

RAGE IS THE SUBTEXT

Readings in Holocaust Literature and Film

SUSAN DERWIN



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY PRESS | COLUMBUS

Copyright © 2012 by The Ohio State University.
All rights reserved.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Derwin, Susan, 1959–

Rage is the subtext : readings in Holocaust literature and film / Susan Derwin.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-8142-1184-7 (cloth : alk. paper) — ISBN 0-8142-1184-4 (cloth : alk. paper) — ISBN 978-0-8142-9283-9 (cd-rom)

1. Holocaust, Jewish (1939–1945), in literature. 2. Holocaust, Jewish (1939–1945), in motion pictures. 3. Friedländer, Saul, 1932– Quand vient le souvenir— 4. Levi, Primo. Se questo è un uomo. 5. Levi, Primo. Sommersi e i salvati. 6. Cavani, Liliana. Night porter. 7. Wilkomirski, Binjamin. Bruchstücke. 8. Kertész, Imre, 1929– Sorstalanság. I. Title. PN56.H55D47 2012

809'.93358405318—dc23

2011050976

Cover design by Greg Betza

Text design by Juliet Williams

Type set in Adobe Bembo

Printed by Thomson-Shore, Inc.

∞ The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of the American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials. ANSI Z39.48-1992.

9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

For Steven

C O N T E N T S

Acknowledgments • vii

Introduction

Another Melody • 1

Chapter One

Encrypted Memories: Saul Friedländer's *When Memory Comes* • 16

Chapter Two

Bodies of Testimony: Primo Levi's *Survival in Auschwitz* and
The Drowned and the Saved • 30

Chapter Three

Unbearable Vulnerability: Liliana Cavani's *The Night Porter* • 48

Chapter Four

Traumatic Aftermaths: Benjamin Wilkomirski's *Fragments* • 61

Chapter Five

Art of Healing: Imre Kertész's *Fatelessness* • 79

Bibliography • 107

Index • 112

A C K N O W L E D G M E N T S

I thank Emily Parsons and Sharilyn Sanders for their valuable research assistance. Thanks as well to the participants of the University of California Interdisciplinary Psychoanalytic Consortium, especially Jeffrey Prager, for our ongoing conversations, which have been a rich source of stimulation. I would like to express my heartfelt appreciation to Sydney Lévy, Vivian Gornick, and Malina Sefanovska, whose steady encouragement kept me on track. To Helene Moglen, who read and reread every word of this study, I owe an immeasurable debt of gratitude.

INTRODUCTION

ANOTHER MELODY

In 1943 Jean Améry was arrested in Belgium for his participation in the Resistance Movement during the German occupation of the country. In an effort to extract information from Améry (he had none), the Gestapo tortured for him several days then deported him to the Auschwitz death camp.¹ Twenty-four years later, spurred by the Auschwitz trial in Frankfurt, Améry began to write about his torture in the Nazi prison camp established at the Belgian Fort Breendonk and in Auschwitz. Apropos of the first essay he composed, on the topic of the intellectual in the concentration camps, Améry stated, “[O]nce a gloomy spell appeared to be broken by the writing of the essay on Auschwitz, suddenly everything demanded telling,” and “everything” demanded to be told in the first person: “Soon the method also asserted itself. If in the first lines . . . I had still believed that I could remain circumspect and distant . . . I now saw that this was simply impossible. Where the word ‘I’ was to have been avoided completely, it

1. In Auschwitz, Améry worked as a clerk in the I.G. Farben factory. As the Soviets approached, he was evacuated, first to Buchenwald and then to Bergen-Belsen. After liberation, he worked as a journalist and eventually began writing works of philosophy and literature. In 1976 he published an exploration of suicide, and two years later, he took his own life by overdosing on sleeping pills. “Jean Améry (Hans Maier) (1912–1978),” *Wollheim Memorial*, http://www.wollheim-memorial.de/en/jean_amry_hans_maier_19121978.

2 Introduction

proved to be the single useful starting point.”² Améry’s reflections express the sense of catalyzing release that writing instigated. Now in command of a language in which to tell “everything” in the first person, Améry newly experienced himself as the subject of his own history.

A parallel sense of empowerment, figured as the provisional dissolution of a blockage, emerges in French Resistance member Robert Antelme’s account of his early efforts to bear witness to his concentration camp imprisonment. After his arrest in Paris on July 1, 1944, Antelme was deported, first to Buchenwald then to Gandersheim. After the end of the war, François Mitterand discovered him, barely alive, in the Dachau concentration camp. Reflecting on the condition of survivors during their first days of freedom, Antelme recalls the internal obstacles they faced. Seized by a “frantic desire to describe” their experience, Antelme writes that “No sooner would we begin to tell our story than we would be choking over it.”³ Words literally became stuck in Antelme’s throat because, according to Antelme’s wife, Marguerite Duras, though the war had ended, Antelme effectively remained a prisoner to his body’s demands. In her journal Duras expressed her sense that those demands were monopolizing Antelme’s identity:

He has gone and hunger has taken his place. Emptiness has taken his place. He is giving to the void, filling what was emptied: those wasted bowels.

. . . For two weeks, three, I watched him eat with unremitting pleasure . . . Sometimes his pleasure made me weep too. He didn’t see me. He’d forgotten me.⁴

As Antelme’s recovery proceeded through different stages, his recognizable self returned. The process of healing included bouts of isolating aggression. Duras writes,

I can see it now, a thick stick, made of some dark wood. Sometimes it’s as if he’d like to lash out with it, hit walls, furniture, doors—not people, no, but all the things he meets. . . .

2. Jean Améry, *At the Mind’s Limits: Contemplations by a Survivor on Auschwitz and Its Realities*, trans. Sidney Rosenfeld and Stella P. Rosenfeld (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), xiii.

3. Robert Antelme, *The Human Race*, trans. Jeffrey Haight and Annie Mahler (Evanston: Marlboro Press, 1992), 3.

4. Marguerite Duras, *The War: A Memoir*, trans. Barbara Bray (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), 61–62.

It's as if he'd like to lash out, as if he's blinded by a rage through which he has to pass before he can live again.⁵

Duras's formulation of Antelme's rage as something he had to pass *through* during this period "before" living suggests that rage subsumed his being (as his body initially had). She describes how, in this state, Antelme once exploded in a café: "I see him now, shouting, banging on the ground with his stick. I'm afraid he's going to smash the windows. The waiters look at him in consternation, almost in tears, speechless. And then I see him sit down, and sit there for a long while in silence."⁶

Two years after his rescue from Buchenwald, Antelme wrote *The Human Race*, an account of his concentration camp imprisonment. He dedicated the book to his twenty-four-year-old sister, Marie-Louise, who had died of consumption on the very day of the armistice, while she was being flown from Ravensbrück to Copenhagen. Duras relates, "Once the book was written, finished, published, he never spoke of the German concentration camps again. Never uttered the words again. Never again. Nor the title of the book," and about Marie-Louise, Duras notes, Antelme "never mentions her, never utters her name."⁷ Reminiscent of the silent coda of rage that filled the café, Antelme's posttestimony silence can similarly be understood as freighted with rage, thereby attesting to Duras's perception "It's in that silence that the war's still there."⁸

As a child, psychiatrist Robert Krell evaded capture by the Nazis in The Hague by going into hiding. At one point during an interview for a documentation project, Krell's interviewer asked him to describe what he was feeling; Krell could not respond. He recalls, "I tried to tell her of my rage, then became mute. I was unable to speak. My silence seemed endless. Words would not form. My mind felt trapped. It was a brush with the darkness within me, a hint of what lies there."⁹ The futility of Krell's attempt to communicate his rage points to the strong inhibition dogging even survivors disposed toward self-disclosure. While Améry did not

5. *Ibid.*, 64.

6. *Ibid.*, 64–65.

7. *Ibid.*, 65.

8. *Ibid.*, 67. For an original study of testimonial literature as the site of "historical energies that have yet to be metabolized," see Michael G. Levine, *The Belated Witness: Literature, Testimony, and the Question of Holocaust Survival* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), 2. See also my review of Levine's book in *Modern Language Notes* 123, no. 5 (2008): 1191–94.

9. Robert Krell, "Psychological Reverberations of the Holocaust in the Lives of Child Survivors," Monna and Otto Weinmann Lecture Series (Washington, DC: United States Holocaust Memorial Council, Third Printing, 2002), 10, <http://www.ushmm.org/research/center/publications/occasional/1997-01/paper.pdf>.

name a specific emotion as responsible for his twenty-four-year gloom, his description of torture's legacy as "resentments [that . . .] have scarcely a chance to concentrate into a seething, purifying thirst for revenge" suggests the presence of a similar inhibition which, in Améry's case, foreclosed action and instead produced "resentments."¹⁰

In a paper he delivered on the difficulties besetting concentration camp survivors forty-five years after liberation, psychoanalyst Henry Krystal notes, "[A]mong the aftereffects of the Holocaust that made psychotherapy very difficult for the survivors was . . . the problems of continuing aggression of an intensity that could not be handled in psychotherapy."¹¹ This very intensity may account for why, according to Krell, "[R]age seldom is expressed for it is seldom asked about. Who can deal with it?" Antelme's experience indicates yet another reason the survivor's rage is avoided: a response whose possible outlet and object is the immediate environment, rage has the potential to implicate the present community in the survivor's suffering, thereby posing a challenge to the community's supportive capacities and intentions. In this context one might also consider how theoretical discussions of trauma that focus strictly on past events and circumstances may serve to forestall consideration of rage, which requires thinking about the survivor's relation to the present world. Here one could cite as representative statements such as Cathy Caruth's, that the "singular *possession by the past* . . . has become a central characteristic of the survivor experience of our time."¹² Dori Laub's discussion of the exigency of testimony similarly foregrounds the past, referring to the survivor's need to bear witness, "unimpeded by ghosts from the past against which one has to protect oneself."¹³

Sociologist and psychoanalyst Jeffrey Prager, writing on trauma, opens up possibilities for thinking about the survivor's rage in terms of his or her relation to the present social environment. Prager distinguishes his work from that of theorists who place exclusive emphasis on the past as the locus of the victim's trauma, noting,

While a prior, overwhelming experience or horrific event—a moment described as inflicting upon the sufferer a *wound* (Van der Kolk, et al.)—is a defining condition for trauma, even that depends on its *post-hoc* remembering. Nonetheless, contemporary trauma research and theory tend not

10. Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*, 40.

11. Henry Krystal, "Trauma and Aging: A Thirty-Year Follow-Up," in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 77.

12. Cathy Caruth, in Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, 151.

13. Dori Laub, "Truth and Testimony," in Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, 63.

to emphasize trauma's negotiated relation between subsequent re-visits and prior experience, but give primacy to the events or experiences of the past, seeing them as driving all subsequent effects.¹⁴

Prager calls attention to the ways in which both past experience and the *present* social world are implicated in the survivor's traumatic suffering:

Psychological trauma is characterized, on the one hand, by the memory of a person or people who profoundly exploit the victim's vulnerability and, on the other, by the memory of those who disappoint by failing to offer necessary protections, who fail to defend against suffering. . . . trauma *indicts in memory the victim's intimate community*—principally mother, father or other caregivers—who, at the time of such overwhelming experience, is felt to have failed to protect the victim (*italics added*).¹⁵

To address the relationship between the present social world and the survivor's traumatized state, Prager recurs to D. W. Winnicott's writings on the early life-sustaining fantasies of the self:

Trauma shatters a fantasy of omnipotence: the destruction of the victim's sense that because of the perfection of the world, all is possible and anything can be achieved. Omnipotence depends on the environment that encourages the person to believe in his dependence on a benign world-in-place to provide for his or her needs. It is a seamless world that, as Winnicott (1971, 12) puts it, never asks "did you conceive of this or was it presented to you from without?" In place of posing the question, the environment sustains the illusion that the individual omnipotently creates the world that provides for him.

. . . But traumatic ruptures promote the *premature* destruction of omnipotent dependency. They yield, in memory, an experience of the community's failure to indulge the illusion that the world is there to gratify me. The living of life in the shadow of this failure means that trauma cannot be placed in the past tense: the fear of its present-day return, as Winnicott (1974) describes, shapes the person's relationship to the future.¹⁶

14. Jeffrey Prager, "Jump-Starting Timeliness: Trauma, Temporality and the Redressive Community," in *Time and Memory*, ed. Jo Alyson Parker, Michael Crawford, and Paul Harris (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2006), 230 (*italics in original*).

15. *Ibid.*, 234.

16. *Ibid.*, 236–37; Prager cites D. W. Winnicott, "The Fear of Breakdown," *International Review of Psychoanalysis* 1 (1974): 103–7, and D. W. Winnicott, "Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena," in *Playing and Reality* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1971), 1–25.

Departing from D. W. Winnicott's representation of a pretraumatic "seamless world," Prager links trauma to the destruction of the dependent self's enabling fantasy of omnipotence: "Independence is a life-long process in which omnipotence is 'tamed' though never fully eliminated. Through the life-course, the world ever remains an expression of one's own centrality and pre-eminence, though maturation typically mutes the fantasy on the pathway toward the world's disenchantment."¹⁷ In tracing the essence of traumatic experience to the premature destruction of the fantasy of omnipotence, Prager brings to the fore the crucial *communal* condition of the self's existence. It becomes evident that the necessity of entertaining a fantasy of omnipotence requires the community's protective presence; given that the fantasy remains operative long after the end of childhood, so, too, does the community's responsibility for preserving the social conditions under which the fantasy can be sustained.

In his consideration of the permanent existential devastation that torture wreaks, Améry departs from a claim that underscores the custodial nature of the social bonds that give rise to the constitutive fantasy of omnipotence. Améry writes, "The expectation of help is as much a constitutional psychic element as is the struggle for existence."¹⁸ This expectation is an inborn assumption we hold that the other will aid us. According to Améry, it is not *only* in critical situations that the self comes to know the other as a provider of relief: a person establishes his or her earliest relationships on the assumption that the world exists to alleviate the self's discomfort. By way of example, Améry considers the situation of a sick child: "Just a moment, the mother says to her child, who is moaning from pain, a hot-water bottle, a cup of tea is coming right away, we won't let you suffer so! . . . In almost all situations in life where there is bodily injury there is also the expectation of help; the former is compensated by the latter."¹⁹ The child moans, and this moan is a communication to the mother. Like every other human cry of pain, it is an address. It conveys the child's expectation of help. It makes no difference whether the mother can actually provide a material remedy for the child's pain; the child's very expectation of help compensates for its suffering. Whether consciously or not, the child who cries out in pain, like the wounded soldier on the battlefield, assumes that someone will come to its aid, that it will not be left alone to suffer. The presence of the other is crucial in such situations of need, because without it, the self

17. *Ibid.*, 236.

18. Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*, 28.

19. *Ibid.*, 28–29.

experiences its suffering body as its enemy.²⁰ If pain chains the mind to the body, the *expectation of help* reassures the self of its reality in another's mind. This assumption enables suffering persons to see themselves from the position of the other, to access a perspective on themselves outside of their suffering bodies and thereby to retain a sense of themselves as more than mere bodies.

The situation of torture deprives the victim of this mediated experience of self. Améry writes, "Frail in the face of violence, yelling out in pain, awaiting no help, capable of no resistance, the tortured person is only a body, and nothing else beside that."²¹ When the boundaries of the body are broken, so too are the sufferer's ties to society, which asserts its presence by overseeing the preservation of those boundaries. Winnicott's discussion of anxiety in the earliest stage of life enables us to formulate why the assault upon the victim's physical borders harks back to this early stage and in so doing undermines the assumption of the inviolability of those borders. According to Winnicott, anxiety in an infant is not "separation anxiety; it relates to quite other things, and is, in fact, anxiety about annihilation."²² This anxiety refers to an experience that predates ego-integration and the attendant demarcation of intersubjective borders. In this earliest stage of life, "[t]he alternative to being is reacting, and reacting interrupts being and annihilates. Being and annihilation are the two alternatives."²³ Torture returns the self to the earliest alternatives: being or annihilation. According to Améry, it "blots out the contradiction of death and allows us to experience it personally."²⁴

To have experienced and survived death-in-life through the hand of his fellow man turned "antiman" was for Améry tantamount to outliving his own murder, the implications of which were devastating.²⁵ He writes, "The experience of persecution was, at the very bottom, that of an extreme *loneliness*. At stake for me is the release from the abandonment that has persisted from that time until today."²⁶ Such an experience of abandonment was specific to a loss of trust, which Améry described as

20. Elaine Scarry writes, "The person in great pain experiences his own body as the agent of his agony." *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 47.

21. Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*, 33.

22. D.W. Winnicott, *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment: Studies in the Theory of Emotional Development* (New York: International Universities Press, 1965), 41.

23. *Ibid.*, 47.

24. Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*, 34.

25. *Ibid.*, 40.

26. *Ibid.*, 70.

the certainty that by reason of written or unwritten social contracts the other person will spare me—more precisely stated, that he will respect my physical, and with it also my metaphysical, being. The boundaries of my body are also the boundaries of my self. My skin surface shields me against the external world. If I am to have trust, I must feel on it only what I *want* to feel.

At the first blow, however, trust in the world breaks down. The other person, *opposite* whom I exist physically in the world and *with* whom I can exist only as long as he does not touch my skin surface as border, forces his own corporeality on me with the first blow. He is on me and thereby destroys me. . . . If no help can be expected, this physical overwhelming by the other then becomes an existential consummation of destruction altogether.²⁷

A “defenseless prisoner of fear,”²⁸ Améry was left with an enduring sense of “foreignness” that could not be compensated subsequently through any kind of human communication.²⁹ Still, Améry’s own experience indicates that a certain psychic *reorganization*, necessary even to acknowledge this permanent state of foreignness, could and did occur in the wake of torture. Prager’s discussion of possible “relief” for the survivor points to the necessity of the community’s involvement if this reorganization is to occur, a necessity he traces to the ongoing dependence of the self on the world-supported fantasy of omnipotence:

Unlike those who suggest that traumatic relief depends on a person’s return in memory to his or her unassimilated past in the form of representing and speaking it in an affect-laden language, it is, rather, the restoration of a community that has disappeared and a re-engagement with an experience of a providing-world that enables moving-on. Relief derives not monologically by reclaiming one’s past through its representation, but dialogically by presently describing to a listener or to a community of listeners who are willing and capable of understanding both the breach that is now occurring and its likely origin in prior disillusionment.

. . . In the same way that psychological trauma is a function of a social community that failed, trauma’s repair requires the social recuperation of omnipotence after its premature destruction, in the face of those who

27. *Ibid.*, 28 (italics in original).

28. *Ibid.*, 40.

29. *Ibid.*, 39.

originally contributed to the failure, or of those [to] whom all of mistrust and violation has become “entrusted.”³⁰

In this fraught situation, the survivor requires the support and protection of the very community, actual or “entrusted,” that may be held responsible for the trauma of abandonment. Given this, we can understand the efficacy of the survivor’s wordlessness: it serves “to protect those loved ones from the anger felt by having been . . . forsaken,” and it can be a means of not losing the community once again.³¹ Krell’s experience attests to the costliness of the survivor’s silence. At the same time, for the survivor to articulate feelings of rage over prior abandonment carries its own hazards, insofar as expressing those feelings runs the risk of attenuating healing bonds to the community. How, then, does the survivor negotiate the conflicting needs, on the one hand, not to consign rage to an implosive wordlessness and, on the other hand, to avoid the recurrence of traumatic abandonment, which the expression of rage might precipitate?

In an observation about a phenomenon common to his work both as a psychoanalyst treating survivors and as an interviewer for the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, Dori Laub alludes to an extraordinary moment of communication, linked to the *metaphoric* register of testimony, that implicitly speaks to this question:

It seems to me that in addition to what is manifestly said . . . there is another, a more subtle melody. A cue is dropped, barely heard. . . . The patient may dismiss it or pass over it in silence; yet there are times in which it is as though a cord [*sic*] is struck and an internal chorus, a thousand voices are set free. The other melody, that subtler music, then emerges, suddenly resounding loud and clear. It has always been there, center-stage, waiting to be liberated from its captivity of silence. It is as though a secret password has been uttered, in the expectation that it be passed over once again; a word by which the patient names himself and asks against all odds for a reciprocal identification. Only this time I responded. And only this time, when I was present enough to recognize and hear the password, could the door be opened and the hidden voice emerge and be released.³²

30. Prager, “Jumpstarting Timeliness,” 238–39.

31. *Ibid.*, 237.

32. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, M.D., *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 63–64.

Laub's description of what might be characterized as the supplement to witnessing via "another, a more subtle melody" enables the formulation of a concept of testimony as the occasion of a transmission, separate from, yet dependent upon, testimonial diegesis. Laub's own metaphoric language calls attention to the emphatically *figural* register of this transmission: the "other melody, that subtler music" that indirectly lends form to potentially destabilizing emotions. I understand the liberation that Laub refers to as resulting from this oblique form of disclosure, which transmutes these emotions through their transfer to a communicative space external to the self.³³ Such relaying of emotion through figuration may also account for the reparative impact of art, noted in Krystal's observation that "survivors were treatable . . . in exceptional cases, if they were especially endowed with literary or artistic talents that permitted them to develop or reconstruct damaged functions."³⁴

A conception of testimony as engaged in such transfer informs Primo Levi's retrospective reflections on the writing of his first work, *Survival in Auschwitz*. Forty years after the testimony's appearance, Levi notes, "I had written those pages without a specific recipient in mind. For me, those were things I had inside, that occupied me and that I had to expel: tell them, indeed shout them from the roof-tops."³⁵ That Levi has no one in mind when bearing witness, that he shouts to no one in particular (just as Antelme wanted to lash out against "all the things," rather than against people), reveals two distinct but related ideas about the trauma of social abandonment. First, that it belatedly triggers volatile emotions in the survivor that hark back to the earliest stage of development, before the differentiation of the subject from the object through the formation of the unconscious. Of this period Winnicott notes, "The events of these earliest stages cannot be thought of as lost through what we know as the mechanisms of repression, and therefore analysts cannot expect to find them appearing as a result of work which lessens the forces of repression."³⁶ Levi's retrospective characterization of bearing witness as an *expulsion* and a *shouting* is thus an apt characterization of testimony, insofar as it underscores its distinctness from "work which lessens the forces of repressions," that is, from psychic working-through, whose goal

33. Krystal finds the motivation for externalization "to be in the dealing with infantile aggression," "Trauma and Aging," 87. Améry's description of torture as an imposed return to an experience of abandonment associated with infantile trauma bears out Krystal's hypothesis.

34. *Ibid.*, 97.

35. Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, trans. Raymond Rosenthal (New York: Vintage International, 1989), 168.

36. Winnicott, *The Maturation Process and the Facilitating Environment*, 38.

is the overcoming of resistances.³⁷ The second idea indicated by Levi's need to unburden himself to no one in particular concerns the requirements for recovering from the trauma of social abandonment: so that the "shouting" force of buried rage does not trigger defensiveness in its receivers, bearing witness involves bringing things into the light of day but not necessarily so that they will be recognized by others.

As Améry's experience suggests, the transformation of rage through narrative-making is a means by which a testimonial "I" can constitute itself in the wake of social abandonment and thereby renew its sense of agency. Bearing witness is of healing consequence, insofar as it forges a shield that protects both the survivor and the community from an upsurge of nonprocessable emotion. Améry alludes to this sheltering dimension of testimony in the following statement: "It would be totally senseless to try and describe here the pain that was inflicted on me. . . . If someone wanted to impart his physical pain, he would be forced to inflict it and thereby become a torturer himself."³⁸ If the only recourse open to the survivor for conveying prior suffering is inflicting it on others, then the primary goal of testimony must not be to communicate to others the raw experience of suffering, for this would turn the survivor into a torturer and hence estrange him or her from the community.

The readings that follow explore how the power of testimony resides in its capacity to ward off such displaced repetitions through a process of externalizing symbolization that aids the survivor and the community in their joint endeavor to "live with incurable vulnerabilities."³⁹ Bearing witness can thus be understood as a procedure of holding, in a double

37. Sigmund Freud, "Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through: Further Recommendations on the Technique of Psycho-Analysis II," in vol. 12, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1958), 147–56. My analysis differs from Laub's account of the dynamics of testimony in one respect; Laub writes: "The re-externalization of the event can occur and take effect only when one can articulate and *transmit* the story, literally transfer it to another outside oneself and take it back again, inside. Telling thus entails a reassertion of the hegemony of reality and a re-externalization of the evil that effected and contaminated the trauma victim." *Testimony*, 69. Whereas Laub views testimony as a process of reexternalization that enables an eventual internalization of psychically charged experience, my reading suggests that not all responses to trauma can be reinternalized; some lend themselves to symbolization but nevertheless remain ego-dystonic; in other words, they do not lend themselves to "working-through." Dominick LaCapra has engaged in a sustained discussion of the possibilities and limits of working-through trauma. See especially *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 86–113; *History in Transit: Experience, Identity, Critical Theory* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), especially 117–43; *History and Memory after Auschwitz* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998).

38. Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*, 33.

39. Sean Field, "Beyond 'Healing': Trauma, Oral History and Regeneration," *Oral History* 34, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 41.

sense: as a protective holding-back of volatile emotion and as the creation of a holding space within which these emotions are submitted to symbolic transfiguration.⁴⁰

Four of the chapters that follow consider texts that are either written by survivors or written from a survivor's perspective. In each, holding, in the double sense discussed above, leads to the consolidation of a voice that enables the narrator/subject to regain agency. The fifth chapter, on Liliana Cavani's film *The Night Porter*, explores the relation between Nazi genocidal rage and *failed* narrative processes of containment and externalization. In this regard the film analysis can be considered a counterpoint to the other readings in this study, each of which underscores the socializing and restorative effects of narrative practices of containment. Even with its different focus and emphasis, Cavani's film, like the written texts considered here, engages the question of how the narrative reconstruction of past trauma participates in the management of present feelings that stand to interfere with the survivor's establishment of a sense of agency in the present.

Chapter 1 analyzes the memoir of one of the most prominent historians of Nazi Germany today, Saul Friedländer, who as a child during World War II was hidden in France, while his parents were deported and murdered in Auschwitz. Friedländer characterizes his childhood as situated at a remove from the events of the Holocaust and sees himself as having lived "on the edges of the catastrophe . . . separated . . . from those who had been directly caught up in the tide of events."⁴¹ His first effort to come to an understanding of these distant events took the form of a literary endeavor: shortly after the end of the war, he tried, unsuccessfully, to write a poem based on stories he had heard about the camps. More than three decades later, he produced *When Memory Comes*, a text whose intricate rhetorical patterning reveals its childhoods roots in Friedländer's literary imagination. Reading the discontinuities in the narrative structure in relation to Friedländer's traumatic separation from his parents, the chapter traces an unconscious fantasy of parental rescue that enables Friedländer to tolerate avowedly unplumbed responses to his parents' deaths.

40. For an excellent discussion of textual procedures of distancing in testimonial narratives that pose obstacles to the recipient's becoming "a participant and co-owner of the traumatic event" (411), see Patricia Yaegar, "Testimony without Intimacy," *Poetics Today* 27, no. 2 (Summer 2006): 399–423.

41. Saul Friedländer, *When Memory Comes*, trans. Helen R. Lane (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1979), 155.

Chapter 2 focuses on two renowned works by Primo Levi: *Survival in Auschwitz* and *The Drowned and the Saved*. The combination of anguished introspection and critical self-distance characteristic of Levi's testimonial writing has made him a compelling figure for both specialists and non-specialists interested in the experience of Holocaust victimization. My reading of Levi's work considers the personal stakes of Levi's philosophically oriented analysis of victimization gleaned from his firsthand experience. I focus on Levi's discussions of the "drowned," or *Muselmänner*, the name given to the most abject concentration camp prisoners. Whereas other readings have followed Levi's lead and invoked the category of "the drowned" as a neutral analytic tool, my reading concentrates on the metaphoricality of the category itself, tracing its origin to specific experiences Levi had in Auschwitz. When considered within the affective economy of Levi's writing, the images of "drowned" men and women in Levi's texts acquire psychological significance as containers for dissociated feelings of rage. Levi's death, a possible but unproven suicide, upset his public image as a survivor whose limpid eloquence reassuringly attested to the endurance of "the human spirit." The concluding part of the chapter considers Levi's reception of Jean Améry's writings, specifically, Améry's contemplation on suicide, in relation to the figure of the *Muselmann*, not in order to contribute to further speculation about Levi's death but to trace certain affinities between the two writers, whose intellectual and spiritual differences have heretofore been emphasized, including by Levi himself.

In contrast to the other readings in this study, chapter 3, an analysis of Liliana Cavani's film *The Night Porter*, explores the externalization of rage through violent action rather than its tropological transformation. I consider the film's plot, which concerns a sexual relationship between a former SS officer and a former female concentration camp prisoner, as an objectified fantasy emanating from the psyche of the Nazi protagonist. Pursuing the logic of the fantasy, the film reveals how, within the Nazi imaginary, victims were positioned as screens upon which the perpetrators projected a rage born of a psychic incapacity to tolerate, much less protect, their own vulnerability. Unlike studies of the relationship between Nazism and symbolic language that focus on the dehumanizing and animalizing rhetoric of anti-Semitism, my analysis of the film suggests that the Nazis' victimization of the Jews and others, though "justified" through explicitly and intentionally dehumanizing metaphors, was underwritten by an intolerance of a fundamentally human condition of vulnerability whose only "solution" was the production of victims who

were made to embody that condition and whose destruction promised release from it.

Chapter 4 focuses on the controversial Holocaust narrative *Fragments*, whose author, Benjamin Wilkomirski, fraudulently claimed to be a child survivor. Whereas previous analyses of Wilkomirski and his text have largely been concerned with the symptomatic cultural significance of the debacle, and in particular with the stature accorded to victims in contemporary culture, I call attention to ways in which certain of the positions adopted by critics bespeak a transferential identification with survivors that is problematic, insofar as it has led to the dismissal of the significance of survivors' favorable responses to the text. In view of these responses, I advocate for the narrative's enduring value as a piece of writing that captures something authentic about the experience of persecution, and I offer a reading of the narrative on this basis. Following the text's intricate symbolic logic, I trace a movement of displacement and reversal harking back to a trauma of abandonment that resolves into a masochistic rage against the self.

If the tropological operations of Levi's writing transform the *Muselmann* into an image of abject internal otherness, for novelist Imre Kertész, the *Muselmann* serves as a figure through which to explore the challenges that confront the survivor after liberation. Gyorgy, the narrator of *Fatelessness*, undergoes an ordeal that parallels Kertész's own history of persecution. Reading the novel's conclusion alongside D. W. Winnicott's theory of creative apperception, I discuss how Gyorgy manages an aggression that threatens to sabotage his preeminent desire to rejoin the community that had stood by while he was deported. The chapter also presents Kertész's reflections on the relationship between the writing of testimonial fiction and the survivor's reawakening to the possibility of love.

The authors whose works I consider were readers of one another. As was already mentioned, toward the end of his life, Levi was in conversation with the writings of Améry; in *The Drowned and the Saved*, he also criticized Cavani's *The Night Porter*, as did Friedländer. Kertész wrote his first novel prompted by other survivors' accounts.⁴² While underscoring their common experiences of improbable survival and incalculable loss, my study is meant to suggest that the intellectual currents running between these authors also conducted shared experiences of more intimate, if inarticulable, effects of victimization.

42. See Saul Friedländer, *Reflections of Nazism: An Essay on Kitch and Death*, trans. Thomas Weyr (New York: Harper and Row, 1984), 40–41.

In addition to the possible reasons already discussed for the scant attention paid to the survivor's rage, timing may also have played a role. Produced in the tailwinds of the catastrophic events, when the reconstruction of communal ties and the fostering of individual and collective continuity were of pressing concern, the vast corpus of critical studies on Holocaust representation has understandably been dedicated, for the most part, to the poetics and politics of mourning and commemoration, and to the intergenerational transmission of trauma. It is therefore not surprising that a response to victimization associated with estrangement of the self from the other writ large did not figure in these critical works emerging from the shadows of persecution and individual and collective loss.⁴³ Addressing this lacuna in Holocaust studies, the following chapters are intended to bring to the fore a previously unremarked reason for the psychologically and existentially reparative impact of bearing witness: its ability to diffuse volatile affect. Perhaps as well the following chapters will be relevant to the study of other traumatic aftermaths that call for the management of potent emotion. The high suicide rate among U.S. veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan would seem to confirm the need for such further inquiry.

43. The figure of the shadow is ubiquitous in Holocaust testimonial literature and scholarship. Cf. Krystyna Chiger and Daniel Paisner, *The Girl in the Green Sweater: A Life in Holocaust's Shadow* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2009); Annette Insdorf, *Indelible Shadows: Film and the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Geoffrey H. Hartman, *The Longest Shadow: In the Aftermath of the Holocaust* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996); Andrea Liss, *Trespassing Through the Shadows; Memory, Photography and the Holocaust* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).

ENCRYPTED MEMORIES

Saul Friedländer's *When Memory Comes*

The impulse behind Saul Friedländer's *When Memory Comes* firmly places it within the tradition of the memoir. According to Vivian Gornick, that impulse “originates in a writer’s desire to set a record straight, tell an exemplary tale, bear witness. . . . It shares with fiction writing the obligation to lift from the raw material of life a story that will shape experience, transform events, make large sense of things.”¹ The particular urgency of Friedländer’s desire to make “large sense,” characteristic of the enterprise of memoir, is attributable to the ongoing pattern of discontinuity that marks his life, beginning with his early childhood during the rise of Hitler and continuing into his adulthood in Israel. His history of rupture created in him the “need for synthesis, for a thoroughgoing coherence that no longer excludes anything,” words that call attention to the dual nature of his narrative: it is both an

1. Vivian Gornick, “The Rhetoric of Witness,” review of *All Rivers Run to the Sea: Memoirs*, by Elie Wiesel, *The Nation*, December 25, 1995, 839. Paul John Eakin discusses *When Memory Comes* as engaged in the pursuit of a wholeness of identity. See *Fictions in Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self-Invention* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), 235–55. See also Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi’s discussion of the relationship between the development of Friedländer’s identity and the “polyphonic forms of narration” of his historical scholarship. “See Under: Memory. Reflections on *When Memory Comes*,” review of *When Memory Comes*, by Saul Friedländer, *History & Memory* 9, no. 1 (1997): 373.

account of his survival during and in the aftermath of the Holocaust, and a meaning-producing endeavor, conceived in the hope that telling his story will alter the experiential pattern out of which it originates.²

In the tradition of the *Bildungsroman*, Friedländer's narrative begins at his birth and concludes with what could be seen as the end of his youth, his arrival in Israel. Woven into this account is an ongoing discussion of issues relevant to the place and time of his writing: Israel, 1977. What we are given, then, is two stories; one about Friedländer's childhood under Nazism and immediately after, and another about the adult narrator's search to uncover the themes running through his history up to the narrative present. In striking ways the project is reminiscent of *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, by Friedländer's compatriot Rainer Maria Rilke. In that text, which Friedländer describes as "moving" and "mysterious," the protagonist must write his way out of his childhood, in order to release himself from its emotional grip (56). Moreover, in their complex chronological structures, both narratives resemble weavings meant to integrate disparate experiences into a synthesized pattern.

Here are the biographical facts of Friedländer's history relevant to the analysis that follows. (For clarity, I present these facts as a chronology.) Friedländer was born on October 11, 1932 (a date he does not include).³ His father was vice president of a German insurance company in Czechoslovakia. His mother's family came from the Sudetenland. Typical of many assimilated bourgeois Jews, the family considered itself German and never anticipated the developments that led to the rise of National Socialism in Germany. For a few months in 1938, Friedländer attended a private English school. On March 12, 1939, when it became evident that Hitler would occupy the country, the family left for Hungary but turned back when they reached the Moravian town of Brno only to find that the Germans had already arrived. Because of the occupation of Czechoslovakia, the family left once again and went to Paris. Friedländer, seven at the time, was placed in a home for Jewish children in Montmorency. After the German invasion of Poland in September 1939, the family moved to the spa town of Nérès in the *arrondissement* of Montluçon, where they remained for two years. In July 1942, when the French began to arrest foreign Jews, Friedländer's parents sent their son into hiding; however, in their panic to do so, they chose a Jewish children's home.

2. Friedländer, *When Memory Comes*, 114. Subsequent references are included in the body of this text.

3. Vineta Colby, ed., *World Authors 1980-1985* (New York: H. W. Wilson Company, 1991), 316.

The very night of his arrival, there was a roundup of children older than ten. The *gendarmes* announced that they would return for the rest of the children the next day, and Friedländer was immediately brought back to his parents in Nérís, who then placed him in Saint-Béranger, a Catholic boarding school. His parents, unable to find a place of refuge, remained briefly at the Montluçon hospital, where Friedländer's father had been admitted for a worsening ulcer. Then, without further options, they attempted to cross the border into Switzerland. "[S]ometime" in October 1942, Friedländer was transferred to a school in Montneuf (93). In September 1943 he went back to Saint-Béranger, where he remained until the end of the war. His parents not having returned, he continued on at the same school for a few months, until he went to live with an appointed guardian and his family. After the war Friedländer learned that his parents had been arrested at the Swiss border and deported to Germany, where they died under circumstances Friedländer does not discuss. In August 1946 Friedländer was sent to a Zionist summer camp in the Jura Mountains, and at sixteen, he left for Israel to fight for the newly formed Jewish state.

Friedländer was forced to assume a series of new names corresponding to the shifts in the places of his asylum. As a young boy before the war, he was called Pavel, or at home, the diminutive Pavliček. He became Paul, "from Paris to Nérís," and later, upon his conversion to Catholicism, in Saint-Béranger, Paul-Henri Ferland, to which Marie was added at his baptism (94). When he went to Israel, he became Shaul, and then Saul. Of these name changes he writes, "[I]t is impossible to know which name I am, and that in the final analysis seems to me sufficient expression of a real and profound confusion" (94). As Friedländer indicates, the confusion of names reveals a deeper confusion, configured in the following image as an internal splitting: "[P]erhaps I am the one who now preserves, in the very depths of myself, certain disparate, incompatible fragments of existence, cut off from all reality, with no continuity whatsoever, like those shards of steel that survivors of great battles . . . carry about inside their bodies" (110). Whereas the first expression of Friedländer's "confusion" expresses the discontinuity of self through an image of a sequential difference (the changes in name), the second description posits that discontinuity as the result of an intrapsychic conflict (incompatible fragments preserved deep within the self). As such, it links Friedländer's identity as a "survivor" not to his having been a hunted and hidden Jew—in 1944 the Vichy militia had literally come looking for him—but to an ongoing, internal, post-Holocaust battle. The language

of the following passage reinforces the image of Friedländer's self as a site of embattlement: "We Jews erect walls around our most harrowing memories, and our most anxious thoughts of the future. Even a story complete to the last detail sometimes turns into an exercise in hiding things from ourselves. These necessary defenses are one of the chief features of our most profound dread" (75). The passage situates the battle within Friedländer as occurring on the terrain of memory, understood as an impermeable space of enclosure. By the same token, the representation of storytelling as a process of building enclosures is qualified by the associative connotations of the metaphor itself, as the notion of "hiding" is evocative of Friedländer's survival as a hidden child. The metaphor thus stages the very movement of symbolic disclosure or revealing that Friedländer's storytelling will perform as it erects walls around memory, thereby suggesting that the "harrowing memories" and "most anxious thoughts" that his story attempts to wall in will also seep out in the text's building blocks of figural language. These textual images of fortification, hiding, burial, and defense indicate that creating a coherent self through memoir-writing will take place through a process of figuration that both erects intrapsychic fortification and allows hidden "things" related to childhood to become visible. The optical metaphor is an apt description of the capacity of Friedländer's story both to hide unbearable memories and to make the hidden things visible, under cover of figural discourse. The question is: which things?

Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok's theory of encrypted memory is useful in thinking about this question. According to Abraham and Torok, memories become encrypted when the subject who has experienced the loss of a love object cannot find the language in which to acknowledge the loss. Instead of words of mourning, which externalize loss in a form that can be shared with others, the subject creates a walled-off psychic space where the lost object is installed and, most importantly, where it continues to exist, undead, within the subject. This process, known as incorporation, engenders in the subject a fantasy world with its own, encrypted existence. Abraham and Torok indicate that such fantasies are designed to "repair" the traumatic damage inflicted by the loss of the love object.⁴ They develop only in cases in which the subject's relationship

4. Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok write, "We can conclude therefore that the primary aim of the fantasy life born of incorporation is to repair—in the realm of the imaginary, of course—the injury that really occurred and really affected the ideal object. The fantasy of incorporation reveals a utopian wish that the memory of the affliction had never existed or, on a deeper level, that the affliction had had nothing to inflict." *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of*

with the object was characterized by a “love totally free of ambivalence” that ended only because of the occurrence of the traumatic event.⁵

Encrypted fantasies also contain an element of secret shame that is associated with the lost object, which it is the task of the fantasy to hide, precisely in order to preserve the love object. In Abraham and Torok’s words, “Crypts are constructed only when the shameful secret is the love object’s doing and when that object also functions for the subject as an ego ideal. It is therefore the *object’s* secret that needs to be kept, *his* shame covered up.”⁶

Abraham and Torok emphasize that because the subject is also convinced of the object’s innocence—the object did not bring on the trauma—whatever aggression is contained in its fantasies of incorporation is an extension of the aggression that the object genuinely suffered—death—which caused the traumatic separation. Of these encrypted fantasies Abraham and Torok write, “Sometimes in the dead of the night . . . the ghost of the crypt comes back to haunt the cemetery guard.”⁷

Abraham and Torok’s theory of incorporation opens up ways to formulate how Friedländer’s memoir articulates loss even as it erects fantasies that silently reveal responses to loss that cannot be integrated into the dominant narrative. In what follows I will address two key memories, located in the middle of the text—a position suggestive of their psychic centrality—that stage the dynamic of hiding and revealing.

The first memory concerns what was to be the last time Friedländer saw his parents. Friedländer recalls that in Saint-Béranger, he experienced everything “through the filter of a single thought, a single desire, a single drive of my entire ten-year-old being: I had to rejoin my parents at any cost. It was more than distress or nostalgia: it was a physical need, so to speak, and nothing could stand in its way” (84). Impelled by this primordial need, Friedländer runs away to the Montluçon hospital in search of his parents:

I climbed up four flights of stairs, opened the door, and threw myself into my mother’s arms.

There are certain memories that cannot be shared, so great is the gap between the meaning they have for us and what others might see

Psychoanalysis, vol. 1, trans. and ed. Nicholas Rand (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 134.

5. *Ibid.*, 136.

6. *Ibid.*, 131 (*italics in original*).

7. *Ibid.*, 130.

in them. Undoubtedly the words exchanged in this hospital room were, objectively, simple, everyday ones: a child's pleas, and adults' promises.

. . . Could I be dragged away from them a second time? I clung to the bars of the bed. How did my parents ever find the courage to make me loosen my hold, without bursting into sobs in front of me?

It has all been swept away by catastrophe, and the passage of time. What my father and mother felt at that moment disappeared with them. (85–88)

The child throws himself into his mother's arms; the adult narrator expresses his inability to impart in words the meaning of this moment. On an explicit level, then, the scene commemorates the present and future impossibility of communicating the significance of this reunion.

The scene's conclusion reads: "of this heartbreak [*déchirement*]⁸ there remains only a vignette in my memory, the image of a child walking back down the rue de la Garde, in the opposite direction from the one taken shortly before, in a peaceful autumn light, between two nuns dressed in black" (88). This "vignette" cannot possibly be an unaltered recollection of an event, because the child is visualizing himself in the memory, whereas a young child characteristically directs his attention to the outside world rather than focusing on himself.⁹

The perspective of the vignette is, however, characteristic of screen memories, which inflect memory with fantasy and in which the subject perceives himself from the outside. Considering Friedländer's memory as having undergone such revision, the scene lends itself to a reading in terms of what Abraham and Torok call "antimetaphor" or "cryptophore," characteristic of fantasies of incorporation.¹⁰ Such fantasies are staged literalizations of the meanings of a significant word. In the scene under discussion, *déchirement* functions as such an antimetaphor. It embodies the heartbreak, literally Friedländer's tearing apart, in the two identical figures of the nuns wearing black clothing. These figures can be seen as

8. Saul Friedländer, *Quand vient le souvenir . . .* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1978), 85. Subsequent page references are included, in square brackets, in the body of this text.

9. See Sigmund Freud: "[I]t contradicts all that we have learnt to suppose that in his experiences a child's attention is directed to himself instead of exclusively to impressions from outside. One is thus forced by various considerations to suspect that in the so-called earliest childhood memories we possess not the genuine memory-trace but a later revision of it, a revision which may have been subjected to the influences of a variety of later psychical forces." *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, vol. 6, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1960), 47–48.

10. Abraham and Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel*, 132.

symbolic pieces of Friedländer's torn-apart self. That the nuns wear the black color of mourning suggests that they stand for the death—the tearing apart—not of Friedländer's parents, but of the child himself.

But what secret fantasy does this scene of deadly tearing express? On the one hand, the image of the torn child can be read as a barely disguised expression of Friedländer's feeling that leaving his parents—not only once, but “a second time”—was a trauma that felt like he was dying. But in the logic of incorporation, cryptophores pertain not to the *subject's* feelings but to the shame of the lost *objects* that the subject has incorporated into himself. Encrypted fantasies “are constructed only when the shameful secret is the love object's doing and when that object also functions for the subject as an ego ideal.”¹¹ The question pertinent to Friedländer's cryptophoric fantasy is: what parental shame is rectified through the fantasy of the dying child?

It is significant that Friedländer frames the scene of parting in terms of his need, which “nothing could stand in [the] way” of, to be with his parents. His need is so deep that he cannot remember a time when he was not anxious about being separated from his parents. In his words, “The fear of being abandoned: I am unable to account for its deepest origins” (13). The opening line of the memoir even suggests that his anxiety about abandonment precedes him: “I was born in Prague at the worst possible moment, four months before Hitler came to power”: Hitler, the cause of danger, is a presence in Friedländer's life even before his birth (3). Still, Friedländer's anxiety proved ineffective in preventing the separation from his parents. But what is more significant in terms of the meaning of the fantasy is that Friedländer's parents proved unable to protect their son, either from his anxiety or from the very thing his anxiety was designed to defend against, namely, abandonment. Their deaths rendered them incapable of making good on their promise that the family would, in the future, be intact. This, I would suggest, is the reason for their shame.

Given that fantasies of incorporation are a means of resuscitating the ego ideal, Friedländer's screen memory of tearing apart must in some way serve to rehabilitate the image of his parents as having had sufficient strength—“courage” is his word—to protect their child from separation, notwithstanding the fact that in reality the family was destroyed. To this end, the fantasy both acknowledges the reality of his parents' deaths and fulfills the impossible, counterfactual, wish that his parents had had

11. *Ibid.*, 131.

enough courage not to force their child to separate from them. It does so by creating an image of the child and parents as together *in death*. That is, in fantasy Friedländer is able to die in order to remain united with his parents, who were murdered shortly after the reunion scene in the hospital.

In addition to symbolizing the tearing apart of the child, the final image of the scene—three figures walking together—can also be understood as expressing the fulfillment of Friedländer’s wish that the family of three had remained intact thanks to the courage of his parents. Symbolically splitting himself in fantasy, Friedländer thus succeeds in his effort both to shield his parents from a shame born of their having split up the family and, in his attempt to negate the outcome of their decision, to have done so by bringing them together in death. In this the fantasy represents Friedländer’s impossible gift of courage to his parents, impossible because postmortem.

The fantasy is also Friedländer’s gift to himself, insofar as it manifests a consoling, if provisional, effect of cryptophores: their capacity to “undermine anyone who would shame their object. They neutralize, as it were, the material instruments of humiliation, the metaphors of dejection. . . . [I]t is not simply a matter of reverting to the literal meanings of words, but of using them in such a way—*whether in speech or deed*—that their very capacity for figurative representation is destroyed.”¹² The screen memory renders the peace that this annulment of the metaphor brings through the image of the child who walks “in a peaceful autumn light [*sous une paisible lumière d’automne*]” (88) [85]. By the same token, reinscribed into the image of peace is death, insofar as the peace is evocative of the phrase “to rest in peace” (*reposer en paix*), and because the light of autumn bears associations with a time of dying. Finally, the image serves to suppress the associative link between heartbreak (*déchirement*) and self-reproach dwelling in the phrase *déchiré par le remords*, “tortured by remorse or self-reproach.”¹³ As such, it indicates the fantasy’s capacity to foreclose Friedländer’s feelings of guilt about the death of his parents.

Finally, after the episode in the hospital, Friedländer develops a symptom that signifies the annulment in “deed” of his parents’ shame. He begins to sleepwalk, like a living ghost from the crypt. “To avoid being humiliated,” he binds himself to his bed in Montneuf, an act which, he writes, “did keep me where I belonged” (95). The means of managing his

12. *Ibid.*, 132 (my italics).

13. My translation.

symptom belies its apparent success in keeping him in his place, insofar as symbolically it reverses the actual outcome of the hospital scene when, without success, he “clung to the bars of the bed.” Now, through this haunting repetition of the scene, the fantasy’s intention of keeping the son tied to his parents can be realized.

The second central memory of the text is of a “crisis,” which directly follows his memory of binding himself to his bed (95). In Montneuf, Friedländer is ten years old, though he does not remember whether he arrived “just before or just after” his tenth birthday (94). He writes, “I became sadder and sadder: in one way or another, I was going to let myself die” (99). He waits until he develops a fever and then, while on a walk with schoolmates and a teacher, falls behind the group and wades into the ice-cold waters of a brook. He is pulled out of the waters. In a passage shortly before this scene, Friedländer indicated that his parents had sent a telegram from the concentration camp at Rivesaltes shortly before their deportation. What he omits to say is that his parents were transferred from Rivesaltes to Drancy; they were among the 1,000 Jewish children and adults transported, on November 4, 1942, from Drancy to Auschwitz, where they were killed.¹⁴ Legible in the name “Rivesaltes” is *rive* (riverbank), a word that links Friedländer’s attempted suicide by the riverbank to his parents’ deaths.¹⁵

A Freudian reading would understand the attempted suicide as a symbolic act of displaced aggression whose intended objects were the deceased parents. But the logic of incorporation dictates another objectal configuration: “Melancholics seem to inflict pain on themselves, but in fact they lend their own flesh to their phantom object of love.”¹⁶ As such, the suicide attempt can be understood as a deed that stages the fantasy of reunion with his dead parents. The narrative placement of this crisis shortly after Friedländer’s discussion of his parents’ arrest suggests that the increasing duration of Friedländer’s separation from his parents lends greater urgency to his need to conceal the shame of their helplessness through drastic acts. His deepening consciousness of his parents’ impotence may also explain why he quotes a written eyewitness account

14. Serge Klarsfeld writes, “When [Convoy 40] arrived in Auschwitz on November 6, 269 men were selected for work and received numbers 73219 through 73482. . . . Ninety-two women received numbers 23625 through 23716. The remaining 639 people were immediately gassed. There were only four survivors, all men, in 1945. . . . None of the 92 selected women survived.” *Memorial to the Jews Deported from France 1942–1944* (New York: Beate Klarsfeld Foundation, 1983), 328–29. The names “Jan Friedlander [sic]” and “Elle Friedlanderova [sic]” appear on the “List of Deportees, Convoy 40,” on page 331.

15. My translation.

16. Abraham and Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel*, 136–37.

of the Jews' final days in the Swiss town where they were arrested. The account states, "Switzerland lets in the old, the sick, the families with children. The others are sent back across the border and into the hands of soldiers!" (89). By way of commentary Friedländer poses a question that casts doubt upon the soundness of his parents' judgment: "If I had accompanied my parents, would we all have gotten across the border?" (89).

Friedländer had expressed these same doubts earlier in the narrative in connection with his memories of his father in NÉris. He writes,

[O]ften my father foundered in a sort of wordless sadness . . . I occasionally wish that he had been unable to think things through, that he had been too sick to do so. Otherwise, he could not have helped but bow to the evidence: his faith in complete assimilation had been mistaken; his failure to recognize the Nazi danger total; his confidence in France ridiculous. We should have been in Palestine or Sweden, like my uncles and my grandmother, at least out of Hitler's reach. Doubtless the worst thing of all in those days was to go on waiting, reduced to complete passivity. (55)

Friedländer's wish that his father had been sick so that he would not have been able to overthink the family's situation bespeaks the same counter-intuitive logic as his wish to be dead in order to remain with the parents: in each case it is an attempt to reinforce the ego ideal at the expense of life itself.

Regarding the presence of aggression in the fantasy, Abraham and Torok note: "If there is any aggression at all, it is shared between the love object and the melancholic subject in being directed at the external world at large in the form of withdrawal and retreat from libidinal investments."¹⁷ Given the aggressive significance of the withdrawal of libidinal investment, it is noteworthy that Friedländer does not register the care bestowed on him after his attempted suicide. He writes about his memories of recovery, "[T]he reality of the daily care given me . . . or Madame Chancel's attentiveness has almost disappeared, whereas these scenes conjured up in my delirium are still as plain as day to me" (100). He does, however, recall that in the room in which he recovered, "Madame Chancel [the directress] installed herself near me, behind a screen, and a long bedside watch began" (100).

17. *Ibid.*, 137.

One “paradoxical memory” stands out from that time: a fantasy based on a memory of an event four years earlier, when, on the train from Czechoslovakia to Paris, he had become separated from his mother (100–101). Of the recurrence in fantasy of the incident, Friedländer writes,

Panic, real panic, overcame me. I began to run from one car to the other, doubtless in the wrong direction. . . . My delirium made the corridors endless and the faces became threatening: I screamed in terror and, if only because of the croup, felt that I was suffocating to death. But suddenly, by a miracle, I was saved: my mother, who had set out in search of me, appeared. I ran to her, threw myself in her arms sobbing, felt the coolness of her fingers on my face . . . I opened my eyes: it was Madame Chancel stroking my forehead to calm me. (101–2)

Immediately after recounting this memory, Friedländer says that for many years he could not speak or write about his childhood memories; they “appeared to be buried” (102). Even so, the delirium rehearses the transition he will eventually make from silence into language. The dream’s contents show that Friedländer has been able to retrieve early memories of his mother as a protector, the role she played before the traumatic separation. The achievement of connection to these early experiences is reflected in the sign it brings, the scream that produces Madame Chancel.

The scream is Friedländer’s first act of communication, an *externalization* of his feelings about his loss. It takes him out of his isolating “delirium” and places him on the threshold of “a community of empty mouths,” that is, of individuals who partake in a compensatory sharing of loss through language.¹⁸ As the first speech act of his postsuicidal “rebirth,” the scream announces the presence of uncontainable emotions without specifying what they are. In this it is emblematic of Friedländer’s text as a whole, which also externalizes uncontainable emotions through figural speech that conceals as much as reveals those emotions. In this context it is significant that the text is not temporally unified: it ceaselessly shifts from the narrative present to a variety of pasts. Its time frame is also not firmly delimited: though Friedländer indicates through dated entries that he composed the text in Jerusalem from June through December of 1977, the first entry does not bear a specific date. Similarly, the final entry does not coincide with the narrative present, as it

18. *Ibid.*, 128.

concerns Friedländer's arrival in Israel on the ship *Altalena*. I understand these temporal ruptures as signifying that the work of synthesis through externalization is interminable.

In the following passage Friedländer reflects upon the relation of his writing to memory:

When people leave us, one after the other, their presence quite naturally anchors itself and survives in the memories of the ones who remain. . . . From time to time, flowers are put on their graves, and their names are there, engraved in stone, essential symbols, through which different generations maintain the ties between each other, follow each other, and communicate. But for me the break was an abrupt one and it cannot become a part of everyday life. What words could one use to say such things amid the happy triviality of ordinary conversations? (134)

Though Friedländer cannot articulate the meanings of his loss, in recognizing the gap separating language and his feelings he also opens a space in which “absent meaning” may nevertheless be phrased.¹⁹ The incorporation into his text of his parents' final letters is an example of such phrasing; his parents' thoughts and feelings may have “been swept away by catastrophe, and the passage of time,” but their voices still haunt Friedländer's text (88). The dates appearing throughout the text, which mark the time of composition of the individual sections, could be construed as headings written upon letters exchanged across generations. That Friedländer includes his parents' names, Elli and Jan Friedländer, at the bottom of their last letter—the only place in the narrative where his parents' names appear together—suggests that Friedländer's text offers itself to his parents as a metaphorical grave in which to anchor the “headstone” of their letter, in this way serving as a permanent marker of, and resting place for, his parents' vanished presence.

Toward the end of the narrative, a third haunting figure surfaces among Friedländer's memories.

To tell the truth, I have always been hungry. Not in Prague certainly. Those first years left me with memories of abundance. Everyone knows

19. Friedländer himself cites Maurice Blanchot's words in an essay on memory: “Whether one considers the Shoah as an exceptional event or as belonging to a wider historical category does not affect the possibility of drawing from it a universally valid significance. . . . ‘Working through’ may ultimately signify, in Maurice Blanchot's words, ‘to keep watch over absent meaning.’” Saul Friedländer, “Trauma, Memory, and Transference,” in *Holocaust Remembrance: The Shapes of Memory*, ed. Geoffrey Hartman (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1994), 262–63.

our national dishes, the *knedliki* of all sorts that for generations have made the reputation of both Czech and Viennese cuisine, but do you have any idea what “Indians,” sold in the pastry shops of the Old City, were? Balls of chocolate, split in two and filled with whipped cream. . . . (168)

In this moment of “truth” Friedländer admits to a hunger for an object whose color and form recall the figure of the torn-apart child. Thus inscribed within a memory of “abundance,” the confection also points to an earlier memory that discloses the secret source of the pastry’s appeal: during those few months in 1938, when Friedländer attended school, his mother would sometimes wait at the school to bring him home. When she did, Friedländer writes, she would first “take me by the hand and whisk me off to the Café Slavia, right next to the school, to have a huge cup of hot chocolate. We would sit there chatting about everything and nothing. It was then, just a few months before we were to leave Prague, that I discovered how much I loved my mother” (27). Sitting in the most famous café of the Old City, the child enjoys the nourishment of maternal presence. Friedländer’s father is also inscribed into this memory of food as love, specifically in name of the favorite confection the child no doubt tasted in the café: “Indian” recalls the books of Karl May, which Friedländer “devoured,” because of an “insatiable appetite” dating from his eighth birthday, when, he recalls, “my father bought me my first real book” (64).

The torn-apart child thus haunts Friedländer’s memories of home, transubstantiated into a literary symbol that neither lays the child permanently to rest nor openly reveals its origins in the trauma of abandonment. But insofar as the symbol externalizes that body, it opens a space in which Friedländer may move, and fight: on the eve of his departure for Israel, he writes a letter to his godfather and godmother stating: “recent events have awakened a feeling in my soul that had been dormant there for a long time, the feeling that I was Jewish. And I want to prove it by leaving to fight alongside all the Jews who are dying in Palestine” (179). The dying Jewish child returns in this memory as well, not inside, but alongside Friedländer, as he fights for his right to exist as a Jew. This is the very fight his father did not put up. As Friedländer notes,

[M]y father was hunted down for what he had refused to remain: a Jew. What he wanted to become, a man like others, had been taken away from him, leaving him no possible recourse. He was being refused the right to live and no longer even knew what to die for. Much more than an

impossibility of acting, his desperate straits had become an impossibility of being. (56)

Friedländer never “becomes” his father. Instead his text keeps watch on his father’s absent presence. In its capacity to do so, *When Memory Comes* may play the role Friedländer imagines books played in his father’s life. He writes that for his father, books “perhaps came to form, from time to time, a magic screen against an unbearable reality; they opened up an inner domain of calm and consolation” (56). Perhaps.

BODIES OF TESTIMONY

Primo Levi's *Survival in Auschwitz* and *The Drowned and the Saved*

In *Survival in Auschwitz* Primo Levi speaks of his pressing need to find “interior liberation” from an “immediate and violent impulse” to tell his story, which had seized him while he was still a prisoner.¹ Given the urgency with which Levi wrote, the measured, reflective tone he achieves in his narrative is astonishing, and that much more so, considering that Levi published his testimony only two years after his liberation. Levi became internationally famous for *Survival in Auschwitz*, which, after its second run in 1957, was translated into many languages and adapted for radio and theatre.

There are two subjects of this testimony, Levi and the *Muselmann*, the latter being the name used in the camps for a prisoner who was not equipped to survive. The title of Levi's testimony—literally “*If This Is a Man*”²—is a reference to the *Muselmänner*, who, in the eyes of the other prisoners, appeared to have lost their human qualities before their biological deaths.³ The title of the

1. Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz: The Nazi Assault on Humanity*, trans. Stuart Woolf (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 9. Subsequent page references are included in the body of this text.

2. *If This Is a Man* is the original title of the first English translation.

3. Levi writes that he does not know why this term was used by the oldest survivors of the camp to describe those prisoners “doomed to selection,” *Survival in Auschwitz* (88). The term *Muselmann* itself means “Muslim.” For a discussion of the significance of the word and its usage, see Gil Anidjar, *The Jew, The Arab: A History of*

text thus directs the reader's attention to the *Muselmänner*. They are also the focus of the central chapter of Levi's testimony, called "The Drowned and the Saved." "Drowned" is Levi's name for *Muselmänner*, while "saved" is his name for the rest of the prisoners. In 1987 Levi brought this division among prisoners into even greater prominence by titling his final text *The Drowned and the Saved*.

In what follows I will explore how the very process of constructing the categories of "drowned" and "saved" was instrumental to Levi's "interior liberation." These categories enabled Levi to analyze the lives and deaths of the prisoners of the German death camp in a way that simultaneously brought his own self into focus in the aftermath of survival. I do not mean to suggest that these categories were significant because they enabled Levi to see himself as one of the "saved," though that was also the case; rather, I will emphasize the way these categories served as an oppositional structure through which Levi expressed, and managed, his own psychic disarray. So compelling was Levi's use of these categories as heuristic tools that their status as metaphors that evolved over time has been forgotten by readers. It is important to keep in mind, though, that Levi first presented the categories in *Survival in Auschwitz* and then returned to them forty years later in *The Drowned and the Saved*. As such, their specific elaboration in each text reflects different phases in the evolution of Levi's identity as a survivor.

In *Survival in Auschwitz*, "drowned" and "saved" are "particularly well differentiated categories among men" (87). They reflect an absolute difference among victims, essential to Levi's presentation of the range of prisoners' experiences. In his view, "Other pairs of opposites (the good and the bad, the wise and the foolish, the cowards and the courageous, the unlucky and the fortunate) are considerably less distinct; they seem less essential, and above all they allow for more numerous and complex intermediary gradations" (87–88).

Levi's portrait of the *Muselmänner* emphasizes their isolation. The other prisoners in the camp believed it was not worthwhile to speak to these "men in decay," because they only complained or talked about eating (89). They were not enterprising, so they had nothing to offer prisoners by way of food or useful items. On the contrary, they were the embodiment of what any prisoner could easily become, and as a result, they were ostracized. The *Muselmänner* were considered non-men, existing alone, without awareness of other people or consciousness of them-

selves. Levi writes, “They suffer and drag themselves along in an opaque intimate solitude [*una opaca intima solitudine*]⁴ and in solitude they die or disappear, without leaving a trace in anyone’s memory” (89). Dying was not death; it was “disappearing,” because the *Muselmänner* did not exist in the eyes of others while they were alive. Their deaths were therefore not witnessed, much less mourned.

Levi first introduces the figure of the “drowned” man through an extended metaphor:

To sink is the easiest of matters; it is enough to carry out all the orders one receives, to eat only the ration, to observe the discipline of the work and the camp. Experience showed that only exceptionally could one survive more than three months in this way. All the musselmans [*sic*] who finished in the gas chambers have the same story, or more exactly, have no story; they followed the slope down to the bottom, like streams that run down to the sea . . . Their life is short, but their number is endless; they, the *Muselmänner*, the drowned, form the backbone of the camp, an anonymous mass, continually renewed and always identical, of non-men who march and labour in silence, the divine spark dead within them, already too empty to really suffer. One hesitates to call them living; one hesitates to call their death death, in the face of which they have no fear, as they are too tired to understand. (90)

The *Muselmänner* impinge upon Levi’s mind. He writes, “They crowd my memory with their faceless presences, and if I could enclose all the evil of our time in one image, I would choose this image which is familiar to me: an emaciated man, with head dropped and shoulders curved, on whose face and in whose eyes not a trace of a thought is to be seen” (90). Where did Levi’s knowledge of the *Muselmänner’s* experience come from? How could he fathom the inner life of a figure who he claimed had no inner life? The answer is obvious: by looking into his own depths. Or rather, by projecting those depths onto an image of otherness from which he could then dissociate. In *Survival in Auschwitz*, before Levi introduces the categories of “drowned” and “saved,” he narrates three episodes whose descriptive language directly affiliates him with the “drowned,” notwithstanding his intention to use this category as the marker of absolute difference between them and himself.

4. All references to the Italian text are from Primo Levi, *Se questo è un uomo* (Torino: Einaudi, 1975), 112. Subsequent page references are included, in square brackets, in the body of this text.

The first of these episodes occurs in a section titled “On the Bottom” [*Sul fondo*] (22) [23]. The episode concerns Levi’s arrival at Auschwitz. Thirsty, tired, confused, the prisoners have been taken off the train and are now standing in a cold room where they are forced to strip. They are shaved and then moved into another room. Levi writes, “[H]ere we are, locked in, naked, sheared and standing, with our feet in water—it is a shower-room. We are alone” (23). Standing with his feet in the water, Levi is literally and figuratively in the region of the “drowned,” on the bottom. After the shower, the prisoners are dressed in rags and destroyed boots:

There is nowhere to look in a mirror, but our appearance stands in front of us, reflected in a hundred livid faces . . .

Then for the first time we became aware that our language lacks words to express this offence [*la nostra lingua manca di parole per esprimere questa offesa*], the demolition of a man. In a moment, with almost prophetic intuition, the reality was revealed to us: we had reached the bottom. (26) [29]

The scene indicates that the speechlessness Levi will associate with the *Muselmänner* originates in this response to the “demolition” he witnesses in this region of the “drowned.” The absence of language to express offense will be reflected in Levi’s writing as a relentless muteness characteristic of the *Muselmann*.

The second episode in which Levi appears among the “drowned” concerns a recurring dream he had in Auschwitz. Levi provides an account of the actual dream and also a description of its emotional effect on him. In the dream itself, Levi has returned from Auschwitz and is telling a story to his sister and some friends. He is describing what it is like trying to sleep in the camps. The focus of his story is the neighbor (“*il mio vicino*”) with whom he is forced to share his hard bed [74]. In the dream Levi has the feeling that he would like to move the neighbor, but he is afraid to wake him, because he knows that the neighbor is stronger than he. Levi also speaks “diffusely” to his audience about other details of camp life, but nevertheless he enjoys the pleasures of storytelling, until something changes (60). Levi writes, “I cannot help noticing that my listeners do not follow me. In fact, they are completely indifferent: they speak confusedly of other things among themselves, as if I was not there. My sister looks at me, gets up and goes away without a word” (60). Still in the dream, Levi writes,

A desolating grief is now born in me, like certain barely remembered pains of one's early infancy. It is pain in its pure state, not tempered by a sense of reality and by the intrusion of extraneous circumstances, a pain like that which makes children cry; and it is better for me to swim [*risalire*] once again up to the surface, but this time I deliberately open my eyes to have a guarantee in front of me of being effectively awake. (60) [74]

To escape from his pain Levi must “swim” (literally “go up again”) to the surface, a metaphor that suggests how his dreamscape, like the shower room, is the nether region of the “drowned.” In the story Levi tells to his sister and friends, Levi, the speaker, is represented as two separate figures: he is the narrator of the account of his difficult night, and he is the neighbor, *il mio vicino*, literally his “near” (*vicino*) one. In keeping with this doubling, the language in which the dream scene is represented exhibits a web of associations between the neighbor and the “drowned.” Like the “drowned,” the neighbor is defined as a body. He is asleep, just as the “drowned” man is “too tired” to think (90). The neighbor is physically immovable—Levi cannot get him out of his bed. His presence in the bed forces the two into a physical intimacy, but without communication: the neighbor and the “drowned” are both mute and psychologically impenetrable. Last, they both dwell in the metaphorical waters of the “drowned.”

As a figure appearing in Levi's dream, it is clear that this “drowned” man reflects aspects of Levi himself. His speechless corporeality suggests the existence of foreclosed psychic spaces that comprise the prehistory of the figure that will signify absolute otherness. The troubling presence of the neighbor in Levi's dream underscores the personal utility of the category of “drowned” as an epistemological construction—one that enables Levi to externalize this impenetrable internal other and thereby dissociate himself partially from it.

The figure of the neighbor also bears consideration in relation to Levi's wish, represented in the dream, to be recognized as a skillful storyteller. If Levi is to command the attention of his audience, the dream suggests that he will have to tolerate the presence of the slumbering yet imposing psychic material crowding his mind. Levi's wish to move the neighbor rather than communicate with him could be read as an expression of Levi's fear of being overpowered by this material. At the same time, in its capacity as wish fulfillment, the dream also presents a way for Levi to tolerate this fear, insofar as its own narrative procedures could be seen as tools for the management of the anxiety that the neighbor

generates. Specifically, the dream uses projection to distance Levi from his fears. For example, although Levi feels devastated when his friends and family ignore him while he tells them his story, he does not blame them for their inattention. Instead he projects his narrative incompetence onto them: in the dream, they, not he, speak “confusedly,” or what is worse, they cannot speak at all. In another instance of projection, Levi awakens from his troubling dream, and now the dream stands before him, which is to say, he has projected it outside of himself in an effort not to be subject to it again. He will keep his eyes open (“I deliberately open my eyes”), avoiding his unconscious in order not to encounter his fears. The dream also demonstrates how, through projection, Levi’s impalpable inner silence is configured as speechless material entities: the neighbor, but also Levi’s sister, whose silence makes her a “related” variant of the “drowned.”

In the dream, Levi has been abandoned by his audience just as he has been abandoned to his fate in Auschwitz. Possibly to protect himself from personalizing his response, he associates his feelings to “barely remembered pains of one’s early infancy,” in other words, to an imagined time of prememory. As such, the analogy between Levi’s grief and pains of infancy expresses Levi’s emotion in a form that removes it from the current situation, which is its point of origin. This has the effect of depriving the feeling of its “sense of reality” by shielding it from “the intrusion of extraneous circumstances.” One could reverse this last formulation and say that this displacement of the origin of his pain into the past through the analogy has the effect of preventing Levi’s pain from intruding on the “extraneous circumstances” of the present: the painful rejection of his audience. By not openly expressing “this offense,” Levi may thus be protecting his ties to his listeners and protecting his listeners from a more accusatory expression of his grief. It is important to remember that Levi repeatedly dreamt this dream in Auschwitz. By creating in fantasy a way of repudiating the impulse to accuse, the dream may itself have been a means of tolerating the complete powerlessness of his situation, including the impossibility of being able to level accusations at the tormentors.

Levi has a second dream, which he relates before introducing the category of the “drowned” into the text. In this dream, which is a day-dream, Levi is on a train. When the train stops, he steps outside into the warm country air and lies down upon the ground. An Italian woman passes him and asks who he is. Levi tells her his story in Italian. He writes, “[S]he would understand, and she would give me food and shelter. And she would not believe the things I tell her, and I would show her

the number on my arm, and then she would believe . . .” (43–44). This maternal figure feeds and protects Levi, and speaks his mother tongue. But even with a common language and willingness to listen, she remains a reluctant listener. Levi cannot secure her recognition as a witness to his story. Like the audience in the first dream, she does not receive his story in the way that he expects. To convince her of the authenticity of his testimony, he must show her a physical sign, his tattoo. While the tattoo does not “say” anything, its reality guarantees the legitimacy of his narrative. Like the mute, slumbering neighbor, the tattoo is an essential presence within the story that must remain visible and that, as an element of the dream, strengthens the association of the body as a representation of internal otherness and the “drowned.”

The most prominent image of the body in *Survival in Auschwitz* is a poem by Levi that is separate from the main text and included on an unnumbered page between the preface and the first page of the narrative. Its placement suggests that it is an alterity existing within the main textual body though distinct from it, like the tattoo of the daydream. Though separate, the poem is central: Levi takes the title of his book from a line in it, which presents images of the “drowned”:

| | |
|---|----|
| You who live safe | 1 |
| In your warm houses, | 2 |
| You who find, returning in the evening, | 3 |
| Hot food and friendly faces: | 4 |
| Consider if this is a man | 5 |
| Who works in the mud | 6 |
| Who does not know peace | 7 |
| Who fights for a scrap of bread | 8 |
| Who dies because of a yes or a no. | 9 |
| Consider if this is a woman, | 10 |
| Without hair and without name | 11 |
| With no more strength to remember, | 12 |
| Her eyes empty and her womb cold | 13 |
| Like a frog in winter. | 14 |
| Meditate that this came about: | 15 |
| I commend these words to you. | 16 |
| Carve them in your hearts | 17 |
| At home, in the street, | 18 |
| Going to bed, rising; | 19 |
| Repeat them to your children, | 20 |

| | |
|---|----|
| Or may your house fall apart, | 21 |
| May illness impede you, | 22 |
| May your children turn their faces from you. (11) | 23 |

The first and subsequently repeated word in the verse, “consider,” indicates that this poem is an apostrophe. As such, it is an appeal to those who *can* see, to consider or recognize those who cannot. The addressee of the call is named in the opening lines: “You.” This “you” could refer to Levi’s readers, but it could also be the poetic voice addressing the narrative voice of the main text. For insofar as it is a call to “consider” and “[m]editate that this came about,” it is prescribing what Levi should do as a witness. Given this, Levi’s statement in the preface that his immediate purpose in writing was to “furnish documentation for a quiet study of certain aspects of the human mind” suggests that his text is a response to this poetic apostrophe (9). In other words, Levi, the first-person speaker of the main text, may be holding a dialogue with the poetic voice. The images in lines 5–14, depicting men and women who have become *Muselmänner*, would seem to confirm that Levi has followed the command of the poetic voice: he has made the “drowned” the subject of his testimonial record.

When the poem was later included in a published collection of Levi’s writing, it was accompanied by the title “Shemà.”⁵ The title indicates that the poem is a rewriting of the central prayer of Jewish faith. Levi’s use of this Biblical model establishes a parallel between his poem and obedience to God’s law, a parallel that continues in the poem’s final lines, which echo the second portion of the Shema. The Biblical passage reads, “And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be upon thy heart; and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thy house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.”⁶ Lines 15–20 of Levi’s poem parallel the Biblical lines, but unlike the Biblical model, Levi concludes his poem with a warning: “Or may your house fall apart, / May

5. Ian Thomson notes that the poem was originally entitled “Psalm” and was written as the Nuremberg trials were underway; it was intended not for publication but rather as “a private ritual cleansing. Before Levi could chronicle the story of his persecution in prose, the rage had to be excised first in poetry. Far from being an afterthought to the cool analytic prose to come, the verse was a vital part of the book now incubating.” Ian Thomson, “The Genesis of *If This Is a Man*,” in *The Legacy of Primo Levi*, ed. Stanislaw G. Pugliese (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 45.

6. Deut. 6:6–7, *The Hebrew Bible in English*, <http://www.mechon-mamre.org/e/et/et0506.htm>.

illness impede you, / May your children turn their faces from you.” The threat here is undisguised. If the poem’s addressee—be it Levi or the reader—does not meditate upon the figures depicted in the verse and how they came to be, a curse will befall him, the precedent for which is God’s anger. While the model for this poetic voice is not human, the accumulating weight of its decree is. It is spoken in the voice of one who stands outside the “warm houses” looking in, fearing that his message will not be received.⁷

How do we reconcile this poetic voice with the measured voice that narrates the main text? Excluded from both the preface and main narrative, compressed into a verse, this voice is raging. The poem’s relation to the main text as a fragment to the whole is mirrored in the imagery of the verse itself: hair, eyes, womb, hearts, faces are as elements of a body that has been blown apart, as if by the force of the speaker’s emotion. In both form and content, this poetic textual fragment represents another figural body associated with Levi’s inner “drowned.” But unlike the slumbering neighbor or the tattoo, this fragment is animated by a rage that has the potential to destroy the coherence of the main text. This, however, does not occur. Instead, the rage implodes upon itself. The images of the shattered body are confined to a circumscribed textual field, pressed to the bottom. As delimited expressions of rage, they, along with the images of the drowned within the text, may express Levi’s divided wish both to express a rage and to silence it. In Levi’s words the relationship of textual body to poetic fragment reflects the “love and rage” with which he composed his text.⁸

Forty years later, in *The Drowned and the Saved*, Levi returns to the “drowned.” In the final chapter of that text, he provides an account of the publication history of *Survival in Auschwitz*:

It was published for the first time in 1947, a run of two thousand five hundred copies, and was well received by the critics but sold only in part: the six hundred unsold copies stored in Florence in a remainder warehouse were drowned in the autumn flood [*vi annegarono nell’alluvione*

7. I am extremely grateful to an anonymous reader for pointing out that the placement of the poem at the threshold of Levi’s text aligns it with the placement of the mezuzah (which contains a piece of parchment inscribed with the Shema) affixed to the doorframe of Jewish homes and that the poem thereby not only engages dialogically with Jewish rites and tradition but even redefines them.

8. This is how Levi described his work on the book to Jean Samuel; quoted in Thomson, “The Genesis of *If This Is a Man*,” 52.

dell'autunno)⁹ of 1969. After ten years of “apparent death,” it came back to life when the Einaudi publishing company accepted it in 1957.¹⁰

The description reads as an uncanny allegory of the structure of *Survival in Auschwitz*. Just as the main textual body of *Survival in Auschwitz* speaks in the “saved” voice of Levi, so too were the majority of copies “saved” from the flood. Further, the “drowned” remains of the book correspond to the voice of the poetic fragment in the text, which is also a kind of remainder cut off from the main textual body to protect the dominant voice from the rage infusing the poetic fragment. It could be said, then, that the raging poetic voice is the “remaindered” voice of Levi himself, which, like the remaindered part of the book run, is “drowned.” Levi’s comment about the book’s reception by the critics brings into focus his investment in being received as a good storyteller, which his first dream conveyed. As such, it enables us to understand how the neighbor, as a figure of slumbering rage that “awoke” in the poetic fragment, had to remain confined in that space so as not to interfere with the more hearable dominant narrative voice. On some level Levi may have known that this internal voice of the “drowned” would not have been well received by the critics.¹¹

Levi’s description of *Survival in Auschwitz* as having come back or returned to life, “*ritornò alla vita*,” is an apt description of *The Drowned and the Saved*, which itself can be read as an uncanny return of the foreclosed aspects of *Survival in Auschwitz*.¹² On the one hand, in *The Drowned and the Saved*, the category of the “drowned” becomes more sharply divided from the rage of the voice in the poetic fragment. At the same time, however, the voice of the poetic fragment associated with the “drowned” also seems poised on the margins of the text in a less contained way than in *Survival in Auschwitz*.

Levi reintroduces the category of the “drowned” in what could be described as a moment of crisis: the voices of the “saved” and the “drowned” momentarily seem to merge into one another. This is the only time that Levi explicitly identifies anger as an appropriate response in the survivor, though neither the voice of the “drowned,” nor of the

9. Primo Levi, *I sommersi e i salvati* (Torino: Einaudi, 1986), 137.

10. Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 167.

11. For a discussion of the publication history of Elie Wiesel’s *Night* that traces the history of the editions as corresponding to the excision of rage in the narrative, see Naomi Seidman, “Eli Wiesel and the Scandal of Jewish Rage,” *Jewish Social Studies* 3, no. 1 (Autumn 1996): 1–19.

12. Levi, *I sommersi e i salvati*, 137.

“saved,” seems to lay claim to this anger. The naming of anger occurs in the context of Levi’s attempt to trace an enduring feeling of “something like shame [*forse non era propriamente vergogna, ma come tale veniva percepito*].”¹³ His discussion leads him to make following statement:

Changing moral codes is always costly: all heretics, apostates, and dissidents know this. We cannot judge our behavior or that of others, driven at that time by the code of that time, on the basis of today’s code; but the anger that pervades us [*la collera che ci invade*] when one of the “others” feels entitled to consider us “apostates” or, more precisely, reconverted, seems right [*giusta*] to me (80).¹⁴

Levi calls attention to a split within the survivor, between the moral code of the community to which he has returned and the amoral code that he had been forced to adopt to survive, which dictates: “I come first, second, and third. Then nothing, then again I; and then all the others.”¹⁵ Levi’s concern in this passage is with those who assume that the survivor can renounce his prior amoral self of incarceration, which is what the image of the survivor as “reconverted” implies. This assumption arouses anger, because, as I understand Levi, it presupposes that the survivor has now rejected the part of himself that survived in the camps precisely by rejecting the moral code of the community to which he has returned. Were the survivor to repudiate his experience of having lived in the absence of his present community’s code, he would be repudiating the basis of his existence as a prisoner and hence, his right to have existed. The anger that is right (or “just”) is on behalf of that past self that is at odds with the survivor’s present community. By the same token, because the survivor is in fact a part of the community, his anger, though just, nevertheless feels like an invasion: it is at odds with the moral code that he has adopted. Directly after this passage Levi leaves a blank in the text, as if to signify a rupture from that self-dividing anger. The blank can also be read as indicating that for Levi, the storyteller, such anger is disruptive and he must therefore dissociate himself from it.

Following this blank, the voice that resumes speaking is the moral voice of the community within the survivor. Levi writes,

13. *Ibid.*, 55 (my translation). This comment is similar to Jean Améry’s reference to “what is called ‘resentments’ in relation to revenge that cannot ‘[purify].’” Améry, *At the Mind’s Limits*, 40.

14. *Ibid.*, 62.

15. Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 79.

Are you ashamed because you are alive in the place of another? And in particular, of a man more generous, more sensitive, more useful, wiser, worthier of living than you? You cannot block out such feelings: you examine yourself, you review your memories, hoping to find them all, and that none of them are masked or disguised. No, you find no obvious transgressions, you did not usurp anyone's place, you did not beat anyone (but would you have had the strength to do so?) . . . you did not steal anyone's bread; nevertheless you cannot exclude it. It is no more than a supposition, indeed the shadow of a suspicion: that each man is his brother's Cain, that each one of us (but this time I say "us" in a much vaster, indeed, universal sense) has usurped his neighbor's place [*il suo prossimo*]¹⁶ and lived in his stead. It is a supposition, but it gnaws at us; it has nestled deeply like a woodworm; although unseen from the outside, it gnaws and rasps.¹⁷

This voice, the representative of conscience, seems to have absorbed the invasive anger of the victimized self of the passage directly preceding it, and to have metabolized that anger into critical self-interrogation. While this voice does not succeed in uncovering a basis for shame in past deeds, it does find something more and less shameful than deeds themselves: a universal mark of Cain. On the one hand, the curse of fratricide implicates everyone in shame. But on the other hand, as an archetypal image of guilt, the curse also renders shame nonspecific, and in so doing, displaces blame away from the community that failed to protect the victims.

The reference in the curse to the neighbor, "*il suo prossimo*" (like "*il mio vicino*," literally "his near one"), suggests that there has been a shift in Levi's relation to the internal alterity symbolized in the sleeping neighbor of his dream of forty years ago. In *Survival in Auschwitz*, the neighbor was a presence that could not be ignored. He was dead weight, but the speaker in the dream continued to share his bed with him, and the voice of his rage was ex-communicated to the poetic text, where it could at least be recognized. By contrast, in *The Drowned and the Saved*, the "near one" has become an intolerable threat, a suspected murderer. In this sense Levi's suspicion that each of us is our brother's murderer can be read as indicating an active turning against the slumbering neighbor and, as such, as a further repudiation of the possibility of even tolerating the presence of opaque sites of meaning within himself.¹⁸

16. Levi, *I sommersi e i salvati*, 63.

17. Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 81–82.

18. For a discussion of Levi's shame in terms of survivor guilt, see Ruth Leys, *From Guilt to*

In this same section of *The Drowned and the Saved*, Levi introduces the image of the *Muselmann* as one who had seen the Gorgon:

I must repeat: we, the survivors, are not the true witnesses. This is an uncomfortable notion of which I have become conscious little by little, reading the memoirs of others and reading mine at a distance of years. We survivors are not only an exiguous but also an anomalous minority: we are those who by their prevarications or abilities or good luck did not touch bottom. Those who did so, those who saw the Gorgon, have not returned to tell about it or have returned mute, but they are the “Muslims,” the submerged, the complete witnesses, the ones whose deposition would have a general significance. They are the rule, we are the exception. . . . We speak in their stead, by proxy.¹⁹

This mythological figure seems far removed from the physicality of the suffering men and women who died in the camps. Their abject reality recedes beneath the complex chain of descriptive phrases Levi uses to signify them: they are “the true witnesses . . . who saw the Gorgon . . . ‘the Muslims,’ the submerged, the complete witnesses, the ones . . . the rule . . .” Thus, it becomes difficult to recognize the corporeality of the *Muselmann*, which I have read as the metaphoric materiality that absorbed and silenced the rage on display in the poetic fragment. It is as if, through the image of the Gorgon and the accompanying description, Levi removes the symbolic bodies visible in *Survival in Auschwitz*. In other words, a nonhuman figure, “the Gorgon,” displaces the images of the human body through which Levi’s internal “drowned” man had been legible. In this regard, the designation of the figure of the *Muselmann* as “the complete witnesses” can be understood as an act of self-authorization: through it Levi constitutes his own testimonial voice, but only by transmuting the body symbolically containing his foreclosed rage.²⁰

Shame: Auschwitz and After (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007). Levi’s discussion of Levi is embedded in a fascinating analysis and critique of a paradigm shift from guilt to shame that began in the 1970s.

19. Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 83–84. Sara Horowitz calls attention to the fact that, notwithstanding Levi’s conceptualization of the dead as the true witnesses, whose stories the survivors tell “by proxy,” the large body of ghetto writings—diaries, chronicles, and archives—left by murdered victims constitutes a “powerful and direct testimonial form”; Sara R. Horowitz, *Voicing the Void: Muteness and Memory in Holocaust Fiction* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 48.

20. Giorgio Agamben traces the contours of “an impossible dialectic” between the *Muselmann*, or “complete witness,” and Levi, the witness “by proxy” (120). He writes, “Testimony appears here as a process that involves at least two subjects: the first, the survivor, who can speak but who has nothing interesting to say; and the second, who ‘has seen the Gorgon,’ who

Coincident with the disembodiment of the “drowned,” a blankness begins to inhabit Levi’s words, evident in Levi’s discussion of the origins of anguish: “Anguish is known to everyone, even children, and everyone knows that it is often blank, undifferentiated. Rarely does it carry a clearly written label that also contains its motivation; any label it does have is often mendacious.”²¹ Levi’s reference to children’s anguish as reflective of his own enduring anguish replicates his discussion in *Survival in Auschwitz* of his “desolating grief” in terms of “certain

‘has touched bottom,’ and therefore has much to say but cannot speak. Which of the two bears witness? *Who is the subject of testimony?*” (120, italics in original). Agamben answers his question: “Testimony takes place where the speechless one makes the speaking one speak and where the one who speaks bears the impossibility of speaking in his own speech, such that the silent and the speaking, the inhuman and the human enter into a zone of indistinction in which it is impossible to establish the position of the subject, to identify the ‘imagined substance’ of the ‘I’ and, along with it, the true witness” (120). According to Agamben, through the movement of testimony the difference between Levi and the *Muselmann* collapses into a “zone of indistinction.” In this way, the testimonial “dialectic” undermines the very position of the subject and thus renders unanswerable Agamben’s initial question about the subject of testimony. The suspension of the subject position, which for Agamben specifies the “place” where testimony occurs, results in a series of uncanny displacements and substitutions in Agamben’s text: at certain points in his analysis, the *Muselmann* displaces Levi, and elsewhere both seem to be displaced by Agamben himself, as in the following passage: “To say that Auschwitz is ‘unsayable’ or ‘incomprehensible’ is equivalent to *euphemein*, to adoring in silence, as one does with a god. Regardless of one’s intentions, this contributes to its glory. We, however, ‘are not ashamed of staring into the unsayable’—even at the risk of discovering that what evil knows of itself, we can also easily find in ourselves” (32–33). In this passage, Agamben openly appropriates an odd, synesthetic metaphor from a work by the early Church Father John Chrysostom—“staring into the unsayable”—to emphasize the ethical importance of his exercising his own un-*Muselmann*-like ability to speak. Even so, the image itself recalls Levi’s description of the *Muselmann* as having been rendered mute by staring at the Gorgon. Thus, through association, the appropriated metaphor locates Agamben with the *Muselmann*, and through the “dialectic,” also with Levi in the “zone of indistinction” where testimony takes place. The passage also illustrates who else Agamben has in mind when he writes that testimony involves “at least” two subjects in the dialectic: Levi, the *Muselmann*, and also himself. *Remnants of Auschwitz* ends with a section composed of quotations by former *Muselmänner*, indicating that Agamben can “leave them—*Muselmänner*—the last word” because from within the “zone of indistinction,” they are authorized to speak for him and he for them. *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (New York: Zone Books, 1999), 165.

Agamben installs himself in the testimonial space with Levi and the *Muselmann* because he believes that the testimonial “I” consists of “‘imagined substance.’” This assumption authorizes him to invoke Chrysostom’s words to bolster his own viewpoint about testimony, in disregard of the fact that Chrysostom delivered eight sermons against Judaizing Christians that were attributed with facilitating the rise of Christian anti-Semitism. *Discourses against Judaizing Christians*, trans. Paul W. Harkins, The Fathers of the Church, 68 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1979). In contrast to Agamben’s reading of the “zone of indistinction” inhabited by the subject of testimony, I understand the testimonial “I” as anchored not in “imagined substance” but in historical and experiential specificity that lends authority to that “I” and which, in retrospect, serves as the material basis for images that configure the survivor’s affective responses to persecution.

21. Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 71.

barely remembered pains of one's early infancy" (60). It prevents Levi from pointing a finger at his community and thereby risking a second estrangement. By the same token, the passage is also significant because for the first time, Levi indicates that he is aware of a space inside of himself that contains feelings that are inaccessible. He continues his discussion of this blank anguish specifically in relation to his experience as a prisoner:

[E]veryone suffered from an unceasing discomfort that polluted sleep and was nameless. To define this as a "neurosis" is reductive and ridiculous. Perhaps it would be more correct to see in it an atavistic anguish whose echo one hears in the second verse of Genesis: the anguish inscribed in everyone of the "tohu-bohu" of a deserted and empty universe crushed under the spirit of God but from which the spirit of man is absent: not yet born or already extinguished.²²

The phrase "atavistic anguish" suggests that the anguish Levi felt was older than humanity, not created by it. As such, it aligns the passage with the others in which Levi also fills in the "blank" of his anger with abstract and abstracting analogies that serve to mitigate blame. But what is distinct about this passage is that it is stripped of references to human beings—Levi cannot even recognize this anguish in children or infants. Nevertheless, in the absence of such a recognizably human form he can hear "an echo" of his anguish in Genesis. This may be because Levi recognizes *himself* in an image, also present in a sentence from that passage, which he does not explicitly discuss but which resonates with his own rendering of "the drowned." The sentence reads, "Darkness was upon the face of the deep."²³ The description of the earth's watery surface as a darkened face, which is to say, as a face that cannot be seen, recalls Levi's category of the "drowned": first, because the *Muselmann* also beheld a face—that of the Gorgon—that humans cannot see; and second because the passage concerns the deep waters of the earth, the very environment of "the drowned." If Levi reads himself in this passage, it can only be because it reflects back to him the very faceless anguish that he associates with the "drowned" man. The phrase "tohu-bohu" could be read as a graphic rendering of the joined state of Levi and the *Muselmann*; each sound is distinguishable only in terms of the other.

22. *Ibid.*, 85.

23. Gen. 1:2, *The Hebrew Bible in English*.

Why would Levi have heard the echo of this anguish in a text about the faceless “drowned”? Insofar as his anguish marked the persistence of a continuing sense of abandonment that was experienced as a deprivation of language, the only images that could possibly commemorate this experience may have been those that pointed to an otherness beyond language itself, such as the one Levi found in this empty universe of the “drowned.”

The Bible is only one of the texts that Levi discusses in *The Drowned and the Saved*. In fact, Levi presents himself as an engaged reader of many forms of writing—philosophy and literature, but also letters; the last chapter includes correspondence with German readers of *Survival in Auschwitz*. Levi also includes a discussion of the writing of Jean Améry. In reference to Améry Levi writes that he feels compelled “to polemicize with a dead man,” whom he also regards as a potential friend.²⁴ Before engaging with Améry’s thought, Levi introduces Améry as “the philosopher who committed suicide and [as a] theoretician of suicide.”²⁵ Reading these lines, it is impossible not to think of Levi’s own death in 1987, when he went over the rail of the landing outside his front door and plunged three stories down the inner stairwell of his apartment building. While Levi’s attentiveness to Améry’s interest in suicide does not substantiate the assumption that Levi took his life, it does provide further impetus for considering what it was in Améry’s writings that might have led Levi to see Améry as a potential friend or kindred spirit.

As he did with “the drowned,” Levi takes his distance from Améry, describing him as a man who lived “his life without peace and without a search for peace.”²⁶ Levi attributes Améry’s misery to his willingness to exchange figurative blows with his enemies throughout his life as a survivor. By contrast, Levi writes of himself:

I must admit . . . my absolute inferiority: I have never known how to “return the blow,” not out of evangelic saintliness or intellectual aristocracy, but due to an intrinsic incapacity . . . I admire Améry’s change of heart, his courageous decision to leave the ivory tower and go down onto the battlefield, but it was and is beyond my reach. I admire it, but I must point out that this choice, protracted throughout his post-Auschwitz existence, led him to positions of such severity and intransigence as to make him incapable of finding joy in life, indeed of living. Those

24. Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 127.

25. *Ibid.*

26. *Ibid.*

who “trade blows” with the entire world achieve dignity but pay a very high price for it because they are sure to be defeated.²⁷

Unlike Améry, who made it his mission to strike out and back at those who had persecuted him, Levi professed not to have written “to formulate new accusations” (9). To Levi’s mind, Améry’s capacity to wage war enabled dignity but made living impossible. Reading the following passage in view of Levi’s comments about Améry, I wonder whether it indicates something about the price Levi was paying to live: “[A] memory evoked too often, and expressed in the form of a story, tends to become fixed in a stereotype, in a form tested by experience, crystallized, perfected, adorned, installing itself in the place of the raw memory and growing at its expense.”²⁸ In view of Levi’s comments about Améry, we might ask whether Levi’s own story had grown to perfection at the greatest expense, for by 1986 Levi’s fame was predicated upon an image aligned with the voice of the narrator in the main part of *Survival in Auschwitz*, and not with the inner “drowned” man.

The language in which Levi introduces Améry into his text suggests a more complex investment than his polemicizing would indicate. Levi’s profile of Améry as a “theorist” of suicide and as a suicide hints at why Améry may have been a particularly compelling figure for Levi. In his theoretical work, *On Suicide*, Améry describes the impact of contemplating suicide: “Those who step to the threshold of voluntary death carry on the great dialogue with their body, their head, and their ego as they never have before.”²⁹ In this dialogue the self becomes aware of the ego as “that part which, ranked highest, is first experienced phenomenally,” and it does so by entering into a relationship with the body.³⁰ Améry describes how the body fills the mind contemplating voluntary death:

I often stand on the balcony of a particular seventeenth floor, then climb over the railing (fortunately I am always free of dizziness) and, keeping only my left hand fastened to the iron bars of the railing, hold my body far out over the void and stare into the depths. I only need to let go. How will my body plummet down? In the elegant turns of a corkscrew, as do the springboard divers I so often admire? Or like a stone? Headfirst, I

27. *Ibid.*, 136.

28. *Ibid.*, 24.

29. Jean Améry, *On Suicide: A Discourse on Voluntary Death*, trans. John D. Barlow (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 67.

30. *Ibid.*

fancy, and anticipate in my imagination how my skull shatters to pieces on the asphalt.³¹

For some of those who believed Levi had committed suicide, the way he had died was more shocking than the (putative) fact of his having made the choice to take his own life. One biographer wrote, “As a chemist he could have ended his life discreetly, like Arthur Koestler, with a lethal drug. Instead, he chose to die like a character in a tabloid crime-sheet, down the stairwell. By this violent and theatrical death, it was pointed out, he had exposed his loved ones to a gruesome sight.”³²

Striking as it is, the formal correspondence between the manner in which Levi died and Améry’s representation of voluntary death does not prove that Levi’s death was intentional. Though this question remains open, what can be known with certainty is that Levi saw Améry as a “potential friend.” I would suggest that Levi’s felt affinity with Améry was based on what Améry’s writings revealed to him: that it was possible to renew contact with the imaginary bodies through which his foreclosed inner “drowned” man had been visible: the sleeping stranger, the tattooed arm, the poetic fragment. In this regard Levi’s fall from great heights, intentional or not, brought to light the “raw” flesh of his memory, held captive for many years, in the form of a story “tested by experience, crystallized, perfected, adorned.”

31. Ibid., 65–66.

32. Ian Thomson, *Primo Levi: A Life* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2003), 500–501.

CHAPTER THREE

UNBEARABLE VULNERABILITY

Liliana Cavani's *The Night Porter*

Commenting on her 1973 film *The Night Porter*, Liliana Cavani stated, "Fascism is not only an event of yesterday . . . [i]t is with us still, here and elsewhere. As dreams do, my film brings back to the surface a repressed 'history.'"¹ The repressed "history" that emerges in *The Night Porter* is a history of shared repression in Nazi Germany. In this, Cavani's film has much in common with Klaus Theweleit's study of the dreams of soldiers of the German *Freikorps*, voluntary armies organized in the aftermath of World War I.² In reference to the Nazi propensity for violence, Theweleit remarked that fascism is not an ideology but "a way of dealing with reality violently."³ One might situate Cavani's film by saying that it seeks to represent the unconscious level of shared experience behind Nazi violence.

Cavani's investigation into "the repressed history" of fascism fittingly centers on a man who works at night—the time

1. Liliana Cavani, letter to *le Monde*, April 25, 1974, quoted in Saul Friedländer, *Reflections of Nazism: An Essay on Kitsch and Death*, trans. Thomas Weyr (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), 129.

2. Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies, 1. Women, Floods, Bodies, History*, vol. 22 of *Theory and History of Literature*, ed. Wlad Godzich and Jochen Schulte-Sasse, trans. Stephan Conway (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

3. Klaus Theweleit, "Killing for Desire: Interview with Klaus Theweleit," interview by Mechtild Blum and Wolfgang Storz, in *Unwilling Germans: The Goldhagen Debate*, ed. Robert Shandley, trans. Jeremiah Riemer (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 213.

of dreaming—when unconscious material comes to the mind’s surface. Max, the eponymous night porter, is a former officer in a Hungarian concentration camp. Now, in 1957, he wants to live “like a church mouse,” and so he has taken a job in a Viennese hotel that also serves as the meeting place for a group of ex-Nazi officers who had worked with him in the camp.⁴ The officers are war criminals who do not want to be put in the position of having to defend themselves before a tribunal. To evade prosecution, they hunt down and kill any surviving witnesses who could testify against them, and they destroy the Nuremburg archival records of their crimes. They also stage mock trials where they proclaim themselves cured of their “guilt complexes.”⁵

It is in the context of Max’s own trial that Lucia, a witness to Max’s past crimes, appears. Now the wife of an American conductor, Lucia had been imprisoned in the concentration camp where Max was in the practice of impersonating a doctor in order to conduct bogus medical experiments on prisoners. He had forced the teenage Lucia into a relationship of sexual bondage. Twelve years after the war’s end, when the film begins, Lucia, accompanying her husband on a concert tour, checks into the hotel where Max is working. Max and Lucia recognize each other, and they are drawn back into a relationship. This time, Lucia becomes Max’s lover by choice. She deserts her husband, and she and Max barricade themselves inside Max’s apartment. Having abandoned his trial, and refusing to turn over his “witness,” Max is now perceived as a threat to the other members of the Nazi group, who consequently plan to assassinate Lucia and him.⁶ This is precisely what happens when hunger drives the couple out of the apartment and into the range of a waiting sniper.

Feminist critics embraced the film as a critical examination and destabilization of traditional “subject positions,”⁷ but mostly it was attacked, accused, among other things, of blurring the line between victims and perpetrators, of pornographically exploiting the victims of Nazism, and of justifying Nazism.⁸ The film was banned by Italian censors, and charges

4. “Do You Recognize Anybody?” *The Night Porter*, DVD, dir. Liliana Cavani (1973, Irvington, NY: Criterion Collection, 1999).

5. “The Church Mouse,” *The Night Porter*, dir. Liliana Cavani.

6. “A Game for Freaks,” *The Night Porter*, dir. Liliana Cavani.

7. Cf. Marguerite Waller, “Signifying the Holocaust: Liliana Cavani’s *Portiere di notte*,” in *Feminisms in the Cinema*, ed. Laura Pieropaolo and Ada Testaferri (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 206–37; Kriss Ravetto, *The Unmaking of Fascist Aesthetics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

8. To cite just some examples of the strong negative reactions the film provoked: Rebecca

were brought against Cavani on the grounds that her film depicted sexual torture.⁹

Perhaps one reason the film opened itself to such a polarized response is that, in terms of character development, Lucia is not presented with the same depth as Max. Throughout the film, she appears almost exclusively through the filter of Max's vision, and as a result, she exists before the viewer only in relation to Max. By thus restricting the viewer's knowledge of Lucia to Max's perspective, the film calls attention to its interest not in Lucia's experience as such, but in *Max's experience of her*. In this regard the blockage of the viewer's direct access to Lucia tells us something about Max (the viewer's lens) and about his relationship to her.¹⁰ It indicates his inability to perceive Lucia in her own right. She occupies his mind, but only as a screen upon which he imposes the very fantasies through which the "repressed history" of fascism emerges. Through Max's vision of Lucia, the film explores the transformation of the victims into phantasms of the fascist imaginary as well as the significance of such phantasms in the development of the "authoritarian personality."¹¹ By troping the victims as signifiers of the Nazi unconscious, the film reveals the affective investments of the perpetrators as they pursue a kind of psychic relief through the destruction of their signifying object.

Scherr states that Cavani "deliberately" blurs the "clear demarcations between the experience of . . . the victimizer in relation to the victimized" and fails to offer insight into the "psyche that has experienced the full atrocity of concentration camp life," "The Uses of Memory and the Abuses of Fiction: Sexuality in Holocaust Fiction and Memoir," *Other Voices: The (e)Journal of Cultural Criticism* 2, no. 1 (2000), <http://www.othervoices.org/2.1/scherr/sexuality.php>; Henry Giroux writes, "Hailed in the American press as 'a charming piece of romantic pornography,' *The Night Porter* is a thinly-disguised fascist propaganda film that glorifies sadism, brutality and exaggerated machismo . . . Its barbarism rests not only in its audacity to extoll [*sic*] fascist principles, but also in its attempt to legitimize the death of millions of innocent victims at the hands of the Nazi machine." "The Challenge of Neo-Fascist Culture," *Cineaste* 6, no. 3 (1975): 31; Vincent Canby entitled his review of the film "'Porter' Is Romantic Pornography," *New York Times*, October 14, 1974.

In response to Cavani's comment "'We are all victims or murderers, and we accept these roles voluntarily. Only Sade and Dostoevsky have really understood this,'" Primo Levi wrote, "I do not know, nor does it interest me much to know, whether in my depths there lurks a murderer, but I do know that I was a guiltless victim, and I was not a murderer. I know that the murderers existed, not only in Germany, and still exist, retired or on active duty, and that to confuse them with their victims is a moral disease or an aesthetic affectation or a sinister sign of complicity; above all, it is precious service rendered (intentionally or not) to the negators of truth." *The Drowned and the Saved*, 48–49.

9. Ravetto, *The Unmaking of Fascist Aesthetics*, 150–51.

10. In the few scenes of Lucia in which Max is physically absent, his perspective still determines how she is portrayed.

11. See Theodor Adorno, Else Frenkel-Brunswik, and Daniel J. Levinson, *The Authoritarian Personality* (New York: Harper & Row, 1950).

In studies of victimization, the fluidly associated concepts of empathy, identification, and secondary witnessing as responses to narratives of trauma have been affirmed in their own right as contributing “to the moral life by making it possible for a person to respond appropriately (though counterfactually) to human need.”¹² It is not self-evident that inquiries into the experience of perpetration expand the moral life. Christopher Browning takes up this issue in the preface to his study of a German reserve police battalion that participated in the massacres of Polish Jews during the Holocaust. Browning writes,

[A] possible objection to this kind of study concerns the degree of empathy for the perpetrators that is inherent in trying to understand them. Clearly the writing of such a history requires the rejection of demonization. The policemen in the battalion who carried out the massacres and deportations, like the much smaller number who refused or evaded, were human beings. I must recognize that in the same situation, I could have been either a killer or an evader—both were human—if I want to understand and explain the behavior of both as best I can. This recognition does indeed mean an attempt to empathize. What I do not accept, however, are the old clichés that to explain is to excuse, to understand is to forgive.¹³

According to Browning, empathy is not corrupting if it expands our understanding, in human terms, of the murders.¹⁴ I would suggest that Cavani’s exploration of the psychological underpinnings of Nazism anticipated studies such as Browning’s, both in its willingness to find points of entry into a human phenomenon, and in its insistence that attempting to map the Nazi imaginary does not serve to exonerate the crimes of its adherents. In this latter regard the film anticipates possible critiques

12. D. G. Myers, “Responsible for Every Single Pain: Holocaust Literature and the Ethics of Interpretation,” *Comparative Literature* 51, no. 4 (1999): 270–71.

13. Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1992), xix–xx. Inga Clendinnen’s study of the SS explores “the emotional involvement of those engaged in the work of management” from an anthropological perspective attuned to the significance of ritual and theatricality. *Reading the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 143.

14. A desire to discourage precisely such empathy guided the organization of the materials on the perpetrators exhibited in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, whose planners had a “gnawing fear that an effective portrayal of the Nazis’ world and their industry of murder would be worse than appalling to visitors—it might be perversely fascinating as well.” Edward Linenthal, *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America’s Holocaust Museum* (New York: Viking, 1995), 199.

on that very basis: during the mock trial at the hotel, a psychoanalytic “defense” is mounted according to which the Nazis’ guilt is rationalized as the product of a “complex.”¹⁵ Through this scene clearly Cavani is distancing herself from mitigating explanations of genocide.¹⁶

In his discussion of the plastic and spatial expressions of the “Theater of Cruelty”¹⁷—his name for “all true theatre”—Artaud notes that “true freedom is dark and infallibly identified with sexual freedom, which is also dark, although we do not know precisely why.”¹⁸ *The Night Porter* conforms to Artaud’s understanding of “true theatre” in that it expresses, in the form of a sexual relation, a life force that remains repressed under Nazism. On the most literal level, Lucia’s return is represented as an interruption of post–World War II collective German repression of responsibility for Nazi crimes; but as we will see, her return also brings into view a foreclosed need of the perpetrators to establish and maintain an attachment to their victims, notwithstanding their drive to destroy them.

Recall that for Browning, an empathic approach toward the perpetrators requires a willingness to recognize a resemblance between ourselves and them. It bears keeping in mind, however, that this resemblance remains hypothetical, insofar as it is based on the assumption of an untested potential to have been like the perpetrators, rather than on an identifiable shared characteristic or experience. *The Night Porter* solicits a more disarming recognition: of an actual rather than speculative point of overlap between ourselves and the perpetrators.

Cavani anchors her exploration of this shared human quality, and its repression under Nazism, in her own affinity with Max on the basis of their common interest in filmmaking. The first time the viewer sees Lucia—in a flashback to her arrival at the concentration camp—she is being filmed by Max while she stands naked in a line with other prisoners. Max’s camera aligns with Cavani’s, thereby indicating their common libidinal investment in capturing the naked Lucia through the gaze. While we do not yet know what Lucia signifies to Max, it is clear from

15. “The Church Mouse,” *The Night Porter*, dir. Liliana Cavani.

16. Giorgio Agamben’s thinking about how the concerns of witnesses fall outside the framework of the law is relevant to *The Night Porter* as well. Agamben writes: “The decisive point is simply that the two things not be blurred, that law not presume to exhaust the question. A non-judicial element of truth exists such that the *quaestio facti* [factual question] can never be reduced to the *quaestio iuris* [legal question].” *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 17.

17. Antonin Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double*, trans. Mary Richards (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1958), 101.

18. *Ibid.*, 30–31.

the outset that Cavani shares Max's desire to possess whatever she stands for. Since the camera within the scene and the camera recording the scene film the same view, their common vision also positions Lucia as the viewer's libidinal object. The interpolation of the film's audience into the Nazi position may account for the charges leveled against Cavani that she created a piece of pornography, even though the characters in the film "never undid a button, untied a bootlace."¹⁹

The film foregrounds the motif of optics and observation in relation to all of the bodies to which Max is attached, and always in a theatrical context. In addition to viewing Lucia's naked body through a camera lens, Max watches Bert, a dancer living in the hotel, perform, while shining a stage light on him. After the dance, Max administers a shot in Bert's exposed buttock. In a flashback to the camps, Bert wears only a loincloth as he performs before an audience of SS officers. Max watches Lucia while she attends her husband's opera as the camera, adopting Max's perspective, focuses on Lucia's bare neck; Max is also audience to Lucia's topless "cabaret" performance in the camp.²⁰ Such scenes of spectatorship call attention to the privileged position of the body as the site of Max's quest to uncover something hidden and crucial.

In an interview Cavani noted,

The Nazis really loved the cinema and adored filming everything; they did it very well—they had some very good cameramen. A lot of the SS possessed Leicas—like the one Max has in the film: it's a genuine 1940s Leica. They just loved filming. Everything, even the worst scenes of torture. Not just the reporters—the professionals—but all of them. It was a hobby . . . It seems to me an attempt to become more objective, to "distance" oneself from what is going on.²¹

The Nazis' attempt to establish distance through focus can only be in response to an unconsciously registered affinity between themselves and their objects. Such perception could more precisely be characterized as projection, for Max does not recognize Lucia in her otherness; he creates her in the image of his own "othered" or foreclosed desire.

The initial flashback to Lucia's arrival at the camp, as well as a later flashback in which Max "playfully" shoots a gun as Lucia dodges his

19. Dirk Bogarde, *An Orderly Man* (New York: Knopf, 1983), 190.

20. "It's a Story from the Bible," *The Night Porter*, dir. Liliana Cavani.

21. Alexander Stuart, "Consciousness and Conscience," *Films and Filming* 21, no. 5 (February 1975), 12.

bullets in a bare room, suggest what it is that Max is trying to visualize through Lucia.²² In both scenes Max coerces Lucia's vulnerability into plain sight. That vulnerability finds its counterpoint in Max, who plays the role of her protector. In one scene in the camp that mixes eroticism and nurturing, Max ministers to Lucia's wounded arm, kissing and bandaging it (the suggestion is that he is also responsible for the injury). Max also infantilizes Lucia. Though she is a teenager, he makes her ride a carousel and has her wear an oversized bow in her hair. When she returns to Max as an adult, she buys a dress in an antiques shop that is too small for her adult frame. Taken together, these scenes suggest that Max transforms her into the image of a child, thereby associating her with a period of dependency and need of protection.

Understood as a representation of external events, the film's plot is implausible. The dress Lucia buys is an almost exact replica of the one Max had her wear in the camps. She knows exactly where Max lives and is able to enter his apartment at will. She deserts her husband without consequence—he never returns to Vienna in search of her. What is not credible on the level of plot is, however, consistent with the power of the unconscious to summon what it desires through fantasy. In this regard the timing of Lucia's reappearance—she arrives at the very moment when Max is “on trial” and attempting to divorce from his past—is significant. On the verge of being repressed, Max's history suddenly returns, *as Lucia*. He *hallucinates* Lucia into existence: Standing in the empty hotel bar, he speaks the words: “It all seems lost. Something unexpected happens. Ghosts . . . take shape in the mind. How can one pull away from it? This phantom. The voice and the body . . . this part of one's self.”²³ The soliloquy indicates that Max's desire comprises the external “setting” of the film's action. It legislates possibility and impossibility in this dream world.

The scenes in Max's apartment double or repeat the flashbacks in the concentration camp, and in so doing, they reverse the original distribution of power between Max and Lucia. I read these repetitions and reversals as indicating that the scenes in the apartment restage the concentration camp scenes in order to bring into view Max's unconscious desire for Lucia, which was hidden beneath his violent treatment of her in the camp. In the camp Max was the agent of aggression; in the apartment he is the passive object, the target of the sniper whose bul-

22. “Do You Recognize Anybody?” *The Night Porter*, dir. Liliana Cavani.

23. “Calling Frankfurt!” *The Night Porter*, dir. Liliana Cavani.

let wounds his hand when he steps onto the balcony. In the camp Lucia had been lying on a bunk when Max selected her to be his “partner”; in Vienna Max is the one in bed in his apartment when Lucia enters, looking for him. In a scene that repeats the incident with Lucia’s wounded arm, Lucia deliberately breaks a glass on the bathroom floor, and when Max steps on the shards, cleans and bandages his foot. These parallels and reversals encourage us to read past and present scenes not as separate incidents but as different versions of the same events: the flashbacks disclose the events as they happened, the scenes in the present supply subtext of unconscious fantasy. Taken together, they suggest that every act of violence that Max inflicted upon Lucia in the camps carried a current of unconscious desire, now brought to life in the hallucinated present. I read these parallels and reversals as indicating Max’s desire to assume as his own image the “Lucia” of his creation: a vulnerable, woundable, needful being.

Understanding Max’s relation to Lucia as a relation to himself, more specifically, as a relation to a foreclosed aspect of the self that Lucia represents, accounts for the film’s concern with theatricality and impersonation. Lucia is a player in Max’s unconscious drama, and the film makes constant reference to theatrics and role-playing to reinforce the association between Max’s need to dramatize and Lucia’s dramatizing function. Max understands his job as night porter to be a role that he assumes and casts off with the donning of his uniform. This is why the janitor in one scene can stand in for Max by wearing his uniform. The “trial” of the SS is also a clear instance of role-playing, with different people assuming the roles of judge, jury, and defendants. When Max first notices Lucia, she is standing naked among a group of prisoners waiting to be registered. He is dressed as a doctor. When he examines Lucia’s mouth, his assistant shines a stage light on her, as if in a theatrical performance. Max later shines a similar light on Bert during his private dance performances for Max. In a flashback within the opera scene, a group of prisoners watches an officer rape a male prisoner. The prisoners are assembled like an audience, the lighting is dim, and music from Mozart’s *The Marriage of Figaro* plays, thereby establishing a link to the operatic framing scene. Still within the flashback and hence absorbing its radiating theatricality, Max silently takes Lucia into a room fitted out for medical examinations and forces her to perform an act of fellatio while the music plays in the background. The encoding of these scenes as spectacles underscores their representational function as stagings of Max’s desire.

When Lucia appears in Vienna after the war, her metamorphosis into the girl she had been in the camps takes place when she changes her clothing: the first thing she does after arriving at Max's apartment is show Max the child's dress she bought. In the final scene, when the two leave the apartment, Lucia is dressed as a young girl, in her child's dress and kneesocks, while Max is wearing his officer's uniform. The dress Lucia wears is far too small but its fit brings into exaggerated clarity what had been evident from the beginning: that Max created Lucia in the image of his unconscious desire; they are two actors playing parts in a script that inexorably controls them.

Lucia's identity as Max's projection is reinforced by the way she is first identified in the camps as the daughter of an Austrian socialist. She comes to life as Max's "offspring." Later Max tells one of the hotel residents that "his little girl" has returned.²⁴ His confidante responds by saying that she has never seen Max so much in love. He corrects her characterization of the relationship: "No, it's not romantic . . . it's a biblical story."²⁵ The film then flashes back to a scene in the camp in which Lucia dances for a group of Nazi officers. In imitation of Herod, who gave his stepdaughter, Salomé, the head of John the Baptist, Max presents Lucia with the head of a prisoner who had been harassing her. The reference to this filial story further enforces the sense that Lucia is Max's filial extension.

Max's investment in Lucia is not exclusively Oedipal. Like Herod and Salomé, Max and Lucia are not blood relations. In addition, Max's relationship with Bert indicates the polymorphous energies of his attachments; he is not bound to only one libidinal economy.²⁶ Cavani's decision not to restrict Max's choice of object gives us leave to consider how all of Max's erotic bonds work in the service of his drive to possess fore-closed aspects of his identity.

24. "It's a Story from the Bible," *The Night Porter*, dir. Liliana Cavani.

25. *Ibid.*

26. Kaja Silverman reads Max's desire as restricted to the Oedipal economy and the film as exposing the illusion on which Max's phallic identity is based. She writes, "Voluntary exhibitionism does not call into question the passivity of the female subject. Rather, it jeopardizes the illusion of masculine activity. It poses a much more profound castration threat than Freud was willing to acknowledge, for by making over the distance between the gaze and the Gaze, and by revealing the fatal attractiveness of the feminine/masochistic position, it quite literally cuts off the masculine sadistic position . . . this film seems intent on laying bare the extremity of the male subject. Max's refusal to project that extremity on Lucia, to re-assert her inferior status by surrendering her to his associates . . . threatens the existence of the micro-culture of which he is a member. This threat is of course intolerable. Max is redefined as a traitor." "Masochism and Subjectivity," *Framework* 12 (1980): 6–8.

The filial quality of Lucia's relation to Max signifies his attachment to her as life-extending. The film also affiliates the viewer and Lucia, through the mediation of Max's attachment. In addition to perceiving Lucia through Max's eyes, the film represents the tie between Lucia and Max as the only authentic relationship in the film. Lucia's husband has little interest in her traumatic past; it does not enter his mind to consider what it means for her to return to Austria as a survivor. The morning after his concert, he reads aloud laudatory reviews, unaware that she is trembling with anxiety. Other characters and relationships are so restricted by the specters of the past that they seem barely to exist: Bert lives only to perform for Max; the wife of the Italian cook becomes catatonic when her husband, who like Lucia is a surviving witness, is murdered; and Max's neighbor concerns herself with other people's business.

But even as the film compels its viewers into identifying with Max through a common attachment to Lucia, it also places a limit on this identification, by affording a distancing perspective on Max. In the flashback to Lucia's arrival to the camp, when the audience first sees Lucia through the aligned cameras of Max's camera and Cavani, the viewer also watches Max engage in the act of seeing Lucia. This latter line of vision opens a space for critical reflection about the significance of Max's desire for Lucia. This space is off-limits to Max—he cannot think about his own investment in her. Enabling the viewer to reflect upon Max's fantasy world interrupts the identification with him. On the level of spectatorship the film thereby avoids pornographically duplicating Max's attachment to Lucia.

In the scenes that take place in the camps, Max unambiguously enforces the Nazi genocidal plan. Lucia matters to Max insofar as he can exploit her as a means of self-expansion.²⁷ In the camp Max makes contact with Lucia only in the context of domination and submission—he shoots at her, shackles her hands, forces her to perform sexual acts. In Vienna after the war, Max's actions demonstrate his enduring commitment to violence: he does not hesitate to murder Mario, the Italian cook, and he cuts his ties to Bert, another bearer of tenderness. Bert's own wounded love converts to murderous revenge in a reversal that doubles Max's own violence: when Max and Lucia leave the apartment, Bert is in the car with the sniper who kills the couple.

27. Jean Améry discusses torture as an act of self-expansion: "[I]n the world of torture man exists only by ruining the other person who stands before him. . . . When it has happened . . . the torturer has expanded into the body of his fellow man." *At the Mind's Limits*, 35.

Max's fantasy of preserving his connection to Lucia may be subversive, but this does not mean that Max understands his passion or that he is able to align himself with it. His fantasy is wordless; he barely speaks in Lucia's presence, as if to suggest that he is not able to integrate what she signifies into his identity.²⁸ Moreover, that the film presents the Nazi imaginary in the form of acting out further indicates the impossibility of incorporating Lucia into a psychically and socially sanctioned space. Artaud describes how, in the absence of such spaces, the theater of cruelty manifests the attitudes of mind that words cannot grasp:

The theater restores us all our dormant conflicts and all their powers, and gives these powers names we hail as symbols . . .

These symbols, the sign of ripe powers previously held in servitude and unavailable to reality, burst forth in the guise of incredible images which give freedom of the city and of existence to acts that are by nature hostile to the life of societies.

In the true theater a play disturbs the senses' repose, frees the repressed unconscious, incites a kind of virtual revolt (which moreover can have its full effect only if it remains virtual).²⁹

Unable to live with Lucia, Max initially responds to her return with rage. In their first encounter in her room in the hotel, he throws her to the floor and yells, "Why did you come!"³⁰ Yet he cannot renounce her either; his suffering from their estrangement becomes evident when the mock tribunal orders her to be murdered because she is a potential witness. Finally, though, lacking the psychical capacity to tolerate vulnerability, much less integrate it into his identity, Max finds himself at odds with his passion for Lucia. He is driven to a social death—becoming a recluse—which might more aptly be described a suicide.

In his discussion of the death drive, Freud examines what happens to a mind like Max's, riven by mutually exclusive desires. Freud calls atten-

28. The perpetrators did not speak of inner worlds; their speech was violence, which is inimical to the language of interiority. Its physical language takes the place of words. This is why Georges Bataille was struck by the absence of silence in the world of the Marquis de Sade's violators. According to Bataille, insofar as de Sade's torturers speak, they differ from real torturers. He writes, "Since language is by definition the expression of civilized man, violence is silent . . . violence never declares either its own existence or its right to exist; it simply exists." *Eroticism: Death and Sensuality*, trans. Mary Dalwood (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1986), 186–88.

29. Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double*, 27–28.

30. "Calling Frankfurt," *The Night Porter*, dir. Liliana Cavani.

tion to the energy of certain “innate instinctual impulses” that are not able to reach the same phase of development as other, acceptable impulses.³¹ These forestalled impulses “turn out to be incompatible in their aims or demands with the remaining ones, which are able to combine into the inclusive unity of the ego.”³² The energy of these incompatible impulses does not dissipate, however; instead, it impels those instincts to find alternate possibilities of satisfaction. We could say that Max’s search for alternate possibilities of satisfaction leads him to hallucination, where he fantasizes Lucia, an embodiment of the traits that his reality requires him to renounce. The phantasm of Lucia offers precisely the kind of neurotic satisfaction that is incompatible with the demands of Max’s ego. What Freud calls “satisfaction” is not synonymous with pleasure: “[P]leasure and unpleasure, being conscious feelings, are attached to the ego.”³³ Thus, when instincts that challenge the ego’s formation seek satisfaction, the ego experiences unpleasure: “all neurotic unpleasure is of that kind—pleasure that cannot be felt as such.”³⁴

The scene of Max’s and Lucia’s death reinforces Max’s incapacity to tolerate Lucia.³⁵ Max has put on his officer’s uniform and laboriously dresses the catatonic Lucia in her girl’s outfit and then drags her out of the apartment. They drive away, knowing that the sniper who has been staking out the apartment will now complete his assignment. They park at a bridge, emerge from the car, and, with Lucia tottering against Max, take a few steps. This is not a Wagnerian reunion in death: shots ring out and the two figures collapse away from each other like marionettes.

If “the theatre is a formidable call to the forces that impel the mind by example to the source of its conflicts,”³⁶ Cavani’s film exposes conflicts within the Nazi mind whose traces remain legible on the bodies of the Nazis’ victims, confirming Theweleit’s observation that “[e]veryone is

31. Sigmund Freud, “Beyond the Pleasure Principle,” in vol. 18, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), 10.

32. *Ibid.*, 11.

33. *Ibid.* (footnote, added 1925).

34. *Ibid.*, 11.

35. In his analysis of the most abject victims of the concentration camps, Wolfgang Sofsky discusses the provocative nature of apathy in the concentration camps. The *Muselmänner*, the most abject victims, incited the rage of the SS and the prisoner-functionaries. By the end of the film, Lucia has become the image of a concentration camp victim. In this sense her murder could be understood as a staging of the rage against the vulnerable prisoner. See “The *Muselmann*,” in *The Order of Terror: The Concentration Camp*, trans. William Templer (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), especially 203–4.

36. Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double*, 30.

susceptible [to violence], in accordance with the violence that has gone into him. For some bodies, violence is a necessity. Let me say this about that: As a rule, perpetrators 'heal' themselves with their acts of violence. They begin 'to live.'³⁷ *The Night Porter* explores the relation between the violence that has gone into the perpetrator's body and the resulting propensity for violence. Max's relation to Lucia suggests that the murderous impulses of the perpetrators answered to a need "to heal" their own wounded vulnerability through the production, and then destruction, of that very attribute in their victims. In this the film bears out Theweleit's observation that, to the fascist unconscious, the "argument that a social democrat is not a communist, a communist not an anarchist, and that none of these categories has anything to do with Jews, has never had much effect. The fascist unconscious perceives an essential sameness in all of the categories (and in the many others that made the spectrum of concentration camp prisoners so diverse)."³⁸ *The Night Porter* indicates that this sameness could be perceived in anyone, because what was perceived was a projected otherness. Cavani's decision not to identify Lucia as Jewish, but rather as the daughter of a Socialist, supports Theweleit's analysis; it suggests that the Jews were the most "available" victims because of the history of European anti-Semitism, but that Nazism could turn anyone, regardless of his or her cultural identity, into a vulnerable being and therefore into an unbearable object of rage.

37. Theweleit, "Killing for Desire," 213.

38. Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, 1, 383–84.

CHAPTER FOUR

TRAUMATIC AFTERMATHS

Binjamin Wilkomirski's *Fragments*

Fragments: Memories of a Wartime Childhood is the English title of a memoir that appeared originally in German in 1995 as *Bruchstücke: Aus einer Kindheit 1939–1948*. Its author, Binjamin Wilkomirski, a Swiss clarinetist, clarinet builder, and teacher, pieced together memories of his childhood as a persecuted Latvian Jew. Born “somewhere in the region of Riga,” Wilkomirski describes his separation from his family during the massacre of Jews when he was three or four and his subsequent capture and deportation to Majdanek and then to another unnamed camp that might have been Birkenau.¹ His account includes his delivery to an orphanage in Kraków and eventually to Switzerland, where he was adopted and raised by unsympathetic Swiss parents.

Reviewers instantly recognized the memoir's power, and they repeatedly called attention to the singular perspective Wilkomirski afforded on the experience of persecution—he wrote from the viewpoint of a child. Appearing, as the book did, fifty years after the end of World War II, its insight into the plight of children victims was made even more poignant by the advanced age of the generation of Holocaust survivors.

1. Stefan Maechler, *The Wilkomirski Affair: A Study in Biographical Truth*, trans. John E. Woods (New York: Schocken Books, 2001), 65–66. The appendix contains the complete text of Binjamin Wilkomirski's *Fragments*, trans. Carol Brown Janeway (New York: Schocken Books, 1996). Subsequent page references, to *The Wilkomirski Affair* and to the appended translation of *Fragments*, are included in the body of this text.

Soon after publication, *Fragments* was translated into nine languages. It was awarded many prizes, including the National Jewish Book Award in the United States and the Prix Mémoire de la Shoah in France. Wilkomirski became a frequent face at survivors' meetings, gave public speeches, and participated in conferences devoted to issues of survivorship.

But his celebrity turned to ignominy in 1998, after Daniel Ganzfried, a Swiss author and the child of a Holocaust survivor, published an article about Wilkomirski in the Swiss weekly *Weltwoche*. Ganzfried's headline presented an entirely different picture of Wilkomirski's background from the one of *Fragments*: "Binjamin Wilkomirski, alias Bruno Dössekker . . . knows Auschwitz and Majdanek only as a tourist" (129). Ganzfried's research uncovered adoption records that dated Wilkomirski's illegitimate birth to 1941 and identified his birth mother, Yvonne Grosjean, as a Protestant woman from Biel. According to Ganzfried's findings, Wilkomirski was placed in an orphanage and in 1945 became the foster child of the Dössekkers, who adopted him in 1957. Local school files in Zurich indicate that he attended first grade in April 1947, which discredited his contention that he had entered Switzerland in 1948.

New facts also emerged about the publication history of *Fragments*. It seemed that Wilkomirski's German publishers had made their own inquiries before the book was released and had uncovered contradictions between the story and legal records. They nevertheless decided to stand behind their author, choosing to believe his contention that his adoption records had been falsified. Some of Wilkomirski's critics saw a profit motive behind the publisher's position, basing their views on the assumption that the book would not have sold as widely had it been marketed as a novel.

Once the book's authenticity was in doubt, prominent historians and public figures revealed that they had been skeptical of the book from the first. Rabbi Marvin Hier, dean and founder of the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles, thought it unlikely that "such a young child could have survived two concentration camps without an adult protector among the guards."² In an interview on *60 Minutes*, Raul Hilberg pointed to the larger context in which the controversy had unfolded. He cited "the 'cult of testimony' that invites 'every single survivor' to be celebrated for telling his or her story."³ Konnilyn Feig felt that the absence

2. Doreen Carvajal, "A Holocaust Memoir in Doubt," *New York Times*, November 3, 1998.

3. Quoted in Harvey Peskin, "Holocaust Denial: A Sequel," *The Nation*, April 19, 1999,

of detail in *Fragments* indicated that its author hadn't really been in the camps.⁴

In the United States, where most copies of the book were sold, *Granta* and the *New Yorker* each published long pieces of investigative journalism about the controversy. Elena Lappin, who had been the editor of the *Jewish Quarterly* in 1997 when it awarded Wilkomirski a prize for nonfiction, wrote the article for *Granta*.⁵ Lappin first met Wilkomirski when he accepted his prize from her journal. Her first impression of him was positive; as Lappin recalls: "When I met Wilkomirski . . . I thought: Here, for the first time in my life, I see a writer who actually *is* his book."⁶ While she herself had not been a judge for the award competition, she had been in agreement with the decision to award the prize to *Fragments*.⁷ It only occurred to her that the book could have been made up in 1998 after she read Ganzfried's article. Lappin interviewed many people for her report, including Wilkomirski and his companion Verena Piller, Ganzfried, Wilkomirski's German editor, his American publisher and translator, individuals who had helped Wilkomirski to reconstruct his past, and leading Holocaust historians. She concluded that *Fragments* must be a fiction, but not without pointing to an unresolved contradiction in her assessment of Wilkomirski, a contradiction she also captures in her article's title, "The Man with Two Heads." Lappin writes,

I cannot believe that *Fragments* is anything other than fiction. And yet when I came back from his farmhouse that evening [of her first interview with Wilkomirski] I was, as I said, convinced he was genuine. Anguish like his seemed impossible to fabricate. As Israel Gutman said in Jerusalem: "Wilkomirski has written a story which he has experienced deeply, that's for sure."

The question now, in Zurich again, is: What story and which anguish?⁸

Philip Gourevitch spent six months researching and writing his report for the *New Yorker*.⁹ His investigation led to an issue that he deemed

4. Carvajal, "A Holocaust Memoir in Doubt."

5. Elena Lappin, "The Man with Two Heads," *Granta* 66 (June 1999), 11 (italics in original).

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid., 12.

8. Ibid., 61.

9. See also Blake Eskin, *A Life in Pieces: The Making and Unmaking of Benjamin Wilkomirski* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2002). Eskin, the first American journalist to question

ultimately much bigger and more troubling than Wilkomirski himself. According to him, the favorable response to *Fragments* signifies a deep cultural malaise, a lack of concern about the distinction between fiction and reality, which in turn has the effect of trivializing the Holocaust. Gourevitch writes, "After more than six months of studying the mischief that has followed from Wilkomirski's fantasies and obfuscation, I am more fearful for and depressed by the culture that received him as an apostle of memory than I am for the man himself, whoever he thinks he is."¹⁰

Tom Segev, author of *The Seventh Million*, worried about the potential fallout from the book. He demanded that it be withdrawn, citing its potential to "fuel the efforts of some right-wingers to deny the fact of the Holocaust."¹¹ Feig compared *Fragments* to the publication of the false Hitler diaries, sharply elevating the stakes of the scandal and suggesting that Wilkomirski's deception had the potential to do "a terrible thing" to survivors who had accepted his narrative as autobiography.¹²

Throughout the controversy Wilkomirski maintained that he was telling the truth. While he acknowledged that his Swiss legal documents were authentic, he claimed that they had been falsified. In 1999 *Fragments* was removed from bookstores; "owing to a lack of sales, several other publishers had already ceased to offer it even before Ganzfried's disclosures" (309). A Swiss attorney filed a formal suit against "Dössekker and consorts . . . as an aggrieved party . . . deprived of the book's price" and misled "into feeling sympathy for this topic" (299). Wilkomirski withdrew from public view in a state of apparent psychological instability.

In 2001 the book was reissued, together with an exhaustive report commissioned by the Liepman Literary Agency, which had been responsible for assigning the international publishing rights for *Fragments*. Stefan Maechler, the author of the report, confirmed what Ganzfried, Gourevitch, and Lappin had established, and uncovered further evidence that *Fragments* was inauthentic. But Maechler did not agree with Ganzfried's assessment of Wilkomirski as a "coldly calculating man systematically executing a fraud" (269). What Maechler calls "[t]he public's reverent pose" was, according to him, "one of the most striking hallmarks of the book's reception" (288). Maechler characterized Wilkomirski as someone

the veracity of the memoir, became interested in Wilkomirski because he thought he might be a family relative.

10. Philip Gourevitch, "The Memory Thief," *New Yorker*, June 14, 1999, 68.

11. Malcolm Jones Jr. and Ray Sawhill, "A Classic or a Hoax?" *Newsweek*, November 16, 1998, 84.

12. Carvajal, "A Holocaust Memoir in Doubt."

whose “fantasies of victimization were radicalized with the help of those around him” (270). Speaking specifically about the American public, Maechler wrote: “As the most innocent of all victims and one who knew how to tell an emotional and shocking story, Wilkomirski was the figure the public had been all but waiting for. In addition, he is not only a victim; at the same time he is also a hero, and as such he was able to satisfy the fundamental American need for success stories” (291–92). Maechler’s critique extends beyond Wilkomirski and his perception of the American public’s tendency to idolize people. He also notes how such idolatry blunts aesthetic judgment:

The almost religious zeal that set Wilkomirski the victim on a pedestal, above all standards of measurement, may also explain the astounding evaluation of the work as great literature. Even if Wilkomirski had been in the camps, that would not automatically mean that he had to write a good book. . . . [T]he general reaction of wishing to bow in reverence before Wilkomirski and to elevate his work to a literary Olympus could also be motivated by a resistance to dealing seriously with the Shoah. (288–89)¹³

Lawrence Langer had immediately discerned that *Fragments* was a work of fiction. In 2006 he speculated that a “desire to learn more [about the Holocaust] might . . . account for” the public’s favorable reception of the book.¹⁴ Nevertheless, he was stymied by the positive reactions of “knowledgeable members of both academic and survivor communities.”¹⁵ And while in 1998 he had described *Fragments* as a “powerful novel,” his later essay contained no mention of his earlier recognition of the text’s literary achievement (117). The book now claimed his attention because it exemplified the “dangers” of fraudulent memoirs. Langer writes, “An embarrassed silence continues to inhibit the voices of those initially misled, and one would hope that eventually some among them will break through that barrier, not in order to construe a needless apologetics but to engage in a frank self-scrutiny that might enlighten future audiences about the ongoing dangers of fraudulent Holocaust accounts.”¹⁶ Langer

13. Gourevitch also attacks the book’s literary merits. In his article he refers to several passages to prove that the writing is “almost too silly to be called kitsch.” “The Memory Thief,” 68.

14. Lawrence L. Langer, *Using and Abusing the Holocaust* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 50.

15. *Ibid.*

16. *Ibid.*, 63.

did not consider that survivors might be responding to the very qualities of the text that had earlier impressed him; nor did it seem that their favorable reactions carried authority with him.

The general absence of curiosity about survivors' positive reactions, of which Langer's response is only one example, may indicate that the revelations about Wilkomirski had triggered an uncharacteristic defensiveness in critics. That the negative evaluations of the literary merits of *Fragments* appeared only after Wilkomirski was exposed as a fabricator further suggests that, at least in part, the critiques of Wilkomirski were polemically driven. This seems especially plausible in view of the consideration that Wilkomirski's transgressions are but an extreme example of the transferential identifications that stand to compromise the critical detachment of all professional readers. Wilkomirski's failure to preserve such detachment may have been an uncomfortable reminder to his critics of the hazards of such unchecked investments, including those that take the form of a defensive stance on behalf of survivors. Wilkomirski's personal background may have further raised the specter of uncomfortable resemblance. For, like many of his critics, Wilkomirski trained as a scholar; his knowledge of the events of the Holocaust is secondhand. While doing graduate work in history, he amassed over a thousand documents, which he eventually donated to Yad Vashem. Gourevitch reports that two rooms in Wilkomirski's house are devoted to Holocaust materials: books, files, computers, videotape machines, a microfilm reader, and an archive of letters, manuscripts, photographs, and documents collected from survivors.

The continuing silence of survivors and academics that Langer points out may indicate that for some individuals, including myself, the undermining of Wilkomirski's credibility did not compromise the authority of his *text*. To understand the source of this authority requires that one separate *Fragments* from the quagmire of its author's missteps, to entertain the possibility that the fraudulent memoir is a rhetorical construct with its own merit and whose narrative form and patterns of figuration offer their own yield of knowledge. In what follows I will consider these representational dimensions of the text, in order to provide an interpretative foundation for the view that *Fragments* captures an important aspect of the survivor's aftermath of victimization.

I understand Wilkomirski's public comportment as a staging or enactment of the voice of his written narrative. Both Wilkomirski the person and Wilkomirski the narrator project an enthrallment to the past and an image of survivorship as a condition in which, notwithstanding the

passage of time, emotional life has not evolved beyond the period of active victimization. Wilkomirski's "performance" of such investment in prior victimhood provides a point of entry into his narrative. Jeffrey Prager has argued that remaining in the past emotionally is one form that coping with the aftermath of survival can take, and that testimonial narratives can serve to reinforce this arrest of time. According to Prager, the investments of survivors in stories of their past may develop in reaction to the threat posed by conflicts that arise in response to their previous victimization, that is to say, in the aftermath of persecution. Accounts of trauma can be a means of avoiding these conflicts, thereby manifesting a "form of defensive distancing from the affective experience and inner personal conflicts of those who have been traumatized."¹⁷ Prager writes, "Narratives of past wrongs tend to externalize conflict to the outside world and, paradoxically, both protect defensive denial, preserve others as villains and promote a sense of oneself as a victim."¹⁸ Telling and retelling the story of that trauma becomes a "protective strategy . . . the construction of a sequestered self—the building of a fortress against fragility [and] the dangerous emotions accompanying trauma—fear of annihilation and rage at abandonment, for example."¹⁹

Considered in terms of Prager's understanding of traumatic narrative, Wilkomirski's behavior and his text, taken together, could be understood as a performative demonstration of an emotional life arrested in an experience of past victimization. I would emphasize that I am not considering the significance of this performance in terms of Dössekker's actual biography but rather in relation to its manifest depiction of Holocaust survival. I am interested in Dössekker's imagined story and his living portrayal of his story's protagonist, insofar as they exemplify the psychological efficacy of testimonial narrative in its specific capacity to displace and contain potentially volatile emotions linked to the aftermath of victimization. It is my contention that survivors may well have responded to *Fragments* precisely because it stages the attempt to manage affect by remaining focused on the past. To analyze the text as performing the displacement of affect has required that I bracket Wilkomirski's actual identity in order to focus on the first-person narrator of the text.²⁰ The

17. Jeffrey Prager, "Healing from History: Psychoanalytic Considerations on Traumatic Pasts and Social Repair," *European Journal of Social Theory* 11, no. 3 (2008): 411.

18. *Ibid.*

19. *Ibid.*

20. For a consideration of the text in relation to Swiss memory politics of the 1990s, see Anne Whitehead, "Telling Tales: Trauma and Testimony in Benjamin Wilkomirski's *Fragments*," in *Trauma Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 30–47. See also Carl Tighe's

references to “Wilkomirski” in the following pages thus designate the persona Dössekker believes himself to be.

Wilkomirski describes his memories as “[m]ostly a chaotic jumble, with very little chronological fit; shards that keep surfacing against the orderly grain of grown-up life and escaping the laws of logic” (377). While not chronologically organized, these memories, when read sequentially, as they appear in the text, do, however, display an order—not one of chronology, but of a psychological evolution of foreclosed affect.²¹ This affect manifests in two early episodes that predate the scenes of persecutory violence. In the first, Wilkomirski writes,

It must have been Riga, in winter. The city moat was frozen over. I’m sitting all bundled up [*wohlverpackt*]²² with someone on a sled, and we’re running smoothly over the ice as if we’re on a street. Other sleds overtake us, and people on skates. Everyone’s laughing, looking happy. On both sides tree branches are bright and heavy with snow. They bend over the ice; we travel through and under them like through a silver tunnel. I think I’m floating. I’m happy. (378)

The elements of the scene harmonize into an atmosphere of containment and connectedness: the environment holds Wilkomirski in a many-layered embrace. He occupies a position in the center of familiar surroundings that literally and figuratively enfold him: he is physically wrapped and protected from the cold; his sled moves among the other sleds, so it too is encircled; his happiness serves as the focal point for the skaters around him, whose happiness reflects his own; the trees that border the

analysis of *Fragments* in the context of the Swiss institution of *Verdingkinder* (earning children), “Faking a Life: Benjamin Wilkomirski, *Fragments*,” in *Writing and Responsibility* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 90–102.

21. The narrative is written in a voice crafted to capture the consciousness of a child survivor but within the framework of an adult experience of memory. Wilkomirski creates this voice through specific narrative procedures. For example, he avoids analyzing his early experiences through retrospective reflection, which reinforces the impression of naïveté. This is apparent in scenes such as the one in which he describes his arrival at the first camp, when he asked a soldier about the “thing . . . hanging down from his belt” (403). The soldier answers by raising his arm with “the strange thing in his fist” (404). Wilkomirski continues, “[S]omething whizzed across my face with such burning heat that I thought I’d been cut in two. That’s how I learned what a whip is” (404). This scene conveys the shock that accompanied Wilkomirski’s every act of understanding; he is a child learning that making sense of things—“that’s how I learned”—is synonymous with serving as a target of assault. Wilkomirski offers no commentary on the scene; he leaves it to the reader to supply the outrage.

22. Benjamin Wilkomirski, *Bruchstücke: Aus einer Kindheit 1939 1948* (Frankfurt am Main: Erste Auflage, 1995), 8. Subsequent references are included, in square brackets, in the body of this text.

frozen moat bend to form an enclosure that intensifies the aura of safety, as does the mention of the moat, a defense against incursion. Wilkomirski's sensation of floating affirms that he feels suspended yet secure in this enveloping atmosphere.

The sustaining environment of the skating scene is echoed in a second early scene in which Wilkomirski and his brothers have escaped from Riga and are staying in a farmhouse in the Polish forest:

I can still see it exactly:

We were all sitting around the table in the main room, and for some reason I was crying. Motti, my eldest brother, stood up and bent over me. His face was full of love and concern, his broad back curved down over me like a great safe shield, and I listened to his comforting voice. (389)

Even though Wilkomirski is in distress, here, as in the sledding scene, he is protected. Paralleling the position of the trees in the first scene, his brother bends over him; his voice envelops Wilkomirski, providing an experience of security. This landscape mirrors what Winnicott describes as the holding environment, by which he designates both the physical holding of the infant and also the complete and sustaining environment in which the infant exists before it achieves a sense of separateness and a relation to time and space.²³ Wilkomirski writes of the latter scene of holding: "But this picture is quickly scared off by other ones, dark and suffocating, which push into my brain and won't let go" (378). The pictures that intervene are "like a wall of solid black between me and the sparkling and the sun" (378). The contents of the displacing images are terrifying, but given that they form a wall, they may also perform a stabilizing function, by preventing something from entering Wilkomirski's consciousness. The very need to wall off the "pictures" of holding suggests that whatever associations accrue to them are more threatening than the "dark and suffocating" ones that intervene. He writes, "For the first time, the feeling of deathly terror in my chest and throat, the heavy tramp of boots, a fist that yanks me out of my hiding in a place under the covers at the bottom of the bed and drops me onto the floorboards in the middle of an otherwise unfurnished little room" (378). This scene is one of destroyed security that represents a reversal of the earlier holding environment: Wilkomirski is violently pulled from beneath the

23. D. W. Winnicott, "The Theory of the Parent-Infant Relationship," in *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment: Studies in the Theory of Emotional Development*, 37-55.

covers of the bed—another holding environment—and made to witness the murder of his father, whom soldiers force to march outside, where he is placed against a wall and then crushed by a truck. Having witnessed this scene, Wilkomirski writes,

I'm sad and very afraid because he turned away from me, but I feel that he didn't do it because he doesn't love me anymore [*ich fühle, dass er es nicht tat, weil er mich nicht mehr liebt*]. His own upset must have been too much for him, and he only turned away because something unknown was even stronger than he was.

All at once I realize:

From now on I have to manage without you, I'm alone [*ich bin allein*]. (379–80) [10]

This passage focuses less on the barely described event of the father's murder, euphemistically presented as a turning away, than on its impact. The doubly negative form of the first sentence suggests the considerable psychic energy Wilkomirski must muster to defend against acknowledging his feelings of rejection: allowing himself to experience his father's death in this way would subject him to “feelings of disharmony and discontinuity.”²⁴ Read in this light, the recognition that he is alone can be understood as an assertion of his survival (captured in the “I am” of the statement) in the face of abandonment, as well as a broadcasting of a persisting psychological condition: in the presence of others, Wilkomirski feels alone. The significance of this state cannot be overestimated; “alone” is the final word of his text:

I wrote these fragments of memory to explore both myself and my earliest childhood; it may also have been an attempt to set myself free. And I wrote them with the hope that perhaps other people in the same situation would find the necessary support and strength to cry out their own traumatic childhood memories, so that they too could learn that there really are people today who will take them seriously, and who want to listen and to understand.

They should know that they are not alone. (496)

Intimacy, the alternative to solitude, might endanger Wilkomirski by making him susceptible to acting out the emotions he feels about his

24. Prager, “Healing from History,” 413.

father's death. Alone, he can externalize these emotions in narrative, that is, symbolize them, and, as we will see, in so doing, symbolically turn them against himself. The text captures this movement of displacement and reversal though a corresponding metaphorical turn: the literal child of the early scenes of holding metamorphoses into the figure of a bundled child. The figure recurs in a number of scenes which, when read in relation to one another, represent the progressive obliteration from Wilkomirski's memory of the early holding experience and, more emphatically, of the gratification associated with that security.

The symbolic bundle first appears in an episode in a Polish train station where, after the war, Wilkomirski waits to travel to a Swiss orphanage. He writes, "I sat in a corner on a bench, clutching my bundle, though I had no idea what was inside it" (386). An iteration of the bundled self of the sledding scene, the bundle Wilkomirski clings to, reflects his desire to retain *something* of that early connectedness; his ignorance of the contents of the package, read as a figure of that experience, suggests Wilkomirski's estrangement from the possibility of connection. By the time he has reached the orphanage, he has lost the bundle, which loss measures his increasing repression of the experience of holding.

The next memory in which a bundle appears is of a concentration camp. Wilkomirski is trying to amuse a guard:

First he grabbed hold of my hand, we danced around in a circle, and he laughed. It sounded funny and rough, but that was just while he was laughing the angriness out of himself. Then he gave a great swing and lifted me onto his shoulders and I rode him like King David on his snow-white horse. We galloped faster and faster in circles and I was so happy, I couldn't even describe it: he'd been all angry, and now he was playing our games with us . . .

But suddenly he began to run crazily straight ahead, and I got frightened. He broke through the circle of amazed children, running for the wall that marked off our playground, took tighter hold of my feet, lifted me up over his head, and came to a stop for a moment at the wall. He was still holding on to my feet in the air and I flew forward like a loose bundle [*wie ein haltloses Bündel*], clean over his head, until my forehead hit the stone. That's when he let go of me and went away. (387) [20]

As blood drips from his head, Wilkomirski thinks: "This is how it's going to be, forever and ever, until everything's dripped out of me, and then I'll be dead" (388). The sledding scene's aura of security, symbolized by

the bundling of the child, is transformed here into its life-threatening opposite: to be held like a bundle is now synonymous with becoming the object of murderous intent. The life-threatening “game” Wilkomirski plays with the guard recalls and negates his former feelings of security: the guard who tortures him is the ghostly embodiment of his brother, the guardian who once protected him. Reading the scene as an extension of the preceding one, we can understand the stone wall that Wilkomirski hits his head against as a materialization of the “black wall” that had blocked his access to the earliest memories and as such, as an image of Wilkomirski’s solidifying self-estrangement. To summarize: this scene reverses the sledding scene, negating the early pleasures of security. It renders the symbolic mental wall as material barrier, thereby staging what is required for Wilkomirski to survive the loss of his father, or more precisely, to tolerate his reaction to that loss: the walling-off or repression of his feeling. It could be said that the description of his bleeding as a “dripping out” of “everything” attests to the force of his repression: Wilkomirski lives, but only to the extent that his affective life bleeds out of him.

The next scene involving a bundle occurs on an evening when “two bundles [*zwei schwere Bündel*],” each containing a small child, are anonymously tossed into a camp barracks (428) [66]. Wilkomirski writes that he had never before seen such small children up close; he is shocked to notice their black, frostbitten fingers. The following morning the children are dead and their fingers white. With sadness and bitterness, an older boy explains to Wilkomirski that the infants had gnawed their fingers to the bone. The boy’s emotionality surprises Wilkomirski. He, by contrast, feels “a sense of superiority” because of the hardness of his bones in comparison to the babies’ fragility (429). These infants, as symbolic doubles of Wilkomirski’s vulnerable self, trigger a defensive indifference and narcissistic self-satisfaction, necessary for Wilkomirski to remain intact and self-continuous.²⁵

The final scene involving a bundle reiterates Wilkomirski’s “flight” and near-death at the hands of the guard. This version takes trauma to the extreme of annihilation. In the scene, a female prisoner leads Wilkomirski into a warm room, presumably the camp laundry, and conceals

25. For a discussion of the image of the freezing bundles in terms of the “tenuous survival of affect” (156), see Mary Jacobus’s inspired reading of the text in relation to Ferenczian and Kleinian theories of trauma; Mary Jacobus, “Border Crossings: Traumatic Reading and Holocaust Memory,” in *Psychoanalysis and the Scene of Reading* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 124–62.

him beneath a pile of rags. SS men come to ferret out the other hidden children in the room, but they do not discover Wilkomirski. As Wilkomirski watches from his hiding place,

Two small, wriggling bundles [*Zwei kleine, zappelnde Bündel*] were pulled out by large hands; the noise got louder again, more yelling from the boots, then a big swing and the bundles flew clear across the room, all spread out in the strangest way as if they were trying to flap their wings, through the window, and out.

Silence for a second—and in the silence, from outside, twice over the unmistakable sound of breaking skulls. (455) [95]

One of the prisoners orders Wilkomirski to run outside to a new hiding place. As he does so, he sees the “two bundles [*die beiden Bündel*], still lying there, or rather, what was left of them” (456) [97]. Echoing the earlier passage in which his own head was bleeding, he writes that he is afraid of slipping in the “mass of yellow, sticky-shiny stuff [that] had flowed out and was splashed against the wall, on the ground, and right across the path” (457). Wilkomirski recalls his response to witnessing the murders: “I often reproach myself, I can’t understand how I could have felt nothing for the little ones back then. Although I was just a child myself, was I already so brutalized that there was nothing left in me, no sympathy, no pity, not even anger?” (458). In the face of paralyzing resemblance—“I was just a child myself”—Wilkomirski is indifferent to the children’s plight; this indifference can be read as an assertion or marking of his difference from them, a marking that is necessary to defend against the memory of his earlier bundled self. The phrase “not even anger” could be understood as a disavowal of the very emotion that abandonment elicits in Wilkomirski.

The text contains a litany of such self-reproaches. To begin with, Wilkomirski feels responsible for the murder of a child who was brought to the barracks and who didn’t understand the laws of daily life. When the boy began to cry loudly, because he needed to relieve himself, no one but Wilkomirski spoke up. Knowing that the guards would kill all of the children if even one were screaming, but also that they would kill whoever soiled his bed, Wilkomirski tells the child, “Just go in the straw, right where you are” (423). The next day the boy was murdered for having done so. Wilkomirski thinks afterward, “I’m guilty, I’m a murderer. If it hadn’t been for me, it wouldn’t have happened” (426). When, after the war, a woman asks Wilkomirski if he wants to go to Switzerland with

her, he hears himself answer that he does, even though a voice inside his head is telling him that he does not want to go. He thinks, “I felt as if I’d been defeated, disgraced. I was going to go away, all secretly, just go, leaving the rest of them in this mess. I could feel the guilt like a lump in my throat” (384). Elsewhere he ponders,

Why had I, in particular, survived? I hadn’t earned that right. I had brought too much guilt on myself for that.

I had handed over the new boy; I was inextricably caught up in the fact of his death. It was only because I was a coward that they killed the new boy. I might perhaps have been able to save him, and I didn’t do anything.

I had betrayed my mother and now called a stranger [his foster mother] “mother.”

I had given up the search for my brothers out of a fear of discovering the truth.

I had deserted the colors, and abandoned my friends in the orphanage in Kraków to their fate. I was sitting here in safe, stuffed Switzerland. I had food, I had clothes, while they were under the stamp of Stalin in Poland, and still belonged among the unwanted. (490–91)

Killing, betrayal, desertion: crimes that bespeak the force of Wilkomirski’s inadmissible and displaced anger, now transformed into self-accusation. In a sense these self-accusations, especially that of desertion, are accurate; in point of fact the adult Wilkomirski is unresponsive to the vulnerability of those closest to him, whom psychologically he abandons when they are most vulnerable. For example, when his wife is giving birth to his son, even though he desires to “be there with her, to support her,” the actual delivery paralyzes him (444). Seeing his son’s crowning head, he writes, “I didn’t know how much dark hair a newborn baby can have. I wasn’t ready for this little half-head of hair. All I could do was stand still and stare at it, and once again, like an echo from before, I heard the ringing and crackling noise in my chest” (444). The “echo from before” is a reference to an earlier scene in a concentration camp when, while sitting outside of a barracks, Wilkomirski had witnessed a rat emerge from the side of a female corpse. This sight confused and disoriented him, because he had been told that children come out of their mother’s belly. Wilkomirski recalls, “I open my mouth to scream, in shock and fear, but nothing comes out of my throat. It feels as if my gullet is being squashed into my chest, and I hear a noise deep inside me, a sort of ringing and

crackling, like something fragile being stepped on” (443). The “ringing and crackling, like something fragile being stepped on” can be read as symbolic of the traumatic rupture of Wilkomirski’s psychic borders, as can the following passage: “Everything inside me comes loose and seems to flow away; I flow away along with my blood and vomit in the bright, muddy runnels of water, down the street of the camp to wherever the runnels peter out” (444). The perceived distinction between Wilkomirski and the rats collapses when he sees one of those “deadly enemies of the little children in the camp” climb out of the female corpse (443). He thinks, “Mother, mama, my mama, what have you done?” (443). If mothers give birth to “the enemy” rat, so Wilkomirski reasons, he must also be a rat; in other words, he must be his own enemy. Hence his answer to one question—“Am I a rat or a human?”—is to pose another: “I’m a child—but am I a human child or a rat child, or can you be both at once?” (444).

Wilkomirski’s self-interrogation goes to the heart of his trauma: in the aftermath of abandonment, he is “both at once,” which is to say, both the human offspring of his father and mother and the raging enemy of his father. Remaining human requires that he destroy his raging rat self. This is precisely what the structural logic of *Fragments*’ rhetorical figures accomplishes: it performs a symbolic self-murder through the sequential transformations of the metaphorical figure of the bundle.

As Wilkomirski’s perception of his wife and son as enemies suggests, there are limits to the power of symbolization to contain threatening emotion. This is also evident in Wilkomirski’s description of what happens after his son’s delivery:

I must have looked pretty bad as I left the birthing room. I walked down the long corridor, past the open dayroom where the nursing sisters were sitting having coffee and eyeing me curiously and giggling.

As I went out into the open air, their mocking commentary still rang in my ears.

They had been murmuring something about men—and weaklings who had no stomach for things. (444)

It is impossible to know whether the nuns’ scorn was real or imaginary. What is evident, though, is that this scene derives its impact from its being yet another instance of a recurrent dynamic whereby Wilkomirski sees himself as a victim of assault. He falls into this very pattern on his book tour. Arthur H. Samuelson, *Fragments*’ American publisher,

reported that everywhere they went, Wilkomirski cried. Samuelson told Wilkomirski that if he didn't stop the crying, he'd send him home.²⁶ Wilkomirski's tears of grief elicit a punitive response—threatened abandonment—thereby recreating the trauma of loss.

It is tempting to see Wilkomirski as unconsciously soliciting the attacks upon him and to recognize the text as having been fabricated for this very reason. Consider the following: Wilkomirski's critics were not the first to identify the fictional antecedents to *Fragments*; Wilkomirski was. He openly discussed the important influence of Kosinski's *The Painted Bird* upon him.²⁷ As is well known, critics accused Kosinski of conflating fact and fiction. In calling attention to Kosinski, Wilkomirski thus opened the door for his critics to accuse him of the same thing. Moreover, in a university lecture titled "Childhood Memory as Historical Source," Wilkomirski dropped an important textual hint about the psychological origins of his text (247):

[O]ne should investigate every traumatic memory to whatever extent possible to see if it is about the original traumatization. It has been observed that an unbearably painful memory will later be covered over with a less onerous memory that apparently cannot be penetrated. This only happens when both memories are bound together in some thematic or emotional way. The hermetic layering of a traumatic memory by a second, less onerous memory is an especially common self-defense mechanism of children (screen memory). (250)

Wilkomirski invokes the concept of screen memory as an explanatory model for the emergence of his traumatic childhood Holocaust memories. He would have his listeners understand that these memories lay buried beneath less painful ones. But it is only a short step from his discussion of screen memories to Freud's writing on the topic, with which Wilkomirski was probably familiar. Freud's account of the origins of screen memories differs in significant ways from Wilkomirski's. Freud's therapeutic experience led him to conclude that some memories from childhood do not originate in a person's early years but are representations of more mature impressions and thoughts that have been projected back in time and distorted. When this happens, later adult experiences

26. Gourevitch, "The Memory Thief," 51.

27. Maechler discussed Kosinski with Wilkomirski, as did Lappin. Maechler, *The Wilkomirski Affair*, 351n82.

appear to be memories of events from childhood, but in reality they are not. Freud writes,

It may indeed be questioned whether we have any memories at all *from* our childhood; memories *relating to* our childhood may be all that we possess. Our childhood memories show us our earliest years not as they were but as they appeared at the later periods when the memories were aroused. In these periods of arousal, the childhood memories did not, as people are accustomed to say, *emerge*; they were *formed* at that time. And a number of motives, with no concern for historical accuracy, had a part in forming them, as well as in the selection of the memories themselves.²⁸

Such memories represent mental experiences that the mind has placed in a childhood setting “[f]or the sake of its innocence.”²⁹ This aura is necessary, according to Freud, because of the tendentious nature of the material hidden behind screen memories. The screen memories “serve the purposes of the repression and replacement of objectionable or disagreeable impressions. It follows, therefore, that these falsified memories too, must have originated at a period of life when it has become possible for conflicts of this kind and impulsions towards repression to have made a place for themselves in mental life.”³⁰ As “falsified memories,” screen memories are thus defensive constructions that arise in response to a struggle between unconscious desires and the ego’s resistance to their becoming conscious. Freud goes on to say that the very conflicts and desires of later life, which are projected back into childhood and expressed as screen memories, are *phantasies*.³¹ Commenting on a particular screen memory of one of his analysands, Freud writes that it emerged when the man “projected . . . two phantasies on to one another and made a childhood memory of them”; he continues, “people often construct such things unconsciously—almost like works of fiction.”³²

28. Sigmund Freud, “Screen Memories,” in vol. 3, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1962), 322 (italics in original). The temporal relation between the screen memory and the repressed material may vary; for the purpose of thinking about *Fragments*, the category of “retrospective or retrograde” displacement that Freud describes is especially relevant. In this mode of displacement, the content of the explicit memory derives from early childhood, while the unconscious thought processes that comprise the essential subject matter of the memory derive from a later stage. Sigmund Freud, *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, 44.

29. *Ibid.*, 317.

30. *Ibid.*, 322.

31. *Ibid.*, 315 (my italics).

32. *Ibid.*

In giving a public lecture on the nature of childhood memory, Wilkomirski was pointing to the very text—Freud’s essay—that could lead to the inference that his own memoir was one of those very unconscious constructions that are “almost like works of fiction.” Freud’s thinking enables us to appreciate *Fragments* as a screen memory, that is, a phantasy that serves to defend against Wilkomirski’s becoming conscious of conflicts emerging from a later period of his life.

It seems that Wilkomirski all but invited his critics to attack him. The indefensibility of his position rendered him unable to do anything more than accuse his critics of creating a “‘poisonous’ atmosphere of ‘totalitarian judgment and criticism,’” a comment that indicates how the controversy was a replaying of his imagined Holocaust victimization in which they (rather than he) were the aggressors.³³ At the same time, his assumed attitude of self-defense may have afforded relief from the conflict between his feelings of aggression and the internal resistance it triggered.³⁴

The “memory of the offense” as defense against present internecine psychic warfare is what may well have resonated with the experiences of Holocaust survivors.³⁵ To the extent that they, too, are vulnerable to self-division and internal attack, the performativity of Wilkomirski’s narrative, enforced by Wilkomirski’s behavior, may have brought into relief, and brought relief from, the lengths to which the embattled survivor will go to sequester the emotions smoldering within.

33. Carvajal, “A Holocaust Memoir in Doubt.”

34. Without concluding that Wilkomirski unconsciously sought this result, Jay Geller notes that the primary source of Wilkomirski’s suffering is the “actual or anticipated refusal by others to hear and believe” his story (361). “The Wilkomirski Case: *Fragments* or *Figments*?” *American Imago* 59, no. 3 (2002): 343–65.

35. For an exploration of this topic, see Primo Levi, “The Memory of the Offense,” in *The Drowned and the Saved*, 23–35.

CHAPTER FIVE

ART OF HEALING

Imre Kertész's *Fatelessness*

Imre Kertész was born in Budapest on November 9, 1929. In 1944 he was deported to Auschwitz and then sent to Buchenwald. He spent one year as a prisoner, returning after liberation to Hungary, where he worked as a journalist until he was dismissed by his newspaper in 1951 “after it aligned itself with the Communist Party.”¹ He served in the military for two years before he began to support himself through his writing and by translating German texts into Hungarian. Presently he lives in Budapest and Berlin.

In 1975 Kertész published his first novel, *Fateless*, which in 2004 was retranslated into English as *Fatelessness*. In the novel's opening pages Gyorgy Koves, a fourteen-year-old Hungarian boy, spends a final day with his father, who has been called to labor service. Gyorgy's parents are divorced, and, in obedience to his father's wish, Gyorgy plans to remain with his stepmother rather than returning to live with his mother. But he never puts his plan into effect, because shortly after his father's departure, Gyorgy is picked up on the streets of Budapest and sent to Auschwitz, where he is held for three days; he is then transported to Buchenwald and on to Zeitz. During his internment, Gyorgy's physical

1. “Imre Kertész—Biography,” *Nobelprize.org*, June 18, 2010, http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/2002/kertesz.html.

and mental condition deteriorates to the point that he becomes a *Muselmann*, but he survives nevertheless. After a year of camp imprisonment he is liberated. Before he returns home, he has a series of jarring, alienating conversations with strangers and former neighbors about his experiences in the camps, and these reveal a fundamental tension between the way in which he views his persecution and the way in which his community resists his view. In speaking with his neighbors, he learns that his father has died in Mauthausen and that his stepmother has remarried. The novel concludes with Gyorgy's anticipating that his mother is awaiting his return with joy and with plans for his future.

Kertész began writing *Fatelessness* in 1955; it was published nineteen years later.² When it finally appeared in Hungary, it was greeted with "compact silence,"³ which one critic attributed to a perception of the novel as "a cynical provocation, a book about the Holocaust that refused to wear the accepted robe of victimhood; it declared everyone, perpetrators and victims, had taken their own steps towards their future."⁴

Jeffrey Prager focuses on the negative social implications of the reception Gyorgy receives upon returning to Budapest, arguing that it attests to the community's failure to participate in Gyorgy's healing process:

George seems to know intuitively what is required to be mentally healthy: remembering, not forgetting; memories that do not return *sub rosa* to undermine one's own sense of the continuity of life, of a sense of oneself moving forward into a creative and productive future, of an ability to experience, whatever his or her fate, happiness. Yet he is also prescient: recognizing the precariousness of his quest for mental health among those that cannot understand his experience as he lived it.⁵

According to Prager, it is the community's responsibility to provide a "corrective emotional experience" in the present, analogous to the analyst's relationship to the analysand.⁶ When it fails to do so, the survivor suffers further traumatization. That is why, according to Prager, trauma

describes the failure of members of the community to contain against disappointment the memorial experience of the person. In this sense,

2. Julian Evans, "A Man Apart," Books, *Guardian.co.uk*, April 22, 2006.

3. "Imre Kertész—Biography."

4. Evans, "A Man Apart."

5. Prager, "Healing from History," 414.

6. *Ibid.*, 413.

psychological trauma is both a disease of the contemporary moment as well as a social one, when an individual's capacity to engage the world presently and orient herself autonomously to the future is insufficiently enabled by the environment. When these conditions prevail, memory intrudes and a traumatic past dominates.⁷

Prager reads Gyorgy's conversations directly after his liberation with the people of his community as forecasting a future bereft of the societal support necessary for the working-through of his traumatic memories. As a result, Gyorgy will be forced to forget his past; "[i]ntrusive memories or flashbacks may instead prevent his moving forward into a creative and productive future."⁸

Prager lays out the crucial social component of the survivor's recovery from trauma, and he emphasizes how the absence of a supportive community in itself constitutes a contemporary iteration of trauma. Departing from Prager's analysis, my question concerns how the novel itself conceives of the community's role in Gyorgy's process of healing. Is Gyorgy's relationship with the witnessing community comparable to the relation between analysand and analyst as Prager suggests? In view of the importance of dialogue in the healing process as Prager discusses it, what are we to make of the fact that most, if not all, of the novel consists of dialogue—not dialogue *between* Gyorgy and others, but dialogue occurring *within* Gyorgy's mind? Even the direct quotations of his exchanges with others are embedded in larger narrative paragraphs that subordinate them to the cohesive framework of Gyorgy's thought process. As such, the novel could be viewed as a continuous internal dialogue that incorporates the voices of others. I understand this structure as indicating Gyorgy's attempt, through the creation of a dialogical testimonial narrative, to reestablish both the intersubjective borders of his identity as well as the intrapsychic borders that Freud discusses in terms of primal repression.⁹ Perhaps only through such a marking of borders will Gyorgy will be able to regain the autonomy destroyed in the camps, where the voice of the other was indistinguishable from the threat of annihilation.

7. Prager, "Jump-Starting Timeliness," 233.

8. Prager, "Healing from History," 415.

9. Jean Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis write, "Anticathexis is the sole mechanism of primal repression"; and while the nature of this anticathexis is not identifiable, it probably derives from archaic experiences of rupture, "the breaking through of the protective shield against stimuli." *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1973), 334.

A scene in the novel that marks a turning point in Gyorgy's survival in the camps exposes the mortal threat posed to the Holocaust victim by a relation that knows no borders. Forced to carry cement bags on his back, Gyorgy accidentally drops one of the bags. A camp supervisor, "not . . . an SS serviceman . . . but . . . a yellow-overalled member of a more shadowy semimilitary 'Todt' organization," witnesses this and proceeds to beat Gyorgy and to make him lick up the spilled powder.¹⁰ Swearing at Gyorgy and then dragging him to his feet, he is determined to "teach" Gyorgy a lesson (169):

From then on, he personally loaded a new bag onto my shoulders each time it was my turn, bothering himself with me alone; I was his sole concern, it was me exclusively whom he kept his eye on, following me all the way to the truck and back, and whom he picked to go first even if, by rights, there were others still ahead of me in the queue. In the end, there was almost an understanding between us, we had got the measure of one another, and I noticed his face bore what was almost a smile of satisfaction, encouragement, even, dare I say, a pride of sorts, and from a certain perspective, I had to acknowledge, with good reason, for indeed, tottering, stooping though I might have been, my eyes seeing black spots, I did manage to hold out, coming and going, fetching and carrying, all without dropping a single further bag, and that, when it comes down to it, I would have to admit, proved him right. On the other hand, by the end of the day I felt that something within me had broken down irreparably; from then on, every morning I believed that would be the last morning I would get up; with every step I took, that I could not possibly take another; with every movement I made, that I would be incapable of making another. (169–70)

The Todt supervisor's lesson is that even after the torture ends, the torturer's life-negating power remains active inside Gyorgy. It assumes the form of the broken-down "something within" that makes Gyorgy think each morning, step, and movement will be his last.

In his Nobel Banquet speech, Kertész conceives of the survivor as a contributor to society who has his own lesson to teach:

The . . . survivor . . . asks the question: what is he bequeathing, what is his spiritual legacy? Has he enriched human knowledge with his tale of

10. Imre Kertész, *Fatelessness*, trans. Tim Wilkinson (New York: Vintage International, 2004), 168. Subsequent references are included in the body of this text.

suffering? Or has he only born witness to the unimaginable degradation of the human being, in which there is no lesson, and which ought to be forgotten as quickly as possible?

. . . if you now ask me what still keeps me here on this earth, what keeps me alive, then, I would answer without any hesitation: love.¹¹

Kertész's comment suggests that we read his novel not as a gratuitous depiction of "unimaginable degradation" but as an enriching bequeathal of a "spiritual legacy." How then can we understand *Fatelessness* as Kertész's legacy and as an indication of his enduring capacity for love? This is the question I will take up in what follows, arguing that the specifically dialogical structure of Kertész's representation of his past transforms the degradations depicted on the level of plot into a narrative about a livable future, and it does so by marking and crossing certain internal and external borders.

Before he became a writer, Kertész was visited not by a literary but by an "existential" inspiration. In his Nobel Lecture he asks,

Why do we write? Here, too, I was lucky, for it never occurred to me that when it came to this question, one had a choice. I described a relevant incident in my novel *Failure*. I stood in the empty corridor of an office building, and all that happened was that from the direction of another, intersecting corridor I heard echoing footsteps. A strange excitement took hold of me. The sound grew louder and louder, and though they were clearly the steps of a single, unseen person, I suddenly had the feeling that I was hearing the footsteps of thousands. It was as if a huge procession was pounding its way down that corridor. And at that point I perceived the irresistible attraction of those footfalls, that marching multitude. In a single moment I understood the ecstasy of self-abandonment, the intoxicating pleasure of melting into the crowd—what Nietzsche called, in a different context though relevantly for this moment too, a Dionysian experience. It was almost as though some physical force were pushing me, pulling me toward the unseen marching columns. I felt I had to stand back and press against the wall, to keep me from yielding to this magnetic, seductive force.

I have related this intense moment as I (had) experienced it. The source from which it sprang, like a vision, seemed somewhere outside of me, not in me. Every artist is familiar with such moments. At one time

11. Imre Kertész, "Banquet Speech," *Nobelprize.org*, June 18, 2010, http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/2002/kertesz-speech.html.

they were called sudden inspirations. Still, I wouldn't classify the experience as an artistic revelation, but rather as an existential self-discovery. What I gained from it was not my art—its tools would not be mine for some time—but my life, which I had almost lost. The experience was about solitude, a more difficult life, and . . . the need to step out of the mesmerizing crowd, out of History, which renders you faceless and fateless.¹²

In this visionary moment, Kertész gains an insight into himself that appears to originate in the outside world, a discovery via indirection, of his “faceless” self. Kertész links his facelessness to a loss of individuality and personal destiny resulting from the impersonal operations of “History” upon him. There is also a more intimate experience associated with being fateless and faceless: that of shame, which, as the following passage indicates, is closely related to the interruption of Kertész's connection to his past. Kertész continues, “To my horror, I realized that ten years after I had returned from the Nazi concentration camps, and halfway still under the awful spell of Stalinist terror, all that remained of the whole experience were a few muddled impressions, a few anecdotes. Like it didn't even happen to me, as people are wont to say.”¹³ A decade after liberation, Kertész's past had become inaccessible to him: he had forgotten most of it, and what he remembered he was dissociated from—his memories seemed not to belong to him: “[l]ike it didn't even happen.” Kertész links his sense of loss to the forgotten traumatic events and to the feelings those events later give rise to.

“[S]peaking of the twenty minutes spent on the arrival platform of the Birkenau extermination camp—the time it took people clambering down from the train to reach the officer doing the selecting,”¹⁴ Kertész writes,

I more or less remembered the twenty minutes, but the novel demanded that I distrust my memory. No matter how many survivors' accounts, reminiscences and confessions I had read, they all agreed that everything proceeded all too quickly and unnoticeably [*sic*]. The doors of the railroad cars were flung open, they heard shouts, the barking of dogs, men and women were abruptly separated, and in the midst of the hubbub, they

12. Imre Kertész, “Nobel Lecture—Literature 2002,” *Nobelprize.org*, June 18, 2010, http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/2002/kerteszh-lecture-e.html.

13. *Ibid.*

14. *Ibid.*

found themselves in front of an officer. He cast a fleeting glance at them, pointed to something with his outstretched arm, and before they knew it they were wearing prison clothes.

. . . I came upon a series of photographs of human cargo arriving at the Birkenau railroad platform—photographs taken by an SS soldier and found by American soldiers in a former SS barracks in the already liberated camp at Dachau. I looked at these photographs in utter amazement. I saw lovely, smiling women and bright-eyed young men, all of them well-intentioned, eager to cooperate. Now I understood how and why those humiliating twenty minutes of idleness and helplessness faded from their memories. And when I thought how all this was repeated the same way for days, weeks, months and years on end, I gained an insight into the mechanism of horror; I learned how it became possible to turn human nature against one's own life.¹⁵

The parallels between the past and his present situation enabled Kertész to understand the disappearance of “their”—read: his—humiliating memories. Of living in socialist Hungary, he writes, “I saw how an entire nation could be made to deny its ideals, and watched the early, cautious moves toward accommodation. I understood that hope is an instrument of evil, and the Kantian categorical imperative—ethics in general—is but the pliable handmaiden of self-preservation.”¹⁶ The evocative present historical moment set Kertész on the path of “discovering”—rather than remembering—his prior experience of accommodation. In an interview he stated,

I don't see a difference between autobiography and fiction. When I begin to narrate what happened to me, it already becomes something different than what actually happened. It begins to develop a shape. My memories change and so do I. The writer is really a deceiver: He narrates what he experienced and changes in the process. Through this exchange of matter between himself and reality he frees himself from injuries that others carry around with themselves for life.

To survive the concentration camp, I must follow its logic. This voluntary or involuntary collaboration is the biggest shame of the survivor; he cannot admit it. The writer can. For literature possesses a special honesty. Those are simply good sentences, you know. Good sentences

15. *Ibid.*

16. *Ibid.*

are more important in this case than my own shame. *Fatelessness* is not a cheerful novel, but I experienced much joy while writing it.¹⁷

Kertész's description of his shame as an "injury" recalls the breakdown Gyorgy suffers when the gaze of the SS's man becomes installed within him. Insofar as shame is an internal iteration of this hostile external relation, it reveals the virulence of the hostile other, which produces new versions of itself long after the literal cessation of persecution. The exchange of matter between the writer and reality, which is a translation of "*Stoffwechsel* [metabolism]," indicates that Kertész's well-constructed sentences do not heal his "wound" of shame so much as "free" him from it by changing its location through externalization, the very process that also characterized Kertész's "existential self-discovery."

In what follows I will trace how Kertész's narrative unfolds in three stages, each of which represents a distinct form and moment of externalization. Taken together, they chart the trajectory of Gyorgy's progress toward successful metabolization of his shame. As we will see, when considered in relation to shame, the novel indicates the power of symbolic forms of expression to contain the survivor's self-subverting emotions in ways that will enable Gyorgy to satisfy his preeminent need to regain his autonomy and to establish bonds of love.

J. Hillis Miller points out the "disjunction [in the novel] between the language of the experiencing I and the language of the narrating I."¹⁸

17. Jörg Plath, "Mein Leben ist eine Fiktion," *Der Tagesspiegel*, October 10, 2006, <http://www.tagesspiegel.de/kultur/mein-leben-ist-eine-fiktion/761282.html>, my translation.

Ich sehe keinen Unterschied zwischen Autobiografie und Fiktion. Wenn ich anfangs zu erzählen, was mir passiert ist, wird es schon etwas anderes als das, was wirklich passiert ist. Es beginnt, eine Form zu entwickeln. Meine Erinnerungen verändern sich und ich mich auch. Der Schriftsteller ist eigentlich ein Tauscher: Er erzählt das Erlebte und verändert sich dadurch. Durch diesen Stoffwechsel mit der Wirklichkeit befreit er sich von Verletzungen, die andere ein Leben lang mit sich herumtragen.

Wenn ich im Konzentrationslager überleben will, muss ich seiner Logik folgen. Diese willentliche oder nicht willentliche Kollaboration ist die größte Schande des Überlebenden, er kann sie nicht eingestehen. Der Schriftsteller kann es. Denn die Literatur besitzt eine besondere Aufrichtigkeit. Das sind einfach gute Sätze, wissen Sie. Gute Sätze sind in diesem Fall viel wichtiger als meine eigene Schande. Der „Roman eines Schicksallosen“ ist kein heiterer Roman. Aber er hat mir beim Schreiben sehr viel Freude gemacht.

18. J. Hillis Miller, "Imre Kertész's *Fatelessness*: Fiction as Testimony," in *After Testimony: The Ethics and Aesthetics of Holocaust Narrative for the Future*, ed. Jakob Lothe, Susan Rubin Suleiman, and James Phelan (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2012).

This disjunction is temporal. It implies the existence of a gap or delay between Gyorgy's experiencing of the events and the time of their narration. In what I designate as the first stage of Gyorgy's metabolizing narrative, Gyorgy restricts the focus of his "narrating I" to the immediate present, that is, to the time of the events as they are occurring. In other words, the "narrating I" comes as close as possible to merging with the "experiencing I," which enables it to avoid reflecting upon the later emotional impact of those experiences. This flight into the past aligns the narrative perspective with the temporality of the narrated events. As was also the case in Wilkomirski's text, the focus on the past is a means of avoiding present emotional conflicts that are the by-products of past trauma. At the same time, the draining of affect from the scene brings into view what is not named: the cutting of ties to one's fellow humans that in retrospect becomes a source of shame.

This first stage of externalization is characterized by dissociation and spans the time before and during Gyorgy's persecution. It exemplifies the defensive response to traumatic events that Judith Herman has analyzed in her study of survivors of trauma. Herman writes that through dissociation,

[e]vents continue to register in awareness, but it is as though these events have been disconnected from their ordinary meanings. Perceptions may be numbed or distorted, with partial anesthesia or the loss of particular sensations. . . . The person may feel as though the event is not happening to her, as though she is observing from outside her body, or as though the whole experience is a bad dream from which she will shortly awaken. These perceptual changes combine with a feeling of indifference, emotional detachment, and profound passivity in which the person relinquishes all initiative and struggle.¹⁹

Gyorgy relates the events leading to and during his incarceration stripped of all affect but the feeling of wanting to avoid feeling. In this sense his narrative captures the dissociation by which Gyorgy survived the individual moments that made up the continual trauma of his persecution. At the same time, the disassociation Herman identifies as a *response* to trauma as it occurs has implications for *the trauma of the aftermath* as Prager has analyzed it. Specifically, the absence of reflection by Gyorgy's "narrating I" upon the "experiencing I" can be read as illustrating not only the

19. Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 42–43.

defense mechanism that enabled Gyorgy to survive traumatization as it was occurring, but also the erasure of the affect of shame that develops when past situations are perceived through the lens of the present.²⁰

Consider, for example, Gyorgy's account of the day and evening before his father's departure for labor service, when neighbors and family members, including Gyorgy's paternal grandparents, come to say their good-byes to Gyorgy's father. Gyorgy describes his stepmother's expressions of grief: "She even moved a hand in my direction, and I half feared that she might perhaps be wanting to hug me. She didn't do so in the end, just let out a deep sigh, with a long, tremulous release of breath. I noticed her eyes moistening as well. It was awkward. After that, I was allowed to go" (4). Gyorgy confines his description to his stepmother's physical actions and reactions, divorcing them from their emotional content, which he clearly does not want to register. He also does not indicate what role he might have played in discouraging his stepmother from reaching out to him. He narrates the farewell scene between his father and himself with a similar detachment:

I found myself enfolded between his arms, his hug catching me off guard and somehow unprepared after all he had said. I don't know if my tears stemmed from that or simply from exhaustion, or maybe even because, ever since the first exhortation that I had received that morning from my stepmother, I had somehow been preparing all along to shed them unflinchingly; whatever the reason, it was nevertheless good that this was indeed what happened, and I sensed that it also gratified Father to see them. (26)

Gyorgy's tears become a springboard for intellectualization. He speculates on their occasioning circumstances, which could be his psychological state of lowered defensiveness ("his hug catching me off guard"); his physiological condition ("exhaustion"); or his predilection for defensive anticipation ("I had somehow been preparing"). Judging his tears is also a mediating activity, because judgment itself is an intellectual act and because it enables him to assume what he imagines to be his father's point of view. Each of these responses enables Gyorgy to divorce himself emotionally from his father's departure as it is occurring. His need to do so is urgent; it trumps his desire *for* his father. Of the time when his father

20. This is the very experience of forgetting that Kertész described in relation to situations such as the photographed *Selektion*.

strokes his head, he writes, "At that touch, for the first time today, something choked in my throat too, though it was not tears, more a kind of queasiness. I would have rather my father had no longer been here" (15).

Commenting on his grandfather's behavior, Gyorgy notes, "What stayed with me as maybe the strangest experience of that entire evening was Grandfather's sole act to draw attention to himself when he pressed his tiny, sharply defined bird's head for no more than an instant, but really fiercely, almost crazily, to the breast of my father's jacket. His entire body was racked by a spasm" (24). Comparing his grandfather's actions to those of a bird and restricting his focus to his grandfather's physical movements creates a distancing effect. Nevertheless, that the scene stays with Gyorgy in spite of his attempt to emphasize its "strangeness" indicates that there is something too familiar about it; it hits too close to home. Try as he may, Gyorgy fails to titrate all of his emotion from the scene: the diminutive, "tiny," expresses Gyorgy's perception of his grandfather's vulnerability, while the disparity between the grandfather's physical size and the spasms that grip him intimate Gyorgy's awareness of a depth of anguish that is reinforced through the verb "rack," which indicates that his grandfather's reaction has both a physical and an emotional component. Although the grandfather's emotions contrast with Gyorgy's detachment, the repetitions within the two scenes of farewell invite a reading of the grandfather as Gyorgy's symbolic other: both are small, and both are analogously positioned in relation to the father. Viewed in terms of Gyorgy's efforts to dissociate from his potentially incapacitating emotions, the intensity of the grandfather's reaction can be understood as a displacement of Gyorgy's own unacknowledged despair over his father's departure.

To summarize, the dissociated narrative tone of the above passages registers both the emotional jockeying that Gyorgy performs at the time of his father's departure so as to avoid overwhelming and destabilizing despair, and his avoidance of the shame that later arose *in relation to the memory* of his earlier detachment from his father and others.

As Gyorgy's survival becomes increasingly predicated upon the deaths of others, the potential for developing a belated sense of shame also increases. In the following scene, Gyorgy narrates his first exposure to death while on the train to Auschwitz. The opening sentence of the description literally names denial as Gyorgy's method of surviving:

There is no denying that, from about the afternoon of the second day on, I . . . was constantly subjected to a particular voice coming from the

wagon behind us: not exactly pleasant. The old woman, so they said in our wagon, was ill and had presumably gone mad, undoubtedly from thirst. That explanation seemed credible. Only now did I realize how right were those who had declared at the very start of the journey how fortunate it was that neither small infants nor the extremely elderly had landed up in our wagon. The old woman finally fell silent on the morning of the third day. Among our lot, it was said at the time that she had died because she could get no water. But then, we were aware that she was also sick and old, which is how everyone, including me, found the case understandable, all things considered. (74–75)

Avoiding emotional response, Gyorgy describes the trauma of the woman's death in physical terms: he cannot shut it out; it invades him aurally. His use of understatement—it was “not exactly pleasant”—opens a margin of psychological distance between the woman and himself. As in the scene of his father's departure, he intellectualizes his reaction, construing her death as “proof” of the wisdom of his fellow passengers and from it extracting reassurance that his own powers of reason have remained intact. Representing the woman's death as a logical outcome also shifts the focus away from Gyorgy himself; he can avoid thinking about the imminent threat he is under, for like the woman, he too is in danger of being driven mad from thirst. The anxiety that the woman's death triggers in Gyorgy nevertheless registers in his euphemistic description of it as a “falling silent,” words that also egocentrically construe the death in terms of the relief it affords him. He had reacted similarly to the woman's vocalizing of anguish, thinking only of his own good fortune in there being no children or elderly people present in his wagon.

Throughout his descriptions of his father's departure and the fellow train passenger's death, Gyorgy projects an image of himself as relatively invulnerable; others are more immediately imperiled than he. Later in the novel, when he has been taken to the camp infirmary, he must protect himself from the recognition that he directly profits from the death of another prisoner. Of the moment when Gyorgy was lying in the bunk beside a boy whose feverish body is warming him, he writes,

I was less enchanted with all his tossing and turning during the night, which, to be sure, did not always pay adequate consideration to my wounds. I told him as well: Hey! Cut it out, ease up there, and in the end he heeded the advice. I only saw why the next morning, when my repeated attempts to rouse him for coffee were futile. All the same, I

hastily passed his mess tin to the orderly along with my own . . . I later also accepted his bread ration on his behalf, and likewise his soup that evening, and so on for a while, until one day he began to go really strange, which was when I felt obliged finally to say something, as I could not carry on stowing him in my bed. (182)

Gyorgy never openly acknowledges that the boy's death prolonged his own survival; instead he construes the death as having occurred in response to his own wishes: "I told him . . . [c]ut it out, ease up there, and in the end he heeded the advice." Accepting the bread "on his behalf" dissimulates the fact that Gyorgy profits from the death; indeed, the phrase connotes the contrary: that he is acting in the boy's interest. Gyorgy's representation of himself effectively as a nonwitness to the deaths of the old woman and the boy in the infirmary thus enables him to dissociate from a potentially self-consuming guilt about having survived instead of others.

He has a more difficult time dissociating when his own body is invaded by agents of death. Of the time he was lying on a bunk with suppurating wounds on his hip and knee, he writes,

Still, the biggest surprise of all was the consternation, then horror, of feeling a sudden tickling sensation on my hip and then, on lifting the paper bandage, seeing they [the lice] were now on my open flesh there, feeding on the wound. I tried to snatch them away, get rid of them, at least root and winkle them out, compel them to wait and be patient at least a little bit longer, but I have to admit that never before had I sensed a more hopeless struggle or a more stubborn, even, so to say, more brazen resistance than this. After a while, indeed, I gave up and just watched the gluttony, the teeming, the voracity, the appetite, the unconcealed happiness; in a manner of speaking, it was as though it were vaguely familiar to me from somewhere. Even so, I realized that, to some extent, and taking everything into account, I could see it their way. In the end, I almost felt relieved, even my sense of revulsion very nearly passed. I was still not pleased, still remained a little bit bitter about it, understandably enough I think, but now it was somehow more generalized, without acrimony, in acquiescing to a degree in nature's larger scheme, if I may put it that way; in any event, I quickly covered the wound up and subsequently no longer engaged in combat with them, no longer disturbed them. (183)

The horror of this scene is not only that Gyorgy is being eaten alive, but

that he *feels* and *sees* that he is being eaten alive. The feel and sight of the infested wound is horrifying, because it reminds him of his helplessness as a victim and also of the hopelessness of his situation. When he gives up struggling against the vermin and instead just watches them, the spectacle is “vaguely familiar,” which suggests that he sees an image of himself in the vermin. This may be because the spectacle mirrors his own dehumanizing struggle to survive, which, as has been discussed, requires that Gyorgy, like the vermin, feed off other prisoners’ lives. In this sense the spectacle reveals to Gyorgy a *divided* image of himself; he is both victim and victimizer, wound and vermin. I understand the “bitterness” that remains as a sign of the difficulty he has dissociating from feelings of anger and shame because of this division. In this regard Gyorgy’s covering of his wound is emblematic of the performative impact of *Fatelessness*, insofar as the text “covers” the injury of Kertész’s emotions by displacing them into a narrative about a fictional other.

Also while in the infirmary where he discovers his vermin, Gyorgy finds himself in the position of owing the continuation of his life to the death of another boy. An orderly substitutes the other boy for Gyorgy when Gyorgy has been summoned, presumably to be murdered because his injury will make it impossible for him to participate in the evacuation of the camp on foot. Gyorgy rationalizes the situation by invoking an abstract ideal: “it had all happened in due accord with justice (that was my opinion, at any rate), as I had been longer in the room, after all” (233).

Toward the end of the novel, the concentration camp is liberated, and Gyorgy sets off for his home in Budapest. With liberation, “something loosened up inside,” as a result of which he becomes more reflective than he could be as a prisoner (236). Once he reaches the city, he begins to describe his camp experiences to the people who engage him in conversation. In the course of these conversations, it becomes evident that with this “loosening up,” the feelings that emerge in relation to his fresh memory of his persecution threaten to hamper his successful return to a place in the community.

In his first exchange, Gyorgy is mostly reactive. He responds to a Holocaust denier’s queries about the gas chambers. The man dictates the terms in which Gyorgy speaks about his experience. Given that he holds his first conversation with a stranger, it is understandable that Gyorgy does not challenge the man’s point of view. As a result, the man easily extracts from Gyorgy the confirmation he seeks that the gas chambers didn’t exist.

In the next discussion, Gyorgy's engagement deepens. The name of his first destination symbolically indicates that his coming home will necessarily involve memory and commemoration: he goes to Forget-me-not Road, where the family of Bandi Citrom, his friend from the camps, lives. At the family's apartment, Bandi's mother and sister tell Gyorgy that Bandi has not returned from the camps. Only Bandi's mother believes that Bandi has survived; his sister does not. Through the conversation it becomes clear that Gyorgy does not want to alienate or wound his interlocutors. Before speaking, Gyorgy first evaluates what he imagines Bandi's family members to be feeling and what he imagines they want to hear from him. For example, when he notices the sister struggling to contain her fears about Bandi's death, he is about to tell her that in his view her mother "had the clearer head, she knew Bandi Citrom better," but he "h[olds his] tongue" (245).

Riding a streetcar to his apartment building, Gyorgy next meets a journalist who engages him in extended conversation. The journalist, "his face brightening," tells Gyorgy, in reference to his persecution, "[T]he main thing is that it's over, in the past" (247). For Gyorgy it is not over. When asked what he feels about being back in his hometown, he responds, "Hatred [toward] . . . Everyone" (247). Gyorgy's willingness to converse and his mindfulness about the impact of his words on others indicate his desire to return to his community. At the same time, on the threshold of his return, the hatred he feels marks a new iteration of his shame. Hatred signifies the self's connection to something outside of itself, and for this reason, it is more bearable than the destabilizing, intra-subjective conflict that characterizes shame. According to Melvin Lansky, feelings of aggression such as hatred can be the outcome of a process of projective identification and can enable shame to be avoided:

Projective identification is instigated by the awareness, conscious or unconscious, of imminent or actual shame. An important function of projective identification, though by no means the only one, is that it is a mechanism that can in fantasy relocate one's shame and pain to the other, in the conscious or unconscious conviction that this will rid one of the problem. This aspect of projective identification consists, then, of a reversal, a turning of the tables, a reversal instigated by an incipient or actual experience of shame. Putting shame into the shamer is a common defensive maneuver and a significant component of vengefulness.²¹

21. Melvin Lansky, "The Impossibility of Forgiveness: Shame Fantasies as Instigators of

Lansky's elaboration of the mechanism of projective identification as a response to shame is useful in understanding the surfacing of hatred in Gyorgy. Projective identification comprises the second of the three stages of the externalization of Gyorgy's shame, and it informs his discussion with the journalist. In an effort to unburden himself of his shame, Gyorgy projects it outward, now displacing his inner conflict into the relation between the journalist and himself. Though the journalist tries to establish solidarity with Gyorgy by expressing his appreciation of the fact that Gyorgy had endured the "hell of the camps," Gyorgy rejects such a characterization of his experience (248). In his view what happened to him was "natural" (247), meaning a piece of experience he could not disclaim by describing it in heightened metaphors. The journalist persists in seeing the camps as an aberration: "a concentration camp in itself is *unnatural*," he maintains (247, italics in original). This prompts Gyorgy to recognize that "there are some things you just can't argue about with strangers, the ignorant, with those who, in a certain sense, are mere children so to say" (248). In spite of this observation, Gyorgy continues to "argue" with this stranger:

I tried to explain how different it was, for example, to arrive in a not exactly opulent but still, on the whole, agreeable, neat, and clean station where everything becomes clear only gradually, sequentially over time, step-by-step. By the time one has passed a given step, put it behind one, the next one is already there. By the time one knows everything, one has already understood it all. And while one is coming to understand everything, a person does not remain idle: he is already attending to his new business, living, acting, moving, carrying out each new demand at each new stage. Were it not for that sequencing in time, and were the entire knowledge to crash in upon a person on the spot, at one fell swoop, it might well be that neither one's brain nor one's heart would cope with it. (249)

While listening to Gyorgy, the journalist fishes in his pocket for his cigarettes and offers one to Gyorgy, who refuses it; then, "having taken two deep drags, he set both elbows on his knees and leaned his upper body forward, not so much as looking at me, as he said in a somehow lackluster, flat tone, 'I see'" (249). The journalist's smoking, his physical doubling-

over, and the draining of affect from his voice express the defensiveness that Gyorgy's words have triggered. Gyorgy notices the journalist's distress but still persists. He next describes what survival entailed for those prisoners who had been in the camps for many years:

I had seen prisoners who had already been—or to be more accurate were still—in concentration camps for four, six, even twelve years. Now, those people somehow had to fill each one of those four, six, or twelve years, which in the latter case means twelve times three hundred and sixty-five days, which is to say twelve times three hundred and sixty-five times twenty-four hours, and twelve times three hundred and sixty-five times twenty-four times . . . and so on back, every second, every minute, every hour, every day of it, in its entirety. From yet another angle, though, I added, this is exactly what can also help them, because if the whole twelve times three hundred and sixty-five times twenty-four times sixty times sixtyfold chunk of time had been dumped around their necks instantaneously, at a stroke, most likely they too would have been unable to stand it, either physically or mentally, in the way they actually did manage to stand it. (250)

The journalist remains stricken. “At this, still in the same position as earlier, only now instead of holding the cigarette, which he had meanwhile discarded, with his head between his hands and in an even duller, even more choking voice, he said: ‘No, it’s impossible to imagine it’” (250). Of the time he spent observing the journalist’s reaction, Gyorgy writes, “For my part, I could see that [it was impossible to imagine the situation], and I even thought to myself: so, that must be why they prefer to talk about hell instead” (250). In an effort to compose himself reminiscent of Gyorgy’s own reliance on parsing time, the journalist “straightened up, looked at his watch, and his expression changed” (250). He also tells Gyorgy that that he works for a “‘democratic paper,’” as if to assert his absence of involvement in Gyorgy’s victimization (250).

Although Gyorgy recognizes the journalist as one of the naïve and ignorant who are incapable of understanding the experiences of the victims, the fact that Gyorgy persists in arguing with him may signify that he is in the throes of projecting his “shame into the shamer.”²² Gyorgy does not intentionally set out to do this, but his overwhelming of the journalist’s imagination suggests that unconsciously this is what is occur-

22. *Ibid.*

ring. And while he does not derive perceptible gratification from the exchange, he also does not shy away from the opportunity it presents.

An earlier scene in the novel anticipates this means of displacing shame onto the shamer. Of the moments spent passing through a bombed-out city along the Elbe River where the inhabitants are existing among the ruins, Gyorgy writes, “I tried to take pleasure at that sight, naturally, only I could not help being made to feel—by the selfsame people—somewhat uneasy at doing so” (240). Though he attributes the check on his gratification to the inhabitants themselves, given that they are passive objects of his gaze, his uneasiness must be an expression of an inner inhibition against acting on his vengeful impulse. As such, this scene reveals the internal conflict that now hampers Gyorgy’s return to his community: on the one hand, he seeks to unburden himself of his shame through projective identification; on the other hand, he is unable to sustain his objectifying displacement onto others, because it alienates him from the very community he needs.

After leaving the journalist, Gyorgy returns to his former apartment building, where he meets two neighbors. The men tell him about his father’s death in Mauthausen and his stepmother’s recent marriage. In a manner reminiscent of the journalist’s, they urge him to ““put the horrors behind [him]”” so that he can move on with his life (256). As in his conversation with the journalist, Gyorgy does not accept their characterization of his experience or their advice to him. He remarks that in the camps he “didn’t notice any atrocities,” a comment that emphasizes the disparity between the immediacy of his lived reality and the abstractness of their characterization of that reality as filled with “atrocities” (256).

When the neighbors express their incomprehension at Gyorgy’s reaction, Gyorgy responds by asking about what *they* did during those “hard times.” They answer that they ““tried to survive,”” which prompts Gyorgy to point out that “[t]hey too had taken one step at a time” (257). He illustrates his point about their survival by referring to the physical stepping of the prisoners during the selection process at Auschwitz:

For each train—and I am not saying it was always necessarily this number, since I have no way of knowing—but at any rate in our case you have to reckon on around three thousand people. Take the men among them—a thousand, let’s say. For the sake of the example, you can reckon on one or two seconds per case, more often one than two. Ignore the very first and very last, because they don’t count; but in the middle, where I too was standing, you would therefore have to allow ten to

twenty minutes before you reach the point where it is decided whether it will be gas immediately or a reprieve for the time being. Now, all this time the queue is constantly moving, progressing, and everyone is taking steps, bigger or smaller ones, depending on what the speed of the operation demands. (257)

As in his conversation with the journalist, Gyorgy narrates these events from a perspective that enables him to assert his agency: the past consists of a series of steps he had taken in a larger “operation” in which he participated. But what distinguishes this dialogue from the first one is that Gyorgy converses with people who had been a part of his life before his deportation. Whereas in conversation with the journalist he acknowledged his hatred in general terms, his accusations are now focused and personal. He tells his former neighbors,

[E]very one of those minutes might in fact have brought something new. In reality it didn't, naturally, but still, one must acknowledge that it might have; when it comes down to it, each and every minute something else might have happened other than what actually did happen, at Auschwitz just as much as, let's suppose, here at home, when we took leave of my father. (258)

Gyorgy first introduces the question of blame in a hypothetical formulation—“let's suppose”—and also includes himself among those who had facilitated his father's capture. As he continues, his conclusions become at once more universal and more targeted:

I could no longer be satisfied with the notion that it had all been a mistake, blind fortune, some kind of blunder, let alone that it had not even happened . . . I made it clear to them that we can never start a new life, only ever carry on the old one. I took the steps, no one else, and I declared that I had been true to my given fate throughout. The sole blot, or one might say fly in the ointment, the sole accident with which they might reproach me was the fact that we should be sitting there talking now—but then I couldn't help that. Did they want this whole honesty and all the previous steps I had taken to lose all meaning? Why this sudden about-face, this refusal to accept? Why did they not wish to acknowledge that if there is such a thing as fate, then freedom is not possible? If, on the other hand . . . there is such a thing as freedom, then there is no fate . . . that is to say, then we ourselves are fate. . . . It was

impossible, they must try and understand, impossible to take everything away from me, impossible for me to be neither winner nor loser, for me not to be right and for me not to be mistaken that I was neither the cause nor the effect of anything; they should try to see, I almost pleaded, that I could not swallow that idiotic bitterness, that I should merely be innocent. (259–61)

Gyorgy's hatred has given way to "bitterness" that he now wants to avoid, indicating a shift in his attitude.²³ Regarding himself as having been "innocent" in the past would mean holding his mother, his neighbors, and his entire community responsible for not having protected him from victimization, a view Gyorgy does not want to entertain. Hence the modulation of hatred into "bitterness," an indication of Gyorgy's refusal to engage in a dynamics of blame and of his desire to achieve a stance of openness toward the very social body he needs to rejoin. Given this emotional shift, we can understand Gyorgy's comment about his one reproachable act—having had this conversation in the first place—as a reflection of his desire to move into a position of even greater openness so as to shield others from accusation and himself from isolating bitterness.

Initially one of the men understands that Gyorgy's accusations originate out of his need to unburden himself. He restrains the other neighbor (called Uncle Steiner as a term of familiarity though he is not Gyorgy's blood relation) from taking Gyorgy's words as an affront. Of this moment, Gyorgy writes: "I saw that every now and then Uncle Steiner was about to interrupt or elsewhere about to jump to his feet, but I saw the other old man restraining him, heard him saying, 'Leave him be! Can't you see he only wants to talk? Let him talk! Just leave him be!'" (259). Notwithstanding his desire to control his vengeful feelings, the ensuing conversation demonstrates how they still dominate him: the inclusive and equivocal "we" of the passage above gives way to an overtly accusatory "they" in the passage below. Once Gyorgy intimates that the neighbors were accessories to his and his father's deportation, their forbearance ends. He tells them:

They too had taken their own steps. They too had known, foreseen, everything beforehand, they too had said farewell to my father as if

23. The bitterness also echoes the feeling that remains when his wound was infested with vermin. In that scene he was also struggling to dissociate his shame and anger.

we had already buried him, and even later on all they [the neighbors] had squabbled about was whether I should take the suburban train or the bus to Auschwitz. . . . At this point not only Uncle Steiner but old Fleischmann as well jumped to his feet. Even now he was still striving to restrain himself, but was no longer capable of doing so: "What!" he bawled, his face was red as a beetroot and beating his chest with his fist: "So it's us who're the guilty ones, is it? Us, the victims!" (260)

Fleishmann, initially the most understanding of the two neighbors, now also loses control; his face reddens and he begins pounding his chest, an equivocal gesture that could signify a self-flagellation or a displaced impulse to accost Gyorgy. Seeing that "they did not wish to understand anything" Gyorgy leaves, "in the midst of a few disjointed words and motions, one more unfinished gesture and incomplete utterance from each," all of which are signs of a traumatization reminiscent of the journalist's reaction to Gyorgy's description of survival (261).

Recognizing the influence of shame on Gyorgy's interactions adds an intrasubjective dimension to the "contemporary moment" of trauma that Prager identifies with the community's failure to provide support. Shame attests to the presence of the other *within* Gyorgy, in the form of his conscience, which belatedly judges—and condemns—his past actions according to standards that derive from the present. This second stage of the metabolization of shame, characterized by its conversion through projective identification into hatred, thus pits Gyorgy against the very community he wants to rejoin, and therefore, against himself.

If *Fatelessness* had concluded with Gyorgy's conversations with the members of the community, the foregoing discussion of shame and its transformation into hatred would affirm the pessimism that critics identify with the authorial perspective as regards Gyorgy's future. But the novel continues for a few paragraphs, and in so doing inaugurates a third stage in the metamorphosis of Gyorgy's shame, one that intimates the possibility of a more hopeful future. Leaving his former apartment building, Gyorgy observes,

Down below I was greeted by the street. I needed to take a streetcar to my mother's place, but now it dawned on me that I had no money of course, so I decided to walk. In order to gather my strength, I paused for a minute. . . . Over ahead, in the direction that I would need to take, where the street appeared to lengthen, expand, and fade away into infinity, the fleecy clouds over the indigo hills were already turning purple

and the sky, a shade of claret. Around me it was as if something had changed: the traffic had dwindled, people's steps had slowed, their voices become quieter, their features grown softer, and it was as if their faces were turning toward one another. (261)

As Gyorgy beholds the view, he endows it with extension and dynamism: the street appears to continue forever, the colors of the clouds and the sky are in transition, and there is a general appearance of change. The movement in this spectacle reflects Gyorgy's dawning sense of time as slowing and of the future as opening. The thinning of the traffic and the slowing pace of the pedestrians could also be seen as figuring a psychological expansion.

D. W. Winnicott characterizes such visions as instances of "creative apperception" which "more than anything else . . . makes the individual feel that life is worth living."²⁴ According to Winnicott, this approach to external reality is not confined to the aesthetic realm; it is a universal practice of relating to the external world. It "is present when *anyone*—baby, child, adolescent, adult, old man or woman—looks in a healthy way at anything or does anything deliberately."²⁵ Projecting himself into the spectacle before him enables Gyorgy to "gather [his] strength"; it also creates the impression that the world is receptive to him: the street "greet[s]" him. Most crucially, Gyorgy's vision of people who look "as if their faces were turning toward one another" can be understood as a projection onto the people he observes of his own desire for recognition. Appearing as Gyorgy is about to find his mother, the turning of faces toward one another brings to mind Winnicott's exploration of the significance of the mother's face as the first thing the baby sees when it begins to look. According to Winnicott, in looking at her face, the baby sees not her face, *per se*, but itself. Functioning as a mirror for the baby, the face of the mother who has adapted well enough to her infant's needs "reflects what is there to be seen" because, when "the mother is looking at the baby *what she looks like is related to what she sees there*."²⁶ This means that for the infants, who, in this early period of life, do not differentiate between themselves and their mother, the experience of looking is a means of "getting back what they are giving."²⁷ Though Gyorgy's conversations with the journalist and the neighbor reveal how the community cannot

24. D. W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (New York: Routledge Classics, 2005), 87.

25. *Ibid.*, 92.

26. *Ibid.*, 151–58 (italics in original).

27. *Ibid.*, 151.

function as his mirror, his capacity to become enlivened by viewing the street may be what saves him from himself, insofar as viewing reflects back to him, in a containing form, what *he* is giving. The scene suggests how, through creative apperception, Gyorgy *externalizes* potentially destabilizing emotions in a *nonthreatening* perceptual exchange; it is Gyorgy's (as yet) *unmet* desire for recognition that colors his perception of the faces turning toward one another. Given this, we could say that creative apperception affords psychic relief by expressing, at a *distance*, Gyorgy's unfulfilled desire. Before setting out to find his mother, he makes one final observation:

Yes, as I looked around this placid, twilight square, this street, weather-beaten yet full of a thousand promises, I was already feeling a growing and accumulating readiness to continue my uncontinuable life. My mother was waiting, and would no doubt greatly rejoice over me. I recollect that she had once conceived a plan that I should be an engineer, a doctor, or something like that. No doubt that is how it will be, just as she wished; there is nothing impossible that we do not live through naturally, and keeping a watch on me on my on my journey, like some inescapable trap, I already know there will be happiness. For even there, next to the chimneys, in the intervals between the torments, there was something that resembled happiness. Everyone asks only about the hardships and the "atrocities," whereas for me perhaps it is that experience which will remain the most memorable. Yes, the next time I am asked, I ought to speak about that, the happiness of the concentration camps.

If indeed I am asked. And provided I myself don't forget. (262)

This concluding paragraph of the novel indicates that the future may well hold happiness. Gyorgy's "growing readiness" to move forward results from his ability to apperceive creatively. In the pause before he takes his next step, he sees a square "full of a thousand promises." Considered together, the above two reflective interludes of looking, which themselves are like the pauses between Gyorgy's steps of accommodation, raise the possibility that in the aftermath of survival, Gyorgy may be able to "[retain] something personal, perhaps secret, that is unmistakably" himself, while complying with the demands of external reality.²⁸ That Gyorgy recognizes the compatibility of accommodating to his mother's

28. D.W. Winnicott, *Home Is Where We Start From: Essays by a Psychoanalyst* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1986), 43.

wishes and to “that inescapable trap” of happiness lends support to the notion that creative apperception can create a secret, containing space for dissociated emotions.

The following passage reveals how the creation of this space of difference within Gyorgy now enables him to play host to nonthreatening others. Gyorgy muses,

It was that peculiar hour, I recognized even now, even here—my favorite hour in the camp, and I was seized by a sharp, painful, futile longing for it: nostalgia, homesickness. Suddenly, it sprang to life, it was all here and bubbling inside me, all its strange moods surprised me, its fragmentary memories set me trembling. Yes, in a certain sense, life there had been clearer and simpler. Everything came back to mind, and I considered everyone in turn, both those who were of no interest as well as those whose only recognition would come in this reckoning, the fact that I was here. (261)

Gyorgy’s very existence—“the fact that I was here”—comprises the “only recognition” of the dead: the woman on the train, the two boys in the infirmary, and even, perhaps, his father. In this regard it could be said that creative apperception makes it possible for Gyorgy to preserve the memory of others’ deaths within himself. By the same token, his recognition of the dead is a “reckoning” that is not synonymous with mourning. Because Gyorgy’s very survival was an untenable reckoning—the loss of another’s life was his gain—mourning is foreclosed, insofar as it would require that Gyorgy retrospectively confront his shame about his collusion, under duress, in those deaths. The alternative to mourning is thus to keep the dead alive *inside* of himself: “Suddenly, it sprang to life, it was all here and bubbling inside me.” This makes Gyorgy a living site of death with an internal custodial bond to the dead.

The opening of a memorial site of death *within* Gyorgy, enabled through creative apperception, reveals something about the relationship between Kertész’s shame and his writing. An elaborated form of creative apperception, writing is not an antidote, but a strengthening supplement, to shame. The creation of a fictional other in Gyorgy enables Kertész to distance himself from his shame so that he can recognize the deceased, who would otherwise vanish.

In his Nobel Banquet speech Kertész draws upon a figure from Greek mythology to characterize his relation to his past in terms that indicate an image of himself as a living site of death. He states, “I have seen the

true visage of this dreadful century, I have gazed into the eye of the Gorgon, and have been able to keep on living. Yet, I knew I would never be able to free myself from the sight; I knew this visage would always hold me captive.” It can be no accident that Kertész invokes, to characterize his condition, the very image that Primo Levi uses to describe the prisoners who died in spirit before their bodies died. Levi writes that the *Muselmänner* “saw the Gorgon.”²⁹ But whereas Levi insists that either they “have not returned to tell about it or have returned mute,”³⁰ Kertész’s self-portrait indicates that, even after gazing into the eye of the Gorgon, he was “able to keep on living.” His words suggest not that he avoids the metamorphosis into stone, but rather that his awareness of the deadly transformation he undergoes paradoxically enables him to outlive it. His survival is thus a question of knowledge: “Yet, I *knew* I would never be able to free myself from the sight; I *knew* this visage would always hold me captive” (my italics).

Whereas Levi invokes the myth of the Gorgon to signify the furthest reaches of the victim’s desubjectification, emphasizing the gap that separates *him* as a survivor from the “true witnesses”—the *Muselmänner*—Kertész’s reappropriation of the Gorgon myth simultaneously inflects it with an alternate self–other relation. Levi bears witness “in their stead,” that is, instead of the *Muselmänner*; Kertész, by contrast, conceives of himself as a living *Muselmann*. Kertész relates an occurrence that affirms the aptness of the image of himself as a living *Muselmann*. While Kertész was preparing his Nobel Prize Lecture, the director of the Buchenwald Memorial center sent him a copy of a daily report mistakenly listing “the death of Prisoner #64,921,” which was the number Kertész was assigned in the camps; about this erroneous announcement of his own death Kertész comments, “I died once, so I could live. Perhaps that is my real story. If it is, I dedicate this work, born of a child’s death, to the millions who died and to those who still remember them.”³¹ In the scene in which Gyorgy conceals the corpse in his bed, he executes to the letter what Levi describes in *Survival in Auschwitz* as the emblematic state of the *Muselmann*. Levi writes:

It is man who kills, man who creates or suffers injustice; it is no longer man who, having lost all restraint, shares his bed with a corpse. Whoever waits for his neighbour to die in order to take his piece of bread is, albeit

29. Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 83.

30. *Ibid.*, 83–84.

31. Kertész, “Nobel Lecture—Literature 2002.”

guiltless, further from the model of thinking man than the most primitive pigmy or the most vicious sadist.

Part of our existence lies in the feelings of those near to us. That is why the experience of someone who has lived for days during which man was merely a thing in the eyes of man is non-human.³²

Levi's "non-human" is Gyorgy, Kertész's fictional other, whose very dissociation from feelings of shame reflects his most human need to reassume the place he lost in his community and to do so by becoming a living site of the dead.

As a survivor of his encounter with the Gorgon, Kertész is a modern Perseus. Whereas Perseus could avoid the gaze of the Gorgon, Kertész could not, but he outlived his transformation nevertheless, existing *as* a man of stone. It could be said that the elegiac capacity of Kertész's text, dedicated as it is to those who died, including Kertész himself, makes such an existence possible. In this regard, Italo Calvino's commentary on Perseus is apt:

The relationship between Perseus and the Gorgon is a complex one and does not end with the beheading of the monster. Medusa's blood gives birth to a winged horse, Pegasus—the heaviness of stone is transformed into its opposite. With one blow of his hoof on Mount Helicon, Pegasus makes a spring gush forth, where the Muses drink. In certain versions of the myth, it is Perseus who rides the miraculous Pegasus, so dear to the Muses, born from the accursed blood of Medusa. (Even the winged sandals, incidentally, come from the world of monsters, for Perseus obtained them from Medusa's sisters, the Graiae, who had one tooth and one eye among them.) As for the severed head, Perseus does not abandon it but carries it concealed in a bag. . . . Here, certainly, the myth is telling us something, something implicit in the images that can't be explained in any other way. Perseus succeeds in mastering that horrendous face by keeping it hidden, just as in the first place he vanquished it by viewing it in a mirror. Perseus's strength always lies in a refusal to look directly, but not in a refusal of the reality in which he is fated to live; he carries the reality with him and accepts it as his particular burden.³³

Like the concealing bag that Perseus keeps with him, *Fatelessness* per-

32. Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz*, 171–72.

33. Italo Calvino, *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*, trans. Esther Calvino (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 5.

forms a holding function, containing within its pages a story steeped in the Medusan blood of dissociated shame. Calvino calls attention to the power that comes to Perseus precisely because he keeps the Medusa head with him: “When his enemies are about to overcome him, he has only to display it, holding it by its snaky locks, and this bloodstained booty becomes an invincible weapon in the hero’s hand.”³⁴ A passage in *Fatelessness*, about Gyorgy’s detention before his deportation, reads as an allegory of the novel’s analogous apotropaic power. In the customs post where he is being held shortly after his arrest on the streets of Budapest, Gyorgy notices a few interesting faces. “One of them . . . did not join in the conversation, for instance, but instead merely read a book that, it seems, he just happened to have with him. He was a very tall, gaunt guy in a yellow windbreaker, with a sharp slit of a mouth stretching between two deep, ill-tempered-looking furrows in his bristly face” (47). The perpendicular lines of the man’s face in relation to the straight line of his mouth form the letter “U,” the signifier that Hungarian concentration camp prisoners wore on their chests. The symbolic letter, along with the man’s gauntness and his yellow jacket, reminiscent of the yellow badge Jews were made to wear, makes it likely that he is a figure or double of Kertész.³⁵ When the prisoners are eventually marched out of the building, the man makes “a single long leap . . . he was off to the side, lost somewhere in the seething eddy of machines and humanity” (55). The allegorical author escapes to freedom, thanks to the Medusan book he possesses, which endows him with the ability to fend off his enemies. Read as a self-reflexive commentary on Kertész’s relation to his writing, the scene represents the expressive possibilities of fiction as enabling Kertész to carry the reality of his shame with him, to accept it as his particular burden. This, in turn, makes the future—and future love—possible, “somewhere in the seething eddy of machines and humanity.”

34. Ibid.

35. This signifier later becomes an explicit topic of conversation, when an adult prisoner asks Gyorgy, “‘Do you know what this here,’ pointing to his chest, ‘this letter, [U] signifies?’ Sure I did, I told him: ‘Ungar, Hungarian.’ ‘No,’ he answered, ‘*Unschuldig*’ meaning ‘innocent,’ then gave a snort of laughter followed by prolonged nodding of the head with a brooding expression, as if the notion were somehow highly gratifying, though I have no idea why” (142–43).

B I B L I O G R A P H Y

- Abraham, Nicolas and Maria Torok. Vol. 1, *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis*, translated and edited by Nicholas Rand. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.
- Adorno, Theodor W., Else Frenkel-Brunswik, and Daniel J. Levinson. *The Authoritarian Personality*. New York: Harper & Row, 1950.
- Agamben, Giorgio. *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen. New York: Zone Books, 1999.
- Améry, Jean. *At the Mind's Limits: Contemplations by a Survivor on Auschwitz and Its Realities*, translated by Sidney Rosenfeld and Stella P. Rosenfeld. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980.
- . *On Suicide: A Discourse on Voluntary Death*, translated by John D. Barlow. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999.
- Anidjar, Gil. *The Jew, The Arab: A History of the Enemy*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003.
- Antelme, Robert. *The Human Race*, translated by Jeffrey Haight and Annie Mahler. Evanston, IL: Marlboro Press, 1992.
- Artaud, Antonin. *The Theater and Its Double*, translated by Mary Richards. New York: Grove Press, 1958.
- Bataille, Georges. *Eroticism: Death and Sensuality*, translated by Mary Dalwood. San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1986.
- Bogarde, Dirk. *An Orderly Man*. New York: Knopf, 1983.
- Browning, Christopher. *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1992.
- Calvino, Italo. *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*, translated by Esther Calvino. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988.
- Canby, Vincent. "‘Porter’ Is Romantic Pornography." *New York Times*, October 14, 1974.

- Caruth, Cathy, ed. *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995.
- Carvajal, Doreen. "A Holocaust Memoir in Doubt." *New York Times*, November 3, 1998.
- Cavani, Liliana. *The Night Porter*. DVD. Directed by Liliana Cavani. 1973; Irvington, NY: Criterion Collection, 1999.
- Chiger, Krystyna and Daniel Paisner. *The Girl in the Green Sweater: A Life in Holocaust's Shadow*. New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2009.
- Chrysostom, John. *Discourses against Judaizing Christians*, translated by Paul W. Harkins. The Fathers of the Church, 68. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1979.
- Clendinnen, Inga. *Reading the Holocaust*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- Colby, Vineta, ed. *World Authors 1980–1985*. New York: H. W. Wilson Company, 1991.
- Derwin, Susan. Review of *The Belated Witness: Literature, Testimony and the Question of Holocaust Survival*, by Michael Levine. *Modern Language Notes* 123, no. 5 (2008): 1191–94.
- Duras, Marguerite. *The War: A Memoir*, translated by Barbara Bray. New York: Pantheon Books, 1986.
- Eakin, Paul John. *Fictions in Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self-Invention*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985.
- Eskin, Blake. *A Life in Pieces: The Making and Unmaking of Benjamin Wilkomirski*. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2002.
- Evans, Julian. "A Man Apart." Books, *Guardian.co.uk*, April 22, 2006.
- Ezrahi, Sidra DeKoven. "See Under: Memory. Reflections on *When Memory Comes*." Review of *When Memory Comes*, by Saul Friedländer. *History & Memory* 9, no. 1 (1997): 364–75.
- Felman, Shoshana and Dori Laub. *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*. New York: Routledge, 1992.
- Field, Sean. "Beyond 'Healing': Trauma, Oral History and Regeneration." *Oral History* 34, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 31–42.
- Freud, Sigmund. "Beyond the Pleasure Principle." In vol. 18, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, translated and edited by James Strachey. London: Hogarth Press, 1955. 7–64.
- . *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*. Vol. 6, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, translated and edited by James Strachey. London: Hogarth Press, 1960.
- . "Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through: Further Recommendations on the Technique of Psycho-Analysis II." In vol. 12, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, translated and edited by James Strachey. London: Hogarth Press, 1958. 147–56.
- . "Screen Memories." In vol. 3, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, translated and edited by James Strachey. London: Hogarth Press, 1962. 303–22.
- Friedländer, Saul. *Quand vient le souvenir . . .*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1978.
- . *Reflections of Nazism: An Essay on Kitsch and Death*, translated by Thomas Weyr. New York: Harper & Row, 1984.

- . “Trauma, Memory, and Transference.” In *Holocaust Remembrance: The Shapes of Memory*, edited by Geoffrey Hartman. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1994. 252–63.
- . *When Memory Comes*, translated by Helen R. Lane. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1979.
- Geller, Jay. “The Wilkomirski Case: Fragments or Figments?” *American Imago* 59, no. 3 (2002): 343–65.
- Giroux, Henry. “The Challenge of Neo-Fascist Culture.” *Cineaste* 6, no. 3 (1975): 31–34.
- Gornick, Vivian. “The Rhetoric of Witness.” Review of *All Rivers Run to the Sea: Memoirs*, by Elie Wiesel. *The Nation*, December 25, 1995, 839–41.
- Gourevitch, Philip. “The Memory Thief.” *New Yorker*, June 14, 1999.
- Hartman, Geoffrey H. *The Longest Shadow: In the Aftermath of the Holocaust*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996.
- The Hebrew Bible in English*. <http://www.mechon-mamre.org/e/et/et0.htm>.
- Herman, Judith. *Trauma and Recovery*. New York: Basic Books, 1997.
- Horowitz, Sara R. *Voicing the Void: Muteness and Memory in Holocaust Fiction*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997.
- Insdorf, Annette. *Indelible Shadows: Film and the Holocaust*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- Jacobus, Mary. *Psychoanalysis and the Scene of Reading*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- “Jean Améry (Hans Maier) (1912–1978).” *Wollheim Memorial*. http://www.wollheim-memorial.de/en/jean_amry_hans_maier_19121978.
- Jones, Malcolm Jr. and Ray Sawhill. “A Classic or a Hoax?” *Newsweek*, November 16, 1998.
- Kertész, Imre. “Banquet Speech.” *Nobelprize.org*. http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/2002/kertesz-speech.html.
- . *Fatelessness*, translated by Tim Wilkinson. New York: Vintage International, 2004.
- . “Nobel Lecture—Literature 2002.” *Nobelprize.org*. http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/2002/kertesz-lecture-e.html.
- Klarsfeld, Serge. *Memorial to the Jews Deported from France 1942–1944*. New York: Beate Klarsfeld Foundation, 1983.
- Krell, Robert. “Psychological Reverberations of the Holocaust in the Lives of Child Survivors.” Monna and Otto Weinmann Lecture Series, June 5, 1997. Washington, DC: United States Holocaust Memorial Council, Third Printing, August 2002. <http://www.ushmm.org/research/center/publications/occasional/1997-01/paper.pdf>.
- Krystal, Henry. “Trauma and Aging: A Thirty-Year Follow-Up.” In Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, 76–99.
- LaCapra, Dominick. *History and Memory after Auschwitz*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998.
- . *History in Transit: Experience, Identity, Critical Theory*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004.
- . *Writing History, Writing Trauma*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001.

- Langer, Lawrence L. *Using and Abusing the Holocaust*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006.
- Lansky, Melvin. "The Impossibility of Forgiveness: Shame Fantasies as Instigators of Vengefulness in Euripides' Medea." *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 53, no. 2 (2005): 437–64.
- Laplanche, Jean and J.-B. Pontalis. *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1973.
- Lappin, Elena. "The Man with Two Heads." *Granta* 66 (June 1999): 9–65.
- Laub, Dori. "Truth and Testimony." In Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, 61–75.
- Levi, Primo. *The Drowned and the Saved*, translated by Raymond Rosenthal. New York: Vintage International, 1989.
- . *I sommersi e i salvati*. Torino: Einaudi, 1986.
- . *Se questo è un uomo*. Torino: Einaudi, 1975.
- . *Survival in Auschwitz: The Nazi Assault on Humanity*, translated by Stuart Woolf. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996.
- Levine, Michael G. *The Belated Witness: Literature, Testimony, and the Question of Holocaust Survival*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006.
- Leys, Ruth. *From Guilt to Shame: Auschwitz and After*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007.
- Linenthal, Edward. *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America's Holocaust Museum*. New York: Viking, 1995.
- Liss, Andrea. *Trespassing Through the Shadows; Memory, Photography and the Holocaust*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998.
- Maechler, Stefan. *The Wilkomirski Affair: A Study in Biographical Truth*, translated by John E. Woods. New York: Schocken Books, 2001.
- Miller, J. Hillis. "Imre Kertész's Fatelessness: Fiction as Testimony." In *After Testimony: The Ethics and Aesthetics of Holocaust Narrative for the Future*, edited by Jakob Lothe, Susan Rubin Suleiman, and James Phelan. Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2012.
- Myers, D. G. "Responsible for Every Single Pain: Holocaust Literature and the Ethics of Interpretation." *Comparative Literature* 51, no. 4 (1999): 266–88.
- Nobel Web. "Imre Kertész—Biography." *Nobelprize.org*. http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/2002/kertesz.html.
- Peskin, Harvey. "Holocaust Denial: A Sequel." *The Nation*, April 19, 1999.
- Plath, Jörg. "Mein Leben ist eine Fiktion." *Der Tagesspiegel*, October 10, 2006. <http://www.tagesspiegel.de/kultur/mein-leben-ist-eine-fiktion/761282.html>.
- Prager, Jeffrey. "Healing from History: Psychoanalytic Considerations on Traumatic Pasts and Social Repair." *European Journal of Social Theory* 11, no. 3 (2008): 405–20.
- . "Jump-Starting Timeliness: Trauma, Temporality and the Redressive Community." In *Time and Memory*, edited by Jo Alyson Parker, Michael Crawford, and Paul Harris. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2006. 229–45.
- Ravetto, Kriss. *The Unmaking of Fascist Aesthetics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001.
- Scarry, Elaine. *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.

- Suleiman, Susan Rubin. *Crises of Memory and the Second World War*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006.
- Scherr, Rebecca. "The Uses of Memory and the Abuses of Fiction: Sexuality in Holocaust Fiction and Memoir." *Other Voices: The (e)Journal of Cultural Criticism* 2, no. 1 (2000). <http://www.othervoices.org/2.1/scherr/sexuality.php>.
- Seidman, Naomi. "Eli Wiesel and the Scandal of Jewish Rage." *Jewish Social Studies* 3, no. 1 (Autumn 1996): 1–19.
- Silverman, Kaja. "Masochism and Subjectivity." *Framework* 12 (1980): 2–9.
- Sofsky, Wolfgang. "The *Muselmann*." In *The Order of Terror: The Concentration Camp*, translated by William Templer. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999: 199–205.
- Stuart, Alexander. "Consciousness and Conscience." *Films and Filming* 21, no. 5 (February 1975): 11–14.
- Theweleit, Klaus. "Killing for Desire: Interview with Klaus Theweleit," interview by Mechtild Blum and Wolfgang Storz. In *Unwilling Germans: The Goldhagen Debate*, edited by Robert Shandley, translated by Jeremiah Riemer. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998. 211–16.
- . *Male Fantasies, 1. Women, Floods, Bodies, History*. Vol. 22, *Theory and History of Literature*, edited by Wlad Godzich and Jochen Schulte-Sasse, translated by Stephan Conway. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.
- Tighe, Carl. "Faking a Life: Benjamin Wilkomirski, *Fragments*." In *Writing and Responsibility*. London and New York: Routledge, 2005. 90–102.
- Thomson, Ian. *Primo Levi: A Life*. New York: Metropolitan Books, 2003.
- . "The Genesis of *If This Is a Man*." In *The Legacy of Primo Levi*, edited by Stanislao Pugliese. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. 41–58.
- Waller, Marguerite. "Signifying the Holocaust: Liliana Cavani's *Portiere di notte*." In *Feminisms in the Cinema*, edited by Laura Pieropaolo and Ada Testaferri. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995. 206–37.
- Whitehead, Anne. "Telling Tales: Trauma and Testimony in Benjamin Wilkomirski's *Fragments*." In *Trauma Fiction*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004. 30–47.
- Wilkomirski, Benjamin. *Bruchstücke: Aus einer Kindheit 1939–1948*. Frankfurt am Main: Erste Auflage, 1995.
- . *Fragments*. In *The Wilkomirski Affair*, by Stefan Maechler, translated by Carol Brown Janeway. New York: Schocken Books, 1996.
- Winnicott, D. W. "The Fear of Breakdown." *International Review of Psychoanalysis* 1 (1974): 103–7.
- . *Home Is Where We Start From: Essays by a Psychoanalyst*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1986.
- . *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment: Studies in the Theory of Emotional Development*. New York: International Universities Press, 1965.
- . *Playing and Reality*. New York: Routledge Classics, 2005.
- Yaegar, Patricia. "Testimony without Intimacy." *Poetics Today* 27, no. 2 (Summer 2006): 399–423.

I N D E X

- abandonment: anxiety about, 22;
in *Fragments*, 70, 75; Levi and
45; loss of trust and, 7; trauma
of, 9, 10–11, 28
- Abraham, Nicolas, 19–20, 21
- absent meaning, 27
- abundance, memory of, 28
- accommodation, 85, 101
- affect: displacement of, 67–68;
draining of, 87–88, 95; psy-
chological evolution of fore-
closed, 68
- Afghanistan, veterans of, 15
- Agamben, Giorgio, 42n20, 52n16
- agency: assertion of, 97; renewal of
sense of, 11–12
- aggression, 20, 54, 78; in fantasy,
25; hatred as, 93; isolating, 2;
suicide as act of displaced, 24
- Améry, Jean, 1–2, 3–4, 6–8, 10n33,
11, 13, 14, 40n13, 45–47; *On
Suicide*, 46; as theorist of sui-
cide, 46–47; torture as act of
self-expansion, 57n27
- analyst, relationship of to analy-
sand, 80–81
- anger: as appropriate response in
survivor, 39–40; displaced, 74;
dissociation from, 92; metabo-
lism of into critical self-inter-
rogation, 41; naming of, 40; as
right, 40
- anguish, 43–45; “atavistic,” 44;
blank, 44; children’s, 43; ori-
gins of, 43
- annihilation: being vs., 7; threat
of, 81
- Antelme, Robert, 2, 10; *The Hu-
man Race*, 3
- anticathexis, 81n9
- antimetaphors, 21–22
- anti-Semitism, 13, 60; rise of
Christian, 42n20
- anxiety, 7; of abandonment, 22;
Levi’s management of, 34
- Artaud, Antonin: “Theater of Cru-
elty,” 52, 58; “true theatre,” 52
- Auschwitz: death camp, 1, 96–97;
Kertész’s deportation to, 79;
Levi’s arrival at, 33; trial in
Frankfurt, 1. See also *Survival
in Auschwitz*
- “authoritarian personality,” 50
- autonomy, 81

- Bataille, Georges, 58n28
- bearing witness: and diffusing volatile affect, 15; as expulsion and shouting, 10–11; healing and, 11; as procedure of holding, 11–12
- being, annihilation vs., 7
- Belgium: Fort Breendonk, 1; Resistance Movement in, 1
- Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, 1n1
- Bildungsroman*, tradition of, 17
- Birkenau concentration camp, 61
- bitterness, 92, 98
- blame, 41, 44, 97–98
- Blanchot, Maurice, 27n19
- body: breaking of boundaries of, 7; chaining of mind to by pain, 7; image of Gorgon and, 42; inviolability of boundaries of, 7; neighbor in *Survival in Auschwitz* as, 34; privileged position of, 53; as representation of internal otherness and the “drowned,” 36
- borders, 81, 83; intersubjective, 7, 81; intrapsychic, 81; psychic, 75
- Browning, Christopher, 51, 52
- Bruchstücke: Aus einer Kindheit 1939–1948*. See *Fragments*
- Buchenwald concentration camp, 1n1, 2, 3, 79
- Buchenwald Memorial Center, 103
- burial, 19
- Calvino, Italo, 104–5
- Caruth, Cathy, 4
- Cavani, Liliana: charges brought against, 49–50, 53; *The Night Porter*, 12, 13, 14, 48–60
- Chrysostom, John, 42n20
- Clendinnen, Inga, 51n13
- community: failure to provide support, 99; fantasy of omnipotence and, 6; moral code of, 40; necessity of involvement of, 8; responsibility of to provide “corrective emotional experience,” 80–81; support and protection of, 9, 11
- concentration camps: as aberration, 94; difficulties besetting survivors of, 4; imprisonment in, 2, 3; intellectual in, 1; victims of, 59n35
- connectedness, 68
- containment, 68; failed narrative processes of, 12
- corporeality, speechless, 34
- “corrective emotional experience,” 80
- creative apperception, 14, 100–102
- cryptophores, 21–23
- Czechoslovakia, occupation of, 17
- Dachau concentration camp, 2
- death: dying as, 32; in *Fatelessness*, 89–92, 102; in *The Night Porter*, 58–59; peace and, 23; social, 58; trauma and, 20
- death drive, 58
- déchirement*: as antimetaphor, 21–22, 23
- defense, 19
- detachment, 88
- disclosure, liberation of, 10
- dissociation, 87, 91–92, 104
- Dösseker, Bruno. See Wilkomirski, Benjamin
- dreaming, 49; in Levi, 33–36, 41
- “drowned”: category of, 13, 14, 31–39, 41, 44–45, 47; disembodiment of, 43; as epistemological construction, 34; figural body and, 38; merger of with “saved,” 39
- Drowned and the Saved, The (Levi)*, 13, 14, 31, 38–46; Bible in, 44; “drowned” in, 38–39, 44–45, 47; image of Gorgon in, 42, 44, 103; neighbor in, 41; as return of foreclosed aspects of *Survival in Auschwitz*, 39
- Duras, Marguerite, 2–3
- dying, as death vs. disappearance, 32
- Eakin, Paul John, 16n1
- ego, pleasure and unpleasure experienced by, 59

- ego ideal: reinforcement of, 25; resuscitation of, 22
- ego-integration, 7
- empathy, 51, 52
- empowerment, as provisional dissolution of blockage, 2
- enclosure, 19
- encrypted fantasies, 20–24
- encrypted memory, 19–20
- experiencing “I” vs. narrating “I,” 86–87
- expulsion, bearing witness as, 10
- externalization: failed narrative processes of, 12; of feelings of loss, 26; interminable nature of synthesis through, 27; Kertész and, 86–87, 94, 101
- Ezrahi, Sidra DeKoven, 16n1
- fantasies: aggression in, 25; encrypted, 20–24; of incorporation, 21; of omnipotence, 6, 8; of self, 5; and shame, 20; in *When Memory Comes*, 20–24, 26; wordless, 58
- fascism, repressed history of, 48, 50
- Fateless*. See *Fatelessness*
- Fatelessness* (Kertész), 14, 79–105; accommodation in, 85, 101; agency in, 97; avoidance of emotional response in, 90; being eaten alive in, 91–92; as bequeathal of spiritual legacy, 83; bitterness in, 92, 98; blame in, 97–98; borders in, 81, 83; community responsibility in, 80–81; as continuous internal dialogue, 81; creative apperception in, 100–102; death in, 89–92, 102; detachment in, 88, 89; dissociation in, 87, 91–92; draining of affect in, 87–88, 95; emotional jockeying in, 89; experiencing “I” vs. narrating “I,” 86–87; externalization in, 86–87, 94, 101; father in, 88, 90, 96; grandfather in, 89; hatred in, 93–94, 97–99; healing in, 81; intellectualization in, 88; invulnerability in, 90; journalist in, 93–97, 99; judgment in, 88; memory and commemoration in, 93; negative social implications of reception received by Gyorgy in, 80; performative impact of, 92; projective identification in, 93–96; reception of, 80; shame in, 84, 86, 89, 92, 93–96, 99, 102, 104; stepmother in, 88, 96; Todt supervisor, 82; torture in, 82; traumatization in, 88, 99; understatement in, 90; victimization in, 98; viewing/looking in, 101
- Feig, Konnilyn, 62–63, 64
- fiction: expressive possibilities of, 105; vs. reality, 64
- figural body, association of with “drowned,” 38
- figural language: building blocks of, 19; externalization of emotions through, 26
- figuration: liberation of emotion through, 10; memoir-writing and, 19
- “foreignness,” 8
- fortification, 19; intrapsychic, 19
- Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, 9
- Fragments* (Wilkomirski), 14, 61–78; abandonment in, 70, 75; absence of detail in, 62–63; authority of despite undermining of Wilkomirski’s credibility, 66; bundled child in, 71–73; child’s viewpoint in, 61, 68n21; compared to false Hitler diaries, 64; containment and connectedness in, 68; defensiveness of critics of, 66; displacement of affect in, 67–68; doubts about authenticity of, 62–66, 76; extension and dynamism in, 100; favorable response to as indicating deep cultural malaise, 64; focus on past in, 87; holding environment in, 69–71; investigative journalism about in United States, 63–64; murder of

- father in, 70; power of, 61; prizes won by, 62, 63; psychological expansion in, 100; publication history of, 62; reissue of, 64; removal of from bookstores, 64; self-reproach in, 73–74; solitude vs. intimacy in, 70–71; and survivor's aftermath of victimization, 66–67; survivors' response to, 66–67; translation of, 62; trauma in, 87
- fratricide, curse of, 41
- Freikorps* (Theweleit), 48
- French Resistance, 2
- Freud, Sigmund, 11n37, 21n9; death drive, 58; primal repression, 81; satisfaction, 59; screen memory, 76–78
- Friedländer, Saul, 12, 14; anxiety about abandonment of, 22, 28; attempted suicide of, 24–26; biographical facts about *Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, 17–18; childhood of, 17; childhood memories of, 26; *déchirement* of, 21–22, 23; discontinuity of life of, 16; and father, 29; gap separating language and feelings of, 27; history of rupture, 16; and hunger, 27–28; identity of as survivor, 18–19; in Israel, 16, 17; memories of recovery of, 25–26; memory of, 19; name changes of, 18; and mother, 26, 28; nature of narrative of, 16; and parents, 20–24, 27; postsuicidal “rebirth” of, 26; self as site of embattlement, 19; *When Memory Comes*, 12, 16–29; writing and memory, 27
- Gandersheim concentration camp, 2
- Ganzfried, Daniel, 62, 63, 64
- Geller, Jay, 78n34
- Germany, rise of National Socialism in, 17. *See also* Nazi Germany
- Gestapo, 1
- Giroux, Henry, 49n8
- Gorgon, image of, 42, 44, 103–4
- Gornick, Vivian, 16
- Gourevitch, Philip, 63–64, 65n13, 66
- Granta*, 63
- grief, 35, 43, 76, 88
- Grosjean, Yvonne, 62
- guilt, 91; curse of fratricide as image of, 41; foreclosure of feelings of, 23; shame and, 41n18; survivor, 41n18
- hatred, 93–94, 97–99
- healing: bearing witness and, 11; bonds of, 9; dialogue and, 81; in *Fatelessness*, 80, 81; process of, 2
- help, child's expectation of, 6–7
- Herman, Judith, 87
- hiding, 19
- Hier, Marvin, 62
- Hilberg, Raul, 62
- Hitler, Adolf, 16, 17
- holding, bearing witness as, 11–12
- holding environment, 69–71
- Holocaust: second-hand knowledge of, 66; trivialization of, 64; victimization, 78
- Horowitz, Sara, 42n19
- Human Race, The* (Antelme), 3
- identification, 51
- idolatry: as blunting aesthetic judgment, 65; tendency of American public to, 65
- If This Is a Man* (Levi), 30
- I.G. Farben factory, 1n1
- impulses, forestalled instinctual, 59
- incorporation, 19–22, 24; fantasies of, 21
- inhibition, 3–4; resentments and, 4
- intersubjective borders, demarcation of, 7, 81
- intrapsychic borders, 81
- intrapsychic conflict, 18
- intrapsychic fortification, 19
- Iraq, veterans of, 15
- Israel, 16, 17

- Jacobus, Mary, 72n25
 Jewish faith, *Survival in Auschwitz* poem
 as rewriting of central prayer of, 37
Jewish Quarterly, 63
- Kertész, Imre: dialogical structure of
 representation of past, 83; discovery
 of faceless self, 84; existential
 self-discovery, 83, 86; experience
 of accommodation, 85; external-
 ization and, 86–87; *Fatelessness*,
 14, 79–105; and Greek mythology,
 102–5; loss of individuality and
 personal destiny, 84; as modern
 Perseus, 104–5; Nobel Banquet
 speech of, 82–83, 102–3; Nobel
 Lecture of, 83, 103; past and present,
 84–85, 87, 88; sense of loss,
 84; and shame, 84, 86; visitation by
 existential inspiration, 83; on writing,
 102, 105
- Klarsfeld, Serge, 24n14
 Kosinski, Jerzy: *The Painted Bird*, 76
 Krell, Robert, 3, 9
 Krystal, Henry, 4, 10n33
- LaCapra, Dominick, 11n37
 Langer, Lawrence, 65–66
 language: deprivation of, 45; beyond
 otherness, 45
 Lansky, Melvin, 93–94
 Lappin, Elena: “The Man with Two
 Heads,” 63, 64, 76n27
 Laub, Dori, 4, 9–10, 11n37
 Levi, Primo, 30–47, 49n8; and abandon-
 ment, 45; analogy between
 grief and pains of infancy, 35; ar-
 rival at Auschwitz, 33; death of, 45,
 47; and deprivation of language,
 45; “desolating grief” of, 43;
 dreams of, 33–36, 41; “drowned”
 category of, 13, 14, 31–39, 41,
 44–45, 47; *Drowned and the Saved*,
The, 13, 14, 31, 38–46; as engaged
 reader, 45; fame of, 46; Gorgon
 image in, 42, 4, 103; *If This Is a
 Man*, 30; “interior liberation” in,
 30, 31; management of anxiety, 34;
Muselmänner in works of, 13, 14,
 30–33, 37, 42, 42n20, 44, 103; pos-
 sible suicide of, 47; as prisoner, 30,
 44; projection by, 35; psychic disar-
 ray of, 31; rage of, 38–39; “saved”
 category of, 31, 32; and self, in
 aftermath of survival, 31; shame of,
 41; *Survival in Auschwitz*, 10–11,
 13, 30, 31–38, 103–4; as survivor,
 31; survivor guilt of, 41; tattoo of,
 36, 38, 47; testimonial voice of, 42;
 tolerance of fear, 34–35
- Leys, Ruth, 41n18
 libidinal investment, aggressive signifi-
 cance of withdrawal of, 25
 Liepman Literary Agency, 64
 loss, of love object, 19–20
- Maechler, Stefan, 64–65, 76n27
 Majdanek concentration camp, 61
 materiality, metaphoric, 42
 May, Karl, 28
 memoir: development of coherent self
 through writing of, 19; fraudulent,
 dangers of, 65–66; fraudulent, as
 rhetorical construct, 66; tradition
 of, 16
 memory: encrypted, 19–20; falsified,
 77; hiding of, 19; as impermeable
 space of enclosure, 19; screen, 21,
 22, 23, 76–78; terrain of, 19; writ-
 ing and, 27
 memory politics, Swiss, 67n20
 metaphor, 10, 13, 19, 31, 32, 34, 71, 94
 metaphoricity, 13
 mezuzah, 38n7
 Miller, J. Hillis, 86
 Mitterand, François, 2
 murder, outliving of one’s own, 7
Muselmänner, 13, 14, 30–33, 37, 59n35,
 80; as “complete witnesses,” 42,
 103; corporeality of, 42; image
 of Gorgon and, 42, 44; “impos-

- sible dialectic" between Levi and, 42n20, 44; isolation in, 31; meaning of term, 30n3; as non-men, 31; speechlessness of, 33–35
- name changes, as internal splitting, 18
- narrative-making, transformation of rage through, 11
- narrative processes of containment and externalization, 12
- narrative reconstruction of past trauma, 12
- Nazi crimes, German repression of responsibility for, 52
- Nazi Germany: history of shared repression in, 48
- Nazi imagery: in form of acting out, 58; mapping of, 51
- Nazis: attempt of to establish distance through focus, 53; genocidal rage, 12, 57; violence of, 48
- Nazism: exploitation of victims of, 49; justification of, 49; pornographic exploitation of victims of, 49; psychological underpinnings of, 51; vulnerability and rage and, 60
- Nazi unconscious, victims as signifiers of, 50
- New Yorker*, 63–64
- Night Porter, The* (Cavani), 12, 13, 14, 48–60; attacks on, 49–50, 51–52; banning of, 49; biblical story in, 56; as blurring the line between victims and perpetrators, 49; body in, 53; character development in, 50; as critical examination and destabilization of traditional "subject positions," 49; death in, 58–59; eroticism and nurturing in, 54; feminist criticism of, 49; filial story in, 56–57; flashbacks in, 54–55; foreclosed aspect of self in, 55; hallucination in, 54–55, 59; identification and distance in, 57; implausibility of plot of, 54; interest in filmmaking in, 52–53; interpolation of audience into Nazi position, 53; Oedipal themes in, 56; and pornographic exploitation of victims of Nazism, 49, 53; projection in, 53, 56; "repressed history" in, 48; as seeking to represent unconscious level of shared experience behind Nazi violence, 48; self-expansion in, 57; sexual torture in, 50; spectacle in, 55; spectatorship in, 53, 57; theatrics and role-playing in, 55; and transformation of victims into phantasms of fascist imaginary, 50; as "true theatre," 52; vulnerability in, 54; wordless fantasies in, 58
- Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge, The* (Rilke), 17
- omnipotence, self's enabling fantasy of, 6, 8
- other: assumption of aid of, 6–7; crucial presence of, 6; fictional, 92, 102, 104; impenetrable internal, 34; presence of, 99; relation of with self, 103; self coming to know, 6; symbolic, 89; virulence of hostile, 86; voice of, 81
- otherness, 53; absolute, 34; image of, 32; internal, 36; beyond language, 45; projected, 60
- pain, and chaining of mind to body, 7
- perpetrators: as establishing and maintaining attachment to victims, 52; recognition between ourselves and, 52; victims vs., 49; violence in body of, 60
- Perseus, 104–5
- phantasies, 77–78
- Piller, Verena, 63
- Prager, Jeffrey, 4–6, 8, 80; contemporary moment of trauma, 99; and survivors remaining in past, 67; trauma of the aftermath, 87
- prememory, 35

- primal repression, 81
 projection, 35, 53, 56
 projective identification, 93–96,
 99–100
 psychic relief, 50, 101
 psychic reorganization, 8
- rage: abandonment and, 9; absorption
 and silencing of, 42; of Antelme,
 3; avoidance of, 4; excision of,
 39n11; foreclosed, 42; forestalling
 consideration of, 5; futility of at-
 tempts to communicate, 3; in Levi,
 38–39; *Muselmänner* and, 59n35;
 Nazi genocidal, 12; Nazism and,
 60; passing through of, 3; in poetic
 fragment in *Survival in Auschwitz*,
 42; and potential to implicate
 community in survivor's suffering,
 4; silence as freighted with, 3; and
 social environment, 4–5; subsum-
 ing of being by, 3; of survivor,
 4, 9; transformation of through
 narrative-making, 11; wordlessness
 and, 9
- Rilke, Rainer Maria: *The Notebooks of
 Malte Laurids Brigge*, 17
- Sade, Marquis de, 58n28
 Samuel, Jean, 38n8
 Samuelson, Arthur H., 75–76
 “saved”: category of, 32, 39–40; merger
 of with “drowned,” 39
 Scarry, Elaine, 7n20
 Scherr, Rebecca, 49n8
 screen memories, 21, 22, 23, 76–78; as
 “falsified memories,” 77
 secondary witnessing, 51
 Segev, Tom, *The Seventh Million*, 64
 self: alleviation of discomfort of, 6; and
 coming to know other, 6; com-
 munal condition of existence of,
 6; discontinuity of, 18; expecta-
 tion of help and, 7; experience
 of suffering body as enemy, 6–7;
 life-sustaining fantasies of, 5; medi-
 ated experience of, 7; as site of
 embattlement, 19
 self-authorization, 42
 self-disclosure, inhibition and, 3–4
 self-expansion, 57; torture as, 57n27
 shame: dissociation from, 92; erasure of
 affect of, 88; fantasies and, 20; in
 Fatelessness, 84, 86, 89, 92, 93–96,
 99, 102, 104; feelings of, 40–41;
 guilt and, 41n18; as injury, 86; Ker-
 tész and, 84, 86; metabolization of,
 86, 99; projection of onto shamer,
 95–96; projective identification as
 response to, 94
 “Shemà,” 37, 38n7
 shouting, bearing witness as, 10–11
 Silverman, Kaja, 56n26
 social abandonment, trauma of, 10–11
 Sofsky, Wolfgang, 59n35
 spectatorship, 53, 57
 speechlessness, 33–35
 storytelling: as process of building en-
 closures, 19; symbolic disclosure or
 revealing of, 19
 suicide, 15, 24–26, 58; as symbolic act
 of displaced aggression, 24
Survival in Auschwitz (Levi), 10–11,
 13, 30, 31–38, 103–4; allegory of
 structure of, 39; dreams in, 33–36,
 41; “drowned” in, 31–38, 39; “The
 Drowned and the Saved,” 31–38;
 German readers of, 45; grief in,
 43; *Muselmänner* in, 30–33, 37;
 neighbor in, 33–34, 36, 38, 39, 41,
 47; “On the Bottom,” 33; poem
 in, 36–39, 42, 47; projection in,
 35; publication history of, 38–39;
 return to life of, 39; “saved” in, 31,
 32, 39–40; tattoo in, 36, 38, 47
 survivor(s): anger as appropriate re-
 sponse in, 39–40; of concentration
 camps, 4; condition of, 2; as con-
 tributor to society, 82; costliness of
 silence of, 9; *Fragments* and, 66–67;
 Friedländer's identity as, 18–19;
 guilt of, 41n18; moral vs. amoral

- codes of, 40; as “reconverted,” 40; relief for, 8; remaining in past, 67; renunciation of prior amoral self, 40; response of, 66–67; self-disclosure and, 3; split within, 40; support and protection of community for, 9; as torturer, 11; traumatic suffering of, 5, 80–81, 87; wordlessness of, 9
- testimonial diegesis, 10
 testimonial “I,” 11, 42n20
 testimonial narrative: continuous, 81; psychological efficacy of, 67
 testimony: cult of, 62; exigency of, 4; metaphoric register of, 9; as occasion of transmission, 10; sheltering dimension of, 11
 “Theater of Cruelty” (Artaud), 52, 58
 Theweleit, Klaus, 59–60; *Freikorps*, 48
 Thomson, Ian, 37n5
 Torok, Maria, 19–20, 21
 torture, 82; and deprivation of victim of mediated experience of self, 7; legacy of, 4; permanent existential devastation of, 6; psychic reorganization and, 8; and return of self to earliest alternatives, 7
 transmission, figural register of, 10
 trauma, 4, 20, 80–81; of abandonment, 9, 10–11, 28; of the aftermath, 87; and avoidance of conflict with victimization, 67; by-products of, 87; contemporary moment of, 99; fantasy of omnipotence and, 6, 8; narrative reconstruction of past, 12; past, present and, 4–5; psychological, 5; responses to narratives of, 51; of social abandonment, 10–11; societal support and, 81; survivor suffering and, 5; survivors of, 87; of victims, 4
 traumatization, survivors and, 80, 88, 99
 “true theatre,” 52
 trust, loss of, 7
- United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 51n14
- Verdinkinder*, 67n20
 victimization: aftermath of, 66–67; experience of past, 67; Holocaust, 13, 78; studies of, 51; survivor, 66–67
 victimized self, 41
 victims: attachment to, 52; community failure to protect, 41, 98; desubjectification of, 103; helplessness of, 92; perpetrators establishing and maintaining attachment to, 52; as signifiers of Nazi unconscious, 50; torture and, 7; trauma of, 4; transformation of into phantasms of fascist imaginary, 50; vs. perpetrators, 49; vulnerability of, 60; Wilkomirski as, 65
 violence, 57, 60; Nazi propensity for, 48, 60
 volatile affect, diffusion of, 15
 vulnerability, 54, 58, 74, 89; rage and, 60
- war criminals, 49
Weltwoche, 62
When Memory Comes (Friedländer), 12, 16–29; abandonment in, 22; antimetaphors in, 21–22; articulation of loss in, 20; cryptophores in, 21–23; *déchirement* in, 21–22, 23; fantasy of reunion with dead parents in, 20–24; fantasy of separation from mother in, 26; hunger in, 27–28; incorporation in, 20–22, 24; memories of parents in, 20–24, 27–29; memory of abundance in, 28; memory of crisis in, 24–20; self-reproach in, 23; suicide in, 24–26; temporal disunity of, 26–27; torn-apart child in, 28
 Wiesel, Elie: *Night*, 39n11
 Wilkomirski, Benjamin: “Childhood Memory as Historical Source,” 76,

- 78; description of memories of, 68; discrediting of, 62–66; failure of to preserve detachment, 66; *Fragments: Memories of a Wartime Childhood*, 14, 61–78; maintaining truth of *Fragments*, 64; performance of investment in victimhood, 67; personal background of, 66; psychological instability of, 64; self-interrogation of, 75; self-reproach and, 73–74; and traumatic narrative, 67; traumatic rupture of psychic borders of, 75
- Winnicott, D. W., 5–6, 7, 10, 14, 69, 100
- witnesses, complete/true, 42, 103
- wordlessness, efficacy of survivor's, 9
- writing: catalyzing release of, 2; Kertész and, 102, 105; memory and, 27; shame and, 102
- Yaegar, Patricia, 12n40
- Zeititz concentration camp, 79