that caters to neo-Nazis. It is a place where anti-Semitic propaganda films are screened, and where clients engage in a form of role-playing where "Nazis" ritualistically humiliate members of the Club who have been designated as "Jews." The Club, then, caters to clients who are fascinated with Fascism, to borrow Susan Sontag's phrase, and wish to blur time in a masochistic desire to either assert dominance and control over a helpless victim or submit themselves to that violence.²³ Neo-Nazis, second-generation survivors, and even people with no direct relationship to the Holocaust can quite literally re-enact the violence and trauma of a generation earlier.

Reuben confesses to having attended the Club for two years, but never partaking in the role-playing: he "always sat as far from the stage as possible, in a corner [...] He wanted to remain as inconspicuous as possible" (33, 34). Reuben's position in the bar highlights his status as a second-generation outsider to the violence and trauma of the Holocaust. He is a silent observer to the Holocaust, quietly watching as imaginative re-en(act)ments of the traumatic events that his parents witnessed firsthand are repeated over and over on the stage. Like the "H"-addicted Eisenstein, Reuben is compelled to watch the horror on the stage and screen, even though it causes him suffering and grief: "He covered his eyes with his hands and saw the hideousness before it began [...] Reuben wanted to gouge out his eyes but dropped his hands and watched again; watched with grieving eyes" (35). Like the books and films that Eisenstein reads, the stage show allows Reuben a belated—though importantly imagined and reconstructed—glimpse of what his parents suffered. Although the Club places limits on the degradation and humiliation that occurs on its stage—the past is not completely repeated—the potential that this Club has for violence and revenge appeals to Reuben. In one of the more chilling moments of the

²³ Sontag's ideas are explored more fully in the section on Timothy Findley's novel *The Butterfly Plague*.

first section of the story, Reuben, hitherto the inconspicuous outsider and silent witness, suggests "that it would not be much longer, one or two more visits to the Club, and he would act. He had long ago ceased to analyse his motives, no longer caring if what he intended to do was for revenge or justice or the memory of his parents" (34).

Reuben's psychiatrist is convinced that he is imagining the Club Holocaust, and refers him to "a psychiatrist in Toronto who specializes in treating children of Holocaust survivors," a pointed commentary from Steinfeld on society's tendency to over-pathologize victims of trauma (37). The psychiatrist's doubt over the genuine existence of the Club is never refuted in the story, and the reader is also left wondering whether the Club Holocaust exists or is a product of Reuben's imagination. Reuben is, after all, a writer, and he claims to be working on a story about his mother, a victim of the Holocaust. The implications of the doubt that Steinfeld places in the reader's mind are significant: if the Club Holocaust is real, then Reuben's warning that in "one or two more visits to the Club [...] he would act," suggests that he is about to perform a genuinely violent and physical act of revenge on the Club's stage that will have real-world consequences for the perpetrator and his victim(s) (37). He would, in a sense, participate in his own re-enactment of the horrors of the Holocaust. However, if the Club only exists in his mind, then imaginative re-creation is once again championed as a physically safe, albeit brutally violent, outlet for working through the trauma of the Holocaust. Once again, "distance matters": in one scenario, Reuben's physical re-en(acting) out of Holocaust violence involves a refusal to acknowledge distance between generations; in the other, it involves both an awareness of that distance and an attempt to work through it through imaginative re-creation.

The reader's uncertainty over the stability of Reuben's character and motives, and his tendency towards a violent form of revenge, is enhanced when he tells his psychiatrist a

"story"—Steinfeld is careful to emphasize that word throughout this text—about a Halloween party that he attended at a university where he used to teach (39). Offended by the presence of two people dressed as Hitler, Reuben creatively expresses his distaste in their costumes: "When the two Hitlers were sitting side-by-side cozy at a table, I hopped up on the table and pissed away. I got only one of them real good, but it was worth it. What a historical event: a Jewish professor from Montreal pissing on Hitler" (39). Of course, Reuben is aware that he is not pissing on the real Hitler, but the way he phrases the final sentence—as if a genuine historical event were happening to a genuine historical figure—suggests that he potentially has difficulty acknowledging the distance that separates him from the Holocaust. One of the men dressed as Hitler was the Dean of the university, and Reuben loses his tenure and job as a result of his actions. Reuben's penchant for violent acting out is thus made clear to the reader and psychiatrist, and, despite the fact that the psychiatrist entreats Reuben to work through his relationship to the Holocaust in the safety of a psychiatric setting, Reuben ultimately resists again. Instead, during his next visit to the Club, he acts out his revenge.

After walking around his New York hotel room pretending to address "a crowd of emaciated concentration camp survivors, assur[ing] them that help was on the way"—and thus using the past to justify the actions that he is about to commit in the present—Reuben avenges his parents, in a poetically just way, by setting fire to the Club while screaming "*Ich bin ein Jude*" ("I am a Jew"), and dancing a "*Totenzanz*" (dance of death) on the Club's stage as it burns (40). His dance becomes a metaphor for uniting the present with the past: he dances like his mother danced before the war, and as he dances on the Club's stage, he feels happy "for the first time in his adult life" because of the "movement and heat and damaged decades coalescing" (41). Again, if Reuben has actually performed this act—rather than just imagining it—he has become

so absorbed in re-en(acting) the violence of the Holocaust that he has lost his grasp of the distance between generations. If he is merely imagining this act, then the physical violence of it becomes fantasy and his writing has provided him with a therapeutic outlet for revenge. Regardless, the story offers an unapologetic view of second-generation anger, and provides a representational glimpse at the nightmares and obsessive revenge that are the primary subjects of many of Steinfeld's works.

An overwhelming desire to respond to the Holocaust with violence, and the turning towards the imagination as a way to express this desire for violence without actually acting it out, is also the main subject of "The Chess Master." In fact, the story begins with a threat of violence: "Lionel wanted to break the window. In the last week he had dreamed of the destruction of the grocery—by explosives, by fire, by the wrath of God, but mostly by his own hands" (1). The window that Lionel can imagine himself breaking belongs to a grocery store operated by the twin brother of a German man, Ernst Kruger, whom Lionel befriends at a young age, and who teaches Lionel how to play chess. The friendship that develops between the young Lionel and Kruger is predicated on Ernst's silence about his Holocaust experiences as a Nazi during the war. When Lionel asks him "were you a Nazi, Mr. Kruger?" his response is neither negative nor affirmative: "that nightmare still lives too odiously in my heart for words" (5). As a result of becoming obsessed with Kruger, Lionel has a hard time imagining why Ernst's twin brother, the owner of the grocery store, treats him with indifference: "'why doesn't he like me?' Lionel asked as Ernst's brother went back into his store. 'Do not worry, Lionel. He sees you differently than I do [...] as a reminder of what he was. What he did'" (6). Interestingly, in a strategy of representation that marks this story as relatively unique among Canadian second-generation texts, "The Chess Master" depicts not only the silence and ambiguity that are the

typical responses to the curious questioning of the second generation, but it also tries to imagine the conflicting emotions of Holocaust perpetrators. Rooted in the contemporary, and reflective of the distance that separates their contemporary selves from the past, the relationship between Ernst and Lionel is a positive, nurturing one. Ernst's brother, however, remains stuck in the past and his treatment of Lionel reflects either his continuing dislike of Jews, or perhaps even feelings of guilt and shame.

Ernst's own Holocaust involvement is made even more ambiguous to Lionel as a result of his appreciation of the youngster's attempts to record his mother's Holocaust experiences in a short story that he writes for school: "this is a beautiful story, Lionel," Ernst says, "this is quite a serious topic that you write about. Your mother talks in such detail about being in the camps?"

(2). Once again, the invitation to draw analogies between Steinfeld and his protagonist is overwhelming, but even if the reader resists the desire to make autobiographical connections, the meta-literary qualities of the text can still be appreciated. As a second-generation victim of the Holocaust, Lionel's connection to the event is "not actually mediated by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation" (107). "Nothing really interests me," Lionel explains, "Nothing makes much sense. Except for the writing [...] It's as if I was there, in the concentration camps" (9-10). Imaginatively re-creating his mother's concentration camp experience is, for Lionel, a way of bridging the temporal distance that separates them. In a speech that seems to summarize much of the theoretical work that has been done on the therapeutic goals and qualities of second-generation writing by Hirsch and others, Ernst urges Lionel to keep writing about the Holocaust: "you have inherited painful feelings from your parents. The past can be transmitted from generation to generation, even through any silence or deafness [...] Write about your pain and being a Jew. Write, and perhaps the suffering will make

sense" (10). It is hard not to read this as Steinfeld's own creative mantra—he writes about pain and suffering perhaps in an attempt to make sense of his own relationship to the Holocaust—or at least as an appeal to other second-generation writers.

Unfortunately for Lionel, it is not that simple. Writing does not seem to offer him a completely satisfactory outlet for his violent anger. When Lionel proposes a way of "deal[ing] with [his] past and [his] future at the same time," by killing Ernst's "Nazi brother" in an act of revenge, he is heartbroken when Ernst admits that he "was a Nazi, too" (10). In response to the overwhelming feelings of anger and betrayal that he feels as a result of Ernst's revelation, and in a perhaps cleverly self-reflexive twist on Steinfeld's part, Lionel writes a story called "The Chess Master," which starts out "with a grocery in flames," and publishes it under his full name "Lionel Lazar Siedelman" (L.L. Siedelman), in the magazine *Jewish Dialog*—a magazine that, coincidentally (?), had published many of Steinfeld's own stories (9, 11). Once again, Steinfeld privileges imagination and writing as constructive outlets for violence. Though Lionel never actually burns down the grocery, he imagines himself committing the violent act in his story. In doing so, a distance is acknowledged—a distance between the present and the past, the writer and the subject, the second generation and the first, and between real violence and imagined violence.

Steinfeld's story "The Apostate's Tattoo" explores what McGlothlin calls "the trope of marking" that "is operative in the literature of the children of both survivors and perpetrators, expressing the second generation's particular perspective with regard to the Holocaust" (20). The story's protagonist, Sam, is a 36-year-old scholar of religious studies whose mother died in Auschwitz. Sam's life has been marked by various acts of resistance and confusion in relation to his Jewish identity, but over the past two years, Sam's wife, Sylvie, has grown increasingly

frightened by the changes that have occurred in her husband's behaviour and speech. When his wife asks him one morning how his lecture went, his cryptic answer, "Arbeit macht frei," leaves her certain that something bad will soon happen (13). She connects his recent change in behaviour, "the changes that at first confused and then frightened her," to a trip that Sam took "to his parent's birthplace in Poland then to Germany to see the site of the Displaced Persons Camp where he had been born" (13). Interestingly, for Sam, one of the effects of bridging the geographical distance that separates him from the Holocaust by taking his trip is that he psychologically also bridges the temporal gap between past and present. He has become obsessed with the Holocaust, and with trying to understand it better by making the suffering that it caused his parents his own. His story provides an excellent example of the dangers of not maintaining a protective distance from the Holocaust for the second generation.

Sam re-creates his life after his trip. He changes his area of religious study from the Catholics in New France to Jewish life in Canada. But he still feels the need to be closer to the Holocaust, and particularly to his mother's Holocaust trauma, and so he decides to get her concentration camp number tattooed onto his forearm: "Sam knew the number as well as his own name; perhaps the number was his own name – or even more indelible than a name" (18). McGlothlin explains that concentration camp tattoos were often the first clues that the second generation had that their parents had experienced some sort of trauma: "the children of Auschwitz survivors grew up seeing the tattoo, the shameful visual reminder of victimhood and suffering that marked the parents as different, and just as it was indelibly printed into the parent's flesh, it was stamped into the consciousness of the second generation" (22). Thus, the concentration camp tattoo becomes "a signifier of a child's absent memory of the parents' Holocaust experience" (Beeler 133).

Sam's desired tattoo goes against the artistic sensibilities of the artist, who has no conception of its historical basis and thinks of it simply as "a stupid number that made no sense," (18). Nevertheless, the tattoo is made, and, as Karin E. Beeler explains in her book *Tattoos, Desire, and Violence* (2006), "by choosing to have a concentration camp number inscribed in his flesh, Sam indicates that he has inherited the narratives of suffering and the memory of those Jews such as his mother who suffered and perished in the camps" (133). He appropriates the iconic tattoo of the Auschwitz victim in order to express his "sense of being marked secondarily by the legacy of the Holocaust" (McGlothlin 20-21). The tattoo, then, like Eisenstein's ring, is a perfect metaphor for postmemory. It brings him to a closer understanding in the flesh, so to speak, of the event that traumatized his mother.

There is something unsettlingly obsessive about Sam's act, though, and his desire to "mimic the suffering that he can only imagine" (Beeler 133). Eisenstein wants to learn about and work through the suffering her parents experienced, but she does not want to experience it herself. Instead, she uses her imagination to re-create her parents' Holocaust trauma. Sam "acts out": by assuming his mother's Auschwitz number, "in an attempt to know," through his own body, "the experience of [his] parents, and thus to write [himself] into that experience," he effectively over-identifies with his mother and psychologically collapses the past into the present (133). He also fails to see how his desire to record his mother's physical pain onto his own body by getting a tattoo is undercut by his *voluntarily* tattooing of his body, and by the sign in the tattoo parlour window: "TATTOOS, PAINLESS, REASONABLE RATES" (15).

When Sam emerges from the tattoo parlour, he excitedly unveils his tattoo to his wife: "I know I've been difficult to live with lately. Now I will be fine. This act was essential, believe me, Sylvie" (19). But, as Sam unveils the tattoo, he realizes that it has been put on the wrong arm:

"Sam stared at his right forearm and the misplaced number. Then he started to scream as the image of his mother and her concentration camp experience choked his consciousness" (19). Ironically, the tattoo that was meant to ultimately bridge the gap between past and present, and unite Sam and his mother physically and psychologically, has made Sam feel even farther away from her. The effect that the misplaced tattoo has on Sam "conveys the message that complete identification with those who experienced the trauma of the Holocaust is not possible, and must remain part of a narrative of frustrated desire" (Beeler 134). The painful result of Sam's over-identification is that he realizes, as he attempts to cover his tattoo at the end of the story, that his body "is not the same as his mother's body and that he must remain separated from her unique experience of the Holocaust" (135). Ultimately, the necessary distance between past and present that Hirsch, Hoffman, and others urge the second generation to embrace and acknowledge is violently forced on those who decide to ignore it.

The danger of over-identification, and the need to acknowledge distance through imaginative re-creation are also the main themes of "Ida Solomon's Play." In this story, the protagonist, an actress and playwright, assumes the role of her Holocaust survivor mother: "on stage I am Ida Solomon, born Radom, Poland, 1921, died Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 1977, through the eight stages of her life I selected as the most dramatically important" (67). The play started as a medium for working through her mothers' traumatic Holocaust experiences, and working on the play helps the narrator come to terms with how the Holocaust, and being a child of a survivor of the Holocaust, has traumatized her own identity: "I wrote the play," the narrator explains, "to keep from jumping off my balcony" (67). The narrator uses the play to give meaning to her life, and to justify her own survival. The play, then, is the product of the narrator's working-through process. She researches her mother's past, and pieces together

fragments of memory to create a narrative of her mother's life: "for the years I knew my mother, I relied on memory; for the years before I was born, I talked to her two older sisters, the surviving ones" (67). Once again, imaginative re-creation is presented as a therapeutic process that can lead the second generation to a better understanding of how their parents' traumatic experiences have shaped their own lives.

While at the beginning of the story the narrator is able to "calm down" and "escape the character [she] play[s]" after a performance—and thus acknowledge the distance between past and present, performer and subject, second-generation daughter and survivor mother—the play quickly begins to quite literally consume her and the lines between past and present, reality and fiction blur (68). She begins to go into bars in her costume and "perform" scenes from the play for the bar's patrons: "'I was in a concentration camp,' I hear myself tell the bartender [...] 'the Nazis raped me.' Then I gave him, word for word, my mother's speech to the unseen psychiatrist during the sixth scene [...] before leaving I performed for the men the entire third scene, Ida twenty-three and in a concentration camp" (68). Even when she goes home with a man from the bar after a performance, dressed as her mother, and is almost raped by him, she filters the experience through her mother's past instead of realizing it was a very real part of her present: "pushing me about his living room, he said that he would make love to me the way a dirty old Jew deserved. I fought back, hitting the guard hard, and I couldn't believe the Nazis weren't going to kill me for resisting [...] after he fell, I ran from the apartment, the concentration camp" (69).

The distinction between on-stage and off-stage grows more and more vague for the narrator, to the point where, as she prepares for a performance, she says, "when I sat in the dressing room in front of the mirror, I swear I saw my mother," and the story ends by exploring

the psychological damage that can occur as a result of this kind of over-identifying with the past (72). When the narrator meets a man contemplating suicide at the bar, she does not attempt to console him with her own voice—a voice that, ironically, because she herself has overcome the desire to commit suicide, would be a suitable voice of experience for addressing the issue—rather, she appropriates her mother's voice and demands justification: "what horrors had he seen?" (72). "Improvising a new scene," the narrator shows the distraught man "*my* concentration camp number" (74, emphasis mine). Of course, this concentration camp number is not her own, it is "the one Sally," her make-up artist, "puts on for [her] with such care every night" (74). And when the old man at the bar pushes up his sleeve and reveals his own concentration camp number, the narrator is filled with guilt: "'I'm so sorry,' I said. Ida had disappeared" (74). Meeting the real survivor in the bar "forces the actress to realize that she cannot carry her mother's deep memory as her own" (Baum 104). Like Sam in "The Apostate's Tattoo," the narrator learns that no matter how much she tries to blur the boundaries between past and present, her body and her experience are not her mother's, and never will be. The story that has consumed her—her mother's story—ultimately falls away, because it is not her story. Distance matters.

Steinfeld continues to explore a spectrum of second-generation reactions to the trauma of the Holocaust throughout the volume, quite often portraying imaginative re-creation as a therapeutic outlet for understanding the trauma and violence of the Holocaust and as a bridge that connects the two generations over a temporal distance. There are two stories in particular that also engage specifically with Canada's geographical distance from the Holocaust and the question of what it means to grow up a child of survivors in Canada. In "The Coinciding of Sosnowiec, Upper Silesia, Poland, 1942, and Banff, Alberta, Canada, 1990," a young artist named Aaron plans a trip to Poland to excavate the paint brushes of his famous grandfather, "the one

[...] whose paintings had been destroyed by the Nazis in 1942, but whose paint brushes had been saved" (237). An expert at painting trees, Aaron lives a comfortable life in Banff, Alberta, and completes commissions for the Banff Centre for the Arts. In a book about Poland and the Holocaust called *The Yellow Star*, Aaron finds a map of the major concentration camps, labelled "Reich 1942": "this map had small black squares and small black triangles to indicate the locations of camps in Europe. Squares for the extermination camps. Tiny circles for the towns" (240). This map forces Aaron into the past, and he becomes obsessed with his parents' Holocaust experiences: his father hid from the Nazis in the Polish countryside, and the rest of his family was taken to "the small black square called Auschwitz" (240).

The map, a symbol of all of the places and all of the experiences that he can never be a part of, engrains itself in Aaron's mind. He begins to say the names of the concentration camps as he paints, and soon he does not even need to look at the map: "he said the names of the camps faster, went deeper into the past" (241). Like so many of Steinfeld's characters, Aaron finds that he can only escape the past and return to the present with great difficulty: "Aaron attempted to return to the present—forced himself back. When he behaved this way, acting as if he were in Europe during the Second World War, as if the past were more important than the present, he became frightened, more now than ever before" (241). Aaron's psychiatrist advises him to work through his fears and demons through his art: "Make your art magic, the doctor encouraged [...]" "You are guilty about not being able to sufficiently ease the burdens your parents feel. Not an unusual feeling for the child of Holocaust survivors" (241). Aaron, like Reuben, resists this therapeutic working-through, thinking that the doctor wants him to paint pictures about the Holocaust itself: "I'm not *that* kind of painter, he had told the doctor, and never returned to his office" (241). Aaron seems to understand that any attempt on his part to depict the realities of the

Holocaust would necessarily be flawed. An impression—an imaginative re-creation—is all the second generation can hope to achieve.

As often happens in Steinfeld's stories, the kind of deep psychological obsession with the Holocaust that Aaron falls into begins to affect his work and his sense of reality, time, and space: "Aaron became trapped at his easel, no longer speaking, thinking of the camp names, caught in the past. He struggled to remind himself that he was in an artist's studio in Banff, Alberta, and it was the fall of 1990" (242). In an attempt to return to the present, to return to Banff, Aaron imagines a beautiful map of Banff, but even this is impossible for him as "other maps superimposed themselves in his mind on the Banff map, maps with black squares and black triangles, maps with blood-red rivers and death-marked towns" (242). This palimpsestic image of one map superimposing itself onto another is a powerful metaphor for the way memories and the past can take over and consume one's life in the present. For Aaron, the geographical and temporal distance between Banff, 1990 and Poland, 1942 has completely disappeared: "into his thoughts came a concentration camp named Banff, in the darkest part of Poland, and he, finding it difficult to breathe, saw himself there, as thin as his mother and father had been" (242). In this way, Steinfeld makes it painfully clear that the trauma of the Holocaust is unescapable for survivor families.

"Because of the War," a story that Berger calls "the best crafted and richest story in Steinfeld's collection," is one of few Canadian second-generation texts to portray the impact of the Holocaust on the *third* generation—the grandchildren of Holocaust survivors (*Children of Job* 77). The protagonist, Matthew, is preparing for his Bar Mitzvah when he receives a package in the mail. Inside the package, which has no return address, Matthew finds "two disparate types of gifts that underscore the dual nature of Matthew's identity" (Berger, *Children of Job* 77). The

package contains dozens of valuable hockey cards and a book of poems by Robert Service: Matthew is Canadian. The other gifts are a book written in Yiddish, a black yarmulke, and a large spiral notebook containing the words "I am an earthworm Jew" written over and over again: Matthew is a Jewish Canadian (Steinfeld 255). Immediately upon seeing the Yiddish book, Matthew's mother knows exactly where the package has come from: "this was my father's book. I can't believe it. He gave the book to my brother, your Uncle Bernie, when Bernie was around your age" (255). This book is like the ring in Eisenstein's *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors*—it is a symbol of the intergenerational transmission of memory—a vivid metaphor for postmemory. Uncle Bernie's package is a symbol of his own torn identity: he is a child of Holocaust survivors, but he also sought to live a normal life, separate from his parents' Holocaust traumas.

Matthew learns about the Holocaust indirectly. The next part of the story switches to the mother's memories of her experiences growing up in a survivor household: Tova's sharing of her own childhood links the boy to his grandparents and, through them, to the Holocaust. As Tova remembers her father reading the Yiddish book that Matthew now holds, a book about the Jews in Poland before the Second World War, layers of the past are piled on top of each other. Tova's story about her experience growing up in a survivor household reveals that she and her brother Bernard (Bernie) responded differently to the Holocaust legacy that they inherited. Tova was careful never to ask questions that would upset her parents, and, at school, she draws pictures and writes stories about her mother's tattoo and the concentration camps that earn her high marks. Once again, artistic re-creation is celebrated as a method of better understanding the second generation's connection to the Holocaust. Bernard's response to the Holocaust, on the other hand, is much more aggressive: "at school, when teachers or classmates annoyed him,

Bernard called them Nazis" (261). Tova works through the Holocaust; Bernard acts out. All of Bernard's attempts to learn about the Holocaust, about his parents' poor health, and about why he had no living grandparents, are met with silence and, occasionally, the repeated phrase "Because of the War" (261). Bernard also bears the burden of being a "memorial candle"—of carrying the name of his father's brother who died during the Holocaust: "'You look so much like my oldest brother,' Bernard's father tells him, 'You have his name. I look at you, Bernard, and see my oldest brother. He was a scholar and the Nazis killed him'" (262).

The result of this silence, and these emotions, for Bernard, is a desire to hide from the Holocaust. When Matthew asks his mother about the phrase "I am an earthworm Jew," printed hundreds of times in his uncle's notebook," Tova tells him that it was "an image your uncle started to use when he was eleven or twelve. Described the sad way he felt at times" (262). She elaborates that Bernard had a "yearning to live under the ground, protected like an earthworm" (259-260). This desire to escape from his Holocaust legacy becomes a part of Bernard's identity: turning to hockey and books for comfort, Bernard is able to "forget his Bar Mitzvah, forget about his father's mysterious book, forget about concentration camp tattoos that crawled into his sleep" like worms (264). By passing on both sides of his identity to Matthew, Bernard attempts to remind him that he is more than just the sum of his inherited memories.

This is, perhaps, the most important message that resonates from Steinfeld's short stories. In order to properly understand how their own lives have been shaped by the Holocaust experiences of their parents, the second generation must first learn to acknowledge and accept the distance that prevents them from ever being able to fully know the Holocaust. Failure to acknowledge this distance leads to anger and violence—a dangerous result of over-identifying and trying to appropriate their parents' suffering as their own. As Reuben, Sam and other

characters show us, this is a remarkably destructive act. Acknowledging distance, however, and engaging in the postmemorial process of *imaginative* re-creation—through writing, theatre, art,—can be remarkably therapeutic for the second-generation survivor, and Steinfeld's artistic characters, much like Eisenstein, discover that they are better able to understand how the Holocaust has shaped their own lives as a result. Imagination and invention, then, are frequently used by second-generation writers to compensate for the temporal distance and absence of first-hand memory that defines their connection to Holocaust survivors—to imagine the unimaginable. For the second generation, distance clearly does matter.

CHAPTER FOUR:

The "Proper Subjects" of Holocaust Fiction: Cultural Distance and the Issues of Holocaust Representation

As is evident by now, any literary treatment of the Holocaust by a writer who did not witness the event first-hand opens itself up to questions of authority and accusations of appropriation and exploitation. Indeed, almost every author that this dissertation has discussed has struggled, to some degree, with these issues. As Sue Vice suggests in *Holocaust Fiction*, "'authority' appears to be conferred on a writer if they can be shown to have a connection with the events they are describing" (4). The geographical and temporal distance that separates all of the Canadian writers that have been analyzed thus far from the Holocaust seemingly undercuts any authority that might be credited to them for the "connection[s]"—even cultural ones—to the Holocaust that they might have. Being Jewish is not enough: Layton's seemingly sudden interest both in the Holocaust and in his own previously ignored Jewish heritage in the late 1960s, for example, has lead biographer Elspeth Cameron to suggest that Layton clearly understood the "endless market possibilities" that the Holocaust presented in the wake of the Eichmann trial and the success of Leonard Cohen's *Flowers for Hitler* (416). In another extreme example, the bizarrely sado-masochistic bath scene in Cohen's *Beautiful Losers*, which climaxes with Hither scrubbing F. and Edith with human soap, has been read as an example of what Lynn Rapaport has called the "sexploitation" of the Holocaust (53). Being the child of a survivor is also not enough. It is interesting, however, that the critical voice that raises questions of authority and appropriation in the works of second-generation writers is often the author's own. In *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors*, for example, Bernice Eisenstein worries that if she draws the ghosts of her dead ancestors, "they will be angry with me and think I have stolen their souls that have already been stolen away" (19). She worries that the act of imagining her parents' Holocaust

experiences, along with the process of putting fictional words into the mouths of the victims of the Holocaust, is inappropriate. Thus, even the degrees of authority that comes from sharing a cultural connection with the victims of the Holocaust, or from being a descendent of a survivor, are not strong enough to completely silence these issues for the Canadian writers that this dissertation discusses.

This chapter examines the questions of authority, appropriation, and exploitation in their most extreme manifestation in Canadian Holocaust literature: works of fiction about the Holocaust that have been written by non-Jewish writers. The writers discussed in this chapter—Timothy Findley and Yann Martel—are not only geographically and temporally removed from the Holocaust, but, as non-Jews, they also cannot claim a cultural connection to the event. The lack of *any* discernible connection to the Holocaust leaves these writers even more vulnerable than their Jewish counterparts to critical challenges about their right to represent an event that they have no connection to, and the modes of representation that they use to do so. This chapter will explore the extent to which these non-Jewish writers, however well-meaning, cross an ethical boundary by depicting the suffering of victims and speaking on their behalf or even in their place. It will also examine the forms or techniques of representation that these writers adopt to mitigate accusations of cultural appropriation as a result of their own awareness of the transgressive nature of their content.

It is important to note at the outset that the texts discussed in this chapter—Findley's *The Butterfly Plague* (1969) and Martel's *Beatrice & Virgil* (2010)—are both novels, and that they were published after Cohen's *Beautiful Losers* (1966). Indeed, there are few significant representations of the Holocaust in poetry or prose by non-Jewish writers in Canada before the publication of the first version (it would later be substantially revised) of Timothy Findley's *The*

Butterfly Plague in 1969. As works of fiction, these texts are particularly susceptible to the "simple mistrust of invention" that ultimately causes the authority of Holocaust texts—*particularly those written by non-Jewish writers*—to come under question (Vice 4). The danger of invention and imagination, Cynthia Ozick argues in her essay "The Rights of History and the Rights of Imagination," is that it "can alter history [...] it can invent a history that never was" (6). Thus, Holocaust novelists inevitably find themselves in a "double bind," as Vice calls it: they are both required and "expected to invent material, yet doing so amounts to inaccuracy" (162). For the non-Jewish writer, the lack of a cultural connection to the Holocaust, in addition to the already daunting distance created by being separated by place and time from the event, ultimately makes this bind even more insurmountable: the assumption is that "the more personal distance there is between author and subject, the more 'invented' the work must be" (Vice 8). Non-Jewish writers, regardless of their motivations for writing about the Holocaust, can expect their works to elicit an even greater degree of scrutiny from critics and readers than those written by a Jewish writer would receive. "On the whole," Vice concludes, "fewer unsympathetic questions are raised about those with the 'right' to fictionalize the subject because of their second-generation or Jewish identity [...] than about those who do not own such a right" (8).

Apart from the association of the novel form with fiction and invention, the greatest concern that often surrounds novels about the Holocaust by non-Jewish writers is the author's motivation for choosing the Holocaust as his subject. "Readers are suspicious of the motives of outsiders," Vice writes, and the greatest concerns are that these writers "might have improper reasons for choosing this subject," and that they are just "bumming a ride on the Holocaust" (4). Many critics of Holocaust literature (including Vice, Young, and Langer) point to the poetry of Sylvia Plath—particularly her 1962 poem "Daddy"—as a model for a poet whose "lack of a

biographical reason for using death-camp imagery [...] opened her to charges of appropriation" (4). According to James E. Young, in his book *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation*, Plath's autobiographical poetry incorporates the Holocaust "not as an experience to be retold or described, but as an event [...] in whose image she has expressed another brutal reality: that of her internal pain" (118). This (mis)use and abuse of the Holocaust in Plath's poetry is often referred to as an example of the dangers of removing the Holocaust from its historical context, and of universalizing and trivializing it for personal reasons.

One of the overriding themes of *Beatrice & Virgil* is the author's desire to experiment with non-realistic and highly symbolic ways of depicting the horrors of the Holocaust in a way that will, paradoxically, make the event seem more familiar for a contemporary reader. Not surprisingly, Martel's decision to use animal allegory to portray the Holocaust has upset many critics, including James Lasdun, who accuses the author of representing the Holocaust in a "strangely trivial and narcissistic" way (Lasdun). Though the universalizing of the Holocaust can sometimes be positive in the way that "it saves an event from becoming part of the distant past by investing it with moral significance transcending its historical moment" (Weissman 12), there is, nevertheless, a greater "risk that such figurative use of the Holocaust tells us nothing about the particular event, but instead, obscures and diminishes the character of the victimization on the Jews of Europe by the Nazis" (Ravvin, "Writing Around the Holocaust" 28). This is a problem that Martel self-consciously wrestles with throughout his book.

With all of the potential for accusations of appropriation and exploitation that Holocaust novels—particularly those created by non-Jewish writers—leave themselves open to, it is not surprising that these texts are often considered to be "scandalous" by readers and critics, and that

they "invariably provoke controversy" (Vice 1). In *Holocaust Fiction*, Vice explores the critical reception of "scandalous" American and British works by non-Jewish writers like *Time's Arrow* by Martin Amis, *The White Hotel* by D.M. Thomas, *Schindler's List* by Thomas Kenealley, *Fragments* by Benjamin Wilkomirski,²⁴ and *Sophie's Choice* by William Styron. Similarly, Efraim Sicher discusses the negative reception of *Time's Arrow*, *Sophie's Choice*, and *Schindler's List* in her book *The Holocaust Novel* (2005). All of these texts, though hugely successful, have faced accusations of appropriation and exploitation. It is very interesting that, with the exception of very brief discussions of Anne Michaels' *Fugitive Pieces* (discussed in the concluding chapter of this dissertation), none of the texts that Vice and Sicher discuss is Canadian. On one hand, this absence reflects the lack of a significant body of Holocaust fiction in Canadian literature, as well as the minor importance of Canadian literature, whatever its topic. Indeed, novels written by non-Jewish writers that deal with the Holocaust—even in passing—are few and far between in this country. While the question of what, exactly, constitutes a novel "about" the Holocaust is debatable, the examples by Findley and Martel that I have chosen for this chapter are not only the most significant examples of novels that attempt to represent or discuss the Holocaust by non-Jewish writers in Canada, but also some of the *only* examples. More significantly, though, the absence of Canadian texts in critical works that explore the reception of "scandalous" Holocaust novels, suggests that, in Canada, novels about the Holocaust simply do not provoke the same degree of scandal and outrage. An excellent example: when *The Butterfly Plague* first appeared, Canadian critics were not critical of Findley's depiction of Nazi

²⁴ Published in 1996, Wilkomirski's *Fragments: Memories of a Wartime Childhood, 1939-1948*, remains one of the most controversial Holocaust texts ever written. The tremendous amount of authority that was conferred to the text as a result of its status as the autobiography of a child survivor was gradually stripped away as the "memoir" and its author were revealed to be fake—the product of a Swiss musical-instrument maker and clarinetist named Bruno Dössekker.

experiments in the concentration camps, Ruth's symbolic rape at the hands of an allegorical character named "Race," or the fiery deaths of thousands of animals documented in "The Chronicle of Alvarez Canyon" section of the book. Instead, as Diana Brydon explains in her 1998 book *Timothy Findley*, "Canadian critics wondered why a Canadian was writing about Hollywood—National boundaries had been breached" (14).

This is not to say that Canadian Holocaust novels do not shock. Indeed, shocking, "scandalous" scenes abound in the novels that this chapter explores: from the fiery "holocaust" at Alvarez Canyon in *The Butterfly Plague*, to the terrifying scenarios designed to make the reader empathize with the brutal suffering of Holocaust victims in the *Games for Gustav* section of *Beatrice & Virgil*. Findley and Martel have certainly not shied away from the brutal and graphic depictions of the Holocaust that characterize the works of their American and British counterparts. So where is the scandal? Ironically, the Canadian works that are typically considered to be the most shocking in their depictions of the Holocaust are undoubtedly the poems of Irving Layton and Cohen's *Beautiful Losers*—works produced by Jewish writers who are, using Vice's logic, seemingly more "authoritative" than the non-Jewish writers that this chapter discusses. So where are the charges of appropriation, exploitation, and authority that typically greet Holocaust novels written by non-Jewish writers?

It is my belief that the main reason that Canadian Holocaust novels have not been subjected to the same kind of negative criticism as the American and British examples that Vice, Sicher, and many other critics analyze, is that they tend to be highly metafictional and self-reflexive about their status as texts written by outsiders—by novelists and witnesses who are geographically, temporally, *and* culturally distanced from the Holocaust. The self-reflexive nature of these texts ultimately functions as a sort of buffer against accusations of appropriation,

exploitation and a lack of authority. If the text itself performs the act of drawing attention to its own distance from the Holocaust, and to its status as a "necessarily vicarious and hypermediated" representation, then it both anticipates and negates the kind of criticism that has often been leveled at Holocaust novels by non-Jewish writers in other countries (J. Young, "Looking Into Mirrors of Evil" xvii). Though I discuss these self-reflexive strategies in much more explicit detail in my reading of Martel's work, metafiction serves as the central framework for my discussions of both *The Butterfly Plague* and *Beatrice & Virgil*.

Indeed, both texts are examples of what Linda Hutcheon calls "historiographic metafiction"—that is, they are examples of fiction that combine an "attention to verifiable historical events, personages, or places with a self-reflexive awareness of their status as artefacts and the fictional narrative conventions they employ" (5). Works of historiographic metafiction draw our attention to the way history is presented, mediated, shaped and received. More important, however, is that these works also purposefully blur the boundaries between fiction and historical fact: according to Hutcheon, "Fiction and history are narratives distinguished by [...] frames, frames which historiographic metafiction first establishes and then crosses" (110). This is important because works that self-consciously draw attention to how they incorporate and present historical "facts"—and that subsequently offer the reader "the pleasure of a double awareness of both fictiveness and a basis in the 'real'"—can also lay claim to a degree of "authority" that is typically not granted to works of fiction (107). The idea of historiographic metafiction, then, provides a crucial way of challenging the suspicion towards "invention" that Vice documents in her discussion of Holocaust fiction, and allows us to understand how a fictional work can, indeed, still be "true" in its depiction of historical events. For Martel, the interplay of fact and fiction that historiographic metafiction promotes allows him to present

Beatrice & Virgil as, in Vice's words, "a counter-argument to skepticism about the value, or even viability, of Holocaust fiction" (7). He does this by positing Holocaust fiction as a "supplementary," though importantly not inferior or secondary, "way of thinking about the Holocaust" (Martel 11). In order to be properly appreciated, it needs to be understood that Holocaust fiction "approaches the subject in its own way, rather than aiming to 'add' to or 'go beyond' the survivor record" (Vice 8).

It is also important to note that works of historiographic metafiction are "structured around various levels of witnessing," and "offer the reader a model of the witnessing process" (Whitehead 8). Both Findley and Martel focalize the Holocaust through an outsider or non-witness figure—Hutcheon's "insider/outsider" (108)—or through a witness who "watches but is powerless to intervene or unable to distinguish clearly the meaning of an action observed" (Brydon 9). By placing this emphasis on the act of witnessing from a distance, both Findley and Martel acknowledge that "the experience of listening to, reading, or viewing witness testimony is substantially unlike the experience of victimization" (Weissman 20). These novelists, then, are less interested in representing the Holocaust than they are in self-reflexively exploring the distance that separates them from the event and the way that the Holocaust has been witnessed by outsiders. The most crucial elements of this exploration of witnessing from a distance—and we have seen all of these already in the poetry of Klein, Layton and Cohen—are an emphasis on complicity, on the banality of evil, and, most importantly, on the need to avoid letting distance from the Holocaust pervert the way it is understood as a unique historical tragedy by universalizing it. "These," James E. Young has suggested, are the "proper subjects" of Holocaust novels by non-Jewish writers, "not the events themselves" (J. Young, "Looking Into Mirrors of Evil" xvii). In their respective works, Findley and Martel respectfully—almost politely, in a

rather stereotypically Canadian way—acknowledge their own limitations in terms of their ability to understand and depict an event that they did not witness; and by drawing attention to the various ways that outsiders learn about and understand the tragedy and trauma of Holocaust, they ultimately side-step the necessity for accusations of appropriation and exploitation.

"Seeds of Fascism" in Timothy Findley's *The Butterfly Plague*

Timothy Findley's interest in the First and Second World Wars, and his fascination with the aesthetics and allure of fascism, have been well documented in dozens of essays and full-length books.²⁵ Indeed, fascism and violence have become the dominant themes in analyses of his work. As Diana Brydon notes, almost all of Findley's works provide an "extended examination of [...] abuses of power" and of the "megalomania" that dictates the actions and decisions of those who appear to be in positions of power and authority (viii). Findley believes that these abuses of power find their ultimate form in fascism, and "the misguided human drive for perfection" that fascism represents (viii). Though these themes find their way—either explicitly or implicitly—into most of Findley's short stories, plays, and novels, his analysis and critique of fascism manifests itself most readily in his novel *The Butterfly Plague* (first published in 1969 and significantly revised in 1986). In this book, Findley examines the allure of fascism and racial purity that ultimately manifested itself in the twentieth century in the Holocaust, and asks why "community leaders—Olympic gold-medal winners, movie directors and producers,

²⁵ See, in particular, Lorraine M. York's book *Front Lines: The Fiction of Timothy Findley* (1991), Diana Brydon's book *Writing on Trial: Timothy Findley's Famous Last Words* (1995), Anne Geddes Bailey's book *Timothy Findley and the Aesthetics of Fascism* (1998), Barbara Gabriel's essay "'The Repose of an Icon' in Timothy Findley's Theatre of Fascism" (1998), and Heather Sanderson's essay "(Im)Perfect Dreams: Allegories of Fascism in *The Butterfly Plague*" (1998).

movie stars, poets, novelists, businessmen, national heroes, and even kids—fall prey to fascist ideology" (Bailey 53).

Not surprisingly, given this interest in exploring the roots of fascism, *The Butterfly Plague* is also the book in which Findley offers both his most thorough meditation, and his most graphic representation, of the Holocaust. Though the Holocaust manifests itself in a number of Findley's later works as well, particularly *Famous Last Words* (1981) and *Not Wanted on the Voyage* (1984), I have chosen to limit my discussion to *The Butterfly Plague* in this dissertation primarily because it is a text that has not received much critical attention in recent years—unlike *Famous Last Words*—and because it best illustrates Findley's self-reflexive use of a distanced, outside figure to mediate awareness of an historical event. For Findley, the Holocaust—the terrifying product of Nazi Germany's quest for the Aryan ideal—represents the manifestation of fascism in its ultimate and definitive form. By critiquing the allure that fascism has had in the past, and by reminding the reader of the brutal history of the Holocaust, Findley ultimately uses the novel to warn against the attraction that fascism may also have in the future. Like Layton, Cohen, Steinfeld, and many other Holocaust writers, Findley believes that the "'seeds of fascism' lie dormant within us all and that the realization of this fact is our best defense against it" (Roberts 73).

To better understand Findley's argument that the Holocaust is the ultimate manifestation of Nazi Germany's "misguided human drive for perfection" (Brydon viii), it is useful to frame *The Butterfly Plague* through the lens of Jean-Luc Nancy's 1986 work *The Inoperative Community*. According to Nancy, one of the products of "the breakdown in community that supposedly engendered the modern era" is an overwhelming sense of nostalgia for the interdependence, "familiarity, fraternity, and conviviality" that he associates with a mythic or

"more archaic" sense of community (10, 9). The "infrangible bonds" of this homogenous mythic community have been replaced by a "multi-pluralistic alterity of many separate communities," and the result is "a potent nostalgia for this lost entity" (Nancy 9; Prestidge-King 84). This longing for community, then, extends out of an idea that we once existed as part of a harmonious, intimate community—a community that has long since disappeared, and to which we dream of returning. "The gravest and most painful testimony of the modern world," Nancy argues, "the one that possibly involves all other testimonies to which this epoch must answer [...] is the testimony of the dissolution, the dislocation, or the conflagration of community" (1).

The danger of this desire for a return to a homogenous community lies in the way that an individual society—like Nazi Germany—"constructs images of this [mythic] past for the sake of an ideal or a prospective vision" (Nancy 10). The society then "play[s] back" this image of its own "unity, intimacy, and autonomy" to itself "through its institutions, its rituals, and its symbols" (9). The result of this idealism, as Charles Prestidge-King suggests, is that societies that try to recapture this mythic sense of community are inherently built on "assumption[s] of commonality"—of unity and communion through "race, religion, outlook, goal, or normative framework" (Prestidge-King 85). Nancy calls this a community's "common being"—an essential identity that is "made up principally of the sharing, defusing, impregnation of an identity by a plurality wherein each member identifies himself only through the supplementary mediation of his living body of the community (9). The "common being," then, is passed out among the group who are all one or one in all (Nancy xxxviii).

Furthermore, Nancy uses the concept of "immanence" to explain the desire for an autonomous, protected, and undivided social commonality. In their quest for undivided selfhood—for a pure, physical and racial perfection, in the case of Nazi Germany—immanent

societies refuse to recognize each member in and of themselves—as what Nancy calls "singular beings"—but instead "sublate and fuse individuals into an organic whole" through a "supplementary mediation of [...] identification with the living body of the community" (9, 10). As Nancy points out, "being *in* common," in an immanent society like Nazi Germany, ultimately means "no longer having, in any form, in any empirical or ideal place, [...] a substantial identity, and sharing this (narcissistic) 'lack of identity'" with the rest of the community (Nancy xxxviii). The necessary logic of an immanent society, then, is that any entity that does not readily assimilate into the community will experience a rejection which often manifests itself in violence: "political or collective enterprises dominated by a will to absolute immanence have as their truth the truth of death" (Nancy 12). Nancy points to Fascism as a specific historical example of "the grotesque or abject resurgence of an obsession with communion" that centres around the "crystalliza[ation]" of its "supposed loss and the nostalgia for its images of infusion" (17). "The logic of Nazi Germany," Nancy explains, "was not only that of the extermination of the other, of the subhuman deemed exterior to the communion of blood and soil, but also, effectively, the logic of sacrifice aimed at all those in the 'Aryan' community who did not satisfy the criteria of *pure* immanence" (Nancy 12).

Nancy's theory provides the framework for a reading of *The Butterfly Plague* that posits Nazi Germany and Hollywood as immanent societies, the novel's two main characters, Ruth and Race, as representative of an immanent society's attempts to erase the discreteness and autonomy of "singular beings" by stripping away their individual identities, and the Holocaust as the ultimate, violent "logic" of Nazi Germany's quest for the mythic community (9).

Findley's "Defining Obsession"

In his 1990 memoir, *Inside Memory: Pages From a Writer's Workbook*, Findley explains in significant detail how the Holocaust entered his consciousness—how it crossed the distance from the concentration camps of Europe to find him in a California dream home—and how it went from an event that had no real impact on his life to becoming what Brydon calls "the defining obsession of [his] fictional universe" (3). During his twenties, Findley spent a period of time living and working in California while he tentatively began the transition from being an actor to being a writer. One evening, he found himself at the Santa Monica home of Ivan Moffat, a Hollywood screenwriter, producer, and photographer. While exploring Moffat's home, Findley "chanced upon a set of books that altered, as things turned out, [his] life forever" (*Inside Memory* 309). Inside the covers of these books were photographs that had been taken by Moffat, an official army photographer, shortly after the liberation of the Dachau concentration camp in 1945. "I was staring, through photographs, into the heart of Dachau," Findley recollects; "I was looking into hell, and hell was real" (310). Findley's reaction to these photographs is interesting: his explanation that he had "already heard what everyone else had heard and seen what everyone else had seen" about the Holocaust indicates that non-Jewish North Americans were definitely aware of the Holocaust in the early 1950s. However, his reaction to the "appalling intimacy" of Moffat's photographs, which "had not yet entered the public domain," suggests that these images were far more graphic and horrific than any the public had been exposed to at the time: "Nothing—not my nightmares, not the worst of my imagination, not the worst of my experience—had opened the door on the remotest possibility of what I saw that night" (310).

In *Beyond Belief: The American Press and the Coming of the Holocaust 1933-1945*, Deborah Lipstadt argues that throughout the early stages of the war, many papers and magazines

in America downplayed the brutal reality of the Nazi persecution of European Jews in their reports because they "were convinced that the situation could not be *as bad*" as their reporters claimed (16). This initial skepticism in the press meant that "Americans who depended on the media for their information were presented with a confused and confusing picture, a picture with many correct but unclear or incomplete details" (142). The result of this confusion about the reality of the Holocaust, and the downplaying of the event in the American press, was that when photographs of the concentration camps became available after their liberation, they were, to a large extent, censored from the public—a public that, as Franklin Bialystok has argued in *Delayed Impact*, "was not psychologically ready to deal with the Holocaust" (246). Findley acknowledges this downplaying and censorship of the Holocaust in both the press and in American public consciousness when he says that, before Moffat's photographs, he had only seen and heard what he had "been allowed to hear, allowed to see" (*Inside Memory* 310). His own psychological unpreparedness for images of such horror is demonstrated when, after seeing the photographs, his initial response is to doubt their validity: "someone—a part of me tried to believe—must have been creating a fictional obscenity. Surely, no one could actually do such things as were seen in these photographs" (310).

Findley's shocked reaction to Moffat's photographs is crucial to understanding one of the author's key writing strategies: the use of scenes of shocking violence to unsettle his readers. Indeed, the most memorable passages from Findley's works are almost always overwhelmingly violent—and quite often sexual—in nature. The screams of a menagerie of animals trapped in a burning enclosure, and the exceptionally violent rape of Ruth, *The Butterfly Plague*'s main character, for example, echo similarly violent scenes in *The Last of the Crazy People* (1969), *The Wars* (1977), *Famous Last Words* (1981), *Not Wanted on the Voyage* (1984), *Headhunter*

(1993), and *Pilgrim* (1999). There is, however, a crucial difference: in *The Butterfly Plague*, Findley's shockingly violent images all explicitly refer to the horrors of the Holocaust. Much like Cohen's "Peekaboo Miss Human Soap," Findley's use of shocking imagery is effective precisely because it is so blunt that it psychologically (perhaps even physically) forces the reader to acknowledge the very real, very graphic, very traumatizing horrors of the Holocaust ("A Migrating Dialogue" 21).

Clearly, Moffat's photographs had a profound impact on Findley, and the desire to incorporate the Holocaust into his writing—to materialize its brutal reality, and to ask how it had been allowed to happen and how it can be prevented from happening again—became one of the guiding forces of his writing career. What makes Findley's encounter with Moffat's photographs of the newly-liberated concentration camps even more interesting is that, as he emphasizes repeatedly, he "saw all this in Hollywood, California" (*Inside Memory* 310). Interestingly, though perhaps not surprisingly, it is Hollywood that provides the backdrop for Findley's first prolonged analysis of fascism and the Holocaust in *The Butterfly Plague*.

The "Innocent Watcher": Witnessing the Holocaust in *The Butterfly Plague*

Though *The Butterfly Plague* is often considered to be Findley's first explicit examination of the atrocities of the Holocaust, it is worth mentioning that Findley had previously alluded to the Holocaust numerous times in his first novel, *The Last of the Crazy People* (1967). These allusions, however, function as little more than points-of-comparison for the Winslow family's "sense of being a persecuted group" (York 23). Indeed, it would be easy to accuse Findley of exploiting and universalizing the Holocaust in this novel when it is evoked rather haphazardly, in scenes of Cohen-like black comedy, to help describe the appearance of the Winslow's cat—

"Hitler's moustache on a black-and-white countenance" (254)—or when a family member complains that "this is like living in Belsen" when Hooker Winslow carts away a wounded squirrel (77). However, Findley's goal in this novel is to show how extreme acts of violence are assimilated into the minds of distanced bystanders, like Hooker Winslow and his family, and how they ultimately become frames of reference for understanding other violent acts. As such, the novel represents an important tentative step towards his examination of the role of the outside, culturally-removed witness that comes to full realization in *The Butterfly Plague*.

That the Winslows use the Holocaust to describe their own sense of persecution demonstrates not only the hold that the Holocaust has on the imaginations of people who are far removed from it, but also how the universalizing and appropriation of the Holocaust that worry critics are an inevitable and unavoidable reality. *The Last of the Crazy People* represents Findley's first attempt to demonstrate that the end result of fascist, authoritarian thinking—particularly the quest for a homogenous community (a family in this case) that is shaped around a "common being" of mental and physical perfection—is violence and destruction. Hooker's "final solution" for dealing with what he perceives to be his increasingly "crazy" family is to commit an act of mass murder—he shoots them all from his perch in the family's barn—mirroring Nazi Germany's own projects of purification and destruction.

Though the Winslow family farm in Southern Ontario is as far removed from the Holocaust as Hollywood, the glitzy setting of *The Butterfly Plague*, it is here that Findley finds the closest analogy to Nazi Germany that North America affords. Like Germany, Hollywood is a place of mythologized community, obsessed with performance, physical perfection, and hero-worship. But the novel is not only set in Hollywood: the novel's geographical scope "spans and juxtaposes the 'dream factory' of Hollywood's corrupt film industry in the 1920s and 30s and the

rise and early years of Nazi Germany" (Pennee 28). In doing so, the novel ultimately compares Nazi race theory and fascist aesthetics to "the universal love of beauty and physical perfection expressed in the worship" and mythologizing of movie stars in North America (Sanderson 107). The Hollywood film industry that emerged in the 1920s and 30s was just as obsessed with fantasy and physical perfection as Nazi Germany. It presented an idealized version of American society that "append[ed] nationalism" to ideals of physical and racial perfection in order "to promote, propagandize, and legitimate all-American perfection" (Pennee 28). That these ideals are still very much part of the present-day Hollywood system is a frightening reminder that, even after the Holocaust, fascist aesthetics still dominate many aspects of our day-to-day lives.

The book's most obvious parallel between the Hollywood film industry and Nazi Germany's desire for racial purification manifests itself in the form of a blockbuster film entitled *America—I Love You!* This film, created to mark the comeback of aging film star Letitia Virden by her loyal follower and director Cooper Carter (could there be a more perfectly American name?), ends with a scene of flag-waving patriotism and Protestant purification:

The hero kicked his spurs and fled away into history. Virginia Mary and the sisters filed decorously into the nearly complete chapel. Nothing remained but the rotting Mexicans in the field. America was safe. THE END. (Findley 333)

Readers will most likely find the ending of this highly ethnocentric film to be quite humorous in its use of cliché. This is the author's goal: the scene comes across as being cliché precisely because it has been played out hundreds of times before in classic Hollywood films. Indeed, many early (and, sadly, even contemporary) American films exploit and capitalize on the kind of mythologized ethnocentrism that pits patriotic WASPs—the "common beings" whose community is sanctified by the destruction of unassimilable and therefore dangerous "other"

entities—against Mexicans, Indians, and African-American slaves. With its numerous echoes of D.W. Griffith's 1915 cinematic celebration of white supremacy, *The Birth of a Nation*, Cooper Carter's *America—I Love You!* delivers a similarly damaging view of an immanent nation built upon national and racial homogeneity. By asking us to step back and think about how prevalent these artificial and damaging binary constructs (us/them, Aryan/other, good/bad) are, Findley reminds us that these attitudes were just as prevalent in pre-WWII America as they were in Nazi Germany. Indeed, as one intertitle in *The Birth of a Nation* suggests, racial purity trumps all else: "The former enemies of North and South are united again in defense of their Aryan birthright" (Griffith). By drawing attention to the expression of racial superiority in the early films of the American studio system, Findley makes the link between American cinema and the Nazi policies of eugenics painfully clear, while at the same time reminding the reader that film was an important vehicle for Nazi propaganda and mythologizing.

Nazi Germany and early Hollywood films, then, both capitalize on an ironic contrast: glitzy, artificial ideals of physical perfection, racial purity, and national pride are evoked and perpetuated in an attempt to both mask and justify the ugly horrors that are the by-products of these ideals. What makes Findley's conflation of Nazi Germany and the Hollywood film system even more perceptive is that he also, quite cleverly, draws our attention to our own complicity in the proliferation of fascist ideals—these dreams of physical perfection and purification. Indeed, the nostalgia and desire for an immanent and mythologized community that centers around an idealized "common being" are still very much with us today. In this way, Findley uses the context of a specific historical event—the Holocaust—to bridge the temporal and geographical distance between Nazi Germany and early (and contemporary) Hollywood.²⁶

²⁶ There is, of course, great irony in the fact that most of the major studios during the "Golden Age" of Hollywood were owned by Jewish businessmen: David Sarnoff (RCA), Louis B. Mayer (MGM), Jack (Jakob) Warner (Warner

Dreams of perfection inhabit the imaginations of all of the *The Butterfly Plague's* main characters. The protagonist, Ruth Damarosch, desires a perfect baby; her brother, a Hollywood filmmaker named Adolphus (Dolly),²⁷ desires to make a perfect film; Myra Jacobs, a film star, desires a perfect body; and the family patriarch, George Damarosch, desires a perfect family. None of these dreams is attainable—Ruth is a carrier of hemophilia, Dolly's films are failures, Myra commits suicide after her iconic body succumbs to the inevitable effects of age, and George is such a raging alcoholic that none of his family can stand to be around him. Nevertheless, their individual desires for perfection are clearly linked throughout the novel "to Germany's attempts to 'purify' itself" (Bailey 58). Though we may have difficulty recognizing ourselves in the Damarosch family and their circle of glitzy Hollywood icons, it is the fact that we all have these dreams of perfection within us that concerns Findley. "I'm convinced we all have inside [...] a need for perfection which tells us that they had some of the right ideas," Findley says of Nazi Germany in an interview with Graeme Gibson, and "you can't have perfection unless it is going to be evil" (142). Findley's focus on the "evil" inherent in the quest for perfection, here, recalls Nancy's claim that the end result of a society's "will to absolute immanence" inevitably manifests itself through violence as the community attempts to remove any individual entity that does not readily assimilate into the "common being" of the community (Nancy 12). Indeed, Naomi Damarosch, the dying matriarch of the family, and a former Hollywood starlet herself, expresses a similar sentiment within the pages of the *The Butterfly Plague*:

Bros.), Adolph Zukor (Paramount), and Harry Cohn (Columbia). This is an irony that is never explored in Findley's novel.

²⁷ Many critics have drawn attention to the similarities between Dolly's proper name (Adolphus) and Adolf Hitler's. That Dolly is a filmmaker—a manufacturer of impossible dreams and a promoter of Hollywood's fascist-like ideals—makes this analogy particularly relevant.

[...] the greatest flaw of all, the very worst, the most destructive seat of all our woes and pain, is this *dream*—this damnable quest for perfection. When I think [...] of the misery and despair caused by people [...] who will not accept—and who will not cope with reality as it is, I find it a small wonder that humanity is condemned to suffering. (156)

Through these characters and their impossible dreams, the novel highlights the danger of societal immanence and the violent, "damnable quest for perfection" that both Findley and Nancy connect with fascism and Nazi Germany. These dreams, according to both Findley and his character Naomi, are "the cause of all human pain"—a pain that, in its most extreme communal form, has the frightening potential to culminate in mass violence and genocide (156). It is a pain that also causes great confusion and suffering for the individual dreamer.

Ruth Damarosch, the novel's chief protagonist, is one of Findley's best examples of "a dreamer" who undergoes a great deal of personal pain and suffering throughout the novel as a result of both her own futile quest for absolute physical perfection, and the ideals of physical perfection that are projected upon her by others. In many ways, Ruth embodies the novel's thematic link between Nazi Germany and Hollywood. Her mother, Naomi, was a Hollywood film actress, and her father, George, is a director and producer. Because she is also an American swimmer who travels to Germany to compete in the 1936 Berlin Olympics—Hitler's international showcase of fascist aesthetics and Aryan supremacy—Ruth is a witness to what Donna Pennee calls two of the most "powerful texts, or rhetorics [...] by which people lived and died" in the twentieth century (Pennee 28).

Not surprisingly, Ruth is also one of Findley's most psychologically complex characters: she is thirty-one years old when the novel opens, but is said to hold on to her innocence "like a

renegade child" (10). Findley calls her an "innocent watcher" in his novel's "exploration of evil," and she is characterized by her inability to process and understand the implications of the events that are happening around her—the persecution of the Jews that she meets in Europe, her family's downfall, and her own increasing mental instability (*Inside Memory* 107-108). When all of this is combined with her own identification of herself as "a notorious liar" and a "gross exaggerator," and the fact that the mingling of reality and fantasy in the novel is never resolved, Ruth becomes an incredibly unstable, unreliable, anti-absorptive, and alienating focalizing consciousness (324). Perhaps this accounts, at least in part, for the novel's relative lack of success amongst readers and critics, though Vice's suggestion that anti-absorptive works that are "unaccommodating to the reader may be more successful in conveying the disruption and unease that the subject demands" is certainly worth repeating here (161).

That Ruth—and by association, the reader—is unable to distinguish between truth and fantasy, dream and nightmare, sanity and insanity, and history and fiction, is a key aspect of Findley's examination of the allure of fascism. So, too, is the fact that she is ultimately unable to articulate or act out her moral or political opposition to it. Through its displays of aesthetic excess, fascism blinds us to the horrific realities of racism and subjection, and to the pain and destruction that have historically proven to be its goals. That Findley chooses to focalize the early history of Nazi Germany leading up to the Holocaust through an innocent, child-like, and naïve witness is a self-reflexive, metafictional acknowledgement of both the well-documented inability of North Americans to understand exactly what was occurring in Germany during the Second World War until it was far too late to do anything about it, as well as the disorganized, belated response to it that eventually did occur.

That *The Butterfly Plague* begins in 1938 is appropriate as this was the year that Hitler's project of *Anschluss* began, "the year of the demise of 'weaker' nations" (York 66). Throughout the early pages of the novel these events in Europe are reflected in "ideological assaults which are made on several of the characters" (66). Similar correspondences are scattered throughout the first three sections of the novel. When Ruth meets with her estranged father on September 29, 1938, for example, the reader is meant to draw a parallel between George Damarosch's unsuccessful attempts to appease his daughter and reunite his family, with British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's visit to Munich and the appeasement of Hitler and desire for "peace in our time" that was his goal. It is in the book's fourth section, "The Chronicle of the Nightmare," however, that these parallels become more numerous and insistent in tone as Ruth's experiences in Europe during the period leading up to the Berlin Olympics in 1936 are juxtaposed with the persecution of European Jews that was occurring in the same time and in the same place. That this section of the novel is the only one that is not dated is important, as Ruth claims that "The Nightmare is always present and timeless" (67), suggesting that "the events of the late 1930s could have happened anytime and anywhere" (Bailey 64).

The "Nightmare begins [...] with an act," Ruth claims, and the act that she narrates at the start of "The Chronicle of the Nightmare" marks the beginning of her exposure to the persecution of Jews in Europe and the start of her uncertainties about what the various signs of their persecution actually mean (67). Reflecting on her arrival by boat in Southampton before travelling to Germany for the Olympics, Ruth remembers her first encounter with "The dreamers [...] Dreaming in long rows" (68). It is important that Ruth is narrating this story of her experiences in 1936 from a temporal distance. Though we do not know precisely how far removed in time she is from the historical period that she is narrating—this section of the novel

is undated—we are nevertheless able to appreciate her awareness of her own initial inability to comprehend who these "dreamers" are when she first meets them. "When I saw this first row of dreamers," she says, "I knew that it was the first of something but not the first of a Nightmare" (69). These "dreamers," having just arrived in England

from France, having traveled on trains from Switzerland and Italy, having left Munich and Hamburg, Bonn and Dresden, Stuttgart and Mannheim, having left Vienna (only the very wise left Vienna in 1936) [...] were in England walking in a line, the queue that had become second nature, the row they dreamed in. (69)

Though Ruth is unable to read these people as anything more than refugees, the reader quickly realizes what Ruth herself will only come to realize much later: that these "dreamers" are the displaced victims of Hitler's persecution of Jews, and of Nazi Germany's aggressive expansionism. They are the exact opposite of the rich and privileged Hollywood "dreamers" that she has left behind in America. Hungry, emaciated, and wandering in rows, they are a far cry from the champions and icons of Hollywood's fascistic dreams of physical perfection. These "dreamers" are fascism's victims, and their "dreams" are actually nightmares. "In a Nightmare you are pursued upright," Ruth remarks, "you die only in Nightmares" (69).

After seeing these "dreamers" only from a distance in England, Ruth is soon forced into direct contact with one of them, Jakob Seuss, at a café in France: he was "out of his row and wandering alone. I knew then that I should learn something of the mystery of my dreamers" (74). Still unaware of who these "dreamers" are, Ruth is further baffled when Seuss, after aggressively begging her for money, chastises her for not being able to read the signs of Jewish persecution around her—for not being able to understand who he is, and what her mysterious "dreamers" represent: "'Well, you have certainly come from America,' he said [...] 'You do not look around

you" (78). Seuss's critique of America's blindness towards the persecution of the Jews in Europe is elevated even further when he pities Ruth for her ignorance (who is the victim of fascism here?) and gives her a gift. "You may look at it," he tells her, "but do not show it. Do not wear it" (78). Seuss expects, quite rightly, that Ruth will not be able to understand the significance of his gift, and he asks her to think of it in symbolic terms: "to remind you of where you are and of what you do not know" (78). When she finally opens her hand after his departure, Ruth finds "a yellow star [...] made of felt" (78).

The Star of David is a remarkably charged symbol in this scene: at its most basic level, it represents Seuss's persecution, suffering, and status as a victim of Nazi Germany. For Ruth, however, the star is symbolic of everything that she cannot yet comprehend. As Anne Geddes Bailey explains in her book *Timothy Findley and the Aesthetics of Fascism* (1998), Ruth "has difficulty reading the implications of various signs presented to her" (64). "Although she understands that Mr. Seuss is a refugee," Bailey continues, "Ruth detaches the sign from its particular meaning—Jewishness—and reads it instead as a general sign of homelessness and loneliness" (65). What Ruth, the "innocent watcher," does not yet realize, of course, is that the star is a symbol of her own distance from the persecution of the European Jews—a distance created by geography, by time, by her status as a non-Jew, and by her child-like naïveté. Combined with Seuss's pity for her, it also functions as a symbol of her own status as victim. Ruth cannot understand what is going on around her, and her incomprehension ultimately reflects the blindness of all North Americans to the destructive implications of fascist ideology at the beginning of the war—an ideology that, ironically, Ruth's own family is complicit in promoting.

The idea of Ruth as a victim is further developed during her journey from France to Berlin. Indeed, it is on this trip—which appropriately takes place by train—that the analogies between Ruth's experiences in Germany and the victimization of the European Jews are developed in earnest. As the train draws close to Berlin, Ruth's coach, Bruno, commits "a hostile act of gender war" by shaving Ruth's hair off in an attempt to increase her swimming speed (York 76). This act takes away one of the final "feminine things that [Ruth] has left, aside from [her] clothes" (76), illustrating Nancy's claim that the immanent community attempts to erase the discreteness and autonomy of "singular beings" by stripping away their individual identities (Nancy 10). More alarmingly, the shaving of Ruth's head also "recalls the treatment of concentration camp inmates on their arrival" (York 76). That Ruth marries Bruno soon after this act of aggression is ironic, but it also suggests, quite troublingly, that Ruth is ultimately complicit in her own victimization: she forgives Bruno for this act because she realizes that he is right. Her own desire to be a champion athlete and a specimen of physical perfection supersedes her feelings of having been victimized.

Already, the reader starts to get a sense of the complexity of Ruth's characterization, and this is made even more complicated by her reaction to her arrival in Berlin. Though Ruth still remains unable to read and interpret the very concrete symbols of Nazi persecution in Europe that surround her—including the felt star from Seuss that she carries in her pocket and her husband Bruno's fascistic behaviour—her arrival in Germany marks an important step in her process of beginning, tentatively, to understand her status as an outsider in Germany, and her witnessing of a tragic period of history. Driving through the streets, Ruth finds herself both attracted to and repelled by the way she is treated by common German citizens: "At several intersections the populace gave us the salute. I felt imperial. It was marvelous. And awful" (87).

This acknowledgement of an "awful" feeling developing in Ruth is significant, even though she remains unable to identify its source. It suggests that she is finally beginning to understand the subjection to fascist ideology that the Nazi salute—another sign that she must learn to read—represents. She is beginning to look beyond the "marvelous," alluring veneer of fascism to see its "awful" implications. Ruth's characterization creates an even further paradox here: as someone who is attracted to the "imperial" and "marvelous" elements of fascism, but still relatively blind to its "awfulness," Ruth is correctly identified by Seuss as a victim. On the other hand, as a champion swimmer, she is a model of the physical perfection that Nazi Germany (and Hollywood America) desire, and as a representative of the Hollywood studio system, Ruth is complicit in the promotion of fascist ideals. Ruth is simultaneously witness, perpetrator, and victim—a confusing identity serving a complex function in the text.

After arriving in Berlin, Ruth pays a visit to the regal Countess Lissl von Buëll—better known to Ruth as her friend Lisa from boarding school who married a German Count. This visit with Lissl marks another important step in Ruth's ability to recognize herself as an outsider in Nazi Germany and to begin to understand who the "dreamers" that she has encountered throughout Europe really are. Because Lissl's status as a German Countess means that she must maintain a certain level of decorum and formality in front of her husband and her servants while Ruth is present, the women are unable to re-connect on the level that Ruth desires. As Ruth's "sole remaining connection to her feminine past and identity," Lissl's inability to share her secrets and reminisce about their past disappoints Ruth (York 75). However, the two women eventually find a method of communicating through physical contact and by writing on paper and passing their messages back-and-forth while not being observed. When Ruth accidentally drops the yellow Star of David that she has been carrying in her bag since Seuss gave it to her,

Lissl, who knows exactly what the star represents in her adopted German homeland, writes "*Where did you get that star?*" (Findley 95). Ruth's reply, "*From Mr. Seuss in France,*" causes Lissl to reply with an important lesson for Ruth: "*We do not carry stars*" (95). Lissl's use of the personal pronoun "*we*" reveals to Ruth that there is a "*they*" who *do* wear the stars—that the simple piece of yellow felt that she has been carrying around with her is actually a symbol of otherness, undesirability, and alterity, especially in Nazi Germany.²⁸

This us/them binary that Lissl articulates is Ruth's first indication that the star means much more than she has previously understood. When she realizes that the star is a symbol of alterity, and that Lissl's evocation of the us/them binary reflects the exact kind of fascist thinking that created this victimhood in the first place, she offers a startlingly perceptive reply to Lissl: "I looked at her and then I wrote, *We should*" (95). Finally, Ruth has started to read the symbols and signs of fascist persecution that surround her. By suggesting that she and Lissl should wear yellow stars—that they should, in effect, be able to identify with the victimization of the Jews, because they, too, are "singular beings" who have had their identities stripped away and new ones imposed upon them—Ruth acknowledges both her own status as a victim of fascism and Lissl's.

In *Front Lines: The Fiction of Timothy Findley*, Lorraine York insightfully draws on Elie Cohen's 1953 book *Human Behavior in the Concentration Camp* to demonstrate how Findley's analogy of Ruth and Lissl as victims of the European persecution of Jews works. According to York, "Cohen charts the three stages in a concentration camp inmate's trauma: depersonalization, adaptation, and resignation" (76). She then explains how Ruth and Lissl both exhibit symptoms

²⁸ Lissl's use of personal pronouns in this scene to highlight the distance that ultimately separates the two women from each other, and that separates both women from the "*they*" who wear the stars, is repeated in her parting letter to Ruth when she writes, imitating a grammar lesson, "I am. / You are. / He is. / We are. / You are. / They are" (97).

of these stages: "each has been depersonalized, un-named," she suggests, referring to Lisa's adoption of the more German sounding name "Lissl," and Ruth's own identity in Germany as "Frau Haddon" (76). "Each woman also adapts to her husband's desire for physical perfection," York continues (76), and points to Ruth's shaved head and Lissl's appearance with "every hair [...] in place" as evidence (Findley 92). Finally, York suggests that Lissl has become "a living symbol of sexual and political resignation," and warns that, at this point in the narrative, Ruth appears to be headed for the same fate through her marriage and subjection to Bruno (76).

Because Ruth is a champion swimmer and possesses the physical strength and perfection that was idealized by Nazi Germany, she is both accepted and celebrated by the Germans who surround her. The "imperial" salutes that she receives on her arrival in Berlin support this (87). Nevertheless, because immanent societies refuse to recognize difference, and instead attempt to "sublate and fuse individuals into an organic whole," Ruth finds herself in the process of having her identity as a woman and as an American—the characteristics that define her "singular being"—literally stripped away from her (Nancy 10). What makes this scenario even more alarming for the reader, however, is the knowledge that Ruth's physical perfection is compromised by the fact that she is a carrier of hemophilia. And, if we take into mind Nancy's argument that "all those in the 'Aryan' community who [do] not satisfy the criteria of *pure* immanence," and who, therefore, cannot be purely and completely assimilated into the mythic community, will experience a rejection that most often manifests itself in violence (20), we are not surprised that, as "The Chronicle of the Nightmare" continues, Ruth finds herself subjected to increasingly more brutal and violent experiments at the hands of Bruno and a team of Nazi doctors.

After shaving Ruth's head, Bruno also wraps her breasts in a truss in yet another attempt to increase her speed in the water. That Bruno effectively masculinizes Ruth by shaving her head and flattening her breasts is a remarkable act of fascist violence that reminds us that the ideal physical specimen in Nazi Germany was male. Ruth's refusal to leave Bruno after these violent and shocking experiments on her body can be interpreted in two ways: on one hand, it suggests that she is resigned to her fate as a victim, as per Cohen's model of the resignation of concentration camp victims. On the other hand, it once again highlights her complicity in his acts, and her own desire for physical perfection and dominance. It also underscores Susan Sontag's idea that "fascist aesthetics [...] flow from (and justify) a preoccupation with situations of control, submissive behaviour, extravagant effort, and the endurance of pain; they endorse two seemingly opposite states, egomania and servitude" (Sontag 91). The reader is hardly surprised that Bruno ultimately begins to adopt the appearance of his German counterparts:

Bruno's face changed. His mouth stiffened. His nostrils flared more often [...] He shaved his own head. He gained weight. He began to carry a riding crop. He donned boots. He wore leather. He bought a cap. Slowly he changed his language. He became German. (Findley 98)

Given Bruno's new "German" identity, it is not surprising that his ultimate act of violence on Ruth's body occurs in a scene that brings Ruth and the inmates of the concentration camps together, and highlights their mutual status as victims. Bruno's increasing interest and identification with fascist aesthetics and demonstrations of power and supremacy increases when he and Ruth are taken to a concentration camp. His response to the camp, upon arrival, is quite telling of his fascist sympathies: "'Splendid,' he said" (103). Ruth remains silent, however, and she finally finds herself able to make the connection between the Jews in the camps and the rows

of "dreamers" that she has seen throughout Europe: "I saw them. Then. The rows [...] This is where they had disappeared. This is where they had gone" (102-103).

Ruth soon learns that she has been brought to the camp to participate in an experiment: "Winter had passed. Experiments in cold air had been conducted. Now they wanted to try experiments in water temperature. I was to show them how. It had something to do with how long one could endure the cold before one died" (103). In the room with Ruth are a number of "specimens": Jewish inmates who had already been subjected to experiments in cold air and had lost their fingers and toes to frost (103). While Ruth has been chosen to swim because of her physical perfection, she realizes that the "specimens" that surround her have been chosen for their expendability. Though she identifies with them as a victim of fascist ideology and experimentation herself—"I realized I was one of them. I was their extension to the outside"—she is also painfully aware that "whatever [she] could not endure, they would have to" (103). This identification with the Jewish victims of the Holocaust, along with her awareness of her status as "their extension to the outside," is an important step in Ruth's process of understanding both their victimization and her own (103). It also becomes the catalyst for her refusal to subject herself to more of Bruno's experiments. As a result, the scene documenting Ruth's experiment in the tank is not one of horror, as one would expect, but rather of triumph. As Bruno yells at her to "*Schwimmen!*" the front crawl, Ruth takes back some of the femininity that he had previously stolen from her by swimming the side and breast strokes, "feminine and graceful [...] almost happy" (104).

If the final step in Elie Cohen's model of concentration camp trauma is resignation, Ruth's refusal to give in to the cold is given an almost heroic status in the scene: "If I could endure more cold than anyone ever had, then they would never have to endure the cold again" (106). Not only

has Ruth started to sympathize with the suffering of the "dreamers"/ "specimens"/ "singular beings" that surround her, but she has also taken the crucial step of extending charity to them. She is swimming so that they will not have to, and the result of her sympathetic act is that "the dreamers in their rows began to sway. We became one" (106). This act of charity is short-lived, however, because just as she thinks she is on the verge of death, she is rescued by Bruno—a luxury that ultimately reinforces the distance that separates her privileged status from the victimhood of the concentration camps inmates that she was prepared to die for.

After winning three medals at the Olympics, and revealing to Bruno that she cannot have children with him because she is a carrier of hemophilia—thus making herself an undesirable entity in his eyes, and reinforcing her inability to satisfy Nazi Germany's "criteria of *pure immanence*"—Ruth moves back to California, hoping to escape the nightmare of fascism that plagues Europe (Nancy 12). Having witnessed this nightmare firsthand, and having struggled through the process of identifying, interpreting, and understanding it, Ruth is now no longer an "innocent watcher," but is instead able to see that the nightmare is present in America as well (Findley 67). The section that immediately follows Ruth's return home at the end of "The Chronicle of the Nightmare" is called "The Chronicle of Alvarez Canyon," and it is in this section that Findley makes his most extreme use of shocking images of the Holocaust to comment on America's blindness to the suffering of the European Jews and complicity in upholding fascist ideals.

"We Didn't See Them": The Holocaust at Alvarez Canyon

Alvarez Canyon is a combination of large pleasure garden, labyrinth, and zoo that has been created in the Los Angeles hills for Hollywood's elite to explore and, with the help of a

guide, "lose" themselves in. Like the set of a film, the park blurs the lines between fantasy and reality by "combining plastic plants and stuffed animals with living things in a gaudy, confusing maze" (Sanderson 115). The park's artificiality is meant to "preserve the atmosphere of Paradise in all weathers," and as such it is a physical embodiment of the Hollywood/Nazi ideal of physical perfection. For a character who has already fallen victim to an inability to discern between fantasy and reality in her trip to Europe, and who has been exposed to the horrific realities of the concentration camps, the pristine, partially plastic, and peaceful canyon quickly turns into another nightmare for Ruth, who once again reprises her role as an "innocent watcher" to the suffering of others.

Halfway through the Damarosch family's visit to the park, ashes from a discarded cigarette start a fire that slowly spreads throughout the dry canyon, engulfing the flora—both real and artificial—and chasing both humans and animals through the maze. The family escapes, but the animals are too confused and panicked to do the same. Ruth and Naomi watch the growing fire from the safety of the parking lot outside the labyrinth. They are literally outside the suffering that is occurring in the garden—innocent witnesses of the fire that is slowly consuming the animals within.

The language that Findley uses to describe Ruth's witnessing of the animals' suffering leaves no doubt in the reader's mind that he is attempting to depict and work through the emotions of a helpless bystander to tragedy—an outside witness to a holocaust. As Ruth and Naomi watch,

The animals quit all thought of individual flight and joined in mutual panic and terror—fleeing mindlessly in concerted directions, not knowing what death was, but smelling death—not knowing what fire was, but being burned. Some turned

back into the furnace. Others crept into flaming trees [...] The wheeling wall of flesh turned round and round. (142)

Seeming to remember the gate that leads out of the labyrinth, the animals quickly flock in that direction, and the humans outside the gate, thinking only of protecting themselves from being crushed by the panicked animals, lock them inside. Naomi's lamentations—"Why? Why? [...] Help them!"—are met with embarrassed silence as the rest of the witnesses, now implicated in the suffering of the animals behind the gate, physically turn away (142).

In a passage loaded with Holocaust imagery, Findley goes on to describe the animals crushing against the gate in their desperate attempts to flee: "the chains of the fence bulged; almost gave—but did not. Paws reached through. Beggars. Dead. Noses, eyes, portions of torn and unrecognizable anatomy dropped before Ruth, melting in the grass at her feet. She turned back. It was over. No more noises. Four thousand creatures had perished against the wall" (143). There are, of course, echoes of Margaret Bourke-White's concentration camps photographs in this passage, particularly her famous image of the emaciated inmates of Buchenwald pressed against, and reaching through, a fence. Findley uses the shocking image of melting flesh to further unsettle the reader—to remind him that in the concentration camps of Europe it was not animal, but rather human flesh that was melting.

Findley's use of animal suffering is strategic. In many ways, like Layton and Martel, he uses animals to push the boundaries of what is considered acceptable in terms of the representation of Holocaust suffering. Although the deaths of four thousand animals is easier for the average reader to picture than the death of six million Jews, it is precisely our ability to "take" the death of four thousand animals in a work of fiction without blinking an eye—we keep reading without stopping to think about the enormity of the suffering involved in what we have

just read, or the significance of the number of victims—that is troublesome to Findley. As Auden writes in "Musée Des Beaux Arts," the reader "turns away / Quite leisurely from the disaster" (Auden 14-15). In this sense, we are no better than the Damarosch family and their turning away from the suffering of the animals in the Alvarez Canyon. Furthermore, by substituting humans for animals in this scene, Findley reminds us that part of Nazi Germany's attempts to champion and mythologize its ideal of physical purity and perfection was to portray its victims as animals that need to be exterminated.

Not only do the human survivors of the Alvarez Canyon tragedy turn away from the suffering, but they also subsequently deny that they ever witnessed it all, further challenging Ruth's inability to discern between fantasy and reality. When Ruth is finally able to speak about the incident a few days after it occurred, Naomi informs her that "there was no wall, dear," and one of the other women who witnessed the event tells Ruth that "it's all in [her] mind" (143). "No one saw it. No one heard it. No one was there," Findley writes, "Or, so they all claimed. Everyone heard about it, of course, but afterward. In the reports" (143). At this point, the reader is once again just as baffled as Ruth. Did the events at Alvarez Canyon occur? Was Ruth there? Or was the whole thing simply another nightmare of Ruth's? In her book *Moral Metafiction: Counter-Discourse in the Novels of Timothy Findley* (1991), Donna Pennee suggests that "what is described here only occurred in Ruth's mind: the Damarosch clan was *not* in Alvarez Canyon—there was a fire, but they did not directly experience it (in the same way that the Holocaust occurred, but not directly to all of us)" (32). If that is the case, then Ruth has transferred her new-found awareness of what was occurring in the concentration camps in Europe while she was there to the suffering of the animals that she has heard about in the "reports" of the incident in Alvarez Canyon.

If Ruth and her family actually were at the canyon when the events occurred, however, then the passage becomes a vehicle for Findley to criticize individuals and governments who chose to turn away from the Holocaust as it was happening. Bailey suggests that "since the scene is narrated from the perspective of the omniscient narrator, who throughout the chronicle moves in and out of various characters' minds [...] the reality of the event and their presence there is reinforced" (61). In this case, the Damarosch family's refusal to acknowledge their presence at the Canyon when the catastrophe occurred—and thus their complicity in the suffering of the animals—seems to echo Bialystok's claim that Canada, and other countries who refused to intercede because they were unable (or unwilling) to grasp the immensity of what was occurring in Europe, was "not psychologically ready to deal with the Holocaust" because "what had happened was [...] tragic, but it happened over there, it was not part of [their] world" (246). Similarly, Findley writes of the Damarosch clan that "they were there, but this had no connection with the reality of their names and faces" (Findley 141). Once again, Findley's use of animal suffering is important: the Damarosch family is able to turn away from the horror of the Alvarez Canyon events because the death of four thousand animals ultimately has "no connection" to them—they feel that they do not share anything in common with the animals that died. Similarly, this lack of a connection to what was occurring in Europe made it easier for many Canadians to turn away from it. "History tells us there *was* a Holocaust," Pennee writes, "and we did not stop it; we did not read the signs" (33). The family's reaction "parallels the historical reaction of many people outside of that experience who could not imagine, and thus not accept as real, the events occurring inside Germany until it was much too late" (63).

Bailey takes things even further by arguing that the Damarosch family's refusal to acknowledge the events in the Canyon "echoes revisionist versions of Nazi history which assert

that there were no death camps, no gas chambers, no ovens, no victims" (61). If we can turn so easily away from the death of four thousand animals, Findley seems to be saying, then can we truly be surprised that people can willfully deny the Holocaust? "They put out their hands," Ruth says in a line that clearly conflates the animal victims of the Canyon with the human victims of the Holocaust, "they were *there*. Begging for their lives. But apparently we didn't see them because you say we weren't there [...] *They put out their hands to us*, Mother, and I was watching. But you turned away to watch something else" (Findley 153). Regardless of how the scene at Alvarez Canyon is interpreted, Ruth once again symbolizes the "innocent watcher," traumatized by her status as a helpless (and perhaps even complicit) outsider.

Race: "This Damnable Quest for Perfection"

Although "The Chronicle of Alvarez Canyon" is the section of *The Butterfly Plague* in which Findley offers his most extended exploration of the Holocaust, there are quite a few other elements in the book that extend his focus on fascism, racial purity, and the inevitable violence that is often the ultimate manifestation of these ideals. Indeed, one of the book's most intriguing—albeit somewhat confusing—elements is the presence of a character simply known as "Race." The reader is never sure whether this character is a real person, or simply another figment of Ruth's overactive and traumatized imagination. Regardless, Ruth claims to see Race, "this man who follows" her, after she returns home from Europe, "even in [her] dreams and nightmares" (154).

Race is the embodiment of the ideals of physical perfection and racial superiority that stood at the heart of Nazi Germany. Indeed, Ruth's mother, Naomi, is quick to interpret Race in this way, characterizing him as "the myth of perfection" and "the cause of all human pain" (156).

Her warning about the violent repercussions of this desire for physical perfection echoes Nancy's assertion that the immanent community's attempts to "sublate and fuse" in its desire to create a perfectly homogenous society always leads to violence and suffering (Nancy 12). Because he combines power, sexual fantasy, and violence, Race is also the embodiment of what Sontag calls the "utopian aesthetics" and "physical perfection" of fascism (91). When Race confronts Ruth at the end of the book, she becomes physically aroused by the sight of his uniform and the "odors of leather and smoke" that define him (Findley 236). "I'm here," she tells Race, "See me? Here I am" (236). Leather, smoke, uniforms, and swastikas are all fetish objects that Sontag associates with sexuality and submission: "boots, leather, chains, Iron Crosses, gleaming torsos, swastikas [...] have become the secret and most lucrative paraphernalia of eroticism," and it is precisely these elements that attract Ruth to Race (Sontag 91). When she drags Race to the top of a hill and tells him to "undo her" (Findley 237), she is ultimately overtaken by Sontag's "two seemingly opposite states" of "egomania and servitude" (91).

Many critics refer to this scene as a rape, but there is no doubt that Ruth desires this encounter because she believes that sex with Race will help her create a "blue eyed baby, with blond hair and fine, long limbs, a straight mind and a health-infested system" (Findley 343). It is only a rape in as much as it symbolically demonstrates Ruth being overtaken and submitting to the physical perfection and purity that Race represents. This is an interesting illustration of Nancy's claim that the essential identity of a community is "made up principally of the sharing, defusing, [and] impregnation of an identity by a plurality" (9). Ruth's desire for perfection has blinded her to reality: she invites and encourages Race's sexual violence, even though, as a carrier of hemophilia, she ultimately knows that a perfect child is impossible. Race, then, becomes the physical manifestation of Ruth's ultimately impossible dream of physical perfection

and communion. He is intimately connected to the way fascism promotes mythological ideals and desires at the expense of reality, as well as Nancy's warnings of the violence that is the necessary product of the "will to absolute immanence" that defined Nazi Germany" (Nancy 12).

Clearly, Ruth is no longer an "innocent watcher." She has, rather, fallen victim herself to fascist ideology and the pursuit of physical perfection. She has been "seduced by the Nazi dream of racial perfection" (Sontag 91), and the juxtaposition of sexual and military imagery that occurs when Findley describes the sexual encounter—"impaling her body onto his blade" (Findley 68)—illustrates Sontag's argument that fascism "glorifies surrender, it exalts mindlessness, it glamorizes death" (91).²⁹ As Naomi has warned earlier in the novel, in a passage that echoes Nancy's theories of the mythic community, it is precisely the allure of fascism, the desire for physical and racial perfection that defined Nazi Germany, and the often violent repercussions of the expression of these ideals, that lead to so much suffering in the world. And there is no doubt that Ruth suffers as a result of her obsession with fascism: in the first edition of the novel, Ruth gives birth to a daughter and then dies in a car accident. As expected, however, the daughter suffers from hemophilia and Ruth's quest for physical perfection is a failure and she is violently cast aside. In the second edition of the book, the ending is more open-ended. Ruth does not die, but is left "alive and embarking anew on the journey of her life despite the heavy baggage of sorrows and memories that she must bear" (Brydon 51). "She has witnessed [...] Nazi atrocities, internalized these horrors, and recycled them through her dreams," and the book suggests that

²⁹ A similar, and less ambiguous, personification of the Aryan ideal is found in the character of Harry Reinhardt in Findley's 1981 novel *Famous Last Words*. Like "Race," Reinhardt's seemingly perfect physical appearance and Nazi paraphernalia (leather again) are fetishized, and he is the agent of a similarly sexualized scene of violence when he forces the main character of the novel to lick his boots and then kills him by stabbing an ice pick through his eye.

although she will always bear the trauma of her experiences, she will ultimately learn to manage (51).

Indeed, the second edition of the book ends on a rather hopeful note that draws together a series of Holocaust-related images that center around the titular plague of butterflies. The symbolism associated with the image is actually quite simple: near the beginning of the book, in a chapter entitled "The Chronicle of the First Butterfly," a migration of butterflies begins to arrive in Los Angeles. The butterflies are met with mixed reactions from the novel's various characters: there are those who want to kill them ("Kill 'em all,' said Mrs. Shackelton"), and those who want to save them ("Oh, no, Mama. No. You know they're always being killed around here. I hate it") (Findley 64). As the book continues, Findley includes a number of scenes in which characters (including Ruth) mindlessly kill the butterflies that they encounter without giving their actions a second thought. The butterflies are seen to be a nuisance, and as their numbers continue to grow, their elimination is met with less and less public resistance, and new methods—including fire—are experimented with to both kill the living butterflies and dispose of their carcasses after they have died. The butterflies are, of course, a metaphor for the Jews of Europe, and their mass, calculated annihilation at the hands of the citizens of Los Angeles becomes a way of bridging the distance between Europe and America, between Nazi Germany and Hollywood.

At the end of the book, as a reinvigorated Ruth attempts to come to terms with both her own victimization at the hands of her fantasies of physical perfection, and the scenes of horror that she has witnessed in both Europe and America, she takes note of a "string of butterflies [flying] North" (355). These are the butterflies who have survived the "genocide" that occurred in Los Angeles, and the language that Findley uses to describe them evokes images associated

with the liberation of the concentration camps at the end of the war and the bittersweet departure of the survivors of the Holocaust: "they were going now [...] they were leaving, tens of millions of dead remaining behind them. Little corpses, easily brushed aside with brooms. They had left dusty red stains on the sidewalks, which people washed down with hose water" (355). "Were they really going?" Ruth wonders, "Was it really over?" (373).

Ruth celebrates the idea that "now there will be no more fires [...] Forever. Or a while," and in that final phrase lies so much of Findley's argument (374). The Holocaust may be over, the victims may have scattered, but the ideologies that tried to destroy them still remain. The fires may be over for "a while," but definitely not "forever." The only way to be prepared for their return is to avoid falling into the role of the "innocent watcher" again, and through the creation of this novel, Findley demonstrates that one of the strategies that can help us do this is to preserve and re-present both the historical event of the Holocaust and the process of bearing witness to it from an outsider's perspective. Indeed, Findley's closest counterpart in the novel is an artist named Noah Trelford who himself aims to "interpret and preserve" the Butterfly Plague of 1938 by representing it in art (76). Trelford mashes the remains of butterfly victims into a paste and then uses that paste to sculpt statues of butterflies. Just like Holocaust writers, though, Trelford soon becomes aware of—and almost stopped by—the ethical questions that surround his artistic representations: does creating a paste out of the corpses of the butterflies implicate him in the very horror that he is attempting to preserve? These questions are, as we have seen, inevitable, and the only way to deal with them is to follow Findley's own advice, voiced by his character Naomi, and give up the "damnable quest" for a "perfect" representation of the Holocaust—a quest for perfection that is ultimately unobtainable for the outside, culturally-removed witness (156).

To "Live in the Terms of Today": (Meta)Fiction, Allegory, and Games in Yann Martel's *Beatrice & Virgil*

Shortly after winning the prestigious Man Booker Prize for his 2001 novel *Life of Pi*, Yann Martel began to advertise his next project. His initial descriptions of the book were vague, and the mystery that surrounded it, paired with reports that Martel had received a \$3 million advance for worldwide publication rights for the book—an unprecedented amount for a Canadian work—piqued considerable public interest (Barber). In a 2007 interview with Tasha Robinson, Martel explained that his forthcoming work would be "two things [...] a novel and an essay. They'll be published back-to-back, upside down, what the trade calls a flip book [...] a book with two covers. And they'll have the same title: *A 20th Century Shirt*" (Martel, "Interview"). He further explained that the first part of the book would be an essay about the need for writers to experiment with new forms and genres when writing about the Holocaust, and the second part would be an experimental fictional representation of the Holocaust that would put into practice his desire for a "non-historical [...] take on the Holocaust" (Martel, "Interview"). It was to be an allegory "featuring a monkey and a donkey," and "set on a shirt. And the shirt is both a shirt and a country [...] a very far cry from your standard Holocaust story" (Martel, "Interview"). The book, then, was to be an exercise in both theory and literary practice: an unconventional form promising an unconventional approach to the Holocaust.

Reminiscent of Layton's battle-cry in his "Foreword" to *Balls for a One-Armed Juggler* for a "poet who can make clear for us Belsen" (xviii), Martel explained that the goal of his new work was to make the Holocaust "live in the terms of today" rather than allowing it to fade into the realm of "black and white images," and "ancient history" (Martel, "Interview"). By challenging the limitations of literary Holocaust representation via the use of new, thought-provoking, and occasionally shocking metaphors and images, Martel's work would allow the

Holocaust to "speak" in a new way to his contemporary readers, reflecting the growing need for novel ways of bridging the increasing historical distance that separates contemporary readers from the historical event. Ambitious goals for an ambitious project.

Then: nothing. Almost a decade passed; Martel still did not release his promised book. Many readers, literary critics, and students of Holocaust literature began to sense that something had gone awry in the process of the book's creation. Finally published in 2010, *Beatrice & Virgil* is a Holocaust novel, but it is not *A 20th Century Shirt*. It does, however, feature a main character, Henry, whose attempt to write a new kind of Holocaust story in the form of a flip book is resisted, and finally rejected, by his publishers. This apparently autobiographical and self-reflexive opening goes at least part of the way in explaining why *A 20th Century Shirt* never materialized. Like Martel, Henry wanted a book that would spur a revolution in fictional representations of the Holocaust, but his publisher wanted a book about the Holocaust that would live up to the hype and commercial success of Henry's second novel which "had won prizes and was translated into dozens of languages" (3). In the end, neither seems to have achieved what they wanted, and the result is that Henry's book is deemed an "unpublishable failure" in its drafted flip book format (Martel 17).

To many reviewers—including *The Guardian's* James Lansdun, who denounced the book as being "strangely trivial and narcissistic"—*Beatrice & Virgil* feels like a cop out: instead of a book that does the things that Martel had been promising it would do in almost a decade's worth of public interviews, we are left with a book that is, in part, about the impossibility of doing those things (Lasdun). While this is certainly true, it is important not to judge what the final product is based on what it was *supposed to be*. However unlike the hypothetical *20th Century Shirt*, *Beatrice & Virgil* is a valuable and unique text in its own right precisely because it self-

reflexively explores, highlights, and documents the very difficulty of finding new ways to represent the Holocaust in fiction. That Martel finds a way to incorporate his original experimental approach to the Holocaust into the final published product, while at the same time offering a very pointed critique of the forces that stand against experimenting with new ways of representing the Holocaust—including, of course, the Canadian publishing industry's hypocrisy towards encouraging experimentation *as long as it will still sell*—makes *Beatrice & Virgil* a unique addition to the canon of Canadian Holocaust literature.

Beatrice & Virgil is structured around multiple, often interlaced, narrative strands. The first—its most autobiographical, metafictional, and self-reflexive—documents, through the story of Henry, the resistance that Martel's initial plans for the book received at the hands of his publishers, and offers a staggering critique of the Canadian large-press publishing industry's privileging of marketable content over experimentation. The reader is left with both the awareness that *Beatrice & Virgil* is itself a result of this practice, and the knowledge that, in order for new, experimental approaches to the Holocaust to flourish, a great deal of reform needs to happen at the level of the publishing industry. Dismayed at the rejection of his book, Henry relocates to an undisclosed city and forms an acquaintance with a taxidermist turned playwright who is eventually revealed to be a former Nazi (21). The taxidermist's play—the novel's second narrative strand—tells the story of a howler monkey named Virgil, and a donkey named Beatrice. Based on a play that Martel had written a few years before the eventual publication of *Beatrice & Virgil* as an example of his desire for an anti-realist, non-historical representation of the Holocaust, this animal allegory provides Martel with a "linguistic and often metafictional playground for his ideas about Holocaust representation" (Petersen 195). Through its use of taxidermy as a metaphor for historiography, and its metafictional self-criticism, the second

strand, more than any other, forces the reader to confront the question of what it means to read or write a story *about* the Holocaust, and in doing so ultimately acknowledges the limitations of allegory as a representational tool.

Finally, the book's third strand—its shortest, but arguably most experimental and effective in terms of bridging the distance between the contemporary reader and the Holocaust by making the historical event "live in the terms of today"—takes the form of a role-playing game that is made up of a series of short questions that force the reader to confront ethical dilemmas similar to those that a victim of the Holocaust may have had to face (Martel "Interview"). That *Beatrice & Virgil* concludes with a series of questions is appropriate, as it is a book that ultimately seems to raise more questions about Holocaust representation than it answers. Nevertheless, through its use of multiple narrative strands, and metafiction, Martel's book offers the reader unique and important insights into the practice and politics of literary experimentation with the Holocaust at the beginning of the 21st century.

"The World Upside Down": The Metafictional Opening of *Beatrice & Virgil*

The opening paragraph of *Beatrice & Virgil* immediately alerts a reader who is already familiar with Martel's past work to the metafictional and autobiographical modes of the first narrative strand. The protagonist, Henry, is basking in the success of his second novel which "had won prizes and was translated into dozens of languages. Henry was invited to book launches and literary festivals around the world [...] he regularly saw people reading it on planes and trains; Hollywood was set to turn it into a movie; and so on and so forth" (3). The reader can easily deconstruct the very thin veil of metafiction that Martel has set up here: Henry can be read as a stand-in for Martel himself, the celebrated second novel is *Life of Pi*, and it was well known

by 2010, when *Beatrice & Virgil* was published, that a film version of *Life of Pi* was in the works and would soon be released.

The simple, short phrase, "so on and so forth," that Martel ends his paragraph with is surprisingly significant, as it embodies the self-reflexive and metafictional strategies of the book's opening section and subtly introduces his critique of the publishing industry. On one hand, the phrase suggests that the pattern of acclaim that follows the publication of any novel that gains popularity, like *Life of Pi*, is predictable, and, therefore, not worth mentioning in detail: first publication, then prizes, then translations and film rights, etc. The reader knows—or at least *thinks* he knows—what the "so on and so forth" entails for a popular novel, because it is so commonplace. On the other hand, because it elides the period of time between the publication of Henry's two books, and in doing so makes it seem like not much out of the ordinary has occurred during that time, "so on and so forth" also exposes how *little* most readers actually know about the industry and about the context surrounding a book's evolution from author's idea to published product. Hidden behind Martel's glib "so on and so forth" are the (often unrealistic) expectations for a new literary work that are manufactured by the publishing industry through intensive marketing campaigns, increasingly high monetary advances for authors, and expectations about the book's form and content that may not necessarily mesh with what the author has in mind. Thus, when the new book is so experimental in nature that it is rejected by publishers, as Martel's original draft was, and when it is ultimately quite different in subject, tone, and style from the book that preceded it, false expectations can potentially lead to disappointment when the final product is released. There is a decade of frustration—for both Martel and his publisher—hidden behind that "so on and so forth."

The metafictional connection between Martel and his protagonist Henry is strengthened as the opening section continues. The reader is told that Henry "wrote another book. It involved five years of thinking, researching, writing, and rewriting. The fate of that book is not immaterial to what happened next to Henry, so it bears being described" (5-6). Because the opening paragraph of the book has already invited the reader to conflate Henry and Martel, the emphasis on the fate of Henry's book presented here suggests that answers to the multitude of questions surrounding *Beatrice & Virgil's* creation, delay, and eventual publication are forthcoming.

By emphasizing the "five years of thinking, researching, writing, and rewriting," that went into the book, Henry attempts to defend the authenticity of his work (5). Similarly, in many of the published interviews leading up to and following the publication of *Beatrice & Virgil*, Martel places a similar emphasis on the amount and type of research that went into his work: "I read about eighty new books before writing a word [...] I also visited Auschwitz three times, the last visit lasting two weeks" (Random House Reader's Circle). This appeal to the credibility of years of research demonstrates Martel's awareness of the conventional demand that Holocaust fiction be rooted in reality, in history, and in fact. Sue Vice's claim that there is a "simple mistrust of invention in relation to the Holocaust" resonates here, particularly given Martel's lack of a cultural connection to the event (4). By drawing our attention to the years of research that went into the creation of his book—even before the reader becomes aware that *Beatrice & Virgil* is a book about the Holocaust—Martel pre-emptively defends himself against readers who may suggest, as Vice explains, that "the more personal distance there is between author and subject, the more 'invented' the work must be" (4).

The reader learns that, like Martel, Henry's initial plan was to write a book "in two parts, and he intended them to be published in what the publishing trade calls a flip book: that is, a

book with two sets of distinct pages that are attached to a common spine upside down and back-to-back to each other" (6). Henry's idea, which echoes Martel's earlier statements about his own project almost verbatim, is to employ this unusual publishing format "because he is concerned with how best to present two literary wares that shared the same title, the same theme, the same concern, but not the same method" (6). The first part of Henry's book was to be a novel, and the second was to be a piece of nonfiction—an essay about literary Holocaust representation. Theory and practice were to be playfully combined in one package.

Henry admits that he has had trouble working through the complete logistics of the packaging:

They had to be published together. But in what order? The idea of placing the essay before the novel struck Henry as unacceptable. Fiction, being closer to the full experience of life, should take precedence over nonfiction [...] but behind serious nonfiction lies the same fact and preoccupation as behind fiction [...] so why should the essay be slotted as an afterword? (7)

Henry's concerns with the effectiveness and aesthetics of the flip book format are entirely reader-centric: he is concerned with presenting his two texts in the most effective way possible and with making his material as accessible to the contemporary reader as possible. Of course, these problems are beyond his control, as the flip book format means that there can be no correct order to the way the material is presented. It is the reader who ultimately has control over which part he will read first—the novel or the essay—and the reading of one will necessarily inform the reading of the other. For Henry's publishers, however, the flip book format creates problems at a commercial level—problems that would eventually lead (for both Henry and Martel) to a

complete scrapping of the original flip book idea, and a much less experimental and innovative final product as a result.

In interviews, Martel mentions that, like his character Henry, he was summoned by his publishers to a lunch meeting in London to discuss the progress of his book.³⁰ As Henry explains, because this lunch meeting occurred just as he was completing his work on the flip book, he falsely believed that its tone was meant to be celebratory: "Henry was in high spirits. He thought they were a wedding party. In fact, they were a firing squad" (12). Alongside Henry's editors, an historian and a bookseller were also invited to the meeting, "which Henry took as a sign of double approval, theoretical and commercial. He didn't see at all what was coming" (11). Expecting praise for his work, Henry quickly learns that the general consensus is that "the whole was a complete, unpublishable failure" (17). Though the content of the book receives its fair share of criticism—"the novel was tedious, the plot feeble, the characters unconvincing [...] the point lost; the essay was flimsy, lacking in substance, poorly argued, poorly written"—it is the proposed flip book format that is criticized the most (17). The key element that both Martel and Henry repeatedly advertised would make their new Holocaust texts unique was seen by publishers as "an annoying distraction, besides being commercial suicide" (17).

Flip books are rare in the publishing industry, but they are certainly not unheard of. They are designed in a way that allows the two parts of the text to be read and treated as separate entities, but the fact that they are published together as a physically cohesive entity points to the interrelatedness of the two sections, and invites the reader to discover the way one part of the book informs and reflects the other part. This format works well for an experimental book that blurs genres, but from a commercial perspective it creates multiple logistical problems. The

³⁰ See John Barber's review of *Beatrice & Virgil*, in the April 6, 2010 issue of *The Globe and Mail*, for a more detailed account of Martel's meeting with his own publishers.

commercial necessity of imposing a generic label on a book—categorizing it as either fact or fiction so that it can be marketed to the appropriate audience and shelved in the proper section of a bookstore—is one of the key concerns that is used by publishers to dissuade Henry, Martel's fictional counterpart, against the use of the flip book format. "Where do you see the book being displayed? [...] In the fiction section or the nonfiction?" the bookseller asks Henry at the lunch meeting in London;" [...] and where are you going to put the bar code? It always goes on the back cover. Where do you put a bar code on a book with two front covers?" (13, 14).

Dumbfounded by a line of questioning at the commercial level that he had not anticipated, Henry can only mumble that he wrote his book "without worrying where the fucking bar code would go" (15).

It is unfortunate that Martel, like Henry, was ultimately unable to publish his Holocaust book as a flip book, because the form offers a perfect metaphor at the material level for the subject of his book. As Henry explains, "the event at the heart of his book was, and still is, profoundly distressing—threw the world upside down, it might be said—so how fitting that the book itself should always be half upside down" (8). To be fair, had *Beatrice & Virgil* been published as a flip book, Martel and his publisher would have undoubtedly faced accusations of trivialization. To the average reader—a mainstream publisher's target audience—the flip book format may have come across as gimmicky or flippant, and given the book's subject matter, that could have been harmful to its overall success (and sales, of course). However, the struggle to match form and content has been the goal of many writers previously discussed in this dissertation: Klein experiments with satire, rhythm, and rhyme, Layton and Cohen champion the use of blunt and disturbing Holocaust imagery, Eisenstein uses shadowy drawings in her graphic novel to capture the blurring and distorting qualities of postmemory, and Findley uses

metafiction to highlight his own cultural and temporal distance from the Holocaust through the character of Ruth. In this tradition, the flip book format might have allowed Martel to better capture the incomprehensibility and the fragmentation of the Holocaust through the physical form of the book itself. Indeed, the possibilities of the physical flip book as a vehicle for the Holocaust are remarkable:

A flip book is a book with two front doors, but no exit. Its form embodies the notion that the matter discussed within has no resolution, no back cover that can be neatly, patly closed on it. Rather, the matter is never finished with [...] the reader is made to understand that he or she has not understood, that he or she cannot fully understand, but must think again in a different way and start all over.

(8)

The flip book format, then, physically embodies Martel's desire to highlight the effects of distance on our understanding of the Holocaust. As Martel explains, through Henry, the flip book format shows us the impossibility of meaning and comprehension: it physically destabilizes our knowledge of the Holocaust, and it constantly reminds us that no one text can ever hope, or claim, to provide a complete and authoritative truth vis-à-vis the real trauma of the event. That the publishers were either unwilling or unable to appreciate the brilliance of this method of matching the book's physical form to its content is unfortunate, and although Martel confesses that the attendees at the meeting he was summoned to "weren't quite so nasty in real life," he was still convinced by his publishers that his book was unpublishable in its flip book form (Barber).

"Little Actual Fiction": Martel's Reading of the Holocaust

There exists, somewhere, an essay written by Martel about literary representations of the Holocaust that has yet to be published. Nevertheless, the author puts a greatly condensed version of the essay into his protagonist's mouth in the opening narrative strand of *Beatrice & Virgil* (17). Henry tells the reader that he "had noticed over years of reading books and watching movies how little actual fiction there was about the Holocaust. The take on the event was nearly always historical, factual, documentary, anecdotal, testimonial, literal" (8). The example that Henry provides to juxtapose representations of the Holocaust against is one that Martel himself had provided in many interviews:

Whereas war—to take another cataclysmic human event—was constantly being turned into something else. War was forever being trivialized, that is made less than it truly is. Modern wars have killed tens of millions of people and devastated entire countries, yet representations that convey the real nature of war have to jostle to be seen, heard and read amidst the war thrillers, the war comedies, the war romances, the war science fictions, the war propaganda [...] No such poetic license was taken with—or given to—the Holocaust. That terrifying event was overwhelmingly represented by a single school: historical realism. The story, always the same story, was always framed by the same dates, set in the same places, featuring the same cast of characters. (9-10)

Despite the fact that Martel falls into the trap of comparing an abstract notion—war—to a specific and concrete historical event—the Holocaust—his appeal for a certain "liberty with the Holocaust" that could possibly lead to the creation of "a Holocaust Western, a Holocaust science-fiction movie, a Holocaust comedy, a Holocaust set in Bolivia" is interesting (Martel,

"Interview"). This is, presumably, the thesis of the unpublished essay that was meant to appear as one part of Martel's original flip book. Unfortunately, it is a thesis that has left many critics dissatisfied. As Jenni Adams argues in her 2012 essay, "A Howl and a Black Cat: Allegory, Nonsense, and Ethics in Yann Martel's *Beatrice and Virgil*," Martel's claim that historical realism has been the dominant mode of Holocaust representation simply is not true: "Not only has the Holocaust been subjected to exactly the range of generic modes associated by Martel's protagonist with the literature of war [...] but the Holocaust is frequently, and increasingly depicted in terms that indicate a flight from realism on the part of Holocaust writers" (31). Adams provides the examples of Joseph Skibell, Art Spiegelman, Yoram Kaniuk, Michael Chabon, and David Grossman as writers who adopt "nonrealist techniques including magic realism, the fantastic, [and] the surreal" to raise "key questions in the process concerning the relationship between representation, experience and traumatic history" (31). One could easily add a number of Canadian authors—especially Cohen—to this list of writers who experiment with non-realist techniques.

Yet by raising these questions about the way the Holocaust has been represented imaginatively, and by asking why Holocaust novels tend to privilege historical realism over non-realist, allegorical treatments of the historical event, Martel demonstrates his awareness of—and his willingness to engage and challenge—over half a century of literary and cultural criticism surrounding Holocaust representations. This includes common debates surrounding the "uncertain status of imaginative texts which take the Holocaust as their subject," including "whether and in what way the Nazi genocide can be represented artistically," the "implications such representation has for the historical record," and the critical concern over authorial intent and authority that any work of Holocaust fiction is inevitably subjected to (Vice 5). Referring

once again to the variety of literary genres that authors have adopted in their fictional depictions of war, Martel offers what Vice calls "a counter-argument to scepticism about the value, or even viability, of Holocaust fiction" (7), when he argues that it is through the very diversity of representations of war that "we come to understand what war means to us" (Martel 10). To that end, Martel's work ultimately encourages readers not to "dismiss or outlaw Holocaust fiction," as many critics have, since it is simply a different genre from survivor testimony" (Vice 8). Indeed, Holocaust fiction "approaches the subject in its own way, rather than aiming to 'add' to or 'go beyond' the survivor record" (8).

***A 20th Century Shirt*: "What's the Symbolism There?"**

Depressed, and suffering from writer's block after the rejection of his flip book, Henry moves to a European city, begins working in a café, and joins an amateur theatre company. One day, in his fan mail, Henry receives an excerpt from a play entitled *A 20th Century Shirt*, written by a taxidermist living in the same city, whose name is also Henry. Interestingly, the taxidermist's dramatic work-in-progress is actually made up of fragments of a two-act play that Martel had intended to publish as part of his original flip book (Barber).³¹ In an interview with John Barber, Martel explains that the taxidermist was not part of the original plan for his flip book. Indeed, it was during the crushing period shortly after his meeting with his publishers, and while he was debating what to do with his own work, that, with "suitable strangeness, inspiration struck when he read about a 2008 fire that destroyed a famous taxidermy shop in Paris" (Barber). "I just read that and I thought—taxidermy!" Martel recalls; "I completely rewrote the book in

³¹ In his 2007 interview with Robinson, quoted from at the beginning of this section, Martel makes it clear that he had been working on an animal allegory called *A 20th Century Shirt*. It can be assumed that the allegorical section of his original flip book idea, at some point in the book's development, evolved from a novel into the play—or the novel containing a play—that is credited to Henry the taxidermist in the final published version of *Beatrice & Virgil*.

three months and added that extra layer [...] I added the writer and the taxidermist and took little fragments of the play and embedded them in the novel" (Barber).

That Henry and the taxidermist share a first name invites interesting parallels to be drawn throughout the book between the desire to experiment with creative ways of interpreting and representing the Holocaust in fiction, and the craft of taxidermy that attempts to preserve and exhibit the past by restoring life to past events: "Every animal I have mounted has been an interpretation of the past," the taxidermist claims; "I am an historian" (97). The goal of taxidermy is preservation, and the taxidermist claims that he chose his discipline so that he could "bear witness" (98). This echoes Henry's own claim at the beginning of the book that the primary goal of the writer who writes about the Holocaust should be to "bear witness, that is, tell what happened and address the needs of ghosts" (15). The historian, the author, and the taxidermist, then, all share a mutual desire to re-present and re-*create* the past. Thus, as Laura Petersen explains in her 2011 essay "'We Are Story Animals': Aesopics in Holocaust Literature by Art Spiegelman and Yann Martel," taxidermy and "fiction in a Holocaust context" are intimately linked throughout *Beatrice & Virgil* because both can "be seen as a way of 'bringing back to life' stories which have been lost and cannot now be told by the victims themselves" (194).

Given the parallels between taxidermy and literary representation that Martel emphasizes throughout *Beatrice & Virgil*, it is not surprising that the play Martel embeds into the novel—the play that he credits to the fictional collaboration of a novelist and a taxidermist—takes the form of an animal allegory. Though by no means an original approach to representing the trauma and suffering of the Holocaust, Martel's use of animal allegory "as a perception aid" in the embedded play is nevertheless effective because it allows him to cut through "a sense of Holocaust fatigue [...] to try to allow readers to empathize again with events of the Holocaust" (Petersen 175).

Petersen's emphasis on the need to "allow readers to empathize *again*" points to Martel's key concern that the perpetually growing distance that separates his readers from the historical event of the Holocaust has led to a sort of monotonous tunnel-vision in terms of the way the Holocaust is represented and thought about. The contemporary author needs to counter the "phenomenon of becoming tired of the Holocaust, or dismissive of its atrocities," as stories about the Holocaust become "too well known, too big and too sad" (202). As has already been discussed in relation to the works of Layton and Findley, animal imagery is an effective way of doing this because it allows writers to defamiliarize the Holocaust—to find new, allegorical ways of depicting the terrible violence of the historical event—while at the same time moving away from the "familiar narrative schemata and codified techniques of Holocaust writing" (Adams 37).

A 20th Century Shirt, the animal allegory that stands at the heart of *Beatrice & Virgil*, is clearly modelled on Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, and shares many of Beckett's themes and dramatic conventions. In Beckett's play, Vladimir and Estragon are universalized characters, stripped of historical referents, and the reader is never sure when or where the play takes place. That the setting of Martel's play—"a country road. A tree. Late afternoon"—quite obviously mirrors Beckett's famously minimalist setting for *Godot* indicates his desire to create an equally dehistoricized framework for his own play (105).³² Even the title of the play, *A 20th Century Shirt*, effectively distances its content from the specific historical event of the Holocaust. As Laura Petersen explains, "the location of the play [...] relocates Holocaust events to an abstract, self-reflecting sphere" (Petersen 200).

³² In case the reader fails to make the connection to Beckett, Martel makes it explicit through Henry's criticism of the play's plot: "There seemed to be essentially no action and no plot in it. Just two characters by a tree talking. It had worked with Beckett and Diderot. Mind you, those two were crafty and they packed a lot of action into the apparent inaction" (134).

The additional notes that the taxidermist provides about the setting of the play only complicate things further by making the setting both more familiar and more abstract:

The province of Lower Back
in a country called the Shirt,
a country like any other,
neighbor to, bigger than,
smaller than, Hat, Gloves,
Jacket, Coat, Trousers,
Socks, Boots and so on. (105)

Not surprisingly, Henry interrupts his reading of the taxidermist's play to ask "what's the symbolism there?" in reference to the white shirt. That the shirt is the setting of the play necessarily invites symbolic interpretation, but, importantly, there is nothing about this setting—and its rather bizarre references to laundry and anatomy—that indicates that this is a play about the Holocaust. Nevertheless, because the paratextual material that surrounds the play essentially forces the reader to read the play as an allegory of the Holocaust, he cannot help but begin the process of breaking down the allegory of the 20th century as a dirty piece of laundry needing to be washed that Martel is adopting. Only when the taxidermist elaborates that "it's a striped shirt," is the connection to the Holocaust solidified in Henry's—and the reader's—mind (107).

Martel's intertextual borrowing of Beckett's work extends beyond the setting of the play, and continues into the content as well, particularly in the play's overall existential tone, its sense of absurdity, and its questioning of the limits of language to express the horrors of a traumatic event like the Holocaust. Beatrice and Virgil spend much of their time trying to find a way to understand and explain what has happened to them, and "the inadequacy of words as descriptors

of reality and of the past is the constant theme in their interactions" (197). Through their dialogue, Martel further experiments with the process of defamiliarizing the Holocaust by making the reader think about it in new terms and new names:

BEATRICE: What name will it have?

VIRGIL: That's a good question.

BEATRICE: The Events?

VIRGIL: Not descriptive enough, and it carries no judgement. Name and nature must be combined.

BEATRICE: The Unthinkable? The Unimaginable?

VIRGIL: If we can't even name it, how can we talk about it? (135).

The list of terms goes on, and includes "The Deluge," "The Catastrophe," "The Searing," "The Terror" (135). After finally settling on "The Horrors," Beatrice and Virgil try to find "onelongword" that will encapsulate all of their traumatic experience. They experiment with phrases like "thepityofallwhensomuchwaspossible," and "evillivingroomanerroneously," before finally choosing "aukitz," a "onelongword" that they believe should be "printed in every book, magazine and newspaper" (146, 147). Through all of this, Martel asks the reader to consider the labeling of traumatic events, and the process by which a phrase like "The Holocaust," which had no specific historical connotations before WWII, begins to take on historic referents that ultimately cannot be detached from it. Virgil's rejection of the "The Catastrophe," on the grounds that the name "could refer to anything, a flood, an earthquake, an explosion in a mine," draws attention to the problem of universalizing a specific traumatic event, and Virgil's proposed use of "evillivingroomanerroneously," with its echoes of Germany's *lebensraum* policy of expansion, demonstrates the impossibility of writing about a specific event without referring, in some way,

to its historical context (135). More significantly, "aukitz," with its obvious echo of "Auschwitz," points to the way that words, dates, and place names have the power to become one-word summaries of traumatic events. The reader witnesses, then, Martel's own process of trying to come to terms with the difficulty of finding new ways to talk about old events without universalizing or trivializing them.

Present in this dialogue about the limitations of language is a very powerful response to the pleas for artistic silence following the Holocaust that have been attributed to Adorno, Steiner, Wiesel, and others. As Beatrice and Virgil struggle to find the language to express their trauma, and at the point in the play where they seem closest to dangerously succumbing to the overwhelming ineffability of the Holocaust and descending into silence, Virgil proposes that they stop talking and "just listen" (138-139):

BEATRICE: To what?

VIRGIL: To silence, to hear what it has to say.

BEATRICE: All right. (Silence.)

VIRGIL: Hear anything?

BEATRICE: Yes.

VIRGIL: What?

BEATRICE: Silence.

VIRGIL: And what did silence say?

BEATRICE: Nothing. (138-139)

On the surface, this clever allusion to Beckett's use of loaded existential silences in his plays seems to be nothing more than Beatrice acknowledging that even with silence she cannot concentrate enough to come up with the language required to capture their experiences. More

evident to the informed reader, however, is that this is a defiant refusal to descend into silence on the subject of the Holocaust, precisely because silence says "nothing" (139). Virgil points out that it is "impossible to hear silence," and quite astutely argues that "if I made a lot of noise, you'd hear silence better" (140). This is a remarkable countering of the claims of early critics of Holocaust literature that silence is the only appropriate reaction to the Holocaust. The silence of not speaking about the Holocaust leads to "nothing," but the voices of the victims demand to be heard, and, paradoxically, their silence can only be heard in the "noise" of those who speak for them. As the play continues, the question of who, exactly, is speaking for whom grows increasingly complicated.

"I Needed More Distance": Henry the Taxidermist

In his interview with Barber, Martel confesses that *A 20th Century Shirt*—his original play which he credits to the taxidermist in *Beatrice & Virgil*—"just didn't work" because he "needed more distance" (Barber). While working on the project, Martel felt that he lacked the critical lens—Layton's need for "improved binoculars" comes to mind here—that would allow him to see his work from the perspective of someone who had not been immersed in it from the beginning—from the perspective of, say, the editor, historian, publisher, and bookseller who deemed his original work to be an "unpublishable failure" (17). Rather than admit defeat and abandon the project altogether, Martel re-wrote his book in such a way that, through the layering on of metafictional levels, and through the character of the taxidermist and his relationship to Henry the author, he was able to achieve the critical distance that he felt he lacked.

Martel's decision to attribute the authorship of his own play to Henry the taxidermist and to weave fragments of it into the larger text of *Beatrice & Virgil* is a remarkably effective

metafictive strategy. The fragments of the play are surrounded by Henry's comments and criticism of what the taxidermist has written. This means that the representational challenges and ethical dilemmas of the taxidermist's play are always being interpreted for the reader by Henry. Henry is an outside reader of the play, reading and interpreting the taxidermist's work for the first time. The multiple layers of metafiction that are at work here ultimately provide Martel with a chance for self-reflection and self-criticism: by placing his own original experiment with an allegorical representation of the Holocaust into the hands of an amateur writer (Henry the taxidermist), who seeks the help and criticism of Henry the writer, who has recently had his own experimental representation of the Holocaust rejected by his publisher, Martel is ultimately able to gain some of the critical distance from his original work that he told Barber he lacked, and use his multiple fictional alter egos to reflect on, and criticize, his own rejected work.

As Henry continues to read the taxidermist's play, he comes to a lengthy monologue in which Beatrice describes her torture at the hands of a young boy. The explicit violence of the passage is unexpected, but is not at all out of place in a narrative about the Holocaust:

Beatrice is held down and beaten with the rifle butt and kicked. While this is happening, she tries to reach Virgil with a hoof and she shouts that she is happy with Virgil, very happy, and that the Horrors is a dirty shirt that needs washing, and she searches for another word, her own word, a onelongword; she finally shouts, "Aukitz!" but then falls into a silent blankness of pain and terror.

When they let her go, she manages to stretch and touch Virgil's body. She is shot three times, one bullet lodging itself in her shoulder, one entering and exiting her body through the chest area, coming close to the heart, and the last

entering her head through the left eye orbit and lodging itself in her brain, which is the direct cause of death.

The Boy, in passing, notices the odd markings on Beatrice's back. He runs his hands over them, prompted as much by a desire to inspect as to ruin.

The Boy produces a small knife and cuts Virgil's tail off. He flicks the soft tail in the air like a whip as he and his friends move away. After a short distance, he carelessly tosses the tail to the ground. (184; italics in original).

It is at this point in his reading of the play that Henry, rather belatedly, seems to understand what the work is "about," and that the taxidermist's role in the book begins to extend well beyond that of a secondary author surrogate.

Earlier, the taxidermist had insisted that his play was about the human persecution of animals. While this is certainly true at the literal level of the play, Henry has arrived at a point in his reading where he is able to unpack and interpret the multiple metaphors that he has been presented with, and is able to read the play as an allegory involving both animals and the Holocaust. Despite the fact that Henry realizes "fate had brought [him] into contact with a writer [...] who was doing exactly what [he] had argued should be done in his rejected book three years earlier: he was representing the Holocaust differently," he has a hard time celebrating, and dwells, instead, on the taxidermist's motives for writing the play (174).

For Henry, the interpretive difficulty lies in the fact that rather than using the suffering of animals to defamiliarize the Holocaust—as Layton and Findley do—the taxidermist seems to be doing the opposite: using "the Holocaust to speak of the extermination of animal life. Doomed creatures that could not speak for themselves were being given the voice of a most articulate people who had been similarly doomed. He was seeing the tragic fate of animals through the

tragic fate of Jews" (173). To use the Holocaust to write about the suffering of animals is, of course, an unarguable example of universalizing and trivializing the Holocaust. By having Henry read and interpret the taxidermist's play in this way, Martel is demonstrating that the problem with allegory is that it lends itself to misinterpretation if the reader lacks an awareness of the author's intent, or of the vehicle and tenor that hold a metaphor together. When we remember that the play that Henry has been interpreting is Martel's own, we can appreciate how the multiple layers of metafiction at play here have provided Martel with the critical distance that he sought—they have allowed him to understand how his use of allegory in his original play might have been, quite harmfully, (mis)interpreted by his readers.

The violent denouement of the book's main narrative strand that follows Henry's realization that the play is a Holocaust allegory has alienated and confused readers. Indeed, the interpretive leaps that Henry takes as he begins to unpack the implications of his discovery are alarming:

Henry was speechless. It wasn't just the elaborate institutional torturing of a donkey. It was something else that arrested him, a detail about the head torturer. Beatrice described him as "a tall raw-boned man." The second adjective was unusual enough that for a moment Henry misunderstood it; a literal and gruesome image flitted through his mind. Then he remembered its proper meaning: lean, gaunt, an absence of fleshiness. Henry dwelt on the image. A tall, raw-boned man. He glanced at the taxidermist. Perhaps it was a coincidence. (180)

Henry comes to the conclusion that "he was rubbing his shoulder with a stinking old Nazi collaborator, now casting himself as a great defender of the innocent. Take the dead and make them look good. How was that for murderous irrationalism neatly packed and hidden?

Taxidermy indeed" (189-190). Henry then throws the play at the taxidermist, yelling "I told you, I don't want your damn play," and the scene descends into melodrama when the taxidermist responds, "Well, in exchange, take this," and stabs Henry "just below the ribs" (191). The taxidermist then returns to his shop while Henry collapses in the street, looks out at Henry through the glass door, and smiles with his "beautiful teeth," before burning down his shop with himself in it: "the store burned quick and hard. A howling inferno" (193).

Petersen summarizes the attitudes of many critics in her description of the passage as "melodrama tending to farce" (Petersen 199). The reader is left wondering how things evolved to this point so rapidly, and what, precisely, Martel is trying to say about the relationship of history, allegory, violence and realism in this scene. Unfortunately, the scene raises more questions than it answers, and a simple reading is—quite purposefully—denied. At the most basic, literal level, Martel kills off his Nazi collaborator/playwright/taxidermist in a way that can only be described as achieving poetic justice. This interpretation of the perpetrator dying at the hands of the author in the same way as his victims died at his own hands is far too simplistic given the book's use of self-reflexive allegory, but one worries that the reader who is unwilling to put too much critical effort into the text—who perhaps missed out on the book's use of allegory all along—may also miss the subtle hints of irony in the book's final pages and put the book down having only reached this remarkably unsatisfactory conclusion.

Though a satisfactory reading of the ending is ultimately impossible, the book's extensive use of metafiction offers an important key to understanding the scene. If we remember that Martel has placed Henry in the role of a reader performing the act of (mis)interpreting Martel's own original play, then Henry's violent interpretive leaps are precisely the kind of reaction to his work that Martel would want to avoid. Martel plays out the act of (mis)reading the allegory

within the story itself so that the reader understands just how potentially damaging to his original purpose a misreading of his play could have been. Like Henry, readers may have questioned the motives of Martel's animal allegory, and turned on him with accusations of trivialisation.

Furthermore, Henry's ultimate rejection of the play, and of his own involvement in it, mirrors the rejection of Martel's work at the hands of the editor, publisher, historian and bookseller who deemed the work an "unpublishable failure" (17).

When read through the lens of metafiction in this way, the final scene of the book offers what Adams calls "a kind of self-conscious critique of the representational strategies" that it has employed (Adams 48). Henry's seemingly hasty conclusion that the taxidermist is a former Nazi, and his melodramatic dismissal of the taxidermist's play, "underscor[es] the necessity for Holocaust literature to itself negotiate the problems of representation linked to the taxidermist and his allegorical tale" (50). The narrative, then, not only incorporates allegory through the character of the taxidermist and the characterization of his craft, but also self-consciously raises questions about the limitations, and ethics, of allegorical interpretations—it "self-consciously invit[es] allegorical reading only to then problematize it" (51).

In the end, the lack of a completely satisfactory ending is undoubtedly intentional on Martel's part. As Petersen suggests, "it appears that the ending in its melodrama was pitched to show the artifice of closure, of finality, when one is dealing with matters of Holocaust art" (199). The purposely false ending of *Beatrice & Virgil*, then, both reflects the general demand for closure in literature, and also highlights the impossibility of providing that closure when writing about the Holocaust. Indeed, the ending enforces Martel's earlier observations, when justifying his original idea to publish his work as a flip book, that the form of a work about the Holocaust can ultimately have "no exit, [...] no resolution," because "the matter is never finished with [...],

the reader is made to understand that he or she has not understood, that he or she cannot fully understand, but must think again in a different way and start all over" (8). The book's lack of a definite ending, then, ultimately demonstrates the need, on the part of the artist, to constantly experiment with new forms of representation, even while it simultaneously depicts the rejection of those experiments.

Games for Gustav: "What Action Do You Do?"

To call the taxidermist's death a false ending to the book is more than just a critical evaluation. The book actually does carry on beyond this scene, but in a remarkably different form. In the final paragraph of the novel, the narrator adds an additional metafictional twist—further solidifying the connection between Martel and Henry—by explaining that "Henry first gave to the story of his stabbing the title *A 20th Century Shirt*. Then he changed it to *Henry the Taxidermist*. Finally, he settled on a title that went to the heart of the encounter: *Beatrice and Virgil*" (196). The book has come full-circle, then, and the reader is invited, once again, to connect Henry's struggles with his project to the author's own. The reader is told that "before he started writing *Beatrice and Virgil*, Henry wrote another text. He called it *Games for Gustav*. It was too short to be a novel, too disjointed to be a short story, too realistic to be a poem. Whatever it was, it was the first piece of fiction Henry had written in years" (196-197). The main narrative of the novel then ends, but on the following page the reader sees the title *Games for Gustav*, and is invited into the book's third and final narrative strand.

As short as the *Games for Gustav* section of the book is, it is undoubtedly the part where Martel comes closest to achieving his desire to make the Holocaust "live in the terms of today"—to bridge the distance between the historical event and his contemporary reader (Martel,

"Interview"). The "Games" consist of a series of thirteen scenarios, presented in the second person, that essentially force the reader to consider how he would respond to traumatic situations—situations that reflect the horrors of the Holocaust, but that ultimately lack any specific, historical referents to the event itself. The result is that these "confronting and effecting [...] dilemmas break down the abstraction of time and distance between the present-day reader and a person living through the events of the Holocaust" (Petersen 194). Take, for example, "Game Number One":

Your ten-year-old son is speaking to you.
 He says he has found a way of obtaining
 some potatoes to feed your starving family.
 If he is caught, he will be killed.
 Do you let him go? (201)

The reader is asked to engage in sympathetic imagination in these games—to place himself in the shoes of someone who has had to make this decision in real life. Each page of the section presents a new, horrifying scenario. A barber is told to shave the heads of "the wife and sister of a good friend" who ask him "what is going to happen to them," and the reader is asked "what do you tell them?" (202). In "Game Number Four," the reader is told to imagine that he has been forced to sing, dance, and pretend that he is a pig by a soldier. Then the soldier "tells you to '____,' and it is a foreign word you don't understand. What action do you do?" (204). The games ask the reader whether he would be willing to perform grotesque actions like stepping on his own dead daughter's head to "reach higher, where the air is better" (#7), but also to consider situations that are more relevant to an outsider, like what he would do "afterwards, when it is all over," if he heard a joke "about your suffering and your loss" (#10) (207, 303).

It is important to emphasize that the traumatic situations presented are not explicitly connected to the Holocaust—they are stripped of any historical dates, locations or names that would connect them intimately to the specific historical event. Indeed, had this section been published on its own, there would be no way to claim that it is "about" the Holocaust. However, the very positioning of this section at the end of a book, which takes for its main subject the difficulty of creating fictional representations of the Holocaust, means that the reader cannot help but approach this section through the lens of the Holocaust. Though the final tone of the book seems to be defeatist in terms of championing Holocaust fiction as a supplementary genre for representation, the thirteen scenarios that comprise *Games for Gustav* function as a poignant reminder "that artistic responses to the Holocaust are mostly successful when they are produced in a way that encourages empathy and imagination" (Petersen 195). As such, they also serve as what Adams calls "a tentative step toward a model of literature as experience rather than object" (52). By "provoking questions rather than proffering a content and encouraging the reader to engage experientially rather than abstractly," the thirteen pages that make up the *Games for Gustav* section do more to highlight, negotiate, and bridge the distance that separates the reader from the Holocaust than the nearly two hundred pages that precede it (52).

CONCLUSION:

Measuring Distance in Anne Michaels' *Fugitive Pieces*

D.M.R. Bentley considers Anne Michaels' 1996 novel, *Fugitive Pieces*, to be "one of the most powerful fictional tellings of the stories of the Holocaust to have emerged from contemporary Canada" (6), and the novel arguably remains the best-known and most critically-acclaimed text in the canon of Canadian Holocaust literature. More than any other work explored in this dissertation, *Fugitive Pieces* focuses specifically on the role that distance plays in shaping a victim's ability to understand and represent a traumatic event that he did not witness firsthand. The novel is both a "sustained exploration of memory," and "a meditation on the availability, or unavailability, of the past to those who exist in the present" (Cook 13; Grimwood 113). In its fictional depictions of a poet attempting to work through his own experience of the Holocaust by experimenting with different modes of representation, a second-generation survivor's desire to understand the Holocaust-related trauma of his parents in order to better understand how the event has shaped his own identity, and the way that outside, culturally-distanced witnesses to the Holocaust can also be understood to have been traumatized by the event, the novel offers a profound summary both of the ethics of representation that this dissertation has explored, and its discussion of how Canadian writers have attempted to negotiate, highlight, erase, and embrace the historical, geographical, and cultural distance that separates them from the Holocaust.

The first part of the novel consists of a series of journals that tell the story of a traumatic event that forever haunts Jakob Beer, as well as his subsequent attempts to come to terms and better understand the loss that he experienced during that event. The section begins with Jakob as a seven-year-old Jewish boy living with his family in Poland. When his house is stormed by a group of Nazis, Jakob escapes death by "vanish[ing] behind the wallpaper in the cupboard,

cramming [his] head sideways between choking plaster and beams" (Michaels 6). From his position in the cupboard, Jakob can only hear the sounds of his parents' suffering: "the burst door. Wood ripped from hinges, cracking like ice under the shouts. Noises never heard before, torn from my father's mouth. Then silence. My mother had been sewing a button on my shirt [...] I heard the spray of buttons, little white teeth" (7). This scene marks "the beginning of Jakob Beer's existence as a traumatic subject," Méira Cook explains in her article "At the Membrane of Language and Silence" (2000), and his "inability to witness" and understand "the violent event as it occurs is characteristic of the traumatized subject" (14).

Not only is Jakob unable to understand the traumatic event as it is occurring, but he is also left uncertain about the fate of his sister, Bella. As he runs from his home, he sees only "two shapes in the flesh-heap" that he has left behind, and it is not until he has once again concealed himself—this time by burying himself up to his neck in soil in a forest—that he "suddenly realize[s]" that his sister is no longer with him and that he has no idea what her fate has been (7, 9). Jakob suffers, then, from a belated realization of his traumatic loss—one that comes to him only after he has distanced himself from the traumatic event. Not surprisingly, in the days and weeks that follow, Jakob has trouble keeping out "the sounds: the door breaking open, the spit of buttons. My mother, my father. But worse than those sounds was that I couldn't remember hearing Bella at all" (10).

In many ways, Jakob's experience of trauma is textbook in that he is "undoubtedly a child traumatized by the sight of his slaughtered parents, a survivor in a very immediate, traditional sense," and in that his trauma manifests itself as a "response to an unexpectedly wounding event that cannot be grasped at the moment of its occurrence and thus returns in flashbacks or nightmares" (Kertzer 205; Gubar 255). But there is also something quite unique about Jakob's

traumatic experience, particularly in the way that Michaels portrays him as having both witnessed the trauma firsthand, while also being simultaneously removed from it. As Adrienne Kertzer explains in her essay "*Fugitive Pieces: Listening as a Holocaust Survivor's Child*" (2000), "Michaels deliberately positions Jakob in the cupboard so that he will not see what happens," and in doing so, "she creates a protagonist who on a literal level is a Holocaust survivor, yet one who repeatedly emphasizes his belatedness, the inadequacy of the visual, and the necessity of the aural" (205). "I did not witness the most important events of my life," Jakob laments; "My deepest story must be told by a blind man" (17). Jakob is at once present for the traumatic event, and distant from it: "he was, as it were, in the next room, *adjacent* to the moment, but not quite of it," Stephen Clingman explains (158).

Bentley explains that there are two elements that define the rest of Jakob's story: "trauma and guilt [...] trauma from witnessing the murder of his parents by German soldiers and guilt from escaping the scene of the slaughter without knowing what happened to his fifteen-year-old sister, Bella" (8-9). Jakob is rescued by an archaeologist, Athos Roussos, who helps him escape further violence by taking him to the Greek island of Zakynthos. Further distanced from the traumatic event that has shaped his life, Jakob nevertheless continues to be haunted by the sounds and images that stand at the centre of his traumatic experience: "On Zakynthos [...] I learned to tolerate images rising in me like bruises. But in my continuous expectation of the burst door, the taste of blood that filled my mouth suddenly, many times a day, I couldn't conceive of any feeling stronger than fear" (19). Above all else, he remains haunted by Bella, and although he "[feels] her presence everywhere, in daylight, in rooms I knew weren't empty," he also feels a strong sense of guilt because his inability to understand what has happened to her has made it impossible for him to properly grieve for her. This inability to let her go torments him: "when I

woke my anguish was specific: the possibility that it was as painful for [Bella] to be remembered as it was for me to remember [her]; that I was haunting my parents and Bella with my calling, startling them awake in their black beds" (31, 26).

Jakob's feelings of guilt are only compounded further by an increasing awareness that while he remains safe with Athos in Zakynthos, Jews continue to be persecuted throughout Europe:

While I hid in the radiant light of Athos's island, thousands suffocated in the darkness. While I hid in the luxury of a room, thousands were stuffed into baking stoves, sewers, garbage bins [...] While I was living with Athos on Zakynthos, learning Greek and English, learning geology, geography, and poetry, Jews were filling the corners and cracks of Europe, every available space. (45)

He also feels guilt over what he "didn't know" of the persecutions while they were taking place—a guilt captured in reflections added only belatedly to his journals after a period of historical distance has separated him from the events:

I didn't know that while I was on Zakynthos, a Jew could be purchased for a quart of brandy, perhaps four pounds of sugar, cigarettes. I didn't know that in Athens, they were being rounded up in 'Freedom Square.' [...] I didn't know that Jews were being hanged from their thumbs in public squares. I didn't know that when there were too many for the ovens, corpses were burned in open pits, flames ladled with human fat. I didn't know that while I listened to the stories of explorers in the clean places of the world [...] and slept in a clean place, men were untangling limbs, the flesh of friends and neighbours, wives and daughters, coming off in their hands. (46)

It is important to keep in mind that the graphic imagery of this passage is the product of historical distance from the traumatic event. It contains information about the atrocities that Jakob and Athos only discover after the Holocaust, and that Jakob subsequently adds to his journals. The fact that he "didn't know" that these events were occurring, while they were occurring, is what is truly important here—the geographical distance that separates his safety on the island of Zakynthos from the persecution of the Jews on mainland Europe delays his understanding of the full horrors of the event.

"To survive was to escape fate," Jakob claims, "but if you escape your fate whose life do you then slip into?" (48). By asking this question about how the Holocaust has shaped his identity, from his distanced perspective in Zakynthos, Jakob forces himself to acknowledge that the Holocaust has, indeed, changed his life, and that his personal identity now encompasses that of both victim and survivor. Appropriately, it is in Zakynthos that Jakob begins to experiment with the power of language to articulate his trauma, and to represent his memories through poetry: "I already knew the power of language to destroy, to omit, to obliterate. But poetry, the power of language to restore: this is what [...] Athos [was] trying to teach me" (79). Jakob realizes that the only way he can begin to better understand how his life has been shaped by the Holocaust—how the sound of his parents' deaths and the silence of his sister's death haunt him—is to begin the process of writing about it: his "response to the hopelessness of silence on the part of the dead is to take up the impossible but necessary task of narrating the event" (Cook 13). However, Jakob quickly becomes overwhelmed by the responsibilities that he associates with his newfound role of Holocaust poet, and begins to ask ethical questions about his representational choices, particularly his use of the voices of other victims: "How can one man take on the memories of even one other man, let alone five or ten or a thousand or ten thousand; how can

they be sanctified each?" (52). This burden of responsibility silences Jakob for a period of time, and it is not until he and Athos move to Toronto, so that Athos can teach geography at the university, that he truly begins to experiment with representing both the Holocaust and his own personal trauma in his poetry in earnest.

In a passage describing the ship that Jakob and Athos are on slowly pulling away from a port in Greece, headed towards Canada, Michaels offers a profound illustration of how distance hinders understanding of a traumatic event: "Athos and I stood together on deck and looked across the water at the bright city. From this distance no one would guess the turmoil that had torn apart Greece and would continue to do so for years" (86). Jakob is able to appreciate how the relatively short distance of only a few kilometres has already made it impossible for him to see, and therefore witness firsthand, the horrors of the Holocaust. Distance masks reality; and this is made further apparent when, upon arriving in Toronto, Jakob and Athos are only able to obtain information about the war second-hand and belatedly: "the facts of the war began to reach us, through magazines and in the newspapers" (92). If, as Jakob suggests, "no one would guess" the reality of the situation in Europe from only a few kilometers out at sea, then how much more unreal, impossible, beyond imagination, and distant must the tragedy seem from thousands of kilometers further away? This passage reminds us, of course, of Bialystok's claim in *Delayed Impact*, that although news of the Holocaust was circulating in Canada, "Canadian Jews were removed from the calamity," and, "simply put, the Holocaust was not part of their world" (7).

In Toronto, Athos teaches Jakob to write and speak in English, and it is in this new language that Jakob's artistic abilities ultimately flourish. As Jakob begins to experiment with short stories and poetry as artistic outlets for his trauma, Michaels meditates on "the ways in which experience, memory, especially Holocaust memory, and identity are 'worked through' into

art and into poetry" (Eaglestone, "Working Through" 23). Throughout the book, poetic metaphors associated with unearthing and geology are used to develop the book's main theme, as Efraim Sicher puts it, that "memory needs to be excavated" (*The Holocaust Novel* 186-187). If history is thought of in terms of what Michaels calls "vertical time," with each historical moment piling on top of each other like archaeological strata—"the past is never past but a layer of the present geology of time and space" (Michaels 161)—then remembering can be seen as a process that involves the peeling away of time—of historical distance—to go back to an original historical moment and reveal "the bond of memory and history when they share space and time" (Sicher, *The Holocaust Novel* 187). Because English is "a language foreign to their happening," and "an alphabet without memory," Jakob finds that he can use the English language as a tool to excavate, explore, and express his memories—to better understand and write about his trauma by, paradoxically, gaining an increased linguistic distance from it (101). In his first poems, Jakob confesses to attempting "to bury images, to cover them over with Greek and English words," in order to avoid facing their reality (93). Because he is still unable to assimilate the horrifying realities of the Holocaust into his writing—because, in truth, he does not yet *know* the horrifying realities of the Holocaust—his first poems and short stories are elegiac meditations on his own loss and suffering. Indeed, his early poems engage in what Kertzer calls "the language of 'Beauty,'" and they "go to great lengths to distract readers from the non-necessary and non-beautiful events" that stand at the heart of his loss and suffering (199).

"The compulsive metaphorization" that Jakob "indulge[s]" in his early poetry, Cook argues, "is, in many ways, a function of the narrative of trauma in which events are referential only to the extent that they are not fully perceived as they occur" (Cook 24). Jakob's early poetry of the Holocaust is focused entirely around memory; but because he ultimately witnessed so little

of the traumatic event, he quickly realizes that his memories are not enough to help him come to terms with Bella's death. He did not witness her death, so he cannot possibly hope to re-member and re-present it in his poetry. "History and memory share events," Jakob writes; "that is, they share time and space. Every moment has two moments" (138). In order to better understand Bella's death, then, Jakob realizes that he needs to escape the restricting confines of his own limited memory of the traumatic event, and enter into the historical "moment." He also realizes that, paradoxically, the only way that he can "remain close to Bella" is to imagine what happened to her (167). Thus, Jakob begins to devote his days to the pursuit of "guileless knowledge, the history of the matter," which, like Bernice Eisenstein's addiction to "H," he begins to treat as "a familiar drug" (119). "In order to give her death a place," Jakob explains, "I collect facts, trying to reconstruct events in minute detail" (139).

Jakob ultimately begins to experiment with increasingly graphic and violent images of the Holocaust in his poetry. Indeed, his poetry fluctuates from attempting, like Klein, to document the horrors of the Holocaust by focusing predominately on "facts: train schedules, camp records, statistics, methods of execution," to, like Irving Layton and Leonard Cohen, "seek[ing] out the horrors" and recreat[ing] them in his poetry (139). As he writes about "pyramid[s] of flesh" and "infants [...] thrown by soldiers from hospital windows to soldiers below who 'caught' them on their bayonets," he is able to focus on "that historical split second: the tableau of the haunting trinity—perpetrator, victims, witness" that stands at the centre of his own Holocaust trauma and the loss of his sister (138, 140, 168). "We know they cried out," Jakob writes, "Each mouth, Bella's mouth, strained for its miracle. They were heard from the other side of the thick walls" (168). Through his awareness of the suffering of others, Jakob is ultimately able to imagine the suffering that his sister experienced on the other side of the *thin*

wall that separated the two of them. And although he acknowledges that "it has taken [him] years to reach this fabrication," he nevertheless understands its importance in terms of how it has helped him come to terms with Bella's passing, to understand how the Holocaust has shaped his own identity, and to create a bridge between the present and his traumatic past (169).

"Born Into Absence": Ben as Second-Generation Survivor

In the second part of the novel, which is significantly shorter than the first, "the focus shifts from a survivor's struggle with his own memories of the Holocaust to the attempts of a man born four years after his parents' liberation from a death camp [...] to come to terms with his parents' horrendous experiences and consequent attitudes" (Bentley 11-12). Ben, the protagonist of the second part, functions as both a conduit for cultural trauma as well as an excavator of his parents' Holocaust experiences. Indeed, Ben is a model for the postmemorial condition of having been "marked by an unlived narrative, of carrying the trace of the Holocaust past within the present," and he suffers from what Grimwood calls a feeling of "belated latency," caused not only by the trauma of the Holocaust, but also by his "physical absence and/or non-being at the time of the trauma" (McGlothlin 8; Grimwood 18).

"I was born into absence," Ben claims, and, as is common in second-generation testimonies, he characterizes his household as being full of silence: "There was no energy of narrative in my family," he explains, "my parents and I waded through damp silence, of not hearing and not speaking" (Michaels 233, 204). Ben's parents, "as adult survivors of Nazi persecution and the death camps, are so traumatized by their experiences that even in Canada they carry the nightmare of their history with them as an implacable weight of silence" (Howells 110). In particular, it is the experiences of Ben's father that remain particularly elusive: "the story

of his life as I knew it [came] from my mother [in] strange episodic images" (216). These fugitive pieces of his parents' Holocaust experiences are both a source of awed respect and great frustration for young Ben. But as "the code of silence" in his family becomes "more complex" as he grows older, Ben conversely becomes obsessed with a need to learn more about his parents and their experience of the Holocaust (223). To do this, he turns to historical documents, other survivors' testimonies, and works of fiction to supplement the few memories that have been passed down by his parents. It is only with the help of these alternative, supplementary narratives that Ben can begin the process of imagining what his parents' experiences of the Holocaust might have been like, and thus better understand how the Holocaust has shaped his own identity.

In particular, Ben turns to Jakob Beer's poetry as "an alternative to the silence surrounding his own father's Holocaust experience" (Grimwood 110). Just as Athos adopts Jakob, "Jakob is adopted as a mentor by Ben" (Gubar 265). In the "facts" of Jakob's documentary poems, Ben finds the concrete information about the horrors of the Holocaust that helps him begin to contextualize his parents' suffering; and in Jakob's highly-metaphorical early poetry, he learns to appreciate how the weight of the Holocaust—its individual and collective trauma—often leads victims, like his parents, to privilege silence over painful memories: "I began to understand [...] how you descended into horror slowly, as divers descend, with will and method. How, as you dropped deeper, the silence pounded" (Michaels 266). Through this appreciation of the evolution of Jakob's poetic representations of the Holocaust, Ben "realizes at once that Jakob has learnt to live with his past in a manner entirely different from his own parents' fearsome paralysis and resentful detachment from the present" (Ramsey-Kurz 28). Importantly, though, Ben decides not to resent his parents for their silence. Rather, he acknowledges that trauma affects people in different ways, and that everyone has different strategies for coping.

As the second part of the novel closes, Ben focuses on one particular memory of his parents—one that further prevents him from resenting them for their silence—and demonstrates a newfound awareness that he, too, must find a way to cope with his understanding of how his identity has been unavoidably shaped by the Holocaust. It is interesting that this realization is shaped by distance: "now, from thousands of feet in the air, I see something else. My mother stands behind my father and his head leans against her. As he eats, she strokes his hair. Like a miraculous circuit, each draws strength from the other. I see that I must give what I most need" (Michaels 294). Ben has learned how to negotiate and understand his distance from the Holocaust, and to come to terms with his memories and postmemorial status, even if he can never completely resolve them. By privileging this memory of his parents' love for each other, while at the same time understanding that the silence that permeated their household was not only a product of their desire to forget, but also a product of their love for him and desire to protect him, Ben understands that he, too, must counter the horrors of the Holocaust with love.

In both Jakob's and Ben's stories, then, there is what Bill Gladstone calls a focus on "the long, slow process of restoration, in a survivor," regardless of how distanced from the traumatic event he may be, "of normal human feelings of decency and trust in the post-Holocaust world" (36). Insofar as *Fugitive Pieces* envisages healing as a possibility, it is "conceptualized as a process of gathering up dispersed fragments and piecing together the past" (Whitehead 55). That Ben's memory of his parents' love for one another comes to him "from thousands of feet in the air," ultimately symbolizes Michael's desire to portray "the notion that it is possible, in time, to transcend the Holocaust, to recover from it, to rise above it and to see beyond it" (Gladstone 36). Once again, it is clear that "distance matters" in our understanding of the Holocaust.

"The Role and the Responsibility of the Listener": Cultural Distance in *Fugitive Pieces*

Michaels is commonly asked by journalists and interviewers to explain her connection to the Holocaust. She always resists answering, and she explains why in an interview with Sarah Crown, cleverly entitled "Anne Michaels, Fugitive Author":

With that book, I was asked am I Jewish, am I Catholic, am I Greek [...] And, yes, I did resist answering, because I really feel that to answer would be a cop out [...] It would be an abdication. People would be able to say: 'Well of course she's interested in this, because she's Jewish, or her father was.' And it would diminish the enterprise. Because, you know, it's not about me. You spend your time when you're writing erasing yourself. The idea is to get out of the way of it. (qtd. in Crown)

In asking Michaels to explain her personal relationship to the Holocaust, critics engage in the fallacy of wanting to judge the quality and authenticity of Michaels' Holocaust text based on her connection—or lack thereof—to the historical event itself. As Sue Vice reminds us, authority is typically "conferred on a writer if they can be shown to have a connection with the events they are describing" (4).

Michaels was born in Toronto in 1958. Her Jewish father and his family left the border of Poland and Russia in 1931, when he was thirteen. She is, therefore, not a child of survivors, but she was, by her own claims, "nevertheless profoundly affected by the Holocaust, an event she did not experience" (Whitehead 53). In some sense, then, both the voices of Jakob and Ben can be said to echo Michael's own position: they are voices struggling to find a way to express an experience that is not directly their own, but that has nevertheless dramatically shaped their lives. Furthermore, by emphasizing her personal distance from the Holocaust in these interviews—by

"erasing [her]self," as she puts it in the Crown interview—Michaels ultimately highlights the collective and cultural nature of Holocaust trauma for the secondary witness. "It seemed like everyone my family knew, their lives have been completely altered by those years," Michaels explains; "It was the immediate history that my own life—the life of my generation—rose from" (qtd. in Brown 55).

Interestingly, despite her desire to "erase herself" from *Fugitive Pieces*, many critics have read two of the novel's primary female figures as being metafictional manifestations of Michaels' own status as an outsider to the Holocaust. When Jakob moves to Toronto, he falls in love with a woman from Montreal named Michaela, who, like Michaels herself, is the daughter of Russian and Spanish immigrants. For Dori Laub, Michaela embodies "the role and the responsibility of the listener [...] to be [an] empathetic and responsive witness" (809). Indeed, it is only through his intimate physical and emotional connection to Michaela that Jakob is able to begin the long process of working through the traumatic loss of his sister, Bella, who has haunted his dreams since her disappearance: "Michaela's hands above my head; I stroke the fragile place on the back of her smooth, soft upper arms. She is sobbing. She has heard everything [...] Michaela is crying for Bella. [...] When I finally sleep, the first sleep of my life, I dream of Michaela" (Michaels 182). Rather than attempt to make Jakob forget about his sister, "Michaela's love and empathy," Bentley suggests, are ultimately what make Jakob "able to remember his sister with 'serenity'" (Bentley 10, Michaels 9).

Similarly, Ben's companion, Naomi, is portrayed as "a foreigner, a stranger in our midst" when he first brings her home to meet his parents (249). Rather than disrupt the family's self-contained atmosphere of silence and forgetting, Naomi enters "the powderbox apartment and instead of blowing our furtiveness sky-high [...] simply brought flowers, sat on an ottoman,

accepted our ways, never overstepping her position. Decorous, patient, and impeccable" (249). Both Michaela and Naomi—like their author—"evinced the ability to acknowledge their separateness from the traumatized," while at the same time, "feeling for and with them" (Gubar 267). In doing so, they, too, "become repositories of memories not their own," and become involved in the process of facilitating, articulating, and negotiating traumatic memories through artistic representation, as Michaels herself has ultimately proven (267).

But what happens if an outsider does enter into the sacred realm of the Holocaust with the intention of "blowing [...] furtiveness sky-high," as Ben puts it? If Michaela and Naomi represent the outside witness as a sympathetic listener and recorder of a traumatized subject's memories, then Petra, a twenty-two year old American with whom Ben has an affair while in Greece researching Jakob's life, can be thought to represent the witness who attempts to disrupt conventional methods of working through, articulating, and representing Holocaust trauma. "Sensing that [Jakob's house] has become a shrine" to Ben, Petra encourages Jakob to make love to her on the floor of the bedroom and then "pillage[s] every room," "desecrat[ing] what had been for years so lovingly preserved" (278, 283, 281). Petra's violence forces Ben out of his belief that the best way to understand and negotiate the trauma of the Holocaust, as an outsider, is to treat it with the utmost respect and propriety; this change in attitude, Michaels suggests, is not necessarily a bad thing. Indeed, it is only after he and Petra "desecrate" Jakob's house that Ben finds the journals that he has been looking for—the journals that make up the first part of Michaels' novel, the journals that give voice to Jakob's Holocaust experience—and is better able to understand how Jakob managed to work through the loss of his sister in his Holocaust poetry. Ben subsequently comes to the realization that he needs to return home to Naomi and share with her the same love that he remembers his parents sharing with each other.

Coda: "Distance Matters"

In drawing connections between *Fugitive Pieces* and the authors and texts that have been discussed in the rest of this dissertation, my intent in this concluding section is not only to represent Michaels' novel as being "typical" of the dominant themes, forms, aesthetics, and ethical concerns of Canadian Holocaust literature, but also to demonstrate and celebrate precisely how *atypical* the text is in terms of its comprehensive exploration of all of these elements as well as multiple forms of distance. As mentioned, *Fugitive Pieces* is unique in that it focuses specifically on the role that distance plays in the mediation and negotiation of memory and trauma. To that end, it is a useful text for both summarizing and synthesizing this dissertation's main concerns.

Like Jakob, Klein "did not witness the most important events of [his] life," and Clingman's description of Jakob as being "*adjacent* to the moment, but not quite of it," offers a profound metaphor for thinking about the spatial and geographical distance that separated Klein from the Holocaust while it was occurring (Michaels 17; Clingman 158). Like Jakob, Klein is left traumatized by the Holocaust, but it is ultimately an event that he only witnesses from a distance. As this dissertation has demonstrated, it is possible to think of trauma as operating on both an individual and collective/cultural level. In his writing, Klein constantly attempts to bridge the distance between the European and Canadian Jewish communities by using terms like "brothers," "kin," and "brethren" to describe his European counterparts, providing an excellent example of how an individual who closely identifies with a traumatized group can be said to have been traumatized by the event regardless of geographical or temporal distance. Furthermore, in a profoundly psycho-social way, Jakob's witnessing of the Holocaust from a position "*adjacent* to the moment," is emblematic of the way that many Jewish communities

around the world, including Canada, were forced to bear witness to the event from a distance.

Many of Klein's Holocaust texts take as their main theme the collective identity, cultural heritage, and religious roots that the Canadian Jewish community shares with European Jews, as well as the ultimate threat of the complete annihilation of this identity that the Holocaust represents.

Interestingly, the Holocaust works of both Jakob and Klein are guided by dual interests. On one hand, as seen in both Klein's journalistic work and early poetry, as well as Jakob's later poetry, there is an overwhelming need to research, record, and disseminate information about the treatment of the Jews in Europe as it becomes available to the writer. The "facts: train schedules, camp records, statistics, methods of execution," as Jakob calls them, form the content of both writers' documentary-style works (Michaels 139). In the case of both writers, the goal is not only to record this information and educate readers, but also to use this concrete information as a way of contextualizing, understanding, and reconstructing the horrific realities of the event that stands at the centre of their own personal trauma, but that they did not actually witness.

On the other hand, both men are also filled with an overwhelming sense of guilt over the distance that separates them from the traumatic event, and the fact that, unlike their murdered kin, they survived. Whereas Jakob becomes obsessed over the ethics of trying to remember and represent his sister's suffering, Klein is troubled by both the question of the poet's function within his community, and the ethics of speaking for the dead. Not surprisingly, the poetry of both men is also marked by a growing awareness that the distance that separates them from the Holocaust is ultimately insurmountable. For Jakob, this realization is a catalyst for increased poetic experimentation, and it eventually leads him towards a sense of having made peace, to some positive degree, with Bella's death. Klein, however, aware that "wailing is vain, and clamour

almost obscene" ("In Praise of the Diaspora" 464) and "unable to face the conflicts within himself and the darkness of our time" (James 37), ultimately found peace in silence.

In the second part of *Fugitive Pieces*, Ben claims to have been "born into absence," a sentiment echoed in many works of second-generation Holocaust literature (Michaels 233). Indeed, as Alan and Naomi Berger explain in their book *Second Generation Voices*, children of survivors are often haunted by "the eternal *presence of an absence*" in their lives (1). In Ben's story, as well as Eisenstein's *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors*, and many of the short stories of J.J. Steinfeld, there is a clear emphasis on how the trauma of the second generation is not caused by the original event itself, but is rather the product of being a vicarious witness to a victim's ongoing suffering. For this reason, second-generation texts tend not to be about the Holocaust itself, but rather about the psychological effects of the Holocaust on its survivors and their offspring, and on the process of trying to piece together and imaginatively re-create the Holocaust experience.

It is only through a mediation of their parents' traumatic experiences that the second generation can begin to understand how the Holocaust has shaped their own lives. Both Ben and Eisenstein rely on outside sources of information to fill in the "shadows"—a term that they both use—of their parents' Holocaust experiences (Eisenstein 66; Michaels 204). They also both turn to art as a means of working through their trauma: a reminder that, according to Marianne Hirsch, the postmemorial generation's connection to the Holocaust is "not actually mediated by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation" ("The Generation of Postmemory" 107). Eisenstein uses her drawings to re-create, imaginatively, the Holocaust experiences of her parents, and to lend those experiences a physicality and tangibility that are a crucial part of coming to terms with the experiences and the memories that she has inherited.

Likewise, Ben absorbs himself in the study and translation of Jakob's poetry, and is better able to understand and appreciate his parents' silence on the subject of the Holocaust as a result. Finally, Steinfeld's artistic protagonists, in many of his stories, use their imaginations—as violent as they may be—to re-create, rather than re-enact, their parents' Holocaust experiences. For Ben, Eisenstein, and many of Steinfeld's characters, art provides an outlet through which they are better able to contextualize their parents' traumatic experiences, and, consequently, are better able to acknowledge and negotiate their own temporal distance from the Holocaust.

Finally, Michaels' concerns over questions of authority, appropriation, and of the ethics of culturally-distanced Holocaust representation echo similar concerns in the works of Findley and Martel. To counter these concerns, all three authors turn to metafiction—they use their texts as a vehicle for exploring their own positions as distanced witnesses—"innocent watcher[s]," to borrow Findley's phrase—to the Holocaust (*Inside Memory* 107). In *The Butterfly Plague*, Findley focalizes the early history of Nazi Germany through Ruth, an innocent, child-like, and naïve witness, who is representative of the inability of North Americans to understand exactly what was occurring in Europe during the Second World War until it was far too late to do anything about it. Martel provides multiple layers of metafiction in *Beatrice & Virgil* both to champion the need for new, anti-realist, and non-historical representations of the Holocaust, and to criticize the Canadian publishing industry's failure to encourage experimental works of Holocaust literature. He also engages in a critical self-reflection of his own Holocaust experiments through the creation of two artistic figures with very conflicting ideas about how the Holocaust should be represented in art. Finally, despite her desire to "erase herself" from *Fugitive Pieces*, Michaels uses the characters of Naomi, Michaela, and Petra to examine "the role and the responsibility of the listener [...] to be [an] empathetic and responsive witness" (Laub

809). It is with a final discussion of these three female characters that I want to conclude this dissertation.

In her characterization of Naomi, Michaela, and Petra as witnesses to the suffering of others, Michaels succinctly summarizes the ethics of representation that have been explored in this dissertation and that have shaped Holocaust literature since Adorno's famous dictum. Whereas the aesthetic theories of Adorno (when misinterpreted), Wiesel, Langer, Howe, and others, tend to promote the "decorous," "never overstepping," "empathetic and responsive" witnessing that Michaels portrays in Naomi and Michaela, all of the writers that this dissertation has discussed have, to various degrees, behaved more like Ben's mistress, Petra in terms of "desecrat[ing]" and "pillag[ing]" conventional forms and modes of Holocaust representation (Michaels 249, 283, 281). Like Jakob, these writers have attempted to "seek out the horrors" of the Holocaust and re-present them through the use of new literary forms, the incorporation of increasingly horrific and violent imagery into their works, and the creation of anti-absorptive, highly metafictional texts. These authors have been guided by a desire to make the Holocaust new for contemporary readers—to "make clear [...] Belsen," and to make the Holocaust "live in the terms of today," as Layton and Martel put it in their respective texts (Layton, "Foreword" to *Balls* xviii; Martel, "Interview"). As with Petra's act, this "desecration" of the Holocaust on the part of Canadian authors is a positive thing. Indeed, it has only been through this kind of experimentation with anti-absorptive, anti-aesthetic, and genre-bending methods of representing the Holocaust that contemporary writers have been able to counter Arthur C. Danto's fear of domesticating the catastrophe, of turning it into a commonplace, and thus stripping it of its meaning. Adorno's famous "after Auschwitz" dictum, interpreted correctly, demands that cultural critics find new modes of representation to replace the inadequate and misleading ones that have

been rendered archaic and "barbaric" ("Cultural Criticism and Society" 34) by the Holocaust, and all of the writers that this dissertation explores have done just that. Indeed, this has been the primary strategy through which Canadian writers have attempted to negotiate, highlight, erase, and embrace the historical, geographical, and cultural distances that separate them from the distant event of the Holocaust.

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