

**AFTER “POSTMEMORY”:
COPING WITH HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE
IN POSTMODERN HEBREW LITERATURE**

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Abstract

This interdisciplinary study suggests that the time has come to pursue a new modality of Holocaust remembrance. It assumes that when we speak of “remembering” we are referring to acts of *remembrance*; with the exception of those who lived through the Holocaust, those of us who were not “there” cannot remember the actual events of the Holocaust. The study further contends that acts of Holocaust remembrance ought to be perceived as forms of *coping* with remembrance of the Holocaust. It also suggests that critical frameworks and narrative strategies developed in postmodern Hebrew literature – specifically the writings of Etgar Keret – offer a literary exemplar of coping with Holocaust remembrance.

The articulation of the *raison d’être* for a paradigmatic shift in conceptualizing Holocaust remembrance is defined in the context of the general field of Holocaust representation. More specifically, the modality of coping with Holocaust remembrance is juxtaposed with an existing and prevalent conceptualization known to scholars and writers as “postmemory” – a structural framework of Holocaust remembrance applied to the second generation.

Of special significance is the interlacing of the modality of coping with Holocaust remembrance with postmodern thinking. Foremost in this alignment with postmodernism is the acknowledgement that the events of the Holocaust destabilized Enlightenment-modern metaphysical faith in human rationalism and linearity of epistemological, ontological, scientific, and humanistic progress. Prominent in this discussion is the philosophy of Jacques Derrida and the ethics of the language of deconstruction. These theoretical insights are then applied to the writings of Etgar Keret. Apart from presenting

Keret as a consummate storyteller, Keret's art and its relation to the modality of coping with Holocaust remembrance is analyzed as integral to the cultural, social, and political ambiance of a postmodern Israeli milieu.

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As I bring my doctoral thesis to its conclusion, and reflect back on how it all began, I realize with full certainty that I could not have arrived at this point without the support and generosity of several people. I wanted to write a comprehensive study on Holocaust remembrance for a long time but aspiring and actually doing are two very different things. I have no doubt that had it not been for the direction, guidance, inspiration, and support I received from my supervising committee I would not be where I am today. There are not enough words to thank Sara Horowitz, Priscila Uppal, and Marty Lockshin for their boundless wisdom and friendship.

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...

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Introduction

Forgetting someone is like
Forgetting to put out the light in the back yard
And leaving it on all day:
But it's the light
That makes you remember.
(Yehudah Amichai, *The Great Tranquility; Questions and Answers*)

Generational Remembrance

And the Rat Laughed (2008) is an extraordinary novel written by Nava Semel. Semel is an Israeli writer and a daughter of Holocaust survivors. She is well known for her short stories and novels on Holocaust remembrance. The narrative of *And the Rat Laughed* opens in the year 1999 at a Tel Aviv apartment. As part of a project on Holocaust survivors, a granddaughter asks her grandmother to reveal her Holocaust past. Until now, grandmother kept silent about her past. But today, she finds it difficult to refuse her granddaughter's wish to know. Still, she tries to hold back. "I had a mother. I had a father. Won't you make do with that? I loved and I lost. That's the end of the story" (5). Several pages later she agrees to remember more. In those days "being Jewish was a terrible thing; being a Jewish little girl was the worst thing in the world" (15). Brutalized by Christian peasants, the only solace known to the girl while being starved, tormented and raped in a backyard pit, was the company of a rat.

From present-day Tel Aviv to the Holocaust, from the Holocaust to the future, then back to the Holocaust and the present, Semel's narrative travels in time and genre. Novel, poetry, science fiction and memoir are interposed throughout this haunting tale. At a certain point, grandmother's story metamorphoses into the myth of "Girl & Rat." The myth is lost in 2025 in the ashes of an ecological disaster but is somehow kept alive

through academic research and virtual games. It is fully revived in 2009 when archeological excavations uncover ruins of “Madonna of the Rat Church in a geographical place once called Poland” (118). Back in the days of the Holocaust, a priest named Father Stanislaw rescued the Jewish girl from being murdered by local peasants. The priest kept a diary in which he tells of some harrowing events occurring between September 1943 and February 1945. Kneeling before the tortured girl Father Stanislaw beseeches God:

My Father, did You not see what was happening underneath the soil, or did You turn your back? Even Your Son was not a little child when He was made to suffer, and even then, on His final journey, He was not alone. (170-171)

Father Stanislaw tells the girl she is Jewish. The girl becomes hysterical.

I tell her, Joachim and Anna, father and mother of Mary, were Jews [...] but she will not listen. How then will this be remembered? For her, forgetting is healing, but for the world, forgetting is the very disease itself [...] I am sealing the diary because I cannot trust the memory of humans. It is not a part of Creation because Adam was born without memory. But memory is the only thing that was created in Your image. Both You and memory are a decaying image, hobbling along on crutches and tagging behind all the others. (221, 229)

Present-day granddaughter is disappointed. As a school project this will not do.

Textbooks, teachings, and ceremonial commemorations of the Holocaust are all about ghettos and concentration camps;

Even though my grandmother really was in the Holocaust, I’m not sure it counts, because she was a little girl and she didn’t go through any of the big, horrifying things we learn about in history or read about or see in the movies. (54)

I open the introduction with Semel’s novel because it mirrors the multidimensional entanglements of generational Holocaust remembrance, individual versus collective memory, Jewish and Christian remembering-forgetting, and the

challenges of writing fiction related to events which were not experienced firsthand. Semel and artists like her in Israel and elsewhere are set apart from the actual generation of the Holocaust by generally being classified as the second generation. Many, although not all, scholars and critics include under the umbrella of the second generation Jewish children born to Holocaust survivors, children of Jews who lived during that era but did not experience the Holocaust directly, and descendants of Nazi perpetrators. Among the scholars who formulated the boundaries and characteristics of second-generation Holocaust phenomenology are Hanoach Bartov, Zygmunt Bauman, Cathy Caruth, Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi, Yael Feldman, Saul Friedländer, Shoshana Felman, Nurith Gertz, Geoffrey Hartman, Sara R. Horowitz, Dominick LaCapra, Berel Lang, Lawrence Langer, Dori Laub, Robert Jay Lifton, Alan Mintz, Dan Miron, Yochai Oppenheimer, Alvin H. Rosenfeld, David G. Roskies, Ernestine Schlant, Naomi Sokoloff, Susan Rubin Suleiman, and Edith Zertal.

Book-length works on second-generation literature (in English) include *Back to the Future: Israeli Literature of the 1980s and 1990s* (2010) by Dvir Abramovich, *The Indescribable and the Undiscussable: Reconstructing Human Discourse After Trauma* (1999) by Dan Bar-On, *Children of the Holocaust: Conversations With Sons and Daughters of Survivors* (1979) by Helen Epstein, *Holocaust Literature of the Second Generation* (2007) by Marita Grimwood, *The Shadow of the Holocaust: The Second Generation* (1990) by Aron Haas, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* (2012) by Marianne Hirsch, *After Such Knowledge: Memory, History, and the Legacy of the Holocaust* (2004) by Eva Hoffman, *Using and Abusing the Holocaust* (2006) by Lawrence Langer, *Israel and the Daughters of the Shoah:*

Reoccupying the Territories of Silence (2000) by Ronit Lentin, *Second-Generation Holocaust Literature* (2006) by Erin McGlothlin, and *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narratives and the Consequences of Interpretation* (1988) by James E. Young. Some collections of essays on second-generation literature include *Second Generation Voices: Reflections by Children of Holocaust Survivors and Perpetrators* (2001) edited by Alan L. Berger & Naomi Berger, *The Holocaust in Three Generations: Families of Victims and Perpetrators of the Nazi Regime* (2010) edited by Gabriele Rosenthal, and *Breaking Crystal: Writing and Memory After Auschwitz* (1998) edited by Efraim Sicher. To the extent that the above mentioned scholars and texts relate to my work, and many do, I refer to these scholarly works throughout my thesis.

Not in any way wishing to disparage existing second-generation theoretical representations, my objective is to show that, in part, second-generation conceptualization has reached a stagnant point beyond which it no longer offers enough in terms of future thinking about Holocaust remembrance. By no longer offering enough in terms of future thinking about Holocaust remembrance, I do not mean that future generations will not understand the ways in which the lives of members of the second generation were shaped by what was passed on to them by their parents. Rather, my contention is that as a *theoretical rubric*, second-generation thinking will not be helpful or relevant enough to the lives and realities of future generations. To take an example, second-generation literature and theoretical thinking often include motifs of remembrance linked to being raised within small family units with no grandparents, few relatives, and siblings who died in the Holocaust. Growing up in the shadow of family members murdered in the Holocaust is a crucial determinant in the familial psyche of the

second generation. It is, however, a determinant that is very difficult for children born into families with grandparents, siblings, uncles, aunts, cousins and so on, to identify with. In and of itself, this does not mean that Holocaust remembrance is no longer applicable to “normal” families. It means, however, that new modalities of Holocaust remembrance are needed.

Remembrance and Silence after the Holocaust

The subject of memory is not new. The subject of remembrance is newer. Memory has a theological, metaphysical and scientific developmental history. Throughout the Torah – the first five books of the Hebrew Bible referred to in English as Pentateuch – the Israelites are commanded to remember God’s active role in the Exodus. Aristotle’s ideas in “On Memory and Recollection” (345 BC)¹ on the preservation of “memory of something by constant reminding” augment Plato’s *Theaetetus* (360 BC)² and the metaphor of memory as a wax imprint. Years later, in *Confessions*, Book X (400 AD),³ St. Augustine elaborates on “images of the things perceived by the senses” that enter memory. For a long time memory is associated with the cultivation of mental capacities. Leaving aside the Anglo-American philosophic tradition, the European Age of Enlightenment bolsters the stature of memory by linking it with identity. Marx applies memory to social theory, Nietzsche is contemptuous of humans’ obsession with accumulating memories, Freud explains the human psyche as predisposed to repressing memories, and modern nationalist movements idolize the collective memory of the people.

Alas, Hegelian teleological design of history did not foresee Auschwitz. Neither Kant nor Hegel anticipated a complete breakdown of rationalism and meltdown of the infallibility of modernist national citizenship. “We Refugees” is a title of an essay written by Hannah Arendt in 1943. Arendt bemoans the miserable failure of Germany to live up to the pledge of the modern nation-state to be the ultimate guardian of the political rights of *all* citizens.

We lost our home, which means the familiarity of daily life. We lost our occupation, which means the confidence that we are of some use to the world. We lost our language, which means the naturalness of reactions, the simplicity of gestures, and the unaffected expressions of feelings (110).

Thus far, I have used the terms memory and remembering interchangeably. Hence forward, I rely on Jay Winter’s (2006) reflections on memory, history and collective memory in the twentieth century as denoting *acts* of remembrance, not constants but dynamic processes. As argued by Winter, in all acts of remembrance “history and memory are braided together in the public domain, jointly informing our shifting and contested understandings of the past” (6). It is “neither history nor memory per se but the overlaps and creative space between the two” (288) that inform us. It is in this creative space that I situate the core idea of my thesis on Holocaust remembrance as *coping* with Holocaust remembrance. By shifting the focus to coping with *remembrance*, as opposed to coping with memory of the Holocaust, I am arguing that with the exception of survivors of the Holocaust, none of us have memories of the Holocaust. Our memories are confined to the ways in which the Holocaust is remembered, to forms of commemoration, and acts of remembrance. We have no memories of the Holocaust. We have memories of remembrance of the Holocaust.

Western civilization's days of reckoning with being a facilitator to atrocities hyped up by fascist "memories" of *völkisch* racism did not come in the immediate aftermath of World War II. Gearing up to take responsibility for allowing an industry of exterminating people to continue uninterrupted took some time. In the immediate aftermath of the war, the urgent task was to rebuild Europe out of its ruins. With millions of displaced civilians plodding their way through destroyed European cities, towns, and landscapes – many with no home or family to go back to – "conceptual framing" of the Holocaust, a term used by Iwona Irwin-Zarecka (1995) when studying the dynamics of collective memory, took a back seat. I imagine Western civilization and its nationalities temporarily transfixed into paralysis as in Edvard Munch's 1893 painting: *The Scream*. As for the Jewish people, when knowledge began to percolate as to the unimaginable magnitude of the catastrophe, aside from the pragmatic urgency of actualizing the Zionist movement's blueprint for a national home for the Jewish people in Palestine, it was near impossible (at first) to reflect on what to do with such traumatic knowledge. Reactions were often locked into silence. In a forward to Jean-François Lyotard's (1990)⁴ *Heidegger and 'the jews'* David Carroll remarks that not talking about memories of devastation is actually "a powerful way of talking about it [as] silence can at times say more and speak louder than discourse" (vii).

Aharon Appelfeld, an Israeli writer famous for his writings about the Holocaust, familiarized himself with silence in ways that most of us will never apprehend. Of the Jewish children who survived the war, most were hidden in convents, orphanages, caves, attics, and sewers. Appelfeld found refuge in the woods. Born in 1932 in Zhadova (Jadova) – a small town near the city of Czernowitz, Bukovina – Aharon Erwin

Appelfeld's family was proud of being steeped in German culture. Aharon's grandparents spoke Yiddish; his parents preferred German. His sweetest childhood memories are associated with his mother. In 1941 she was murdered outside the family's home. Aharon and his father were deported to a labor camp in Transnistria but the boy managed to escape and hid in the woods until 1944. He was twelve years old when he emerged from hiding and attached himself to the Soviets who had recaptured the Ukraine. In 1946 Appelfeld made his way to Israel, then Palestine, where he lives to this day.

On route, Appelfeld stumbled upon places and locations, railway stations, remote villages, and rivers. They all had names but he recalls none. In his 2004 autobiography, *The Story of a Life*, Appelfeld conveys that details remembered are "imprinted within my body and not within my memory" (90). A sudden noise, or dampness in his shoes, makes him tense; "for a moment it seems to me that I've made a mistake [...], I'm still in the war, and I have to retreat to the outer edges of the forest, running and ducking" (90). Speech does not come easily to him and it is no wonder; "we didn't speak during the war" (102). Primo Levi, too, spoke of memory triggered by physical sensations. He binds the physicality of memory with the failure of language. As Levi nears the end of his life – whether by suicide or accident – what seems to haunt him most when writing *The Drowned and the Saved* (1986) is the inadequacy of words to express a personal torment over being "saved" while "the best all died" (82).

Sara Horowitz expounds in *Voicing the Void: Muteness and Memory in Holocaust Fiction* (1997) on how muteness became preferable to survivors over "value-laden words whose simple meaning can no longer be trusted" (113). Horowitz relates to George Steiner (1969) mulling over language, silence, and inhumanity, and notes that language

per se was damaged by Nazi atrocities; perhaps not permanently or irrepealably but significantly. Noting Elie Wiesel's typology of silence which draws upon traditional Jewish mysticism as well as modern absurdist literature, Horowitz illuminates mute protagonists in Wiesel's fiction who "consciously refrain from speech, as though muteness were their vocation" (119).

Lea Wernick Fridman's (2000) analysis of narratives and aesthetic strategies in representation of the Holocaust speaks of creating unfamiliar silences through "the exchange between experience and language" (58). For Eva Hoffman's (1989) father, silence meant the preservation of self-dignity. Years later, when maintaining his dignity was no longer entwined with silence, the Holocaust narrative disclosed by her father came across more like James Bond adventures.

Currently archived at The Clara Thomas Archives & Special Collections, York University, Toronto, a hand written (some pages are typed) manuscript of a play by Adele Wiseman represents a different sort of self-imposed silence: silence from a distance. Having won much acclaim with the 1956 publication of *The Sacrifice*, Wiseman received a Guggenheim Fellowship which afforded her the opportunity to spend several years in New York. It was during that time that she wrote a Holocaust play titled *Lovebound: A Tragi-Comedy*. *Lovebound* tells of a group of doomed Jewish refugees in the summer of 1939. The refugees are traveling on a ship in search of a country that will grant them asylum. Having spent all their money on obtaining the "right" documents, some passengers imagine themselves as Jonah saved from drowning by God. Others have no patience with God talk. They camouflage their anxiety with wisecracking: "When the Germans took to wearing brown shirts, the Jews should have taken to wearing brown

shirts [...] We could be running the whole show, instead of just running again” (Part I, Scene 1). Days go by and no country is willing to grant entry to the Jewish refugees. Near the end of the drama, long after the Jews commit suicide and vanish into the ocean, the ship’s crew and non-Jewish passengers grumble over a stifling Jewish scent; “When you carry animals,” a crew-member explains, “the smell they leave is [...] thick and pungent” (Part 2, Scene 2).

The more I immersed myself in what impressed me as a literary gem, the less I understood why *Lovebound* was never published,⁵ that is, until I came across a compilation of *Selected Letters of Margaret Laurence and Adele Wiseman* edited by John Lennox and Ruth Panofsky (1997). Apparently, having read the manuscript, Laurence could not wait for the play to be published and staged. In a letter to Wiseman dated September 1964 Laurence insists that *Lovebound* must be seen by everyone. She thought it brought to mind Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick* and applauded Wiseman for her depiction of protagonists “earning their humanity” (178). Laurence assured her friend that she has written a scintillating play in which nothing is “overdrawn” or “hammered at” (176), albeit, she jokingly wondered “what the hell kind of theatre it would make” (178).

In a letter dated September 23, Wiseman informs Laurence of her decision to publish the play. However, several days later, having received negative feedback, she changes her mind. The first negative response to *Lovebound* came from Malcolm Ross, Wiseman’s former professor-mentor at the University of Manitoba. She tells Laurence that Ross thought “I handled a subject worthy of compassion with lack of compassion” (180). Wiseman then met with the critic Leslie A. Fiedler. She told Fiedler that she

spent four years writing a play on the Holocaust and that she thought it was the best thing she had ever written. The correspondence between Wiseman and Laurence does not indicate whether Fiedler actually read *Lovebound*. Regardless, he told Wiseman that he wished she had not written the play. Dismayed, Wiseman suggested to Laurence that perhaps she had written a play on the Holocaust merely to satisfy her own guilt-ridden self. In any event she no longer had the stamina to “continue peddling the play” (196).

Other possible reasons for deflating Wiseman’s will to publish *Lovebound* notwithstanding, I am suggesting that in succumbing to negative feedback Wiseman concretizes a hesitancy which Saul Friedländer attributes to Jews who lived during World War II but experienced the events from afar. He includes himself in this category even though, born in 1932 to Jewish parents who died in Auschwitz, Friedländer would be considered by most as “close enough” to the Holocaust. Nonetheless, having lived through the Holocaust under the guise of a Roman Catholic boy, he attests to having difficulties putting himself in the category of Holocaust victims. Friedländer went on to become one of the most important historians of the Holocaust. Yet, in his 1979 memoir *When Memory Comes*, Friedländer regards himself more as a spectator.

I had lived on the edges of the catastrophe; a distance – impassable, perhaps – separated me from those who had been directly caught up in the tide of events, and despite all my efforts, I remained in my own eyes, not so much a victim as – a spectator. I was destined, therefore, to wander among several worlds, knowing them, understanding them – better perhaps, than many others – but nonetheless incapable of feeling an identification without any reticence, incapable of seeing, understanding and belonging in a single, immediate, total movement. (155-156)

Different types of Holocaust related silences are represented by Charlotte Delbo, Henri Raczymow, and Patrick Modiano. Delbo was a member of the *Résistance* during World War II. She was eventually captured and sent to Auschwitz. After the war she

thinks of silence as an inability to transcribe her thoughts into words. She states in *Auschwitz and After* (1995)⁶ that it was as if “you’ve forgotten all the words” (236). Henri Raczymow’s protagonist in *Writing the Book of Esther* (1995)⁷ alleges that the only silence worth contemplating is not the “grandiose nonsense about the silence of God” (146) but “the silence of the victims themselves, the silence of the Jews facing the gas chamber” (147). In Patrick Modiano’s *Dora Bruder* (1999),⁸ Paris remains submerged in stifling stillness having witnessed Dora and her father “departing Drancy with thousands of other men and women on a convoy of trains bound for Auschwitz” (118).

Hanoch (Helfgott) Bartov depicts silence or muteness in his 1965 novel *The Brigade*⁹ as an alternative to an instinctive impulse to avenge the slaughter of his people. In Aharon Megged’s *Foiglmán* (2003),¹⁰ silence is equated with the Yiddish language being muzzled by the Zionist-Israeli vision of a “new” Hebrew-speaking Jew. For Michal Govrin’s protagonists in “La Promenade”¹¹ keeping busy with small talk about food, vacations, and the triteness of aging is a form of silencing the pain of remembering. In Shulamith Hareven’s “Twilight”¹² silence is waking up in Jerusalem and being able to erase from memory a nightmare of being thrown back into the European city she fled – a city with Dante’s words as its password: “*Per me si va nella città dolente; I am the way to the city of sorrow*” (163). Neighborhood children in Yitzhak Laor’s story “Rachely’s Father Who Was an Actor”¹³ know that Rachely’s oddness has something to do with her father never saying anything about Auschwitz during the day, but at night his screams can be heard coming from his bedroom window. There is also Grandpa Mendel who

promises to keep silent in Savyon Liebrecht's "Hayuta's Engagement Party"¹⁴ but cannot.

A table laden with food and drinks triggers something uncontrollable.

In the camp, every day two or three people would die in our barracks. We used to drag them to a corner.... Once I found a potato in the pocket of one of them. We used to look in their pockets; we would take sweaters or socks off them. What use were socks to them now? I have no idea how he got the potato. He didn't work in the kitchen. I asked around, but nobody knew. And I couldn't figure it out. Where did he get that potato? (420)

Breaking the Silence and Postmemory

Eva Hoffman (2004) proclaims: "I come from the war... it is my true origin. But, as with all our origins, I cannot grasp it. Perhaps we never know where we come from; in a way, we are all created ex nihilo" (162). Herein a shared despondency among members of the second generation, the Eva Hoffmans and Savyon Liebrechts of the Jewish people: an inconsolable need to penetrate the silence, to read into the uncommunicative language of the Holocaust generation by way of infusing themselves into events that only their parents experienced.

This is an important theme to consider when contemplating second-generation Holocaust remembrance. For many members of the generation born to Holocaust survivors and raised in homes marred by a nondescript parental trauma, thoughts on bettering the world had much to do with remembering the Holocaust by osmosis. In a 1996 write-up on Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, Marianne Hirsch defines the idea of trans-generational transfer of traumatic knowledge and experience as "postmemory" – a concept that became prevalent among academics and psychologists. According to Hirsch (2012), others – among them Ellen Fine, Celia Lury, Alison Landsberg, James Young,

Froma Zeitlin, and Henri Raczymow – evoke a similar “‘syndrome’ of belatedness or ‘post-ness’” (3) to a parental past but employ different terminological labels such as absent memory, belated memory, prosthetic memory, vicarious witnessing, received memory, and *mémoire trouée*. In all, the events envisioned are so traumatic that their “memory *can* be transferred to those who were not actually there to live an event [italics in the text]” (3).

According to Hirsch, the “generation after” is saddled with a personal sense of the trauma of the Holocaust despite being fully cognizant of the fact that in reality only the Holocaust generation experienced and hence can remember the Holocaust. Over time the concept of postmemory has come to encompass the traumatic legacy of an entire post-Holocaust generation and not “just” children of survivors. While Hirsch’s focus is on the Holocaust she views postmemory as applicable to other colossal collective traumas such as slavery. Hirsch (1996) defines “postmemories in exile” as seeking connections; “It creates where it cannot recover. It imagines where it cannot recall” (662).

Postmemory is often linked with an imagined return to places one has never seen. The return motif, as fantasized by second-generation writers such as David Grossman, Nava Semel, Jonathan Safran Foer, and Joseph Skibell, is complex and presents an ethical query for readers and critics offended by literature that imagines terrible sufferings of others. My views on literature and moral knowledge are spelled out in chapter five. In principle, I do not fear the moral consequences of flights of imagination taken by Grossman, Semel, Foer, Skibell, and others. To the contrary, as I show, literature’s way of avoiding claims to deliver absolutes of moral knowledge enhances

Holocaust remembrance by infusing it with changeability, fluidity, and hence greater relevance to the present and the future.

My critique of the modality of postmemory is not on moral grounds. As I explain in chapter three, the problem I see in conceptualization of postmemory relates to theoretical totalizing. I do not doubt Hirsch's (2012) claim that as a member of the postmemory generation she has very few memories of her childhood but can "recall particular moments from my parents' wartime lives in great detail" (4). My contention is that when Hirsch speaks of postmemory "as a *structure* of inter- and transgenerational return of traumatic knowledge and embodied experience [italics in the text]" (6), the prospect of postmemory adjusting to future times and circumstances is being compromised. To an extent, I echo Jenni Adams's (2011) argument that inherent to Hirsch's postmemory is a tendency to slip into overly definitive language when representing postmemory experiences. According to Adams, for postmemory to become less definitive, non-totalizing, and more yielding in terms of future possibilities of Holocaust remembrance, it needs "to employ dialogic representational strategies" (55) *à la* Mikhail Bakhtin: a dialogic discourse that foretells a narrative that refuses "to acknowledge its own language as the sole verbal and semantic center" (57).

My critique of postmemory is *not* to be construed as objecting to being preoccupied, as Hirsch and others are, with the Holocaust and its remembrance. I myself am preoccupied with the Holocaust. At the very least, the murder of my German-Jewish grandparents and their relatives, and the traumatic scars this left particularly on my mother who fled Germany in 1936 (as part of a Zionist Youth Movement operation) and remained guilt-ridden throughout her life for not persuading her parents to leave their

beloved Berlin, are sufficient reasons for living and reliving Holocaust remembrance. From wishing to name my children in memory of lost family members, to an involuntary anxiety that envelops me when hearing Richard Wagner's *Tannhäuser* – the Holocaust defines me. I am the last person to question Jean Améry's painful reflections on "Being a Jew" (1980), and his analysis of himself as being conditioned psychologically and spiritually by the reality of being a Holocaust victim. His left forearm bore the Auschwitz number. The tattooed insignia read "more briefly than the Pentateuch or the Talmud and yet provides more thorough information" (24). Being a Jew after the Holocaust came to mean "those realities and possibilities that are summed up in the Auschwitz number" (24). I never knew a day in Auschwitz but like Hirsch, I too am oppressed by what *really* happened to members of my family and my people. The consciousness of being a Jew after the Holocaust is not an ideology or a neurosis "but rather precisely reflected reality" (26).

Universal and Particular Holocaust Remembrance

While the focus of my work is on what Améry attributes to an individual's consciousness of being a Jew after the Holocaust,¹⁵ or, as in my work, the consciousness of being an Israeli Jew, I also deliberate universal implications of Holocaust remembrance. Gillian Rose (1996) universalizes Holocaust representation by speaking of mourning as becoming definitive and obligatory as the law. Rose asserts that when it comes to thinking about the Holocaust, Western civilization cannot resign itself to remaining suspended in a horrified gaze backwards which is tantamount to mystifying something we do not dare understand. We do not dare understand for "we fear that it

may be all too understandable, all too continuous with what we are – human, all too human” (43). Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht (2013) conjoins the universal with the particular when contemplating Western civilization after 1945. Gumbrecht particularizes his argument when comparing reactions to the trial of Adolf Eichmann in Israel and in Germany. Bringing Adolf Eichmann to trial in Jerusalem in 1961 was a historical turning point; the trial was the first time the Jewish people as a collective stood before an executioner of the Final Solution. In Germany the sentiment was more of relief: “To rid the world of a major agent of the Holocaust seemed to represent a way to take distance from the past” (169-171). The superficiality of this specific comparison and other instances of questionable phraseology notwithstanding,¹⁶ the universal thrust Gumbrecht posits is rather interesting. It is not specific to the Holocaust but has much to do with it. Gumbrecht encapsulates a post war (Second World War) tenor of “lingering latency” that offers no assurance “whether we will pass into the threshold of futurity” (38). In the aftermath of World War II, most people would have liked nothing more than to put this horrifying era behind our historical and cultural memory. But that was not to be. As Gumbrecht argues, while other catastrophic events remain part of Western civilization’s collective memory, in their aftermath, there was always a sense that hence forward we can hope for a better humanistic future. In contrast, drawing on Samuel Beckett, Paul Celan, Jean Paul Sartre and others, Gumbrecht maintains that in the aftermath of 1945, we have lost a capacity to move forward and are merely engaged in expanding the present. Just like Vladimir and Estragon in Becket’s *Waiting for Godot*, Gumbrecht envisions us “moving the whole time without making any progress” (28).

Somewhat compatible with Gumbrecht's idea of post World War II latency, but directly related to the Holocaust, Moishe Postone and Eric Santner (2003) contend that if the Holocaust continues to somehow defy full integration into our cultural sensibilities, and be put to rest as past history, "then it does so, perhaps, not simply because of its radical otherness or utter uniqueness, but rather because of a kind of over proximity, that is, because we are still in some ways caught up in the forms of life – and social fantasies – that made it possible" (14-15).

In line with thoughts on post World War II latency and the inability to fully integrate the Holocaust into our cultural sensibilities, Seyla Benhabib (1984) speaks of a crude awakening from a dream: the Enlightenment's dream. Benhabib notes that whatever the currents of modernism-postmodernism were, are, and will be, awakening from the Enlightenment's dream "of an infinitely malleable world, serving as mere receptacle of the desire of an infinitely striving self, unfolding its powers in the process of conquering externality" (103) is too difficult in that so much of Western humanistic tradition is rooted in the Enlightenment's discourse on reason, science, and progress.

One among many other remarkable features in Etgar Keret's writings is that he does not defy the integration of Holocaust remembrance into our lives. By allowing his imagination to situate the dead and the survivors in day-to-day scenarios, Keret makes Holocaust remembrance an integral part of our lives. Thus, as an example, in one of Keret's stories, a grandfather who died in the Holocaust becomes an imaginary team-player in his grandson's soccer game. In another story, a high school teenager risks being roughed up by two classmates after he reported seeing them steal a bicycle from a Holocaust survivor. Keret's unique way of superimposing remembrance of the Holocaust

onto everyday happenings such as a soccer game or rivalry between high school teenagers is a key strategy of coping with Holocaust remembrance. It is entirely different, say, from Appelfeld's memories of being a boy who is all alone in a hostile world, hungry, cold, and in constant danger. There is nothing comforting and dependable in the boy's immediate environment onto which he can project his terror and sufferings. Nothing in his day-to-day surrounding offers a form of escape from physical and emotional misery. All he has left are moments of *dreaming* about the happiness he once knew but the dream is always interrupted by a crude awakening to a terrifying reality. For Keret's boy-protagonist it is exactly the opposite. Thinking about the Holocaust is frightening but *reality* offers several means of coping with imagining the worst. Keret's protagonist has a loving family, plenty of food, clothing, friends, and an environment upon which he can build a creative foundation for coping with Holocaust remembrance.

Etgar Keret

Salman Rushdie refers to Keret as the voice of the future.¹⁷ Keret began writing while serving as a soldier in the Israeli army. He was born in 1967 and lives in Tel Aviv. His literature is inspired by Franz Kafka, Isaac Babel, Hassidic folklore, Anton Chekhov, Nikolai Gogol, and Raymond Carver. Humble, obliging, and unpretentious, Keret continues to win the hearts of readers in Israel and elsewhere. I had the privilege of meeting Keret in Toronto and then again in Tel Aviv. We continue to correspond by electronic mail. He is always extremely generous with his time and responds to my questions in a sincere and earnest manner.

Keret has few stories that deal strictly with Holocaust remembrance but traces of Holocaust remembrance permeate his oeuvre. Most of his stories are very short. He is the son of Holocaust survivors. By all accounts Keret “belongs” to a group of second-generation Israeli authors such as Savyon Liebrecht, Nava Semel, Lizzie Doron, and Amir Gutfreund. Keret, however, does not see himself fitting this typology in the way that, for example, Semel and Liebrecht do.¹⁸ As he explained to an audience at Syracuse University in 2009,¹⁹ and has reiterated on several other occasions, he deems such a typology as “some sort of a reduction of my family and my relationship with my parents” (5). Keret sets himself apart from members of his generation who, as Iris Milner (2003) suggests, were raised by parents “committed to the articulation of silenced memories” (196).

Extracted from writings by second-generation Israeli writers such as *My First Sony* by Benny Barbash, *See Under: Love* by David Grossman, *Why Didn't You Come Before the War?* by Lizzie Doron, *Our Holocaust* by Amir Gutfreund, *The Name* by Michal Govrin, *It's Greek To Me She Said To Him* by Savyon Liebrecht, *Nobody's Child* by Tsippi Gon-Gross, *Hat of Glass* by Nava Semel, *Heat wave and Crazy Birds* by Gabriela Avigur-Rotem, *Legends of the Silent Lakes* by Itamar Levi, and *A Golem in a Circle* by Lily Perry-Amitai – Milner draws out a common denominator:

[these authors] often remember how ashamed they were of their own parents, particularly their mothers: because of their look, their clothing, their language, and accent (bad Hebrew, or, what was even worse, Yiddish), because of their hairdo, their hospitality manners, their eating habits [...] – in short, because of their complete otherness. (198-199)

This may not differ from children of many immigrant families. However, in the case of children of immigrant Holocaust survivors, an added layer of something unspeakable and

dark is sensed as being part of the so-called otherness of their parents. Apart from references to what happened over “there”, Semel describes to Ronit Lentin in *Israel & Daughters of the Shoah* (2000), a “transmission of non-verbal information, through body language and through crises and catastrophes [...] And then there was the word ‘Auschwitz’ [...] identified with sleeping pills at night, with black clothes, with terror, and with something very terrifying, which I didn’t want to know exactly” (34). In other words, Milner’s articulation of the shame felt by children of survivors is different from other immigrant families in that it is steeped in terror and fear of knowing that their parents experienced something terrible in their past. But this is not how Keret recounts his childhood memories. I describe Keret’s home life in greater detail in chapter seven but in the context of this introduction, suffice it to say that in all my discussions with Keret, and in interviews with others, Keret speaks of a happy childhood home. This is not to say that his childhood, youth, and early adulthood were years of complete bliss. Rather, it is to say that Keret does not associate his unhappiness with his Holocaust-surviving parents, but, as I show, with his years of schooling and later, as a young adult, with being a soldier in the Israeli army.

Keret’s rapport with his readers is that of an empathic acquaintance as opposed to a know-it-all prophet. In demeanor and writing I think of Keret as exemplifying the best of what Patricia Drechsel Tobin (1978) defines as our messy “peer culture” (212) – a culture that “traces literary action back to human action” (213), and a culture in which the “artistically new” is “humanly better” (211). In many ways Keret’s *empathia*, in the Greek sense of passion or feeling, is epitomized in rescuing the Other out of anonymity – be it the lonely Holocaust survivor, the discriminated against Arab, the misfit child, the

dejected immigrant, or the forlorn soldier. For example, in a story titled “What, of this Goldfish, Would You Wish?” a protagonist named Yonatan sets out to create a documentary related to the pursuit of happiness. The characters chosen by Yonatan to appear in his documentary are the socially invisible, the voiceless marginalized.

Yonatan had a brilliant idea for a documentary. He’d knock on doors. Just him. No camera crew, no nonsense. Just Yonatan, on his own, a small camera in hand, asking, “If you found a talking goldfish that granted you three wishes, what would you wish for?” Folks would give answers, and Yoni would edit them down and make clips of the more surprising responses [...]

Yoni grabbed his camera and went out knocking on doors. In the first neighborhood he went to, the kindly folk that took part generally requested the foreseeable things: health, money, bigger apartments, either to shave off a couple of years or a couple of pounds. But there were also powerful moments [...] A Holocaust survivor with a number on his arm asked very slowly, in a quiet voice [...] he’d been wondering, if this fish didn’t mind, would it be possible for all the Nazis left living in the world to be held accountable for their crimes? Yonatan knew that if the project was going to have any weight, he’d have to get to everyone, to the unemployed, to the ultra religious, to the Arabs and Ethiopians. It was in Bethlehem, actually, that Yonatan found his Arab, a handsome man who used his first wish for peace [...] Yoni knew even as he was filming that this guy would be his promo for sure. Either him or that Russian [...]

“What, of this Goldfish, Would You Wish?”²⁰

As I show in chapters six and seven, integral to a discussion of Keret is the fact that he is a secular Israeli artist. The meaning of “secular” is discussed in chapter six in the context of examining the development of modern Hebrew literature as integral to the chronicle of cultural Zionism. Interestingly, whenever asked to situate himself on the Jewish-Zionist-Israeli cultural continuum, Keret invariably identifies his literary lineage as Jewish first and Israeli second. I am never quite sure as to the degree to which this, like other surprising statements made by Keret, is meant as provocation. Be that as it may, Keret is a secular Israeli writer who is knowledgeable in Jewish sources and embraces aspects of the Jewish tradition in a non-religious way.

Why is the issue of secularization important to my study? First, secularization has much to do with the history of the Zionist movement and Israeli statehood. Second, for the most part, Hebrew literature is written by writers who classify themselves as secular. As I show in chapter six, the issue is anything but self-evident. Secular Hebrew literature is steeped in biblical references and theological themes; the presence or non-presence of God in the Holocaust being one such meditation. Third, religious and secular demarcations impact the Israeli political trajectory which, in turn, is interlaced with Holocaust remembrance. Nowadays, particularly when mixed with politics, a religious-secular schism divides Israelis. Among religious extremists residing in Israel are those who long for Messianic redemption that will replace the Zionist blasphemous enterprise, otherwise known as the State of Israel, with God's kingdom. At the secular extreme are Israelis who view every religiously observant Israeli as a potential Jewish Ayatollah Khomeini. Between these polarities there is a vast terrain of cultural overlap and a vibrant secular-religious conversation. Unfortunately, when religious differences are allowed to infiltrate politics, as they often do in Israel, the divide can become a tempestuous quarrel even among non-extremists.

Fourth, I am a secular Jew. As such, my familiarity is with secular Israeli culture in general and secular Hebrew literature in particular. Secular literature represents the bulk of modern-postmodern Hebrew literature, the upsurge since the 1990s in Hebrew literature written by observant Jews such as Emuna Elon, Yochi Brandes, Haim Sabato, and Yehudit Rotem notwithstanding. In general, I agree with Dan Miron's (1984) affirmation that when addressing Zionist and Israeli realities in Modern Hebrew literature, one ought to refrain from "reductive procedures" which ascribe to Hebrew

literature a unified profile; modern Jewish history “produced not one Jewish culture but many variants of possible Jewish cultures or sub-cultures” (49). While secular Hebrew literature regarded itself “as the true and legitimate custodian of national literary creativity” (49), it was challenged by the Hasidic movement and Yiddish literature. Catastrophically, an entire Yiddish culture was destroyed in the Holocaust and secular Israeli literature was left with the task of approximating post Holocaust resumption of existential “normalcy” and spiritual-cultural life.

My discussion of what I occasionally refer to as “the Keret phenomenon” – that is, Keret’s meteoric rise to fame – is represented as mirroring an evolutionary cultural process. It is not a question of something missing in Hebrew literature prior to Keret. Rather, I regard Keret’s arrival on the literary scene as a natural progression from one phase in Hebrew literature to the next. In other words, as I show in chapters six and seven, the emergence of Keret as a popular reflector of the “mood” of many Israeli readers is part of a much larger narrative in which historical, social, political, and cultural determinants intermix. To take an example, the divisiveness created among Israelis in 1982 over a military operation in southern Lebanon had much to do with demythologizing the Israeli army. The Israeli army was never beyond criticism – earlier literature written by S. Yizhar (“The Prisoner”)²¹ and Binyamin Tammuz (“The Swimming Race”)²² attests to that – but the post 1982 intensity of questioning the army’s impeccability was unprecedented for Israel. In other words, at least in part, events in Israel that led to the demythologizing of the Israeli army prepared the grounds for the receptivity of Keret’s stories that often include disparaging portrayals of military personnel and army routines. An analogy made by Keret in a story called “Cramps”²³

between an abusive manager of a workplace and an army officer – “His workers hated him because he kept yelling at them. They complained that he treated them like they were in basic training” (59) – does not cause unease among present-day readers as it would have in the earlier years of the State of Israel.

In addition to anchoring Keret’s literature in the dynamics of a Hebrew-Zionist-cultural-political timeline and ambience, I assess Keret’s qualities as a gifted postmodern storyteller who appeals to a heterogeneous audience. Keret’s mastery of the genre of the short story can leave the reader breathless.

When you have an asthma attack, you can’t breath.
When you can’t breathe, you can hardly talk. To make
a sentence all you get is the air in your lungs. Which
isn’t much. Three to six words, if that. You learn the value of
words. You rummage through the jumble in your head. Choose
the crucial ones – those cost you too. Let healthy people toss out
whatever comes to mind, the way you throw out the garbage.
When an asthmatic says “I love you,” and when an asthmatic
says “I love you madly,” there’s a difference. The difference of
a word. A word’s a lot. It could be *stop*, or *inhaler*. It could even
be *ambulance*.

(“Asthma Attack” in *The Girl on the Fridge*.)

Postmodernism and Jacques Derrida’s Deconstruction

Intrinsic to Keret is his affinity with postmodern language of deconstruction. Time, place, atmosphere, plot, characters, conflicts, and points of view are all elements that constitute the settings of a short story. But the postmodern short story is also about fragmentation. As depicted by Farhat Iftekharrudin (2003), the postmodern short story, its language and delivery, comes across as fragments stuck together. Dominick LaCapra (2000) points out that we have long passed the time when it was possible to think of language as a neutral and self-contained instrument of conveying meaning. LaCapra also

maps out an ethical relationship between language deconstruction and representation of the Holocaust in Jacques Derrida's philosophy. Derrida's philosophy and language of postmodern deconstruction is fundamental to my way of constructing the modality of coping with Holocaust remembrance.

In "There is no *One* Narcissism" (*Points*, 1992) Derrida describes his family as being observant Jews "in a very banal way" (205). He regrets not being steeped in Jewish culture. Not out of "nostalgia for a sense of Judaic belonging, but because I think it is a lacuna in anyone's culture – mine in particular" (205). He further notes that this makes his cultural inheritance difficult "for it to be passed along neither by genes, nor by thematic, nor by language, nor by religious instruction" (205). That being said, and as I outline in chapter four, Derrida's Jewish path shows gradual deepening, increased familiarity with Israel,²⁴ and an expanding preoccupation with the Holocaust. "Cinders" is how Derrida would come to call the "absolute misfortune" – "the destruction of memory, one in which the very sign of destruction is carried off. The name of the victim is effaced" ("Passages – from Traumatism to Promise" in *Points* 1992:389).

The responsibility for the Other pervades Derrida's thinking about language, interpretation, translation, hospitality, ethics, truth, forgiving, theology, sacrifice, politics, culture, art, life and death. It is the responsibility for the Other, which, according to Derek Attridge (2011), is at the heart of Derrida's unbroken connection with deconstruction – famously exclaimed in *The Gift of Death* (1995): "*tout autre est tout autre*" (every other is wholly other) – that inspires my thoughts on the relationship between Holocaust remembrance and democratic political ethics.

Much of my discussion of Derrida and the responsibility for the Other is embedded in Derrida's conceptualization of deconstruction. More than any other term in the Derridian lexicon, deconstruction is most intimately associated with Derrida. It is also a term most likely to be misused. Contrary to what is commonly assumed, deconstruction is not meant as a method or blueprint on how to read a text. "It is not something anyone chooses to undertake but rather something that happens" (Attridge 2011:149). This makes Derrida's deconstruction difficult to follow for it always oscillates in unforeseeable ways. It is not a literary paradigm that can be applied to studying a text, but it is indispensable to examining "how *this* reading of *this* text at *this* time engages with or evades" (25) issues of responsibility. Deconstruction summons us and confronts us with an "undecidability which is also always an opportunity and a demand, a chance and a risk" (28). As Attridge (2011) explains, there is no truth or essence of deconstruction; "All one can do is testify to the deconstructive effect" (29).

Derrida's thinking on what constitutes the politically ethical is closely related to his view of literature as "a site of resistance to metaphysics and transcendence – an ethico-political as well as an intellectual resistance" (Attridge, 2011:30).

The institution of literature [an institution that tends to overflow the institution] in the West, in its relatively modern form, is linked to an authorization to say everything, and doubtless too to the coming about of the modern idea of democracy. Not that it depends on a democracy in place, but it seems inseparable to me from what calls forth a democracy, in the most open (and doubtless itself to come) sense of democracy.

(Jacques Derrida, "This Strange Institution Called Literature," Attridge 1992:37).

The deconstructive effect is depicted in Keret's postmodern writing as in when nothing can mean much more than concretized realism or tangible substance. "Nothing" (*The Girl on the Fridge*) is a story about a woman who loved a man "who was made of

nothing” (109). Hours without him, boiling water for coffee he will never actually drink, imagining him stroking her cheeks lovingly, waiting for him in bed, making love to him in an empty bed, and holding his invisible hand is the best she ever knew. Her parents are not too thrilled with her invisible lover, although, once she overheard her father say “Better than an Arab – or a junkie” (110). But she is happy for she is confident –

that this love would never betray her. What could possibly let her down when she opened the door? An empty apartment? A numbing silence? An absence between the sheets of the rumpled bed? (110)

The Derridian deconstructive effect and Keret’s empathic perfection of “nothing” are intrinsic to the conceptualization of coping with Holocaust remembrance. Some seventy years after the Holocaust we have deepened and broadened our grasp of collective remembrance of traumatic history. Encapsulated by Jakob Lothe, Susan Rubin Suleiman, and James Phelan in their 2012 study of ethics and aesthetics of future Holocaust narrative, “after the Holocaust” encompasses everything from the real business of living after World War II – to fiction. As Derrida argues in “Economic of the Crisis” (Elizabeth Rottenberg, ed. 2002), in the aftermath of the Holocaust it is not enough to be

tirelessly eloquent about the end of philosophy, about the inability of human sciences – including psychoanalysis – [...], about the recession of Marxist or humanist dogmatism [...], about the return of the religious in its enigmatic and dispersed power, about uncontrollable ‘technological mutations’ that no longer seem commensurable with what we still call *ethics, politics, culture, ecology, economy* [...], and about the new for-itself of a finite humanity that finally knows itself capable of a radical auto-destruction. (69-70)

Coping with Traumatic Remembrance

Kenneth Doka’s (2003) reflections on responses to collective traumas, living with grief, and coping with public tragedy are highly informative. Doka notes that the scope

of the tragedy is only one factor in the typology of responses. For example, the response to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 had little to do with the number of people killed and the damage incurred. Rather, it had much to do with a superpower's loss of self-confidence. As Doka explains, responses to tragedies foster retrospective accounts that relate to degrees of preventability, expectedness, and intentionality of violence. Variations in retrospection are situated along "the natural-to-human-made continuum" – the more natural the disaster, the less preventable, and less intentional. In addition, responses to collective-public traumas entail measures taken to prevent future catastrophes. Doka shows that while deemed necessary, protective measures taken in the form of infringements on civil liberties, such as post 9/11 profiling of Middle Eastern travelers, are nonetheless perceived as yet another facet of loss of innocence, and a sign of greater vulnerability. Public tragedies retain an undying flame that lies dormant until reignited by yet another calamitous event. A new tragedy begets "old" (familiar) responses. Thus, for example, the threat to Israel when attacked in 1967 by surrounding Arab countries unleashed Holocaust-related fears of total annihilation.

Jewish-Israeli remembrance of the trauma of the Holocaust is discussed in my thesis in relation to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. I do not presume to know the Palestinian people, let alone speak on their behalf. All I aspire to do is bring across perspectives that reflect on *my* people. Jean Améry's (1980) statement that "The pain was what it was [and] Beyond that there is nothing to say" (30) remains an undisputed truth. Still, the failure of words to transmit Améry's suffering, and our inability to fathom Auschwitz, ought not to circumscribe the Holocaust outside humanity's orbit, an

orbit saturated with urgent moral and political conundrums such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Concluding Words

Lawrence Langer's (1975) explication on the Holocaust and literary imagination as beautifying suffering is a given. The problems entailed in beautifying suffering notwithstanding, literature is represented in my thesis as offering the best there is in terms of Holocaust remembrance, if only, but not only, because philosophy and history have come up short. Even historians like Saul Friedländer and Hayim Yosef Yerushalmi recognize the lead taken by literature in grappling with Holocaust remembrance. In an essay on "Trauma, Memory, and Transference" (1994), Saul Friedländer weighs in on the history-literature predicament and its relation to Holocaust remembrance by citing Hayim Yosef Yerushalmi's reflections on the post-Holocaust Jewish world. "Awaiting a redeeming myth, as in the wake of the expulsion from Spain when it embraced the mystical symbolism of the Kabbalah" (255), but with no such redemptive myth in sight, Yerushalmi resigns himself in *Zakhor* (1982) to Holocaust literature as a surrogate. Friedländer broadens a pro-literature proclivity by turning to Maurice Blanchot's precept in *The Writing of the Disaster* (1986) on having "to keep watch over absent meaning" (42). Friedländer is also heartened by literature's ability not to confine itself "to the community of the victims" (Friedländer, 263).

I affirm stances taken by critics such as James Wood in *How Fiction Works* (2008) and Marjorie Garber in *The Use and Abuse of Literature* (2011). Both credit literature for not pretending to have clear answers to moral interpellations. I follow

Derrida's treatment of literature "not as an object for dissection but as a staging of some of the most significant and mysterious aspects of human (and sometimes non-human) experience" (Attridge 2011:43). As I show, it is the Derridian undecidability which "literature capitalizes on and exploits to the full" (Attridge 2011:43); an undecidability which Etgar Keret seizes upon brilliantly. My thesis is not a study of Jacques Derrida as a leading voice in postmodern literary theory or of Etgar Keret as a postmodern Israeli artist. Rather, my thesis promotes a modality of coping with Holocaust remembrance which is aligned with Derrida's philosophic deconstructive discourse and exemplified in Keret's storytelling.

My discussion is predicated on freeing remembrance of the Holocaust from the constraints of a structural framework that links remembrance with generational chronology. Chronologically structured thinking made absolute sense when the Holocaust was recalled by those who witnessed and experienced it. A chronologic framework was also helpful in understanding how memories of the Holocaust were transmitted from Holocaust survivors to their children: the second generation. With the fourth generation, and future generations to come, the chronological timeline has lost some or much of its efficacy and usefulness. I am therefore suggesting a modality that posits a conceptual Gestalt that is not necessarily linked to the number of decades that have passed since the Wannsee Conference of January 1942 when Reinhard Heydrich secured the cooperation of Nazi administrators in the implementation of the "Final Solution" – the plan to exterminate every living Jewish person.

Finally, a closing thought on historicity of the Holocaust versus art and aesthetics of Holocaust remembrance. On April 26, 1937 the German *Luftwaffe* bombed the

Spanish Basque village of Guernica. The factual details of unarmed men, women, and children killed in an unannounced attack from the air have little to do with affixing this event into Western civilization's shared cultural memory. Rather, it has everything to do with the event sparking Pablo Picasso's *Guernica*. Art does not replace history. Art enhances our understanding of history. Without artistic expressions, remembrance of the Holocaust is curbed in scope, constrained in applicability, confined in meaning, and short-lived in our collective memory. As Jay Winter (2006) reflects on World War I as between memory and history,

historical remembrance entails much more than chronology of events, documentations, and credible first-person narratives. Which is why any consideration of remembrance "must recognize the role of novelists, playwrights, poets, filmmakers, architects, museum designers and curators, television producers, and others in this varied set of cultural practices we term historical remembrance. (278)

After Postmemory: Coping with Holocaust Remembrance in Postmodern Hebrew Literature is an interdisciplinary dissertation organized in two major parts. The first part establishes the methodological framework and theoretical scaffolding for rethinking Holocaust remembrance in terms of coping with remembrance. In chapter one I introduce Holocaust remembrance as part of the scholarly field of Holocaust representation. As I note in the opening to the first chapter, the Holocaust was one among several acts of genocide humans planned and executed in the modern era. While I refrain from engaging in comparing the severity of different genocides, I state several reasons for considering the Holocaust unique among other horrific historical events. It is

not a matter of measuring degrees of destruction and suffering. The uniqueness of the Holocaust has to do with the humanistic rupture it caused in Western civilization's metaphysics, ethics, and notions about the linearity of cultural progress. As I remark in a later chapter, no matter how one interprets the "post" in postmodernity, it often entails equating the move from modernity to postmodernity with the occurrence of the Holocaust. With Germany succumbing to unconditional surrender to the Allied forces, and as the magnitude of the Nazi horrors unfolded, Western civilization came to realize that it was not the physical ruins of Europe in 1945 that stood in the way of future recovery. It was the impossibility of reconciling European enlightened metaphysical tradition with the reality of Auschwitz. We still regard Immanuel Kant as scaffolding the Enlightenment's faith in rationalism and scientific progress, but we no longer exalt in Kantian absolutes regarding the promise of humanistic progress. I also articulate in chapter one other thoughts pertaining to Holocaust representation including whether it is even possible to fathom a twentieth-century industry of exterminating men, women and children, and if so, what are the ethics of representing the unspeakable. What challenges do historians encounter when attempting to convey the history of the Holocaust, to cite Dominick LaCapra (1998), "when a concern with memory includes a desire to be attentive to the problem of history" (8), and what are some of the linguistic barriers we are faced with when trying to undertake Holocaust representation.

In chapter two I narrow the focus by clarifying the meaning of Holocaust "remembrance" and its relationship with memory and remembering. An analysis of the subject of "collective memory" is central to my discourse. Several years after World War I, Maurice Halbwachs published *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (*On Collective*

Memory). As Erika Apfelbaum (2010) notes, in many ways Halbwachs views on collective memory were prophetic for “in delineating the social and collective dimensions of individual memory, tracing their dialectical links in the process of elaboration and transformation, in addition to analyzing the mechanisms and modes of dissemination of collective memory, [Halbwachs] laid the theoretical foundations for a comprehensive approach [...] to human behavior” (77). At the heart of Halbwachs’s thinking is not only the idea that memories retained by individuals are shaped through membership in various types of groupings – family, community, nation, and so on – but that these socially defined memories are not just etched into memory but “are truly active selections and reconstructions of the past” (77).

Halbwachs’s wife was Jewish. Halbwachs was arrested by the Gestapo and sent to Buchenwald after protesting the treatment of his Jewish in-laws. Jorge Semprun recalls in *Literature or Love* (1998) Halbwachs’s dying hours in 1945. “I had taken Maurice Halbwachs in my arms [...] that last Sunday. He was lying in the middle level of the three tiers of bunks, just a chest height to me. I slipped an arm under his shoulders and leaned over his face, to speak to him as closely, as gently as I could. I had just recited to him [a] poem by Baudelaire, the way one says a prayer for the dying” (41). It is a heart wrenching scene in Semprun’s personal account of his time in Buchenwald.²⁵ I make mention of this haunting literary beauty because it is one among incalculable instances when the depravity of Nazism makes absolutely no sense. The Nazis “succeeded” in killing Halbwachs but not his legacy. While nothing, absolutely nothing of value remains of Nazism, as Apfelbaum (2010) remarks, key concepts introduced by Halbwachs on socially constructed memory live on for ever. As I render in chapter two,

Halbwachs's foundational legacy on collective memory is picked up, refined, expanded, and amplified by theorists such as Pierre Nora, Jan Assmann, Dominick LaCapra, Paul Connerton and others.

I follow the deliberation of memory and collective memory with an analytic explanation as to why we ought to shift from thinking about *remembering* and *memory* to thinking about Holocaust *remembrance*. This part of the conversation leads into chapter three in which I examine remembrance in relation to Marianne Hirsch's conceptualization of Holocaust remembrance as postmemory. The modality of coping with Holocaust remembrance is then put forth as an alternative to postmemory. Postmemory, as represented by Hirsch and others, is a modality of remembrance that pertains to the generation that came after the Holocaust generation. The argument I present in chapter three does not set out to prove Hirsch wrong. Instead, I am suggesting an alternative to the conceptualization of postmemory in the form of a modality of coping with Holocaust remembrance which, as I strive to show, is more relevant to present and future thinking about Holocaust remembrance.

The discussion of a paradigmatic shift from postmemory to coping with Holocaust remembrance is continued in chapter four by aligning the *raison d'être* for a shift in conceptualization of remembrance with postmodern thinking. I begin by discussing the fact that there does not seem to be a consensus over what exactly does postmodernism stand for. Is it an era? Is it a mere chapter in contemporary literary theory? Is it mostly a style – as in architecture and art? I then focus on Jacques Derrida's postmodern philosophy of deconstruction. I posit Derrida as a postmodern philosopher who embodies some of the best of postmodern thinking. I also elucidate Derridian

language deconstruction as an embodiment of the language of coping with Holocaust remembrance.

Derrida was first and foremost a philosopher but he was also a great proponent of literature's imaginative preponderance, changeability, and inconstant wavering. In many ways Derrida thought literature was a better exemplifier of the ethics of deconstruction than philosophy and he sought to apply literature's ways onto philosophy. A general contemplation of philosophy versus literature in relation to moral knowledge is the subject of chapter five. Much of the discussion evolves around the post-Holocaust fall from grace of metaphysics of the Enlightenment and the notion that moral knowledge ought to be relocated from philosophy to literature. My aim is not to offer a conclusive resolution to the philosophy versus literature polemic. Instead, chapter five serves as a preamble to the second part of my study in which I apply Derridian deconstruction onto Etgar Keret's literature. Elements of Derridian undecidability, *différance*, and Otherness, as well as postmodern principles of non-totalizing and fluidity are brought to bear on Keret's literature.

Chapter six, the first chapter in Part II, is structured as a historical, cultural, and political backdrop to Etgar Keret as a postmodern Israeli author. I review cultural developments and political factors that herald Keret's arrival on the Israeli literary scene. Components examined include the history of Zionism as a modern national movement seeking territorial and political independence, the meaning and evolution of cultural Zionism, the transformation of biblical Hebrew into a spoken vernacular, the birth and development of Modern Hebrew literature, the history and present-day reality of religious and secular Zionism, remembrance of the Holocaust in Israel, and the ongoing

Palestinian-Israeli conflict as critical variables in the configuration of an Israeli cultural climate. While Keret's artistic expression is influenced by determinants that are not all specific to the Israeli ambiance, I contend that in order to understand Keret as an extremely popular Israeli writer one must first understand the cultural, social, and political environment into which he was born.

Finally, in chapter seven I review core themes, concepts, perceptions, and interpretations that were presented in my study as constituting the substance of the modality of coping with Holocaust. I then apply this overall theoretical framework onto Keret's literature. Debates on Holocaust representation, dynamics of collective memory, moral knowledge as rendered by philosophy versus literature, postmodern literary theory, the ethics of Derridian deconstruction, and generational remembrance of the Holocaust are brought to bear on Keret's writings as inseparable from thinking about Holocaust remembrance in terms of *coping* with Holocaust remembrance.

Like the postmodern language of deconstruction, the modality of coping with Holocaust remembrance is meant to remain incomplete and receptive to revisions. Its openness to changeability is perhaps best depicted as a contrariety to a title of a 1985 collection of Holocaust remembrance stories by Nava Semel, *Kova Z'chuchit (A Hat of Glass)*. Cited by Dvir Abramovich (2010), the critic Nurit Govrin suggests that the title is a metaphor "projected upon the children of survivors" (59):

This glass hat, its touch is cold. It is transparent and insulated, burdensome and not isolated, vulnerable, and may break into pieces at any moment. More than it protects, it exposes and bears great danger. It concentrates the sunrays and amplifies the heat underneath so much so that it can cause a fire. (59-60)

The modality of Holocaust remembrance formulated in my study is also vulnerable.

However, as I am suggesting, thinking in terms of coping is less likely to cause a fire to Holocaust remembrance.

Endnotes

- ¹ Translated by W. S. Hett (1936) as cited in *Memory: An Anthology*, eds. Harriet Harvey Wood & A. S. Byatt (London: Vintage Books, 2009):159-160.
- ² Translated by Benjamin Jowett (1892) as cited by Wood & Byatt (2009):156.
- ³ Translated by William Watts (1633) as quoted by Wood & Byatt (2009):163.
- ⁴ Originally published in 1988 as *Heidegger et "les juifs"* by Éditions Galilée, Paris.
- ⁵ Wiseman had a copy printed for private use only in 1961.
- ⁶ *Auschwitz et après* is a three part trilogy: "None of Us Will Return" – written a year after the war but not published until 1965 – "Useless Knowledge" and "The Measure of Our Days" first published in 1970.
- ⁷ Originally published in French as *Un Cri Sans Voix* in 1985.
- ⁸ Originally published in French as *Dora Bruder* in 1997.
- ⁹ Originally published in Tel Aviv by Am Oved Publishers, the novel was translated by David S. Segal, and appeared in English in 1968 (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston). The chapter, "Enemy Territory", cited here appears in *Facing the Holocaust: Selected Israeli Fiction*, eds. Gila Ramras-Baruch and Joseph Michman-Melkman, (1985):51-74.
- ¹⁰ Originally published in Hebrew as *Foiglmán* in 1987.
- ¹¹ The text used here was translated by Dalya Bilu and appears in *Selected Israeli Fiction*, eds., Gila Ramras-Rauch and Joseph Michman-Melkman, (1985):227-260.
- ¹² Translated by Miriam Arad, "Twilight," *ibid.* (1985):161-170.
- ¹³ Yitzhak Laor's story "Rachely's Father Who Was an Actor" (1976) was translated by Sheila Jellen. See *50 Stories from Israel; an Anthology*, eds. Zisi Stavi & Chaya Galai, (2007):397-408.
- ¹⁴ "Hayuta's Engagement Party" was translated by Marganit Weinberger-Rotman and appears in *Apples from the Desert: Selected Stories* by Savyon Liebrecht, (1998):81-92.
- ¹⁵ In a way, what comes to mind is Tzvetan Todorov's profound examination of moral psychology in *Facing the Extreme: Moral Life in the Concentration Camps* (1996). Todorov cites Charles Maier noting that "Jews should emphasize the ordinariness of the Holocaust, Germans its uniqueness" (117).
- ¹⁶ Page 20 reads: "The First World War offers no parallel to the more than six million people slaughtered in German camps between 1939 and 1945, nor does anything correspond to the unknown but even larger number of men, women, and children who died under different— but equally cruel— circumstances in the Soviet Union, Japan, and elsewhere." That the First World War offers no parallel to the atrocities of World War II is a given. The problem (for me) is the wording of: "more than *six million people* slaughtered..." Everyone knows that six million Jews were murdered during the Holocaust. True, not all six million died in the camps but why use this specific number in reference to all victims, Jews, gypsies, homosexuals, anti-Nazi activists, and the disabled, slaughtered in German camps? Perhaps even more disturbing is the "equally cruel" equation between circumstances under which people died in Nazi concentration camps and Soviet and Japanese gulags/prisons. I am actually pretty sure the circumstances were *not* equal, but be that as it may, what could possibly motivate a professor at Stanford University to make such a volatile statement?
- ¹⁷ On the back cover of *Suddenly, A Knock on the Door* (2012).
- ¹⁸ See Nava Semel's interview with Ronit Lentin (2000): 27-67, and Lily Rattok's introduction to *Apples from the Desert* by Savyon Liebrecht (1998):9-38.
- ¹⁹ Keret's lecture, together with a preface by Ken Frieden and an introduction by George Saunders was produced and distributed by Syracuse University Press in 2010. The publication includes bibliographical and biographical information, as well as four stories by Keret, "Asthma Attack," "Shoes," "Siren," and "A Foreign Language."
- ²⁰ "What, of this Goldfish, Would You Wish?" (2012):117-123.
- ²¹ Trans. V.C. Rycus, *Modern Hebrew Literature*, ed. Robert Alter (1975):294-310.
- ²² Trans. Joseph Shachter, *50 Stories from Israel; an Anthology*, eds. Zisi Stavi & Chaya Galai, (2007):104-116.
- ²³ In *The Girl on the Fridge* (2008).
- ²⁴ See Michal Govrin's "Instead of Kaddish: First Words Facing Jacques Derrida's Open Grave." <http://www.michalgovrin1.com/138470/Instead-of-Kaddish-First-Words-...> (Downloaded 10/25/2013)
- ²⁵ Jorge Semprun was a member of the French Resistance. He was caught by the Nazis and sent to Buchenwald.

PART I:

METHODOLOGY, THEORY, AND CONCEPTUALIZATION OF COPING WITH HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE

We remember the past
and God remembers the future.
Then we forget the past,
God forgets the future,
and the world returns to chaos.

(Yehuda Amichai “The Precision of Pain and the Blurriness of Joy:
The Touch of Longing in Everywhere,” *Open Closed Open*)

Chapter 1: Post Holocaust Representation

Representation of an event such as the Holocaust is vexed with sensitive quandaries. To some extent, the same can be said of representation of acts of genocide committed by Mao Z-Dong against his own people and Tibetans, Russians, and Ukrainians starved to death or killed in Stalin’s gulags, Armenians slaughtered by the Turks, and three million Russian POWs left to die by the Nazis. Sadly, the list goes on: Cambodia, North Korea, Ethiopia, Biafra, and Rwanda. Six million murdered Jews is a monstrous number, but numbers alone do not make Holocaust representation unique. The singularity is in its geographic-national-cultural-humanist scope and its implications for Western civilization. An entire European continent – with few notable exceptions such as Denmark – either welcomed, participated, or stood by as men, women, and children, loyal Jewish citizens of Germany, Austria, France, Belgium, Estonia, Hungary, Italy, Yugoslavia, Poland, Romania, the Netherlands, Slovakia, Soviet Union, Bohemia/Moravia, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, and Greece, were rounded up and taken

away. An entire European transportation system was set up by people who were not coerced, but willingly and knowingly took part in deporting Jews to labor and death camps. To sum up, the Holocaust left an ugly blotch on modern Western civilization as a whole.

Alon Confino (2011) propounds an unusual comparative analysis in his study of historical understanding of the Holocaust. He postulates the French Revolution and the Holocaust as two foundational events in Western civilization's modern history. Confino explains that his overall objective is to present methodological-historical questions, "not from some metaphysical, ahistorical sense of the uniqueness of the Holocaust, but from the point of view of the historical method" (145). Confino regards the Holocaust as an extreme genocidal case which "remains at the limits of historical interpretation" (3). "No other genocide constituted such a historical and epistemological break as the Holocaust" (5). Until the Nazi onslaught, the French Revolution was *the* "foundational event" in the history of Western civilization; "now it has become the Holocaust" (9). 1789 revolutionized Western civilization's political and humanistic discourse; the Third Reich invalidated it.

Confino emphasizes historical narrative "that combines evidence and poetic art" (54) as exemplified by Saul Friedländer in *The Years of Extermination* (2007). A "historical sensation permeates" (61) Friedländer's writing. One of Friedländer's most important contributions is the conjoining of interpretation and evidence within "a narrative marked by violent dislocations and interruptions" (55). According to Confino, what makes Friedländer's research and delivery most efficacious is the integration of the history of the Nazi era with an array of social, political, and cultural elements that predate

European fascism: elements that in retrospect warned of what was to come. The complete disintegration of humanistic principles was not born with the Final Solution; it must have been imagined before. The Holocaust happened “because there were words, images, and concepts to articulate and conceive of it” (81). It is this conjoining of the radical singularity of the Holocaust with generalized inevitability as rendered by Friedländer (2007) that Confino regards as foundational to post Holocaust historical narrative.

Confino (2011) goes on to explain that his post Holocaust orientation to historical narrative is influenced by contrapositions articulated by two thinkers. On the one hand, Confino refers to a metaphorical analogy envisioned by Jean-François Lyotard (1991)²⁶ between the Holocaust and a monstrous earthquake. The scale and scope of the earthquake was so devastating that it destroyed not only lives, communities, and cultures, but the instruments to measure such a titanic disaster. On the other hand, Confino is mindful of Alexis de Tocqueville’s notation on the inevitability of the French Revolution: “*tout ce que la Révolution a fait se fût fait, je n’en doute pas, sans elle*” (All that the Revolution had done, would have been done, I have no doubt, without it).²⁷ In principle, and methodologically speaking, I follow Confino’s approach to Holocaust representation which allows for the possibility of offering new frameworks of Holocaust representation which are unconventional, but do not minimize the gravity of the subject matter.

To be clear, a more future-oriented frame of Holocaust remembrance has nothing to do with minimizing the monstrosity of the Holocaust. Julia Kristeva was right when stating in *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* (1982) that “Never has a cataclysm been more apocalyptically outrageous; never has its representations been assumed by so

few symbolic means” (223). Or, as argued by Jay Winter (1995) in his foundational work on sites of memory and mourning, while visions of an apocalypse “predicated on divine justice” (203) and augmented by the Passion of Christ (217) could be interwoven into secular commemorations of the battles of Arras, Ypres, Verdun, Somme, Marne, and Gallipoli, the horror of Hitler’s gas chambers excluded exegetical applications of apocalyptic divine intervention. None of this, however, precludes rethinking representations of Holocaust remembrance. Moreover, it is my conviction that resisting new modalities of Holocaust remembrance will hasten historical erasure. Mindful of the reductive danger when allowing for too much cognitive “grasp” of Auschwitz (*Tout comprendre, c’est tout pardonner*), I am contending that reconfiguration of Holocaust remembrance can help us focus on the future without forgetting the past.

The tension arising from rethinking representations of Holocaust remembrance is perhaps most evident in the continued controversy over Hannah Arendt’s *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1977).²⁸ Noted by Idith Zertal (2007) in her survey of Arendt’s report on the trial, a subtext permeates Arendt’s debriefing, which, when reappraised can endow the main text with a new perspective. Zertal suggests a clash between two narratives: Arendt’s thoughts on Eichmann administrating the Final Solution, and Arendt’s “estrangement from the project that had haunted and excited her for years: Zionism and Israel” (1139). On the one hand, Arendt is firm when insisting on the unfathomable nature of the Holocaust by refusing to give meaning to a monstrous policy of depriving Jews of everything they own: from material belongings to their lives. To seek meaning would be tantamount to minimize the horror of it all.²⁹ On the other, Arendt is unable to objectify her animosity toward much of what she observed in Israel, from disliking

Gideon Hausner, the trial's attorney general, whom she depicts as a mere spokesperson for David Ben Gurion's political ambitions, to an overall dread of "the dangers of a self-secluding nationalism blended with militarism" (1138). By way of personalizing Arendt's controversial reporting, Zertal offers a modality of Holocaust representation which is politically relevant to past, present, and future Holocaust remembrance.

The incomprehensibility of the Holocaust is another subject matter which needs to be talked about in relation to new paradigms of remembrance. The issue dates back to the actual days of the Holocaust. Famously told by Primo Levi in *The Drowned and the Saved* (1989), Levi recalled SS men sadistically taunting prisoners at Auschwitz by telling them that in the event Germany loses the war, and some witnesses survive, nobody will believe their testimony. This particular macabre prediction did not go the Nazi way. We *do* believe the testimonies of the few who survived the Nazi inferno. The difficulty is in imagining it.

In *Writing the Book of Esther* (1995), Henri Raczymow's narrator tries to explain the unexplainable. He declares that the barbaric Turks who murdered Armenians could not have invented slaughter camps. Barbarians do not have the wherewithal to design gas chambers that looked like showers; only those who had the genius for music and philosophy could. Jorge Semprun describes in *Literature or Love* (1998) how in the days leading to liberation from Buchenwald, he prevailed upon fellow inmates to expect that the truth about what they went through will be met with suspicion, and will not be easily believed. "That's right!" responds a fellow inmate [...]: "It's so unbelievable that I myself plan to stop believing it, as soon as possible" (124).

The frailty of the issue of the unexplainable becomes most evident in Sue Vice's (2000) sensitive critique of a single instance in *Fugitive Pieces* (1996) by Anne Michaels. Vice is quite clear: *Fugitive Pieces* is a formidable novel about the Holocaust. She nonetheless expresses some misgivings over a scene in which Michaels mourns pregnant Jewish women dying in the gas chamber while giving birth to "you who were born and died without being given names." The narrator then asks to be forgiven for "this blasphemy of choosing philosophy over the brutalism of fact" (Michaels 1996:168). Vice takes exception to this specific moment in which Michaels imagines the unimaginable in an effort to "wring aesthetic and meaningful comfort from an event which offers no redemption of any kind" (Vice 2000:9).

Berel Lang (2000) wrestles with the incomprehensibility of the horrors of the Holocaust in his study of art within the limits of history and ethics. Lang posits the Final Solution as "moved by a corporate will and blindness to evil" and thus constituting "a subject that in its elements is at odds with the humanizing effects of figurative discourse [...]" (70). The madness of Lear is never full madness for it is "still governed by reason" (165). Being enveloped in the poetics of Goethe and Schiller, while performing acts that reduce humans to tattooed numbers, was deemed by all too many as governed by reason and self-control. All that said, Lang concludes that "the price of silence about the Holocaust in lieu of its representation [...] is too high" (19). Along with Michael Rothberg's (2000) thoughts on traumatic realism and demands of Holocaust representation, as well as Lawrence L. Langer's (2006) discussion of using and abusing Holocaust remembrance, Lang's cogitation is not about whether or not to speak about the

Holocaust. It is about the ethics of what is appropriate or inappropriate to communicate and imagine about the Holocaust.

In a write-up on laughter after the Holocaust, Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi (2001) maintains that positing the Holocaust as unspeakable is analogous to fearing the danger of daring to come too close to a sacred flame. According to Ezrahi, when crossing the boundaries of imagining the events of the Holocaust is perceived as an act of trespassing, stringent rules of representation are imposed; rules analogous to approaching a theologian source/text. Inga Clendinnen's (1999) sense of trespassing in relation to the Holocaust is "emotional rather than cognitive" (20). Persecutor-victim images are deemed terribly threatening for they "represent ourselves become not ourselves" (18).

Sanctification in the religious sense often means that one ought not to seek understanding or reasoning. Faith in God is not predicated on understanding or knowing God. Not understanding and not questioning God, or God's ways, is often hallowed as an ultimate virtuous conduct of the steadfast faithful. The problem with applying this sort of sanctification onto the Holocaust is that it invariably results in appraising the Holocaust as an aberration: a onetime historical-cultural psychosis. The evil of the Final Solution is deemed so diabolical that it need not be deciphered. Holocaust remembrance transfigures into a faraway shadow – our own – whereby we live with the foggiest of not quite being "at home in the world because now we know the fragility of our content" (182). Opting for the onetime aberration stance becomes a form of resignation to some mystically enigmatic historicity. (Somewhat similar to Philippe Ariès (1974) contemplating Western attitudes toward death: we all know we are going to die and yet we act as if we are immortal. Thus, death becomes unnamable.)

Lawrence Langer throws into the mix an ominous variable. He states that the true enigma of construing the Holocaust as unfathomable has to do with the near triumph of the Nazis. Had Germany won the war, systematic mass murder would have been the norm, “and the idea of *civilization* would have been permanently redefined [italics in the text]” (Langer 2006:121). This type of thinking is difficult to refute. But it seems to me as speculative as, say, what if Lenin would have succeeded in preventing Stalin from becoming his successor, or what if the Roman Emperor Constantine would not have embraced (312 or 313 AD) Christianity. The Nazis *were* defeated, and we are left with having to cope with the hideousness of our human self-portrait, which, to quote Langer, “succeeds in undoing us even as we try – and fail – to undo it” (Langer 2006:121).

In all, I am contending that navigating toward a modality which rests on the idea of having to cope with Holocaust remembrance will result in tempered, and non-totalizing tonalities when debating Holocaust representation. One of my objectives is to rid Holocaust conversation of sanctimonious, holier-than-thou rhetoric. As I continue to contend throughout my thesis, an earthly, demystified representation of the Holocaust will ensure its remembrance and its future relevance to our lives. I join Karyn Ball’s (2008) call in *Disciplining the Holocaust*, to declare “a moratorium on the melancholic fetishism of unrepresentability and unspeakability [...]” (11). I agree with Ball. The disputation over non-representability is unworkable, and unhelpful. Reverberated by Paul Ricoeur in *Memory, History, Forgetting* (2004), historical representations make sense only if “we understand the past as past only in its connectivity with the future quality of the future and the present quality of the present” (346).

My doctoral thesis advocates for a standpoint which speaks of greater empathetic theoretical flexibility. Dina Porat's methodological approach to the reaction of Jews residing in Palestine to the European Holocaust is a telling example of what I mean by empathetic scholarly disposition that makes perfect sense. Porat's 2008 study is a comprehensive study of responses of Jews living in Palestine to the Holocaust while it was still occurring, as well as in the immediate aftermath of World War II. Porat predicates her work on concern and hope. Concern over introducing her findings "with due proportion and reservation," and hope "that the reader would come an inch closer to a nation that had undergone an unprecedented trauma" (xii). There are opinionated studies which dwell on Zionist ideological adversity to Jewish life in the Diaspora, as an explanation to the failure of the *Yishuv* (a Hebrew term designating the Jewish population living in Palestine) to rescue European Jews.³⁰ In response, Porat constructs "a tragic triangle consisting of the *Yishuv*, the Nazis, and the Allies" (2). She argues that not only did the *Yishuv* lack a military capacity to influence events taking place in Europe, but being subordinated to the British mandate over Palestine, there were no political avenues to undertake by way of pressuring Allied forces to regard the Jewish cause a priority. She goes on to state that 360,000 Holocaust survivors reached Palestine-Israel. As Porat indicates, this meant that in 1951 one out of every four Jews residing in Israel was a survivor. Many were physically and emotionally broken. The survivors and the society as a whole were in dire need of intensive healing therapy. But there was no time for that for these years coincided with the trauma of the 1948 War of Independence, and a severe economic crisis, to the point of almost running out of fuel and food. Added to these factors was the initial shock and inability to grasp the enormity of the catastrophe, let

alone react “appropriately” to an unheard of industry of exterminating people. Over four hundred meticulously documented, fact-finding pages – without which Porat’s sympathies could have amounted to sentimental mush – the overture is that of empathetic historical narrative. Porat does not ignore flawed decision-making by Yishuv leaders, particularly after Rommel’s defeat in the North African campaign. But throughout it all, Porat plows through a difficult scholarly field with a great deal of empathic sensitivity.³¹

Further to the theme of empathy and Holocaust representation, Carolyn Dean (2004) elaborates on the fragility of empathy after the Holocaust. In a thought-provoking meditation on “empathy fatigue” and “compassion fatigue” in relation to the Holocaust, Dean explores “narratives of numbness” and cautions against swift judgments of bystanders. It is Dean’s contention that in doing so, we are projecting our own fears onto bystanders. It is not that we think ourselves capable of instigating acts of genocide, but we are well aware of our propensity to ignore victimization. Dean argues that “the predominant construction of bystander indifference” in post Holocaust representation is rooted in “a longing that we would have done or will do something differently when the time comes” overshadowed by “the fear that we will not” (105).

In contrast, and as suggested by the title: *Selling the Holocaust; from Auschwitz to Schindler, How History is Bought, Packaged, and Sold*, I find Tim Cole’s (1999) study lacking in empathy. I also regard Rabbi Michael Lerner’s³² back-cover synopsis, in which he praises Cole’s achievement in undermining “some of the self-satisfying of those who piously chant ‘Never Again’ while doing little to transform the conditions that make equally horrible suffering a likely recurrence,” antithetical to an empathic methodological orientation. Whether or not Cole’s critique “from Anne Frank onwards” (172) has any

validity is not the issue. The issue is the conclusiveness (arrogance?) with which Cole judges Holocaust representations in Israel, North America, and elsewhere, as “an obsession” with the Holocaust. As already stated, I regard the Jewish peoples’ “obsession” with the Holocaust perfectly understandable, in the very same way African Americans are perfectly justified in being obsessed with slavery. More to the point, obsession or not, the type of polyphonic, open-ended, and empathetic method of inquiry I am promoting – as opposed to didacticism and rebuke – has a far better chance in channeling a so-called obsession into enduring and creative narratives.

Asserted by Jakob Lothe, Susan Rubin Suleiman, and James Phelan (2010), Holocaust narratives that endure “have the greatest chance of transmitting the story to future generations,” and somehow, “all possess a significant aesthetic dimension” (2). Guided by factual historical facts, and predicated on giving full attention to testimonies of witnesses, the authors speak of “after the Holocaust” as representing “a broad spectrum of Holocaust narratives and a correspondingly broad set of issues about the aesthetics and ethics of representations” (11). Enunciated by the authors, “after the Holocaust” narratives exhibiting humility and empathy while demonstrating courage and perseverance, prove to be an invaluable resource when Holocaust representation “comes up against the limits of its ability to explain” (9).

Meir Wieseltier’s disquieting poem “Ilana Stays Alone in the Armchair Looking at a Gray Book” (“Father and Mother Went to the Movies” in the literal translation from Hebrew),³³ is one such empathetic “after the Holocaust” literary exemplar.

She turns the pages, naked uncles
so naked and skinny, run and
even aunties with fannies showing
and others in pajamas as in a show

with yellow cloth stars sewed on;
And everybody so ugly and thin,
and big round eyes like chickens.

It's awfully weird, so gray. Ilana has pencils – red
and blue and green and yellow and pink.
So she goes to her room
and takes all the beautiful pencils
and draws with great flair
glasses and funny faces on all of them.
Especially on that bald skinny boy,
she gives him a big red mustache
and perched at the tip of the mustache – a bird.

Wieseltier, an Israeli poet, brings remembrance of the Holocaust down to a simplistic and innocent level of a young girl. In many ways, the poem enacts Israel's thirst to normalize life after the Holocaust. The reader knows what is awaiting the girl. She too will learn about the Holocaust. The anxiety over extermination of her people will be conveyed to her directly and indirectly. But for now, given her age, she can still indulge in coloring the sad, skinny, emaciated images, and make them look happier and more beautiful. Unlike Cole, Wieseltier's verses are attuned to emotions and impulses that are part of an empathetic approach to coping with remembrance of cultural-historical traumas.

Thus, in methodology and content, my thesis hinges on there being an alternative to either fixation on the site of the Holocaust, or turning away from the fire for fear of being consumed by it. The third way, the way of conceptualizing coping with Holocaust remembrance is deemed more pluralistic, less rigid, empathetic, and present/future-oriented. As I show, this third way is more conducive to an infusion of ethics and political pragmatism into the discussion. As such, I believe my approach to Holocaust representation is in accordance with an overarching humanist academic commitment to being ethically and politically relevant.

I also argue that greater methodological plurality and empathy has much to do with literature's important role in Holocaust representation, albeit, this area, too, does not lack in controversial opinions. For example, when considering truism and falsity in Holocaust fiction, Ruth Franklin (2011) asserts that in the matter of revisions made by Anne Frank and her father to Anne's diary, as well as lesser known revisions made by Elie Wiesel and Primo Levi to their own text, "no matter how simple, how neutral, or how unconscious" there is no such thing as a narrative unmitigated by changing political and cultural circumstances. It has little to do with authenticity. It has to do with the inevitability of "incomplete representation of actual events" (12). Franklin goes on to assert that factual historicity and eyewitness accounts cannot suffice. Only literature can offer "an imaginative access to past events, together with new and different ways of understanding them that are unavailable to strictly factual forms of writing" (13). As such, Franklin considers the act of imagination "an act of empathy" (15). Referring to Imre Kertész and W. G. Sebald, Franklin argues that no matter what the degree of autobiographical proximity between Kertész and the protagonist of *Fatelessness*, or Sebald's factual memories in *The Emigrants*, both writers attest to writing fiction as a way of enacting "the uneasy balance between fact and fiction" (189).

Saul Friedländer is one of the most eminent historians of the Holocaust.³⁴ He remarks in *Probing the Limits of Representation; Nazism and the Final Solution* (1992) that rather than speaking of transgressions in Holocaust representation, one needs to be more discerning of "multitude crosscurrents" reflecting "a very wide field of ideological positions" (18). Jeremy Popkin (2003) focuses on Holocaust memoirs written by historians, versus writers of literature as a genre of Holocaust representation. He does not

agree with Raul Hilberg's objection to fellow historians writing personal autobiographical accounts of the Holocaust. In fact, he regrets that except for Friedländer's 1979 memoir, autobiographical accounts that are in the limelight are not those written by historians but by writers of literature. He believes this is unfortunate and suggests that writers-survivors tend to situate the Holocaust as coming out of nowhere and leading nowhere, essentially denying "the possibility of a real autobiography" (53-54). I cannot imagine how anyone would brand Aharon Appelfeld's autobiography (2004) as coming and going out of nowhere. Be that as it may, Popkin sets out to promote autobiographies written by historians as an enhancement to Holocaust studies. As Popkin concludes, the format of the historian's autobiography "is more than source material; it is an alternative way for narrating the past, capable of teaching historians some important lessons" (Popkin 2003:63).

Anton Kaes (1992) traces idiomatic phrasing pertaining to Holocaust representation. In a composition on the Holocaust and postmodern historiography in cinema, Kaes reiterates Jean-François Lyotard's contention that the crime of Auschwitz serves as "a sign" for historians "that something [...] cannot be phrased in the accepted idioms" (207).³⁵ Along with Lyotard, Kaes cites Maurice Blanchot's thoughts in *The Writing of the Disaster* (1986) on Auschwitz as an atypical and unrepresentative event which has nonetheless "left its impressions and traces on every sector of the political and cultural life, reminiscent of the devastations of an earthquake long ago" (207). Lastly, borrowing Jacques Derrida's notion of a "quiescent mood of *post-histoire*" (206), Kaes maintains that German "*post-histoire*" always means "history after the apocalypse" (207), as if "after Hitler and the Holocaust" became a new point zero for German history.

James Young (2006) adds to the discussion of Jewish memory of the Holocaust in our postmodern age. He notes that the postmodernist way of representing “silences between words” correlates with Friedländer’s warning against linearity of historical narrative in search for closure. A “double-edged conundrum,” articulated first by Adorno, it does not forsake Holocaust representation but it questions “how to do it without automatically recuperating it” (241). In Young’s view, it is a conundrum that fuels and paralyzes the postmodernist enterprise vis-à-vis the Holocaust.

Jörn Rüsen (2006) views the subject of Holocaust representation through the theoretical lens of establishing historical meaning. Rüsen maintains that just as history was thought to be over, what came to an abrupt end was historical theory – hence the need for a new theory. A chronology of past events constituting history will not do. Nor do binary oppositions such as “materialism versus idealism, realism against constructivism, empirical evidence against poetic creation” (2-3) make much sense post World War II. If history is to be of greater relevance than a chronicle of past events, as it was thought to be in the past, it needs to prioritize the interpretation of the past vis-à-vis the present and – crucial to my approach – it must position itself as “expecting the future”(3).

In their review of Allan Megill’s probe into the type of historical account that can accommodate the radical evil of Nazism, Jonathan Glover and Erna Paris (2002) emphasize Megill’s use of the word “why” in Arno Mayer’s 1988 composition titled “Why Did the Heavens Not Darken?” Their contention is that Mayer’s “why” is an ontological question which does not apply only to the crimes committed by the Third Reich. Rather, “It is the question as to how the universe itself could justify such an event

[...] but it is not itself a historical question; the historian *qua* historian is powerless to answer it” (105).

To be clear, rethinking methodological principles of writing history does not devalue the cogency of historical representation of the Holocaust. Instead, it is what Hayden White (1987) construes as narrative discourses of historical representation. According to White, rethinking the content and form of writing history is embodied in Friedländer’s reconsideration of intellectual historiography. That is, historiography after the Holocaust can no longer ascribe modernist-scientific-objective methods to strategies of writing history. Ours, White contends, is an era of hermeneutical rebellion “against the *clarté* of [...] Cartesian heritage” (104).

In an introduction to a 2010 compellation of essays by White on history, literature, and theory, Robert Doran further emphasizes that it is a “linguistic self-awareness” which White found lacking among his fellow historians. As Doran explains, White, a historian committed to his craft, utilizes the figurative nature of language to destabilize all truth claims: “one cannot represent the meaning of historical events without symbolizing them” (White 1987:53). Self-aware intellectual historians are viewed by White as engaging in a form of sublimation in that they allow for the creation of a historical narrative which is essentially a story. White defines the process in which the historian reconfigures his sources into a culturally-based story/plot: “emplotment.” Specific to the Holocaust, a historical narrative is posited by White in a foundational essay titled “Historical Emplotment and the Problem of Truth” (1992). White questions whether “the nature of Nazism and the Final Solution sets limits on what can be truthfully said about them; do they lend themselves to emplotment in a set of ways,” or do they

remain “infinitely interpretable and ultimately undecidable” (37-38). Friedländer (1992) does not dispute White’s reconfiguration of the intellectual historian but reminds us that it is not theory that serves as a starting point for Holocaust representation; “*it is the reality and significance of modern catastrophes that generate the search for a new voice* [italics in the text]” (10). Either way, Friedländer, White and others, are painfully aware that despite a surplus in factual knowledge about the Holocaust, few interpretive historical gains have been made.

Alvin Rosenfeld’s (1980) thoughts on Holocaust literature are appraised by James Young (1988) in his work on writing, rewriting, and interpreting narratives about the Holocaust. Young cites Rosenfeld’s contention that the gassing and burning of humans “do not lend themselves to metaphor, simile, or symbol – to likeness or association with anything else” (80). True, yet, “to leave Auschwitz outside of metaphor would be to leave it outside of language altogether” (91). Young employs Paul Ricoeur’s (1978) “rule of metaphor” to further claim that metaphors do not lessen authenticity of factual history. Furthermore, an injunction against the use of metaphors would distort the ways in which very real events were in fact remembered by those who lived through the inferno. As Young asserts, integral to the historicity of the Holocaust was the figurative language used in persecuting Jews, as in equating Jews with vermin. He suggests that it is for this reason that Israeli Jews find it near-impossible to dismiss verbal threats of war and destruction (“throw all Israeli Jews into the Mediterranean Sea”) as nonsensical figurative language.

Geoffrey Hartman (2004) contemplates narratives about the Holocaust as a struggle against inauthenticity. He pictures the search for appropriate narratives as an

“anxious search motivating both trauma studies and cultural studies” (174). The difficulty, says Hartman, is in “thinking with grief” after the “collapse of symbols” (173). He illuminates the difficulty by juxtaposing the use of the German language by Goethe and by Paul Celan. Knowing what we know about the use of the German language to execute a murderous *Lebensraum*, and given that Celan continued to write in German despite his terrible sufferings during the Holocaust, we almost feel doubly motivated to allot Paul Celan an honorable cultural-linguistic place. At the same time, some of us cringe at the splendor with which Goethe used the German language knowing that the Holocaust was yet to come. And if we do not cringe, asks Hartman, can we escape complicity in what we deny? Echoing Iphigenia’s lament – “Must this curse then last for ever?” – Hartman (1996) speaks of “the longest shadow” under which we live after the Holocaust. We are after Auschwitz but not beyond it.

Nothing in the way of representation will change what happened, but representation will determine how we *cope* with remembrance of what happened. Language becomes key component in representation and in coping with remembrance. Language in Holocaust fiction is Sara Horowitz’s (1997) subject matter. Horowitz is beholden to Berel Lang and his decisive stance over the obligation to remember the Holocaust. According to Horowitz, Lang’s thinking reaches beyond a predilection for factual historicity. It represents a deep-rooted conviction in “the moral obligation to remember and tell the events truthfully [...]” (18). As explained by Horowitz, Lang believes that according to Judaism, the Exodus and the Sinai revelation constitute a “moral discourse” (22) of remembering. Jewish tradition maintains that every Jewish soul – past, present, and future – is to be regarded as having participated in the Exodus

and as being present at the giving of the Torah at Sinai. Horowitz illuminates how this formative collective identity, which transforms physical absence into “a narrative of presence” (22), is projected by Lang onto remembering the Holocaust.

A secular Jew (as I am) may have a hard time constructing a moral frame of Holocaust remembrance drawn out of a tradition of commemorating two events that in all likelihood never happened. But Horowitz skillfully navigates away from this predicament by bridging over an “opposition between historical and literary discourse as a means to recovering the real” (24-25). Eliciting writers such as Aharon Appelfeld, Jorge Semprun, Primo Levi, Tadeus Borowski, Charlotte Delbo, Jean Améry, Ida Fink, and Nelly Sachs, Horowitz develops a seismographic route that shows that literary reconstructions of the Holocaust do not deflect “our attention away from the events” (24). Rather, the dynamics are of an ever-evolving “self-conscious artifice that [...] insistently frames questions necessary to a moral discourse” (24-25) of Holocaust remembrance.

Sidra Ezrahi’s 1992 write-up on “unbound metaphors” in poetry written after the Holocaust embodies Horowitz’s moral compass of Holocaust representation. Ezrahi’s narrative tells of Bukovina Jews who thrived under the rule of the Habsburg monarchy. Granted political emancipation in 1867, Bukovina Jews were proud of their immersion in German culture. Things began to deteriorate for the Jewish population with the occupation of Bukovina by Rumania in World War I. The end came with the Nazi occupation during World War II. In June 1941 Bukovina’s Jews were deported by German troops and their Rumanian collaborators to ghettos and concentrations camps. These are the facts. But there is more to this chapter in Jewish history. In a compelling comparative analysis of literature written by three German-speaking Bukovina survivors,

Paul Celan, Dan Pagis, and Aharon Appelfeld – all three destined to become preeminent Holocaust writers – Ezrahi unveils layers that do not nullify factual historicity but provide a more complete picture of the past through which we can better envisage present and future Holocaust remembrance.

Eliciting an autobiographical comparison between Celan, Pagis, and Appelfeld, Ezrahi develops a panoramic cultural picture. She contrasts Dan Pagis and Aharon Appelfeld “washed ashore” (270) to Palestine with Paul Celan who “remained at sea” (270), as it were, in France. Ezrahi wonders what can be deduced from Celan’s lasting allegiance to the German language, the language in which the annihilation of his home and family was carried out, as compared to Appelfeld who chose to write in Hebrew. Would Celan’s post Holocaust life end differently had he divorced himself from the German language? To what extent does the literature written by these three Bukovina natives reflect their “after the Holocaust” life? What is the relationship between Holocaust remembrance and national, geographic, and political circumstantial variances? Horowitz’s discourse on Lang’s moral imperative to remember the historicity of the destruction of Jewish life is enhanced by Ezrahi, for, like Horowitz, she maintains a high level of historical self-consciousness as she delves into the depths of literature.³⁶ In the final analysis, Horowitz and Ezrahi offer a multifaceted, fluid, and expansive mode of moral schematization of Holocaust representation.

Compared to the deluge in expressive creativity after World War I, the nature of the Holocaust and other Nazi atrocities precluded cathartic, post World War II artistic mourning of the war in Germany. Elucidated by Jay Winter (1995) in his examination of sites of memory and sites of mourning associated with the Great War, Winter asserts that

nineteenth-century *fin de siècle* esprit of *Flucht nach vorne* (a flight forward) lived on in European cultural history despite the horrors of 1914-1918. Modris Ekstein (2012) encapsulates the idea of retentiveness of European cultural glory – despite the calamity of World War I – by designating Igor Stravinsky’s ballet score, “The Rite of Spring,” as the title for his pictorial analysis of modernity, the Great War, and the aftermath years leading to World War II. As Ekstein illustrates, the fervor of Serge Diaghilev’s productions, Stravinsky’s music, Michel Fokine’s choreography, and Pablo Picasso’s art, eclipsed the melancholic residuum of World War I. In complete contrast, fascistic art left no aesthetic legacy in that, as Ekstein affirms, it is nothing but kitsch in the mask of killing and destroying. With the burden of Auschwitz “in the eye of the storm” (383), German cultural remembrance of World War II represents something entirely different from remembrance of World War I.

Elisabeth Domansky (1997) argues that in post World War II Germany, the memory of Hitlerism dictated a relationship to the past that was different from any other period in German history. In his analysis of morality after the radical challenge of Nazism, Peter Haas (1992), too, maintains that the Nazi’s complete loss of a moral compass did not leave doors open “for future acceptance of places such as Dachau, Chelmno, and Auschwitz” (233). Even if some historians trace Hitler’s origins back to the legendary Bismarck, Germany of post World War II is quite certain that it need not erase Bismarck from its collective memory. It does, however, wish to disassociate itself from Hitler. In the aftermath of Hitler, Germany claims to have no innate or essential ties with its immediate past – a phenomenon or a facet of collective behavior defined by Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich (1975) as “an inability to mourn.” President

Ronald W. Reagan's 1985 Bitburg faux pas, and West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl's attempts to beautify the memory of former Waffen-SS notwithstanding, Germans yearn to view themselves as victims rather than instigators of Hitler's tyranny.

Having touched upon the multipartite domain of collective-cultural memory, I follow the discussion of Holocaust representation with an overview of the field of collective memory. I examine the evolution of the idea that a collective acquires memories, shares memories, and forms acts of remembrance. I then focus specifically on collective memory of traumatic events/history. It is one thing to think in terms of an individual coping with traumatic memories, but what do we envision when we speak of a collective coping with traumatic remembrance? Finally, I relate theories of collective-cultural memory to Holocaust remembrance and the concept of coping with Holocaust remembrance.

Endnotes

²⁶ Originally published as *Le Différend* in 1983.

²⁷ Alexis de Tocqueville “Etat social et politique de la France avant et depuis 1789,” *Euvres complètes*. Vol. II : *L’ancien régime et la révolution* (Paris, 1952) cited by Confino.

²⁸ As opposed to the storm created by the non-scholarly Holocaust text of Benjamin Wilkomirski’s (born Bruno Grosjean) fraudulent *Fragments: Memories of a Wartime Childhood* (1996) – first published in German in 1995 as *Aus einer Kindheit 1939-1948*).

²⁹ For further discussion of this point see Dustin Ells Howes, “Consider If This Is a Person: Primo Levi, Hannah Arendt, and the Political Significance of Auschwitz,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, Volume 22, Number 2 (Fall 2008), Volume 22, Number 2:266-292.

³⁰ Specific to a non-welcoming attitude toward Holocaust survivors, see Tom Segev’s *The Seventh Million*, trans. Haim Watzman (Markham, Ontario: Fitzhenry & Whiteside Ltd., 1991).

³¹ A similar approach is suggested by Dan Miron in *Ha’sifriya ha’iveret; prozah me’orevet: The Blind Library; Assorted Prose Pieces: 1980-2005*. A leading Israeli literary critic, Miron echoes Porat’s assessment of the reactions by the *Yishuv*, and later by the newly established State of Israel, by objecting to a critique aimed at Hebrew writers of that era, who were supposedly insensitive to the catastrophe. First, Miron offers hundreds of Holocaust writings – poetry and prose – created during the forties and fifties. Second, he emphasizes that for at least five of the canonic poets of those years, Uri Z. Greenberg, Abba Kovner, Amir Gilboa, Avot Yeshurun, and Dan Pagis, the Holocaust became and remained the nucleus of their spiritual universe. The same goes for writers/poets such as Yehuda Karni, Yocheved Bat-Miriam, Avigdor Ha-meiri, Aharon Zeitlin, and S. Shalom. Even more pertinent to the issue of historic, social, and political contextualization of Holocaust representation is Miron’s insightful browse through the Holocaust in Shmuel Yosef Agnon’s writings. As told by Miron, in 1939, Agnon, Israel’s 1966 Nobel Prize laureate writer, wrote *A Guest for the Night*. He cites Sidra D. Ezrahi remarking in *By Words Alone: The Holocaust in Literature* (1980) on the narrator’s visit to his hometown in Galicia in the shadow of World War I and the gathering of darker clouds of what was to come. Agnon was an Orthodox Jew. As Miron shows, with the unfolding of the European nightmare, Agnon was gripped by a theological tortuousness.

Nitza Ben-Dov illuminates Miron’s stance in her 2011 autobiographical write-up on Agnon (available in Hebrew only.) She does so by way of examining an Agnon story, *Ha-siman* (The Sign) written in 1944, in Jerusalem, when the incomprehensible news reached the author of the Nazi eradication of his Galician hometown, Buczacz. The narrative story takes place during the holy festival of *Shavuot*, the time marking the giving of the Torah at Mt. Sinai to the Israelites. The speaker-protagonist, an Orthodox Jew like Agnon, is faithfully immersed in the sacred observance of the day, but the aesthetic ambiance is frightfully surrealistic. The annihilation of Buczacz is submerged into *Shavuot* and the speaker’s presence in his Jerusalem synagogue. Macabre irony engulfs the narrative as the story-teller relates, exuberantly, how perfect is his home [*metukan ve’naeh*], and how blissful his surroundings are, how magnificent is the décor of festivity on this glorious day – a day fit for the celebratory garb adorning him. A festering cognitive dissonance mushrooms as more and more inexplicable details muddy the ecstatic surface, all of which pointing to a terrible theological turmoil. It is precisely through the narrator’s fixation on what can be seen at ground level – the decorative objects, attire, beautiful flowers, and structural splendor – that the reader knows what is *not* there, and what the narrator avoids: lifting his eyes upwards. Only the material is within sight; the heavens are not part of this 1944 day of *Shavuot*.

³² Rabbi Michael Lerner is the editor of *Tikkun* magazine.

³³ The English translation of the original Hebrew text provided here is that of Shirley Kaufman (with the cooperation of Wieseltier) published in *The Flower of Anarchy; Selected Poems* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, Ltd., 2003). Translated literally, the title of the poem is “Father and Mother Went to the Movies.” However, in Kaufman’s translation the title reads: “Ilana Stays Alone in the Armchair Looking at a Gray Book.”

³⁴ Saul Friedländer was my history professor at the Hebrew University, Jerusalem.

³⁵ Kaes citing Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend* (Minneapolis, MN: The University of Minnesota Press, 1988 [Originally published as *Le Différend* in 1983]:53.

³⁶ See also Yael S. Feldman, “Whose Story Is It, Anyway? Ideology and Psychology in the Representation of the Shoah in Israeli Literature” in *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the Final Solution*, ed., Saul Friedländer (1992):223-239.

Chapter 2: Collective-Cultural Memory and Holocaust Remembrance

The terms cultural memory and collective memory are often used interchangeably. Superficially speaking, collective memory denotes experiences shared by a group of people, such as a nation, while cultural memory denotes symbolic ways of representing these experiences and passing them from one generation to the next. As such, the memory of the Holocaust constitutes part of the collective memory of the Jewish people, while texts, monuments, museums, and ceremonies commemorating remembrance of the Holocaust comprise, create, and recreate a cultural heritage/memory.

Ariela Freedman's (2007) review of collective memory theories edited by Michael Rossington and Anne Whitehead (2007) illuminates some of the problems related to defining the field of collective-cultural memory. How and why, Freedman wonders, does one arrive at a decision to include a write-up by Walter Benjamin *on* Marcel Proust but not a text *by* Proust, particularly in light of the fact that Proust intended his canonic *À la recherche du temps perdu* (In Search of Lost Time, also known as Remembrance of Things Past) to be regarded not "just" as literature but as a theory about memory.

Patrick Hutton (1993) expounds on history as an art of memory, and the complexity of designating meaning to memory. Hutton's notion on memory is suffused with associations with the Greek myth of Mnemosyne: goddess of memory and imagination. Much like Mnemosyne, memory is enigmatic in that it "draws the past into the present but colors it with its particular hues and reflections" (xvi). While not indifferent to "losing touch with collective memory as it carries forward ideas and values that we might still wish to honor" (123), Hutton follows Michel Foucault's lead in that he

emphasizes the exclusionary functionality of language in shifting our focus from shared memory to counter memory. Hutton's theoretical directive is not in pursuit of truism about memory but excavating multiple ways of trailing the relationship between memory and history. Hutton echoes Foucault's departure from envisioning history as an amalgam of events structured by superimposed beginnings but as discourses that generate discourses which generate discourses, and so on. Once remembered, events, personalities, and ideas are considered less for their intrinsic meaning but are "reinterpreted for their extrinsic forms" (116).

Pierre Nora's magnum opus *Les Lieux de mémoire* (1984-1992), with its litany of historical sites and objects, is viewed by Hutton as one such cultural memory discourse. Nora's aim was to give memory a history by resisting the collapsing of memory and history into one; "pure" historicity versus a tradition of memory triggered by anything from a structure, say, the *Bastille*, to a song about honor. According to Nancy Wood (1994), the last bastion in "Memory's Remains" was for Nora the nation-state. Wood contends that Nora's yardstick for selecting "sites of memory" was consistent with the "memorial status [of sites] rather than by their impact on current social or political behavior" (142-143).

Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (1983) unveil the devastation brought about by white Europeans falsifying historical traditions in anthropological investigations of colonized Africa. Famously known as *The Invention of Tradition*, Hobsbawm and Ranger reveal how Western racism invented "scientific" historical accounts of African genealogical kinship and traditions of tribal polity. Pre-colonial fluidity of African traditions were misrepresented and infixed into "documented" (212) historical narratives.

What were in reality mobile cultural practices, were rewritten as cultural entrenchment in inflexible traditions. So-called historical “evidence,” misrepresented cultural memories of creative “internal patterns of trade and communication,” (248-249) and fluid structures of hierarchies. Paul Ricoeur (2004) calls upon historians to retrospectively uncover traces and instances of culturally (hegemonic) “invented” historical chronicles.

David Harlan (1989) considers the relationship between memory, literature, intellectual history, and the postmodern text. He speaks of the postmodern text as striving for “a medium in which the text lives – the only medium in which it can live” (602). Harlan suggests that “endangered” (invented) texts can be rescued from disappearing into irrelevant historical context, if, for example, one follows Michael Walzer’s methodology in *Exodus and Revolution* (1985). Edward Said’s 1986 critique of Walzer’s reading of the Exodus story as a theory of liberation, as opposed to a narrative “based on exclusion and displacements of others who are deemed to be lesser” notwithstanding, Harlan views Walzer’s approach as reconfiguration of an “old” text through self-reflective cultural discourse of “slavery and freedom, flight and deliverance, oppression and liberation” (607).

Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi’s thesis on Jewish memory and Jewish history in *Zakhor* (1982) is considered by many paradigmatic in differentiating between history and collective-cultural memory. Yerushalmi argues that Moses delivered the Hebrews from Egyptian slavery not in the name of the Creator of Heaven and Earth but in the name of the “God of the fathers; that is to say, the God of history” (9). The Hebrew God pulls the strings of history-making. On their part, the Israelites are commanded to remember “God’s acts of intervention in history, and man’s responses to them” (11). Faith,

Yerushalmi contends, is reaffirmed by history not theology. As the history of the people evolves into a sacred scripture, and with the sealing of the biblical canon, Jews stop writing history. The rabbinic tradition does not seek to record a chronology of events but to explore the scriptures and “the meaning of the history bequeathed to them” (18). Compared to the study of Talmud, Kabala, and Jewish philosophy – “the highways of religious and intellectual creativity” (52) – the study of history throughout the centuries was deemed a diversion, perhaps even a waste of time. This changes dramatically with the coming of modern European emancipator movements, Liberal Judaism, and Zionism. The ratio between Jewish history and memory is overturned. As Yerushalmi conveys, historiography is now viewed as different from collective memory and “in crucial respects, thoroughly at odds with it” (93). It is rather fascinating to note that in a 1987 postscript to *Zakhor* (“Reflections on Forgetting”), Yerushalmi reaffirms his commitment to “the essential dignity of the historical vocation” (116). That being said, and in what has become a much quoted annotation among scholars of Holocaust representation, Yerushalmi suggests that Holocaust remembrance is currently shaped “not at the historian’s anvil, but in the novelist’s crucible” (98).

The French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs established in *On Collective Memory*³⁷ the theoretical foundation for the idea that memory constitutes itself through participation and membership in multiple groupings – from family to civilization. A disciple of David Émile Durkheim, Halbwachs taught that reconstructing memory (historical and cultural) is largely determined by present needs. Religion is no different; it preserves the past by creating rites, texts, and dogmas according to present needs and precepts. While not everyone fully endorsed Halbwachs’ principles, very few dispute the

fact that Halbwachs was the first to *systematically* engage in the matter of individual memory as constructed through group-collective membership. Previously mentioned, in his attempt to explain the ascendancy of collective memory to popular heights, Pierre Nora's voluminous compilation of *Les lieux de mémoire* became enormously influential in identifying museums, archives, cemeteries, monuments, emblems, texts, symbols, flags, paintings, music, songs, speeches, and state commemorative rituals, as an inventory of sites of collective memory.

Much like Halbwachs, the German Egyptologist Jan Assmann regards collective remembrance as largely defined by present interests. Memories are not about history but about manufacturing cultural meaning of the past. Cultural memory is fluid for it is largely dependent on the flow and receptivity of content and norms from one generation to the next. One of Assmann's best known works is *Moses the Egyptian: The memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism* (1997). The "construction of cultural otherness" (67) is central to Assmann's discourse. Supposedly inspired by a sporadic monotheistic interlude in Egyptian cultural history, Assmann's Moses is driven by a compulsion to sever the Egyptian umbilical cord. With that, a perpetual memory of the Jew "as the religious enemy par excellence – as atheist, iconoclast, sacrilegious criminal" (43) was born, and then continues to be obsessively hammered into Western civilization's cultural memory by Christianity. The Jew as the eternal Other is not deemed by Assmann as arising from any particular historical experience but out of a suppressed cultural memory. Assmann employs Freud's idea of anti-Semitism as a psychoanalytic transfer "from the plane of individual psychology to that of collective psychology" (Assmann 1997:161) – a conceptualization Freud articulated in *Totem and Taboo: Resemblances between the*

Lives of Savages and Neurotics (first published in German in 1913), and in *Moses and Monotheism* (1937). Assmann's Freudian-based Eurocentric psychohistory represents a breakaway from history, and an embrace of cultural memory that is always linked to present contingencies.

Edward Said (2003), too, relies on Freud's monotheistic Moses but Said's thinking on Freud and the non-European differ from Assmann's particular discourse. Journeying from Freud to Joseph Conrad and Frantz Fanon, Said maintains that individual and collective memory sustain "endless structuring and restructuring" (27). He suggests an analogy between Beethovens's perturbed state of health when composing his last piano sonatas and quartets, and Freud's distress over Nazism and his own declining health when writing *Moses and Monotheism*. *Missa Solemnis* and *Der Mann Moses und die monotheistische* are interwoven by Said into a (rather doleful) tapestry of cultural memory.

In a compendium, Jacqueline Rose (2003:65-79) challenges Said's way of equalizing Freud's self-image with that of a Jew distanced "from his [Jewish] European affiliation" (70). Rose cites the 1930 Hebrew preface to *Totem and Taboo* in which Freud apologizes for being "ignorant of the language of the holy writ" and "estranged from the religion of his fathers" (70). Rose suggests that Freud "feels that he is in his essential nature a Jew and has no desire to alter that nature" (70).³⁸ The self-definition of a modern secular Jew "shedding the trappings of linguistic, religious and national identity [...] does not make him less Jewish, but more" (71). I do not wish to dwell on Said's view of Freud as a lesser Jew – an appraisal reinforced by Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi (1991) who thought Freud's denial of knowing Yiddish and Hebrew was suspicious and

resented “the very violence of Freud’s recoil against Jewish religious belief and ritual”³⁹ – or, alternatively, on Rose’s assessment of Freud’s modernist secularism as indicative of a strong attachment to Jewish identity. My intent is to illuminate some twists and turns in investigating individual-collective cultural memory.

David Lowenthal’s (1985) composition of an inventory of resources drawn from psychology, literary criticism, history, geography, and the arts, to interpret the past as “a foreign country,” is also propelled by the notion that constructing cultural memory is always impelled by present requisites. Benedict Anderson (1983) adds to this theoretical directive by attributing the extension of nationalism to the dynamics of “imagined communities,” whereby past and present cultural-collective memory reach beyond geographic borders. Indebted to his mentor, Eric Hobsbaum, Anderson posits cultural memory as a major constituent in the construction of national identity which need not be confined to a country’s geographic borders. The tenacity of nationalist sentiments in an era of supposed globalization lends Anderson’s inferences on the continued potency of nationalism much significance.

Paul Connerton’s (1989) analytic meditation on how societies remember is another theoretical landmark in the study of collective-cultural memory. Connerton’s thesis is that “memory, or tradition, gets passed on in non-textual and non-cognitive ways” (102-103). He defines this as “habitual memory” which is much more than mere inclination to do or think in a habitual manner. Connerton’s collective-cultural memory is of social nature and is invariably expressed in commemorative activities and bodily practices. The two are interrelated. Commemoration entails performance of bodily rites: “commemorative ceremonies prove to be commemorative only in so far as they are

performative.” However, since performing acts cannot be thought of without introducing the concept of habit, and since habit assumes “a notion of bodily automatisms” (5), individual/collective memory is socially habitual. According to Connerton, even revolutionary acts reveal pre-revolution bodily and commemorative practiced habits.

Steven Aschheim’s (1994) critical appraisal of retrospective assignment of meaning in the process of constructing cultural-collective memory is indispensable to contemplating collective-cultural memory of the Holocaust. Aschheim’s compelling analysis of Nietzsche’s legacy in Germany (1800-1990) relates directly to Holocaust remembrance in that, as Aschheim claims, various attempts to retrospectively pinpoint the “real” Friedrich Nietzsche invariably end up speculating on the Nazi’s use or misuse of the philosopher’s teachings. Among the “Nietzscheans” assessed by Aschheim are Walter Kaufmann, Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche, Karl Jaspers, and Georg Lukacs. Opinions range from denouncing Nietzsche as a post 1870 prototype-bourgeoisie-Fascist thinker, and father of Nazism (Georg Lukacs, *The Destruction of Reason*, 1981), to asserting that linking Nietzsche with the moral decadence of Nazism is a gross distortion of the philosopher’s anti-political agenda (Walter Kaufmann *Nietzsche, Philosopher, Psychologist, and Antichrist*, 1974). Aschheim’s goal is not to clinch the ultimate Nietzsche but to “analyze and understand rather than judge [...] the manifold ways in which a complex of ideas, catchwords, and images – quite apart from their validity – permeated the culture and political sensibilities of German society” (309).

Aschheim does not engage in retrospective unearthing of the philosopher’s teachings. Instead, he points to how the making of the cultural memory of a philosopher, in this case Nietzsche, lent it to being distorted, misconstrued, and misappropriated. I

find Aschheim's thinking intellectually and morally edifying. His position is two-pronged. On the one hand, Aschheim contends that when appraising Nazism's exaggeration of its conformity with the Nietzschean spirit, one must also consider other ideological affiliations with Nietzsche; the pre Holocaust Zionist movement being one such interesting instance. On the other hand, even if one acknowledges that Nazism is a blatant distortion of Nietzsche, and it is therefore unreasonable to saddle Nietzsche with the responsibility for Auschwitz, citing Martin Jay (1988),⁴⁰ Aschheim concludes that Nietzschean tenets lent themselves to misrepresentation, perhaps even justification of Nazism, "in a way that, say, those of John Stuart Mill or Alexis de Tocqueville could not" (316). Or, to quote Jacques Derrida, "How and why what is so naively called a falsification was possible (one can't falsify just anything)" (316).⁴¹

So far, the sketchy theoretical framework of cultural and collective memory provided here highlights examples from scholarly works that are academically sophisticated and generally thought of as in the category of high culture. That may have been adequate in a pre postmodern era. Nowadays, as I elaborate on in ensuing chapters, the tendency is to do away with binary separation between "high" and "low" culture. The issue is not mere disbandment of binary demarcations. Rather, the crucial issue here is that the dynamics between high and popular – a far more appropriate term than "low" – culture, and the ways in which these dynamics create tensions between hegemonic and countercultural trends, are extremely important in contemplating Holocaust remembrance.

I open this part of the discussion with George Lipsitz's (1990) riveting investigation of American popular culture and collective memory. The content of

Lipsitz's study of "time passages" is not about the Holocaust. Regardless, methodologically and theoretically Lipsitz's studious analysis of the relation between popular culture and collective cultural memory is highly relevant when deliberating expressions of Holocaust remembrance in popular culture.

Lipsitz speaks of slang that "undercuts the authority of the word" thereby "valorizing the street as a locus of sociality and creativity" (15-16): "a sideshow can sometimes be the main event" (20). According to Lipsitz, popular television is "the most important discursive medium in American culture" (39). Clearly, television is the primary vehicle in commercialization of consumerism. However, if left at that, one would only have a tunnel vision of the potentiality of American television. The fact is that while television is a powerful "forum for redefining American ethnic, class, and family identities into consumer identities" (47), it is also a sophisticated counter-culture medium, a purveyor of "democratic and egalitarian propensities" (100), and a provider of a major comedic/dramatic platform for middle-class and working-class Americans. It was through television that Americans encountered middle-class youths of the 1960s "imitating Afro-American hairstyles" (128). It was also through radio and television that capitalist driven America clashed with potent countercultural sentiments personified in the music of two "apocalyptic" working-class heroes: Jimmy Hendrix and Janis Joplin. In and of itself, countercultural forms of protest are as old as human history. It becomes most enthralling when, as with Hendrix and Joplin, it springs from an obscure and marginal source and morphs into a subculture that eventually entrenches itself into a collective cultural identity. From Hillbilly musicians, folk-gospel blues and jazz, to Little Richard, Elvis Presley, Bob Dylan, and the "invasion" of the British Beatles – what often

resonated as marginal countercultural musical vibrations, evolved into cultural expressions of the American nation.

As I discuss in greater detail in the second part of my thesis, my particular interest in Etgar Keret's literature is based on construing Keret's writings as an affirmation of the postmodern effacement of divides between high and low culture. It was Michel de Certeau who stated in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1988) that literature gives birth to stories, while news media spreads rumors. "Stories diversify, rumors totalize" (107). He notes that eighteenth century Enlightenment believed that readings of high culture could transform society. Prior to the Enlightenment "scriptural imperialism" (166) linked reading with the Church; popular literature represented and embodied a complex and unpredictable process of creating "indefinite plurality of meanings" (167). Textual meaning is accorded through "codes of perception that it [literature] does not control" (170). As de Certeau contends, "It is always good to remind ourselves that we mustn't take people for fools" (176). Urbanization is posited by de Certeau as an enhancement to popular culture. Whatever the avatars of urbanized conceptualization were – "a totalizing and almost mythical landmark for socioeconomic and political strategies" – city life emerged as a formidable catalyst for cultural creativity that is "outside the reach of panoptic power" (95). Urbanization fostered a proliferation of unpredictable and unstoppable movements of popular culture sprouting from marginalized "secluded places" (108) and neighborhoods.

Haya Bar-Itzhak (2005) tells of Israeli counterculture emanating from immigrant neighborhoods. In the preface to her exploration of Israeli folk narratives, immigration and ethnicity, she emphasizes that up until the establishment of the State of Israel, Jewish

history was that of a marginalized ethnic-religious group within non-Jewish hosting countries. It is only with the establishment of a national-territorial independent Jewish homeland that types of Jewish cultural marginalization are located *within* the boundaries of a Jewish-Israeli country. The example provided by Bar-Itzhak is of a Polish-Jewish minority in the midst of an Israeli-Jewish majority. With the resurfacing of anti-Semitism in Poland during the 1950s, a remnant of Polish Jewry that survived the Nazi onslaught said their final goodbyes to Poland, and made their way to Israel. Israeli sociologists refer to this wave of immigration as the “Gomułka *aliya*” (Gomułka immigration) (57). As told by Bar-Itzhak, the acclimatizing process for this group of immigrants was a daunting experience and brought about an emergence of a Polish-Jewish-Israeli counterculture. It was a counterculture that reflected a combination of elitist self-perception – a perception not shared by the larger Israeli society – and a reality of economic-social ruggedness. The paradoxical intermix of an aggrandized sense of cultural superiority with existential hardship gave birth to a subversive subculture which, as is often the case, is doused in humor. Thus, Israeli hot climate – a desert wind known as *hamsin* – acquires a Polish etymology and *hamsin* becomes *chamski syn*, meaning (in Polish) “son [Israeli] of a hoodlum” (59). The neighborhood’s Israeli name, Qiryat Nazareth, is referred to as *Qiryat Natzorres*: a “town of troubles” (60). Delicious Polish plums are compared with measly local plums that are mistaken for olives, the scrumptiousness of Polish food is contrasted with pitiful Middle Eastern cuisine, and the lushness of Polish forestry is juxtaposed with pathetically lean Israeli greenery. Hilarious (bigoted) “epithets and stereotypes” (67) abound in reference to the shenanigans of

Rumanian and Hungarian Israeli politicians, the “inferiority” of Moroccan Jews, and “primitivism” of Arab-Israelis.⁴²

As noted, present-day interplay and reciprocity between high and popular culture, and the tension between hegemonic and countercultural pulls, are extremely important in deciphering the complexity of Holocaust remembrance. No matter how singular as a historical happening, Holocaust remembrance is susceptible to cultural dynamics and changeability of collective memory. As I will show in Part II of my thesis, Etgar Keret’s subversive approach to state commemorations of the Holocaust mirrors historical, social, and political developments in Israel. A cultural messenger, Keret epitomizes what Susan Rubin Suleiman renders in “My War in Four Episodes” (2001): the public intellectual who is a formidable dispenser of cultural portraiture.

When debating the subject of remembering the Holocaust, Jeffrey Alexander (2009) correctly states that history does not wait. Months and years were needed to process the horrifying scenes encountered by Allied liberating troops at various locations of Nazi concentration camps. Yet, political and judicial circumstances demanded that a narrative be produced as swiftly as possible. It was literature that quickly took a leading role. The corroboration of factual evidence by survivors-writers was/is not surprising. What is utterly astonishing is the remarkable quality of the literature written by Elie Wiesel’s generation. In shock, alone, physically ill, and bruised to the depth of their human soul, survivors-writers began to write extraordinary literature. If there is one fact that cannot be disputed regarding literature written about the Holocaust – and there are several such undisputed facts – it is that people like Elie Wiesel, Primo Levi, Dan Pagis, Amir Gilboa, Ida Fink, and Aharon Appelfeld, to name but a few authors, paved a

formidable path for future writing about the Holocaust. In doing so, they secured literature's cultural (and countercultural) capacity and cardinal role in creating and navigating Holocaust remembrance. The Nazis were in the habit of documenting their crimes in full detail. Historical evidence of Nazi atrocities abounds. Where history fell short was in providing a cultural and moral directive as to how to internalize all that evidence. The intricacies of cultural-collective remembrance of the Holocaust became – not exclusively but significantly – the domain of literature.

A core idea expressed by Julia Epstein and Lori Hope Lefkowitz (2001), when relating “shaping losses” to cultural memory of the Holocaust, is that cultural remembrance is prone to fluctuate between clarity and confusion, formality and unpredictability, collective and individual. While there are definite psychological factors that determine an individual's memory and collective memory, there are spawning cultural forces that bypass or transcend individuality and only apply to a collective as a whole. When quoting Charlotte Delbo's anguished words: “*Oublier ou nous souvenir ne depend pas de notre vouloir*” (forgetting or remembering does not depend upon our willing it),⁴³ Epstein and Lefkowitz imply that the realm of cultural memory is not always aligned with individual memory – an insight I intend to elaborate on in relation to Keret's stories.

In their editorial introduction to a collection of theoretical readings on the Holocaust, Neil Levi and Michael Rothberg (2003) argue that the *Historikerstreit* (the mid-1980s historians' debate in Germany) “stands as a warning about how the act of [historical] comparison itself is not innocent or neutral” (17). As argued by Levi and Rothberg, a group of neo-conservative German historians led by Ernst Nolte, attempted

to “normalize” Holocaust remembrance by promoting greater sympathy for the Wehrmacht, and by casting Stalinist-Soviet terror as a precedent and a “model” emulated by the Nazis. The opposition to Nolte was led by Jürgen Habermas who deemed such an appraisal of Nazism as a form of advocacy for history to relinquish moral responsibility.⁴⁴ Much has been deduced from this controversy about ethical safeguards in writing “pure” history. Literature goes beyond this. In its ethereality, subjectivism, and immaterialist nature, literature lends itself now, as it lent itself in the immediate aftermath of World War II, to sophisticated moral expressions of Holocaust remembrance.

Dominick LaCapra (1998) navigates between history and memory after Auschwitz. LaCapra argues that cultural-collective memory is dependant on being shared by a large number of people. Known for studying responses to trauma through psychoanalytic conceptualization of transference, resistance, denial, repression, acting-out, and working-through, LaCapra aims to “undercut the binary opposition between the individual and society”(43). He posits Art Spiegelman’s *Maus; A Survivor’s Tale* (Part I, 1986 & Part II, 1991) as a fine exemplar of “working-through” trauma and mourning, and contrasts it with Claude Lanzmann’s *Shoah*, and its “emphatic exclusion of archival material” and insistence on “discovering the past in and through the present alone” (99). LaCapra argues that the momentum achieved by Spiegelman’s *Maus* stems from a textual-visual narrative which provides historical authenticity while sustaining a “level of metaphor or allegory” (161).

As I broaden the discussion on representation of Holocaust remembrance, I pause to reflect on cultural memory derived from visual displays and sources. Susannah Radstone’s (2010) thoughts on the medium of cinema as simultaneously enhancing and

taming memory are important. Radstone asserts that even if one does not view films as analogous to “modes of memory,” it is impossible to conceive of cultural, social, and public memory without considering the impactful potency of films, television, and digital media. Memory, from Plato’s *Theaetetus* and the idea of memory as an imprint, to Freud’s memory metaphor of a writing pad, was always visualized. The omnipotence of cinema – over and above still photography – is anchored in its ability to convey motions and mobility of memory. In Radstone’s words: “Modernist trauma cinema, while refusing the fetishistic illusion of mastery of the event, ushers in the possibility of representing that which had hitherto confounded representation, allowing mourning, remembrance, and even, perhaps, forgetting” (333).

Sara Horowitz (1997) affirms Radstone’s appraisal of cinema’s potential by way of critiquing the filming techniques used in *Schindler’s List*, Steven Spielberg’s 1993 cinema adaptation of *Schindler’s Ark* by Thomas Keneally. It is precisely in what Radstone articulates as cinema’s refusal to create an illusion of mastery of historicity that Horowitz finds *Schindler’s List* wanting. Horowitz’s position is articulated in a 1997 essay titled “But is it Good for the Jews? Spielberg’s Schindler and the Aesthetics of Atrocity.” She argues that a seemingly innocuous technique of infusing black-and-white photos into a film that is mostly in color, paints “a false claim to authenticity” (122). Thus, “although Spielberg’s *Schindler* is about morality it is not a moral film” (136). Some, particularly when comparing *Schindler’s List* with another mega Holocaust movie hit, Roberto Benigni’s 1997 *La vita è bella* (Life is Beautiful), praise Spielberg’s endeavor. Driven mostly by his intense dislike of Benigni’s allegorical film, Kobi Niv (2000) titles his write-up on *Life is Beautiful* as “life is beautiful but not for the Jews”.⁴⁵

Niv favors Spielberg's handling of cinematic techniques as a way of authenticating history.

In line with Geoffrey Hartman's (1997) comments on "the cinema animal" as related to Spielberg's disconcerting "tendency toward stylization," I am among those who found it irritating that Spielberg cast Ralph Fiennes in the role of Amon Goeth: a boorish slob who had none of Fiennes's grace and elegance. It is no fault of any viewer if Goeth comes across as less monstrous than he was in real life. Still, I concur with Miriam Bratu Hansen (1997) who, as part of an evaluation of *Schindler's List* in relation to popular culture and public memory, notes that unless we take all aspects seriously – including distortions and omissions of "mass-mediated memory culture" – we will be stuck in "a compulsive *pas-de-deux*" of intellectual history, and would be missing "a chance to understand the significance of the Shoah in the present [...]" (99).

Yosefa Loshitzky (1997), editor and contributor to a collection of critical perspectives on "Spielberg's Holocaust," argues that *Schindler's List* is an embodiment of "collective memory as transmitted by popular culture over a memory contested and debated by professional history" (3). Loshitzky goes on to state that for American Jews, Spielberg's film symbolically transformed mourning over six million Jews "into a celebration of the approximately five million Jews [presumably Canadian Jews are not included] living in America today" (4). A preposterous statement to my mind, yet, Loshitzky is correct in her assessment of the incisive cultural impact of the genre of cinema. For some, the trenchant impact of films like *Schindler's List* and *Life is Beautiful* is worrisome. Others go along with Radstone who believes that "spectators' ability to engage in negotiation of images" (2010:334-335) should not be underestimated.

Lastly, Barbie Zelizer (1997) notes that when contemplating *Schindler's List* in relation to historicity, the essence of the discussion is actually about trust or the limits of trust in representation of the Holocaust. Zelizer contends that the type of controversy over *Schindler's List* indicates an ambivalence regarding popular culture and representation of the history of the Holocaust. On the one hand, we approve of raising “a popular voice in retelling a story of the Holocaust.” On the other hand, we have “framed our acceptance in ways that make such retelling more like history and less like popular culture” (18).

Patrick Modiano speaks of a different type of visualization and cultural memory. Not the cinema, but a visual display of landscape. “*Des traces subsistent dans des registres*” (traces survive in registers) is how Patrick Modiano pieces together a montage of *Dora Bruder's* (1999)⁴⁶ short life and disappearance during the Nazi occupation of France. A trail of spatial memory haunts Modiano's narrative. The address 62 Rue du Petit-Picpus is where the Holocaust conjoins with another cultural memory: the hiding place of Cosette and Jean Valjean from the police in Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* (1862). Modiano's autobiographical memories of adolescent years intermix with Dora's whereabouts before she was taken to Auschwitz. “Topography resists obliteration through traces of roadmaps, street signs, buildings, and sites that summon into existence a terrible past [...] The blue road signs on the road to the airport still bear the old names: Drancy or Romainville” (Modiano 1999:117).

Svetlana Boym's *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001) is a lyrical exploration of palpability of cultural memory in relation to homes, places, and landscapes. Nostalgia, as in *nostos* (returning home) and *algia* (longing), is “a longing for a home that no longer

exists or has never existed” (xiii). It is also about “the relationship between individual biography and the biography of groups or nations, between personal and collective memory” (xvi). Nostalgia, Boym argues, impassions and inflames us for it is about “the repetition of the unrepeatable” (xvii). There are no trains at the Grunewald station; there are only tracks covered with gravel and weeds which Boym follows on foot to the last platform. On route, she makes note of iron plaques with dates and numbers but with no names of the Jews that were transported from Grunewald station to death camps. “The past is stored here in its unredeemable emptiness” – this transportation space no longer in operation, it being “beyond repair and renewal” (194).

Back in Poland – the “site of the crime” – Deborah Tall (1998) comes across a location in Warsaw “spackled with plaques and monuments.” It is a haunting relic that remains part of the local landscape of Krakow: Kazimierz, the old Jewish quarter. Arriving at her grandfather’s village, Tall does not recall the terrain she sees but she nonetheless adopts it as her own. (19) Lisa Appignanesi’s (1999) family memoir on “loosing the dead” speaks of an “ultimate generation game” her friends “play” in an attempt to regain their sanity in lost European scenery (80-81). At Pruszków, “osmosis between Polish and Polish-Yiddish cultures [...]” (107) rekindles itself. Born in Poland but raised in France and Canada, Appignanesi is overcome by her familiarity with rural Poland. An aroma she always assumed was the scent of the Canadian countryside is now identified as that of a Polish village (108) – a spatial memory epiphany of sort. Appignanesi walks the length of a railway yard and is overcome with memories “cascading through the generations in a series of misplaced fears, mysterious wounds,

odd habits” of the land. The railway yard once belonged to her grandfather. When the Germans came he was made a slave laborer on his property. (110)

Landscape is a crucial variable in Simon Schama’s (1995) construction of cultural memory. Landscape and memory in relation to the Holocaust is portrayed by Schama as “a tradition built from a rich deposit of myths, memories, and obsessions” which was lost but perhaps can still be found (14). Through an extraordinary narrative, Schama excavates memories that lie beneath the ground: landscapes that “are culture before they are nature” and countryside metaphors that “are more real than their referents” (61). Picturesque landscapes and “the sunny confidence of the Enlightenment” were devastated by wars and “fertilized by the bones and blood of the unnumbered dead” (19). As Schama tells it, post World War II Poland has many such places. But for Polish Jews there was no home, no family, no people, and no Polish land to return to – except in nightmares. We think of the Holocaust “as having no landscape” or as landscape “collapsed into shades of dun and gray; the gray of smoke, of ash, of pulverized bones, of quicklime” (26). What a shock it is to arrive at Treblinka, as Schama did, and realize that this terrible historical spot is now an idyllic landscape; “rolling, gentle land” nurtured by the rivers “of the Bug and the Vistula” (26).

Schama recalls members of his family that were part of a group known in Poland and Lithuania as “people of the forest, the wilderness *puszcza*” (27). Like many other “wood-*shleppers*” his great-grandfather and his four sons – “outriders of this Judeo-Lithuanian world” – were completely at home “with horses and dogs and two-handled saws as with prayer books and *shabbos* candles” (28). Not too many people realize that “the native fabric” (31) of this lush wooded landscape is saturated with Jewish-Polish-

Lithuanian spiritualism and myth. When the Nazis came they turned the woods into “a colony of death.” The idea was to exterminate all the natives of the forests and Germanize the woods to become “the Greater Reich’s most splendid hunting ground” (71). Thoroughly in keeping with the Nazi madness, once the tide of the war began to change, the orders from Berlin headquarters were to burn all the forests to the ground.⁴⁷

While not directly related to the Holocaust but relevant to visualization of landscape in the formation of cultural memory, Edward Said maintained that biblical archaeology was summoned as a form of historicity “to the task of consolidating” Zionist-Israeli identity (2003:45). Worded differently by Sidra Ezrahi (2000) in introducing her comprehensive narrative on exile and homecoming in the modern Jewish imagination, “What is being excavated is the narrative that, grounded in the past, grants the present its meaning.” Two thousand years of “portable Jewish geography” was reclaimed by modern Zionism “as “real homecoming” conceptualized through “a notion of original space to which the text and culture could return” (15). In their grasp of space, land, and place in contemporary Israeli experience, Eyal Ben-Ari and Yoram Bilu (1997) agree that “the rhetoric of place and the rhetoric of action” were intimately intertwined in the discourse” of early Zionists. Landscape is infused by Yehuda Amichai into his personal-historical identity.

[...] I didn't kiss the ground
when they brought me as a little boy
to this land. But now that I've grown up on her,
she kisses me,
she holds me,
she clings to me with love,
with grass and thorns, with sand and stone,
with wars and with this springtime
until the final kiss.⁴⁸

Ben-Ari and Bilu (1997) also note that in the early years of statehood, “the territorial ethos of Zionism” was established through formal schooling and youth movements which glorified knowledge of the land (*yediat ha-aretz*), an obsession with archeological excavations, and various forms of celebrating nature-agriculture related festivals. Later, with the near-disaster of the 1973 Yom Kippur War, the disputed legitimacy of the 1982 Lebanon excursion, and the *Intifada* (Palestinian uprising), secular “spatial sentiments” (232) began to erode. Young Israelis still love traveling in Israel, but nowadays, they seem more enthused about the prospect of touring remote places in Asia and South America. It is an observation not lamented by Ben-Ari and Bilu for the authors view it as signifying a (healthy) suspicion of territorial mythology, and a basis for the development of a politically “broader social *zeitgeist*” (235).

Gideon Bar (2008) reconstructs the creation of Jewish sacred space in the State of Israel over two decades: from 1948 to 1967. According to Bar, idealized Zionist topography consecrated war memorials and military cemeteries as hallowed places of remembrance. In the aftermath of the 1967 War, traditional Jewish sacred sites such as the Western Wall, Rachel’s Tomb, Tomb of the Patriarch’s at Hebron, King David’s Tomb, and Elijah’s Cave, suddenly became accessible. To Ezrahi’s (2000) dismay, these traditional sites of cultural memory morphed into “interdicted forms of idol worship” (19). Yehuda Amichai feels overwhelmed altogether with too much memory:

Let the memorial hill remember instead of me,
that’s what it’s here for.
[...]
Let the beasts of the field and the birds of the heavens eat
and remember.
Let all of them remember so that I can rest.⁴⁹
“Songs of Zion, the Beautiful” in *Songs of Jerusalem*

For most Israeli writers of literature, Ezrahi argues, the ultimate challenge is “how to keep images from becoming icons [and] archeology from becoming eschatology” (23).

Yochai Oppenheimer’s (2012) essay on representation of Israeli space in *Mizrahi* (Middle-Eastern/North-African Israeli Jews) fiction illuminates the connectivity between cultural memory, social marginality, and spatial localities. Most specifically, Oppenheimer focuses on the relationship between cultural group-identity of *Mizrahi* immigrants, and poor Israeli neighborhoods. Oppenheimer’s study of Israeli *Mizrahi* culture is grounded in Henri Lefebvre’s (1991) notion regarding the “production of space” as an ideological process of determining “public and private consciousness” (336). Lefebvre’s concepts of “absolute space” and “differentiated space” are applied by Oppenheimer onto Hebrew literature written by several renowned *Mizrahi* authors such as Shimon Adaf, Shimon Ballas, Sami Michael, Kobi Oz, Yosi Sucary, Ronit Matalon, Dudu Bussi, and Sami Berdugo. Oppenheimer finds *Mizrahi* fiction reflective of “the presence of distinct ethnic spaces” that constitutes “an alternative to Israeli hegemonic literature” (340); differentiated space “grows out of the eruption of contradictions and differences in society [...] that calls into question the unity of the common space” (337). Geography “is no more than a projection of the mental topography of those who live in the landscape” (351). In Oppenheimer’s view, Tel Aviv, once a “white city” of European culture and architecture, epitomizes in *Mizrahi* literature a spatial horizon of “long-term ethnic exclusion” (363). That being said, and perhaps touched by the same whiff of optimism expressed by Ben-Ari and Bilu (1997), given present-day proliferation of diverse currents in *Mizrahi* Hebrew literature, Oppenheimer signs off with a belief in the coming of a more inclusive Israeli cultural memory.

Julia Creet and Andreas Kitzmann's (2011) multidisciplinary approach to memory and migration reveals a similar methodological orientation. Creet and Kitzmann note that by taking their theoretical cue from Paul Ricoeur's contemplation of "inhabiting physical places" as "relational" rather than geographic locality (7), they are able to navigate from topographic fixity to topographic mobility. The relationship between place, migration, fixity, and mobility is perceived as transforming cultural memory into a socio-political phenomenon. Post Second World War themes of "melancholy, the absence of origins, and the inability to return" are fundamental in Creet and Kitzmann's inquiry into ways in which displacement and loss of "place" intensifies memory. The movement that illuminates displacement, the complete break of locus, the impassable border where Walter Benjamin ended his life is "the *topos* of memory itself." (10)

Philip Gleason (1981) wonders whether the last Americans to be able to imprint upon America's collective memory an image of an Odysseus-like triumphant return home, were post World War II soldiers. Outlined in an essay on World War II and the shaping of American identity, Gleason argues that the image of the liberator-American-soldier of World War II is so deeply entrenched in America's collective memory that no memory of slavery, Orwellian-like McCarthyism, extreme social-economic injustices and discrimination, the disaster of the Vietnam War, and untold number of botched military skirmishes around the globe, can topple this seductive, iconic portrait in America's collective-cultural memory.⁵⁰

The consolidation of the Palestinian historical-national-collective memory around the traumatic dispossession from their land in 1948 is a telling case in cultural memory. One can bemoan the fact that the Palestinian people have not shown too many signs of

incorporating anything but this trauma into their collective identity, but that does not justify invalidating the germaneness of 1948 to their collective memory. Ahman H. Sa'di and Lila Abu-Lughod, editors of *Nakba: Palestine, 1948, and the Claims of Memory* (2007), state from the outset that Palestinian memory of “the catastrophe” (*al-nakba*) is of double poignancy. It is not only a matter of historical memory of 1948; it is a collective memory perpetually refueled by present events and daily visualization of additional land lost in the war of 1967. I shall return to the polemics of the 1967 War and its aftermath. At this point, I only wish to state the fact that the 1948 war resulted in an awful tragedy which left countless Palestinians homeless and with no other choice but languish in refugee camps in Jordan and Egypt. The collective memory of the *Nakba* is comprised of personal histories of loss. Unlike other traumatic occurrences which are often followed by a process of rehabilitation, the post 1967 Israeli presence on pre 1967 Palestinian land continues to inflame the collective memory of the 1948 *Nakba*.

Not as prevalent as thinking about remembrance when theorizing collective memory, forgetting is also considered part of formative cultural memory, or cultural non-memory. As contended by Paul Connerton (2008) in articulating seven types of forgetting, “repressive erasure” is not necessarily a failure. The French were eager to efface all memory of the *ancient régime* but along the way the urge to erase was transformed into forms of “structural amnesia” (60). Archiving historical material is tantamount to saying that the material is retrievable and therefore “we can afford to forget it” (65). Germany imposed on itself a form of amnesia regarding Allied bombings of 131 German cities and towns during the course of World War II. W. G. Sebald (2003) defines Germany’s collective forgetting of a destroyed landscape “a natural history of

destruction” motivated by not wishing to admit that “the real pioneering achievements in bomb warfare – Guernica, Warsaw, Belgrade, and Rotterdam – were the works of Germans” (104).

Eviatar Zerubavel (2003) conjures up collective memory of the past as time maps that are shaped socially. Halls of Fame, textbooks, and illustrations of “mnemonic socialization” – as in George Washington’s image on dollar bills – are depicted by Zerubavel not as spontaneous but as acts governed by “unmistakably social *norms of remembrance* [italics in text]” (5). Zerubavel’s deliberations are geared toward the development of what he defines as “a *transcultural* as well as a *transhistorical* perspective on social memory as a generic phenomenon [italics in text]” (9). He draws upon numerous contexts – from nature and animals, to people living in Europe, North America, and the Middle East – as he searches for common mnemonic attributes ranging from biology to language. Zerubavel perceives excavating mnemonic attributes as a process of “mapping” cultures and histories. (81)

James Young (1993) speaks of “texture of memory” while attempting to distinguish between cultural memory and collective memory. Cultural memory is what most of us understand it to mean. However, given that collective memory is action-oriented, Young prefers the concept of “*collected* memories [my emphasis].” A society’s memory, Young argues, is to be regarded “as an aggregate collection of its members’ many, often competing memories” (xi). In other words, according to Young, a society’s collective memory does not exist “outside of those people who do the remembering,” and since individuals do not share exact same memories, one can only speak of maintaining “a sense of collected memories” (xi).

James Wertsch (2009) is altogether frustrated with an apparent plethora of terms used interchangeably in researching collective memory. Examples of confusing terms listed in Wertsch's 2009 essay on collective memory are public memory, social memory, cultural memory, and bodily memory. Less common, albeit equally confusing to Wertsch, are notions like "historical consciousness" and "mnemonic battles." In part, Wertsch attributes the muddle to a surplus in disciplines – sociology, history, psychology, anthropology, cultural studies, and the arts – that partake in the study of the field. By definition, collective-cultural memory is inherently social which brings about multiplicity of divergent social and political trends; in a word: "academic disarray" (132).

Noa Gedi and Yigal Elam (1996) question whether the memory "industry" indicates "conceptual degeneration" as opposed to academic sophistication.⁵¹ It is Gedi and Elam's contention that when history is configured as collective memory, the narrative produced is fabricated for social-ideological reasons. Alternatively, it represents "the creative whim of a particular historian" (41). While conceding to a critique of present-day historiography by Anita Shapiro and others, Gedi and Elam reject endowing collective memory with the same degree of authenticity attributed to historical research. Halbwachs, the authors claim, was mistaken; individuals *have* memories outside of social frameworks. Dreams, for example, are driven by "a private consciousness." In any event, Gedi and Elam regard the value in thinking in terms of collective memory miniscule, and even misleading in that it is merely "a creature of myth and imagination" (43), or simply a new name to an old term: "myth" (47).

I disagree with Gedi and Elam on several accounts but this is not relevant to the schematic outline provided here pertaining to the interchangeability between cultural

memory and collective memory. My overall goal is to illuminate degrees of consensus among theoreticians – Gedi and Elam notwithstanding – regarding the social gist in approaches to memory. I do not deny the academic confusion created by a plurality of headings and subheadings such as collective memory, historical memory, social memory, cultural memory, traumatic memory, habitual memory, migrating memory, ethical memory, political memory, commemorative memory, popular memory, public memory, and mnemonic memory. I, however, prefer to think of this type of proliferation as academic and scholarly creativity. Noted by Wulf Kansteiner (2002) in a composition on methodology and collective memory studies, scholarly diversity affords a combination of “social relevance and intellectual challenge” (179).

Kerwin Klein (2000) reflects on the emergence of the subject of memory in historical discourse. He states that once upon a time, we talked about folk history and oral history. This has now been subsumed under popular memory “paired with history” (128). Klein is critical of liberties taken by thinkers who move freely from individual memories to group consciousness. He is not fond of James Young’s notion of “texture of memory,” and even less partial to psychoanalytic jargon affixed to collective memory – melancholia, ritual, catharsis, redemption – which seem to Klein to attribute to memory an aura of “an active agent if not a hero” and a tonality linking memory to “explicit religiosity” (136).

I do not share Klein’s frustrations with what he deems as forms of “therapeutic discourse” on memory. I would submit to him Barbie Zelizer’s (1995) synthesizing approach to collective memory expressed in the title of her write-up as: “reading the past against the grain.” Skillfully introducing an overarching overview of conflicting

approaches to collective-cultural memory, Zelizer offers to meet halfway. Zelizer acknowledges that the tendency to substitute individual memory with its “collective cousin” creates a feeling of “a blended family grown too large too fast” (215). However, she also contends that in blurring “interdisciplinary boundaries” (216), the field of collective memory offers a commingled, eclectic, and hybridized forum for theorization. Under Zelizer’s scholastic umbrella, collective and cultural memory can emanate from particularistic and/or universal points of confluence. For example, the canonic photo of the Warsaw Jewish boy surrendering to armed German soldiers is undoubtedly an image carrying a particular Holocaust memory. And yet, as a symbol of Nazi barbarism and the dehumanizing effects of a vicious war, it metamorphosed into universal memory. Admitting to “insufficiently-traveled routes” across the terrain of collective memory studies, Zelizer nonetheless does not wish to slow down the tide or narrow the focus. Instead, she advocates “thinking broadly but practicing narrowly” (235).

As shall become evident in upcoming chapters, in which I address dilemmas pertaining to the universal and/or particular applicability of ethics of Holocaust remembrance, Zelizer’s thoughts on “thinking broadly” and “practicing narrowly” are linked to contemplating morality, ethics, and political behavior in our postmodern age of presumed globalism. I purposefully say “presumed” for I have in mind John Keane (2003) reflecting on *homo civilis* in our global civil society. Specifically, I refer to Keane’s questioning whether the notion of universal ethics has any substance or is it merely alluding to what Keane’s defines as “promiscuousness of the idea” of global civil society. To clarify, a brief discussion of what epitomizes global membership is not a digression from my current stream of theorizing. Holocaust remembrance has much to

do with what we have in mind when referring to our era as an age of globalization. Indeed, as Keane determines, there is much more to globalization than a global space being framed by “norms clustered around scientific-technical progress” (185). The fact that jeans originated in America, but are worn by men and women around the globe – by veiled women too – is not indicative of global “homogenization of meaningful ways of life” (24). To some extent, Keane perceives this global civil society neologism as a belated name for modernist European imperialism. That said, he also acknowledges that Western imperialism can no longer operate in a one-way direction of spreading Western ideals to the world. It may very well be that the language of global civil society is spoken “with a Western accent” (29), but one can no longer presuppose “disempowerment or outright crushing of [non-Western] others elsewhere in the world” (30). In all, global civil society is envisioned by Keane as a “dynamic space of multiple differences” (175) in which millions of people are constantly on the move. Referred to by Keane as “School of Cantankerousness,” the skeptics among us dismiss the idea of a global civil society characterized by a semblance of shared ethics. Keane, however, applies David Hume’s form of reasoning “reached inductively” whereby cooperative behavior is not arrived at by way of “rational contracting,” but by way of pragmatic cognition of the advantages inherent in “the sweets of society and mutual assistance”.⁵²

Stated differently, Keane’s vision is that of “a universe of freedom *from* a singular Universal Ethic [*italics in text*]” (196) by virtue of multiplicity of group-memberships. He promotes the notion of “humble morals” (197). Humble morals are all about ambiguity anchored in knowing full well that “moral purity is an existential impossibility” (200). The *sine qua non* ethical rule in Keane’s global civil society is

pragmatism, and is best reflected by Keane in contemplating air-traffic control systems. Being a member of global civil society is much like accepting international rules of aviation. Plurality of airlines, each promising superior traveling accommodations is one thing, but there can be no inconsistencies, deviations, or hesitations in adhering to air-traffic regulations. In laying down a pragmatic scenario, Keane has done away with any metaphysical notions of natural humanistic inclinations. Civilization's history has shown that no such innate inclination exists, and the likelihood of cultivating a civilization predisposed to do good is nil. Still, Keane believes we may currently be one step ahead of what was once known as a balance of terror. Fragile as it is, present-day global civil society has moved closer to abiding by a form of moral pragmatism that cannot afford to "tolerate its intolerant opponents" (203).

Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider (2002) contribute to the particular-universal collective memory conversation by examining Holocaust remembrance in Israel, the United States, and Germany. In an essay on the Holocaust and the formation of cosmopolitan memory, Levy and Sznaider argue that "extraterritorial quality of cosmopolitan memory" is fostered by a globalization process of "deterritorialization of politics and culture" (88). The authors contend that while national and ethnic sentiments are not a thing of the past, these forms of compartmentalized identity mutate in accordance with certain globalizing patterns of "common rhythms and periodizations" (89). "Old" prototypes of national identity and cultural/collective memory are infused with global dynamics. Specific to Holocaust remembrance, Levy and Sznaider state that "cosmopolitization of Holocaust memory" does not imply blanket uniformity. Instead, it

means that the particularity of Israeli Holocaust remembrance has become more a universal.

To be sure, media and technological innovations have much to do with the cohabitation of singularity and globalism. Keane, however, suggests that it is not only about technology. The ever-widening circumference of communication is also about ethics. Avishai Margalit's nuanced demarcation in *The Ethics of Memory* (2002) between morality and ethics is relevant to this deliberation. Margalit's theorizing is grounded in a *prima facie* supposition of there being no other source or responsibility for ethics and morality other than human beings. No transcendent, celestial, or superhuman force defines morality or bears responsibility for our actions but we humans. Beyond this foundational principle, Margalit contends that "there is an ethics of memory [but] there is very little morality of memory" (7). Indeed, one ought to always be suspicious of a pledge "to appraise memories in moral terms" (14). Morality "ought to guide our behavior toward those to whom we are related just by virtue of their being fellow human beings" (37). Ethics run deeper. Ethics are the substance of "thick relations" with those "near and dear" to us (7). "Being moral is a required good; being ethical is in principle, an optional good" (105). The "obligation to remember" (83) radical evil that sought to rewrite humanity's past, present, and future, and have total control over cultural memory, is in the domain of morality.

A typology of thin and thick morality is also found in Michael Walzer's (1994) analysis. In Walzer's study, "thick" and "thin" adjectives are applied to situations of dialoguing among people. Thick morality is "a way of talking among ourselves" in our national and cultural homes about a shared history and culture. Thin morality

corresponds with “ways of talking to people abroad, across different cultures, about the thinner life we have in common” (xi). Walzer does not believe that morality starts off thin and thickens with age. Depending on its “home,” morality can start off thick. Thin morality – as in international rules of aviation – is not negotiable.

Walzer believes that only homeland societies can be said to have members with memories. Global humanity has members but no memory. It has “no history and no culture, no customary practices, no familiar life-ways, no festivals, no shared understanding of social goods” (8). The “internationalism” of the Left failed to grasp the forcefulness of tribalism. (64) There is little hope for humanity, as far as Walzer can tell, without shared minimalist/thin morality. It is not a substitute for thick morality; values of social democracy and cultural pluralism cannot be navigated and sustained by minimal morality. It is Walzer’s contention that the unity of the West, or today’s European community, is made possible by an acceptance of the legitimacy of thin morality, in other words, the realization that “there is no ideal tribe” (68-70).

Can one teach thin morality? Somewhat different from Keane’s pragmatism, Howard Gardner (2000), the notable psychologist and theoretician of multiple intelligences, answers in the affirmative. Gardner’s “disciplined mind” is not about standardized testing. Rather, it is about what every child from kindergarten to grade twelve deserves to know. Gardner propounds three types of cultural-historical-moral pillars upon which humanist education rests. Bearing in mind that there is no golden pedagogic route for dispatching humanist education to all children from kindergarten to high school, Gardner nonetheless believes in the wisdom of transmitting three humanist maxims to all students. These three bastions of Western civilization’s collective memory

“have names and histories” and are located in the realms of truth, beauty, and morality. According to Gardner, the realm of truth is embedded in Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution, the realm of beauty in Mozart’s operatic *The Marriage of Figaro*, and the realm of morality in the Holocaust.

Jeffrey Alexander (2012) believes that thinking about trauma and social theory, cultural memory, ethics of remembrance, and thick and thin morality, is conditioned and dependent on “who is telling the story” and “who controls the means of symbolic production” (37). Heaven forbid, had the Nazis won the war, in all likelihood there would be no record of the Holocaust, and if a record were to be kept, it certainly would not be represented as radical evil. I have already expressed my unease with “what if” speculations. I only wish to add that the Nazis *were* defeated, and to cite Alexander himself, “a powerful symbolic logic” evolved into “a system of collective representations that focused its beam of narrative light on the triumphant expulsion of evil” (48). Alexander adds that over the years, as a by-product of collective representations, the radius of those responsible for the Nazi killing machines widened to encompass democratic governments such as Canada, European bystanders, the greedy Swiss, the Vatican, and the inept Red Cross. The early “progressive narrative” of the Nuremberg War Crimes Tribunal⁵³ metamorphosed into a monumental “tragic narrative” with no possibility of arriving at an Aristotelian catharsis. A prototype which acknowledges the Jewish particularity of the Holocaust has come to be universalized as a trauma in Western civilization’s collective memory.

In conclusion, the schematic review provided here of several constituents of collective and cultural memory, such as generational and group kinship, habitual and

commemorative practices, the intermingling of narratives of high and popular cultural, visual, spatial, and transferability of shared memories, and the inwards of cultural/collective memory and morality, are integral to my overall thesis and its several subtopics. To take one example, regardless of the political and moral stance taken by Israeli Jews in relation to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict – an issue pursued in greater detail in the second part of my work – opinions and emotions expressed make little or no sense at all if taken out of the context of Jewish collective and cultural memory. By Jewish collective and cultural memory I mean remembrance of a biblical covenant (God, Torah, the people, and the Land of Zion), Jewish prayers and liturgy, traditions, customs, rituals, language, legends, and folktales. By Jewish collective and cultural memory I also mean remembrance of a long-awaited return to Zion turned into a reality by the national-modernist Zionist movement, and the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 in the aftermath of the Holocaust.

Having positioned the dialectics of cultural/collective memory as a theoretical backdrop to Holocaust remembrance, I now zero in on the conceptualization of the modality of coping with Holocaust remembrance. The modality of coping with remembrance is construed not as a negation, but as an updated version to an existing modality of Holocaust remembrance known in academia as “postmemory” – a term generally associated with Marianne Hirsch’s (2003, 2008, 2012) thinking. To be clear, my objective is not to invalidate Hirsch’s conceptualization of postmemory. Instead, my goal is to offer the modality of coping with Holocaust remembrance as an alternative that is culturally, ethically, and politically, better attuned to the present and the future.

Endnotes

³⁷ See Maurice Halbwachs in Lewis A. Coser, ed. & trans., *On Collective Memory* (1992).

³⁸ Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo: Some Points of Agreement between the Mental Life of Savages and Neurotics* (1913) in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Volume XIII, preface to the Hebrew edition, cited by Jacqueline Rose.

³⁹ See Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Freud's Moses; Judaism Terminable and Interminable* (1991):68.

⁴⁰ Aschheim citing Martin Jay, "Should Intellectual History Take a Linguistic Turn? Reflections on the Habermas-Gadamer Debate," in *Fin-de-Siècle Socialism and Other Essays* (New York: Routledge, Chapman, and Hall, 1988).

⁴¹ Aschheim citing Jacques Derrida, *The Ear of the Other: Autobiography, Transference, Translation*, trans. Peggy Kamuf and Avital Ronell, edited by Christie McDonald (Nebraska: Nebraska University Press, 1988):33.

⁴² For an informative write-up on the interplay between hegemonic cultural operators and marginal popular subcultures, see Aaron D. Gresson III, "Postmodern America and the Multicultural Crisis: Reading *Forrest Gump* as the 'Call Back to Whiteness'," in *Taboo: Essays on Culture and Education* edited by Shirley R. Steinberg and Lindsay Cornish (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2010):55-74.

⁴³ Charlotte Delbo, *Auschwitz and After* (1995):255 cited by Epstein and Lefkowitz.

⁴⁴ For further readings on the *Historikerstreit* see the *New German Critique*, No. 44, Special Issue on the *Historikerstreit* (Spring-summer, 1988).

⁴⁵ Available in Hebrew only.

⁴⁶ Originally published in French in 1988.

⁴⁷ Landscape and the formation of cultural memory of genocide and survival are not only relevant to Holocaust remembrance. Candace Savage's *A Geography of Blood: Unearthing Memory from a Prairie Landscape* (2012) conveys a cultural memory of a different type of genocidal narrative. Through the prism of "the truest expression of the grasslands" (42) Savage chronicles a gruesome history of turning the entire Great Plains, from western Canada all the way to Texas, into a vast slaughterhouse of thirty million buffalos, thus destroying the livelihood of the North-American native Indian. What scientists regard as a case of "ecological extinction," Savage reconfigures as a cultural memory of unimaginable loss. She puts her ear to the ground and imagines hearing "the rumbling vibrations of thousands of hooves running across the plains," only to awaken to the realization that all she is hearing is "the eerie voice of a curlew echoing over a lonely landscape" (42).

Landscape as formative in collective cultural memory resonates throughout Margaret Atwood's groundbreaking 1972 book: *Survival: a Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*. Surveying the Canadian experience through Canadian literature, Atwood maps out a Canadian "state of mind" which often views nature as hostile to people. Spring and summer are almost unreal while "the true and only season here is winter [...]" (59). A type of "double-minded attitude towards Canada" is the substance of Susanna Moodie's classic: *Roughing it in the Bush*.⁴⁷ First published in 1852, Atwood depicts Moodie's love for Canada versus nature failing her time and again (61). Cultural memory of disparity between "expectation and actuality" characterizes "settler fiction" of the prairies (147) and immigrant novels by Morley Callaghan, Brian Moore, Adele Wiseman, and others. While conflicting emotions about the country left behind, and the realities of a new land, are not unique to Canada, compared to American literature, even if the promise of the American melting pot is not the panacea it was made to be, for many Canadian writers "failure has evidently been easier to imagine than success" (180). According to Atwood, Brian Moore's *The Luck of Ginger Coffey* (1960) epitomizes cultural memories that always stand "ready not only to manufacture and export failure but to attract it and provide for it an appropriate setting" (189).

⁴⁸ Yehuda Amichai, "Travels of the Last Benjamin of Tudela," *Selected Poetry of Yehuda Amichai*, eds., and trans. Chana Bloch and Stephen Mitchell, (1986).

⁴⁹ Yehuda Amichai, from "Songs of Zion the Beautiful," in *Songs of Jerusalem*, Bilingual Edition cited by Ezrahi, *Booking Passages* (2000):23.

⁵⁰ The French counterpart is a collective memory of the *Résistance*. Compellingly analyzed by Nathan Bracher in a write-up on "Remembering the French Resistance: Ethics and Politics of the Epic" (2007), for awhile, the invocation of Greek legends and Olympians skies by Charles de Gaulle – "The Gaullist Odyssey" – had enough clout to sway "history into metaphysics" (48). But not for long; the memory of Vichy proved to be too overwhelming to the point where nowadays the French resent "epic discourses of military heroism and national grandeur" (49). "Unjust suffering of innocent victims and scapegoats" (52)

is valorized instead. In a gripping tale of commemorative dynamics, Bracher maps out a deliberate, thought-through shift from the grandeur of the 1945 *Mémorial de la France Combattante at Mont Valérien*, to Pascal Convert's 2003 *Mont Valérien, aux noms des fusillés* – a list of over one thousand names of French, non-French, Jews, and non-Jews executed by the Nazis.

⁵¹ Throughout their essay, the authors allude to the fictitious nature of collective memory by always bracketing it in quotation marks. I have taken the liberty of undoing this grammatical “symbolism.”

⁵² David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature: Being an Attempt to Introduce the Experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects* (London, 1739), book 3, section 7, cited by Keane (2003):188.

⁵³ Alexander also tends to leave the British, French, and Soviets out of the equation of the war by way of fully Americanizing the post-war discourse.

Chapter 3: From Postmemory to Coping with Holocaust Remembrance

I do not know of a more eloquent poem that communicates the meaning of being close but not close enough to the Holocaust than “I Wasn’t One of the Six Million” by Yehuda Amichai. The poem appears in Amichai’s last poetry collection, *Open Closed Open* (2000).

I wasn’t one of the six million who died in the Shoah,
I wasn’t even among the survivors.
And I wasn’t one of the six hundred thousand who went out of Egypt.
I came to the Promised Land by sea.
No, I was not in that number, though I still have the fire and the smoke
within me, pillars of fire and pillars of smoke that guide me
by night and by day. I still have inside me the mad search
for emergency exists, for soft places, for the nakedness
of the land, for the escape into weakness and hope,
I still have within me the lust to search for living water
with quiet talk to the rock or with frenzied blows.
Afterwards, silence: no questions, no answers.
Jewish history and world history
grind me between them like two grindstones, sometimes
to a powder. And the solar year and the lunar year
get ahead of each other or fall behind,
leaping, they set my life in perpetual motion.
Sometimes I fall into the gap between them to hide,
Or to sink all the way down.

For people who were not “there” – like the poet – the Holocaust is for ever hovering beneath the skies.⁵⁴ People who were not “there” do not quite know how to face those who were. People who were not “there” carry a heavy memory baggage. For a Jewish person like the poet it means to be “in perpetual motion” between “weakness and hope” but sometimes sinking “all the way down.”

It is this notion of perpetual motion, of repeated, never-stopping, ever-flowing changes in the dynamics of Holocaust remembrance which I draw out of Amichai’s poem, and seize upon when reflecting on what in my estimation is missing or not present

enough in the conceptualization of postmemory. As articulated in the introduction to my thesis, the crux of my theoretical claim is that with shifting trends in cultural memory, such as postmodern deconstruction of language of remembrance – a topic I pursue in the next chapter – the present and future call for more yielding and inclusive conceptualizations of Holocaust remembrance. As argued by Wolfgang Müller-Funk (2003) in reference to German cultural and collective memory, it is hardly possible in a postmodern era to “conserve a culture by a monumentalized collective memory” (219). In fact, as Müller-Funk contends, what happens in a postmodern age is that “memory itself, for a long time a guarantor of constancy, becomes dynamic” (219-220). Furthermore, it is precisely memory as active and shifting that prevents the Holocaust from being forgotten or becoming irrelevant. More so than the Jewish Museum of Daniel Libeskind in Berlin and/or Eisenmann’s Holocaust project next to the Reichstag, it is the tension between the two structures – Eisenmann being far more traditional than Libeskind – that according to Müller-Funk propels the continued relevance of Holocaust remembrance. In terms of my appraisal of the conceptual model of postmemory, I contend that it lags behind in its capacity to set in motion future-oriented trends of remembrance, which, as I will show, are necessary if we are to break through cultural constraints which thwart political justice.

In advocating for greater fluidity and a more future oriented approach to Holocaust remembrance, I am echoing a motif articulated by Geoffrey Hartman in a preface to Jeffrey Alexander’s (2009) debate on remembering the Holocaust. In part, Hartman reveals that he is driven by a fear of the wound [Holocaust] becoming an identity. Zygmunt Bauman’s (2000) type of conjuring up a ghost in relation to Holocaust

remembrance seems to exacerbate Hartman's fear. In Bauman's mindset, the Jewish people epitomize victims who lost the ability to practice self-defense. Self-defense entails an ability to extrapolate a lesson from the past. The Holocaust, Bauman argues, is far too terrifying and overwhelming to serve as a lesson. Suggesting "a two-pronged legacy of the Holocaust," Bauman claims that on the one hand, Auschwitz assigned Jewish survival a supreme value. On the other hand, survival has evolved into "a site of conflict between incompatible interests in which the success of some depends on the non-survival of others" (9). Unlike, say, the military plans of the Allied forces which called for unconditional surrender by Nazi Germany, but did *not* require, and hence did *not* result in the complete annihilation of the German nation, the racial and totalistic nature of the Nazi war against the Jewish people *did* entail the killing of every living Jew. This is essentially what Bauman has in mind when speaking of a "self-perpetuating and self-producing [...] ghost of the Holocaust" (14); an uncompromising ghost incarnated in the notion of total destruction. I do not believe in ghosts. More to the point, I am convinced that a new paradigmatic thinking in terms of *coping* with Holocaust remembrance can go a long way in disempowering Bauman's ghost of the Holocaust.

I regard Art Spiegelman's demythologizing Holocaust survivors through a true-to-life portrayal of Vladek, his father, as an invaluable artistic contribution toward the disempowerment of the ghostly presence of the Holocaust in our collective memory. Having said that, demythologizing does not necessarily mean that knowledge acquired about surviving the Holocaust translates into real understanding. This is what Geoffrey Hartman (1994) has in mind when referring to Spiegelman's generation as members of a generation that acquired knowledge without any real understanding of it. Acquiring

factual knowledge about what a concentration camp and a crematorium means in terms of construction, location, and layout is one thing; understanding what its real function was, and what it meant to actually be in the vicinity of the flames of a crematoria is an entirely different matter. As depicted in *Nightfather* by Carl Friedman (1994), the dissonance between what children picked up from what they were told by their father who experienced a Nazi concentration camp, and what they actually understood or could imagine, is exemplified in the children's habit of associating the word "camp" with "a condition" (1), not a place. "I've had camp," their father says. "That makes him different from us. We've had chicken pox and German measles" but never "camp" (2). In fact, as far as the children can tell, father "still has camp, especially in his face. Not so much in his nose or his ears, although they're big enough, but in his eyes" (2). They think they know the meaning of the word "hungry" except that their father always insists that they have no idea what hunger means. The children are spellbound by their father's past but somehow they need to process their father's planet of gas and starvation into an everyday life of school, food, clothing, and play. It is a type of processing that can be done by knowing but not really understanding.

Demythologizing the Holocaust also pertains to experiences encountered in the homes of children born to Holocaust survivors. Helen Epstein (1988) conversed with sons and daughters of Holocaust survivors who recall growing up "acutely aware of how our parents were driven by an impetus toward life as well as death" (203). As in reference to Spiegelman, here, too, demythologizing does not mean the type of understanding we generally associate with a level of cognition attained through a mental-psychological process that facilitates comprehension of something from information

received. Rather, as Epstein explains, demythologizing means knowing that one has developed an acute awareness of an existential phenomenon linked to the home life of Holocaust survivors. Epstein identifies Dr. Vivian Rakoff's 1966 publication in *Viewpoints*, a Canadian-Jewish journal, as the first medical-psychological write-up on children of survivors. Conversing with generational brothers and sisters whose family trees were "burnt to a stump" (11), Epstein concludes that "our parents' wartime experiences had not given rise to a handful of clinically categorized symptoms but to a particular world view" (220). Epstein cites Rakoff surmising that this world view consists of appreciating life not simply as a given "but an almost unexpected gift" (207). As such, life is not merely to be lived. Life becomes a mission. Often this sense of life-as-a-mission bore a heavy load of expectation on children of survivors. Rakoff explained that "by virtue of their concentration experiences," parents became almost sacred figures to be obeyed and not to disappoint. Invariably, children of survivors "could not express towards their parents the aggression that is part of the usual process of growing up" (207). Epstein adds that children of Holocaust survivors are torn between conflicting emotions of being in awe of their parents and their will to live, and ashamed in imagining their parents reduced to starving animals. Eli, a child of survivors, tells Epstein: "I am in awe of my parents" but "I'm also uneasy; I can't feel too secure" (31). Delineated by Marianne Hirsh (2012) in her studies of the generation of postmemory, and visual culture after the Holocaust, children of survivors are often imbued with guilt for not having gone through the horrors experienced by the parent generation. Guilt transforms into compulsive digging into family ruins and can also manifest itself in phantom physical symptoms. Raised in small families that had no grandparents and only few relatives,

Amir Gutfreund's fictional protagonists in *Our Holocaust* (2006), are in the habit of "adopting" acquaintances as family relatives and referring to them as uncle-aunt (*dod-doda*). Jewish children born to survivors are often named after grandparents and relatives who perished in the Holocaust. Epstein's counterparts in North America, Europe and Israel are presumed by Henri Raczymow to be impelled by "memory shot through with holes (*une mémoire trouée*)" (1994). His books, he said, do not attempt "to fill in empty memory" nor are they "simply part of the struggle against forgetfulness." Rather, he presents memory as empty: non-memory which cannot be filled. Raczymow argues that there are too many holes in Jewish remembrance of the Holocaust. Specifically, there are holes in Jewish genealogy. "We have no family trees. At the most, we can go back to our grandparents. There is no trace of anyone before" (104).

"Past Lives: Postmemories in Exile" is the title of a 1998 essay by Hirsch in which she reveals that it was a 1991 *Die Zeit* article by the Israeli writer Yoram Kaniuk, which triggered the conceptualization of postmemory. Kaniuk's write-up was titled "Three and a Half Hours and Fifty Years with Günter Grass" and it delineated the life of Kaniuk's Jewish family before the Holocaust. Hirsch construed Kaniuk's narrative as representing "postmemory in exile" (418-419). The Germany Kaniuk "relives" is a Germany he personally never encountered. And yet, his glossary of streets, aromas, sounds, and linguistic expressions, all amounted to what Hirsch allegorized as nostalgia for a home that was destroyed. To choose to live in a Diaspora is one thing; to be exiled from a world that no longer exists "is a break impossible to bridge" (420). In her search for a term that will embody the principle of experiences "dominated by narratives that preceded their birth," and by "traumatic events that can be neither fully understood nor

re-created” (420-421), Hirsch landed on the concept of postmemory. Intrinsic to postmemory is that “Home” for children of survivors is elsewhere. It is in Vienna, Berlin, Paris, Warsaw, Cracow, Czernowitz, and Salonika. Postmemory is a non-memory that strives to connect through creating and imagining “where it cannot recall” (422). Postmemory can never be fully incorporated into memory.

I do not dispute the phenomenon of postmemory as related to Holocaust remembrance. I myself can attest to experiencing a postmemory moment/episode. It happened in Germany in 1981. Briefly, my parents – mother, father, and stepmother – are of German origin. My mother (Eva Hollander) and father (Martin Seliger) left Germany for Palestine in 1936. Ruth (Lewinnek), my stepmother, was a *Kindertransport* child sent to England several months prior to the outbreak of World War II. Almost all other members of the Hollander (mother) and Seliger (father) families did not or could not leave Nazi Germany. Most did not survive the Holocaust. My mother, a daughter of a prominent Berlin family of lawyers, would never set foot in Germany again. But my father, a distinguished professor of political theory at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, did. On the one hand, he declined an offer to be a visiting professor at Heidelberg University by responding that he would rather be a shoemaker in Israel than a professor in Germany. On the other hand, he hardly ever missed an opportunity to spend vacation time back in Germany. He could never have enough of the sumptuous terrain of the Thüringen countryside into which he was born. In the 1970s, Eisenach, my father’s place of birth, better known as the hometown of Martin Luther and Johann Sebastian Bach, bestowed upon my father an honorary citizenship. I could not join him then but in 1981 I accompanied him and Ruth on what was to be a journey in my father’s

autobiographical footsteps: from Eisenach to Bad Kissingen – my father’s favorite childhood resort/spa place. On route we visited Steinach, my grandmother’s (Paula Seliger) place of birth. A luncheon honoring my father was organized by the mayor of Steinach. I could not help notice that among the photos of past mayors mounted on the wall of the mayor’s office was a portrait of Steinach’s Nazi mayor during World War II. I wanted so badly to ask our gracious female mayor why is there a photo on the wall of a man who undoubtedly was instrumental in orchestrating the expulsion of 20% of his town’s population (at the time, Steinach’s population numbered a mere 1,000, out of which 200 were Jews), but out of respect for my father I remained silent. On another occasion, I was overcome with despondency and melancholy during a magnificent outdoor evening performance of *Die Zauberflöte* (The Magic Flute). But the “postmemory meltdown” was yet to come.

“It” happened in Bad Kissingen – a town/health resort situated in the Bavarian region of Lower Franconia. My father and Ruth were having their midday *schlafstunde* but I was restless and went for a walk. Our hotel was centrally located and overlooking an immaculate looking park. I desperately wanted to get away from this perfectly stylized greenery and headed in the direction of the town’s outskirts. Located on the Franconian Saale River, the further I strolled, the more naturally alluring the scenery. It was here, alone and emotionally wasted, that I was suddenly gripped by a total sense of insufferable agony over the merciless collision of the natural exquisiteness of the German landscape with the tragic hideousness of my family’s history. It was at this moment of uttermost grief that I “remembered!” I was absolutely certain that I was here before! This was *my* place, *my* language, *my* culture, *my* past, *my* family’s history. What I had

experienced was a painful nostalgic yearning to be at one with my ravaged, wiped out familial roots. This was no cathartic purgation: it was a postmemory moment.

Hirsch attests to having very few childhood memories except for detailed “recollections” of her parents’ wartime experience about which she has no firsthand knowledge. She constructs postmemory upon “the conception of the mind as a mental space in which memories are stored and then retrieved by a search process” (Hirsch 2012:238). In other words, Hirsch’s postmemory is not an issue of malfunctioning cognition. Hirsch, like Epstein, is fully cognizant of *not* experiencing the events of World War II. Rather, postmemory relates to the dynamics of a retrieval mechanism complicated by the opaqueness of personal experience. Assuming Hirsch acquired much factual information regarding her parents’ Holocaust experience, the harrowing nature of the information is beyond intelligible comprehension for adults, let alone children. According to Hirsch, this memory retrieval process is entangled not only with the emotional “I” but with emotional crossovers between parents/grandparents and their offspring.

Alain Finkelkraut repudiates Hirsch’s postmemory generation for embezzling the sufferings of the Holocaust generation. Titled *The Imaginary Jew* (1994),⁵⁵ Finkelkraut’s anger resonates strongly. I happen to believe his approach is unfair. As Karein Goertz (1998) argues in a composition on transgenerational representations of the Holocaust, it makes little sense to dismiss second generation “vicarious sharing in past traumatic experiences” as “a ploy.” The fact is that there is more than enough psychoanalytic evidence to show that the Holocaust past of the parent generation intruded

upon the lives of their children in ways that are anything but “disingenuous posturing and an appropriation” (35).

Marianne Hirsch (2008) highlights her kinship with Eva Hoffman. Hoffman’s (2004) contemplation of memory, history, and the legacy of the Holocaust is summoned under an all-embracing notion of living “after such knowledge.” The second generation is referred to by Hoffman as “the hinge generation” – the generation that lived between experiencing and remembering the Holocaust. As Hoffman spells out, having been shaped by memories of the catastrophic history of their parents, members of “the hinge generation” undertook, or were expected by their parents to undertake, the role of “guardianship of memories” of the Holocaust. For her, as she explains in the closing chapter of *After Such Knowledge* (2004), the shocking events of September 11, 2001 seemed of primary significance, albeit, not in the way September 1, 1939 is engraved in her memory, but as a history-changing occurrence that inserts itself and adds information “to my reading of my generation’s story, and history” (241). That being said, Hoffman asserts that memory of formative events does not last forever. In Hoffman’s words, “the lines of meaning drawn out of the past cannot retain their strength as a scaffolding for present significance” (243). I agree with Hoffman up to a point but not with wording the matter as “the statute of limitations on the great cataclysms of the twentieth century [...] running out” (243). Memory-remembrance *can* last forever but translating memory into acts of remembrance is always subject to change.

In a write-up on the long afterlife of loss, Hoffman (2010) clarifies that while it has become a matter of routine to speak of “memory,” the simple truth is that all those who came after the Holocaust have no personal memory of the event. Children of

survivors knew that what was transmitted to them were “acid-etched traces of what they [the parents] had endured” (407). Tracing *the process of retrieval* – as opposed to the actual events – of personal and historical experiences passed on from one generation to the next, is an important focal point in unraveling the dynamics of postmemory of Hoffman’s generation. Hoffman adds that it is common among children of survivors to charge themselves with rescuing their parents from grieving over “death which had so nearly engulfed them” (409). A Hamlet-like devotion to a ghost, Hoffman denotes this as representing more than an “Orphic danger.” To look back to the Holocaust is to drag oneself into the Hades. Encountering “panic, deadliness, shame and guilt” (409) is hard postmemory labor, but it need not mean being helplessly swallowed into an abyss of remembrance; “If you dare visit the Hades, you may bring back the kind of pity that is the source of beauty” (413).

As a matter of definition, and by way of digressing momentarily, it is worthwhile mentioning that scholars such as Alan Berger, Sara Horowitz, Susan Gubar, Aaron Hass, Erin McGlothlin, Iris Milner, Daniel Schwarz, and others, expand the rubric of the second generation to include not only children of survivors but members of the generation born after World War II. Susan Rubin Suleiman qualifies this grouping by setting a separate category for children who lived and survived the Holocaust as youngsters prior to forming an adult identity. She classifies this group as “The 1.5 Generation” (2004). Notable literary personalities of the 1.5 generation include Aharon Appelfeld, Imre Kertész, Georges Perec, Elie Wiesel, Dan Pagis, Louis Begley, Ruth Klüger, and Sarah Kofman. Georges Perec’s *W or the Memory of Childhood* (1988),⁵⁶ and the configuration of “two narrative genre, two modes of discourse” (376), is

considered by Suleiman a classic portraiture of the 1.5 generation. These children, Suleiman asserts, share a duality of memory from before and after the war. In many cases the before and after equates with before and after being separated from their parents, and in some cases, before and after they were given an identity of a non-Jewish child, with some being baptized, given a new name, and a new language. Still, Suleiman acknowledges that second-generation references are applicable to members of the 1.5 generation for much of their memory of the war years was based on what was passed on to them by others.

Be it the 1.5 or the second generation, memory entrapments and cognitive buffers are integral to Froma Zeitlin's (1998) configuration of vicarious witnessing and belated memory as *strategies* of Holocaust remembrance. Henri Raczymow's *Writing the Book of Esther* (1995)⁵⁷ is viewed by Zeitlin as a formidable example of vicarious witnessing translated into a strategy of Holocaust remembrance. The novel is narrated by Mathieu. Esther was his sister. She narrowly escaped being murdered during the Holocaust, but remained obsessed with reliving it. Seven years after her death by suicide, her brother attempts to imagine how "she might have imagined herself writing [...] a journal in the Warsaw ghetto during the years 1940-43" (9). Mathieu was born after the war and is desperately aware of him being neither here nor there: he was not a witness to the events of the Holocaust but he witnessed related victimization of a different sort. Mathieu's inheritance is that of trauma, terrible sadness, and terrifying questions, as well as guilt of not being a first-hand witness. As Zeitlin illuminates, Raczymow is able to personify through the narrator of the novel the conflicts associated with "cross[ing] the threshold into forbidden zones" (5). The personification is accentuated by Raczymow's use of the

genre of the diary “to ventriloquize the voice of the fictional narrator’s sister, Esther” (9). Overall, Zeitlin emphasizes literary attributes that make *Writing the Book of Esther* a second-generation novel par excellence. The literary quality of “a Jewish voice” (a child’s voice, for Mathieu is a mere boy) speaking “from within the remnants of a shattered community” is one such quality. Another literary quality emphasized by Zeitlin is the manner in which Raczynow transfers the problems inherent in Holocaust remembrance from the generation of the Holocaust to an uneasy relationship between brother and older sister, thereby locating Holocaust remembrance “entirely in the second generation itself” (10). In citing Shoshanna Felman’s (1992) analysis of a brother “returning the voice” of his lost sister by allotting her a fictional presence as a narrator of a diary, Zeitlin underscores Raczynow’s employment of the genre of a diary “twice removed” from reality, as a strategy of intertwining “absent memory” with a strong “sense of posthumous existence” (Zeitlin, 1998:13). Vicarious witnessing and genre disruptions create an acute “void of loss” (15).

Within scenarios of so much loss – from lives to culture – as often depicted by second generation writers, “real” evidence of pre war Jewish life is of primary significance. Photographs documenting Jews and Jewish life before the Holocaust are of great importance in Hirsch’s postmemory structure. Hirsch’s heart wrenching illustration of pre war photographic “non memories” in “Past Lives: Postmemories in Exile” (1998)⁵⁸ leave us with unbearable sorrow. Staring at the pictures, we know what was awaiting the person whose image in black-and-white stares back at us. The horror is not in the photograph but “in the story we bring to it” (427). The analytic insights provided by Hirsch in the process of aligning photographic images of family members – those

beautiful children all dressed up for the occasion – with “cultural/archival memory” (425), are most instructive.⁵⁹ As Hirsch notes, Holocaust photographs trigger “traumatic transfers” that serve as means of identification as well as “screens that absorb the shock, filter and diffuse the impact of the trauma” (425). As observed by Karyn Ball (2008), Hirsch succeeds in casting “a constructive light” on “the compulsive recycling of certain photographs of the Holocaust” (199). In other words, Hirsch’s analysis of what happens to us as we transfix our mournful gaze onto images of living, smiling, pensive people of all ages, national, and cultural backgrounds, enhances our intellectual and emotional capacity to comprehend the magnitude of what was lost in the Holocaust, without necessarily having to gaze directly into an incomprehensible abyss – an unbearably frightful abyss which can result in altogether shifting our focus away from remembrance.

Stationary images of life before the Holocaust have the potential of stirring up the dialectics of remembrance. And yet, as I wish to argue, there are aspects of theoretical totalizing in Hirsch’s discourse that concern me. But first, although methodologically questionable, I wish to introduce my critique of Hirsch by way of articulating a type of criticism of Hirsch with which I do *not* agree. I go this rather peculiar way, for, as I demonstrate, in a roundabout way the criticism I reject is relevant to the criticism I offer.

One of Hirsch’s critics (as best as I know her followers outnumber her critics by far) with whom I have issue is Gary Weissman (2004). Weissman refers to postwar efforts to experience the Holocaust as “fantasies of witnessing” and is unable to reconcile Hirsch’s acknowledgement of differences between what survivors remember, and second-generation postmemory. Weissman insists that despite evidence affirming Hirsch’s awareness of generational demarcations, the line separating the two generations

is vague and often blurred in Hirsch's discourse. Weissman objects to the idea of postmemory in the same way he rejects other terms that allude to the same phenomenon. Secondary witnesses, vicarious witnesses, retrospective witnesses, witnesses by adoption, witnesses through the imagination, and so on, are all the same to him. He is troubled by what he regards as the possibility that Hirsch's thinking causes readers, viewers, and visitors to Holocaust museums to identify with survivors' children, and not with the real Holocaust victims.

I disagree with Weissman's conjectures, but first, a proviso pertaining to Hirsch as well as to Weissman, and for that matter to anyone, myself included, who attempts to construct a modality of Holocaust remembrance. Theorizing about the Holocaust and its remembrance can never be free of inconsistencies, paradoxes, and unanswerable questions, for many of the reasons I alluded to in relation to representation of an event as horrific as the Holocaust. As carefully and honestly that one crafts a theoretical approach to Holocaust remembrance, along the way, as I have encountered on several junctures while researching and writing my thesis, one invariably arrives at an emotional and intellectual impasse. How does one maintain an academically consistent and intelligent mode of "theorizing" about 1.5 million Jewish children gassed, burnt alive, starved to death, shot, tortured, and left to die horrible deaths? No matter how well documented, and how well articulated, the methodologically organic structure you thoughtfully and meticulously labored to build seems suddenly awfully trivial.

With this stipulation in mind, I return to Weissman. It is beyond the scope of this study to prove to Weissman beyond any doubt that Hirsch's postmemory has resulted in shifting our interest from victims of the Holocaust to the second generation. Suffice it to

suggest that from my relative familiarity – although by no means exhaustive – with the academic field of second generation remembrance of the Holocaust, no such shift of interest has occurred. More to the point, focusing on Weissman’s worry over children of survivors taking over, so to speak, Holocaust remembrance, I posit Sara Horowitz’s (2010) composition on nostalgia and the Holocaust which offers a counter-argument to Weissman and others who criticize Hirsch along the same lines. Horowitz underscores that children of survivors (like Hirsch) are fully aware of what separates their yearning for a home they never knew, from the type of nostalgia felt by their parents for the home they knew and lost. Disquieting as it may be to speak of “nostalgia” in relation to the Holocaust, when invoked, it is directed at “an invocation of a world as yet untouched by the Nazi genocide, a world before transports, selections, and death camps entered into Jewish historical memory” (45). This is not a simple longing for a romanticized past; rather, where there is “a mode of kinship between nostalgia and trauma” (57), good and bad memories intermix. It is not a wish to go home, say, from Haifa back to Warsaw or from Toronto back to Lodz. “It is the yearning that is desired and not the actual return” (49). The similarity or overlap between the generations is in the yearning, not in the substance or details of what is longed for.

Leo Spitzer and Hirsch (2002) expound on postmemory and generations of nostalgia. On route to Czernowitz, there seems to be nothing left but a nostalgia for “a cultural landscape” (256). For Holocaust survivors, the return to European landscapes triggers painfully ambivalent remembrance in which “nostalgic memory clashes with negative and traumatic memory” (261). It is this painfully ambivalent nostalgic yearning, that, as contended by Hirsch, Spitzer, and Horowitz, is internalized by members of the

second generation. For them, the “return” to former hometowns is felt as a way of constructing “a deeper and more nuanced understanding of history and of memory” (262). Hirsch and Spitzer go further in identifying “a momentarily, effervescently point of memory” as an “encounter between generations, between past and present, between nostalgic and traumatic memory” (274). Weissman’s tendency is to confuse this “encounter between generations,” and the internalization of parents’ nostalgia by their children, with borderless changeability between generations.

My critique of Hirsch lies elsewhere. Among others, I turn to Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz (2010) who maintain that when considering memory, histories, and theories of remembrance one must always remain cognizant of circumstances that are in flux. The idea is paramount to my thesis and underlines my critique of Hirsch’s structural postmemory, which, as I see it, tends to be construed by Hirsch as a standalone concept, somewhat detached from changeable cultural and political circumstances. Writing about visual culture after the Holocaust, Hirsch (2012) speaks of “tasks of memory” in relation to Bosnia, Rwanda and Darfur, the events of September 11, 2001, and the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. Hirsch claims that “the Holocaust can no longer serve simply as a conceptual limit case in the discussion of historical trauma, memory, and forgetting.” (18) I could not agree more. The problem is that beyond engaging in a thoughtful discussion on the risks of comparing tragedies slipping “into problematic equation and distressing competition over suffering,” and expressing the hope that the notion of postmemory “provide useful framework” for multidirectional and connective approaches, there is little or no demonstration *how* to apply the concept of postmemory to

the here-and-now. How does one move from a *structure* of postmemory to politics in flux?

There is a sense of rigidity, or even finality, to Hirsch's (2012) wording of the "Object of Return" in her analysis of ethics and aesthetics of future Holocaust narratives. It seems to me that phraseology such as narratives of return, "forever frustrating the promise of revelation and recovery" (200), conjure up little dialogism. Hirsch views the art created by Bracha Lichtenberg-Ettinger – a second-generation Lacanian psychoanalyst and feminist artist – as a way "to measure the political and psychic implications of the repetitions and irresolution of return" (209). For Hirsch, Lichtenberg-Ettinger's artistic photography reflects an inability to engage in a narrative of return "without the superimposed, layered, screen image" (214) of the Holocaust itself. The implication here is that narratives of postmemory represent a structure of returning "to the same images and the same themes obsessively, again and again" (218). I do not question Hirsch's appraisal of photos as constituting a "medium of narrative shared across generations" (204). Photographs "create sparks of connection that activate remembrance and thus reactivate the trauma of loss" (206). I am, however, concerned with a lack of indication as to what comes after the heart-wrenching sadness and maddening pain that envelops us as we gaze at images of pre-Holocaust Jewish life. We must always revisit these photographic images. However, while doing so, we must make room for present and future dialogism which does not put these images aside but incorporates them into a dialectical, changing, and inclusive conversation.

Marianne Hirsch and Irene Kacandes (2004) have given much thought, care, and sincere contemplation when compiling thirty-eight contributions by various theorists and

writers into an anthology-reader on teaching the representation of the Holocaust. Their aim is to construct a pedagogical enterprise that answers a fundamental question: “How do we transmit so hurtful an image of our species without killing hope and breeding indifference?” (494) But hope for what? What sort of indifference do Hirsch and Kacandes have in mind? The nature of my critique of Hirsch’s conceptualization is grounded in a theoretical perspective that prioritizes the present and the future while remembering the past. The shift in orientation proposed, does not negate Marianne Hirsch’s contribution to our understanding of the Holocaust as “a past that does not fade away” (“Mourning and Postmemory” 2003). Instead, it is aimed at developing an orientation that does not let the past fade away, but at the same time, fosters future, open-ended conceptualizations of Holocaust remembrance.

I am troubled by a certain degree of fixity when looking backwards – Lot’s wife frozen into an eternity of looking back as told in Genesis 19. At the heart of my argument is the discontinuance abeyance of photographic images in the “Tower of Faces” at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, rendered by Hirsch as “the medium connecting memory and postmemory” (“Past Lives” 1998:429). My problem is not with the tower-shaped room itself where visitors are surrounded by hundreds of photos assembled by Yaffa Eliach (author of *Hassidic Tales of the Holocaust*, 1988) of Jews from the pre-Holocaust Lithuanian town of Ejszyski. Quite the contrary; if I were to have it my way, each one of us would familiarize himself and herself with Hirsch’s fact-based camera-eye recounting of the young girl, Yaffa Eliach, escaping from the Germans with photos of her family and her town tucked into her shoes and fastened under her brother’s clothing. My concern is with wishing that the Tower of Faces – a “domestic

space” which bridges the gap “between viewers who are personally connected to the event and those who are not” (429-431) – expand “the postmemorial circle” (431). I am all for expanding the circle of postmemory but the meaning, scope, and applicability of such an expansion cannot be limited nowadays to merely ensuring a steady stream of visitors to a Holocaust museum. Hans Kellner (1994) proclaims: never again is now. Coping with traumatic remembrance occurs “within a changing discourse” of the “now,” and that which tomorrow will morph into yet another, somewhat different, “now” (144).

Although the following may be a digression of sort from the topic of postmemory, a brief reflection on two reactions to the Benjamin Wilkomirski’s fraudulent *Fragments: Memories of a Wartime Childhood* (1995), is relevant to my stance on the need for methodological elasticity in representing Holocaust remembrance. The two reactions to the Wilkomirski affair that I wish to highlight are by Amy Hungerford (2001) and Susan Rubin Suleiman (2000). Hungerford dissects the Wilkomirski affair through trauma theories. She underscores the fact that as a youngster, Bruno Dössekker (Benjamin Wilkomirski’s real name) immersed himself in reading Holocaust memoirs. Borrowing Cathy Caruth’s (1996) conceptualization of “transmissible abstraction” of trauma, that is, “witnessing” a traumatic event one has not personally experienced,⁶⁰ Hungerford surmises that trauma can be “passed unknowingly from one person to another” leading to fantasy language “about memorization” (87). Hungerford claims that “fantasy language about memorization” is as relevant to a novel by Don DeLillo, as it is to Wilkomirski’s imaginary memoir. Hungerford draws upon the relationship between trauma and memorization as famously fashioned by Ray Bradbury in the 1953 classic *Fahrenheit 451*. Anticipating the coming of a totalitarian-cultural disaster, Guy Montag, Bradbury’s

main protagonist, memorizes as many books as he can; “texts are imagined as part of what is destroyed when persons are destroyed” (87). Hungerford claims that somewhat reminiscent of Montag, as a child, Wilkomirski consumed far too much information about the Holocaust. “Memorizing and memory” (88) became interchangeable in Dössekker/Wilkomirski’s vulnerable mind.⁶¹

Susan Rubin Suleiman, too, explores Wilkomirski’s “deluded memoir” (2000:543). She expands on the psychological damage brought upon Bruno Doesseker as a child. He knew he was an illegitimate son of a Swiss woman who gave him up for adoption. Textually, Wilkomirski’s memoir does not admit to being fictional, except that by virtue of its falsity, it *is* fiction, and, as Suleiman adds not substandard fiction either. Instead of rendering the book as a possible weapon in the arsenal of Holocaust deniers, a highly exaggerated reaction among critics, Suleiman raises thoughtful questions on where does literature end/begin and psychopathology begin/end? Where do we draw the line between personal memory and imagined/“borrowed” memory? Rather than positing Wilkomirski as depreciating Holocaust remembrance, she recommends that the book be allowed to maintain its presence in literature, albeit, perhaps not as a memoir or a novel, but as “a case.” In allowing into the fold of Holocaust remembrance “a case” with literary value which does not falsify the reality of the Holocaust, but is represented untruthfully as autobiographic rather than fictional, Hungerford and Suleiman exemplify the type of scholarly fluidity which expands the spectrum of grappling with literal truths of Holocaust remembrance versus perceptions of literal truths, corroborated realism versus aestheticism and artistic norms, and the relationship between individual/private remembrance and collective remembrance.

To an extent, my inclination to follow Hungerford and Suleiman's methodological orientation explains why I deem Gary Weissman's (2004) critique of "fantasies of witnessing" problematic. Misappropriating (to my mind) a citation from a 1993 article by Andreas Huyseer on monument and memory in a postmodern age,⁶² in which Huyseer refers to the Holocaust as the un-representable that does not go away, Weissman seeks to determine whether referring to the Holocaust as "un-representable, unspeakable, unimaginable, indescribable, and inexpressible" has largely to do with "our own limited ability to feel appropriately horrified by the horror in the present" (208). By way of elaborating on Alfred Kazan's initial admiration of Elie Wiesel, later turning into resentment, Weissman engages in a tiresome analysis of discrepancies between different (earlier and later) versions depicting a famous scene in Wiesel's *Night*. The scene is well known to readers of Holocaust literature. It tells of a young boy suffering a cruel death by hanging at Buna, Auschwitz's sub camp. All the inmates are forced to witness the terror of the boy's prolonged death at the gallows. At a certain point, one of the inmates asks: "where is God now?" to which the prisoner-narrator replies: "He is hanging here on the gallows." Not wishing to regurgitate Weissman's polemics on presumed textual contradictions in Wiesel's text, suffice it to say that it would be beneficial if Weissman consulted with Horowitz's (1997) *Voicing the Void* where she outlines Wiesel's ways of circumventing unilateral presentations and finality of versions. Contrary to Weissman's view of Wiesel's conflicting descriptions of his father's death at Buchenwald as a "striking instance of disparity" (2004:56), Horowitz explains that "By drawing the reader into first one version, then another, then another, Wiesel undermines them all, forcing the reader to grapple with the unspeakable abyss" (1997:155-156). It is precisely

Weissman's one-dimensional vision that prevents him from seeing Wiesel's literary "flaws" as stemming from a Holocaust biography, which, as noted by Sidra Ezrahi in *By Words Alone* (1980), is anchored in the life of a pious lad, torn out of a Transylvanian nest of "insulated religious ambience" (116), and brutally thrown into a living nightmare where the only imperative was to survive. (117)

I am taken aback by the highhanded disdainfulness with which Weissman ascribes the adjective "melodramatic" (57) to the young Wiesel who had witnessed what Weissman could never imagine in his worst dreams. In addition to Horowitz and Ezrahi, I refer Weissman to Mieke Bal's introduction to Jonathan Crewe and Leo Spitzer (1999) co-edited work on acts of memory as forms of cultural recall in the present. Echoing Horowitz's analysis of variations in textual versions that are in keeping with the nature of artistic reenactments of traumas of the magnitude Wiesel experienced, Bal contends that narrative variations correlate with changes in proximity to the actual traumatic events. In the aftermath of entering a traumatic event into memory, the traumatic event undergoes transformative modifications in the process of mutating into a narrative. Further ascertained by Ernst van Alphen (1999) in a write-up on discursive symptoms in narratives of traumatic memories, van Alphen claims that such narratives are always produced within certain cultural and political settings. In other words, as Horowitz, Ezrahi, and Alphen elucidate, Bal surmises that traumatic memory representation is not "a static, timeless phenomenon, of which the possibilities are fixed once and forever" (Bal 1999:26).

Susan Brison (1999) considers the remaking of the self through traumatic narratives. She states that a traumatic event of the magnitude of the Holocaust is one in

which a person is made to feel utterly helpless. With the passage of time and the reconfiguration of shattered lives, traumatic memory transforms into “narrative memory” (45) as (most) survivors gain a measure of control over “intrusive memories” (46). Furthermore, to reiterate Alphen’s contention, the extent and nature of traumatic events transforming into trauma narrative is contingent on one’s cultural heritage and circumstantial environment. Marita Sturken (1999) perceives narratives of recovery of repressed cultural memory as cultural defenses. Sturken argues that, initially, the reenactment of the trauma occurs without remembering or without the binary of real and imaginary. What follows is a reenactment constructed into a narrative. This narrative construction mechanism involves selecting and editing contextual substance and expressive generic/syntactical diction. This has little to do with true or false. It has to do with a process of “narrative integration” that continues to manufacture the *memory* of the traumatic event [*italics in text*]” (235).

The formation of narratives of memory is brought to light in two examples provided by Alan J. Lambert, Laura Nesse Scherer, Chad Rogers, and Larry Jacoby (2009) in their comprehensive composition on collective memory. The authors argue that in creating a sense of collective memory, political ramifications of traumatic remembrance are set into motion. The authors extrapolate from the events of 9/11 interconnectivity between a collective’s emotional reaction to a traumatic event, and ensuing political actions. Few of us doubt that the emotional reaction to 9/11 had much to do with a readiness to take President George W. Bush at his word, and support a punitive attack on Iraq, regardless of the lack of evidence of Iraq possessing weapons of mass destruction. An even more intriguing case of the intricacies of collective memory

and politics relates to America's civil rights movement. Based on recently released tape-recordings of talks held between President Lyndon B. Johnson and Martin Luther King Jr. four days after the assassination of John F. Kennedy, Lambert, Scherer, Rogers and Jacoby are able to connect the dots between trauma, memory, and politics – the 1963 assassination, discrimination of African Americans, and the civil rights movement. As Lambert, Scherer, Rogers, and Jacoby convey, it was precisely when the traumatic shock over Kennedy's assassination was at its zenith that – unbeknown to most Americans – Johnson and King took advantage of the nation's temporary grieving paralysis, to swiftly put into motion a ratification of civil rights legislation.

As stated in the introduction to my thesis, the construction, recreation, and editing of narratives of Holocaust remembrance is a powerful formative determinant in matters pertaining to Jewish-Israeli political realism. As delineated in detail in chapter six in the context of discussing cultural and political Zionism before and after the Holocaust, and in chapter seven in relation to Etgar Keret's literature about Holocaust remembrance, the formation of memory narratives of the trauma of the Holocaust is a primary factor in shaping political stances. More specifically, narratives of Holocaust remembrance are decisive in shaping Jewish-Israeli reactions to what are perceived as threats to the survival and security of the State of Israel. Accordingly, as I see it, if the Israeli-Palestinian war is to come to a just resolution, one must first disentangle the elements of Jewish-Israeli Holocaust remembrance that block any chance of arriving at a politically just and pragmatic solution to a tragic saga in dire need of mending. For reasons outlined here, I regard the continued thinking in terms of postmemory as one such block.

I realize that in the matter of the Holocaust there is no comparable narrative which has the healing potential of, say, the civil rights movement vis-à-vis slavery. That being said, I firmly believe there is no remembrance narrative of traumatic events, not even of the Holocaust, which is devoid of political implications. Peter Haas (2008) conveys this sentiment in a write-up on conflicting moral visions held by Israelis and Palestinians. Haas argues that moral analysis in this day and age “is not about identifying the absolute metaphysical truth that governs a situation but rather about constructing a meta narrative that takes account of the complex sub-narratives that describe the situation as a moral problem to begin with [...] Whatever truth we find will emerge from the details and meaning of each particular situation, a situation that is itself already constructed by the intersection of a variety of earlier narratives” (17-18). I am fully aware that in the same way that the wretchedness of American slavery cannot be compared with, say, present-day exploitation of foreign workers, the catastrophe of the Holocaust cannot be compared with the Palestinian tragedy. But this is hardly the point. The absoluteness of the Holocaust does not minimize the misery of Palestinians languishing in refugee camps of Jabalia, Shatila, Zarqa, Jalazone, Kan Yunis, Ein el-Hilweh, and Kalandia. Deheisha (a Palestinian refugee camp) is *not* Auschwitz. And as Sara Horowitz commented while reading these lines, not all Palestinians dwell in refugee camps, and there is a difference between genocide and a dispute over territory. Auschwitz, in Jeffrey Alexander’s words, epitomizes “the engorgement of evil” (*Remembering the Holocaust*, 2009: 49); the kind of evil that “drips and seeps, ruining everything it touches” (50). Deheisha is not that kind of evil. Expounding on Paul Ricoeur’s “*longue durée*,” Hayden White (2010)⁶³ is correct in identifying “what can be legitimately forgiven and what cannot” (324). There

is no forgiveness for the Holocaust. Having said that, I turn to David Grossman who cannot be accused of minimizing the catastrophic dimensions of the Holocaust, and yet, as told by Grossman in *The Yellow Wind* (1988), Auschwitz is of little relevance to Palestinian children growing up in Deheisha “with the look of hate in their eyes.” Auschwitz does not matter to these children, who, as Grossman describes, listen attentively to their kindergarten teacher telling them a story-fable about innocent sparrows, longtime tenants on an ancient tree, attacked by a black raven who banished them from their beloved tree. The Holocaust means everything to me but this hardly makes a difference to a Palestinian woman in Kalandia (another Palestinian refugee hellhole) who dreams in her sleep about avenging the wrongs Zionism inflicted upon her.⁶⁴

As already mentioned, I develop this subject further in ensuing chapters. At this juncture, I put forward an opinion articulated by Neil Caplan (1999) when addressing issues pertaining to victimhood, identity, and psychological obstacles to possible Israeli reconciliation with the Palestinians. Caplan asserts that Israelis and Palestinians have arrived at an endpoint “where the currency of victimhood has become so debased” that it may have lost its effectiveness. The morality of a claim, Peter Haas (2008) adds, may be argued from several perspectives which can all be true but are not equally valid. What needs to be put into full gear is a postmodern *Weltanschauung* which precludes a possibility of there being only one correct conviction, with all other convictions “ipso facto wrong and not even deserving of a hearing” (Haas 2008):17.

What then constitute narratives of remembrance that are conducive to bringing together Holocaust remembrance and political realism? In principle, and as further

deliberated directly and indirectly in the remainder of my study, I concur with Jakob Lothe, Susana Rubin Suleiman, and James Phelan (2012) who conclude that traumatic narratives that have “the greatest chance of transmitting the story to future generations” are narratives of aesthetic quality. Citing Ernst van Apphen’s (1997) reflections on Holocaust effects in contemporary art, literature, and theory, as well as Brett Kaplan’s (2007) anatomization of aesthetic pleasure in artistic Holocaust representation – “unwanted beauty” – Lothe, Suleiman, and Phelan show that enduring historical, political, philosophical, and ethical contemplations of Holocaust remembrance have a propensity to intertwine with artistic aestheticism.

Along these lines on aestheticism and Holocaust remembrance, I now proceed to establish a fundamental connection between the language of postmodernism and aesthetic narratives of Holocaust remembrance. The connectivity is illuminated by Dora Apel (2002) when contending that aesthetic narratives of Holocaust remembrance speak the language of postmodernism precisely because postmodernism has done away with the binary opposition between high and low culture. Apel’s focus is on artistic explorations of “secondary Holocaust witnessing” that are lesser known to the public, from visual arts to body-tattooing. The artists examined by Apel attest to a great deal of non-uniformity, inconstancy, and un-fixedness. Often, their touchstones are political in that they connect Holocaust remembrance with political issues such as gay rights, social prejudice, poverty, the ills of capitalism, and so on. This is not spirited by a free-for-all wantonness or mere impulsiveness. Some of the art displayed is coarse and vulgar but not irresponsibly capricious. In all, as Sander Gilman affirms, Apel’s survey of postmodernist cultural aestheticism of Holocaust remembrance is an astounding work of cultural production.⁶⁵

Berel Lang's (1986) conservative – critical but not dismissive – approach to postmodernism posits postmodernism as being defined mostly “by what it rejects in the past and so by what it is not” (210). He does not, however, devalue the postmodernist ethos. He also believes that the postmodern turn fits into a long history of metaphysics. Be it Descartes, Locke, or Kant, they all represent sons rebelling against the metaphysical discourse of their fathers/forefathers. According to Lang, Derrida's poststructuralist swerve is not all that different from Kant turning “the mechanism of cognition inside out” as he repositions “Hume's critique of causality” (327). What *is* new is the postmodernist rejection of “*institutional* philosophy [my emphasis]” – a nineteenth century phenomenon of linking philosophy with bureaucracy and professionalization. (329) He would have preferred the postmodernist suspicion of philosophy to be replaced with wonder that compels philosophy to start anew. Wonder is “a way of being or thinking *in* the present without yet being quite *of* it [italics in the text]” (330) – as in Derrida's discourse on that which is “not quite yet” and “more about its absence than its presence [...]” (320). Everything becomes possible, “including philosophy when it flatly asserts that not everything is possible” (331). Lang contemplates whether it would be possible to think of postmodernism not as “a present possibility” but “a possibility attached to the present, *whenever* the present occurs [italics in the text]” (218). In Lang's persuasive words, he would very much like “to beat the swords of deconstruction into the ploughshares of pragmatism” (214).

Endnotes

⁵⁴ Amichai was born in Germany in 1924 but the family left for Palestine in 1936.

⁵⁵ First published as *Le Juif imaginaire* in France in 1983.

⁵⁶ First published in France as *W ou le souvenir d'enfance* in 1975.

⁵⁷ First published in France in 1985 as *Un cri sans voix*.

⁵⁸ Originally appearing in *Poetics Today*, 17.4 (1996), this landmark essay can also be found in Susan Rubin Suleiman, ed., *Exile and Creativity: Signposts, Travelers, Outsiders, Backward Glances* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998):418-446. Citations provided here are quoted from the 1998 version.

⁵⁹ One such picture is a well known photograph by Margaret Bourke-White of inmates behind barbed wire which was used by Spiegelman in *Maus*.

⁶⁰ I am paraphrasing slightly Hungerford's citation on page 83 of Caruth.

⁶¹ To some extent, Hungerford's attempt to explain the Wilkomirski "phenomenon" is in congruous with Derrida's understanding of trans-generational memory. Derrida does not picture memory as a simple carryover from one era/generation to the next. Rather, Derrida thinks of newly directed, newly created, and newly simulated meanings of inherited memory. He also interjects Gerhard Richter thoughts on ethical acts of memory as having to be responsible for inherited memory despite not quite understanding its mechanism of transference, translation, and reproducing itself.

⁶² Gary Weissman citing (page 207) Andreas Huyssen, "Monument and Memory in a Postmodern Age," *Yale Journal of Criticism* 6, no. 2 (1993):256-258.

⁶³ Hayden White, "Guilty of History? The *longue durée* of Paul Ricoeur" in *The Fiction of Narrative: Essays on History, Literature, and Theory; 1957-2007* (2010):318-339.

⁶⁴ See write-ups in Kamal Abdel-Malek and David C. Jacobson, eds., *Israeli and Palestinian Identities in History and Literature* (1999).

⁶⁵ See book cover.

Chapter 4: Postmodernism, Jacques Derrida, Deconstruction and the Language of Coping with Holocaust Remembrance

The objective in this chapter is to trace the development of postmodernism as a response to the shortcomings and failures of modernity – twentieth-century rise of fascism, and the occurrence of the Holocaust being prime examples of the disastrous failure of the promise of modernism. I view postmodernity as an era and a way of thinking about culture, history, language, ethics, aesthetics, philosophy, literature, and political behavior. The “post” in postmodernism is not meant to be equated with “after” but as a reaction to modernity and its hubristic flaunting of scientific knowledge, brilliant metaphysical advances, and a complete faith in rational thinking and humanistic progress. Thus, postmodernism can mean a time/era, a way of thinking, an approach to reading a written or visual text, an architectural style, a vocabulary, and so on. However, what is most pressing in the context of my thesis is to illuminate a postmodern type of thinking which negates theoretical totality by employing a philosophic language of deconstruction. As I contend, it is not a perfect language but perhaps the best available metaphysical language to employ when constructing the modality of coping with Holocaust remembrance. In the process of speaking about the language of postmodern deconstruction I demonstrate the ethics of deconstruction as exemplified in Jacques Derrida’s discourse, and as explicated in Etgar Keret’s storytelling. I begin with a review of some attempts to define postmodernism, its various meanings and applications, as well as some opinions that deny its merit as a philosophy and a way of thinking.

Steven Connor (2004) lists 1947, the year India was granted independence, as the first chronological event on a postmodernist historical timeline. Other landmark events

include the Algerian War of Independence, 1967 Arab-Israeli War, nationwide riots in France, student protests across North America, Neil Armstrong stepping on the moon, personal computers, AIDS, explosion of the space shuttle *Challenger*, Tiananmen Square massacre, fall of the Berlin Wall, the first Gulf War, cloning of Dolly the sheep, opening of Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Museum in Berlin, and 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York. Symbolically, Connor paints the modernist-postmodernist odyssey as meandering from the dying Goethe's Enlightenment exclamation "*Mehr Licht!*" to the postmodernist motto: "More Voices!" (15)

Brian McHale (1989) broaches the issue of the prefix "post" in postmodernism. He maintains that the prefix can be misleading if taken to narrowly mean "after" modernism. Instead, McHale suggests that postmodernism ought to be conceived as emerging out of modernism; a foundational principle which reinforces Connor's claim that one cannot choose whether or not to be a postmodernist. Ours *is* a postmodernist era. David Simpson (1995) posits several turning points in shaping the postmodernist milieu. Andreas Huyssen's alignment of postmodernism with the end of World War II is regarded by Simpson as one such turning point. Philosophically, the postmodernist abandonment of the modernist way of totalizing metaphysical truths is noted by Simpson as a major shift. For good or for bad, Simpson concludes that the postmodern turn is largely informed by what we have come to mean by modernity, and more specifically, what we have come to distrust in modernity.

Gertrude Himmelfarb (1997) believes in the inevitable demise of postmodernism. Himmelfarb holds that postmodernism is "profoundly anti-historical" and "radically anti-humanistic" (173). Reminding us that we have survived the death of God and the death

of man, Himmelfarb is confident we will survive the death of history, of truth, reason, morality, society, reality, “and all other values that have now been problematized and deconstructed; we will even survive the death of postmodernism” (174). Geoffrey Eley and Keith Nield (1997) react to Himmelfarb’s prophecy of doom by viewing present-day postmodernity as a “moment of social history,” and by arguing that “scoring polemical points” (372) is easy when focusing only on extreme postmodern facets. Perez Zagorin (1997), too, addresses criticism voiced by scholars such as Himmelfarb. As Zagorin notes in his historiography of postmodernism, the move to “aestheticize history” and sever it from its former grounding in conditions of truth and reality” (299) is a difficult pill for historians to swallow.

Peter Brooker’s (1992) modernism/postmodernism analysis posits Ihab Hassan’s comparative graph of modernism versus postmodernism as clarifying the variables distinguishing the two. According to Hassan, modernity is about form, while postmodernism is anti form. Modernity insists on having presence; postmodernism equates itself with absence. Modernism is about genre, metaphor, and metaphysics. Postmodernism is about metonymy, irony, and linguistic rupture. Modernism is driven by cultural paranoia, postmodernism by schizophrenia.⁶⁶ David Harvey’s (1991) inquiry into the origins of postmodernism as “a condition” of cultural change presents modernism as being about elitism, closure, authoritarianism, social engineering, fixed meanings, centers, meta-narratives, homogeneity, and structures, while postmodernism is about popular culture, flexibility, pastiche, fragments, *petite* history, pragmatism, skepticism, signifier, discourse, and deconstruction. There is also the matter of crossovers between continents as explored by David Ayers (2004). There are variances, says Ayers, between

the French “headquarters” and elsewhere. Searching for a common postmodernist denominator, McHale (1989) and Brooker (1992) do not suggest that epistemological inquiry is a thing of the past. The change is encapsulated in no longer envisioning a grand, totalizing narrative of knowledge aligned with reason, rationality, and human progress.

Jürgen Habermas (1981) rejects the idea of equating modernity with failure. He prefers to think of modernity as an unfinished project/promise. Steven Best and Douglas Kellner (1991) add that Habermas is not alone in engaging in a “qualified defense of modernity” (237). They note that Habermas and others do not dispute modernist philosophy warranting scathing criticism. Nonetheless, the modernist epoch is still valorized as the bedrock of liberalism and rationalism. The way Best and Kellner see it, Habermas is calling for a shift from thinking in terms of “philosophy of consciousness to a philosophy of communication” which aims at “understanding and agreement” (238). In their effort to preserve the best of Habermas, as well as the best of those who disagree with him, Best and Kellner amalgamate Habermas’s reconstruction of modernist “social rationality, consensus, emancipation, and solidarity” (239-240), with postmodernist deconstruction. Among others, the authors endorse some of Habermas’s critique of reactionary elements in radical postmodernist discursive theorizing. This stance is echoed by Richard Freadman and Seumas Miller (1992) who claim that everything cannot be discourse, and discourse is not everything we can ever know.

Robert Young offers a methodological doorway to postmodernism by way of revising (2004) a 1990 edition of *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West*. He explains that while the 1990 publication was meant as “political intervention within the

landscape of contemporary Western theory,” the 2004 edition evolved into a critique of “the West’s greatest myth – History.” Young’s somewhat strange vision of a conjoined waving of Che Guevara’s flag with the Palestinian flag as a symbol of “postcolonial struggle against oppression” (30) notwithstanding, his 1990 acronym MAMA (Male/Anglo-Saxon/Marxist/Academia) is retrospectively viewed in 2004 not as a wholesale critique of Marxism, but its “implacable whiteness [and] its Eurocentrism” (4).

Harsher criticism of postmodern literary theory is voiced by David Hirsch. I incorporate D.⁶⁷ Hirsch into the discussion not because I concur with his appraisal, but because of its pertinence to Holocaust remembrance. Articulated by Hirsch (1991) as “criticism after Auschwitz,” D. Hirsch condenses postmodernism into a travesty whereby the sum total of postmodernism and the deconstruction of literature amount to words begetting words, and more words. Jacques Derrida’s response to the scandalous discovery of Paul de Man’s pro-Nazi journalist exploit during World War II typifies for D. Hirsch this precept. (I shall return to the de Man affair and Derrida’s reaction to it shortly.) The episode epitomizes for D. Hirsch what transpires when “literary theorists play philosophers’ games with minimal skills” and when they “dabble in philosophical discourses they do not necessarily control” (67). D. Hirsch does not mince words in postulating French and German postmodernist discourses as contemptible. According to D. Hirsch, in their turn to Martin Heidegger as a philosophic muse – as opposed to wholesale rejection of a philosopher who joined the Nazi Party in 1933, was married to a staunch anti-Semite, and although his rendezvous with the Nazi authorities did not last, remained silent about the monstrous criminality of the Nazis – postmodernist literary theorists “resolutely mock the idea of truth itself” (68). For Heidegger to be situated in

the eye of the Nazi storm was bad enough. Even more outrageous, according to D. Hirsch, was for post Holocaust European intellectuals to find inspiration in Heidegger's metaphysical oeuvre.

For D. Hirsch there is a direct link between Heidegger's silence over the Holocaust and Michel Foucault's discourse. Born in 1926, Foucault was a young adult when the Nazi occupation of France ended. By the early and mid-sixties, Jorge Semprun's and Charlotte Delbo's accounts of Auschwitz became public knowledge. As pointed out to me by Sara Horowitz, Robert Antelme's depiction of his imprisonment in a concentration camp, *L'Espèce humaine*, was published in 1947, as was David Rousset's *The Other Kingdom*. And yet, as D. Hirsch (correctly) observes, Foucault had nothing to say about the Holocaust until the early eighties.⁶⁸ I empathize with Hirsch's fury but I do not share his contempt for postmodernism and the language of deconstruction. I also find parts of D. Hirsch's inflammatory rant, particularly when equating Foucault's critique of "bourgeois ideas of justice" with "Hitler's disdain for bourgeois legal proceedings" (258-259), preposterous. "Even" Himmelfarb (1997) – a staunch anti-postmodernism – credits postmodernists for not passing over "what may be the hardest case in modern history, the Holocaust" and for continuing to agonize over it "with much sensitivity" (164).

Freadman and Miller (1992) view Derrida's deconstructive "play" as disabling contradictions embedded in the very concepts Derrida seeks to deconstruct. (118-119) Nonetheless, and similar to other critics, Freadman and Miller are not prepared to reject the French oracles of literary theory and turn the wheels of metaphysics back to the Enlightenment, or, like D. Hirsch, put their faith in "Judea-Christian ideologies as the panacea of individualism and liberal democracy" (1991:267). Instead, they promote an

“alternative account” which would basically replenish contemporary literary theory with a more demanding ethical capacity.

As a way of explaining some of the opposition to postmodernist thinking, Frederic Jameson (1991) suggests that one of the problems relates to the difficulty of settling once and for all what postmodernism stands for. University students find it difficult to relate to theories out of which it is near impossible to extract “primary statements” (392). The idea of “saying anything at all” to mean “leaving something else out,” or thinking of language in “a permanently second-degree relationship to sentences that have already been formed” (393), is not easy to live by. Yet, as I have come to see, and as I shall elaborate upon in relation to Derrida’s deconstruction, is crucial to reading and thinking responsibly.

Hal Foster (1998) aims to clarify whether postmodernism is a concept or a practice. Is it mostly an aesthetic breakaway from modernism? Is it about anti-aestheticism? Or does it represent a new economic reality? Foster identifies two modes of postmodernism: “postmodernism of resistance” and “postmodernism of reaction.” Reactive postmodernism responds “therapeutically” to the failings of modernism. Postmodern of resistance constitutes “a counter-practice” to modernism, *as well* as to postmodernism of reaction which is criticized for not being assertive enough. In all, Foster is convinced that postmodernism of reaction denotes neo-conservatism and will not do: “a practice of resistance is needed” (xvii). For example, Foster views reactive postmodern architecture as being elitist and neoconservative in its “rapprochement with the market and the public” (67). He is critical of its pastiche and partial simulacra which “privileges style” (72) that can hardly be said to reject its “modernist precursor” (69). In

contrast, postmodernism of resistance is anchored in poststructuralist theory and is “concerned with the discursive paradigms of the modern” and “with a critique of representation” (73). What self-criticism was to modernist practice, deconstruction is to postmodernism of resistance, and postmodern deconstruction is entirely different from mere “instrumental pastiche” (73).

Terry Eagleton points to an unsteady balance between claiming the impossibility of constructing a totality, and claiming that it does not exist. As suggested by Eagleton in *The Illusions of Postmodernism* (1996), those who reject certain types of totalities generally turn out to be in favor of their own totality. He also questions whether postmodernism represents enough of a challenge to the oppressive material logic of capitalism.

The difficulty and imprecision in defining and characterizing postmodernism does not concern me. To the contrary; twentieth-century history has shown us with terrifying clarity what happens when hubristic decisiveness and totalizing theories translate into totalitarian practices. Keith Jenkins (1997) claims that whether we think of postmodernism as an enemy to textual coherence, meaning, and consistency, and whether one is inclined to perceive postmodernist discourse as sheer anarchy – a panacea of aporia and *différance* – the fact remains that “we live today within the general socio-economic and political condition of postmodernity” (3). Postmodernity is not an ideology or a stance one can decide to accept or reject. Postmodernity is “our condition” (3) – a condition grounded in the humanistic failure of modernity. This is not to say that henceforth “a bourgeois version” or “a proletarian version” of modernist universal-individualist emancipation is being discarded. It is, however, to say, that appraised by its

own objectives to greatly improve the wellbeing of all people through the application of reason and knowledge, modernity failed. That being said, Jenkins remarks that there is nothing to stop us from picking and choosing among modernist leftovers – some of which are of tremendous value. I am comfortable with a theoretic stance that acknowledges that we *are* living in a postmodernist era but that does not nullify modernist headways achieved in social-psychoanalytic-liberal-metaphysical-aesthetic domains.

The realm of language has much to do with this conversation. Neville Kirk (1997) believes that poststructuralist thinking puts much weight on “written, spoken and symbolic utterances and means of communication” (319). Rather than merely being an instrument of expressing a totality of “pre-existing external reality,” language plays a key role in creating “aspects of social reality” (328). Mindful of Terry Eagleton’s (1991) ideological frustration with “The category of discourse [which] is inflated to the point where it imperializes the whole world [...]”,⁶⁹ Kirk maintains that future postmodern “intellectual labor” (335) will have to incorporate “the study of language into a wider framework of analysis which embraces agency and structure, saying and doing, the conscious and the unconscious, and the willed and unintended consequences of individual and social action and thought” (336).

In addition to acquiring a better understanding of what postmodernism stands for, I needed to find a postmodern frame of reference that would guide me methodologically. To an extent, I located it in a dialogic modality of postmodernism as enunciated by Seyla Benhabib (1992). Benhabib situates the self, gender, community, and postmodernism in contemporary ethics. Her ability to juggle a conglomerate of feminism, political realism, democratic principles, theory and pragmatism, and universal-particular demands of

selfhood and ethics, has come to serve as an inspirational methodological framework in that my study too maneuvers between contraries of individuality and universalism, rationalism and emotionalism, modernity and postmodernity, theory and praxis, history and literature, philosophy of ethics and political pragmatism. Assessing modernist social and cultural theorization, Benhabib looks at “what is living and what is dead” by feminist and postmodernist yardsticks. While feminists share with Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Jean-François Lyotard a mistrust of meta-narratives, they are not quite ready to relinquish feminist gains achieved through modernism. Benhabib’s dialogic postmodernism accepts a marriage between deconstruction and a language of “communicative ethics” (9). She introduces a universalistic, nonnegotiable axiom which considers *every* human worthy of moral consideration in a democratic polity by virtue of “*being immersed in a network of human relationships that constitute our life together* [italics in text]” (124). Everything else, “juridical, military, therapeutic, [and] aesthetic” judgments must be subject to “reasonable debate” (124). She goes on to argue that Lyotard, Foucault, and Derrida have been “crucial allies for contemporary feminism” in their critique of the Enlightenment’s epistemic exclusion of “*petit recits*” on favor of “grand narratives” (15). That being said, Benhabib’s feminist alliance with postmodernism is a conditional relationship.

Using a feminist-postmodernist lens, Benhabib distinguishes between radical and less radical versions of postmodernism (213). As a feminist, she cannot go along with radicalism that professes “the death of the subject thesis” (215) for the simple reason that the “old” hegemonic narrative of a white-Christian-male is still with us. A radical postmodernist discourse that leaves no room for rearranging “the significations of

language and narrative” (215) is virtually synonymous to dispensing with women’s selfhood. Benhabib respects devoted feminists who discovered in the postmodernist discourse a powerful antidote to modernist thinking gone wrong, and are therefore willing to forgo the issue of woman selfhood. She, however, is not ready – at least not yet.⁷⁰

Benhabib’s methodological prototype in which postmodernism and feminism coalesce, although not to the point of complete interfusion, is how I would characterize Susan Ingram’s (2003) style and approach to shaping cultural history. As Ingram states, there are several points of methodological entry into postmodern thinking. For Ingram it is the interlacing of postmodernism and modernism with feminist-autobiographical narratives. The narratives chosen by Ingram are of six women (“Zarathustra’s sisters”): Lou Andreas-Salomé, Simone de Beauvoir, Maitreyi Devi, Asja Lacis, Nadzhda Mandelstam, and Romola Nijinsky. All six women were known by virtue of being in a relationship with a male “celebrity,” and to some extent, by virtue of their own notoriety. Ingram explores emotional and intellectual complexities of these women, who, in the process of striving to attain personal autonomy, had to deal with the consequences of “unabashed admission of specific subservience vis-à-vis the men with whom they chose to remain in long-term relationships [...]” (128). By telling the personal stories of six women in which fact intermixes with fiction, and by analyzing the “fragmentary, ambiguously autonomous identities that are nonetheless still, and perhaps all the more so, identities” (136), Ingram navigates between representations of philosophy, art, history, politics, language, and gender issues, thereby modeling “the ethics of postmodern scholarship” (129).

Having skimmed through the challenge of decoding postmodernism, I navigate toward the heart of poststructuralism; a heart associated with Jacques Derrida. Enumerating concepts that are primal in Derrida's oeuvre is one thing; deconstruction, *différance*, traces, destabilization, sign, supplement, and dissemination are several such primary notions. Assigning concretized meaning to this lexicon is another. To begin with, this seemingly uncomplicated terminology cannot be understood in its conventional meaning. Accordingly, deconstruction is not the undoing of construction. *Différance* is not just different, and Derrida's trace, sign, and supplement cannot be interpreted in a metaphoric sense. Second, as already noted, Derrida's philosophy does not conflate into a comprehensive whole. Layers upon layers in Derrida's thinking do not add up to a clearly mapped out metaphysical school of thought or persuasion. There is no Derridian "method" of textual reading and interpretation that can be applied from one text to the next. There is no encircled centripetal design or a solidified centre from where everything comes and goes. Rupturing of linearity and theoretical hierarchy is integral to Derrida's Weltanschauung, as is the use of conventional terminology which, in the Derridian context, means something else. As remarked by Attridge in *Jacques Derrida: Acts of Literature* (1992), the act of reading a text à la Derrida "displaces the entrenched configurations of our mental habits" and yet it cannot be "isolated, conceptualized, or named" (9). In fact, "deconstruction" or "metaphor" or "trace" or "*différance*" are not concepts. They designate something but mostly the undecidable.

Given my profound reverence for Paul Ricoeur, I wanted to better understand what issues set him and Derrida apart. Eftichis Pirovolakis (2010) designates his comparative reading of Derrida and Ricoeur as improbable encounters between

deconstruction and hermeneutics. According to Pirovolakis, Derrida and Ricoeur are both interested in phenomenology, psychoanalysis, and hermeneutics. Both reflect on the works of Edmund Husserl, Sigmund Freud, and Emmanuel Lévinas. But there is a foundational difference. While neither strives to bring a dialogue or mediation to “an absolute degree” (4), Ricoeur’s “dialectical construal of the present” (5) has more completeness to it than Derrida would ever consent to. Ricoeur is more of a negotiator between aporetic structures, while Derrida bespeaks of discontinuity and a more “rigorous concept of singularity” (12). Ricoeur’s mediation replaces “perceptual present” with a “reflective present” that has not given up on “a hermeneutic belief in dialectics and teleology” (162). Derrida persists in undermining the sustainability of interpretation, and while the undecidability is slightly reminiscent of dialectics, in principle, Derrida is resistant to dialectics. Rodolphe Gasché adds in “Deconstruction and Hermeneutics” (2000) that Derrida was enormously respectful of Ricoeur. True, his thoughts on hermeneutics could be read as a critique of Ricoeur, but that was not the intention. Derrida’s concern is with hermeneutics “assuming a fixed, self-identical and self-present meaning-content of discourses, or texts, capable of being recovered in full [...]” (137). It is not that deconstruction is the opposite of hermeneutics. Rather, deconstruction submits hermeneutics to questions that hermeneutics does not, or “cannot ask itself [...]” (149).

My commitment, then, is to deconstruction which I believe is an attitudinal requirement for responsible post Holocaust textual (including visual and musical text) humanistic reading. Derek Attridge (*Jacques Derrida; Acts of Literature*, 1992) and others have remarked that on more than one occasion, Derrida complained that the word deconstruction has “acquired a generality and a celebrity which he did not foresee,” and

which in turn, makes it “necessary to revise radically the popular images associated with it” (26). Deconstruction is always on the move; effacing and adding, expunging and creating. It blurs the demarcation between “delete” and “insert” – to use Attridge’s analogy from the world of computers. Deconstruction is not tangible or finite. Deconstruction suggests that what is synthesized and articulated is less meaningful, and/or equally meaningful, as that which is omitted, forgotten, absent, and yet to come. What is written does not constitute a beginning nor a summation but reiteration which invites further reiteration, which invites further reiteration, and so on.

Attridge contends that university students engaging in Derridian deconstruction will need to juggle institutional-university rules of oral and written presentation that make perfect sense, but nonetheless collide with the prefix (“de”) in Derrida’s deconstruction and ruptured linguistic/textual acts of reading. It is one thing to speak of pastiche and cultural plurality. It is another to remain cognizant of Derrida’s deconstruction discourse. Occasionally I think of Derrida’s discourse as comparable to motifs attributed by Slavoj Žižek (2010) to Alfred Hitchcock’s films. Among others, Žižek speaks of motifs of suspicion, “interpretive delirium” (126), the wrongly identified, suspension on edges of roofs, encountering forces that elude us, a compulsion to repeat, and unexpected leaps and departures “from the official content” (127). Or, to use Mladen Dolar’s (2010) Hitchcockian metaphor – “A Father Who Is Not Quite Dead” – Derrida’s act of reading and writing is reminiscent of Hitchcock’s obsession with the gaze. It is a gaze omnipresent in *Rear Window* (1954) whereby a professional photographer, L. B. Jeff (James Stewart), is “reduced to a being of the gaze, confronted with the enigmatic signs in the building opposite his rear window” (143). Just like Jeff, in following Derrida “one

sees too much and not enough at the same time” (144). In an interview with Richard Kearney, Derrida said the following about deconstruction:

In short, deconstruction not only teaches us to read literature more thoroughly by attending to it as a language, as the production of meaning through *différance* and dissemination, through a complex play of signifying traces; it also enables us to interrogate the covert philosophical and political presuppositions of institutionalized critical methods which generally govern our reading of a text... It is not a question of calling for the destruction of such institutions, but rather of making us aware of what we are in fact doing when we are subscribing to this or that institutional way of reading.⁷¹

Implied in this citation are destabilizing factors in the act of reading which are invisible and at the same time recognizable by “ghostly” traces and *différance*.

Citing Derrida, the main thing about deconstruction, says Nicholas Royle (2000) is to keep things moving.

This destabilization on the move is in, if one could speak thus, ‘things themselves’; but it is not negative. Destabilization is required for ‘progress’ as well. And the ‘de-’ of *deconstruction* signifies not the demolition of what is constructing itself, but rather what remains to be thought beyond the constructivist or destructionist scheme.
(Derrida, “Afterword: Toward an Ethic of Discussion,” 1988:147)

In a 1992 letter written to Geoffrey Bennington, Royle (2000) refers to “the least bad definition” of deconstruction suggested by Derrida: “the experience of the impossible”

(6). Stated more positively, deconstruction always entails that which is yet to come.

Dogmatism and totalitarianism are about finality and deterministic closure.

“Deconstruction seeks to take as fully into account as possible the ways in which all performatives are necessarily haunted by a non-present remainder, by what remains to be thought, calculated or experienced” (9). This is not to say that we no longer have any use for dictionaries. There are many constant concepts, statements, frames of reference, genres, and so forth in Derrida’s philosophy. Deconstruction is not about destroying “its

host” (10). But deconstruction cannot settle for entrenched methodological and theoretical structures. Deconstruction is the opening of the future itself;

a future which does not allow itself to be modalized or modified into the form of the present, which allows itself neither to be fore-seen nor-programmed; it is thus also the opening to freedom, responsibility, decision, ethics and politics, so many *terms* that would therefore have to be withdrawn from the deconstructed logic of presence, conscience or intention.

(Derrida, “Afterwards: or, at least, less than a letter about a letterless,” 1992)

Critics have argued that deconstruction begins and ends with language games.

Derrida’s famous saying “There is nothing outside the text” in *Of Grammatology* (1976:158), has not served him well. Royle (2000) suggests that the problem with “there is nothing outside of the text” is that the word “text” is misunderstood to mean text in the conventional way rather than “in how it opens onto “unbounded generalization” (8).

Royle cites Derrida saying that a text is:

no longer a finished corpus of writing, some content enclosed in a book or its margins, but a differential network, a fabric of traces referring endlessly to something other than itself, to other differential traces. Thus the text overruns all the limits assigned to it so far (not submerging or drowning them in an undifferentiated homogeneity, but rather making them more complex, dividing and multiplying strokes and lines [...]

(Derrida, “Living On”)

What is outside the text matters a great deal but “the utterance of truth – or of a statement making a truth-claim – is in fact always *mediated* by language. And language has its own sedimented history, structural properties and figurative potential [*italics in the text*]” (Attridge, “Deconstruction and Fiction” 2000:107). The same can be said about speech despite speech deemed “at least since Plato [...] to be a guarantor of authenticity, of the here-and-nowness” (107). In part, Perez Zagorin’s (1997) rethinking of historiography in relation to postmodernism is about theorizing over textual language. Yearning for the

good-old-days of modernist demarcation between high/elite culture and mass popular culture (300), Zagorin regards “postmodernist themes” as unsustainable for they lack “any feeling of *élan* or conviction of advance or progress” (299).

I echo Richard Rorty’s (2010) thoughts on “culture of pragmatism”⁷² and the liberal-democratic credo. I fully agree with Rorty’s attestation that “Bland, calculating, petty, and un-heroic” as liberal-democracy may be, it is the only safeguard against totalitarian “thugs” and “a reasonable price to pay for political freedom” (253). I endorse Rorty’s (2010) preference of Dewey over Foucault for Dewey gives hope and Foucault sends a message of hopelessness. The fears expressed by Rorty in a post 9/11 interview with Gideon Lewish-Kraus (2003) over the fragility of democracy and its ability to “withstand the threats of liberty”⁷³ are most instructive. Where Rorty (2010) and I part ways is in his assessment of postmodern thinking on human rights, rationality, and sentimentality as unhelpful in providing an impetus “to pick ourselves up and try again” (357). I believe I can always detect the hopeful in Derrida’s philosophy.

In 2011, celebrating the twelfth printing of *Consequences of Pragmatism (Essays: 1972-1980)*, Rorty devotes a full chapter to demythologizing what Derrida has to say about language.⁷⁴ First there was Kant who believed in “a vertical relationship between representations and what is represented” (92). Along came Derrida who rejects this vertical relationship. Kant regarded the model of scientific truth as a guiding light; Derrida does not privilege science. Kant’s argumentation tends to “present itself as a scientific attempt to get things right,” while Derrida’s style is to “present itself obliquely, with the help of as many foreign words and as much allusiveness [...] as possible” (92). The Kantian urge is for philosophy to solve all problems of the world. The Derridian

push is for writing to always lead to more writing and for “texts to comment on other texts” (95).

Rorty concludes that in *Of Grammatology* (1976) Derrida was not out to offer “a comprehensive view of anything” (97). Instead, he was protesting the philosophical tradition of taking language to represent “how language hooks on to the world” (97), and how language gives total meaning and reference. Reminiscent of “the prophets of secularization” (98) of the nineteenth century who were very serious about change, Derrida is “serious about what he calls ‘deconstruction’” (98). Derrida wanted to do better than Heidegger in dismantling traditional Western metaphysics and herein, as Rorty argues, one of the problems. In trying so hard, Derrida “succumbs to nostalgia, to the lure of philosophical system-building [...]” (99). Despite Derrida’s warning against “the temptation to divinize the *trace*” (102), in speaking of language as conveying “traces” rather than “signs,” Derrida “comes perilously close to giving us a philosophy of language” (100). “All this nonsense about language not being a system of representations” is not total nonsense, and to be sure, Rorty has no desire to return to the “unfinished walls and roofs of the great Kantian edifice” (104). But here we are with Kant versus Derrida, and no chance of the two meeting half way for each “live each other’s death, die each other’s life” (107). Still, generally speaking, Rorty is respectful of Derrida. He praises Derrida for reminding us all that no one has the “last commentary, a last discussion note, a good piece of writing which is more than the occasion for a better piece” (109).

Mark Krupnick (1983) contends that Derrida’s French isn’t even typically French: “Its pathos seems Germanic, its tragic ironies almost Greek, its jocular play almost

cinematographic in an American manner, its graphic immediacy archaic and alphabetical as the Talmud” (89). Upon Derrida’s untimely death, Judith Butler mourned him as the one who “not only taught us how to read, but gave the act of reading a new significance and a new promise” (32). In 2003 Derrida was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. He died on October 9 2004 at the age of seventy-four. Derrida’s biographer, Benoît Peeters (2013), writes that several months prior to the philosopher’s death he agreed to appear on stage to pay homage to *Le Monde diplomatique* on their fiftieth anniversary. Appearing at the Palais des Sports in Paris, he decided to use the opportunity to offer a portrayal of himself as a non-Eurocentric philosopher. He spoke about Europe having “to struggle on behalf of what this name represents today, with the memory of the Enlightenment, to be sure, but also with the guilty conscience, fully accepted, of the totalitarian, genocidal, and colonialist crimes of the past” (529). He then proceeded to outline the Europe he wished for:

A Europe in which one can criticize Israeli policy, especially that pursued by Sharon and Bush, without being accused of anti-Semitism or Judeophobia. A Europe in which one can support the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people to recover its rights, its land and a state, without thereby approving of suicide attacks and the anti-Semitic propaganda that often – too often – tends, in the Arab world, to give renewed credit to the monstrous *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* [...] (530).

On September 11, 2001 Derrida was in Shanghai. Several weeks later, upon arriving in New York, he told Borradori (2003) how deeply moved he was at being in the city after the attack. When asked whether he thought 9/11 will be remembered as a historical landmark, and whether it is a lesson in deconstruction, Derrida responded by saying that he believes “in the necessity of being attentive first of all to this phenomenon of language, naming, and dating [...] in order to try to understand what is going on

precisely *beyond* language [italics in the text]” (95). He then spoke about suicidal acts of high-tech violence, the irony of America having provided Osama bin Laden with the arms and training used in 9/11, the symbolism of striking America at its capitalistic headquarters, “the World Trade Center, the very archetype of the genre” (96), the role of media, the good and bad in globalization, potential for democratization, and the significance of international law. Reading the complete text, one is struck by the spontaneity and extraordinary stream of conscious with which Derrida tackles the political real by way of deconstructing language. There is nothing vague about Derrida’s analysis of the fear generated by the events of 9/11 – a dread of this occurrence signaling “precursory signs of what threatens to happen [...] from the repetition to come – though worse” (97).

Style of writing was of utmost importance to Derrida; the external format being integral to the content of the text. “I am not happy with any choice that presupposes an interpretation or hierarchy, I’m strongly tempted by putting the authors in alphabetical order – it’s arbitrary enough to neutralize the question of semantic or systematic order” (Peeters 2013:269). Derrida’s deconstruction aims to transcend the gospel of liberalism from tolerance to hospitality. As Borradori (2003) argues, this is more than semantic subtlety. Tolerance accorded to foreign workers, as an example, is different from genuine hospitality. The type of sympathy conferred to foreign workers is always conditional on the foreigner conducting himself/herself in accordance with rules and expectations prescribed by the patron/employment agency/country.

Born in 1930 at El-Biar, Algiers, the child was named Jackie Derrida by his Jewish parents: Aimé Derrida and Georgette Sultana Esther Safar. In “Deconstruction

and Biblical Narrative” (1989), Edward L. Greenstein postulates Derrida as a secular Jew, although similar to Martin Hägglund’s (2008) thoughts on Derrida in relation to radical atheism, Greenstein does not view Derrida’s atheism as a denouncement of religious tradition. Rather, as Hägglund affirms, “the logic of radical atheism allows one to read the religious tradition against itself from within” (208). In Derrida’s “negative theology” God is unnamable, albeit, God made unnamable can be construed as a way of “saving God from the contamination of finitude” (6). Why even deliberate God in Derrida’s philosophy? Because, as Hägglund contends, “The stakes of Derrida’s radical atheism” (11) are high for Derridian followers are everywhere – as in Greenstein and the application of Derridian deconstruction onto Biblical text.

Gideon Ofrat’s *The Jewish Derrida* (2001) does not dispute Derrida’s atheism but he has uncovered a rich current of Jewish culture running through the philosopher’s lifework. Derrida’s dramatic notation “I am the last Jew” in *Circonfession* (1991),⁷⁵ is taken by Ofrat to mean “I am a bad Jew” but I may also represent Judaism’s “only chance of survival” (9). Derrida’s Jerusalem “transcends any particular geographical location or historical event” (129). It is “the site of the ultimate self-offering and the location of the sacrifice of the son that is reiterated relentlessly throughout history” (128). The indefinite deferral which concludes the reading of the Passover *Haggadah*, “Next Year in Jerusalem,” has Jerusalem moving “between the present and the promise” (130).

The Jewish rite of circumcision is envisaged by Derrida in *Schibboleth: for Paul Celan* (1994) as “the experience of the eternal scar that will never heal” (46). Circumcision and Celan’s poetry conjoin in thinking about the Holocaust. Peeters (2013) represents *shibboleth* as “a password” (368). It is a Hebrew word extracted by Derrida

from the biblical story (Judges 12) of the Ephraimites identified (and then killed) by Jephthah, leader of the Gileadites, by the mispronunciation of the “*sh*” in *shibboleth*. Circumcision, that permanent mark of segregation decreed by Abraham, was Abraham’s way of enslaving himself and his people to God; a God he feared but was “incapable of loving” (Ofrat, 2001:48). With circumcision, the patriarch imprinted for all Jewish generations to come “enduring emasculation” (48), and a cultural “divorce from nature” (49).

Ofrat gives serious consideration to the possibility that Derrida was a self-hating Jew. Not surprisingly, Ofrat recalls Sander Gilman’s (1986) seminal work on anti-Semitism and Jewish self-hatred. According to Gilman, self-hatred is fostered through Jewish “acceptance of the mirage of themselves generated by their reference group” and is nurtured by the “desire for acceptance” (4). Immanuel Kant’s prejudicial view of Judaism as a rigid system of laws and exclusivity was internalized by modernist German Jews. Gilman explains that in their eagerness to be part of Germany, Jews could not consider the possibility that Kant got it all wrong. Feeling most assured of their loyalty and love for Germany, and having taken steps toward changing their image – Moses Mendelssohn’s German translation and commentary of the Pentateuch (1780-1783) being one such step – Kant’s negativity is projected onto the Jewish Other, the non-enlightened, Yiddish speaking Eastern European Jews. With modernist secular Zionism resigning itself to the refusal of Eighteenth-century Europeans “to ascribe a sense of beauty to any group they believed to be marginal” (119), a new Jewish manliness is born: a Hebrew speaking, nature-loving *übermensch*. The quintessential Yiddish-speaking *schlemiel* is now condemned by Jewish Zionists who wish to replace Yiddish with a “purified form”

of the biblical language, free “from the neologisms and grammatical errors of the post-Biblical rabbinic era” (105). Karl Marx’s 1844 crass meditation “On the Jewish Question” – a prototypical self-hating Jew by Gilman’s yardstick – spreads the malaise of Jewish self-hatred. From Heinrich Heine, Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, Arthur Koestler, and Woody Allen, all exemplify this self-deprecating phenomenon. Gilman’s theorizing is widely respected. It is compelling and yet I find it too totalizing. As for Derrida, not being a qualified psychoanalyst, I cannot determine the extent to which the Algerian-Jewish child named Jackie Derrida, a member of a family whose Jewish history dates back to fifteenth-century expulsion of Jews from Spain and Portugal, internalized anti-Semitic bigotry. This much we do know. Edouard Drumont’s infamous anti-Semitic *Jewish France* (1897) was out there when Jackie (Élie) came into the world, although, the 1870 Crémieux decree granting French citizenship to Algerian Jews withstood the ugly tides of French anti-Semitism until the arrival of the Nazis. We also know that Jackie’s home was not a traditional Jewish home, and that heightened awareness of being Jewish coincided with anti-Semitic persecution.

As for the word *Jew*, I do not believe I heard it first in my family [...] I believe I heard it at school in El Biar, already charged with what, in Latin, one would call an insult [*injure*], *injuria*, in English, *injury*, both an insult, a wound, and an injustice [...] Before understanding any of it, I received this word like a blow, a denunciation, a de-legitimation prior to any legality.⁷⁶

Compiling a list of all the blows he suffered in his youth, Peeters (2013) notes that Derrida soon realized that “they were always linked to racism one way or another” (290). After the Nazi invasion of France, Jackie, along with other Jewish pupils, was expelled from Lycée Ben Aknoun. His parents enrolled him in “this improvised” Jewish *lycée*, Maïmonide. Jackie hated his Jewish *lycée* and rarely attended classes. From then on

Derrida resented being branded as part of a “homogeneous milieu” and refrained from seeking “membership in a group”.⁷⁷ Perhaps this is indicative of a Gilman-type self-hating affliction, and yet, over the years, Derrida felt more and more inclined to identify with “his secret forename, Élie, the name that was given to him on the seventh day of his life” (10). Prior to his death he left instructions to be buried outside the Jewish section so that his non-Jewish wife, Marguerite, could be buried next to him after her death. He wanted no rituals or prayers, and “contrary to Jewish tradition [...] and] asked not to be buried too quickly so as to give resurrection a chance” (540).

Far be it for me to critique Sander Gilman. I dwell on the matter of Jewish self-hatred for it has much to do with secular cultural Zionism which tends to be construed as a paradigmatic case of self-hating Jews rejecting Yiddish speaking Diaspora – a cultural-historical paradigm with implications on the subject of early Zionism and the Holocaust. It also has to do with my affinity with the postmodern way of non-totalizing. I therefore choose to go along with Amos Oz and his charming way of anecdotally destabilizing theoretic totalizing, including that of self-hating Jews. Oz conveys in “Imagining the Other: I”⁷⁸ that he was raised in a staunch Zionist-strictly-Hebrew-speaking Jerusalem home. A precocious, rather lonely child, he remembers often being called by his parents: “*sheigetz*”. He did not know it in his youth, but in later years he learned that *sheigetz* is a Yiddish word used by Ukrainian Jews implying a peasant boy “who herds pigs and throws stones at Jews” (116). Oz claims that this connotation came to him as a complete surprise. He vividly recalls associating the occasions on which he was addressed by his parents as a *sheigetz* with instances of his parents expressing their love, joy, and pride in him. At the very least, Oz’s reflection on this childhood Yiddish inflection demonstrates

the flexibility and inconclusiveness of the Jewish-Yiddish self-hating taxonomy.⁷⁹ Noted by Adam Rubin (2005) in his study of Hebrew folklore, monolithic theoretical interpretations of Zionism such “the negation of exile (*shelilat ha-golah*)” (62), and the Yiddish-Hebrew dichotomy to explain modern political and cultural Zionism, can only serve as partial explanatory theories.

Illuminated by Attridge (2000), Derrida’s *différance* penetrates and destabilizes the monolithic – with the “a” (seventh letter) as a built-in, destabilizing sign. First introduced by Derrida in a lecture, and then published as *Writing and Difference* (1978), *différance* is an “irreducible difference [...] due to an interminable *delaying* of the theoretical foundation [italics in the text]” (202). In French, the condition of being differed conjoins with being different; presence and absence in construing meaning.⁸⁰ The Derridian *différance* explains Derrida’s high regard for literature. There is always an implied “remainder” (Hill, 2007:109) in the writings of James Joyce, Edgar Allan Poe, Paul Celan, Franz Kafka, Samuel Beckett, and Maurice Blanchot. It is in literature that Derrida locates the undecidable, which is not relativism or complacency, but as Hill states, “a call to think, and to always think further than the status quo allowed” (110). Jonathan Boyarin (1996) “thinks in Jewish” when he faults Derrida for assuming that “the whole world is French” (130). At the same time, Boyarin praises the consistency with which Derrida refrains from positioning himself as a categorical “opposite of that which he criticizes” – an “uncontrolled *droit à la différence*” (130).

Angelika Bammer (1994) studies issues of displacement and cultural identities. Bammer reflects on “postmodern geography of identity” as being “both here *and* there and neither here *nor* there at one and the same time” (xii). Derrida’s notion of

“displacement” picks up on a Freudian trail of continuous physical and cultural dislocation which can never assume full placement or full replacement. Bammer adds that this deconstructionist in-and-out motion is masterfully exemplified in literature written by Toni Morrison (to which I add Etgar Keret), and perhaps best iterated by Salman Rushdie (“In Good Faith”): “I am a bastard child of history.”⁸¹

Susan Shapiro (1994) elicits Derridian deconstruction as a Blanchot-like writing about the Holocaust – “a symptom of a disaster within writing itself” (183) – as she examines Jews in Western Discourse. Shapiro’s thinking warrants careful consideration for it alerts us to what can happen – with the best of intentions – when deconstruction is taken too far. She argues that in attempting to view Jews as inseparable from Western civilization by way of deconstructing Christian anti-Jewish narrative, Jean-François Lyotard ends up, unintentionally, removing Jews out of Western culture altogether. Clearly, Lyotard’s “perpetual dismantling and displacing of its subject” in *Heidegger and ‘the jews’* (1990) is motivated by a post-Holocaust desire to identify with the Jewish people. By deconstructing “I,” “them,” “they,” “us,” as “one” (184), Lyotard aims at dismantling Christianity’s fixation on the Jew as the quintessential Other. The problem is that this sort of deconstruction of the *unheimlich*, to use Heidegger’s anti-Semitic rhetoric,⁸² is much like *écriture féminine* which writes about women without giving women a real voice. *Écriture judaïque* is a form of European *mea culpa* without giving the Jews a voice – real Jews, living Jews – not the jew (lower case “j”) metonymically representing “all the Others the West created” (187).

From Derrida’s deconstruction to the compendious subject of Holocaust representation, and once again, this time by Robert Eaglestone, Saul Friedländer is

brought into the fold as *the* Holocaust historian who sets in motion a dialogue among the likes of Giorgio Agamben, Jean François Lyotard, Maurice Blanchot, Jacques Derrida, Slavoj Žižek, Emmanuel Lévinas, and Geoffrey Hartman. A Derridian disciple, Eaglestone's (2004) major study of the Holocaust and postmodern thinking brings together Friedländer and Derrida in a formidable deconstruction trajectory. Eaglestone views Derridian deconstruction as a form of engagement in "the relationship between what can be discussed, the text and the 'exorbitant' which lies outside the text but forms its context" (191). The exorbitant in Friedländer's writing is the Final Solution. In all, Eaglestone's goal is "to Friedländerize deconstruction" (192). Like others, Eaglestone is of the opinion that postmodernist theorizing begins with the Holocaust. The delayed response to the Holocaust by postmodernist theorists is explained by Eaglestone not as a lapse in moral judgment but as having to regroup and reorient Western metaphysical thinking to the reality of the Holocaust.

Eaglestone regards Emmanuel Lévinas and Jacques Derrida as embodying the profoundness of a postmodernist response to the Holocaust. It is with Lévinas and Derrida that Eaglestone locates the "grounding of a new form of hope and humanism; a humanism beyond humanism" (4). By "hope" Eaglestone is not alluding to an optimistic utopia, rather, much like Etgar Keret's literature, as "aiming to shake their readers and audiences from slumber" (10). Of the two, Lévinas and Derrida, critics have found Lévinas easier to associate with the Holocaust. Terminological shifts in Lévinas's theorizing indicate an accelerated preoccupation with the Holocaust. The earlier Lévinas spoke about Hitlerism. Over time he speaks of Nazi persecution, horrors, and "Hitlerian massacres." He then interjects Auschwitz and the Final Solution. Lastly, in 1987, he

settles on the Hebrew term: *Shoah*. Emil Fackenheim's unconvincing objection to Lévinas notwithstanding, contending that Lévinas cannot reflect adequately on the Holocaust because of his pre-war attachment to Heidegger, the relevance of the Holocaust vis-à-vis the centrality of the Other in Lévinas's discourse, Western betrayal of the Other, murder of the Other, obligation to the Other, language, suffering, absolute evil, religion, and failings of metaphysics – is all-encompassing.

But Eaglestone's heart is with Jacques Derrida. From Eaglestone's perspective, the Jewish Holocaust is "*all-pervasive* in Derrida's work [*italics in the text*]" (280). Others point to Derrida's 1991 *Cinders (Feu la Cendre)* as a culmination in which, as envisaged by Shellie McCullough (2008), deconstruction is a prayer and cinders is the "we" of Derrida's Jewish Self. Derrida and the Jewish "we" become inseparable. Ashes/cinders are Élie/Jackie Derrida's legacy. Symbolized through a text in the form of a prayer, and a parallel mirror text dotted with citations from Derrida's writings, *Cinders* unfolds as "polyphony of an indeterminate number of voices in uncertain genders" (74). Accentuated by McCullough, the androgynous speaker bestows upon the silenced millions a voice "appear[ing] to speak through the writing of a single author" (75). The cinder trope embodies Derrida being haunted by "a self without presence" (74). Being "there" but knowing he was never "there." The cindered, "the millions of obliterated Jewish 'I' are relegated a relationship with "what remains without remaining from the Holocaust" (75).

Thinking of the cinder begets thinking of the Holocaust, which begets thinking of the trace, which begets thinking of justice. Deconstruction "grows out of singularities, from specific times, places and texts," and for Derrida "that singularity was the Holocaust

[...]” (289-290). It is precisely from the singularity of the Holocaust, Eaglestone states, that deconstruction takes off and is universalized. Cinders are ashes of the non-present. Cinders indicate a future that “is yet to come as a process of humanization” (297).

A hopeful that is yet to come is conveyed by Etgar Keret in one of his best known Holocaust remembrance stories. The story is titled “Shoes” (*The Bus Driver Who Wanted to be God*). A remarkable short story of some three pages, “Shoes” is a postmodern story that has already acquired canonic stature in Holocaust literature. The title is instantaneously associated with photographic images showing piles of shoes of Holocaust victims. As will be further discussed in chapter seven, like many of Keret’s stories, this story too is based on autobiographical details.

On Holocaust Memorial Day our teacher Sara took us on bus Number 5 to visit the Museum of Volhynia Jewry, and I felt very important. All the kids in the class except for me, my cousin, and one other boy, Druckman, had families that came from Iraq. I was the only one with a grandfather who had died in the Holocaust. (41)

Volhynia House is very beautiful and posh, “all made of black marble, like millionaires’ houses” (41). It was full of sad black-and-white pictures. In the boy’s mind, a dissonance is created in juxtaposing “beautiful posh marble” with “black-and-white pictures mounted [...] on simple cardboard” (41). Worse, the teacher instructs the students: “don’t touch!” anything on display; an instruction that makes absolutely no sense to the boy. The boy-narrator disobeys and touches the picture: “It’s my Grandpa and I’m touching whatever I want!” (41) Having walked through the display of photographs, the students are shown a movie of children shoved into a truck and gassed. An encounter with a speaker-survivor follows the movie presentation. The Holocaust survivor beseeches the children not to buy German-made products;

[...] whether it's a television set or anything else, you should always remember that underneath the fancy wrapping there are parts and tubes that they made out of the bones and skin and flesh of dead Jews. (42)

The postmodern way, Keret said to me, is to undertake a deconstructed journey of discovery, of historicity, of mourning, of loving, of labor, of remembrance, of work, of leisure, of suffering, and of doing justice. It certainly cannot be arrived at with a “don’t touch!” imperative.

Two weeks later the boy’s parents return from a trip abroad. Upon seeing her son, the mother is thrilled to hand him a present she knows is something he wanted badly. Without a doubt, the gift would have brought her son much joy had it not occurred after the Volhynia House experience. Without looking into the bag, but having noticed the Adidas logo on the bag handed to him by his mother, the boy knows what is inside: a shoebox containing German-made Adidas running shoes. Distraught, but the good and grateful son that he is, he politely thanks his loving parents and retrieves the shoebox.

The box was rectangular, like a coffin, and in it were two white shoes with three blue stripes and the inscription ADIDAS on the side; I didn’t have to open the box to know what they looked like. (42)

The associative links with the shape of a coffin, the whiteness of death, and the blue stripes, as in the garment of concentration camp inmates, are all too obvious. Keret is not in the habit of employing esoteric, abstruse insinuations, particularly when the story is told from the perspective of a child. Symbolism needs to be drawn in straightforward strokes. Pressured by his good-intentioned mother, father, and older brother to try the shoes on, the boy tries to delay the inevitable. He now attempts to awaken in his parents what he believes is a dormant Holocaust consciousness – a very serious subject which is not made less serious by the employment of one of Keret’s best known qualities as a

writer: a delicious sense of humor. “They’re from Germany, you know,” he says. “Of course, I know” his mother replies; “Adidas is the best brand in the world.” The boy is agitated and tries again.

Grandpa was from Germany, too” I tried to give her a hint. “Grandpa was from Poland,” Mom corrected me. For a moment she became sad, but she got over it in no time. She put one shoe on my foot and started to tie the laces. I kept quiet. I realized there was nothing doing. Mom didn’t have a clue. She had never been to Volhynia House. Nobody had ever explained it to her. For her, shoes were just shoes and Germany was Poland [...]

“Are the shoes comfortable?” my mother asked. “Sure they’re comfortable,” my brother answered for me. “These aren’t cheap Israeli sneakers. These are the same sneakers that the great Cruiff wears.” I tiptoed slowly toward the door, trying to put as little weight as I could on the shoes. (43)

Arriving at a nearby park where some schoolmates were getting ready to play a soccer game, the boy-narrator joins the Holland team playing against Argentina and Brazil.

At the beginning of the game I still remembered not to kick with the tip of my shoe, so that it wouldn’t hurt Grandpa, but after a while I forgot, just like the old man at Volhynia House said people tend to do, and I even managed to kick a tiebreaker. But when the game was over I remembered and looked at the shoes. All of a sudden they were so comfortable, much bouncier than when they were in the box. “Some goal, eh?” I reminded Grandpa on the way home. “The goalie didn’t know what hit him.” Grandpa didn’t answer, but judging by the tread I could tell that he was pleased, too. (43)

Yaron Peleg (2008) refers to Keret as a “dispirited rebel with a cause” (64). In his study of Israeli culture from 1987 to 2005, Peleg argues that Keret extricates Holocaust remembrance from its official memorial site – the Volhynia House – and transfers it to a soccer field. Roman Katsman offers in a 2002 *Mikan* (an Israeli literary magazine) an analysis of “Shoes” in relation to postmodernist mythopoeia. This myth-making literary term is perhaps best known nowadays for its popularization by J. R. R. Tolkien. In Katsman’s analysis of Keret’s “Shoes,” mythopoeia entails a conscious creation of a

myth. In the case of Keret's protagonist, the myth created is individual in that Holocaust grandpa is made to become the boy's personal remembrance myth. From the perspective of the family's history, it has little to do with the mother's father who was murdered in Poland during the Holocaust. From the perspective of the boy's self-induced capacity to cope with remembrance of the Holocaust, it has everything to do with the child, the family, and the nation.

I know of no other text of such miniscule size as "Shoes" that encapsulates effectively themes of Holocaust remembrance, generational memory, communal-collective commemoration versus individual remembrance, fiction versus historicity of the Holocaust, and ethics of Holocaust fiction-writing. Derridian deconstructionist features are scattered throughout Keret's text, from eliciting the priority of the subtext, elements of discontinuity, omissions (when and what did the son know from his parents about the Holocaust and Grandpa?), lacunas in historicity (where and when did Grandpa die?), idiomatic colloquialism, irony, paradoxes, open ended endings, and the decentralization of acts of remembrance.

Having temporarily slipped (to be resumed later) into Keret's "Shoes," I now return to "the Jewish Derrida" – to borrow the title of Gideon Ofrat's 2001 study of Derrida. Ofrat's book includes an interview with Derrida conducted after Derrida's visit in 1998 to Yad Vashem, Israel's national Holocaust Museum in Jerusalem. Derrida spoke to Ofrat about "the spirit of the Holocaust" (152) hovering over any "after the Holocaust" writing. Ofrat quotes Derrida saying that "Today nothing at all can be burnt, not even a love-letter, without thinking about the Holocaust" (152). France must own up to the crimes of the Vichy era. It is not up to him to forgive or not forgive the French. It

is also not up to him to forgive or not forgive Paul de Man for his rendezvous with the Nazis.⁸³ Only victims of the Holocaust have the right to grant or deny such forgiveness. He noted that “the signature” – a deconstructionist variable in his philosophy – offsets the erasure of names in the Holocaust.

James Berger (1999) argues that to the extent that the concept of *différance* operates when “every linguistic sign reveals itself to be [...] separate from its referent, and divided and inconsistent in itself” (111), it mirrors Derrida’s “apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic” (111) after the Holocaust outlook. Berger indicates that Derrida’s contemplation of Heidegger’s infatuation with Nazism, and Paul de Man’s short-lived wartime collaboration with the Nazis, are interwoven into an ongoing process of redefining the relationship between deconstruction and ethics/justice. Yet Berger is not at peace with Derrida’s “ethical turn,” and what Berger regards as insufficient differentiation between totalitarian and non-totalitarian legal systems. It is one thing for Derrida to argue, as others do, that Nazism sprang out of Western European grain of metaphysical absolutes. It is another to skim over the demarcations between wrongs of parliamentary democracies and the heinousness of totalitarian systems. To Berger, this represents a sense of justice that is “too distant, too far deferred” and in “absolute opposition to every known form of law” (129).

The underlying issue here is deconstruction and its relation to ethics. For Zygmunt Bauman things are rather obvious. Bauman (1993) contends that modern moral codes remain far more appealing than postmodernist insoluble contradictions and absence of explicit moral dictates. In a 1995 epilogue to essays on postmodern morality, Bauman adds that he has come to realize that postmodernist uncertainty is not “a temporary

nuisance” but that postmodernist moral life is taken to mean “continuous uncertainty” (287). The problem is that “human condition [...] shot through with ambivalence” (286) is extremely difficult to live with.

Geoffrey Bennington (2000) disagrees. Mulling over deconstruction and ethics, Bennington states that “Deconstruction cannot propose an ethics” for “ethics is metaphysical through and through” (64). Yet, while deconstruction “shows up ethics deconstructing itself,” a definite sense of ethics “survives deconstruction or emerges as its origin or resource” (64). In uncovering ideas “repressed or left unexploited by [...] metaphysical determination” deconstruction may prove to be what led Derrida to famously claim that “justice (as distinct from right or law) is the undeconstructible condition of deconstruction” (65).⁸⁴

Bennington remarks that the instances in which Derrida is engaged explicitly in discussing ethics are instances in which he dialogues with Emmanuel Lévinas. This then is the meeting of the minds of Derrida, the philosopher deconstructing metaphysics, and Lévinas, the philosopher who sought to thoroughly challenge traditional metaphysical conceptualization of ethics. It is an exciting post Holocaust philosophic juncture where the focal point is our duty and responsibility toward the Other or “reading the Other’s text” (68). We all understand, as Bennington clarifies, that be it Lévinas or Derrida, there is no escaping from traditional metaphysical vocabulary. The issue is the degree of “complicity” (68) with this tradition. In an attempt to avoid complicity with the absoluteness of traditional metaphysics, Lévinas calls for ethics to be “reconsidered as *first* philosophy, prior to what he calls ontology [italics in the text]” (69).

Much of Simon Critchley's (2014) writing on Derrida is devoted to ethics of deconstruction. Critchley insists that deciphering Derrida's ethics of deconstruction is dependent on understanding Lévinasian ethics. Understanding Derrida's approach to ethics begins with appreciating Derrida's debt to Lévinas. It is a debt Derrida always acknowledged even when faulting Lévinas for not being sensitive enough to the feminist movement, and having a blind spot in matters concerning the State of Israel – a blind spot Critchley defines as Israel's "double function" in Lévinas's discourse "as both ideal and real [...], between holy history and political history" (306). Whatever the differences between these two larger than life philosophers, the most important issue for Critchley is that "Derridian deconstruction has a horizon of responsibility or ethical significance, *provided that ethics is understood in the Levinasian sense* [my emphasis]" (236) – the Levinasian sense of ethics depicted by Critchley as departing from the Heideggerian "abstruse question of Being" toward "the more concrete question of the *human* being [italics in the text]" (284). The ultimate subject matter for Lévinas is "the ethical relation to the other human being" (284). Critchley explains that while Lévinas acknowledges that we can never fully know all there is to know about other people, "unless our social interactions are underpinned by ethical relations to other persons, then the worst might happen" (285) – as it did, in the Holocaust. According to Critchley, "*Après vous, Monsieur*" is how Lévinas was fond of summarizing the entirety of his philosophy of ethics. Lévinas is quoted by Critchley saying that philosophic wisdom is not found "by starr[ing] into the starry heavens, but by looking into another's eyes [...]" (287). But there is a paradox, says Critchley; a crucial paradox that haunts Derrida's deconstructive discourse. The paradox is that "the only language that is available to deconstruction is

that of philosophy [...]” (29). It is, perhaps, in this sense that Bennington (2000) suggests that in relation to Lévinas’s limitless and absolute ethical insistence, Derrida’s foremost debt to Lévinas, never to be forgotten or minimized, “the chance for ethics” (72) lies in recognizing that perhaps “less is more” (74). In the end, as Bennington determines, Derrida’s thinking about Otherness as “non-absolute” saves Derrida from Lévinas’ unsuccessful attempt “to situate the ethical as ‘first philosophy’, against ontology” (75). In all, given present-day centrality of Derrida’s literary discourse, and the association of postmodern deconstruction with Derrida, this Lévinas/Derrida discussion is highly informative, not only as a reflection on the relationship between Lévinas’s and Derrida’s thinking, but as an overall translucent elucidation of the ethical meaning of deconstruction – an ethical meaning which I intend to develop further through Etgar Keret’s writings.

Derrida’s principle “*tout autre est tout autre*”⁸⁵ “introduces simultaneously a certain irreducible *singularity* and a certain *plurality* [italics in the text]” (75). Succinctly extrapolated by Derek Attridge (2010) when tracing Derridian deconstruction in reading and responsibility, “The Impossibility of Ethics: On Mount Moriah” is paradigmatic to Derrida’s singularity/plurality mode. It opens with a quote from Derrida’s *The Gift of Death*;⁸⁶ a rather puzzling opening:

How would you ever justify the fact that you sacrifice all the cats in the world, to the cat that you feed at home every day for years, whereas other cats die of hunger at every instant?

The preamble of the cats is clarified through Derrida’s assessment of ethics in the story of the *Akeda*, and Søren Kierkegaard setting Abraham as an example in *Fear and Trembling* (1843) of the most praiseworthy believer whose faith in God superseded the immorality

of the near-killing of his son. According to Attridge, Derrida makes his swerve from Kierkegaard – “and the cats start their stealthy advance” (58) – by contradicting Kierkegaard’s idea of the *Akeda* being a one-time “teleological suspension of the ethical” (59). Derrida maintains that every singular other, not “just” God, makes ethical behavior, “from the very first moment, from before the very first moment, utterly impossible” (59). The most precious things to us, such as love and friendship, are never completely ethical for the “realm of possibility” is dependent on “that which it excludes: the impossible” (61). There are, of course, understandable, practical, emotional reasons for preferring my cat over all other cats. But there is no way “*I can justify my failure*” (62) ethically. Abraham, Derrida argues, fulfills Lévinas’s infinite responsibility to the Other – the singularity of God – but in doing so he decides “to do the worst possible *injustice* to his son” (63). Accordingly, Attridge continues, “if the act of doing justice is always also the act of doing an injustice, ethical acts – acts which involve no injustice – cannot happen” (63). Derrida offers an example from his own, personal, life.

By preferring what I am doing here and now, simply by giving it my time and attention, by giving priority to my work or my activity as a citizen or professional and professional philosopher [...], I am perhaps fulfilling my duty. But I am sacrificing and betraying at every moment all my other obligations: my obligations to the other others whom I know or don’t know, the billions of my fellows (without mentioning the animals that are even more other than my fellows) who are dying of starvation or sickness ... everyone being sacrificed to everyone else in this land of Moriah that is our habitat every second of every day.

Derrida, *The Gift of Death* (2008):69-70

Derrida’s sense of moral responsibility dictates an obligation “to *seek out* the other, to *learn* to hear its voice and see its face” (Attridge 2010:73). Understood as such, Attridge points out that in obeying God’s command, Abraham not only sacrifices his obligation toward his son but also toward his wife, Sarah. The ethics of Derrida’s

systematic responsibility include attending to Sarah “who has been excluded, who will be sacrificed on the same altar as Isaac without achieving any of the glory of her husband” (73).

The same principles of ethical responsibility apply to deconstructive reading. While focusing on language (text and speech), Derrida traces the notions of writing and reading in relation to notions of “*truth* and *presence* [italics in the text]” (Attridge 2000:107). The issue is not whether or not Abraham “really” heard God commanding him to sacrifice his beloved son. For Derrida the issue is that “the utterance of the truth – or of a statement making a truth-claim – is in fact always *mediated* by language; language which has its own sedimented history, structural properties and figurative potential [italics in the text]” (107). The truth in language is never simply present. Among others, it means that the context in which it is produced is always different from that in which it is received.

In line with Derrida’s exposition of deconstruction as active and as toilsome labor which can never be completed, Mark Hewson’s (2011) review of Maurice Blanchot elevates Blanchot’s writings to the level of “*le travail* and not just *l’oeuvre* [italics in the text]” (16). Focusing on Blanchot’s “Literature and the Right to Death” (1999), Hewson quotes Blanchot saying that “If we see work as the force of history, the force that transforms the world, then a writer’s activity must be recognized as the highest form of work” (370). Furthermore, if a writer is not “attentive first and foremost to what he is doing, if he were not concerned with literature as his own action, he could not even write [...]” (367). To which Geoffrey Hartman (2003) adds that in the same way that for Lévinas there is no philosophy without death, “there is no writing without death” (223)

for Blanchot. Death, Blanchot stipulates, is the most human quality in us. “Men want to escape from death, strange beings that they are,” and yet, “without death everything would sink into absurdities and nothingness” (Blanchot 1999:192). The Holocaust disrupted this delicate balance between life and death. As suggested by Michael Bernard-Donals (2009) when contemplating remembrance and “forgetful memory” in the wake of the Holocaust, Blanchot was correct in *the Writing of the Disaster* when portraying the post Holocaust writer as a “daytime insomniac” who can never rest.

Blanchot’s post Holocaust faith in literature is evident in Derrida’s thinking as articulated by Derrida in “This Strange Institution Called Literature” (1992). “The possibility of literature, the legitimization that a society gives it, the allaying of suspicion or terror with regard to it, all that goes together – politically – with the unlimited right to ask any question, to suspect all dogmatism, to analyze every presupposition, even those of the ethics or the politics of responsibility” (36). The “poetic license to go against the grain,” there being “no essence of literature, no truth of literature, no literary-being or being-literary of literature” is delineated by Zlatan Filipovic in “For a Future to Come: Derrida’s Democracy and the Right to Literature” (2011) as constituent to Derrida’s philosophy. There being “no ontology of literature” (15) is a theme pursued in the next chapter.

Endnotes

⁶⁶ For Hassan's full comparative table as cited by Brooker see pages 11-12.

⁶⁷ "D" so as not to be confused with my frequent references to Marianne Hirsch.

⁶⁸ See pages 118-127 for D. Hirsch's discussion of Foucault's "silence" over the Holocaust.

⁶⁹ Kirk citing Terry Eagleton, *Introduction to Ideology* (1991):219, in "History, Language, Ideas, and Postmodernism" (1997):334.

⁷⁰ Not quite the same, however, given the persistence of anti-Semitism, I too, am not ready to throw everything into the basket of radical postmodernism.

⁷¹ "Deconstruction and the Other: An Interview with Richard Kearney," *Debates in Continental Philosophy: Conversations with Contemporary Thinkers*, ed. Richard Kearney (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004):139-156 as cited by Wolfreys (2007:35).

⁷² See, for example, Richard Rorty, "Pragmatism, Relativism, and Irrationalism," in *The Rorty Reader*, eds. Christopher J. Voparil and Richard J. Bernstein (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010):111-121, and "Thugs and Theorists: A Reply to Bernstein," *Political Theory*, No. 4 (1987):564-580.

⁷³ Fears expressed in an interview with Gideon Lewis-Kraus, "Richard Rorty," *The Believer* (June 2003): http://www.believermag.com/issues/200306/?read=interview_rorty, accessed July 31, 2009.

⁷⁴ Anyone looking for some laughs while debating Derrida's philosophy should read Rorty's essay on "Philosophy as a Kind of Writing."

⁷⁵ For the English translation, see Geoffrey Bennington, *Jacques Derrida (Religion and Postmodernism)*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993).

⁷⁶ Peeters citing Jacques Derrida, 'Abraham, the other', in Bettina Bergo, Joseph Cohen, and Raphael Zagury-Orly, eds., *Judeities: Questions for Jacques Derrida*, tr. By Bettina Bergo and Michal B. Smith (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007:10):17.

⁷⁷ Peeters quoting Derrida in Jacques Derrida and Élisabeth Roudinesco, *For What tomorrow...: A Dialogue*, trans. Jeff Fort (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2004:109):21.

⁷⁸ Amos Oz's essay also appears in *The Writer in the Jewish Community*, eds., Siegel and Sofer (1993).

⁷⁹ Jay Y. Gonen's 1975 *A Psychohistory of Zionism* in which modern Zionism is explained as "a rapid transition from inferiority to overcompensation" rooted in a repressed urge (Freudian) "to replace the father and to taste forbidden fruits against his will" (22) is another example of an all-encompassing paradigmatic modality to explain Zionism as a political movement.

⁸⁰ In his massive biography of Derrida, Benoît Peeters cites Heidegger mulling over Derrida's "*différance*" in 1967. Although, as Peeters remarks, Heidegger "was usually so ready to vaunt the philosophical merits of the German language," he paid special attention the concept of *différance*, "a concept that was deeply embedded in French." Reported by Pierre Aubenque in conversation with Heidegger, the German philosopher spent a long time trying to translate the term into German but could not.

⁸¹ Salman Rushdie cited by Bill Schwarz, "Memories of Empire," in Bammer, ed., *Displacement: Cultural Identities in Question* (1994):156-171.

⁸² Shapiro's use of Heidegger's anti-Semitic terminology to indicate Jewish homelessness or in Shapiro's preferred translation: "un-homey."

⁸³ Forgiveness, as Paul Ricoeur teaches in *Memory, History, Forgetting* (2004) cannot be bestowed on unpardonable crimes such as the crimes committed by the Nazis. Political institutions have no business granting amnesty over evil deeds of such magnitude for "It places a seal of incompleteness on the entire enterprise [of memory and forgetting]" (457).

⁸⁴ Bennington citing Derrida, *Force of Law*, Paris: Calilée, 1994).

⁸⁵ Bennington suggests David Wills's translation as "Every other (one) is every (bit) other."

⁸⁶ *Donner la mort* first appeared in the form of a book in 1999. A revised English translation appeared in 2008 and it is this text that Attridge uses.

Chapter 5: The Ethical Constellation: on Literature and Holocaust Remembrance

Jacques Derrida was a philosopher. Etgar Keret writes literature. Why bring philosophy *and* literature together under a theoretical canopy of coping with Holocaust remembrance? My response to the question is: the ethics of pragmatic political justice. It is this configuration that I set out to develop and affirm from this chapter to the conclusion of my thesis.

As a preamble to the overall discussion of philosophy, literature, and the ethics of political justice, I begin by referring to Noël Carroll's (2002) "wheel of virtue" and the relation between art, literature, and moral knowledge. Carroll's basic assertion is that while literature does not have philosophy's long history of direct engagement in the subject of ethics, by now, we have come a long way from Plato banishing the poets. In other words, the significance and relevance of fiction written, for example, by Franz Kafka, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and Samuel Beckett is a given. Who can doubt Jane Austen's pertinence to the plight of women in nineteenth-century England seeking to break through social barriers that force them to be totally dependent on the institution of marriage? Who can question George Orwell's and Alexander Solzhenitsyn's denouncement of totalitarianism?

The less obvious aspect of the literature-philosophy-ethics-politics configuration has to do with a comparative evaluation of literature's impact on ethics versus that of philosophy. Stated differently, the issue is not whether modernist and postmodernist literature and philosophy are associated with an ethical debate; both are. The question is whether a comparative analysis of philosophy versus literature is warranted in terms of efficacy in ethical probing. I submit that prior to the Holocaust the response would be

“no” – perhaps not a resounding no, but no nonetheless. In the aftermath of the Holocaust the answer is “yes,” an analysis of ethics conveyed through literature versus philosophy is necessary. Furthermore, in a post Holocaust milieu it is unclear whether philosophy can convincingly maintain its traditional lead over literature as conveyer of ethical guidance and as patron of moral knowledge.

I also draw upon a succinct treatise by Simon Critchley (2012) on ethics of commitment and politics of resistance. Critchley’s main argument is that contrary to what was traditionally assumed, philosophy does not begin “in an experience of wonder” but “with the indeterminate but palpable sense that something desired has not been fulfilled, that a fantastic effort has failed” (1). It is the connection between a philosophic sense of failure and “what might justice be in a violently unjust world” (3) that Critchley pursues by offering a theory on commitment to ethical experiences of politics. What does Critchley mean by ethical experience? First, an ethical experience cannot be passive; an ethical experience is action-oriented – including “the receptivity to the other’s claim upon me” (14). Second, an ethical experience implies approval and demand. There can be no sense of the good “without an act of approval, affirmation or approbation” (14-15) – albeit, an ethical experience does not become good “*by virtue of approval [italics in the text]*” (16). For instance, as Critchley clarifies, Buber’s meditation on the relation to Thou “is the expression of a demand to which the self gives its approval” (17). How did Buber’s self come to be constructed the way it was? Through his studies of traditional Jewish sources and other types of learning he was exposed to, family life, his social-economic environment, and so on. In other words, as Critchley argues, there is no other entity than the self that gives shape to itself.

Accordingly, and negatively speaking, if I am a person who acts in ways that I know are evil, as in acts of genocide, I am “acting in a manner destructive of the self that I am” (21). The construction of the self does not presuppose “any specific content of the good” (21) but reasons for moral actions “must be reasons for all” (31). In other words, and in line with Kant’s categorical imperative, “the only norms upon which I can legitimately act are those which I can consistently will as a universal law” (33).

Critchley follows the definition of what constitutes an ethical experience with promoting the idea of a synthesis between ethics and politics. Although, as Critchley maintains, it is possible to distinguish between ethics and politics, we must espouse to blending the ethical with the political. He contends that “If ethics without politics is empty, then politics without ethics is blind” (120). We need “ethics in order to see what to do in a political situation” (120). Politics, Critchley affirms, cannot be conducted at the level of fantasy, as in speculative metaphysics or be driven by the pervasiveness of images such as the destruction of the World Trade Center by al-Qaeda. Rather, a commitment to experiences of ethics is about political moments of democratic dissent and about a sense of politics as “now and many” (131). I share Critchley’s directive on the synthesis between ethics and politics and proceed to apply it to the philosophy versus literature conundrum.

Noël Carrol (2002) argues in relation to art, literature, and moral knowledge that natural sciences and history provide reliable *factual* knowledge but that literature is a source of *moral* knowledge. Carrol’s response to philosophers who contend that literature merely provides recycled “thought experiments” is that this is true for literature as well as philosophy. Both reveal “insight into that which we already know” (19).

Martha Nussbaum (1989) elaborates on literature as “moral imagination” and believes that moral knowledge ought to be relocated from philosophy to literature. Communicating morals “is not simply a matter of the uttering and receiving of general propositional judgments. Nor is it any sort of purely intellectual activity” (168). Nussbaum deems Henry James and Iris Murdoch instructors on living the moral life; the well lived life. Through his protagonists, Henry James strives to get it right in terms of accuracy; “not to miss anything, to be keen rather than obtuse” (188). Nussbaum further contends that the novel is a genre that denotes moral achievement as evident in “The relationship between moral attention and attention to a work of art” (186). As such, Nussbaum views the genre of the novel as “a paradigm of moral activity” (170). As for postmodern philosophy, in essays written by Nussbaum (1992) on philosophy and literature – garnered by her under the concept of “love’s knowledge” – Nussbaum notes that she is impressed with Jacques Derrida but he leaves her frustrated. It seems to Nussbaum that Derrida avoids “the practical urgency” of engaging more critically with the written. Citing Nietzsche’s Zarathustra, she applies “I love only what a man has written with his blood”⁸⁷ onto her thoughts on the shortcomings of Derridian philosophy.

Geoffrey Harpham (1999) disagrees with Nussbaum. In an effort to throw some light on “the shadows of ethics” and arrive at an idea of a just society, Harpham contends that in perceiving literature as a panacea for moral insight, Nussbaum’s critical vision fails to distinguish between the ethical and political pragmatism – a so called failure which, as noted previously, Critchley (2012), as an example, would not regard as a failure. In other words, while Critchley maintains that theoretically it is possible to distinguish between ethics and politics, ideally, one should strive to achieve an

interlacing between the two. Joshua Landy (2012), too, objects to Nussbaum's judgment of literature and does not accept her critique of literary theory. While Landy's thoughts on "how to do things with fiction" does not quite equate Nussbaum with Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* (1993), and its adulation of elitist literature as "harmonious perfection" of cultural beauty [and] intelligence (66), Landy rejects Nussbaum's notion of fictional simulation which can "fine-tune our moral decision-making capacity" (29). Armed with readings from the New Testament, Plato, Mallarmé, and Beckett, Landy critiques Nussbaum's discourse as being overly didactic. Landy does not diminish the role of literature in the humanistic quest for the moral life. Instead, he seeks to redirect the discussion from information to formation; not the content of our thoughts but the awareness as to why and how thinking is constructed. Samuel Beckett does not aim to feed us insights. Rather, the "studious balance between the closed and the open" in Beckett's tragicomic writing prompts us "to detach ourselves from our desire for certainty [...]" (11). *Waiting for Godot* is "formative fiction" projecting "the proper feel of philosophic glue-traps [...]" (15). Beckett's texts are "only for sufferers, which is to say only for those in whom philosophy has become a disease" (144).

In summary, Harpham, Carrol, and Landy imply that literature needs to be thought of as "philosophical questions in circumstances of our own" (Landy 2012:144). In accordance with postmodern deconstructionism, "cognitive clarification, emotional clarification, formal modeling" no longer serve as standards for all forms of fiction and/or text – including cinema. The postmodernist way moves from recognition of plot, scenes, and protagonists to questioning "old" patterns and benchmarks of hypothesizing,

introspecting, and interpretation. There is no more blanket uniformity, as Landy explains, as “formative fictions [...] work on one soul at a time” (13).

James Wood’s (2000) criticism of Nussbaum is by way of converging on Nussbaum’s depiction of Iris Murdoch as elemental to her paradigm on literature as a superior provider of moral knowledge. In and of itself, Murdoch’s Christian devoutness is not an issue for Wood. The problem for Wood is Murdoch’s entrenchment of morality and goodness in pious “annihilation of the self before the irreducibility of other people” (180-181), and Nussbaum’s apparent endorsement of this sentiment by way of positing Murdoch as essential to her overall theory on literature and ethics. “Why should it be the case that the highest ethics is the suppression of self, or that the greatest artists gloriously smother their personalities?” (182) Overall, Wood would have liked Murdoch to be less philosophical and more aesthetically/artistically inclined.

I concur with Wood’s appraisal of W. G. Sebald as an exceptional humanist who assumes responsibility for the real while choreographing it into extraordinary writing. In Wood’s view, Sebald’s *Vertigo*, *The Emigrants*, *The Rings of Saturn* and *Austerlitz* are “amphibiously slippery, neither quite fiction nor travelogue, and yet always absolutely artistic” (248-249). A son of a World War II German soldier, Sebald believed that the enormity of the horrors committed by his nation leaves no other choice but to deconstruct literary narratives. I fully subscribe to Wood’s (2000) admiration of this great German writer/person who excelled in creating “real” fictional narratives of “scrupulous uncertainty” (250). Sebald’s subjects “can escape nothing” (256). They are survivors of events – regardless of whether they had a direct experience of the events – which haunt them for their incomprehensibility. And yet Sebald’s pessimism is of the aesthetic kind;

a type of melancholia which outside Sebald's books would not mean much but through Sebald's narrative becomes "newly real" (257). Thus, in accordance with Wood's perspective on literature and ethics, Sebald's writings do not postulate literature as a categorical, head-on moral instructor but as the most lucid and transparent *mirror* to critical issues that are of moral nature.

Priscila Uppal (2009) offers another type of perspective on literature through an analysis of the genre of the elegy – specifically the contemporary English-Canadian elegy. It is Uppal's overall thesis that, as the title of her work indicates, *We Are What We Mourn*. In interpreting Canadian elegies as independent from English and American traditions, Uppal surveys Canadian elegiac mourning over the Holocaust. Uppal notes that although Anne Michaels is known internationally for her novel *Fugitive Pieces* (1996), it is in her poetry that Michaels continues to explore the mournful legacy of the Holocaust. Uppal makes special mention of "What the Light Teaches," an extraordinary poem by Anne Michaels. The poem appears in *Miner's Pond* (1991). It is a long poem that "explores the relationship between mourning and memory through its treatment of language and landscape" (199). Uppal points to the ways in which Michaels invites the reader "to enter a metaphysical landscape that has preserved cultural memory when personal memory has been unable to do so" (199). Uppal also remarks that Michaels does not only mourn over the victims of the Holocaust but for all generations to come, "and Western civilization as a whole" (198). Uppal observes that the "you" in the poem "is suggestively unspecific as the majority of the mourned dead are known neither by name nor personally by the poet" (199). However difficult, "the poet strives to hear their voice" (199). The use of "we" is also indicative of a collective's remembrance. It is for

the collective “we” that Michaels creates a meeting place: the river. The river, says Uppal, “is envisioned as a torrent of collective memory capable of overflowing the bounds of historical oppression [...]” (199). “When there are no places left for us/this is where we’ll still meet,” the poet says as she envisions a landscape for mourning, “a meeting place for her Jewish community [of victims of the Holocaust] within the imaginative construct of the river” (199).

Eliciting Sigmund Freud’s “Mourning and Melancholia” (1917), specifically Freud’s analysis of mourning in relation to processes of detachment and reattachment from loved ones, Uppal laments the painful arduousness of recovering memories of the Holocaust and of creating a future.⁸⁸ The “elegiac strategy” of “dialogue and active engagement with the past” (13) employed by English-Canadian poets in mourning losses fosters animated recovery and enkindling a sense of present and future. Alas, given the magnitude of destroyed lives, histories, communities, and ways of life during the Holocaust, the employment of the “elegiac strategy” becomes more difficult. Remaining fully cognizant and highly sensitive to the limitations and constraints of “recovery as a conduit to memory” (14) in relation to the Holocaust, Uppal is steadfast in her faith in elegiac language through which the memory of the Holocaust is invited into our world to be mourned now and in the future. Words like “number” and “oven” remain the property of factual history of the Holocaust but these words can now be – as in “What the Light Teaches” – poetically “redeemed from their misuse through memory” (205). Indeed, it is the poet who undertakes the task of listening attentively through language, imagination, and genre to “lost cultural narratives of the dead” (200). Thus, Uppal, a professor of English, and author of several books of poetry, fiction and non-fiction, unravels an

elegiac requiem on we are what we mourn. Specific to the conceptualization of the idea of coping with Holocaust remembrance, Uppal's study of the genre of the elegy is highly relevant, for, as we know from our personal lives, a primary prerequisite to coping is the ability to mourn.

Genre is also what triggers Tzachi Zamir's (2007) thinking on philosophy versus literature in relation to morality. Zamir is a Martha Nussbaum devotee. The genre highlighted by Zamir, in what he defines as "a double vision" on philosophy and literature, is the Shakespearian drama. Zamir believes that there ought to be less talk about moral content and more about "the manner of contemplation, support, and acceptance of this content that constitute literature's unique contributions to philosophical reflection" (19). Skillfully dodging ideological, metaphysical, and theological truth-claims, Zamir sets in motion "intellectual processes that are essential to understanding important features of morally complex situations" (22) and shows that fictional imagination fosters in readers capacities that have a chance of "reaching and affecting the springs of moral activity" (23). Turning to Shakespeare, Zamir claims that Richard III knows full well that his deeds are evil but he has no problem justifying his immorality.⁸⁹

And therefore, since I cannot prove a lover
To entertain these fair well-spoken days,
I am determined to prove a villain
And hate the idle pleasures of these days.

Shakespeare's Richard III is thoroughly non-philosophic about his evil doings. There is no metaphysical treatise on morality applicable to Richard III. There are only "if only" speculations in Shakespearian dramas. "If only Lear would have kept his kingdom undivided, if only Othello would have listened to Emilia" (89). These are not deep metaphysical dilemmas; these are temporal, unspiritual options. Philosophy can dwell on

love as it can on evil. What it does not do as well as literature is “enact the epistemic conditions that enable perceiving” (126) love or evil. Drawing a panoramic view of works of literature as “structures of experience” (127), Zamir illustrates literature’s embryonic potential to develop and enhance “our listening capacities” (126) – capacities that are linked to “experiential knowing” (127).

Peter McCormick (1983) further pursues literature incarnating lived experiences and transmuting them into moral knowledge in relation to Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina*. The canonic novel is posited by McCormick as a prototype of literary moral knowledge, albeit, McCormick considers the depiction of Anna and Vronsky’s illicit love affair a disputation as opposed to moral determination. Tolstoy’s narrative may imply some moral guidance but *Anna Karenina* offers no resolute arbitration and categorical moral judgment on adultery. McCormick appreciates this sort of approach to literature and argues that we would be doing literature a terrible disservice if we equipped novels, stories, poems, elegies, drama, comedies, myths, fairytales, folktales and sonnets with metaphysical or theological “moral truths” (410). Literature, then, is not a moral formula for the good but, to reiterate, it may very well surpass philosophy in its ability to *mirror* moral knowledge. After all, is it not true that from Plato to Descartes, and from Descartes to Heidegger, one observes an inclination among philosophers to ratify and substantiate ways of thinking as irrefutable positive axioms? In contrast, is Stephen Greenblatt (2004) incorrect in stating that far from certitude, it is precisely Hamlet’s indecisiveness and vacillation that has captured our imagination and humanist thinking? As Greenblatt asserts, it is not Hamlet’s passionate plan for revenge that all of us

remember but his contemplative hesitancy and wavering: “To be, or not to be, that is the question.”

To be sure, as argued by Paul Eisenstein (1999) in an essay on Holocaust memory and Hegel, it is not unreasonable to think of Hegel’s “Spirit” and “Absolute Knowledge” as less totalizing than postmodernists make Hegelian discourse out to be. More than anything Eisenstein wishes to refute Hegel being firmly “on the side of the fundamental fantasy of fascism” (3) and somehow preparing the philosophic ground for making Jews disappear. Eisenstein argues that to condemn Hegel after Auschwitz for some “abstract Master-Principle” is problematic. Eisenstein does not minimize “the precariousness of the universal” when subsuming “individual particulars” (15). That being said, Nazism is a complete distortion of Hegel in that Hegel’s “Absolute Spirit” is not meant to be realized through elimination of differences and particularities. Rather, the “Absolute Spirit” is arrived at “wherein one finally comes clean about the impossibility of total knowledge, wherein one experiences the abyss between all that we are able to conceptualize and the real itself” (16).

Eisenstein is not alone in making every effort to hang on to the coattails of the great masters of metaphysics despite some disturbing connectivity with fascistic movements and totalitarian regimes. Furthermore, lest this be seen as retrospective judgment applied only to metaphysics, literature too is subject to hindsight re-examination, Shakespeare included. In the aftermath of the Holocaust, Shakespeare’s imagery of Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* is viewed by some as disturbing as Immanuel Kant’s portrayal of Jews as a nation of swindlers who lack any potential for genius. Alas, divorcing ourselves from Kant is difficult enough but for many of us it is

simply out of the question when it comes to Shakespeare. Indeed, as insightfully argued by Marjorie Garber (2008), after the Holocaust we *want* to believe that Shylock's most quoted lines are somehow not the words spoken by a heartless scoundrel. Accordingly, it has become fashionable to question whether the famous lines –

I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs,
dimensions, senses, affections, passions [...] If you prick us do we not
bleed? If you tickle us do we not laugh? If you poison us do we not die?
And if you wrong us shall we not revenge?

– can perhaps be regarded as a “great speech about humanity” (130).

Garber thinks it can and I agree. First, as Garber suggests, beyond the availability of some sparse biographical details, nobody knows what Shakespeare “really” thought about Jews in the way we know what Kant thought. Second, in terms of textual analysis, Garber correctly highlights Portia entering the courtroom and asking: “Which is the merchant here, and which the Jew?” It is not inconceivable to construe Portia's question as challenging the stigmatization of the Jew. Being unable to immediately tell the difference between a Christian and a Jew is a radical thought for sixteenth century England. Third, and perhaps most important, the fact is that the portrayal of Shylock *lent itself and continues to lend itself* to transfigurations – from early staging of a hated money-lender to Laurence Olivier's 1970 amalgamation of “the Disraeli Shylock, the Rothschild Shylock, and the Shylock as up-and-coming Englishman” (142), to Al Pachino's⁹⁰ portrayal of Shylock, on Broadway and on screen, as a deeply pensive, shy, introspective, intelligent, and sad character.

I imagine there are those who would argue that there is not much difference between Mark David Chapman motivated to kill John Lennon by J. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* or Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther* driving some hopelessly

romantic young men to commit suicide, and National Socialism finding inspiration in racist eugenics and a return to Aryan paganism as promoted by the likes of Arthur de Gobineau and Houston Stewart Chamberlain. Yet neither Goethe nor Salinger can be said to have cultivated and nourished an insatiable lust for mass murder and unprecedented violence.

Fearing that I be accused of being blinded by my love for literature, I wish to contend that there are instances in literature, even great literature, where retrospective reconciliation is difficult. A vile anti-Semite, Fyodor M. Dostoevsky hardly ever missed an opportunity to picture Jews as monsters who are always on the lookout for innocent Christian boys to butcher and use their blood for ritual purposes. Had it not been for the Holocaust, I would find Dostoevsky's lies about Jewish ritual killing no more than irritating and silly. For that matter, I would probably feel the same way about Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. I cannot be sure, but it is possible that had the Holocaust not occurred, Gary Saul Morson (1983) would not have insisted in an essay on Dostoevsky's anti-Semitism, that from a moral point of view Dostoevsky's brilliance is irreconcilable with his total "submission [...] to the God of the Christians [...]".⁹¹ But the Holocaust *did* happen, and the dissonance between *wanting* to love Dostoevsky the artist (315), and having to cope with Holocaust remembrance, is too great to bridge over.⁹² That being said, and, recalling the first time (high school) I read *Crime and Punishment*, it was Raskolnikov's volatility and insecurity that made a lasting imprint on my cultural-spiritual consciousness. Above all, it was the *lack* of consistency, *lack* of single-minded lucidity, and constant ruptures in Raskolnikov's rationalization of acts of murder that enthralled me as a relatively young reader.

Some of the contentions made by Adam Phillips (2001) in his writings on psychoanalysis and literature support my approach to literature versus philosophy vis-à-vis moral instruction. Phillips's main contention is that it is not ideas qua ideas but a psychoanalytic perspective on social-political action/behavior on a massive scale that needs to be examined carefully. In other words, as perceived by Phillips, literature and psychoanalysis share the characterization of representing "forms of persuasion" (364) which do not lend themselves to be propounded as absolute moral claims.

I believe this psychoanalytic-philosophic-literary-ethics trajectory is illustrated brilliantly in one of Etgar Keret's best known stories: "The Bus Driver Who Wanted to be God".⁹³ The story opens with the reader being told that this particular bus driver upholds fixed, nonnegotiable moral precepts. Eventually the driver will come to realize the impossibility of moral perfection or absolutes, that is, unless you think of yourself as God, which for a while, he did. Over time the bus driver will come to appreciate the ethics embedded in empathetic pragmatism which, by definition, cannot be the language of totalistic metaphysics or theologian absolutes. Empathic pragmatism is the language of literary deconstruction. As Keret told Runo Isaksen (2009), a moral compass to human behavior is not about right or wrong but about empathetic relatedness to people.

Readers of "The Bus Driver Who Wanted to be God" are told at the outset that this story is about a bus driver "who could never open the door of the bus for people who were late."

Not for depressed high-school kids who'd run alongside the bus and stare at it longingly, and certainly not for high-strung people in windbreakers who'd bang on the door as if *they* were actually on time and it was the driver who was out of line, and not even for little old ladies with brown paper bags full of groceries who struggled to flag him down with trembling hands. And it wasn't because he was mean that he didn't open

the door, because this driver didn't have a mean bone in his body; it was a matter of ideology. The driver's ideology said that if, say, the delay that was caused by opening the door for someone who came later was just under thirty seconds, and if not opening the door meant that this person would wind up losing fifteen minutes of his life, it would still be more fair to society to not open the door, because the thirty seconds would be lost by every single passenger on the bus. (1)

Passengers on the bus or latecomers chasing after the bus had no idea why the driver never made exceptions to his rules. The driver himself was pretty sure they thought the worst of him. Clearly it would have been so much easier to accommodate some of the latecomers "and receive smiles and thanks" (2). Except that when it came to choosing between smiles and thanks, and moral principles, "this driver knew what it had to be" (2). That is, until an unforeseen destabilizing factor comes into play in the guise of an encounter between the bus driver and Eddie. Eddie is a decent fellow. He earns a living as an assistant cook at a restaurant called Steakaway. But Eddie had "a condition" – "one that had already caused him to miss out on all sorts of things in life" (2). It was a sickness that always made him oversleep by ten minutes "and no alarm clock did any good." Most people tolerated Eddie's "condition" and had little difficulty accepting his habitual tardiness. And so, there really was no reason for Eddie to "beat his condition" until he met Happiness, fell in love, and arranged to take her out on a date.

Unfortunately, he had fallen asleep on the day he was to meet Happiness and was running late. He began chasing after the bus "because now he had something to lose and all the pains in his chest [...] weren't going to get in the way of his pursuit of Happiness" (3). The bus driver saw Eddie huffing and puffing as he ran to the bus stop but he would not come to a stop, and proceeded to drive away from the station. He had his principles, an airtight belief that above all "relied on a love of justice and on simple arithmetic."

Eddie went right on chasing the bus “even though he didn’t have a chance” (3) until he could run no more and fell to his knees “panting and wheezing” (3). Seeing through the side mirror of the bus Eddie collapse, reminded the bus driver of something.

Something from out of the past, from a time even before he wanted to become a bus driver, when he still wanted to become God. It was kind of a sad memory because the driver didn’t become God in the end, but it was a happy one too, because he became a bus driver, which was his second choice. And suddenly the driver remembered how he’d once promised himself that if he became God in the end, He’d be merciful and kind and would listen to all His creatures. So when he saw Eddie from way up in his driver’s seat, kneeling on the asphalt, he simply couldn’t go through with it, and in spite of all his ideology and his simple arithmetic he opened the door, and Eddie got on – and didn’t even say thank you, he was so out of breath. (4)

There is more to the story but not before the narrator-author suggests to the reader that “The best thing would be to stop reading here, because even though Eddie did get to the Dolphinarium on time, Happiness couldn’t come, because Happiness already had a boyfriend” (4). As is often the case, the subtext in Keret’s stories is of greater importance or, at the very least, of equal importance. At one level, Eddie arriving at the Dolphinarium on time, only to find out that Happiness couldn’t come because Happiness already had a boyfriend” (4), has something to do with Eddie’s hopeless pursuit of happiness. “Happiness” with a capital “H” in English (in the original Hebrew version the wording is “*ha-osher*,” “*ha*” being the definite article which is not capitalized in Hebrew, but can indicate either “the” or “the” with a capital “H”) implies several things, some more ambiguous than others. But at the level of the subtext, arriving at “the Dolphinarium on time” has an entirely different meaning. Keret’s text is sparse and does not explain. It shocks, it amuses, and it vibrates very strongly. The rest is up to the reader. Accordingly, the story can be understood on multiple levels which need not

include “the Dolphinarium” connotation/subtext. But it ought to, and it *does* for Israeli readers.⁹⁴

The Dolphinarium is a discotheque located at Tel Aviv’s beachfront. On June 2001 a Hamas suicide bomber blew himself up outside the club, killing over twenty young Israelis and injuring dozens more. It was a horrific event in which the dead and the wounded were terribly young. Most were youths of Russian immigrant families. Eddie may have lost Happiness, but his “arriving on time” means he is alive, and for that matter, so is Happiness. But is she? Can we speak of happiness in relation to a situation that brings on the type of mayhem associated with the Dolphinarium calamity?

The story goes on to tell that having realized Happiness is a no show, Eddie wants nothing else but to get back home. As he begins to make his way home he sees the bus pulling at the bus stop and letting passengers off. He is far too tired and distraught to make any attempt to catch up with the bus and proceeds to travel on foot.

When he finally reached the bus stop, he saw that the bus was still there, waiting for him. And even though the passengers were shouting and grumbling to get a move on, the driver waited for Eddie, and he didn’t touch the accelerator till Eddie was seated. And when they started moving, he looked in the rearview mirror and gave Eddie a sad wink, which somehow made the whole thing almost bearable. (4)

What exactly was made “almost bearable” is left for the reader to contemplate.

Rabbi Chaim Navon (2003) constructs an interesting theological exegetical explication based on the story. Navon decodes two moral systems in “The Bus Driver Who Wanted to be God.” One is driven by moral principles and the other is driven by emotions. Initially, actions taken by Keret’s bus driver are propelled by moral principles which dictated that a predetermined definable social good outweighs any other consideration. Later, Eddie’s personal plight causes a dramatic shift whereby the driver’s

decision-making becomes emotionally driven. Navon's objective is to demonstrate that both variants are integral to Judaism. There is a code of law which dictates the way of life for a religious Jew but the rigidity of the law is at times supplemented with supportive compassionate reasoning. According to Navon, the *kashrut* law that forbids cooking and eating a mixture of meat and dairy products is based on an emotional consideration as delineated in the Book of Exodus and repeated in Deuteronomy; "Boiling a (kid) goat in its mother's milk" is forbidden because it is cruel.

I am intrigued by Navon's analysis which strives to offer a theological slant to Keret's literature as a way of making Keret more relevant to an observant Jew like Navon. How does one explain Navon's apparent need to drape Keret's story – which happens to contain the word "God" – in a theological garb? Why has it become so important for readers like Navon to make Keret their own? What cultural lesson can be deduced from this rather unusual instance of readership response? Some of the answers to these questions are provided in chapters six and seven when I expand on the reciprocity between the author and a milieu that gave birth, cultivated, and continues to respond favorably to the artistic phenomenon of Etgar Keret.

Having touched upon the inseparability between the political (as in the Dolphinarium in Keret's story) and the ethical as conveyed through literature, I now proceed to argue that Richard Bernstein's (1986 & 1991) conceptualization of the "ethical-political domain" as "non-foundational pragmatic humanism" helps shape my overall literature-political orientation. Reading Gadamar, Habermas and Rorty, Bernstein ponders over pragmatic humanism. He encapsulates his thinking in what I consider a perfect metaphorical imagery. The backdrop is that of a modern-postmodern horizon/sky

and the image is that of a new ethical-political constellation. Bernstein's "constellation" proved enormously helpful in solidifying my political-theoretical stance which rests upon a postmodernist substratum. Bernstein imagining the ethical-political horizon of our modern/postmodern era as a constellation is intended to do away with Hegel's dialectical interplay between thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. Much like the stars above that are never to become one organism or a totalizing star – a catastrophic possibility to be sure – a delicate and unstable balance between "attractions and aversions" must always be kept alive in human affairs if justice is to prevail.

In the course of what Bernstein (2002) defines as a philosophical interrogation of radical evil, Bernstein reveals that the construction of an ethical-political constellation came to him as a response to the Holocaust. Having attempted to better comprehend the phenomenology of evil from the writings of Kant, Hegel, Schelling, Nietzsche, Freud, Lévinas and Arendt, Bernstein suspects that we will never be able to fully account for evil. We have come to know that humans are capable of wishing to make others superfluous and that there is a type of evil that not only "resists total comprehension" but is so outrageously meaningless that it "resists theodicy" (227-229). The Holocaust proved Kantian deontological ethics highly inadequate. Bernstein remains skeptical of the possibility of articulating "a *theory* of evil [italics in the text]" (225) "for the choice between good and evil is inscrutable; [...] there is always a gap, a 'black hole' in our accounts" (235).

In line with Bernstein's doubts as to the possibility of categorical theorizing about evil, David Jones (2007) resists a type of psychoanalytic Original Sin predilection which shuts out any "situational explanations of human evil" (327). Mindful of the equally

mistaken inclination to “succumb to the pathology of hope” (327), Jones remains somewhat optimistic. His more hopeful outlook regarding human nature is based on general political observations which seem to indicate that genocide was/is generally a function of state-government planning, and execution, and that democracies almost never declare war against other democracies. Democracies are not inclined to lend their resources to commit genocidal acts against another democracy. There is no getting rid of peoples’ evil inclinations but pragmatic ethically democratic politics can keep our less than good nature tied to a humanist behavioral tether.

As Emmanuel Lévinas and Seán Hand (1990) reflect on a philosophy of Hitlerism, they recall a 1934 *Esprit* write-up by Lévinas in which he castigated Hitler’s diatribe as unsophisticated but menacing. As early as 1934 Lévinas called attention to “a soul’s attitude towards the whole of reality and its own destiny” (64). Lévinas did not categorize Hitler’s thinking as that of a mad man but of a person who acknowledges no historical limitations and adheres to wholesale rejection of civilization as we know it. Marxism radicalized its rejection of liberalism but in so many other ways Marxism “consciously continues the traditions of 1789” (67). Hitlerism, Lévinas prophesized, propagates “a community of masters” who do not establish a new universal order as an ideological consequence “but are out to erase what exists in order to construct “a world of masters and slaves” (71).

The query posed by James Waller (2007) on how does one become evil, and how do ordinary people come to commit acts of genocide and mass killing, is a quandary we all want answered. A psychologist, Waller focuses on collective-social-national execution of evil policies. He is among those who reject classifying Nazis as “mere”

lunatics. Most were ordinary citizens from various social-economic backgrounds who became engaged in perpetuating horrendous acts of brutality against defenseless civilians. Human nature, then, is the problem but human nature is also the source of possible remedies. Humans, Waller continues, can go the wolf-man way or the conciliatory way. The “trick” is to know what we are all capable of – and although unfortunately we already know the extent of evil we are capable of endorsing – cultivate “pro-social tendencies” (288) that minimize prerequisites that enable evil to rise to the surface. Easier said than done, and yet, I have in mind the foolishness and shortsightedness of the June 1919 Treaty of Versailles versus the wisdom of post World War II Marshall Plan. The demand that Germany take responsibility for World War I and that it be forced to disarm was one thing but the excessive reparations Germany was ordered to pay the Entente powers was, at best, counter-productive. In contrast, the American initiated plan to rebuild war-devastated European economy made far better sense and proved to be much more constructive. Mindful of not confusing explanation with exculpation, this is not to say that there is a direct correlation between the rise of Nazism and the harsh terms of the Treaty of Versailles. It is, however, to say that massive punitive measures are generally not conducive to placating evil inclinations. Waller goes on to expand on “our innate desire for *social dominance* [italics in the text]” (294) as a major problem. It is this propensity for submitting ourselves to social dominance that causes us to adapt all too willingly to undemocratic tides. Our inclination to construct social hierarchies must be kept in check. We cannot change what is innate in us but we can strategize against succumbing to it. No totalitarian governments are ever warranted and there is no such thing as “temporary” totalitarianism. The first warning signs signaling “moral

disengagement” are widespread acceptance of “excommunication” (290) of Others from within.

According to Geoffrey Harpham (1999), “the key to the kingdom of ethics” is represented in a relationship to Otherness as contemplated by Jacques Derrida through the notion of the undecidable. Harpham contends that “limited and precise prescriptions of morality” must always contain a safeguard, “a principled irresolution” (30), namely, the Derridian “undecidable.” Literature’s non-authoritarianism does precisely that when “negotiating conflicting claims” (32) – an approach to literature which accounts for Harpham’s critique of Nussbaum’s tendency to position literature in the role of moral authority. Derrida’s undecidability is epitomized by Harpham as well as Peeters (2013) in Derrida’s response to a scandalous revelation about Paul de Man – a revelation that became public knowledge on December 1, 1987 when the *New York Times* published a front-page write-up titled: “Yale scholar’s [de Man] articles found in pro-Nazi paper.” Derrida’s response to the de Man affair brings me back full circle to the literature-philosophy-ethics debate.

According to Peeters, the *New York Times* article was full of mistakes and half-truths but it received enormous coverage in the United States and in Europe. “The German press was particularly virulent while in Sweden de Man was labeled ‘the Waldheim of postmodernism’” (391). The Swedish characterization is important for, as Peeters indicates, just like the Heidegger debate, the de Man polemic “soon extended to deconstruction as a whole” (393). By 1987 de Man was no longer alive but Derrida was. For Derrida this was a terrible blow. His friendship with de Man was very dear to him.

It had flourished through their connection with Yale University. Initially, one month following the *New York Times* bombshell, Derrida said the following:

Nothing in what I am about to say, analyzing the article [in the *New York Times*] as closely as possible, will heal over the wound I right away felt when, my breath taken away, I perceived in it what the newspapers have most frequently singled out as recognized anti-Semitism, an anti-Semitism more serious than ever in such a situation, an anti-Semitism that would have come close to urging exclusions, even the most sinister deportations” (Peeters 2013:394).

“Reading through his tears with an anguished sense of the inexcusable complicity of de Man in the Holocaust” (Harpham 1999:65), Derrida’s only ethical way was to adhere to his own “exacting principles” of deconstruction. Admitting to being shocked by the discovery of his friend’s pro-Nazi writings for a Belgian newspaper (1940-1942), Derrida goes on to trace “a suppressed argument critical of ‘vulgar’ anti-Semitism” (66). Harpham points out that Derrida knew that he will lose some friends over this but there was no other way for Derrida. Taking great care to deconstruct “syntactic modulations” (Peeters 2013:395) in the de Man text, Derrida followed his conscience.

Dated January 1988, the English translation (by Peggy Kamuf) of “Like the Sound of the Sea Deep within a Shell: Paul de Man’s War” appeared in *Critical Inquiry*. It is a lengthy article of sixty two pages which I have read and reread. Briefly, Derrida speaks of the responsibilities of responding to the de Man affair in terms of “what *responding* and taking a *responsibility* can mean” (592). He then goes on to tell that when approached by *Critical Inquiry* to “be the first to speak” (596) he had to ask himself why him of all people? He who “by birth, history, inclination, philosophical, political or ideological choice have never had anything but a mistrustful relation to everything that is being incriminated with such haste about these texts” (596-597). He goes on to consider

the prudence in putting so much weight on enunciations made by a very young journalist during the war, as opposed to an oeuvre of over forty years of “the theoretician, the thinker, the writer, the professor, the author of great books.” True, the first reading left him with “a wound, a stupor, and a sadness that I want neither to dissimulate nor exhibit” (600). The hurt will never go away but more needs to be said. It may seem that a somewhat coherent ideological stance comes through the de Man text, and yet, “de Man’s discourse is constantly split, disjointed, [and] engaged in incessant conflicts” (607). De Man insists on the richness of the German culture and “the fundamental role that it always plays and ought still to play in the destiny of Europe” (613) but at no point does de Man name Nazism “a fortiori in order to praise it” (613).

Halfway through his response, Derrida bemoans the fact that nothing he has said, and is about to say, can heal the anguish felt when reading de Man’s “*Les Juifs dans la littérature actuelle*” (Jews in Contemporary Literature). Published on March 4 1941 in *Le Soir*, the composition does not speak of Nazism but it contains “stereotypical descriptions of the ‘Jewish Spirit’” (622). Jewish writers, according to de Man, are unimportant and have no substantial influence on great literary genres. Then, “in a terrifying conclusion,” de Man alludes to “a solution to the Jewish problem” (623). No, it does not speak of extermination or killings. De Man’s solution speaks of the creation of “a Jewish colony isolated from Europe” which would only mean a loss of “a few personalities of mediocre value” (623) for Western culture.

What does one do with “the fact of the *unpardonable* violence?” Derrida asks, and then answers: “one must have the courage to answer injustice with justice” (623). Specific to “The Jews in Contemporary Literature,” it is possible to read it as vulgar anti-

Semitism. But “I will dare to say, this time as before, ‘on the other hand’” it is possible to view the de Man text “as an indictment of vulgar anti-Semitism [...] against the ‘myth’ it feeds or feeds on” (623). Derrida has little doubt that in 1941 Nazi occupied Belgium, it was rather risky to go against the current and undermine deafening Nazi propaganda which vehemently caricatured Jews as all powerful and a threat to everything that was good about German culture. If German culture “let itself be invaded by a foreign force, then we would have to give up much hope for its future” de Man wrote. But de Man continues by saying that this is not the case for despite “Semitic interference in all aspects of European life,” Jewish literature has made a miniscule dent in European cultural excellence.

Was this really de Man’s convoluted way of spewing anti-Semitic rhetoric in order to actually say that the Jewish “threat” is no threat at all and hence physical violence against Jews is unnecessary? I doubt it. Derrida admits he does not know, although, like Shoshana Felman (1992) – Paul de Man’s student – he minimizes the seriousness of Paul de Man’s wartime journalistic career. Both are terribly upset over de Man’s 1941 write-up in *Le Soir* on Jews and European literature but they differ in explaining de Man’s silence over his wartime past. I much prefer Derrida’s uncertain and subdued tonality over Felman stirring up an animated and ultimately absurd comparison between Primo Levi as a silent witness (of Auschwitz) and de Man as “a witness to the very blindness of his own” (139). Equally senseless (to me) is Felman’s notation on the significance of de Man reflecting toward the end of his career on Walter Benjamin’s silencing of himself. As Felman believes, Walter Benjamin’s tragic miscalculation of his chance to escape to safety, and thus leading him to commit suicide, is comparable to de

Man's choice to remain silent over his past mistake/miscalculation. Felman resorting to Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* in an effort to vindicate de Man is equally irritating. I fail to think of "call me Ishmael" as akin to de Man surviving "the fanaticism of the war against the whale and the disaster of the shipwreck by uncannily and paradoxically – as Melville quite fantastically imagines it – *floating on a coffin* [italics in the text]" (135-136). The commonality Felman discovers between Ahab and de Man "condemning himself to exile" – an "exile" of studying at Harvard University and becoming a professor at Yale University – is unconvincing.

Derrida and Felman contemplated the appropriateness of De Man not asking for absolution and remaining silent over his past. Whatever arguments are employed to excuse or condemn de Man, I believe that the summation Derrida offers in his response provides some sort of closure to the affair. Derrida recommends that this grievous matter left us a deconstructed exercise in combating totalitarianism. Reading de Man obligates us "to reread, to understand better, to analyze the traps and the stakes – past, present, and especially the future" (650).

In all, Derrida's principled philosophic undecidability brings postmodern philosophy much closer to literature's non-absolute irresolution. Harpham's (1999) definition of ethics as, "the point at which literature intersects with theory, the point at which literature becomes conceptually interesting and theory becomes humanized" (33), is akin to Derrida's stance. Harpham's reading of William Styron's *Sophie's Choice* – a tale narrated by an American writer from the South about a Polish survivor of Auschwitz named Sophie – as a successful precipitation of "mutual stimulation" (37) between literature and theory, is meant to reinforce an overview of ethics as a matrix; "a hub from

which various discourses, concepts, terms, energies, fan out and at which they meet, crossing out of themselves to encounter the other, all the others” (37). Critics such as Efraim Sicher (2005) who found *Sophie’s Choice* to be a problematic novel in that, in Sicher’s words, it introduces “a reductiveness that brings the evil of Auschwitz within reach of ordinary Americans” (122) notwithstanding, Harpham links the virtues of greater interdependency between philosophy and literature with the ethics of postmodern Derridian representation.

Cora Diamond (1983) reacts to Martha Nussbaum’s message “to let works of literature teach us something about what moral philosophy can be” (156). Diamond contends that the modernist notion of there being a possibility of neutral analysis of morals is no longer applicable. Generally speaking, it seems to Diamond that we have come up short in clarifying the type of issues that belong on the agenda of moral philosophy; abortion and same-sex marriage among such issues. Diamond further contends that it is precisely in appraising the boundaries of moral philosophy and its relation to literature that we can sharpen and deepen our understanding of ethics.

D. D. Raphael’s (1983) deliberation on whether literature can be thought of as moral philosophy dwells on a typology of representation of literary and philosophic narratives. According to Raphael, we do not have to agree with Plato’s *Phaedo* or *Republic* in terms of content; but how can we not appreciate Plato’s manner of presenting an argument? The reverse is also true. Martin Buber is deemed by Raphael as a wise philosopher who, regrettably, employed irrational methods of persuasion. The content of Buber’s moral insights is profound but the manner in which Buber interjects into

everyday experiences bizarre deductions – as having an “I-thou relation with a tree” – results in Buber becoming less convincing or morally applicable.

Finally, by way of concluding this chapter and the theoretical debates introduced in Part I of my thesis, as well as creating a passage to Part II which is more Israel specific, I refer to Adia Mendelson-Maoz (2009) approach to Israeli Hebrew literature as a moral laboratory. Embracing Derridian deconstruction, Mendelson-Maoz emphasizes the built-in, self-regulating, self-criticism, and self-doubt embedded in the ethics of deconstruction which prevents breeding hierarchical paradigms. A key literary sample in Mendelson-Maoz’s study of literature as a moral laboratory is David Grossman’s novel about Holocaust remembrance, *See Under: Love* (1989). Labeling Grossman’s narrative rhythm as “organized rupturing [my translation of Mendelson-Maoz’s Hebrew term *k’tiut meurgenet*]” (203), Mendelson-Maoz shows how the novel is purposefully divided into four disjointed and stylistically different sections. Grossman navigates between an Israeli boy who fantasizes about overpowering a monstrous Nazi beast, an adult by the name of Shlomo who travels to Poland in the footsteps of his authorial muse, Bruno Schultz, and a writer-inmate named Wasserman who tells the camp commandant, Herr Neigel, an episode per night from Wasserman’s *Children of the Heart* in exchange for Neigel’s promise to shoot the author who only wishes to end his suffering and die. Pointed out by Dvir Abramovich in *Back to the Future: Israeli Literature of the 1980s and 1990s* (2010), Shlomo is present in the Wasserman-Neigel encounter, but only Wasserman, the victim, can see Shlomo. The boy finds *The Hebrew Encyclopedia* – which he reads obsessively – lacking in information about the Holocaust. Accordingly, the final part of

the novel titled “The Complete Encyclopedia of Kazik’s Life,” may be thought of as missing information about the Holocaust which can best be transmitted through literature.

Gilead Morahg (2002) classifies Grossman’s novel as taboo-shattering literature. By taboo-shattering Morahg means that Grossman’s novel dares enter a concentration camp through the imagination. Asked about the ethics of fictionalizing the reality of a concentration camp, Grossman revealed in a 1995 interview with Yael Admony⁹⁵ that he was plagued by insoluble queries: “what if it had been me and my family [...]; what if the Holocaust were to catch up with me [...] how would I have acted as a victim?” There is no moral answer forthcoming to Grossman’s self-tormenting question but over some four-hundred pages of brilliant literature, Grossman exemplifies a postmodernist conveyance of unanswerable ethical probes.

Ruminating briefly over David Grossman’s literature about Holocaust remembrance sets in motion a conversation on the interlacing of Israeli-Hebrew culture and politics with the modality of coping with Holocaust remembrance. Specifically, the ensuing part of my study posits Holocaust representation, the modality of coping with Holocaust remembrance versus postmemory, postmodernism, Jacques Derrida, and literature-philosophy moral knowledge in relation to cultural Zionism, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Hebrew literature, and Etgar Keret’s writings. I begin with a survey of modern cultural Zionism as spawning a cultural milieu in which coping with Holocaust remembrance is construed as inseparable from Israel’s national and political circumstances. I then proceed to the final chapter in which I show that the analytic roads paved throughout my work point to Etgar Keret’s writings.

Endnotes

⁸⁷ Martha Craven Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (1990) citing F. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. W. Kaufmann (New York: Dover Publications, 1966).

⁸⁸ This discussion is articulated by Uppal in the "Introduction" to the book, pages 1-37.

⁸⁹ For Zamir's full analysis of Richard III see pages 65-91.

⁹⁰ Interviewed in 2010 by Jason Zinoman of The New York times, Pacino was asked if he ever felt Jewish, to which he responded: "What is a Sicilian but an Italian Jew?"

⁹¹ Morson citing Sigmund Freud, "Dostoevsky and Parricide," in *Dostoevsky: a Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Rene Wellek (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice, 1962:98):311.

⁹² As told by Jill Robbins in *Altered Reading: Lévinas and Literature* (1999), when asked what brought him to philosophy, Emmanuel Lévinas said that it was reading Russian literature that influenced him most, Dostoevsky in particular. A paradox of sorts, as Robbins points out, for in general, with the exceptions of Agnon, Celan, and Blanchot, Lévinas' response to the Holocaust led him to reject art.

⁹³ Etgar Keret, "The Bus Driver Who Wanted to be God," *The Bus Driver Who Wanted to be God & Other Stories* (2004).

⁹⁴ André Alexis (2002) writes in his Globe and Mail review of *the Bus Driver Who Wanted to be God* that he wishes he could read Keret in Hebrew for he cannot stand the thoughts that he may have missed something in translation.

⁹⁵ Yael Admony's interview with David Grossman (1995) cited by Dvir Abramovich in *Back to the Future: Israeli Literature of the 1980s and 1990s* (2010):78.

PART II:

CULTURAL AND POLITICAL ZIONISM, ISRAELI HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE, AND ETGAR KERET'S LITERATURE

An Arab shepherd is seeking a kid
on Mount Zion.
And on the opposite hill I seek my little son.
An Arab shepherd and a Jewish father
both in their temporary failure.
Our two voices meet above
the Sultan's Pool in the valley between.
Neither of us wants the son or the kid
to enter the terrible process
of Passover song "One Kid."

Afterwards we found them between the bushes,
and our voices returned to us
and we wept and laughed deep inside ourselves.

Searches for a kid or for a son were always
the beginning of a new religion in these mountains.
(Yehuda Amichai, "An Arab Shepherd is seeking a kid on Mount Zion,"
The Great Tranquility: Questions and Answers)

Chapter 6: Secular Cultural Zionism, the Palestinian Other and Coping with Holocaust Remembrance

Theodore (Binyamin Ze'ev) Herzl (1860-1904), the visionary prophet of *Der Judenstaat* (The Jewish State), first encountered the incurable European malaise of anti-Semitism while studying law at the University of Vienna. He later came upon a more ferocious form of anti-Semitism in Paris as a journalist covering the trial of Alfred Dreyfus who was wrongfully accused of treason in 1894. Dreyfus would eventually be exonerated but Herzl would never forget the ugly swell of anti-Semitism. Ari Shavit

(2013) designates the Dreyfus affair as a landmark in the epic story of Israel's tragedies and triumphs. Shavit marks out the year Dreyfus died, 1935, as the year the racist Nuremberg laws were enforced in Nazi Germany, and a year when Jewish doctors, scientists, architects, engineers, intellectuals, musicians and artists fled Germany and arrived in Palestine. Tel Aviv hosted a *Purim* parade (the *Adloyada*) in March 1935, and the second sporting events of the *Maccabiah* Games in April 1935. Over seven million crates of oranges, grapefruits and lemons were exported that year from Palestine, and *Land of Promise*, a documentary on the progress made by Jewish settlers in Palestine, was filmed in June 1935. A vicious human storm was brewing in Europe while "a mysterious bond between Jews and oranges" was cultivated in Zion-Palestine. There seems to be "no limit to the land's bounty" and "there is no limit to the ability of Palestine to absorb and save [Diaspora] Jews" (67). In 1935, Zionism is an ideology of Jewish social democrats and liberals wanting Zionism "to be rooted in the land and to grow from it gradually and naturally. There is no talk of taking the land by force" (65).

Some seven years later the killing machines at Auschwitz go into full gear. The magnitude of the European catastrophe is yet to be realized in Palestine but with Rommel's plans to invade Palestine – thankfully intercepted by Montgomery defeating Rommel at El Alamein – the Zionist narrative changes. A new Zionist ethos comes into being: the "ethos of Masada" (95). The outbreak of World War II cut short the Zionist dream of millions of Jews scattered throughout Europe landing on the shores of Palestine. The dream turned to ashes. Gone was "the great human reservoir that was to save Zionism" (96). Along with it, a long Jewish tradition of "adjustment to death" (97) morphed into resistance. Regardless of the historical accuracy of existing narratives about

the events of 73 A.D. at the fortress of Masada, where almost one thousand Jewish rebels chose to kill their families and then take their own lives rather than surrender to the Roman Legion, what now evolves is a Zionist *raison d'être* of resistance. "From now on the decisive image of the Zionist enterprise is not that of swamps drained or of orange groves bearing fruit but that of a lonely desert fortress casting the shadow of awe on an arid land" (97). But as Shavit notes, there will be consequences to what he defines as "a dark secret of Zionism" (108): either Zionism or nothing. Either a Jewish State in Zion cleansed of populations deemed as a threat (Palestinian Arabs), or another Holocaust, or a Masada-like mass suicide. Proceeding to convey the grim story of the 1948 expulsion of Arab men, women, and children from the town of Lydda, demolishing its mosques and turning its houses, markets, and stores into ruins, Shavit laments: "I see a reality I cannot contain; I am not only sad, I am horrified" (131). Tragic consequences to decision-making aside, he feels Israelis are left with one choice only: "either reject Zionism because of Lydda, or accept Zionism with Lydda" (131).

Even if Shavit's construction of the events that took place in Lydda can be challenged, in general terms, most Israelis have resigned themselves to accept Zionism with Lydda. A much greater divide between Israelis transpired in the aftermath of the 1967 war between Israel and surrounding Arab countries. Hardly anyone questions Israel having no choice but to win the war and take hold of Palestinian territories. However, many object to what should have been a temporary occupation (legal by international law) becoming an annexation (illegal by international law). It is over the legitimacy of the continued occupation of pre-1967 land populated by Palestinians that the Israeli nation is conflicted – a conflict that currently seems insurmountable. Prior to 1967 the

land in question was illegally annexed by Jordan. Aside from two wrongs – illegal occupation of the land by Jordan and then by Israel – not making a right, as I continue to uphold throughout my political argumentation, as a Canadian-Israeli-Jew my heart is with my people and their moral conduct. Somewhat analogous to a parent who can only or mostly worry about the conduct of her own children, I only focus on what I believe is the politically ethical way which the nation I belong to ought to embrace. In any event, generally speaking, the Israeli political Right supports “the settler movement” and the Left blames “settlers” (*mitnah^halim*) for the breakdown of attempted peace initiatives between Israelis and Palestinians.

On the pro-settlement end is a group of zealots who view the 1967 victory as a sign from above sanctifying the liberation of Judea and Samaria toward an ultimate replacement of the State of Israel with a Kingdom of God. The secular counterpart to religious zealots is a small group of post-Zionist historians and sociologists. Baruch Kimmerling and Ilan Pappé regard the 1967 occupation of Palestinian inhabited land as a mere expanse of the initial lawless enterprise of Zionist-Israeli colonialism. Laurence Silberstein (1999) relies on the teachings of Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, Paul Gilroy, Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak to buttress the “post-Zionist” thinking on knowledge and power in Israeli culture. Silberstein also points to an earlier group known as the “Canaanite movement” of the 1940s and 1950s as similar to post-Zionism in its ideological stance. Founded in 1939, and reinforced by archeological and linguistic (Semitic) claims, “The Council for the Coalition of Hebrew Youth” (cynically referred to by critics such as Natan Alterman and Baruch Kurzweil as the Canaanite movement) urged Zionist youths to sever their ties with Judaism and “return”

to a mythical Hebraic past. Just like Islam and Christianity, the Canaanites regarded Judaism a universal religion. As such, the Canaanites argued, Judaism cannot make any territorial claims. Canaanite Zionists avowed to having more in common with indigenous Middle Eastern ways of life than with what became known after the era of the Second Temple as Judaism.⁹⁶ The somewhat fascist-like exaltation of nature characteristic of the Canaanite movement notwithstanding, the fact is that disproportionate to the movement's political powerlessness, it left a significant cultural and intellectual residue – a phenomenon undoubtedly attributed to the intellectual quality of its members. As a political organism the Canaanite movement more or less evaporated shortly after the establishment of the State of Israel but the writings of Yonatan Ratosh, Benjamin Tammuz, Amos Kenan, Adia Horon, Uzzi Ornan, and Aharon Amir, remain integral to the canon of Hebrew literature.

I disagree with much of Silberstein's contention that Jewish Israeli literature written by Amos Oz and Amos Elon, and the Israeli Palestinian writers Anton Shammas and Emile Habiby are aligned with the Canaanite legacy. Specific to Oz, Silberstein misreads Oz's Zionist convictions as challenging "all claims of a unified Jewish people, a unified zionism⁹⁷ or a unified Israeli culture" (19). Not wishing to dwell on post-Zionism but knowing the centrality of Oz to Hebrew literature and his relatedness to Etgar Keret's writings, perhaps it is best to allow Oz to speak for himself as a mainstream Leftist-liberal Israeli. Delivered as a keynote address in 1996 at a ceremonial dedication of the Chair for Democracy and Tolerance at Bar Ilan University, the speech was titled: "A Full Wagon, An Empty Wagon?"⁹⁸

[Zionism today is] everything that is part of the People of Israel,
everything that has accumulated over the generations, everything that has

been born within or adopted from without and become part of the family heritage [...] That which is accepted by all and that which has been accepted only by some; that which is accepted today and that which was accepted in previous generations. That which is written in Hebrew and that which is written in other languages; and that which is in books and that which informs the text; perhaps it also includes certain codes of behavior and modes of response which are linked to a collective memory: possibly a certain brand of humor and of sophism, a strongly critical bent, self-irony, self-pity, self-hatred mingled with self-righteousness, pragmatism draped with fantasy, ecstasy and skepticism, euphoria soaked in depression, melancholy gaiety, and a certain mistrust of all kinds of authority and a gut resistance to injustice.

Oz's words do not echo any of the binary radicalism – homeland versus exile, workers versus bourgeoisie, Hebrew versus Jewish – Silberstein wrongly attributes to him. The truth is that Baruch Kimmerling, Silberstein's much quoted muse, was far more sophisticated in his critique of mainstream liberal Zionism than Silberstein. Kimmerling created quite a scandal with his 1983 book on the socio-territorial dimension of Zionist politics and went even further in a 2005 study on Israeli statehood, society, and militarism. Kimmerling was angry with Israelis, who, according to Kimmerling, go about their business oblivious to Israeli militancy. Born in Romania, the Kimmerlings survived Nazism by escaping in a Gypsy wagon. From an early age until his death at the age of sixty seven, Kimmerling suffered from the crippling effects of cerebral palsy but his poor health never hindered his intellectual abilities. Eulogized by Lawrence Joffe from *The Guardian* on Tuesday 26 June 2007, Joffe noted that even Kimmerling's critics regarded his scholarly work as "a seminal reformation of Israeli sociology that places 'the conflict' centre-stage".⁹⁹ Kimmerling identified three historical-sociological orientations to Israeli politics: the security orientation, the conflict orientation, and the settlement or peace orientation. Although he did not believe in the danger of a military coup in Israel, he was always greatly disturbed by "the military-mindedness of large parts of the civilian

population and political leadership and by the high expectancy that the military will solve non-military problems” (Kimmerling 2005:226). The difficulties I have with Kimmerling’s historical-sociological revisionism¹⁰⁰ are echoed by Anita Shapira and Derek Penslar (2003) in their survey of Israeli historical revisionism from Left to Right. Shapira and Penslar argue that a history-revisionist critique is not unique to Israel. In his contribution to the book, Michael Walzer suggests that historic “retelling” is integral to any national-liberation movement that succeeds. Penslar contends that it is best to think of Zionism dialectically as “historically and conceptually situated between colonial, anti-colonial and postcolonial discourse and practice” (85).

Between the polarity of situating Zionism as a colonial enterprise or as a steppingstone toward the bringing about of God’s Kingdom, there are several other types of orientations – some more intelligent than others – on past, present, and future Zionism-Israel. If I were to be asked to choose one or two terms that best encapsulate cultural, social, economic, and political Zionism – with all its contours of courage and fears, brilliance and naiveté, hope and despair, vision and short-sightedness – I would be inclined to select two terms: “tragedy” and “wrestling.” The first is extrapolated from Bernard Avishai’s (2002 edition) title to his in-depth exploration of Israeli democracy and its revolutionary past. The second is derived from the words “wrestling with Zion” which appear in the title of Tony Kushner and Alisa Solomon’s (2003) compellation of Jewish-American responses to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Indeed, tragedy and wrestling appear to me as epitomizing the Homeric Zionist epic, although, by tragedy I do not mean an ancient Greek calamity headed for an inevitable doom. Rather, I have in

mind a revolutionary tempest in modern Jewish history imbued with Aristotelian poetics of noble characters, cathartic moments, fear, and pity.

I consider Avishai's narrative on the tremors leading to the 1967 war followed by a euphoric delusional aftermath, to be a balanced and highly intelligent discourse.

Avishai does not euphemize the facts. The Palestinian territories expropriated in the course of the war were/are not "liberated" but by international law illegally occupied. On the other hand, appraising the religious *and* secular expansionist post 1967 vision of a Greater Israel, Avishai is mindful of this having much to do with some very real survival fears generated before the war by Egypt, Syria, Jordan, and other Arab countries embarking on a crusade to annihilate the Zionist enterprise. To this day it is difficult to explain King Hussein's refusal to accept Israeli Prime Minister Levi Eshkol's guarantee that if Jordan remains neutral the eastern front will not be touched by the Israeli army. It is quite possible that had faraway Arab countries such as Iraq, Tunisia, and Morocco not seem overly enthusiastic to send troops (as far as I know the troops never actually arrived) to help Egypt, Jordan, and Syria drown all Jews living in Israel in the Mediterranean Sea, or had the United Nations under U Thant's leadership made some serious effort to guarantee Israel's survival, more Israelis would have felt inclined to act magnanimously and return the spoils of the war. Alas, there is no question that the preamble to the 1967 war registered as a traumatic Holocaust *déjà vu*. Six years later the ineptness of Golda Meir's government led to the unforeseen 1973 attack on Israel by Egypt and Syria on *Yom Kippur* (Day of Atonement), which more or less sealed what Avishai posits as a tragic shortsightedness of Israelis playing master over millions of vanquished Palestinians while pretending to hold on to democratic values. It is a tragic

story in that time and again the splendor of the Zionist cultural narrative is tarnished by serious lapses in judgment that are often fueled by real unfortunate circumstances.

As for wrestling, the association is with Genesis 32:25 and the biblical text describing Jacob wrestling with a stranger “until the break of dawn”.¹⁰¹ Exegesis bent on representing Jacob wrestling with a mysterious man/being/angel as an inner struggle between doing the right thing and being prone to deceiving his brother (and then having to flee) is the orientation taken by Tony Kushner and Alisa Solomon (2003) in selecting over fifty reactions from Jewish-American writers, poets, journalists, and intellectuals, to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin, Steven Feuerstein, Marcia Falk, Jonathan Safran Foer, Naomi Klein, Robert Jay Lifton, Arthur Miller, Adrienne Rich, Susan Sontag, and Rabbi Arthur Waskow are among the contributors. None arrive at a clear-cut adjudication over right or wrong. Always dear to my heart, Grace Paley’s “Afraid” epitomizes this type of indecision.

My father said, I told you they’d run into trouble. It’s true my parents died years ago, but they still speak to me whenever I’m willing to listen [...] Anyway, what is this business of settlements? Probably mostly from Brooklyn. What do you mean they’re tearing up trees and knocking down people’s houses? Then the Arabs (he always says Arabs) for revenge they go after the Jews by killing themselves along with our people? Then our people take revenge? Then back and forth? [...] My God, I’m glad I’m six feet under. And the Jews of America say all this is OK? [...] I think they lost their Jewish minds. Us; poor people hounded all over the earth for a couple thousand years and now they want to be the hounds? [...] My mother who died thirty years ago [...] She says, only have pity [...] (234-235)

Homing in on the September 1993 handshake between Rabin and Arafat on the White House lawn, James Young (2003) illuminates in an essay on Jewish memory in a postmodern age the profundity of the moment. It symbolized for Young a passage from modern Jewish memory to postmodern remembrance. If modernist Jewish memory

strived to liberate itself from “archaic meanings” (241) of the past, postmodern Jewish memory is more pluralistic and more self-doubting. The very same Yitzhak Rabin who issued in 1948 an order to expel all the Arab inhabitants of Lydda, now acknowledges through the symbolism of an ill-fated handshake with Arafat that not only is he hoping for a changed future but that the past too needs to be remembered differently. In view of clicking cameras from all corners of the world, the legendary fighter was asking the Jewish people not to forget their past but reconsider its remembrance and commemoration in light of the sufferings brought upon the Palestinian people. Sadly, with all that has transpired since September 1993, including Rabin’s 1995 assassination, continued Israeli occupation of post 1967 Palestinian territory, Arafat’s corrupt ways, and the emergence of Hamas as a political factor, Israelis seems to be stuck in what Paul Ricoeur (2006) would view as a Freudian “repetition compulsion.”

Gadi Taub (2010) studies the struggle over the meaning of Zionism for Israelis and Jews supporting the post 1967 settler movement. He speaks of a growing divide between those who prioritize a state (*Medinat Yisrael*, State of Israel) as in a sovereign and independent political entity, and those who prioritize the land (*Eretz Yisrael*, Land of Israel), namely, a territorial disposition. At the moment, a violent armed clash between these oppositional camps does not seem likely. The immediate danger looming over Israel is in its democratic infrastructure which hinges on resolving the state-land dichotomy. Taub is also careful not to romanticize a democratic Zionist past. Concisely stated by Avishai (2002), Zionist Jews of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries did not identify with the Zionist cause “for the sake of democracy” (22).

Avishai discusses two branches of Zionism: cultural and political. Cultural Zionism was inspired by Asher Zvi Hirsch Ginzberg (1856-1927) – better known by his pseudonym, Ahad Ha'am, meaning “one of the people.” A believer in a Hebrew renaissance of the Jewish spirit, Ahad Ha'am argued that traditional Judaism could no longer serve as the glue that keeps the Jewish people together. Although he advocated incorporating Rabbinic/Talmudic teachings into a new Hebraic spirituality, these texts would no longer be considered sacred. Hebrew, not Yiddish, was to be at the core of this Jewish renaissance. Only a Hebrew language freed from centuries of sanctification could be instrumental in delivering and carrying through the torch of modern national self-determination for the Jewish people. As Avishai delineates, the Zionist branch known as political Zionism was inspired by the charismatic leadership of Theodore Herzl. The ultimate objective of political Zionism was to establish a sovereign national-territorial entity for the Jewish people which would never again have to rely on the grace of hosting countries that have consistently shown vulgar symptoms of an incurable disease known as anti-Semitism. Only once, due to difficulties Herzl encountered in negotiating with world leaders, was a territory in East Africa considered as an alternative to Zion-Palestine. As Avishai remarks, other than causing a verbal storm during the proceedings of the Sixth Zionist Congress in 1903, “The Uganda Plan” was quickly forgotten.

Eventually, between passionate political, cultural, Marxist, socialist, Hebraic, biblical, territorial, religious, and secular ideological variations and squabbles, a form of “synthetic Zionism” surfaced which consolidated most branches of cultural and political Zionism. Its proponent was Chaim Azriel Weizman (1874-1952). According to Avishai, this Zionist cultural-political-military-spiritual-pragmatic *modus vivendi* endured until the

aftermath of the 1967 war. It basically stands for Israelis being “strong and united against the outside world; that religious splits and class conflicts must be suppressed for the sake of unity [and] that the Jewish state was every Jew’s patrimony” (231). Early “Zionist settlement yielded security and inspiration” and was to become “the new, actual center of Jewish spiritual life [...] a force that mediated between the Bible, Jewish historical scholarship, and archeology [and Zionism alone] gave Jews the promise of normalcy and peace” (231). All factions of Zionism recognized the tenacity of anti-Semitism and the legitimate quest of the Jewish people to be like any other nation and not be persecuted as “abstract citizens” (Taub 2010:27).

As for Arabs living in Palestine, Taub contends that the charge made against Zionist pioneers as being oblivious to native Arabs is exaggerated. He points to Israel’s Declaration of Independence in which an explicit concern for minority rights is articulated. Taub insinuates that had it not been for the post 1967 settler movement’s discriminatory policies toward Palestinians, the realities of Israeli Arabs and Palestinians languishing in refugee camps since 1948 could have been resolved through compensation for lost land, property, homes, and livelihood. But that was not to be. According to Taub (and Avishai, Ezrahi, Oz, Grossman, Keret, and others), the toxic combination of pre 1967 dread of another Holocaust with post war victorious jubilation ousted checks and balances between “redemption on the one hand [and] the state on the other” (96).

Avi Sagi and Yedidia Z. Stern of Bar Ilan University are two religious Zionists who are critical of what they consider a troubling shift in their movement. Articulated in *Barefoot Homeland* [*moledet yehefa*] (2011), Sagi and Stern long for the “good-old-days” when *Bnei Akiva*, their religious Zionist youth movement, did not appear to be interested

in imitating ultra-Orthodoxy ways of much reliance on rabbinic authority, segregated schooling, and disciplinarian dress codes. Sagi's "requiem to religious Zionism" (2011:137-144) argues that messianic expansionist "liberation" of the land of Zion was never a founding principle for religious Zionism. Sagi points to a disturbing resemblance between current codifying of gender segregation among religious Zionists and Calvinist Protestantism. Sagi bemoans: "*Bnei-Akiva sheli einam od* (my *Bnei-Akiva* are no more) [my translation]" (144). Sagi and Stern do not dwell on whether messianic religion had something to do with the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. Instead, they promote the idea of renaming the annual Memorial Day for Rabin to *Yom Ha-democratya* (Democracy Day) (228). Sagi and Stern do not behold current Israeli political stratification as between secular and religious, or Left and Right, but as polarization between fanatics and demoralized pragmatists. They eagerly await the surfacing of a third trend; one which gives meaning to being Jewish *and* democratic.

Taub (2010) maintains that the era of checks and balances is embodied in the teachings of Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Hacohen Kook, and the years following 1967 are viewed by Taub as exemplified in the extremist teachings of his son, Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Hacohen Kook. Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Kook (1865-1935) was the founding spiritual master of religious Zionism who envisioned Jewish rejuvenation which included a return to the land of Zion. Rabbi Kook served as Chief Rabbi of Palestine. His son, Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Hacohen Kook (1891-1982), head of Jerusalem's *Mercaz HaRav*, a *yeshiva* founded by his father, became a spiritual leader to the religious settlement movement of the West Bank. Thousands of students were inspired by Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Hacohen Kook teachings. In an informative study on messianic Zionism and Jewish religious

radicalism, Aviezer Ravitzky (1996), a renowned Judeo-humanist Orthodox Jew, and Israel Prize laureate, raises some fundamental questions and issues. Ravitzky wonders whether present-day Jewish religious thinking can “acknowledge an intermediate or hybrid model that is neither exile nor redemption? Can it make room for a notion of Jewish historical existence that hovers somewhere between these two poles without clearly belonging to either” (1-2)? While Ravitzky’s extensive study encompasses marginal anti-Zionist religious groupings, such as Neturei Karta and Satmar Hasidim, the ones who matter most in terms of Israel’s future are religious Zionists. Secular Zionists point to what they perceive as a departure of Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook from the precepts of his father, Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook. What fascinates me is the yearning and keenness with which secular Israelis wish to believe that the current tension between religious and secular Zionism is entirely the fault of a son who supposedly betrayed his father’s teachings. Even prior to turning to Ravitzky I suspected that this so-called father-son dichotomy is a myth (wishful thinking myth) propounded by secular Israelis.

Indeed, Ravitzky deflates the myth of Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook compromising his religiosity for the sake of worldly Zionism. Rather, Ravitzky explains that “What for the father had been merely a utopian hope was manifest to the son and his followers as a concrete reality” (82). Rabbi Dov Lior of Kiryat Arba may be using extreme language when he refers to the Israeli army as “the army of the Lord” (84) but Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook’s acceptance of the secular Zionist “pioneer in the Land of Israel” is not to be confused with his long-term vision which does not allow for a Zionist rebirth “without a parallel spiritual one to guide it” (89). Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook believed in the idea of human progress which empowers “the human determination to achieve eschatological

fulfillment” (103). There are times in which a Copernicus, a Darwin, or an Einstein signals a necessary pause in reaching the summit but there is no basis to assume that the elder Rabbi Kook entertained the possibility of a *lasting* secularization of Jewish Zionism. He may not have perceived 1967 – as his son did – as a cathartic event signaling an end to provisional secular Zionism, but Ravitzky dispels the idea that Rabbi Zvi Yehuda HaCohen Kook’s interpretations of his father’s teachings came from nowhere. The fact is that the son merely carried his father’s legacy to its “logical extreme” (123).

The elder Rabbi Kook died in 1935. Hitlerism was on the rise but the Final Solution was several years away. Ravitzky can only speculate on Rabbi Kook’s reaction to the Holocaust. What is not a matter of speculation is that for his son “only a deterministic, messianic interpretation of the State of Israel can confront the Holocaust and endow it with any religious meaning” (127). Seven years after the war of 1967, and one year after the shock of the unforeseen 1973 Yom Kippur War – to which young religious Zionists responded without hesitation despite mobilization coinciding with the holiest day of the Jewish calendar¹⁰² – Rabbi Zvi Yehudah Kook announced to his many followers that they are in the midst of a redemptive era. Acknowledging that not all Israelis live in accordance with the laws of the Torah, readiness for redemption need not be measured by the conduct of all Jewish citizens but by the moment’s “a priori, unconditional religious meaning” (136). Ravitzky clarifies that Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook (who died in 1982) was not speaking on behalf of all religious Zionists. One such dissenting vocal opponent was Rabbi Yo’el Bin-Nun. Bin-Nun made it clear that if it ever came down to having to choose between the State and the Land of Israel, it would be the state. Ravitzky affirms in the afterward to his book (207-209) that Bin-Nun is one

among many such moderate religious Zionists. He does not minimize Rabbi Zvi Yehudah Kook's countless students who fervently sanctify his teachings. For them, a partial peace agreement with the Palestinians is downright senseless since the only peace worthy of achieving is an absolute "perfect peace" (140). It is in relation to them that Ravitzky ponders how long can Israel "content itself with being a mere beginning and not press forward?" (140).

Michael Morgan identifies the Six Day War in 1967 as an ideological and psychological catalyst that caused a visceral release of dormant threats of annihilation thrusting Holocaust remembrance into a "focal location in the Jewish people's identity" (2001:87). In the aftermath of the war, both, Israelis opposing and Israelis supporting the settlement movement evoked and continue to evoke the memory of the Holocaust. Arye Naor (2003) attempts to formulate "lessons of the Holocaust versus territories for peace" and argues that changing circumstances determine the vigor in which the pendulum of Holocaust remembrance swings in either direction. The terrorist attack on Israeli athletes at the 1972 Munich Olympics triggered an awakening of feelings of the vulnerability, while the 1977 visit by Egypt's President Anwar Sadat to Yad Vashem buttressed the confidence of those who believed that the Jewish people were existentially in a better and more secure place.

Naor tells of supporters of the Movement for Greater Israel, among them the writers Moshe Shamir and Uri Zvi Greenberg, who, in 1979, when Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin successfully negotiated a peace treaty with Egypt, equated Begin with Marshal Philippe Pétain, former head of France's pro-Germany Vichy regime. Yitzhak Rabin's government signing the Oslo Accords in 1993 was depicted by some as

reincarnation of the controversial *Judenrat*. Advocates for territories in exchange for peace are also in the habit of conjuring up remembrance of the Holocaust. Ezrahi (2012) invokes Walter Benjamin's "protest culture" (298) as being in congruence with anti-settlement expostulations. She highlights Hanokh Levine's theatre production, *Ha-patriot* (The Patriot) which "conflates the iconic Jewish child from the Warsaw Ghetto and an innocent Palestinian child" (296-297). Novels, stories, and poems written by David Grossman, Yoram Kaniuk, Yehoshua Sobol, Dan Pagis, and Dahlia Ravikovitch are submitted by Ezrahi as literature which projects the Holocaust onto a morally "embattled present" (300) vis-à-vis the occupied territories.

Ezrahi concurs with the Israeli historian Idith Zertal (2005) who is unequivocal in her opposition to employing Holocaust remembrance in sanctifying territorial gains. In a 2000 composition on Israeli collective memory, fear and war, Zertal refers to Ernest Renan's ominous forewarning against too much memory and too much history. Zertal argues that an access of collective memory always comes with selective amnesia. Exaggerated Israeli militancy is sure to follow any time the memory of the six million victims is brandished "as a sublime lesson" (2000:105) in situations which smack of Jewish/Israeli defenselessness. Serious lapses in political accountability occur whenever the incomprehensibility of the Holocaust becomes "a commodity" engaged in "a fateful transformation of the State of Israel, a modern, rational, political manifestation, into the Land of Israel, the primordial, sanctified, and a-historical concept of Israel" (120).

A near complete schism exists between those who think like Zertal and Ezrahi and those who have been influenced by the teachings of Rabbi Kook (son). Rabbi Yoel Bin Nun, a member of the settlement movement but as already alluded to, not an

extremist, told Shavit (2013) that after the Six Day War broke out, while fighting from alley to alley in east Jerusalem was still taking place, “the skies opened and they touched the earth” (204). The voice that echoed in his ears was that of Kook’s revelatory words instructing his students to listen to the land “beckoning us” (204). “The land filled our soul. It was as if the Bible were suddenly alive. A historic event of Biblical magnitude had occurred: the State of Israel had returned the people of Israel to the Land of Israel” (204). Yehuda Etzion, a resident of the settlement Ofra spoke to Shavit about the skies opening in 1967, crashing down again in the 1973 Yom Kippur War, and reopening with the settlers’ movement of *Gush Emunim* [Bloc of the Faithful].

It was about bringing the people of Israel to the mountain of Israel. [...] Our way is the way of our fathers; we must go back to the land of our fathers, go back to the mountains we lost. We must bring Zionism back to the mountains and bring the mountains back to Zionism” (208).

In all, as Shavit argues, post 1967 and 1973 bring “religious Zionism from the fringes of the Zionist narrative to its center” (224) with the settlement movement conceived “outside the womb [...], outside state law, state borders, and state sovereignty” (224). “Bereft of international goodwill” and “devoid of international context” (224) the settlements exist and do not exist.¹⁰³

A different type of representation of the political dispute over land is constructed by Meir Wigoder (2010). Wigoder is a photographer theorist at Tel-Aviv University. Known in Hebrew as *homat ha-hafrada* (the wall of separation), there are those who object to the Israeli built West Bank barrier-security for political reasons. Other object to it for environmental reasons. In a user-instruction booklet on photographing the Barrier Wall, Wigoder guides students on how to use the camera as a conveyer of politically-ethical messages. Some are convinced that the barrier functions

as a protective wall from Palestinian terrorist attacks. Environmentalists are offended by the construction of an imposing coarse fixture amidst a serene agrarian landscape. Those objecting to the wall on political grounds argue that the wall stands for an illegal *de facto* confiscation of Palestinian land. Wigoder interlaces into photographic asceticism highly suggestive associations with the Holocaust. First, through a series of strictly technical instructions, Wigoder demonstrates how to stage things so as to dramatize the visual-structural crudeness of the barrier. He suggests that a possible technique would be to consider whether or not to include pedestrians in the photos. If the idea is to accentuate the infringement on human rights, it may be advantageous to include pedestrians. On the other hand, it may take away from the depiction of the wall as invasive and a violation of nature's habitat. It is when Wigoder's camera zeroes in on some innocuous numbers and letters imprinted on the construction materials that associative Holocaust memories are set in motion. The imprints are mere remnants of initial architectural calculations but the mercilessness symbolized by stamped numbers and letters on a silent surface is hard to miss. An impassible barrier and walls barricading civilian populations does not sit well with Wigoder's historical-cultural memory. Does Wigoder actually equate the building of the barrier with the construction of ghettos and death camps? Not to my knowledge. Does he wish to tap into a painful Jewish collective memory in order to bring home the dehumanization of an entire population by his people? I believe he does. In all, Wigoder surmises that photographing the barrier wall as an "aesthetic weapon" can only go so far; it often leaves the onlooker with an overwhelming sense of helplessness or desperation – *ein onim* in the Hebrew text.

Dan Bar-On posits in a 1997 publication two types of Zionist-Israeli cultures: a “culture of death” and a “culture of life.” In a culture of death citizens/members are unable to let go of an attachment to “a myth of death and dying” and find it near-impossible to become more receptive to “the hopeful prospects of a peace process” (1997:97). Similar to an individual who grew up with too much violence and becomes addicted, so to speak, to violent situations, societies/nations may develop “a comfort zone” of fear and death.

Bar-On believes that the cyclical Jewish calendar reinforces this prevalent mood of endangerment. There are, to be sure, agricultural associations with Jewish celebrations and annual holidays. That being said, Bar-On identifies a disproportionate number of religious-national festivals that are linked with some remembrance of a threat to Jewish survival. Hanukah is associated with the threat of the Greeks, Purim with the Persians, Passover with the Egyptians, the Ninth of Av – the destruction of the First Temple – with the Babylonians, and the destruction of the Second Temple with the Romans. Non-religious commemorations of the dead occur on Memorial Days for Holocaust victims and fallen soldiers in the Israeli wars. Nowadays, the threatening Other is no longer the Greek, Roman, or German but Iran, Hamas, and Hezbollah. Bar-On does not minimize the ugly impression left by Palestinians joyfully celebrating Iraqi Scud missiles aimed at Tel Aviv during the Gulf War, or jihadist rubbish spewed by the likes of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Regardless, Bar-On insists that present-day Israel ought to be able to better restrain the culture of death and specifically a culture of death that connects Holocaust remembrance with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

A long-time member of Kibbutz Revivim, Bar-On researches and provides therapy to Holocaust survivors. He also investigates the psychology of children and grandchildren of Jewish survivors and Nazi perpetrators. Bar-On's work helped me pursue and affirm my thesis on Holocaust remembrance as a form of coping. As I have stated repeatedly, Israelis-Jews are justified in fearing another catastrophe. Any critique of Jewish-Israeli neurosis which transforms fear into aggression needs to be processed with a great deal of empathy. It is from this standpoint that I appreciate Bar-On's efforts to drill into Jewish-Israeli collective identity that fear is not conducive to political justice. I fully concur with Bar-On's hope that Israelis learn "to live with ambiguity" which fosters the development of a critical counterpart to "self-definition that has been achieved mainly through the negative use of the Other" (99). Ezrahi may sound more demanding of Israelis, but she too makes sense to me when stating that "the phantoms of the genocidal past can still be contained, indeed, if household needs [Israeli-Palestinian conflict] take priority" (2012:308).

Daniel Bar-Tal's 2001 study of societies "engulfed by intractable conflict" as societies in which fear overrides hope supports Bar-On's thinking. Fear activates a physiological reaction subconsciously "grounded in the perceived threatening present, often based on the remembered threats in the past" (605). According to Bar-Tal, hope does not spark an automatic physiological response for it is imbued in cognitive and "positive imagination of the future" (605). As Bar-Tal's findings show, the problem is that fear rooted in unmitigated forces of the subconscious tends to override hope. Repeated experiences of fear result in "overestimation of dangers and threats" and "selective retrieval of information related to fear [and] avoidance of risk" (604). In

contrast, hope allows for cognitive flexibility and taking risks in situations where there is no assured outcome. Similar to Ezrahi and Bar-On, Bar-Tal believes that a meaningful shift from fear to hope requires more than a political fix. In Bar-Tal's words, "hope orientation not only needs to inhibit the automatic activation of memories associated with fear, but also must replace these memories with new beliefs and behaviors" (620).

Amos Oz suggested to Shavit (2013) that the Israeli peace movement failed to recognize the extent to which Israelis are driven by fear. He argued that "The Right's strongest argument is fear" and at some level it is "a legitimate argument" (Shavit 2013:260). The Israeli Left, including him, miscalculated. "It overlooked and has not dealt with the fact that for millions of Palestinian refugees, the main concern was-is not the occupation but a wish to return to their lost Palestine" (254-255). He suggested that the Left dominated the anti-occupation debate but practically speaking, on the ground, lost badly. "We didn't stop colonization. We never managed to forge a coalition wide enough and strong enough to stop the settlers [...] We failed to say to the world and to our people that occupation must cease even if peace cannot be reached" (Shavit:256-257). In retrospect, if a peace movement were to start anew, Oz suggested to Shavit that he would recommend one major change: "I would address our fear of Arabs; I would have a genuine dialogue about the Israeli fear of extinction" (260).

Ezrahi, Bar-On, Oz, and Bar-Tal are anything but oblivious to the Arab world keeping Israelis attached to "collective memories that fixate their fears" (Bar-Tal 2001:621). Gestures such as Edward Said's insistence that Arabs recognize the devastating impact of the Holocaust on the Jewish people, Emile (Imil) Shukri Habibi's acceptance of literary prizes bestowed upon him by, both, the Palestinian Liberation

Organization (PLO) in 1990 and by the Israeli government in 1992 by way of demonstrating cultural coexistence, and President Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian Authority stating that the Holocaust was “the most heinous crime to have occurred against humanity in the modern era” (*New York Times*, April 27, 2014) – are all important in helping Israelis redirect the tides of fear and channel them into hope.

Another ray of hope may found in Palestinian literature. Literature written by Palestinians is not in the purview of my thesis nor part of my academic expertise. I therefore rely on Samira Meghdessian’s 1998 “Discourse of Oppression” in which Meghdessian explores Palestinian writings during the *Intifada*, the Palestinian uprising against Israeli occupation in the eighties and nineties. Meghdessian makes note of Palestinian intellectuals such as Salma Jayyusi and Hanan Ashrawi who daringly voice their critique of Palestinian writers who do not seem to be able to rise above the “old” tragic melodrama. Meghdessian emphasizes the *Intifada* as a catalyst to the surfacing of the female Palestinian protestor-writer. In other words, the struggle for freedom from oppression is not only directed at the Israeli occupier but at gendered forms of discrimination. Although powerlessness, violence, and martyrdom remain dominant motifs in Palestinian literature, Meghdessian detects an entirely new inflection, unheard of in the past: a measure of empathy with Israelis. Meghdessian cites a poem titled “In Search of Yaakov Eved” by Fawaz Turki.¹⁰⁴ “Yaakov” is how Jacob is pronounced in Hebrew and “Eved” means slave in Hebrew. I believe this remarkable poem cited by Meghdessian (1998) speaks for itself.

Yaakov Eved is like me
he knows all the stabbed dreams
all the ones who died
and who now keep company

with their gods,
So Yaakov Eved and I
we sit and talk about this and that [...]
and Yaakov Eved says Salaam Shaaer
and I say Shalom Yaakov.
Yaakov is like me
he knows all the lonely travelers
all the ones who never returned [...]
Now I do not know where
Yaakov Eved is
and I do not know where to find him
I have never known anyone by that name
but these verses are for him.¹⁰⁵

I am well aware that some, perhaps many, would consider my thrill over a glimmer of hope extracted by Meghdessian out of Palestinian literature, naïve. Like Meghdessian, Jayyusi, Ashrawi, Turki, and Samir El-yousse,¹⁰⁶ I expect and hope for many more such gestures from Palestinian writers and intellectuals. Having said that, the dialogue I am having here on Holocaust remembrance and political responsibilities is not with the Palestinians but with the people I know best: the Israeli-Jewish people. It is with this in mind that I criticize the political implications in Alan Mintz's (2011) suggested way of entering "the Great Archive of the Holocaust" (186) as articulated in a study on popular culture and the shaping of Holocaust remembrance in America. Mintz's way is pedagogic "pilgrimages" of Jewish youths to former concentration camp sites. Known as "March of the Living," the trips are referred to by Mintz as "the most powerful weapon in the Jewish educational arsenal" (34). I appreciate Mintz's earnest search for "rays of hope and ethics in the enterprise of the Holocaust museum," and his longing to discover "some cannons of morality that counter the reign of evil" (33). That being said, I disagree with Mintz's way of coping with Holocaust remembrance through emotionally laden visits to European Holocaust sites, followed by some sort of cathartic purgation in

Israel, “so as to enact the dramatic passage from destruction to homeland” (33). In fact, this sort of pathos is an anathema to me. I view this emotionally supercharged voyage from extermination to redemption as a passage from fear to belligerency. I very much doubt whether anyone amongst Mintz’s “troops” can ride through a ten day tempest – from Auschwitz and Majdanek to Jerusalem and Tel Aviv – and come out with a type of cognitive and emotional dexterity needed to join Fawaz Turki in his search for his imaginary hopeful Yaakov Eved.

In contrast, I view Jessica Lang’s (2008) analysis of Holocaust literature written by Chaim Potok a more hopeful form of coping with Holocaust remembrance. Titled “Violence, Redemption, and the Shoah,” Lang’s essay posits Potok’s novels *The Chosen* (1967) and *The Promise* (1969), as well as *Wanderings*, Potok’s 1978 work on Jewish history, as elucidating “a sense of promise, a sense of hope” through the writer’s navigation between actual and imagined violence. Weaving into *Tikun olam* (the Jewish notion of repairing the world) forgiveness that cannot be granted for wrongs that are not “quantifiable” and hence “identifiable” (75), Lang analyzes the continuance from *The Chosen* to *The Promise* as sequential writing indicating the possibility of reaching a balance between emotional (*The Chosen*) and cognitive (*The Promise*) responses to the Holocaust. According to Lang, Potok exemplifies in his sequential move from *The Chosen* and then to *The Promise* the possibility of imagining the catastrophe through the “redemptive power of art” (84). Lang’s way of conferring upon Potok the potential embedded in art as a form of coping with remembrance of the Holocaust is highly relevant to secular Hebrew literature written in Israel during and after the Holocaust.

I say “secular” Hebrew literature for Modern Hebrew literature is commonly associated with secular artists. That being said, the so-called secularism of Hebrew-Israeli writers is mingled with factors that complicate attempts to define secularism of Jewish-Israeli authors such as Etgar Keret. As I proceed to show, defining secularism and deciding whether secularism and secular are the same thing is complicated enough. Applying such terminological clarification to secular Jewish-Israeli writers is even more confusing. What does it mean to be a secular Jew or a secular Israeli-Jew? Why would Yehuda Amichai profess to be secular, as he did, while God’s presence or absence permeates his poetry? Why would secular Hebrew authors such as Dan Pagis and Amir Gilboa care about the presence or non-presence of God during the Holocaust if they do not believe in God? Expounding on the meaning of secular/secularism in general and then more specifically in reference to Modern Hebrew literature provides the conclusion to the current chapter. At the same time, the concluding part is meant to offer a preamble to the next and final chapter of my thesis about Etgar Keret’s literature as exemplifying the conceptualization of coping with Holocaust remembrance.

In rethinking secularism, Fred Dallmayr (1999) argues that *secularism* – as different from secular – is more in line with the French *laïcité* which connects with the removal of religion from government affairs. J. Milton Yinger (1967) suggests in a write-up on pluralism, religion, and secularism that secularism be used to refer to “beliefs and practices related to the ‘non-ultimate’ aspects of human life” (18). Secularism does not necessarily reflect anti-religious sentiments or a radical substitute for religion. Rather, secularism is perceived as “simply another segment of life” (19). While for the most part Yinger associates religion with bloodshed and intolerance he nonetheless

recognizes that the religious-secularism divide is more of a multipartite continuum than a dichotomy. For him building a house is a secular endeavor but for a Maori it has significant religious meaning.

Charles Taylor (2007) explains over more than one thousand pages why he thinks it makes little sense to speak of secular-religious dichotomies. Copernicus, Darwin and Freud, says Taylor, do not refute religion. He rejects a correlation made between modern civilization and the “death of God” (21) and disagrees with those who denigrate secularists as “having lost, or sloughed off, or liberated themselves from certain earliest, confining horizons, or illusions, or limitations of knowledge” (22). Past religious practices were “naïve” and modern practices are “reflective” (13) thanks to secular concepts of time and individuality that have injected life and sensibility into stagnant religious ways. We no longer speak of evil spirits but of mental illness. As Taylor sees it, Spinoza’s view of The Plan without a planner, and Darwinism refuting the biblical narrative of Genesis, do not negate a belief in a transcendental God. Faith is not about believing or not believing; it is about an “immanent frame” (550) which some of us regard as closed and others as open. A religious mind is no more closed or open than a secular mind but thanks to a secular modernist innovative spirit, religiosity has relinquished its closed, anachronistic ways so that the doorway to it remains open.

Ruth Abbey (2000) reflects on Taylor’s “inescapable frameworks” of a secular age. While I am not as convinced as Abbey that Taylor’s theism is as morally accommodating of Marxism and/or feminism as Abbey is, I accept Abbey’s representation of Taylor’s “moral ideal” and “epistemological doctrine” (83). Abbey reiterates Taylor’s objection to depicting modern secularism as a mere loss of a superior

sense of morality and shows how Taylor goes out of his way to emphasize “the moral rather than the intellectual attractions of the secular outlook” (201). Taylor, Abbey suggests, honestly believes that secularism has set theism on the right track.

Conrad Ostwalt’s (2003) “secular steeples” give the religious-secular continuum an interesting cultural and religious spin. Ostwalt points to a blurring between the sacrosanct and the temporal. Ostwalt focuses on “the functional authority of religion in [American] society” (5). Given that religion still functions as a regulator of behavior and morality, Ostwalt regards secularism as having more to do with changing “structures of power in society” (23) than with the dissipation of religion. Ostwalt also argues that secularized popular art embraces initiatives and expressive modes of religious motifs. For example, Don McLean’s “Bye, Bye Miss American Pie” speaks of the Father, Son, and the Holy Ghost – presumed by critics and musicians to be in association with Buddy Holly, Ritchie Valens, and the Big Bopper killed in a 1959 plane crash – and Madonna’s popular song: “Like a Prayer” (195). Of particular interest to Ostwalt are secularization of “the sacred Apocalypse” in postmodernist films such as *12 Monkeys*, *Independence Day*, and *The Matrix*. Nowadays, apocalyptic “agents” – religious precepts of apocalyptic doom – are more likely to be a killer virus, extraterrestrial aliens, or out of space meteors. Hopes for salvation and deliverance are now projected onto a Jesus-like Keanu Reeves (174) in the role of Neo, the savior in *The Matrix*.

David Biale (2011) asserts that Jewish secularism is grounded in traditional sources. Biale contends that Biblical, Talmudic, and rabbinic texts are not estranged from Jewish temporality. Even the Kabbalah, “the most theosophical genre of Jewish literature” (4), relates to the materialistic worldly. According to Biale the rabbinic term

for profane is *hol* which translates into everyday; “neither holy nor defiled” (5).

Hiloniyut (secularism) or *hiloni* (secular) is an offshoot of *hol*. Biale refers to Amos Funkenstein’s (1986) conceptualization of “secular Jewish theology.” Integral to Funkenstein’s secular Jewish theology is a “dialogue, however implicitly, with pre-modern Judaism” (13). Ahad Ha-am’s most acclaimed protégée, Hayim Nahman Bialik, the great secularist historian, Simon Dubnow, and the polemicist, Micha Yosef Berdichevsky, epitomize so-called “secular Jewish theology.” Biale is correct in stating that secular Jewish theology was, and continues to be, overwhelmingly present in the formidable corpus of Hebrew literature. Toiling the land of Zion Avraham Shlonsky romanticizes secular Zionist pioneers as he adorns them with a *talit* (prayer shawl) and *tfilin* (phylacteries).

Dress me, pure mother, in a striped tunic of splendor
and with dawn bring me to work.
Wrap my land in light like a talit [...].
And in the evening father will return from his toils
and like a prayer he will whisper contended:
my dear son Avraham,
skin and veins and bones,
Hallelujah.¹⁰⁷

The quality and tenor of cultural Zionism under Ahad Ha-am’s tutelage, known by its movement’s name *Hibat Tzion* – commonly translated as “Love of Zion” but more accurately translated by Hamutal Bar-Yosef (1996) as “Sympathy with Zion” (70) – was influenced by the revolutionary spiritualism of Russian *narodniks* (populists). Nonetheless, in their prioritization of intellectualism over emotionalism, Ahad Ha-am’s followers were anti-romantic. Bar-Yosef also dismisses any notion of attributing Nietzschean-Dionysian rhetoric to Theodore Herzl. Herzl never acquired the tonality of apocalyptic romanticism. As for early twentieth century Marxist-Socialist Zionism, it

certainly did not move in the direction of “swallowing romanticism” (73). Did immigration to Palestine and firsthand intimacy with the coveted land change things? Yes and no. “Yes” according to Bar-Yosef in the cultish *Hashomer* (self-defense units) appropriation of Arab attire, décor, and folkloric aura, and “yes” in terms of the Canaanite movement’s exaltation of Pushkin and “Caucasus primitivism” (74). “No” in terms of the writings of major authors of pre 1948 Palestine such as Yosef Hayim Brenner, Aharon David Gordon, Aharon Reuveni, Asher Barash, and Yitzhak Lamdan. What permeates from their writings “is neither a happy return to the cradle of the nation’s history nor an escape to nature and pure childhood” (75); disillusionment and painful realism counterbalances and often nullifies mystification and romantic enigmatic fantasy.

Nurith Gertz studies mythic narratives as well demythologized themes characterizing secular Zionism. Of particular relevance in Gertz’s survey titled *Sh’vuya be’haloma* (2000) – translated as *Myths in Israel Culture: Captives of a Dream* although literally meaning “imprisoned in her dream” – is “the few-versus-many” myth. According to Gertz, mythologizing a vulnerable David against a mammoth Goliath is a theme propagated in many cultures. In its Jewish variation it is exemplified in the legendary triumphant rebellion of the Maccabees in 167-160 BCE against the Seleucid Empire. In its secular Zionist adaptation the rebellion against Hellenistic religious coercion is replaced with a virtuous struggle for national-political self-determination. Surmised by Gertz, the mythical secular Zionist narrative of confronting a Goliath Other persists throughout the decades leading to the establishment of the State of Israel and years after. Over time, “familiar, well-rehearsed narratives” (172) continue to serve Israeli politics but the consensus over earlier Zionist-Israeli myths is gone. This is not a

straightforward issue of erasing old narratives; it is a *process* of demystification whereby a hegemonic national chronicle is not discarded but broken into a panorama of subtexts which were meant to live side-by-side in mutual disagreement. Ben-Ari and Bilu (1997) assert that the fractures within the ranks of secular Zionism ought to be understood as reflecting “a broader social *zeitgeist*” (233). They regard the diminution of impassioned ideological nuances “a prerequisite for the political process of reconciliation and peace” (235).

Hannan Hever (2013) examines God, theology, and politics in secular Hebrew literature. Hever and others note that while it may seem paradoxical for secular Israeli writers to be obsessed with God’s presence or non-presence, the reality is that secular Israeli Hebrew literature is ambivalent toward Judaism as a religion, as opposed to Judaism as a culture and a way of life. As an example, Hever notes a theological underpinning surfacing in what is ostensibly a secular Zionist-Israeli construct in Yehudah Amichai’s poetry. Envisioning an absent God that he does not believe in, Amichai writes –

When God packed up and left the country, He left the Torah
with the Jews. They have been looking for Him ever since,
shouting, “Hey, you forgot something, you forgot,”
and other people think shouting is the prayer of the Jews.
Since then, they’ve been combing the Bible for hints of His
whereabouts, as it says: “Seek ye the Lord while He may be found,
call ye upon Him while He is near.” But He is far away.
(“Gods Change, Prayers Are Here to Stay,” *Open Closed Open*, 40-41)¹⁰⁸

In the concluding chapter of Shavit’s *Promised Land* (2013), Shavit imagines “an ultimate Zionist congress” (392) undergoing an evaluative review of the movement’s historical record. “The need was real” and “the insight was genius” (392-393). The vision was ambitious but was too late in preempting the Holocaust. The Holocaust

pulverized the secular Zionist vision for ever. From then on “Zionism became an unruly process of improvising imperfect solutions to acute challenges;” “If another historic disaster were to strike, it might be the last” (393). Stephen C. Feinstein (1998) adds that second/third generation Israeli literature about the Holocaust ought to be thought of as secular *Responsa* (rabbinic decisions or rulings arrived at in response to questions) or *Midrash* (exegetical method of interpretation).

This then is a schematic cultural backdrop of *tragedy* and *wrestling* to Etgar Keret’s secular literature. What now remains as a precursor to the next chapter is to usher Keret into the marvel of literature written in the Hebrew language. Eric Zakim (2006) states that from its inception, secular cultural Zionism is reflected *and* instructed by literature written in the Hebrew language. Scholarly accounts provided by others,¹⁰⁹ all expand on Hebrew literature’s role in the formation, cultivation, and spread of usage of modernized Hebrew language – from vocabulary and syntactic inflections to metaphoric-idiomatic expressions. One way or another all are explicatory of a creative reciprocity between the “miracle” of the revival of the Hebrew language and the chronicle of Hebrew literature.

Benjamin Harshav (1993) emphasizes the fact that the Hebrew language renaissance relied on a plurality of origins from the Bible, Talmud, and other traditional sources, as well as linguistic borrowings and adaptations from Aramaic, Yiddish, and Arabic. In other words, linguistic Hebrew innovations were/are not construed *ex nihilo*. Hannan Hever (2002) elaborates further on the Hebrew language when deliberating the development of the Hebrew canon as a form of modern nation-building. Hever contends that as a case-study, the Zionist-Hebrew linguistic and literary rebirth is instructive in

studying any cultural expressions of revolutionary national movements. Benjamin Harshav (1993) speaks of “a new [Hebrew] base” (177) which was/is created through an organic relation with a Hebraic and Jewish past/present. Harshav maintains that it is often a historical shock that enables a “peripheral nucleus to move to the center of culture” (178). He argues that in the same way that Russian Futurism migrated to a cultural center following the shock of World War I, the pogroms of 1881 and the devastation of World War I, thrust Hebrew language awakening to center-stage cultural Zionism. The modernist resurrection of the Hebrew language provided Jews as individuals and as a collectivity with “a vehicle for expressing a totality of twentieth-century experience in a language of their own, and a new social identity, irrespective of their various countries of origin and political views” (81). Hebrew “grew as a language of modern sensibilities, fiction, politics, and ideology” (83) with a biblically-based territorial linkage. The rest is truly history. Unlike other objectives of political and military Zionism, in the matter of the revival of the Hebrew language as a spoken language and as the language in which formidable literature is written, all expectations were surpassed. Etgar Keret was born in August 1967 into a precarious and volatile historical, social, and political environment, in which, to cite Hever (1993), Hebrew literature and its language “are perfectly secure” (175).

The next and final chapter is aimed at bolstering the conceptualization of coping with Holocaust remembrance through an assemblage of major theoretical components of my thesis, and conjoining them with an explication of Keret’s literature. The aim is not to repeat what has already been conveyed. Rather, the intention is to further illuminate

the theoretic paradigm of coping with Holocaust remembrance through Keret's storytelling.

Endnotes

⁹⁶ For further reading on the Canaanite movement see J. S. Diamond, *Homeland or Holy Land? The 'Canaanite' Critique of Israel* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), Yaakov Shavit, *The New Hebrew Nation: A Study in Israeli Heresy and Fantasy* (London: Frank Cass, 1987), and Nurit Gertz (ed.), *Hakvutza hakna'anit – sifrut ve'ide'ologya [The Canaanite Group – Literature and Ideology] Volume 1 and 2* (Tel Aviv: Open University Press, 1986).

⁹⁷ Silberstein does not capitalize Zionism.

⁹⁸ Amos Oz, "A Full Wagon An Empty Wagon?" presented by MEITAR – The College of Judaism as Culture on November 1996 as reprinted by The Center for Cultural Judaism (New York).

⁹⁹ Lawrence Joffe, "Baruch Kimmerling: Controversial Critic of Israel's Origins and its Role in the Middle East," *The Guardian*, Tuesday 26 June 2007

<http://www.theguardian.com/news/2007/jun/26/guardianobituaries.israel> (Downloaded July 10, 2012)

¹⁰⁰ On a personal note, Baruch Kimmerling and I were good friends. We did not agree on several political issues and historical perspectives but differences in opinion did not stand in the way of our friendship. In all, Baruch was a kind, generous, and courageous man.

¹⁰¹ I have used the version appearing in *Eitz Hayim Torah and Commentary*, JPS Publication of The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism.

¹⁰² For a dramatic depiction of the foreboding sound of a siren piercing the solemn sacredness of the day, leaving no time to ponder over being called to debase the sacrosanct for one's country, see Emunah Elon's novel, *If You Awaken Love* (2006).

¹⁰³ Tight knit dynamics between space and identity are not unique to Jewish settlers of Judea and Samaria. Far away from the Middle East, all the way to Vienna, Susan Ingram and Markus Reisenleitner show in *Vienna Chic: A Locational History of Vienna Fashion* (2013) how spatial urban imagery becomes "intimately linked to its historical legacy" and how spatial materiality became "a force that has had to be negotiated at every turn" (175) in Vienna – undoubtedly a Vienna that wants to disassociate itself from the days it welcomed the *Anschluss*.

¹⁰⁴ The poem appears in the *Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature from 1858 to 1990* edited by Salma Khadra Jayyusi.

¹⁰⁵ The verses appearing here were selected from the English version provided by Meghdessian (1998):46-47.

¹⁰⁶ Samir El-youssef is a Palestinian writer and scholar of Palestinian literature. First published in English in 2004, El-youssef and Etgar Keret co-wrote *Gaza Blues; Different Stories*.

¹⁰⁷ Avraham Shlonsky, *Shirim* (Poems), Tel Aviv: Sifriyat Po'alim (1965) as cited by Zakim (2006):108-109.

¹⁰⁸ The question of God's presence/absence in times of great sufferings predates the Holocaust. In the aftermath of the shock of the gruesome 1903 Kishinev pogrom, God is portrayed by H. N. Bialik as helpless, albeit, not altogether absent. As shown by Eric Zakim in his insightful study of landscape, literature, and the construction of early Zionist identity, *To Build and Be Built* (2006), Bialik's God asks to be forgiven for His apparent bankruptcy: "Forgive me, wretched of the world, your god is poor like you, He is poor in your life and more so in your death [...]" Hayim Nahman Bialik, *Kol shirei Hayim Nahman Bialik*, Tel Aviv: Dvir Publishing (1970:352-353) as cited by Zakim (2006):35.

¹⁰⁹ Among them, Gershon Shaked, Baruch Kurzweil, Nurit Gertz, Dan Meron, Benjamin Harshav, Chana Kronfeld, Naomi B. Sokoloff, Leon Yudkin, Hillel Barzel, Adir Cohen, Yael Feldman, Alan Mintz, Gilead Morahg, Nurith Guvrin, Hannan Hever, Yael Zerubavel, Avner Holtzman, Ruth Kartun-Blum, Yochai Oppenheimer, Iris Milner, and Sidra D. Ezrahi.

Chapter 7: Etgar Keret's Literature: A Genre of Coping With Holocaust Remembrance

Etgar Keret is currently one of Israel's most popular authors. He is best known for his short stories although his oeuvre includes comic books, children's books, screen writing, literary editing, a novella, and journalist writing-commentary. He is internationally acclaimed. His works are translated into well over thirty languages. He is a sought-after invitee to world cultural events. Larry Rohter of the *New York Times* reported (March 1, 2012) that along with notable writers such as Tony Kushner, Herta Muller, Martin Amis, Salman Rushdie, Paul Auster, E. L. Doctorow, and Aleksandar Hemon, Keret was asked (and agreed) to take part in PEN World Voices happenings. Similar to some of the other writers from the Middle East, Marjane Satrapi from Iran, and Elias Khoury from Lebanon, Keret has the international reputation of an eccentric Israeli maverick who writes wonderful stories which are grounded in the Israeli culture but are universally relevant. Keret depicted himself to Leva Lesinska (2012) as "a court jester in the land of the convinced."

Tzahi Yoked and Alon Hadar of the daily Israeli newspaper *Ma'ariv* were present when Keret was a guest speaker in 2010 at Columbia University. They describe some American students taken aback as Keret appeared on stage. The students were told that they are about to meet one of the greatest Israeli authors of his generation and the person in front of them was an unimpressive guy wearing ill fitted jeans, a black t-shirt, and worn-out sneakers. Two hours later they were lining up and waiting patiently to have Keret autograph one of his books or just convey to him how thrilled they were to meet him in person. Yoked and Hadar cite Haim Be'er – one of Israel's old-time writers – saying that when a baby is born he is very pleased for he knows Etgar Keret has just

acquired another potential reader. In her review of a story written by Keret for children, *Abba boreah im ha-kirkas* (Dad Escapes with the Circus), Yael Dar conveys that Keret is loved by all age groups.

Keret is a lecturer at Tel Aviv and Ben Gurion Universities. He has won many literary prizes and honors in Israel, Europe, and North America. Written by Keret's wife, Shira Gefen, and directed by Keret, the 2007 Israeli film "Jellyfish" won several top prizes including at the Cannes Film Festival. Written and directed by Keret and Ran Tal, the film "Skin Deep" won the Israeli Oscar as well as several international awards. He writes for a number of literary magazines. In a July 2014 interview with Maya Sela for *Ha-aretz* newspaper he explained that he was named by his parents "Etgar" (meaning challenge in Hebrew) because it was a challenge to bring him into the world. He was born premature, weighed less than a kilogram, the umbilical cord was wrapped around his neck, and he had jaundice. Etgar Keret lives in Tel Aviv with his wife and son.

Keret's readership is remarkably diverse. It ranges from the radical Left to Right-wing Benjamin Netanyahu. Honors bestowed upon him span from France's Order of Arts and Letters (2010 *Chevalier*/Knight medallion) to a Warsaw "Keret's House" designed by a non-Jewish Polish architect named Jakub Szczęsny in memory of members of Keret's family who perished in the Holocaust. Aviad Kleinberg of Tel Aviv University jokingly complained (2002) that critiquing Keret is a thankless job.¹¹⁰ Any criticism of Keret is bound to be deemed by readers as a match between Israel's most beloved *enfant terrible* and a closed minded ostentatious critic.

As reported by Ronit Dekel in *Ha-aretz* (March 21, 2012), the judges who selected Keret as the 2012 winner of the Newman Literary Prize – awarded in the past to

celebrated writers such S. Y. Agnon, U. Z. Greenberg, Haim Hazaz, Lea Goldberg, Meir Shalev, and Aharon Appelfeld, highlighted Keret's extraordinary ability to blend rebelliousness and abrasiveness with empathy, sensitivity, and humanism. The judges went on to single out Keret's style as ingenious in that it incites many readers to contemplate issues and conflicts they may have otherwise been tempted to ignore. Anguish and desolation typify Keret's sinister creations but throughout it all one detects heartening hopefulness.¹¹¹

It was with the appearance in 1994 of *Missing Kissinger* (Ga'agu'im le'kissinger), Keret's second collection of stories, the first being *Pipes* (Tzinorot), that the marvel of Etgar Keret mushroomed into a cultural sensation.¹¹² Keret was taken by complete surprise by this meteoric rise to fame. He acknowledged in an interview with Elad Zeret (2013) that the transition from being considered super avant-garde and barely tolerated by some critics to reporters fighting over a chance to interview him was totally unexpected.¹¹³ Yaron Peleg (2008) observes that that part of the amazement at the marvel of Keret is exemplified in "disinterested teenagers" who are as spellbound by Keret as are avid readers and "seasoned critics" (64). Gut reactions from youths who until they picked up a book by Keret "had no stomach for literature" (64), are as telling as reactions from fellow artists and literary critics. Peleg quotes the critic Yehudit Orian saying that reading Keret's stories is like entering "a wonderful Gehenna" (64). He also cites Fabiana Hefetz referring to "Keret's existential angst" delivered to readers through a tempo which Peleg imagines as "video clips [translated] into words" (65).

In a write-up for *Ha-aretz* (July 19, 2004), Asaf Hanuka – a gifted Israeli illustrator with whom Keret collaborated – wrote that Keret often creates an imaginary

mirage of textual words which come across as photographic-cartoonist illustrations. Reviewing *Pizzeria Kamikaze* (2007), a collaborative Keret-Hanuka endeavor based on a short story by Keret, Michel Kichka (2004) – a talented Israeli writer-cartoonist in his own right – prefaces his review by noting that the genre of cartoons was never very popular in Israel.¹¹⁴ Aging Israelis may still remember the days of *Ha-aretz shelanu* (Our Country). *Ha-aretz shelanu* was a weekly magazine for youth. During its years of publication, 1951-1985, in addition to cartoons, it promoted creative writings – poems, stories, and essays – by children as well as interactive dialogues between writers and readers. The magazine was extremely popular among young readers but with the exception of Pinhas Sadeh and Binyamin Tammuz, adult Hebrew writers had little regard for cartoons. The genre was viewed as a plebeian form of literature. The partnership between Keret and Hanuka represents an extraordinary artistic moment in Israeli culture.

I asked Keret whether being a celebrity interferes with what continues to be an important thematic thread in his stories, namely, the personification of the underdog, the *déclassé*, the marginalized Holocaust survivor, the misunderstood child, and the misfit soldier. In his usual candid manner Keret responded that the perks of being economically secure cannot be underestimated. He went on to tell me that his older brother pointed out to him that the protagonists in his first collection of short stories use public transportation. In the second they use taxicabs and in the third they travel by plane. Humor aside – which is never easy for Keret – he emphasized that his popularity validates for him that much of what troubles him concerns others too. He used to fear being the oddball but evidently many of his readers attest to similar thoughts and feelings. It gives him indescribable gratification to know that so many people find solace

in his stories. He is not a nihilist or an anarchist but if nothing else his popularity legitimizes the demystification of Israeli hegemonic cultural trajectories. He told me that he tries his best not to let fame cloud his judgment. He knows all too well that one must learn to take the good with the bad; if you put your trust in good reviews, you must also learn to accept the bad ones. He reassured me that fame has not changed the rebellious nonconformist Etgar. He also told me that notoriety helped cure a speech impediment; he no longer stutters.

Etgar Keret is unassuming, endearing, frank, engaging, affable, sympathetic, enormously clever and knowledgeable, hilariously funny, and shy. He speaks of writing almost in missionary terms; as a moral responsibility. He believes Israelis are better connected with the real but the real is not great. In this sense, that is, for the sake of preserving a flow of naturalism and realism, he would prefer that his stories not be taught to university students. Literature ought to be less revered and less institutionalized so that it is more accessible.¹¹⁵

Every country, Keret suggested to me, has its hidden sewers (*biyuv*); in Israel, particularly after the assassination of Rabin, the sewers are more visible. Prior to Rabin's death, if someone dared question a political or military move and ask "why are we doing this" he or she would immediately be told to "shut up and reload the gun." After the shock of Rabin's murder, and the realization that such an awful thing could happen in Israel, the boundaries of the national conversation became less restrictive. "Moral Something" (*The Girl on the Fridge*) is a story about an Arab condemned to die for killing a female Israeli soldier.¹¹⁶ The homeroom teacher explains to the class that

different people feel different ways about the death penalty, and no matter what arguments you make for it or against it, people would have to decide

in their heart. And Tzachi the retard [...] started laughing and said the Arabs would have to decide in their heart after it stopped beating” (117).

Later, after school, some of the boys decide to conduct an experiment in order to find out what it would be like to hang a cat. And they proceed to do just that: they hang a cat from a basketball hoop. Alas, it was at that macabre moment that Michal,

who is possibly the prettiest girl in school, happened to walk by and said that we were all disgusting, like animals, and I walked to the side and vomited, but not because of her. (118)

Five words, “but not because of her,” – in Hebrew only three: *aval lo biglala* – echoing a boy’s self-loathing and moral awakening, so to speak, versus moral chaos brought about by peer-pressure and group dynamics. Keret conveyed to me that A. B. Yehoshua disapproved of this story. His contention was that such extreme violence is unlikely to be found among Israeli children. Keret thinks otherwise. Violence may not be what ultimately defines Israelis but it is part of the Israeli social composite. Furthermore, whether inflicted upon Israelis or by Israelis, ongoing violence has serious social-ethical ramifications.

In one of Keret’s stories, ethics come down to difficult decision-making under unusual circumstances. The story is titled “Surprise Egg” (*Gaza Blues*) and is about a woman in her early thirties killed in a terrorist suicide attack. As explained by the narrator in a factual manner, the bodies of those killed in terrorist attacks are routinely taken for an autopsy to the Forensic Institute in Abu-Kabir. It makes no sense to the narrator for the cause of death is rather obvious.

A body isn’t some surprise egg that you open without knowing what you’re going to find inside — a sailboat maybe, or a racing car or a plastic koala. (73)

As it turns out, in this particular case there *was* a surprise awaiting the pathologist. The autopsy revealed that had the woman not been killed in the terrorist attack she would have died within a month or two of cancer that had metastasized. Keret's pathologist is now faced with a moral dilemma: should the grieving husband be told about his wife's terminal illness? Keret told Nissim Calderon (2010) of Ben Gurion University that on the one hand, the medical diagnosis is comforting. No need for those who loved the woman to agonize over "if only" speculations; if only she took a cab and not the bus, if only she arrived minutes later at the bus stop. On the other hand,

What is cancer, he [pathologist] thought to himself, if not a terrorist attack from above? What is it that God is doing if not terrorizing us [with] something so lofty and transcendental that it is beyond our grasp? (77)

In an interview with Ramona Koval (January 2, 2005) Keret said he thinks of "Surprise Egg" as a metaphor for Israel. "I think that Israeli society is obsessed with outside dangers and with the conflict and represses so many core issues." He told Koval he imagines himself as the pathologist in his own country. "I can make very critical observations but they won't save the patients; they're no good for anyone."

"Surprise Egg" is not the only story in which Keret brings across the message that nowadays, in our postmodern era, the rules have changed and that moral decisions can no longer rely on same-old touchstones. Here I am reminded of an interview with Jacques Derrida titled "The Deconstruction of Actuality" (*Negotiations*, 2002). Derrida tells his interviewer about a German journalist who telephoned him and asked that he sign an appeal to governments from European intellectuals for moral vigilance (108). At some point the German journalist beseeched: "Where is Zola today?" Derrida describes how

he tried to explain to the journalist that “I was not sure that he [Derrida] was the only, or the best, model for a ‘J’accuse!’” He further noted that –

Everything has changed; the public space, the trajectories of information and decision-making, the stature of the public intellectual, the writer, the journalist, etc. It is not the ‘J’accuse!’ that is out of date, but the form and space of its inscription. One must of course remember the Dreyfus affair, but one must also know that it cannot be repeated as such. There could be worse, this can never be excluded, but it will certainly not be the same Dreyfus affair (108).

“Surprise Egg” was first published in Hebrew in 2010. By then suicide bombings were carried out by Palestinians in Israeli coffee shops, bakeries, buses, bus stops, central bus stations, busy streets, markets, road junctions, indoor and outdoor malls, train stations, hotel lobbies, supermarkets, restaurants, clubs, and medical centers. Invariably the attacks were followed by acts of retaliation by Israel. Keret often wonders about the abnormality and incomprehensibility of living like this.

In “Matchstick War” (2009), Hamas fighters are firing missiles at the University of Beersheba from Gaza. Occasionally a siren goes off and everyone is instructed to proceed to a nearby shelter. On one such day the siren goes off while Keret is teaching a class but there was no time to reach a proper shelter. Keret, together with some other instructors and students, make do with an entrance to a building which is thick-walled and windowless. While waiting for the all-clear siren the narrator-Keret recognizes Kobi: “a crazy kid from my childhood in Ramat Gan who liked fifth grade so much he stayed in it for two years.” As the two reminisce over their Ramat Gan childhood, Kobi says: “Just think: if it wasn’t for that Qassam rocket, we could have walked right past each other and never met.” It is hard to tell what is normal in Keret’s Israel and what is not.

Keret and I talked about morality in situations of political strife and tragedy. We agreed that in this particular instance we were not thinking of a Nazi concentration camp situation where, to quote Giorgio Agamben (2002), “the dignity offended” was not of life but of death, and where “corpses cannot be called corpses” and “death cannot be called death” (70). We had in mind present-day Tel Aviv, a space and culture Keret feels privileged to know but finds unsettling. He believes the most commendable form of demonstrating allegiance to one’s country is exercising the obligation to tell it as it is. Living in Israel has earned him the duty to speak out and be heard.

We converse in Hebrew and I take meticulous notes and tape-record him. (The English wording provided here is my translation but I have made every effort to produce a near-verbatim translation.) He is a nonconformist and remembers being so from an early age. A much loved youngest child of Polish Holocaust survivors who managed to build a life and a home in Ramat Gan, Etgar was the oddball at school. Invariably, parents (and teachers) of his classmates were from Iraq. The Holocaust occurred far away from where they were at the time. The result was that the Holocaust narrative he heard at home clashed with the script taught in school which made no mention of Jewish life before the Holocaust, and was outrageously simplistic in representing the European catastrophe. Keret tells me the school-version of the Holocaust went more or less like this: “at a certain period in modern history the German people went bonkers. Other nations did not do anything to stop them because they were all anti-Semites. Jews who remained in Europe were naïve and foolish; they chose to ignore the writing on the wall. Jews can only be safe in Israel. Any Jew who does not immigrate to Israel is an idiot.”

At home, his parents listened to Wagner and his mother loved reciting poetry in Polish. His parents came from “there” but their arms were not tattooed and they did not speak Hebrew with a foreign accent. Outside the home, in the street or in public, somewhat like the *Marranos* in Spain and Portugal, Keret reflects, his parents made every effort to blend in. Occasionally he would muster the courage to conjure up at school – without revealing too much about his parents – a somewhat different “official” Holocaust narrative but to no avail. He reiterates to me that he did not encounter at home the type of silence about the Holocaust experienced by many children of Holocaust survivors. His home was a bustling talkative environment. It was at school that he came across a type of cultural suppression and silenced remembrance. Keret suggested a term he believes encapsulates the psychological after-effect experienced by him as a result of the dissonance between his home and the formal schooling he received. He calls it a “reactive reflex” to a schizoid environment: “the kind of reactive reflex known to spies who assume a dual identity. The challenge was to learn to live with two conflicting Holocaust narratives.” The trait of non-conformism persists throughout Keret’s life. By association, I am once again reminded of a comment made by Derrida in “A Madness Must Watch Over Thinking” (*Points*, 1995): “If by community one implies, as is often the case, a harmonious group, consensus, and fundamental agreement beneath the phenomena of discord or war,” then he personally, senses in it “as much threat as promise” (355).

Reviewing *Suddenly, a Knock on the Door* (March 4, 2010), William Skidelsky of *The Observer* detects a stylistic dualism in Keret’s writing. The stories have an ambience of “bar-room anecdotes or surreal jokes” but the writing style harks back “at older

storytelling traditions as the parable, the folk tale and the absurdist fictions of Gogol and Kafka.” I would add another form of dualism which pertains to current writings of Israeli Hebrew literature whereby the avant-garde Keret is as integral to Israeli literature as are “old” literary luminaries such as Amos Oz, Yoram Kaniuk, Chaim Be’er, Yehoshua Kenaz, and A. B. Yehoshua, as well as not so old canonic writers such as David Grossman and Zeruya Shalev. Keret sets himself apart from what he refers to as an epic style characterizing literature written by Oz, Yehoshua, and Grossman. He invariably posits his literature as almost antithetical to what he views as writings representing the meta-Zionist narrative of the 1960s and 1970s. True, his stories are not of an epic style that spans over generations. Nonetheless, Keret’s storytelling is rooted in the everyday Israeli temporal and worldly – a theme I shall return to in my discussion.

Ruth Wisse (2000) carves out a journey through literature and culture of the modern Jewish canon. She suggests that when taking their first Hebrew modernist steps, writers such as Abraham Mapu, Mendele Moykher-Sforim, Haim Nahman Bialik, and others,¹¹⁷ remained “bound to the European experience from which [they] had emerged” (329). The next group of Hebrew writers to emerge¹¹⁸ created a different literary style. Still holding onto European literary ancestry, Hebrew writers of prose and poetry, among them Avraham Shlonsky, Moshe Shamir, Binyamin Tamuz, Amaliya Kahana-Carmon, Lea Goldberg, and Natan Alerman, to be followed by a younger cohort, namely Amos Oz, Yehuda Amichai, S. Yizhar, and so on, crystallized a homegrown Hebrew-Israeli ambiance. Etgar Keret, born and raised in a culture steeped in the prose and poetry of this second group, ends up turning away from home-grown literature and finds his muse back in Europe (and North America) as he spawns his unique postmodernist vernacular.

What exactly is it that Keret rebels against while creating his own? What idiosyncrasies of Hebrew literature did Keret absorb throughout his youth and young adulthood only to reject them later? Often referred to as *Palmach*¹¹⁹ writers, this close-knit group was not as monolithic as is often portrayed. What distinguished this impressive assemblage of writers of poetry and prose was the urgency to somehow balance idealism with realism. They had in common a shared traumatic experience of the 1948 War of Independence. Subsequent wars were traumatic enough but 1948 was different in that it was the first time when somber realism eclipsed the Zionist dream.

“The Silver Platter” written by Natan Alterman is a poem that echoes none of Bialik’s meticulous linguistic artistry, Saul Tchernichovsky’s rhapsodist lyricism, or Yehuda Amichai’s perfection of figurative language. It is, however, a formidable lament over a nation’s loss of quixotic innocence. Alterman was born in Warsaw in 1910. His family settled in Tel Aviv in 1925. A poet, journalist, and translator of Shakespeare as well as French and Russian classics, Alterman published his first collection of poems in 1938. It was followed in 1941 by what some consider his magnum opus: *simḥat aniyim* (The Joy of the Poor). From 1945 to 1947 Alterman published a weekly column in *Davar*, the Labor-Zionist newspaper of the time. The column was known as “The Seventh Column.” The people read Alterman’s column as one would read scriptural prophecies. The thirst for the prophet-poet’s sagacity was insatiable. Yigal Schwartz (2000) ascribes to Alterman the person, the path, and the melody, the reputation of being the first to sculpt an Israeli-Hebrew literary selfhood through poetry.

In reviewing Alterman’s “The Silver Platter” I am indebted to Mordechai Naor’s sophisticated and detailed analysis published in *The Eighth Column* (2006). “The Silver

Platter” (*magash ha-kesef*) is generally attributed to a pronouncement made by Chaim Weizmann. As the jubilation over the United Nation’s November 1947 partition plan¹²⁰ spread like wildfire amongst the Jewish population in Palestine and elsewhere, Weizmann was quoted saying to a Jewish audience in Atlantic City that the Jewish state is not bestowed on a silver platter. In other words, Jewish statehood does not come without having to pay a hefty price. Historians are quite certain that it was not Weizmann’s intention to undermine or muffle the joyous euphoria over the United Nation’s approval of the establishment of a national home for the Jewish people in Palestine. He was merely pressing upon North American Jews that there is still much work to be done and Palestine-Israel is in dire need of their support.

As Naor elucidates, in Palestine the *yishuv* was eagerly awaiting Alterman’s oracular weekly column. Expecting nothing less than a Homeric *epopee*, Alterman’s readers were disappointed to find instead a rather subdued, almost unrelated poem titled “And There Was Evening” (*vayehi erev*). As if that was not perplexing enough, the following week Alterman’s column was not published altogether. The prophet-poet’s silence was utterly inexplicable and it is not an exaggeration to state that the entire nation was aware of Alterman’s silence. David Ben Gurion is reported by Naor to have questioned why is “the nation’s conscience” (69) not being heard.

The answer came a week later. In retrospect, the reality of the United Nation’s nod of approval threw Alterman off balance. Citing Dan Miron, Naor explains that the substance (not the title) of “The Silver Platter” had reverberated in Alterman’s mind for several weeks prior to the United Nation’s resolution. By then, bloodshed among Arabs and Jews was a daily occurrence. While Weitzmann’s silver platter metaphor was missed

or ignored by most Hebrew and English newspapers reporting on his visit to America, it triggered something in Alterman's mind and consolidated his thoughts, hopes, and fears. In any event, "The Silver Platter" was published in *Davar* newspaper on December 19, 1947.

Almost from the outset, the poem makes an analogy between the Jewish people being awarded political statehood and the receiving of the Torah at Sinai as told in the Book of Exodus. As pointed out by Naor in his incisive interpretation, the correlation made between giving/receiving of the Torah and giving/receiving statehood is striking. As in the wilderness of Sinai, when the Israelites were told to cleanse themselves and be ready for a revelation, Alterman's nation solemnly awaits the endowment of a hallowed gift. At Sinai, as morning dawned, all that were there witnessed "thunder, and lightning, and a dense cloud upon the mountain" (Exodus 19:16). And now, for the second time in the nation's history, the people arise trembling with awe and terror to receive a sacred offering.

And the land grows still, the red eye
of the sky slowly dimming over
smoking frontiers.
As the nation arises, torn at heart
but breathing, to receive its miracle,
the only miracle.
As the ceremony draws near, it will
rise, standing erect in the moonlight
in terror and joy.
When across from it will step out a
young man and woman and slowly march
toward the nation.
Dressed in battle gear, dirty, shoes
heavy with grime, they ascend the
path quietly.
To change garb, to wipe their brow
they have not yet found time. Still
bone weary from day and from nights in the field,

with endless fatigue,
and the dew of their youth still seen.
Thus they stand at attention, giving
no sign of life or death.
Then a nation in tears and amazement
will ask: "Who are you?"
And they will answer softly,
"We are the silver platter on which
the Jewish State was given."
Thus they will say and fall at the
nation's feet into the shadow.
And the rest will be told in the
Chronicles of Israel.¹²¹

Naor alludes to the possibility that for Alterman the miracle of Jewish statehood may even surpass the Sinai revelation ("As the nation arises [...] to receive its miracle, *the only miracle* [my emphasis]") except that then, at Sinai, the thunderous calling emanated from God and now the rumblings are coming from the direction of the battlefield. Adorned in festive attire and awe-struck by the majestic event of awaiting the miracle of statehood, those present are suddenly jolted by a harrowing sight: two youthful living-dead are seen approaching the nation. Aghast, the nation does not recognize the living-dead and asks: "who are you?" To which the lifeless youths respond, "We are the silver platter on which the Jewish State was given [...] and fall at the nation's feet into the shadow."

"And the rest shall be told in the chronicles of Israel" seals the poem. As Naor and Miron indicate, it is this final verse that is the key to deciphering Alterman's delayed response to the United Nation's Partition Plan. The breakout of bloody hostilities between Arabs and Jews made it clear to Alterman that statehood will come at an unbearable cost: the lives of Israel's finest. But that was not all that Alterman feared. For him, the ferocity of the battle for independence put the survival of the Zionist

enterprise in question. As Dan Miron (1992) notes in *mul ha-ah ha-shotek* (Facing the Silent Brother) – a study of poetry of the War of Independence – the poem’s closing words are meant to draw us back to the opening verse: “And the land grows still,” a citation from the biblical narrative as told in the Book of Judges chapter 5:2-31. The biblical citation alludes to Deborah, the prophetess-judge, reciting a victory hymn in the aftermath of the Israelites defeating an enemy army led by Sisera. The epic narrative conveyed by Deborah in the Book of Judges ends with “And the Land had rest for forty years.” Assuming the Israeli army will prevail, Alterman dreaded the long-term (beyond “forty years”) prospects of ceaseless battles awaiting the Israeli nation. It is the inverted meaning of the citation from the Book of Judges that explains Alterman’s vacillation in disclosing his subliminal reaction to the United Nation’s momentous resolution.

It took several decades of maturation for Israeli critics to dare unveil the melancholic and pessimistic tenor of Alterman’s poem. By then, the poem was taught and misrepresented to school children and recruited soldiers, and endlessly repeated in national commemorative ceremonies. The misrepresentation of the poem is twofold: uncertainty over the longevity of the State of Israel, and the possible positioning of the Sinai revelation as secondary to the miracle of modern statehood. To be sure, misinterpreting an iconic poem is not limited to Israelis and their literature. For example, in her recent study of contemporary Canadian literary responses to World War I, Neta Gordon (2014) argues that John McCrae’s poem “In Flanders Fields” does not echo everything Canadians assume it does. As with Alterman’s “The Silver Platter,” through repeated acts of remembrance this iconic poem is reenacted as an affirmation of Canada’s sacrifice and willingness to go to war despite Canada being a peace loving nation. Any

interpretive hint that McCrae's poem reveals a pro-war sentiment in the final stanza is missed or ignored. Gordon defines it as "a troubling blind spot in the popular use of the poem" (29). As Gordon explains, the "troubling blind spot" in the poem begins with "Take up our quarrel with the foe" and continues with a warning stating that if "our quarrel with the foe" not be taken up "We [the dead] shall not sleep" (29). It is not Gordon's intention to disparage McCrae's poppies. Rather, she aims to point out that at the very least, to the extent that one posits "In Flanders Fields" as an elegy which would allow the dead to rest in peace and the living to go on living, the language of "quarrels" and "foes" and "we shall not sleep" is unsettling.

In Israel, as Schwartz (2000) shows, "a national path" (321) of the living-dead trope was passed on from Alterman to future generations of Israeli-Hebrew writers.¹²² Most important, the motif of a society under siege and threat, as well as a collective engulfed in traumatic memories of death and loss, is conjoined from then on with remembrance of the Holocaust. Ruth Kartun-Blum (1999) reflects on a dialogue between Modern Hebrew poetry and the Bible. Paradigmatic in Kartun-Blum's analysis of "profane scriptures" of Hebrew literature about the Holocaust and Israeli wars is the repetition of the biblical drama of the near-sacrifice of Isaac. The drama represents for Kartun-Blum "a double bind." Biblical poetic phraseology is interpolated into "a modernistic idiom that is psychoanalytically informed" (8). The motif of "a" father willing to sacrifice his child – God and His children murdered in the Holocaust, Israeli fathers/leaders sending their sons off to war – is used interchangeably in Hebrew literature (particularly poetry) written in Israel. As an example, Tuvia Rübner's 1960s

poem “Voices” (*kolot*)¹²³ can be thought of as transpiring either between Abraham and Isaac, or God and a Holocaust Jew, or between an Israeli father and his son-soldier.

I walk. I always walk...
Do I walk? I am not here.
Where does this wood in my hand come from?
This fire? They are not mine. I am not mine...
I know, my son, I am the father.
I lead you. We two go together...
I sleep. My heart is awake...
Yes. Here I am.
No!

All this is to say in a roundabout way that Keret’s denial of being influenced by his Israeli predecessors notwithstanding, he inherited a Hebrew-Israeli literary heritage which, even in times of intense, tight-knit collective solidarity, cultivated the non-conformist authorial voice. Years before Keret’s arrival on the Israeli literary scene, stories like “Tehila” by S. Y. Agnon (1962) and “The Prisoner” by S. Yizhar’s (1962) exemplified extraordinary fiction that navigated against the meta-Zionist cultural tide.

Up until 1982, a colloquial idiom *ein brera* (meaning “no alternative”) was understood by everyone as code words associated with Israel’s security issues. *Ein brera* stands for no choice but to be militant in responding to any security threat. *Ein brera* encapsulates Israel’s collective injunction to survive even if the immediate threat does not always seem obvious to everyone. Etgar Keret was a teenager when the *ein brera* libidinal reflex was depleted (but never invalidated) of its potency by the lack of consensus over the 1982 Lebanon War – a conventional war orchestrated by then Minister of Defense Ariel Sharon. Aimed at weakening Syrian hold over southern Lebanon and striking at the PLO (Palestinian Liberation Organization) this military escapade would have most likely be part of the *ein brera* mantra had Israeli troops

prevented the massacre by Christian Phalanges of Palestinian refugees at Sabra and Shatila. As it happened, the Israeli army stood by and did nothing. The reaction by the Israeli public was swift and vocal. It is not an exaggeration to state that from then on Israel was a changed nation. For the first time in Israel's history thousands of reserve soldiers joined some 400,000 Israelis in a Peace Now rally protesting the government sanctioning the army's conduct.¹²⁴

Thus, post 1980s Israeli literature mirrors a ruptured nation's collective identity and an antagonistic political climate. Avner Holtzman contends in his 2005 roadmap of Hebrew literature (*mapat d'rahim*) that writers such as Orly Castel-Bloom, Yoel Hoffman, Yuval Shimoni, Itamar Levi, David Grossman, Ronit Matlon, and Etgar Keret – each in his/her idiosyncratic way – reflect the disintegration of Israel's meta-narratives beyond mere ideological, social, and aesthetic pluralism. Holtzman adds that this pluralistic mosaic of the eighties and nineties also includes Yehudit Katzir, Chana Bat-Shahar, Yitzhak Bar-Yosef, Eli Amir, and others who continue to write literature that stylistically is reminiscent of the sixties and seventies. Epic generational tales of individual struggles vis-à-vis societal and cultural pressures is the literary soul of A. B. Yehoshua and Amos Oz (born in 1936 and 1939) but typifies Eshkol Nevo's (born in 1971) writing as well. The 1980s brought about another development in Hebrew literature: a deluge of female writings. Older novelists such as Yehudit Hendel, and Shulamit Hareven, and younger writers such as Michal Govrin, Yehudit Katzir, Tzrurya Shalev, Dahlia Ravikovitch, and Agi Mishol, finally acquire “a room of their own” and join their male counterparts as equal partners in creating a profound literary spectacle.

Contemplating Etgar Keret's political voice as emerging from the environment which nurtured him as a person and a writer, I think of the poet Agi Mishol as echoing a similar aesthetically defined conveyance of political ethics. A 2002 poem titled "Shaheeda" (woman martyr in Arabic) is of particular pertinence. Born in 1947 to Hungarian parents who survived Auschwitz – they had a daughter who did not survive – Mishol published her first volume of poetry in 1972. It did not take long for the critics to note that in the same way Israel was once blessed with the poetry of Rachel Bluwstein, Lea Goldberg, Yona Wallach, and Dahlia Ravikovitch, now the stage belongs to Agi Mishol.

The poem reacts to an April 12, 2002 suicide bombing by a Palestinian woman who blew herself up in a Jerusalem market killing six people and injuring dozens. Lisa Katz (2002) of the Hebrew University explains that the spark that ignited Mishol's wording of the poem was the oddity of the female-terrorist's last name: Andaleeb Khaleel Takatkah which sounds like a ticking bomb: "Takatkah."¹²⁵

"Shahida"

The afternoon darkens, and you are only twenty.
(Natan Alterman, *Afternoon in the Market*)

You are only twenty
and your first pregnancy is an exploding bomb.
Under your broad skirt you are pregnant with dynamite
and metal shavings. This is how you walk in the market,
ticking among the people, you, Andaleeb Takatkah.
Someone changed the workings of your head
and launched you toward the city;
even though you came from Bethlehem,
the Home of Bread, you chose a bakery.
And there you pulled the trigger inside yourself,
and together with Sabbath loaves,
sesame and poppy seeds,
you flung yourself into the sky.
Together with Rebecca Fink you flew up
with Yelena Konreeb from the Caucasus

and Nissim Cohen from Afghanistan
and Suhila Houshy from Iran
and two Chinese you swept along to death.
Since then other matters
Have obscured your story,
about which I speak all the time
without having anything to say.¹²⁶

Mishol spoke to Katz about Andaleeb Khaleel Takatkah choosing to detonate the bomb at a market bakery and the allegorical symbolism of arriving from Bethlehem, which in Hebrew literally means “a house of bread.” Imagining being “pregnant with a bomb,” Mishol wondered how does one pick a place to detonate? The epigraph quotes a verse from a poem by Natan Alterman that depicts an idyllic scene of a market of fruits and vegetables in the early pioneering days. It is clearly meant as a contrast to present-day market mayhem of torn limbs, nails, and “metal shavings.” The crescendo is reached in the final stanza. Having named those killed in the suicide attack, Mishol makes mention of two unidentified Chinese foreign workers. Their anonymity (by the time their identity was revealed the poem was already in print) triggers by association a tongue-twisting nonsensical childhood song which, in all probability, is only known to Israelis about “Two-hoo Chinese” with a great big violin chanting by the roadside. While alluding to social-economic exploitation of foreign workers, this fiddle-dee-dee is used by Mishol as a springboard to the closing, disquieting notion “about which I speak all the time/ without having anything to say.” This is the only instance in the poem in which Mishol uses the personal pronoun “I” and it coincides with a major shift in tonality: from initial violence, through silliness, to passive and hopeless resignation. The ambitious “I” of Alterman’s era has morphed into an “I” that speaks, and speaks – blah, blah, blah – and says nothing at all. The Zionist narrative has not disappeared from Mishol’s poetry

nor from Keret's stories but its original script has been tarnished by too many political, social, and moral aberrations. And present-day political rhetoric speaks nothing but the language of blah, blah, blah.

As I see it, Mishol's poem and Keret's stories echo literary ethics that exemplify Derridian language deconstruction. Articulated by Derrida in "There is no *One* Narcissism" (*Points*, 1995), deconstruction "should not be only an analysis of discourses, of philosophical statements or concepts, of semantics; it has to challenge institutional, social and political structures, the most hardened traditions [...]" (213). Specific to Mishol and Keret, I believe neither advocates the abandonment of the Zionist-Israeli homestead. Rather, and using Derrida's words, their literary strategy is employed "not in order to sound the death-knell of democracy, but to rethink democracy *from within these conditions* [italics in the text]" ("Nietzsche and the Machine," *Negotiations* 2002:251). Democracy "can no longer be contained within frontiers" or "depend on the decisions of a specific group of citizens, a nation, or even of a continent" (252). In the Derrida/Mishol/Keret political sense this is "something that has never been done, for we are talking here of something much more complex, much more modest, and yet much more ambitious [...]" in that it "obliges one to challenge instituted law in the name of an indefinitely unsatisfied justice, thereby revealing the injustice of calculating justice whether this be in the name of a particular form of democracy or of the concept of humanity" (252).

Keret's clipped, brusque, and aphoristic style evokes a resistance to parabolic and fanciful figurative language. In a 2008 conversation with Michelle Johnson (*World Literature Today*) Keret conveyed that as a writer he finds inspiration in Hassidic fables,

and stories by Franz Kafka, Isaac Babel, Nikolai Gogol, Vladimir Nabokov, Anton Chekhov, Bruno Schultz, and Isaac Bashevis Singer. He told William Skidelsky of *The Observer* (Sunday, March 4, 2012) that “there is something about Jewish writing that is very reflective, while Israeli writing is more active and epic in nature.” He also remarked to Avner Rovner in a WWB (Words without Borders) session¹²⁷ that he feels a connection with authors like Kurt Vonnegut, J. D. John Cheever, Nathan Englander, and Jonathan Safran-Foer. It almost goes without saying that he is a great admirer of Raymond Carver’s short-story-realistic-minimalist style.

The son of Holocaust survivors, Keret told Rovner that he always wears sneakers: “you never know when you’ll need to run quickly.” He has made Tel Aviv his hometown where he currently lives with his wife and son. Tel Aviv’s urban space is an important variable in deciphering Keret’s literature. Barbara Mann (2006) speaks about the literary mappings of the Jewish city and other terrains. She applies Michel de Certeau’s thinking when reading Henry Roth’s novel *Call it Sleep* (1934) and Shimon Ballas’s *Tel Aviv East* (1998). Mann contends that Roth and Ballas experience space as “inextricably connected to the experience of time [...] and a representation of history” (3). Rachel Harris (2009) analyzes the urban topoi in literary depictions of Tel Aviv in general, and the significance of Tel Aviv’s urbanized space in Keret’s “Kneller’s Happy Campers” in particular. Harris claims that at times Tel Aviv is painted by Keret as a city no different than any other. That being said, there is something singular in Keret’s depiction of Israel’s *dolce vita*; the darling city of the Zionist movement.

Tel Aviv is situated by the Mediterranean Sea and is bustling with mesmerizing tempo of cultural life and material consumption. According to Mann (2006), no other

Israeli city represents “a hybrid between East and West, myth and reality” (83) as Tel Aviv. Established in the days of the Ottoman rule by some sixty Jewish families in 1909, the location was to become a “Homestead” (*ahuzat bayit*). It was later renamed Tel Aviv (Hill of Spring). The sociologist Yehuda Shenhav (2000) thinks of Tel Aviv as Theodore Herzl’s utopian Jewish city. Alas, the conversation nowadays is no longer about redeeming the land and turning malaria infested swamps into livable space for Jewish-Zionist idealists, but about unaffordable real estate listings. Shenhav assesses the transformation as a process of normalization (*hitnarmelut shel si’ah hadash*) in which past Zionist ethereal élan is limited nowadays to an ecological-environmental discourse.

Karen Grumberg (2011) speaks of Tel Aviv as a “vernacular space” in Hebrew literature which indicates stages and aspects of identity formation. Similar to Mann (2006), Grumberg cites Michel de Certeau’s ideas on localized everyday life as “activated by narrative” (19), and Henri Lefebvre’s thoughts on idealized space vis-à-vis real social-economic-political practices. A space like Tel Aviv does not spring from a vacuum “but from an intricate web of social relations” (23). Grumberg goes on to contend that the ways in which Israelis interact with “the vernacular of places” – be it Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, or lesser examined spaces – reveals just as much about “their identity as does the relationship they have with the nation” (25). Surveying literature written by Amos Oz, Orly Castel-Bloom, Sayed Kashua, Yoel Hoffman, and Ronit Matlon, Grumberg suggests that the relationship people develop with a place is not determined by external ideological formulations but “by their interactions *with* and *within* the place [italics in the text]” (249). Oz’s desert-land dialectics of light and darkness, Castel-Bloom’s “disintegration at the core of the urban experience” (121), Kashua’s “no-man’s-

land” of being neither home nor in exile (157), and Hoffman’s Israeli-European bourgeois salons, mirror identity-formation paradoxes which are integral to the dynamics of an ever-developing Israeli cultural profile. It is out of this Israeli spatial complexity that Etgar Keret creates his protagonists and the situations in which they find themselves.

In an interview with Jerry Portwood (2012) Keret identifies one of his favorite locations in Tel Aviv: Meir Park. It is here that one meets many children and an equal number of dogs. In Meir Park one also finds Tamara’s Fresh Juices stall, Abu Hassan’s Hummus stand, the Gordon Swimming Pool where his father used to run a cafeteria, and Frishman Beach – “a safe haven” for soldiers, foreign workers, and tourists who “share a sunset view in one of the most beautiful spots I’ve ever been.”

In an introduction to a recent collection of Tel Aviv stories edited by Keret and Assaf Gavron, *Tel Aviv Noir* (2014), Keret conveys that when asked by Johnny Temple of Akashic Books to edit the anthology his immediate reaction was that this must be a mistake. Tel Aviv “is one of the happiest, friendliest, most liberal cities in the world. What could possibly be dark about our sunny city, a city nicknamed ‘The Bubble’ due to its sense of complete separation from the violent, conflicted country in which it situated” (11). In the end, Keret agreed to edit and write the introduction to the book. While he still maintains that Tel Aviv “is a lovely, safe city” (12), there are, he notes, dark things that happen “the rest of the time, to the rest of its inhabitants” such as a café targeted by a suicide bomber, crimes, clubs filled with drunks, and peace-loving Israelis who “have undergone extensive automatic-weapons training and hand-grenade tutorial” (12).¹²⁸

Never been known to conceal biographical details, Keret’s Tel Aviv is juxtaposed with Jerusalem where his ultra-Orthodox sister lives. Keret loves his sister but her

departure from the family pains him. He speaks in “Ultra-Orthodox Sister” (2010) about a sister who “died” some years ago “in a small wedding hall in Bnei Brak” and currently “lives in the most Orthodox neighborhood in Jerusalem.” The tonality of “Ultra-Orthodox Sister” is of grieving over a great personal loss. Keret’s sister turned to religion at a low point in Israel’s collective morale. The Lebanon War was nearing its end, and with many of his buddies taken away, the last thing Keret was prepared for was the disappearance of his sister into a cloistered neighborhood “in the armpit of Jerusalem” (220). Although he knows she is upset that “I don’t observe the Sabbath or keep kosher,” she loves to hear about his personal life and successful writing career. He tries to resign himself to the fact that she will not read his stories. He made an effort to appease her and his nephews. As part of a contractual agreement with his publisher, his 2000 children’s book *Dad Runs Away with the Circus* (*abba bore ’ah im ha-kirkas*) was printed in two versions: a secular version and one which is respectful of religious attire. But even the “observant” version was deemed unacceptable by his sister’s rabbi.

Keret is not generally associated with writing about the Holocaust in the way that Dan Pagis, Yocheved Bat-Miriam, Aharon Appelfeld, Itamar Levi, Savyon Liebrecht, Michal Govrin, and Nava Semel are. Out of hundreds of stories, few can be said to be devoted *stricto sensu* to Holocaust remembrance. And yet, Holocaust remembrance permeates his writings. Keret himself reveals in interviews, lectures, and other forms of public appearances – including our conversations – that Holocaust remembrance defines him as a person and a writer.

Situating Keret on a continuum of Israeli authors who write about Holocaust remembrance requires a brief historical review of the development of Hebrew literature

about the Holocaust and its remembrance. Importantly, the first issue to bear in mind is that the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust coincides with the drama of the establishment of the State of Israel. Furthermore, as already mentioned, every significant war, 1948, 1967, 1973, 1982 – and to a lesser extent the *Intifada* – unleashed anxieties pertaining to Holocaust remembrance. While there is a plurality of genres and literary styles in which the narratives of Holocaust remembrance and the Israeli wars are interwoven in works of Hebrew literature, the inseparability of the two narratives can hardly be disputed.

Hanna Yaoz assembled a catalogue of Hebrew Holocaust literature and research which is currently housed at The Pedagogical Center/School of Education at Bar-Ilan University.¹²⁹ Yaoz regards Hebrew Holocaust writings of the 1940s by Natan Alterman, Avraham Shlonsky, and Uri Tsvi Greenberg, as constituting the first layer in Israeli Holocaust literature. Geographically these writers were removed from the European horrors but all had relatives and friends in Europe who perished. The second layer of Hebrew Holocaust literature developed during the fifties and sixties. The writings linked to those years are by Abba Kovner, Tuvia Rivner, Dan Pagis, Itamar Yaoz-Kest, Ya'kov Besser, and others. Yaoz catalogues this group under the motif of “covering and uncovering” – revealing while suppressing what was too painful to uncover.

The fifties are also known for the shock created by Yekhiel Dinur, better known by his pseudonym: Ka-Tzetnik 135633¹³⁰ (from *Konzentrationslager*). Ka-Tzetnik's *Salamandra* (Sunshine over Hell in the English translation)¹³¹ and *Bet ha-bubot* (House of Dolls)¹³² confused many Israeli readers. Some praised Ka-Tzetnik's courage in

detailing unspeakable horrors of sexual slavery at Auschwitz noting that the author told things as they were as opposed to speaking in euphemisms. Others did not dispute the facts but were troubled by what they deemed an offensive slippage into sadomasochistic pornography. Unlike Lea Goldberg's 1955 *Ba'alat ha-armon* (The Lady of the Castle, 1996) which was first criticized for its supposed identification with cultural European elitism, but was soon after recognized for its literary quality, Ka-Tzetnik's critics multiplied over the years. Dan Miron (1994) and Omer Bartov (1997) published a scathing depiction of Ka-Tzetnik as a tragic writer of deplorable kitsch.

I believe Galia Glasner-Heled (2007) is correct in contending that apart from the questionable quality of Ka-Tzetnik's literature, his public persona was linked with the spectacle of him collapsing on the witness stand during the Eichmann trial. As Glasner-Heled argues, the visualization of Ka-Tzetnik fainting at the trial made it even more subjectively complicated to assess his merit as a writer. Tragically, Ka-Tzetnik's literature about the Holocaust came to represent the opposite of a "successful reading experience" (130).

Yaoz's next phase in the development of Israeli literature about the Holocaust and its remembrance is comprised of authors such as Aharon Appelfeld, Uri Orlev, Aharon Meged, and Yoram Kaniuk, as well as Itamar Levy, David Grossman, Savyon Liebrecht, Rivka Miriam, Michal Govrin, Lizi Doron, and Nava Semel. As a side note, clearly the artistic focus here is on literature. I am, however, mindful of Stephen Feinstein's (1998) portrayal of general artistic responses to the Holocaust by the second generation which includes not only writers of literature but a spectacular conglomeration of painters, sculptures, musicians, film makers, and photographers. I agree with Feinstein that Haim

Maor's photomontage known as *The Mark of Cain* represents a formidable aesthetic medium of Holocaust remembrance. An image created by Maor portraying a photo of a bearded man, his eyes blinded by a black cloth, and a yellow triangle in the middle of his forehead,¹³³ bespeaks "all the problems of memory, from forgetting to denial, and brings together concepts and issues from diverse disciplines" (219).

Gershon Shaked's (2000) comprehensive review of Modern Hebrew fiction links Hebrew literature about the Holocaust and its remembrance with the Zionist meta-plot. Shaked views Israeli poetry written about the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising (1943) as reenacting "the last Jewish stand in Massada" and Holocaust prose written in the early days of Israel as reflecting "the old Jew in Israeli eyes" (190-191). The war of 1967, before and after, are posited by Shaked as "inextricably intertwined with thinking about the Holocaust" (192), as are the 1973 war, the first Lebanon War, and the *Intifada*. Shaked also views Appelfeld's "inventory of alienated and uprooted immigrants and refugees" (235) as a vital constituent in an all-encompassing cultural Zionist-Israeli collage.

Nurit Govrin takes a different approach to Holocaust remembrance literature. I regard her orientation essential to the postmodern theoretical modality of coping with Holocaust remembrance. Govrin's two volume 2002 research is titled *Reading the Generations (Kri'at ha-dorot)*. Methodologically, it departs from a chronological organization of literature about the Holocaust in favor of a thematic approach. Similar to the conceptualization of coping with Holocaust remembrance which moves us beyond the notion of postmemory, Govrin's survey of literature is not necessarily generationally bound. Govrin identifies five groups of Hebrew Holocaust remembrance writing. The

groupings are thematically drawn and involve cultural crisscrossing that transcends generational perimeters. Etgar Keret's literature is part of Govrin's thematic design.

Govrin's first grouping consists of writers who experienced the Holocaust first hand. She designates their literature as elicited *mib'saram*; from their flesh. This group of writers is preoccupied with interpellations regarding the ethical appropriateness of literature after Auschwitz. Tantamount to their literature are conflicting compulsions between needing to forget and an urge to recount the horrors they went through. Dan Pagis, S. Shalom, Alona Frankel, Aharon Appelfeld (and Ka-Tzetnik) are members of this group. Their writing attests to the physicality of Holocaust remembrance.

Govrin's second group is comprised of Hebrew writers who relive the trauma of the Holocaust as transmitted to them by their parents. These include Marianne Hirsch's postmemory carriers but not in Hirsch's explicit sense. A Hirsch-like postmemory classification would include Etgar Keret in this group except that Govrin's categorization is based on her reading of the text and not necessarily on biographies of authors. Govrin does not do away entirely with biographical background but she prioritizes motifs such as silence entangled with overprotection, lack of intimacy, and demonstrative emotionalism. Accordingly, Savyon Liebrecht, Nava Semel, and Leah Aini¹³⁴ are members of this group but Keret is not – despite being a child of Holocaust survivors. Similarities in genre are of primary importance in Govrin's methodology. Thus, while different in age and biographical background, Govrin includes *The Legend of the Sad Lakes* (1990) by Itamar Levy and *And the Rat Laughed* (2002) by Nava Semel as works of literature of second-generation writers. The content of the two novels is not even remotely similar. Levy's dark plot is about an Israeli protagonist desperately trying to prove that his father is an

innocent Jew and not the Nazi he is accused of being. Semel's novel is a heart wrenching tale of an Israeli grandmother who barely survived the war hidden in a ground pit. As Govrin shows, what binds the two together into one literary grouping is deliverance of content through frantic shifts between genres and frenzied syntactic style. It is a group characterized by a quote that Govrin borrowed from Semel which envisions writers such as herself as "a long convoy of amputees fighting for implants" (159).

Govrin's third group is comprised of Israeli Holocaust writers who either arrived in Palestine at a young age or were born in Palestine and/or Israel. What conjoins these writers is not this periodic background but their initial contact with Holocaust survivors and the memorable impression this left on them. Members of this group have a strong tendency to infuse Holocaust remembrance with doctrinaire Zionism. Typically, the initial collision between them and survivors was problematic but evolved over time into a transformative catalyst bridging over cultural, linguistic, and ideological crevices.

Govrin is quite adamant in contravening accusations made against this group as supposedly being callously impartial to the sufferings of Holocaust survivors. From a literary perspective, Govrin posits Amir Gutfreund's *Our Holocaust* (2001) as representing this group brilliantly. *Our Holocaust* is a novel that illuminates social, cultural, and psychological issues as reflected through the lives of young protagonists and mature into adulthood while encountering "traces of Shoah" lurking "in the most surprising places, like the little shops where Dad went to order wallpaper or buy light bulbs" (85) and like in the company of "*Shoah*-smart" Grandpa Yosef (258).

Govrin's fourth category is comprised of writers with or without direct knowledge of the Holocaust who were raised and educated in Israel. At some point in their lives

members of this group felt inclined to seek beyond formal Holocaust teachings and representations sanctioned by the state. Their literature is intended to deconstruct hegemonic narratives of Holocaust commemoration. Keret is a member of this group and I will return to Govrin's appraisal of Keret shortly.

Govrin's thematic construct of the fifth group links it with the first. If the distinctness of the first group was a form of first-hand experience of the European Holocaust, members of the fifth group, among them Gershon Shoffman, Yaakov Fichman, and Uri Zvi Greenberg, experienced the Holocaust metaphorically in the flesh (*mib'saram*) but from afar (*merahok*). Fleeing Europe before the Nazis caught up with them, these writers left behind families, friends, homes, communities, and landscapes. An innermost familiarity with the people and a way of life was carved into their identity. They were also torn by guilt for having escaped while so many loved ones were left behind. Govrin extracts from the poetry written by Shoffman, Fichman, and Greenberg between 1941 and 1945 what she postulates as an anguished wail. Having learned that his entire family and community was destroyed, Greenberg was seized by a fury of writing but refused to publish any of his writings until 1951 when *rehovot ha-nahar* (Streets of the River) was printed. Govrin suggests that quite possibly *rehovot ha-nahar* is the most important Hebrew Holocaust elegiac poem ever written.

I elaborate on Govrin's methodology for I am convinced it allows for the type of fluidity upon which future Holocaust art, academic research, teaching, and studying rests.¹³⁵ The fact that Joshua Sobol, a writer and theatre director, was born in Israel in 1939 is a detail worth mentioning but it hardly explains the genesis of *Ghetto*, his 1984 play, let alone *Ghetto*'s receptivity in some twenty five countries. Keret was born almost

three decades after Sobol. Yet, by Govrin's flexible parameters, they inhabit the same (fourth) grouping of Holocaust writers. It is their dissenting counter-culture voice that brings them together. In Sobol's case, his subversive stance is aimed at an all too common anathematization of what are historically known as the *Judenrat*: Nazi appointed Jewish ghetto councils. *Ghetto* is a drama that travels from Tel Aviv back to the Vilna Ghetto during the Nazi occupation of Lithuanian Vilna. As Yael S. Feldman (1988) notes, a "theatre within theatre," *Ghetto* dramatizes scenes occurring between the *Judenrat* leader Jacob Gens,¹³⁶ a Bundist librarian by the name of Herman Kruk, and the SS officer Kittel, a sadistic jazz music fan. Feldman argues that *Ghetto*, a theatre from hell, exemplifies "a change of paradigm in the Israeli attitude to the Holocaust victim" (1988:168). Admonishing Israelis for their discomfort with Holocaust survivors was depicted years earlier by Lea Goldberg in *The Mistress of the Castle* (1958), Ben-Zion Tomer in *Children of the Shadow* (1963), and Moshe Shamir in *The Heir* (1963). But Sobol dares go much further. Not only does he use the medium of the theatre to "stage the trauma itself" (169) but he comes close to debunking "the myth of the ghetto partisans" by elevating "the weak and beaten" (175) *Judenrat* members.

Govrin's thematic approach facilitates the inclusion of another Israeli-specific Holocaust literature subject: Sephardic (*Mizrahi*) writers who write about Holocaust remembrance. Hanna Yablonka (2009) and Yochai Oppenheimer (2010) introduce the topic as it pertains to the exclusion of Sephardic Jews from a major constituent in the nucleus of the nation's collective memory: Holocaust remembrance. The idea is that the Holocaust happened to Ashkenazi Jews not Sephardic, and it is this exclusion from the nation's collective and cultural memory that Sephardic Israeli writers such as Eli Amir,

Sami Michael, Shimon Adaf, Haim Sabato, Ronny Someck, and Kobi Oz struggle with. A chronological timeline of Holocaust remembrance is indispensable. But it is through an approach freed from periodic sequence that the Ashkenazi- Sephardic Holocaust remembrance subtheme can be properly delineated.

Known for her intricate crime stories, Batya Gur encapsulates in *Murder on a Kibbutz: a Communal Case* (1994) the Ashkenazi-Sephardic Holocaust remembrance theme through an observation made by Michael Ohayon: Gur's idiosyncratic fictional detective. Detective Ohayon is sent to investigate the murder of a female kibbutz member. In the process of investigating the crime, Ohayon is pulled into the thicket of Zionist ideology, Holocaust remembrance, and the Ashkenazi-Sephardic predicament. In the early years of statehood Israelis regarded the kibbutz as a communal sanctuary for emotionally injured Holocaust orphans, and several years later, as an invaluable educational setting for "culturally handicapped" young immigrants from North Africa. While conducting his murder investigation Ohayon comes into contact with some of these young immigrants. As in Gur's other detective novels, Ohayon is not just a detective. Ohayon is a detective-philosopher who in *Murder on a Kibbutz* theorizes about Zionism in general and more specifically about the erroneous notion of the kibbutz serving as a Zionist melting pot.

But if you think about it, what happens to a person if you put him into a melting pot is that he gets burned [...] It isn't hard to imagine what happens to a child of six or seven when he's put into a children's house on a kibbutz, and he's got a sister, a crazy twin, from there, from the Diaspora, from the Holocaust [...] Look at Jojo, even that name of his — since when is a little boy from Poland called Jojo? It's not even an Israeli name it's a Moroccan name! (295-296)

Kobi Oz's 2002 *Petty Hoodlum* tells of an elderly Sephardic protagonist named Maurice Batito who has a terrifying nightmare in which he is transformed into an emaciated Ashkenazi Holocaust boy covered with lice. Analyzed by Oppenheimer (2010), Amira Hess worries in *The Bulimia of the Soul* (2010) that her pain will not be taken seriously for it cannot compare with Ashkenazi Holocaust sufferings.

How can I mention my father Yehuda
whose personal holocaust
is not like the Holocaust of my people?
Who was not collectively taken with another 6 million
to the gas chambers, but was amputated from his home?
(Amira Hess, "People Who Stutter Understand")¹³⁷

Hannah Yablonka's (2009) socio-economic study of Asher Tlalim's documentary film, *Don't Touch My Holocaust*, is an insightful thematic account of Sephardic Israelis, the Holocaust, and Israeli collective identity. Yablonka's thesis rests on the assumption that as Israeli-Sephardic Jews of North African and Middle Eastern origin navigate from the country's socio-economic periphery to the centre their protest over being excluded from the Israeli culture of Holocaust remembrance gathers momentum. Asher Tlalim was born in Tangier. *Don't Touch My Holocaust* is a three part documentary film. It consists of Dudu Ma'ayan's Akko Theatre Center award winning performance of *Arbeit Macht Frei*, a three-year chronicle of *Arbeit Macht Frei* on tour in several countries, and Ma'ayan's journey back to Morocco, his country of birth. The film won several awards including a 1994 Israeli Oscar and best documentary at the 1995 Berlin Film Festival. Remarkably, the artistic conveyance of core messages related to Israeli collective identity, namely Ashkenazi-Sephardic social-cultural tension, and the tragedy of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict does not in any way minimize the catastrophe of the Holocaust. In Yablonka's words, the film "wished to revive it [the Holocaust] and

remove it from the routine of life.” The artists “were fully aware of the centrality of Holocaust memory in the national psyche, but they wanted to shake it up and resuscitate it” (106).

In summary, be it Tlalim’s *Don’t Touch My Holocaust*, Keret’s “Shoes” and “Siren,” Shoshi Breiner’s *The Book of Farewell* (2009), Amir Or’s poetry “A Pint of Beer” (2008:277), “Esperanto” by Amos Oz in *Between Friends* (2013), or Michel Kichka’s *The Second Generation; Things I Never Told My Father* (2013) – to list but several titles out of a ceaseless stream of Hebrew literature gems – none fit squarely into a periodically compartmentalized chronology of literature about the Holocaust and its remembrance.

Feminist approaches to Holocaust literature and Holocaust studies are also difficult to assess by a chronological yardstick. Yael Feldman (1992), Sara R. Horowitz (1998), Dalia Ofer & Lenore Weitzman (1998), Ronit Lentin (2000), Iris Milner (2003), and Talila Kosh Zohar (2009), do more than provide a female’s voice to Holocaust remembrance. These female scholars endow feminist remembrance of the Holocaust with ethics. Feminist orientation to second-generation writings foster a more diversified and expanded conversation on the ethics of writing about Holocaust remembrance. Zohar (2009) recruits the voice of Mnemosyne in her analysis of ethics of memory in second-generation literature.¹³⁸ According to Zohar, second-generation feminist Holocaust remembrance literature emphasizes the centrality of the family as an alternative to the national agenda. Feminist perspectives loosen up constraints imposed by hegemonic male conceptualization, and elevate the language of silence, whisper, stutter, and murmur, to the stature of a language of choice for Holocaust remembrance.

Body language becomes an “*atar shel edut*” (31) – a witness setting/site or a site of witnessing. In so far as the feminist movement focalized its protest on perceiving the female as the timeless Other, Zohar maintains that a feminist approach to second-generation Holocaust literature helps promote pluralist orientation versus hegemonic, marginal versus centralized, and deconstructed versus totalizing. It is language which Zohar believes opens our eyes to the stranger in our midst. Metaphorically, feminist orientation to second-generation Holocaust literature is represented by Zohar as shifting the language of Holocaust remembrance from the voice of Orpheus as he fails to retrieve Eurydice from the underworld, to the voice of Mnemosyne: the mythological daughter of Uranus and Gaia who personifies memory.

Govrin’s thematic approach lends itself to an unusual elucidation of objects (shoes) as a motif that aligns Holocaust remembrance stories written by Michal Govrin and Etgar Keret. The two stories referred to are “La Promenade” by Michal Govrin (2010) and “Shoes” (*The Bus Driver Who Wanted To Be God*) by Keret. The similarity is in the exposition of objects – in this case shoes – that like piles of hair, looking glasses, and suitcases, is often associated with victims of the Holocaust. Similar to Keret, Govrin (Nurit, the critic) wishes to depart from conventional commemorative displays of objects. She does so by juxtaposing a pair of orthopedic shoes designed to provide support for an aging Holocaust survivor, Lusia Taft in Michal Govrin’s story, with Keret’s child-protagonist who accelerates his mobility through Holocaust-victim-grandpa’s imagined presence in Adidas running shoes. For Michal Govrin’s female protagonist the cumbersome orthopedic shoes are what enable her to retain some mobility but like the weight of her Holocaust history, she is enslaved to them; she cannot walk without them.

For Keret's boy-protagonist, shoes made in Germany are not to be touched for, as he was led to believe, they are linked to the evil that was done to grandpa. Eventually, through a process of deconstructing remembrance, the shoes-sneakers are transformed into a liberating force which does not erase the memory of grandpa; to the contrary, remembrance of grandpa becomes an intimate and liberating part of the boy's identity as a grandchild of a Holocaust victim.

An even more radical thematic comparison is drawn by Govrin between a 1945 Holocaust story written by the novelist Moshe Shamir (1921-2004) and a story published by Keret almost fifty years later. Shamir and Keret were born in Israel and wrote/write in Hebrew. Beyond this, four decades separate Shamir and Keret and the two represent political opposites. Shamir's staunch allegiance was with the political Right and Keret's politics and public persona are linked with the Israeli Left. Still, Govrin threads together "The Second Stutter" (*ha-gingum ha-sheni*) by Shamir and "Siren" by Keret. The linkage is complex for in 1945 Shamir had yet to acquire a semblance of historical perspective on Holocaust remembrance. One can hardly speak of post Holocaust literature in 1945. To Shamir's credit, as early as 1945 Shamir sensed a naïveté and denial among his fellow kibbutz members (*mishmar ha-emek*) regarding Holocaust survivors. Shamir realized that the incomprehensibility of what survivors went through is being met with credulous ignorance by his kibbutz comrades who deluded themselves that once survivors were enveloped in the life of the kibbutz, memories of death camps and lost family members will be replaced by Zionist optimistic vivacity.

Shamir's "The Second Stutter"¹³⁹ tells of two survivors from the same concentration camp. The Nazi heading the camp was a sadist who found pleasure in

inflicting unspeakable tortures on the Jewish inmates. He was also known for his stutter. Following the end of World War II, one of the two Holocaust survivors cannot shake off the horrors he witnessed. The people he encounters only focus on the physicality of his being. All they are capable of seeing is that he is physically alive. His spiritual and emotional ruin escapes them. They cannot or do not wish to acknowledge that the evil he witnessed is gnawing at his soul and corroding his ability to consider himself human again. Eventually, and tragically reminiscent of the Nazi camp officer, he develops a stutter. The second survivor is “saved” and finds redemption in love. As Govrin points out, by the time Keret found his calling as a writer and wrote “Siren” – a story I shall return to – there was no shortage of post-Holocaust literature in Israel, Europe, and North America. Written some forty years apart, Govrin reveals a common denominator between Shamir and Keret: both are critical of Holocaust illiteracy. In Shamir’s case it pertains to relating to Holocaust survivors and in Keret’s case illiteracy is associated with meaningless commemorative acts.

Historically, official Israeli Holocaust commemoration begins with the establishment in 1946 of Kibbutz Yad Mordechai in memory of Mordechai Anielewicz: the legendary fighter of the Warsaw ghetto uprising. In a write-up on the Israeli experience of remembering the Holocaust, Dalia Ofer (2013) remarks that at the time the idea was to glorify acts of brave resistance to the Nazis. In the 1950s Israel’s *Knesset* (parliament) marked a day on the Jewish calendar (26th of *Nissan*) as Memorial Day for the Holocaust and the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. In 1959 the *Knesset* codified the observance of Memorial Day into law. The day became known colloquially as *Yom Ha-Shoah ve’ha-g’vurah*. As Ofer points out, “patterns and ceremonies” (74) were

established by the authority of the state thereby instituting “a ‘meta memory’ of the Holocaust” (82).

Parallel to commemorating the Holocaust, a Remembrance Day for Israeli Fallen Soldiers – to which later were added Victims of Terrorism – was enacted into law in 1963. The two commemorative days, Holocaust and wars, are scheduled a week apart. Known in Hebrew as *Yom Ha-Zikaron*, the nation’s commemoration of the Holocaust begins with official ceremonies, the lowering of the Israeli flag to half staff, and a two-minute siren. Everything and everyone comes to a complete standstill for two minutes.

“Siren” (*The Bus Driver Who Wanted to Be God*) is one of Keret’s most famous stories in which the two commemorative days arch over. On Holocaust Memorial Day, a protagonist-narrator by the name of Eli attends a school assembly. All students gather in the school’s auditorium.

A makeshift stage had been put up, and on the wall behind it they had stuck up sheets of black cartridge paper with the names of concentration camps and pictures of barbed-wire fences. (57)

A guest-speaker-survivor was waiting to address the assembly of students and teaching staff. Shelley (Sivan in the original Hebrew) asks Eli to reserve a seat for her but soon after, to Eli’s disappointment, she changes her mind and decides to sit next to Ron (Gil’ad). Ron’s best friend Mikey (Sharon) is conspicuously absent. Shelley tells everyone that Mikey is being considered a candidate to serve in a prestigious unit of the Israeli navy and is presently undergoing interviews with army officials. There is also Sholem, a Holocaust survivor and the school’s janitor. After the ceremony, as students make their way back to class, Eli runs into a tearful Sholem. It turns out Sholem recognized the survivor who spoke to the students at the assembly. “That man in the

hall,” Sholem said, “I know him, I was in the *Sonderkommando* too” (58). Having no idea what being in the *Sonderkommando* at Auschwitz meant but recognizing the word “commando” Eli is caught by surprise. “You were in the commandos? When?” As hard as he tries Eli cannot picture “our skinny old Sholem in any kind of commando unit [...]” (58).

Some time later macho Mikey and Ron (a Cervantes-like Sancho Panza) steal Sholem’s bicycle. Eli witnesses the theft. Driven by a sense of justice, personal identification with the underdog, and perhaps by some revengeful jealousy over the loss of pretty Shelley to Ron, he snitches on the thieves to the school’s principal. The principal takes immediate action. A week goes by. By that time belligerent Mikey and Ron know the identity of the snitch. They catch up with Eli in a back field with the intention of beating him to a pulp. “I wanted to get away from there, to run, to raise my hands and protect my face” (60) but fear paralyzes Eli. Just then a remarkable thing occurs: a siren is heard marking the commemoration of Israeli soldiers killed in the wars.

Suddenly, out of nowhere, there came the wail of the memorial siren. I’d completely forgotten that it was Remembrance Day for the fallen soldiers. Mikey and Ron came to attention [and] I wasn’t afraid anymore [...] The sound of the siren protected me with an invisible shield. (60)

An overload of remembrance divulged in less than four pages, “Siren” has captured the imagination of readers, critics, educators, and students.¹⁴⁰ One does not read “Siren” and land safely on a clear ending. When I read or teach “Siren,” the ending always seems like a beginning, a different beginning each time. What does Keret wish to convey when he has Mikey and Ron coming to attention to the sound of a siren that commemorates Israeli wars, thereby forgoing (temporarily, perhaps) punishing Eli? Why is Mikey being interviewed by army personnel on Holocaust Memorial Day? Aside from

the obvious, what does the siren protect Eli from in relation to the Holocaust and the Israeli wars? How do we envision or conceptualize a commemorative siren as a protective “invisible shield?” What political, philosophical, psychological, legal, democratic, and moral issues arise from the proximity of the two memorial days? What is Shelly’s role? Why assign her such a minor role – the role of sexual/physical allurement? Does Keret require a “lesson” in feminist theory or is the tacky gender subtext more telling than the dominant text? Following Derrida’s line of thinking which privileges literature “by reason of what it thematizes about the event of writing, and in part because of what, in its political history, links literature to that principal authorization to ‘say everything’” (“A ‘Madness’ Must Watch Over Thinking,” *Points* 1992), in what ways does “Siren” say everything “in such a unique fashion to what is called truth, fiction, simulacrum, science, philosophy, law, right, democracy” (346)?

“Remember? Forget? What to Remember? What to Forget?” are some of the questions posed by Tuvia Friling (2014). He states that November 1942 was the first time an official disclosure was made by the Jewish Agency Executive to the Jewish community in pre-state Israel about Nazi Germany “perpetrating the systematic, all-inclusive, industrial annihilation of European Jewry – not a pogrom of the type all too common in Jewish history, but a Holocaust” (51). It was from then on that the agony over the meaning of the Holocaust and its remembrance began. What are the ways in which “the presence” of the Holocaust evolved since 1942 until Keret writes his story? How does Yehuda Elkana’s call in 1988 (*Ha-aretz* March 2, 1988) “In favor of forgetting the Holocaust” contravene Friling’s prognosis of Holocaust remembrance continuing to “resonate in the *long durée* [...] as a kind of bond, an embrace, a cohesive force in Israeli

society”(65), and how do Elkana and Frilling negate or affirm Keret’s deconstructed Holocaust remembrance text?

Deconstruction requires empathy. Keret’s entire oeuvre can be perceived as a labyrinth of empathetic deconstruction. Deconstruction also entails patience. There is always something – a theory, a thought, a method, a system, a philosophy in the making which will be undone as quickly and assuredly as it is formulated. Just as we think we have “arrived” and we can spell out the ABC of Keret’s literature, questions and doubts arise and we backslide to where we assume we began. Keret’s stories resist ultimate interpretive meaning. Interpretation, too, is deconstructed and it is for this reason that Jacques Derrida favored the word *oeuvre* instead of work. He told Derek Attridge (1992) that the term *oeuvre* has the connotation of ongoing work; “The English word *work* doesn’t perhaps do this in the same way, generally” (67). A Derridian reading of a text “takes *its part* in the genre, the type, the context, meaning, the conceptual generality of meaning, etc. It loses itself to offer itself” (68). There *is* singularity in Keret’s “Siren” but singularity, Derrida claimed, is “never closed like a point or a fist [...] in that it speaks singularly of both singularity and generality” and of “iterability” (68). Keret’s superb stories affirm that deconstruction is not a free-for-all ride where everything is permissible, and where all linguistic, thematic, cultural, and traditional boundaries are superfluous.

Mulling over *Romeo and Juliet* Derrida admitted to Attridge (1992):

I would very much like to read and write in the space or heritage of Shakespeare, in relation to whom I have infinite admiration and gratitude; I would like to become (alas, it’s pretty late) a ‘Shakespeare expert’; I know that everything is in Shakespeare: everything and the rest, so everything or nearly. But after all, everything is also in Celan, and in the same way, although differently, in Plato or in Joyce, in the Bible, in Vico

or in Kafka, not to mention those still living, everywhere, well, almost everywhere (67).

By way of focusing on Jean-Jacques Rousseau's philosophy, Derrida's objective in *Of Grammatology*¹⁴¹ was to show that writing qua writing is more than providing a mirror to historical, moral, and political reality. "Death," said Rousseau, "is not the simple outside of life" (80). Keret's storytelling is restless, always on the move, structuring and pulling apart, empathetic and cynical, depicting protagonists living here, in the afterlife, or somewhere between. The challenge in deconstruction is in being consistently faithful to *de*-stabilization, *de*-interpretation, *de*-systematization, and iterability (repeatability).

Judith Baumel (1995) speaks of deconstructing commemoration of the Holocaust in Israel. Baumel argues that commemorative acts are driven by culturally motivated forces embedded in an ethos which one generation wishes to pass on to the next. Simply stated, commemorative rituals serve "the interest of the commemorators and not necessarily of those being commemorated" (146). Hanna Yablonka and Tuvia Frilling introduce a 2003 *Israel Studies* edition devoted to remembrance of the Holocaust in Israel, by recalling Benzion Dinur, Israel's first Minister of Education, speech to Israel's *Knesset* on May 18, 1953. Dinur proclaimed that "The 'I' of the nation exists only to the extent that it possesses a memory, to the extent that the nation is capable of combining its experience from the past into a single unity [...] Consequently, the memory of the Holocaust and Jewish heroism in it, in actuality, pertains to the profundities of the Jewish experience."¹⁴² Yablonka and Frilling find Dinur's statement prophetic in that the Holocaust is commemorated in Israel (and elsewhere) in ways that reflect the needs of the commemorating collective. As contended by John Gillis (1994), there is an operative relationship between commemorations and history, memory, and national identity. There

is nothing wrong in beautifying ceremonies commemorating the Holocaust. In recent years, it has become fashionable to include liturgical readings in ceremonies commemorating the Holocaust. It serves the needs of many members of present-day Jewish communities. Whether it also represents what the dead would have wished for is another matter and will always remain an unanswerable (moral? ideological?) question.

Michael Bernard-Donals (2009) speaks of an overlap between the all-inclusive (“global” in Gills’s terminology) and the specific (“local” by Gillis). In some ways Bernard-Donals picks up where Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi (*Zakhor*, 1982) left off. While the Holocaust is the most violent break with Jewish memory, according to Bernard-Donals, it was not the only break. “Historical catastrophes that destroy collective memory” (162) have been with the Jewish people throughout their history. Bernard-Donals goes on to cite David Roskies’s (1984) thoughts on responses to catastrophes in modern Jewish history. The Jewish people “preserve the collective memory of the collective disaster” through public mourning but in doing so, “fall back on symbolic constructs and ritual acts that necessarily blur the specificity and the implacable contradiction of the event” (167). Whereas for Yerushalmi *Zakhor* was more about “retrieval” of memory, Bernard-Donals believes that for Roskies, the focus is on “presentation” of memory (168). It is the commemorative presentation that Bernard-Donals finds troubling particularly when rituals of Jewish mourning integrate the Holocaust “into a tapestry of [Jewish] destruction” thereby “flattening” the Holocaust so that it can be “recited in a litany of destruction” (168).

James Young (1993) states that Holocaust Day in Israel can no longer be perceived as “a day of shared memory, but rather a shared time of disparate

remembrance” (280). The unifying sound of the siren on Holocaust Remembrance Day will not withstand forces of cultural erosion. Liturgical readings may have added to a shared text, but Young does not necessarily regard this trend as appropriate. The Holocaust did not happen “only” to religious Jews. It happened to all Jews including those who rejected their Jewish heritage. It is Young’s hope that unlike immovable monuments, remembrance can be re-imagined and re-invigorated “to encompass multiple memories and meanings” making Holocaust commemoration “more the perennial guardian of memory and less its constant tyrant” (281).

Yablonka and Frilling (2003) articulate problems generated by secular Zionism constructing inseparability between the commemoration of the Holocaust and the establishment of the State of Israel. Judith Baumel (1995), too, refers to an uneasy relationship between national-collective commemoration of the Holocaust and communal/local/personal commemorations. Baumel contends that most *landsmanschaften* commemorations do not occur on Israel’s national Holocaust Day but on various anniversary dates on which a European community was emptied of its Jewish residents. Unlike national Holocaust commemorative acts and ceremonies these local communal commemorations have little to do with the establishment of Israel in 1948, let alone the establishment of Israel as some sort of redemptive aftermath to the Holocaust. Thus, Keret’s “Siren” encapsulates the complexity of a society’s struggle to make sense of cultural norms and forms of commemoration. “Siren” is also about a plurality of subtexts, including subtexts that, in Derridian language, are yet to come.

Etgar Keret has something funny to say about being a child of Holocaust survivors. He told me that critics who hate his stories often add a touch of condescending

sympathy. They attribute what they regard as Keret's psychological deficiencies, to being a child of Holocaust survivors. But the truth is he *is* the youngest child of Holocaust survivors. Both parents are from Poland. His mother lost her entire family in the Holocaust. His father lost a sister but he himself survived, as did his parents. They hid in a pit where you could only be in a sitting position; a position they were in for six hundred days. When the Russians arrived and they were pulled out of the pit none could walk. The Holocaust, then, is in Etgar Keret's DNA.

Keret informed me that his thoughts on being considered a member of the second-generation were conveyed in a 2009 lecture at Syracuse University. Notes of the lecture were later transcribed and reproduced as a pamphlet which was published in 2010. The pamphlet includes his lecture and four stories by him. Keret affirms that he "belongs" to what is known as the second generation. As previously noted, he finds this blanket classification problematic. According to Keret, it assumes a similar shared experience between all parents who survived the Holocaust and their children. Keret argues that not only does this shared experience vary from family to family, but that the details of what was conveyed to him, his brother, and sister, were less important than the manner in which events of the Holocaust were transmitted. For example, when asked how he managed to survive the war by hiding with his parents in a hole in the ground for six hundred days, his father would invariably introduce his response with a philosophic prelude. Every person, Keret's father would explain, has the potential to become a champion of some sort. Unfortunately, most of us are never given a chance to discover our potential for greatness. Someone who has an extraordinary gift for playing tennis ends up becoming a mediocre piano player. But he was lucky. The war facilitated the

discovery of a most unusual talent which proved to be of enormous value: a talent for sleeping. Crouched over in a dark pit, he would close his eyes, sleep for six or seven hours, wake up, ask his father if the war was over and upon being told that it was not he would go back to sleep.¹⁴³ Keret told his Syracuse audience (and other audiences) that he is well aware of the improbabilities in his father's recollection of those terrible times. Nonetheless, it was not the facts, but his father's way of paint-brushing over being reduced to subhuman existence that left the strongest imprint on Keret the boy-man-writer. Brute facts were transmitted to Keret with an "almost optimistic" (6) whiff.

Keret's mother was born in Warsaw in 1934. When the Nazis arrived, the family was forced into the Warsaw ghetto. She, like other young children, found ways to escape in and out of the ghetto so that she could smuggle some food into the ghetto to feed her starving family. In "A New House in the Old Country" (2012) Keret writes that as things got worse and worse, his mother told her father that she does not care if the Nazis kill her. But her father beseeched her to survive, so that the family name will live on. In the end, her mother, father, and brother were killed, and she was left all alone. Somehow she survived. After the war, she was sent to orphanages in Poland and France, and then to Israel. She never went back to Poland but her son, Etgar, did. A Polish architect, Jakub Sazczesny, got in touch with Etgar Keret and explained to Keret in "his heavily Polish-accented English" that he wishes "to build a home for me in Warsaw, the narrowest home in the world." The location for the house was to be in a narrow space between two houses at Chlodna Street – the spot where a Nazi barricade used to stand, and which Keret's mother had to get past while smuggling food. It was as if the small house was to proclaim: "A family once lived in this city. They're not here anymore, but everyone who

walks past me will have to stop for a minute and look at my narrow, defiant body, look at the sign and remember that family's name" – just as Keret's grandfather beseeched upon his daughter.

Having found each other, married and raised three children, Keret's mother and father insisted on the importance of reading and telling their children stories. Keret remembers that stories told by his father usually took place in seedy bars. Prostitutes and drunks were the lead characters. Keret recalls that for quite some time he did not know what prostitutes were except that his father always depicted them as good-hearted people who for no fault of their own found themselves in bad situations. Exhibiting some extraordinary willpower and initiative, these impoverished derelicts overcame their misfortune and achieved something marvelous. He also recalls his father having a German friend who fought with Rommel in Africa. In all, "there was always a tension between something horrible – something that is completely illegitimate – and some beautiful human spirit behind it that compensated for that." The dynamics between "something horrible" and "some beautiful human spirit" was expressed by Keret in a straightforward, perhaps purposefully blunt way, when interviewed by Stefan Treyvaud (2003). Asked by Treyvaud, "How would you describe your childhood?" Keret responds: "My childhood was a very happy one. My parents were both Holocaust survivors." The mere statement of these two biographical facts is thought-provoking enough; even more so is Keret deliberately phrasing these two facts about his childhood in an unbroken sequence. Ultimately, as I see it, Keret teaches us and future generations that meaningful Holocaust remembrance can and should be preserved at all times – in happy times too.

He feels blessed for having parents who taught him how to live with inconclusiveness and ambiguity. The dissonance between home and school, between the ghost of grandpa in “Shoes,” between German-made sneakers and his father’s friendship with a German soldier, between Mikey’s chauvinism (“Siren”) and Sholem’s vulnerability, between individual and state commemoration, and between commando and *Sonderkommando* – it all has much to do with the contours of coping with remembrance. I am suggesting that part of Keret’s way of coping with Holocaust remembrance can be perceived in what Derrida calls “the abhorrent ghost” (“The Deconstruction of Actuality” in *Negotiations* 2002:107). We recall the ghosts of the victims “to preserve their memory but also, inescapably for the sake of the current struggle, and in the first place for the promise that mobilizes this struggle [and] for the future without which it would have no meaning” (107).

Aside from telling stories, his mother and father were always eager to ensure that their children were provided with material plentitude: food, clothing, books, toys, and so on. But there was always an understanding in the home that social activism, religion, and art transcend materiality. Social activism became his brother’s way, religion his sister’s, and for him, having contemplated a career in mathematics, it was art. Of all his stories, “Pride and Joy” (*The Nimrod Flip Out*) was his father’s favorite. This story tells of a boy named Ehud Guznik. Ehud is an excellent student and a promising basketball player. He is an only child and means everything to his parents. Ehud’s father predicts that one day Ehud will be “the Moshe Dayan of basketball, except without the [eye] patch” (67). But something goes wrong. It seems that as the boy grows taller his parents begin to shrink. Initially, no one feels terribly concerned. All the loving parents notice is their

blossoming of son. A day after the week of Passover, Zayde, the family's dog, fainted and had to be rushed to the vet. It turns out that Zayde was going to be fine, but having noticed the height-issue between son and parents, the vet informs the Guzniks that they are suffering from a rare disease for which there is no cure. It will only terminate when father and mother die.

Ehud is heartsick and decides to outsmart fate. If he can thwart his growth perhaps his parents will stop shrinking, and worse, die. Thus, the perfect son begins to smoke two packs of cheap unfiltered cigarettes a day. He eats as little as possible, and finds ways not to sleep. His grades suffer and he is no longer a star athlete. He reeks of cigarette smoke and his former friends want to have nothing to do with him. But the loving son does not care. Lo and behold, when father and mother measure fifteen centimeters only, the shrinking stops. From then on Ehud tucks his parents carefully into his pocket from where he can always sense his father cheering him on, and his mother crying softly tears of pride and joy. Offering interpretations to his stories is antithetical to Keret. He did, however, point out to his Syracuse audience, that the ability to extract a smile or a chuckle out of a narrative which is essentially a terrifying story is a philosophic legacy passed on to him by his Holocaust surviving parents. He phrased this message to me as “the right to be confused” (*mevulbal*) over serious existential-survival anxieties (*haradot kiyumiyot*).

“Pipes” (*Gaza Blues*) is one of Keret's early stories and among his personal, all-time favorites. A seventh grade adolescent is diagnosed by a psychologist as suffering from severe perceptual disorders. When shown pictures of a person without ears, the boy fails to notice the oddity. The boy, now a teenager, drops out of school and finds a job in

a factory that specializes in producing pipes. The teenager finds the work satisfactory. It even becomes enjoyable once he begins to roll marbles through the newly manufactured pipes. To his surprise, the marbles never roll back. Once tossed through a pipe, the marbles simply vanish. Having no family or friends, the narrator decides to construct a large pipe into which he could fit and hopefully tumble through just like the disappearing marbles. For the very first time in his life, having arrived at the decision to follow the mysterious flight of the marbles, and hopefully disappear, the teenager knows happiness.

I don't think there was another human being in the whole world who wanted to disappear more than I did, and that's why it was me who invented the pipe. (55)

And disappear he does. At some point, having crawled through the self-made pipe, it strikes him that he has made his way to Heaven. It is here that he encounters a variety of misfits who seem to be no different than him. He also discovers that they pass the time having quite a bit of fun playing with those marbles he unknowingly sent through the pipes. Heaven in Keret's story is nothing like what we are made to believe. It most definitely is not a place for the righteous. Rather, it is "a place for people who were genuinely unable to be happy on earth" (56). Contrary to what the reader may think, residents of Heaven are not people who committed suicide. To the contrary: the rule is that people who kill themselves get a second chance at life "because the fact that they didn't like it the first time doesn't mean they won't fit in the second time" (56).

Heaven is for those who have no chance of fitting into the world.

If you're really unhappy down there and if all kinds of people are telling you that you're suffering from severe perceptual disorders, look for your own way of getting here, and when you find it, could you please bring some cards, 'cause we're getting pretty tired of the marbles. (56)

Contemplating “Pipes,” I am reminded of Derek Attridge (1992) asking Derrida whether he agrees that Samuel Beckett’s literature is “so deconstructive” or “so self-deconstructive,” that there is not much left to do. Derrida replied that although this is undeniably true about Beckett, “the two possibilities are in the greatest possible proximity and competition. He is a nihilist and he is not a nihilist” (61). Being a nihilist and not a nihilist can somehow be applied to Keret’s literature in that as Attridge (1992) deduces from Derrida’s “Before the Law” (*Vor dem Gesetz*),¹⁴⁴ an essay on narratives within narratives and deconstruction on legal authority,¹⁴⁵ postmodernism does not think of literature (and philosophy) as an institutional passé “brought into being by processes that are social, legal, and political, and that can be mapped historically and geographically” (23). Rather, postmodernism says that deconstructing “what is literature” is about “no truth of literature” (6).

James Warner (2011) goes the psychoanalytic way when interpreting “Pipes” and associates hollow-shaped pipes with the son’s (Etgar’s) subconscious identification with his father’s experience of hiding in a ground pit during the Holocaust. This may be a valid psychoanalytic insight. My approach, however, to Keret’s literature is more the Derridian kind whereby literature does not merely constitute a space for “plenitude of meaning,” but a sphere of “emptying-out of meaning that remains potentially meaningful; [...] a repeatable singularity that depends on an openness to new contexts and therefore on its difference each time it is repeated” (Attridge 1992:16).

Can Keret’s “Pipes” be construed as encouraging suicide? Leva Lesinska (2013) had this question in mind when she interviewed Keret in Riga. Lesinska wanted to know more about depictions of suicide and the afterlife in various stories (not only “Pipes”)

written by the author. Keret's response was that from a moral perspective he thinks about suicide as a choice taken when looking at life "both as an insider and an outsider." The emphasis is on there being a choice that "breaks the inertia of life." His first brush with suicide came about when a close friend of his shot himself. From then on, suicide in his stories evolved into something "outside of life" touched upon by his friend, and people like his friend. His friend shot himself during the time they were serving together in the army. Keret was the one who discovered his body. "Pipes" was written a week later. He told Lesinska that at the time, he found his way "back to life" through love. He also conveyed to Lesinska that he believes that deciding to pursue the business of living entails taking responsibility for one's life. For him, taking responsibility means writing. It also means being highly suspicious of capitalism and believing in a compromise of a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Taking responsibility also came to mean being a vegetarian – a decision he arrived at when he was five years old after the trauma of viewing Disney's *Bambi*.

It would be difficult *not* to read into "Pipes" emotions that are very personal. Yaron Peleg (2008), however, raises some questions about the "I" in many of Keret's stories. "Love, Suddenly: Etgar Keret Invents Hebrew Romance" is a suggestive title to Peleg's composition in which he argues that Keret is not about an individual "I" or a communal "we" but about the romantic couple. To be sure, there are many expositions of love, friendship, sentimentality, intimacy, and sex in Keret's literature. But I would hesitate to affirm Peleg's view regarding the search for true love as "an organizing principle of redemptive significance" (159) in Keret's oeuvre. I am even less inclined to agree with the poet-critic Rachel Shkolovsky (2002) who set out to examine the tenor in

thirty stories by Keret, and ended-up ascribing to him some sort of hippie-like faith in free love. Elaborating on supposed anti-establishment motifs, Shkolvsky highlights some cross-cultural dialectics of normalcy and insanity, life, and the afterlife. She links those with R. D. Laing's New Left, anti-psychiatry turn of the 1960s. Perhaps "Jetlag" (*The Bus Driver Who Wanted to be God*) – Keret's fictional account of passengers being told by the pilot that their plane is about to crash in mid-ocean as a way of teaching travelers to "start taking the whole flight safety business more seriously" (81) – is fantastically insane. But I do not see a link between R. D. Laing's psychosis of "the divided self" (*The Divided Self*, 1960) and Keret's idiosyncrasies.

James Warner (2011) contends that Keret's depiction of the afterlife in "Kneller's Happy Campers" (*Kneller's Happy Campers*) is closely related to Keret's "coping strategies" with "irresolvable moral ambiguities." Keret conveyed to me that the difficulty or inability to confront painful moral ambiguities is how he explains the refusal of some teachers to teach "Siren" to their students. He cited one educator telling him that she has been teaching the Holocaust for many years. She knows how to do it and is not about to deviate from her ways by incorporating "Siren" into the curriculum. Other teachers criticize him for being disrespectful of the dead. They believe in revering Holocaust victims. He disagrees and equates revering the memory of six million victims with dehumanization. The dead become faceless, an idea, not people. There is also the issue (Art Spiegelman's issue too vis-à-vis his father) of revering someone known to have been thoroughly unscrupulous in his/her lifetime, merely because he/she died in the Holocaust, survived the Holocaust, or was killed in a café by a terrorist.

A sociologist, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi (2009) illuminates dilemmas associated with revering the dead in relation to the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin. Beginning with the funeral which included heads of states and senior representatives from some eighty nations, to parks, squares, streets and buildings named after Rabin, along with bumper stickers, books, songs, artistic displays, and a national memorial day – the reaction was/is overwhelming. Rabin represents “a highly present absence” (2). Rabin’s political metamorphosis – from mythological soldier to peacenik – added to the mnemonic frenzy over his assassination. To the extent that commemorative acts and habits offer insights into “sociology of commemoration” and “sociology through commemoration” (5), remembrance of Rabin is a highly informative case-study. Vinitzky-Seroussi navigates skillfully through the contours of emotion, time, and space, as she appraises numerous mnemonic narratives of Rabin’s life and death. “Pilgrimages to the exact spot where Rabin was shot” represent an ultimate reenactment of [...] a difficult past” (148). A past that “some wish to remember, some wish to forget, and many wish would never have taken place at all” (20). Only time will tell whether the assassination of Rabin will be associated in the Israeli collective memory with Aviv Gefen’s¹⁴⁶ (Left-wing) *Livkot lecha* (Crying Over You) – a song sung at the rally minutes prior to the assassination – or will Israelis feel more at ease with Naomi Shemer’s (centrist Right-wing) tribute to Rabin: translating and composing a melody to Walt Whitman’s “Oh, Captain, My Captain.”¹⁴⁷

The complexities of remembrance and commemoration are conveyed by Yoram Bilu and Eliezer Witztum (2000) in relation to mourning those killed in the Israeli wars. In their study of war-related suffering in Israeli society, the authors contend that while the 1948 War of Independence initiated “state-authorized agencies of the cult of the dead”

(5), the government's mishap in 1973 set in motion a "shifting salience from collectivism to individualism" (26). In other words, commemorative trends in Israel have undergone dramatic changes. Rachel Harris and Ranen Omer-Sherman (2013) expand on these shifts in commemoration through a study of remembrance of Israeli wars in Israeli art and culture. The authors illuminate narratives of dissent which are expressed through poetry, prose, music, drama, theatre, cinema, photography, and digital forms of popular Israeli art. Glenda Abramson's (Harris & Omer-Sherman, 2013) focus is on the years between the 1982 Lebanon War and the first *Intifada* as an era of unprecedented change in public opinion and in Israeli culture of commemoration. Citing works by Amos Kenan, Meir Wieseltier, Natan Zach, Dahlia Ravikovitch, Yitzhak Laor, Avner Treinin, Zvi Atzmon, Eitan Kalinski, and Yitzhak Ben-Ner, Abramson emphasizes that this was not a simple matter of protesting against a government in the way artists in the United Kingdom opposed Margaret Thatcher's policies. This was, and still is, "unrestrained rage" (222).

Noa Roei (Harris & Omer-Sherman, 2013) speaks of soldier-citizens greeting cards as "consuming nostalgia." In the aftermath of the victory of 1967, greeting cards featuring "military parades, military arsenal, or portraits of soldiers and generals, as a backdrop to wishes for "A Happy New Year" or "A Year of Peace and Security" (79), were extremely popular. No such euphoric remembrance is associated with the 1982 Lebanon War. In fact, the aftermath of 1982 is more likely to be epitomized in Raya Harnik's anguished poems mourning the death of her son in the battle of the Beaufort on June 6, 1982 – a battle Harnik, like many Israelis, believes was pointless and unnecessary. As Esther Raizen (Harris & Omer-Sherman, 2013) highlights in her discourse on bereavement and "failed motherhood" in Harnik's *Oh, My Brother* (1993), a

new way of depicting bereavement comes into being in Hebrew literature. It is bereavement through the eyes of a child who lost an older brother. Not only has the child lost an older brother but he now faces a mother who cannot cope with the death of her older son, let alone attend to the needs of her younger child. The shift in literature is from the battlefield to the personal space of the bereaved family; “a vulnerable unit, condemned to schizophrenic existence that is fueled by the need to keep up appearances of strength as it crumbles in pain, sending individual members into loneliness” (136).

“The collapse of the ethos of bereavement” is how Nava Sade-Beck (Harris & Omer-Sherman, 2013) explains the culture of online mourning and commemoration of fallen soldiers in Israel. The proliferation of commemorative websites running counter to *Iscor* – the Israeli government’s commemorative website – in the form of personal sites, personal bereavement, links for contacting bereaved families, selections of music, and personalized art is viewed by Sade-Beck as signifying a breakdown in centralized and national forms of bereavement and commemoration. Adam Rovner (Harris & Omer-Sherman, 2013) writes about the radicalization of literary and artistic protest in Israel. Rovner’s focus is on apocalyptic Israeli fiction written from 1971 to 2009. He emphasizes that while Israelis may still refer nostalgically to the days of idealism and pioneering, they no longer identify or depend on “a milk-and-honey-coated version of modern Israel” (205). “The tension between a promise and a threat” (206) is not easy to live with but Israelis are equipped to do so. Rovner also argues that “Taboos against linking together Jewish and non-Jewish suffering are more powerful in the Diaspora than in Israel” (217). Recalling the injunction in Deuteronomy 25:17 to remember (*zakhor*), Glenda Abramson (2013) cites a poem by Yitzhak Laor as exemplifying an evocative

voice of protest which, as Abramson speculates, is more difficult for Diaspora Jews to contend with than for Israelis.

Remember
What Amalek
did to you
of course,
Over.
Do unto Amalek
what Amalek did to you
of course,
Over.
[...]
Don't compare
anything to what
Amalek did to you
of course,
Over.
Not when you want to do what
Amalek did to you
of course,
Over and out,
Remember.
(Yitzhak Laor, *Poems in the Iron Valley*)¹⁴⁸

It must be stated that overriding my entire discussion of post 1982 radicalization of Israeli cultural dissent, is a nonnegotiable tenet shared by Israelis (politically Left or Right) regarding Israel's right to exist as an independent state. I fully concur with Leon Wieseltier, literary editor of *The New Republic*, who articulated this principle when reviewing Ari Shavit's *My Promised Land* (2013). From the outset, Wieseltier is careful to set the appropriate tone by stating that "Too much of the discourse on Israel, is a doubting discourse." By that he did not mean that the discourse is too critical or not critical enough. The issue is not whether Israel is judged too harshly or not harshly enough but that all too often Israel is "judged for its viability or its validity, as if some fundamental acceptance of its reality is pending upon the resolution of its many problems

with itself and with others.” Thus, a critique of Israel like Shavit’s, Keret’s, or mine, is anchored in an a priori principle that the legitimacy of the State of Israel and its right to exist as a sovereign country is *not* negotiable.

Bearing in mind the above mentioned stipulation, I turn to an informative interview (over several hours) conducted with Etgar Keret by the novelist-journalist Runo Isaksen in 2003. The conversation with Keret was part of several discussions held by Isaksen with Israeli and Palestinian authors. The material was later translated by Kari Dickson, and published as a book in 2009. Life in Israel, Keret told Isaksen, is not unbearable but tragic. But he added that this seems to be the way of the world. Contemplating Jewish identity, Israeli identity, the Zionist ethos, Holocaust remembrance, Jewish and Israeli literature, education, humor, victimization, and Palestinian-Israeli rhetoric, Keret explained that he rejects any move by a collective to map out a national discourse for an individual like himself. Ideology in general does not play the decisive role it did in the past. Zionism is hardly synonymous to current Israeli national identity. At the heart of Labor Zionism was the ethos of socialism, and while Israel maintains some attributes of a welfare state, it is essentially a capitalist society. Keret suggested an analogy to Isaksen between Zionism and a computer program contaminated by a virus. Most Israelis of his generation are only capable of admitting that there is something wrong with their PC but they have no idea how to fix the problem.

There are still too many taboos in Israel regarding soldiers killed in battles, victims of terrorist attacks, and the Holocaust. Societal taboos stand in the way of humanizing individuals, and dehumanized individuals cannot be expected to engage in nation building. Israel must exist. That is a given. But personal grief ought not to be

used to create a country's collective identity. The focus needs to move away from the collective telling the nation's story as a know-all outsider. Keret is critical of the Israeli educational system for having taught him French instead of Arabic; "why do we need French here? Who can you talk to? Everyone around you speaks Arabic" (Isaksen, 2003:25). Lest Keret be deemed free of contradictions he confesses to being "a living paradox" (25). He does not care for Arabic music. He loves Mahler.

Keret speculates that if there is to be a meeting point for all Israelis "then it's neither philosophical nor cultural but pragmatic. As a nation, we nurture the idea that we are strong, but deep down, we feel weak and persecuted [...] we live in constant fear of being wiped out" (20). "Shoes" and "Siren" are all about "people trying to keep their own personal memories instead of just swallowing some pre-digested mush" (36). He lost his best friend while they were serving in the army. His friend did not die fighting in a battle, yet, his army officer eulogized him as a courageous soldier who was loved by all. Truth be told, his friend was a coward, hated the army, and was despised by everyone except Keret. There is something terribly wrong with a collective force that does not allow you to die as yourself. Prescribed rituals of Holocaust commemoration turn the Holocaust into something extraterrestrial which it most definitely was not.

The impetus for an Israeli writer to envision himself as some sort of prophet often originates with a public in want of prophecy. For him it means a constant struggle to strike a balance between his popularity and his refusal to be perceived as an oracular messenger. "I'm not Oz or Grossman. I have no new plans for the Middle East [...] I'm responsible for my own morals, not anyone else's" (30). It may very well be that Grossman and Oz wake up in the morning thinking about the future of the Middle East.

He wakes up thinking “I hope no one stole my car.” Then it is time for a cup of coffee and only after that, “I may have the first political thought for the day” (30).

It is when the personal and the political collide that a story like “Throwdown at the Playground” (2009) is born.¹⁴⁹ The narrator in “Throwdown at the Playground” is the author himself; a common literary-stylistic feature in Keret’s writings. By this time a father in real life, Daddy Etgar Keret likes to take his son to Ezekiel Park. His son’s name is Lev (meaning heart) and the park is Lev’s favorite spot in Tel Aviv. In the morning hours there are no fathers in the park. That is, except for Keret “who hardly ever works” for, as everyone knows, he is a writer. He is dubbed “*ha-abba*” (“*the father*”) and he loves it. He takes part in all the conversations from breast pumps to cloth versus disposable diapers. Keret can’t help it when, suddenly, he is struck by Holocaust remembrance self-consciousness. “As a second-generation Holocaust survivor who considers his momentary survival to be exceptional and not the least bit trivial [...] there is nothing more enjoyable than few tranquil hours spent discussing sterilizing bottles with organic soap and the red-pink rashes on a baby’s bottom” (1).

The magic of “my private paradise” comes to an abrupt end when on one particular morning, a mother by the name Orit asks the narrator-author: “Will Lev go to the army when he grows up” (2)? He did not see this coming and tells Orit that he has not given it any thought. Lev is still in diapers. But Orit snaps right back and says that she and her husband have made up their mind; their boy (aged three) is not going to serve in this current Israeli army. Back at home, Keret tells his wife what happened in the park. To his utter surprise his wife tells him that unlike him, she *has* been thinking about it from the day their son was born. Furthermore, she has made up her mind: Lev will not be

a soldier. Resenting his wife's a fait accompli decision-making, the author responds: "I think it's very controlling to say something like that. In the end it will be up to Lev to decide" (3). His wife will have none of this and declares she would much rather be controlling "than have to take part in a military funeral [...] fifteen years from now." Keret-husband-father-writer argues "but we live in a part of the world where our lives depend on it" (3).

Unbeknownst to mother and father the little boy has entered the room and wants to know why are Daddy and Mommy fighting. With that the discussion comes to an abrupt end or is at least postponed. On another blissful day at the park, father Keret sees his son shove "Orit's peacenik son" (3). Later, on their way home, Lev chases after a cat with a stick. "Start saving, Daddy," I tell myself. "Start saving for a defense attorney. You're not raising just a soldier here, but a potential war criminal" (3). As for the ideological matter at hand, during the months that followed, Lev's parents arrive at a decision to compromise by advocating for one thing they agree on: to spend the coming years "working towards family and regional peace" (3).

The wars, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, his son's future as an Israeli expected to serve in the army, are always on Keret's mind. When it comes to literature, he is interested in literature written by Palestinians but not as manifestos on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. There are Israeli writers who are compelled to write about Palestinians as if they really know Palestinians. He doubts Palestinians need Israelis to enlighten them as to what is wrong with their situation. Far be it for him to explain to Palestinians why they are hurting. All he can do is explain his own fears and views on the madness of suicide bombers. A Keret story published on February 24, 2012 in the *New*

York Times Magazine was not received well by a peace activist named Liz Shulman. The story is titled “A Mustache for My Son” (2012). It opens with his son’s sixth birthday. Asked what he would like as a present, Lev wants Dad-Keret to grow a mustache. There are very few things Keret would deny Lev and growing a mustache is not one of them. He ponders over the mustache being “a hairy and mysterious creature [...] far more enigmatic than its older sibling, the beard.” As it turns out, the timing could not have been better. It coincided with the sadness he felt after his wife miscarried, it was a week following an injury to his back, and two weeks after his father was diagnosed with inoperable cancer. Instead of well intentioned people asking about his father’s chemo they now asked “what’s with the mustache?” And the author would answer: “it’s for the boy.”

Several days later, while undergoing acupuncture treatment for his back, the narrator meets an officer who serves in an elite army unit. As Keret is having his back treated the officer proceeds to tell him that once, as part of a military undercover operation, he had to disguise himself as an Arab, and the first thing he did was to draw a mustache on his face. By the time the officer is done conveying gory details about blood, guns, terrorists, and snipers shooting Arabs, Keret had already made up his mind: the mustache had to go. “Reality here is confusing enough as it is.”

Liz Shulman loves Keret’s stories but was offended by this one.¹⁵⁰ She found one sentence in Keret’s narrative particularly offensive. It reads: “If you have a respectable mustache and believable shoes, people will take you for an Arab even if your parents are from Poland.” To Shulman, this smacked of “dominant Ashkenazic narrative” upholding “the status quo of colonialism.” It seemed to her that the mustache was used by Keret

only as means of “othering Palestinians” who are all presumed to be terrorists. She has now come to believe that Keret is following in the passive footsteps of liberal-minded Amos Oz, A. B. Yehoshua, and David Grossman, who, in campaigning for peace and return of post 1967 occupied territories, have proven utterly ineffective. Shulman further contended that what makes this story particularly sad is that given Keret’s popularity, it will be read by millions, thus deepening “the institutionalizing of stereotypes.” She fears that the “absurdist” and the “quirky” will become the new mainstream.

Keret responded. He thought there is a difference between colonialism and a story about a guy who as a form of escapism grows a mustache. He put aside (wisely) Shulman’s issue with liberal Zionists, and focused on ways in which readers respond to literature. If one reads the text carefully, one would notice that it is not the narrator who uses the terms “terrorist.” It is the officer blabbering about some undercover operation. But regardless of “the disagreement or misunderstanding between us,” he truly appreciates the causes she is fighting for. He then ends with wishing he could discuss things further “but my father is dying and I simply got to run.”

I happen to think Shulman misread Keret’s story which stigmatizes Israeli prejudice more than anything said about Arabs. Be that as it may, she touched on an important matter regarding Keret the public intellectual. Whether Keret likes it or not, his popularity makes him a public persona. His writings matter a great deal to a wide circle of readers. Apparently, and perhaps somewhat surprisingly, this circle of readers includes Israel’s current Prime Minister: Benjamin Netanyahu. In 2011, Netanyahu invited Keret to join a delegation to Italy. Keret mulled over the invitation and finally agreed. His recollections were published some time later in the daily newspaper *Ha-aretz*

on June 15, 2011.¹⁵¹ The insightful rendition starts off in Keret's Tel Aviv apartment. His wife beseeches him to deliver a handwritten note in which she begs Benjamin Netanyahu to do everything in his power to bring peace to the region; "for the sake of all the children." Keret reflects on this dramatic gesture. He wonders whether his wife imagines the Prime Minister as some sort of Western Wall into which one shoves prayers and wishful requests written on pieces of paper. He then proceeds to describe the orchestration of the delegation. A great deal of care is taken to ensure that no unexpected embarrassments or unforeseen mishaps occur. Italian and Israeli reporters are permitted to pose two questions but not before the questions *and* the answers (!) are scrutinized and preapproved.

Netanyahu never veers from his political mantra: the problem is not Jewish settlements on Palestinian land but Palestinian refusal to acknowledge Israel's right to exist. Keret is somewhat baffled by Netanyahu's personal demeanor. Contrary to the negativity associated with Netanyahu's public image, the Israeli Prime Minister is easy going and genuinely friendly. But as the proceedings continue, Keret comes to realize that Netanyahu, and what Netanyahu represents, terrifies him. It suddenly dawns on him that Netanyahu is *not* a mere demagogue and opportunist. Netanyahu is an intelligent and well-educated man who believes that the truth is not in what you actually say but in the power of tautological repetition. Whether or not Netanyahu fully believes in what he says is not as frightening as his conviction that a message turns into "truth" by stating it over and over again. Keret concludes by saying that he accepted Netanyahu's invitation to join the delegation hoping to gain some insight as to where things are headed. Now he knows: nowhere.

“Suddenly, the Same Thing” is a short story that was published on February 12, 2006 in the Sunday magazine of the *New York Times*. The story tells of a suicide terrorist attack. The wounded are rushed off to a nearby hospital, where, as it happens, the author-narrator’s wife is giving birth to their firstborn. A male nurse recognizes the author and talks to him about the bombing. Keret explains he saw nothing and is in the hospital’s waiting room because his wife is about to deliver a baby. The male nurse is disappointed: “Too bad you weren’t there. A reaction from a writer would’ve been good, [...] someone original, someone with a little vision.” Somewhat taken aback, the narrator-Keret asks: “What kind of original thing can you say about an explosion and senseless deaths?” To which the male nurse responds: “beats me; you’re the writer.” Shortly after, the author’s son is born. Holding his newborn son in his arms, Keret tries to comfort the crying infant. He tells him there is nothing to worry about. By the time he grows up there will be no more terrorist attacks and there will be peace in the Middle East. The infant does not stop crying. The author tries again; maybe once in a blue moon there will be an attack but by then there will be someone around with a little vision to describe it perfectly. For a moment the baby stops whimpering as if contemplating what his father just said. But then, “even he doesn’t buy it, and after a second’s hesitation and a small hiccup, he goes back to crying.”

Mahmoud Shuqair, an acclaimed Palestinian writer of short stories, was also among those interviewed by Runo Isaksen (2009) as part of the dialogue on “literature and war” between Israeli and Palestinian authors. They met in a café in East Jerusalem. Shuqair had just read stories written by Etgar Keret which – highly unusual for literature written by Israelis – were translated into Arabic and published in Ramallah. He had

previously read (in Hebrew) literature written by A. B. Yehoshua, Yehuda Amichai, and Amos Oz but it was only in Keret's literature that he unearthed humanism which is "not bound by any kind of Israeli ideology" (116). Even when Keret writes about violent Palestinian suicide bombers, Shuqair detected a type of wisdom that is not conditioned by any specific political platform. It simply reflects the creativity of a thoughtful, empathetic person-author. The Palestinian poet Ghassan Zaqtan appreciates the support shown by Israelis to Palestinians but believes the Israeli intelligentsia needs to do better. He suggested to Isaksen that Palestinians represent the flip side of Israeli dreams. As for Keret,

His humane ideals are very close to my own. We really are partners in this conflict. We were both born into it, and this is our shared place, with only one hour between him in Tel Aviv and me in Ramallah. But when we talk about our memories, he talks about his grandfather in Europe (137).

Rebecca Frankel met Etgar Keret in Washington DC in October 2006. On the day she interviewed Keret for *Moment Magazine* he was suffering from a cold and had a slight fever. He is, as Frankel and many others agree, a courteous listener and an avid talker. She thought his thick Israeli accent had "a soothing quality to it." Asked about his writing habits, Keret told Frankel that he does not write every day, and he rarely plans ahead how to end a story. He spoke to Frankel about his son and showed Frankel a photo of a baby with chubby cheeks. Apparently the chubby cheeks earned Lev the nick-name: Jabba the Hutt (a character in George Lucas *Star Wars* trilogy.) The photo, Frankel notes, shows baby Lev clutching between his fingers and mouth a white-and-blue banner. As Frankel explains, these are the colors of the Israeli flag and Lev is seen biting into them. Keret contended that he is no different from other Israelis who suffer from

nightmares about Israel being reduced to a smoking hole in the ground. That being said, the political violence in his stories is meant to make readers think about the “moral ambiguities of war” as opposed to “pointedly marking right or wrong.” But who is he kidding? Nothing about the conflict is simple. During the Intifada he felt good about collaborating with the Palestinian writer Samir el-Youssef in a joint literary endeavor, successfully actualized with the publication of *Gaza Blues* in 2004. He (temporarily) lost his appeasing mood when Hezbollah missiles targeted Israeli cities and towns. He is not a pacifist and still believes that serving in the Israeli army is not about taking a political stand. It is a necessity.

While Keret’s narrative is not always rooted in Israel, Israeli cultural leitmotifs are always present in his stories. When the female protagonist in “Cramps” (*The Girl on the Fridge*) fantasizes about being married to a retired colonel whom everyone hates because he dehumanizes them “as if they were in basic training” (59), Israelis understand the intimation. Israelis have no difficulty identifying with Daniel, the protagonist in “Journey,”¹⁵² who, while on a trip notices that –

Every hostel, every waterfall, every palm tree was teeming with tourists: Swedes, Germans, Israelis; especially Israelis. All looking for virgin territory and making do in the end with a game of cards and a few rounds of gin and orange juice. (106)

Many Israelis are familiar with an Israeli macho prototype in the image of Naama’s father in “Goody Bags” (*The Girl on the Fridge*) who knows Uri Geller, is involved in a top security cover job which necessitates traveling to faraway countries like Colombia and Madagascar – pronounced by Naama “Magadascar” – and is paid “a million billion for it” (137).

Keret's stories often take place on Israeli buses, bus stations, and bus stops. The link between buses and Israeli life transcends buses as means of public transportation. Israeli buses are associated with The War of Independence. Some memorable battles in the 1948 war were fought over bus routes. Campaigns such as the one fought over the Burma Road to free besieged Jerusalem, and "Operation Yoav" to reopen the road to Israel's southern Negev, were mythologized in Israel's collective memory. This is not much different from the way in which the battle of Vimy Ridge was inscribed in Canadian's national memory. Israel's largest public transport cooperative *Egged* was established in 1933. The linguistic root of the Hebrew word implies unity or gathering. *Egged* buses drove soldiers and delivered arms and food to battlefields and besieged communities. A powerful cooperative,¹⁵³ it is deemed by its members inseparable from the mythological Zionist script.

As Israel "normalized," transportation by bus became less about heroic nostalgia and more about schedules and bus fares; that is, until a wave of suicide bombings erupted. Not too many Israelis saw this coming. In an era of greater border security and military strength, suddenly, Israeli buses were targeted once again. Realistically speaking, suicide bombings never amounted to a serious threat to the country's security. However, quite apart from the anguish and suffering brought upon many individuals and families, these acts of terror were terribly demoralizing for the entire nation. The list of locations where buses were detonated is too extensive for me to enumerate. Suffice it to say that far too many Israelis who did not own a car or could not afford taxis were killed and wounded while travelling on buses, waiting at bus stops or central bus stations.

“The Night the Buses Died” (*The Girl on the Fridge*) is an extraordinary Kafkaesque story. The first person narrator is waiting on a bench for the arrival of the bus. Seated next to him is a grumpy elderly man. A jogger appears out of nowhere. As he passes by he yells that the buses are dead: “All of them — all dead” (113). With no other means of transportation available, the narrator decides to walk home. Along the way he comes across several other abandoned bus stops. Some distance away from home, on “Ben Gurion Avenue,” he sees a corpse in the shape of a bus. Later, upon arriving at the location of the central bus station, he discovers hundreds of disemboweled corpse-buses. Downcast passengers are roaming around aimlessly hoping against hope “to hear the purr of a motor” (115). A bus inspector wearing his uniform hat suggests that the problem may just be here; a whole fleet of buses is on its way from Haifa. “They’ll be here any minute” (115). But the narrator and other passengers know the grim truth: “none had been spared” (115). Clearly there is something universally Kafkaesque about “The Night the Buses Died,” but for Israeli readers it resonates as an all too realistic (horrifying) metaphor.

“Hole in the Wall” (*Missing Kissinger*) takes place at a central bus station. Readers are told that once upon a time, an ATM machine was attached to the wall. At some point the ATM machine broke. Some workers sent by the bank yanked it out, leaving an ugly hole in the wall. One day a lad by the name of Udi faced the hole in the wall and made a wish. He wished for an angel as a friend. His wish came true but it was not in the form of a luminous angel-friend Udi had in mind. The angel was “skinny and all stooped and he wore a trench coat the whole time to hide his wings” (29). He also had a dubious character and was more at ease telling lies than the truth. Udi ends up throwing

the angel to his death – knowing and not knowing that angels, especially undervalued ones, are mortal.

“Vladimir Hussein” (*The Girl on the Fridge*) is about hellish realism – Israeli hellish realism. To everyone’s frustration the bus schedule seems to be moving at an exceptionally slow pace. A passenger named Vladimir Hussein detests having to wait for the bus. Finally the bus arrives. Having found a vacant seat, Vladimir Hussein decides to read the newspaper. Another passenger is set on interrupting Vladimir Hussein’s reading and persists in calling him a dirty Arab. Vladimir Hussein tries to remain calm and explains to the belligerent passenger that actually he is half Russian, and half Arab. His mother is from Riga, and his father from Nablus. The bully passenger blurts: “two diseases in one body” (153-154). By then, Vladimir Hussein has had enough, and in one swoop cracks the passenger’s head with an iron crowbar. Just as Vladimir Hussein is about to step off the bus, a kind-looking elderly man hands Vladimir a gift in the form of a beret. The elderly man explains that this is meant as a peacemaking gesture to make up for malicious prejudice against Arabs and Russian-Jewish immigrants. The small gift was to indicate that the narrow-minded bully deserved a violent death. Vladimir Hussein is momentarily appeased and steps off the bus. (When teaching this story I have students stop reading here. Without fail, an exciting debate ensues in which students discuss everything from what’s in a name, prejudice, social-economic matters that come into play vis-à-vis modes of transportation, punishable moral deeds, and so on. Only then do we proceed to read the conclusion of the story which invariably brings about an equally heated deliberation – essentially deconstructing the previous discussion.) For reasons he will never be able to explain, as the bus pulls away from the stop, Vladimir Hussein

tosses the beret into a green trash can and instinctively drops to the ground. “The explosion came a few seconds later, showering him with garbage.”

In a write-up (May 15, 2002) in the daily newspaper *Ha-aretz*,¹⁵⁴ Gadi Taub reflects on how Etgar Keret is loved and admired by many Israelis. In an attempt to uncover the clues to Keret’s cultural allure, Taub highlights the author’s ability to waltz between logic and paradoxes, consistency and contradiction, desperation and hope, tragedy and humor, the grotesque and the aesthetic. He points to vulgarism in Keret’s text that is somehow purifying. Taub takes particular interest in anatomizing the empathy that ascends from Keret’s literature particularly in light of the fact that there is more of Stephen King to Keret’s stories than the Sugar Plum Fairy. Taub also contends that “Breaking the Pig” (*The Bus Driver Who Wanted To Be God*) – a Keret classic – is erroneously taught as a story with a happy ending. I agree with Taub up to a point. Beyond that, I believe that the ways readers construe “Breaking the Pig” is far more telling than whether Taub thinks the ending is happy or not. The story itself is about a young boy who longs for a Bart Simpson toy-doll and a boorish father who is on a pedagogic mission to teach his son a lesson in fiscal responsibility. The father does not object to the idea of a Bart Simpson toy but wants his son to earn it with his own pocket money. The boy is talked into dropping his pocket money into “an ugly porcelain pig with a slot in its back” (23). Over time, the sensitive and rather lonely boy begins to imagine the porcelain pig coming to life. Unbeknownst to his parents, the piggybank is treated by the boy as one would care for a living pet. Seeing how diligent his son has become in saving his pocket money, the father congratulates himself on being such a brilliant instructor on the values of monetary capitalism. Wishing to reward his son and

noticing that the piggybank is full to the brim, father fetches a hammer with which he plans to break the pig, retrieve the money and purchase the Bart Simpson doll for his son. The boy is horrified. He somehow manages to convince his father to delay the ordeal, and at night, while everyone is sleeping, he quietly smuggles the piggybank out of the house and leaves him in a nearby field. This is where Keret ends the story but countless readers have suggested imaginative addendums. Keret welcomes them all but will not favor any specific ending.

Keret told Taub that moral behavior is rarely obvious or self-explanatory. Definitive assertions about morality generally reflect narrow-minded tribalism. He rarely thinks in terms of morally right or wrong. Rather, morality is understood by Keret in terms of inertia versus authenticity. Evil is associated with apathetic inertia. There will always be a Hitler or a Stalin but Hitler did not mold the Germans from good people to evil doers, nor did the Germans revert to being good people with the arrival of Allied troops. It was apathy and unresponsiveness to what everyone knew was happening to the Jews that facilitated the Holocaust. This is not to say that a person snuggled comfortably on a cold winter day under the coziness of two blankets can be expected to always have in mind the homeless. But morality resides on a continuum that runs between inertia that facilitates evil, and inertia that is unavoidable.

I find Keret's thoughts on morality having much in common with a distinction made by Avishai Margalit (2004) between thick and thin relations and their concurrence with ethics and morality. Noted previously in my work, according to Margalit, "Being moral is a required good; being ethical is in principle an optional good" (105). Acting morally is *not* engaging *voluntarily* or *willingly* in executing acts of genocide. Acting

ethically is being charitable and offering a homeless person a blanket. I am also assuming that Keret would concur with Susan Neiman (2002) who argues that agreeing on what constitutes inertia that generates evil will not put an end to genocide and torture. What can, and ought to be expected of Western civilization is that awareness of evil doings will jolt us into awakening the inertia in us.

The Welfare State exemplifies for Keret a system that knows all about human frailty and inertia. It represents a moral system which knows better than relying exclusively on voluntary goodwill and personal magnanimity, and is accordingly founded on provisions for minimal health-care, social security, and so on. It is not a perfect system but it recognizes society's responsibility in mitigating the deleterious consequences of human apathy. In his illuminating study of collective memory and the moral demands of memory, Jeffrey Blustein (2008) suggests that "human community is worthy of affiliation and loyalty only in so far as it takes its responsibilities seriously" (228). I am not suggesting that Keret represents an Israeli incarnation of the prophet Amos. I am, however, suggesting that the overwhelming receptivity to Keret's literature is indicative of a remarkable embryonic potentiality to stimulate moral thinking.

When contemplating reader receptivity in relation to Etgar Keret as a writer and public figure I am reminded of Roland Barthes's "The World of Wrestling" in *Mythologies* (1972). The wrestler is not there to win. Just like in tragic spectacles of an ancient theatre, "one is not ashamed of one's suffering" (16). Similar to Keret's personification of the lonesome child or the forgotten Holocaust survivor, French wrestling (unlike American) is about "the construction of a highly moral image: that of the perfect bastard" (23). At times, "the perfect bastard" will "reject the formal

boundaries of the ring” and “sometimes he reestablishes these boundaries and claims the protection of what he did not respect a few minutes earlier” (24). The rhythm of wrestling is different from that of boxing. It is “a real Human Comedy” where the body of the wrestler finds its most natural expressions in gestures” (18) – with some wrestlers known to be as entertaining as “a Molière character” (19).

Molière brings me to consider laughter in Keret’s stories. More specifically, humor in stories about coping with Holocaust remembrance. By way of appraising the comic as related to the tragic, I first turn to Paul Woodruff (1977) who negates Jean Jacques Rousseau’s critique of Molière’s ethics of laughter. I believe Woodruff’s thinking is helpful when contemplating laughter in difficult situations. Woodruff’s way is to differentiate between “warm” and “hot” laughter, and laughter that is “on target” or “off target.” Warm laughter requires a degree of closeness between the one triggering laughter, those who laugh, and at what or at whom the humor/laughter is targeted. According to Woodruff, this is perfectly exemplified in Richard Pryor’s comedic genius. As an African American, Pryor purposefully targeted his humor at African Americans like himself. Pryor was brilliant in creating a shared and loving ambience between him and his audiences. To be able to cause laughter by repudiation is conditional upon shared values and an intimacy of mutual understanding between a comedian and his or her object of ridicule. This is the nature of warm laughter. In contrast, hot laughter lacks in closeness and identifiable affinity. As Woodruff shows, hot laughter occurs when the target of laughter is perceived as nothing more than “a thing” (328). To treat a person as a thing, is not funny; it is “bad metaphysics and bad morals” (332). It is the innocence and intimacy between writer and reader that I believe Keret’s humor projects in stories

about coping with Holocaust remembrance. It is no coincidence that “Shoes” and “Siren” are told from the perspective of youngsters. It is also no coincidence that so many of Keret’s stories are told by the first person narrator-author. Keret is never external to the narrative. He is the writer-reader-protagonist all at once.

There is nothing funny about the events of the Holocaust itself. But a scene from “Himme” by Keret (*The Nimrod Flip Out*), in which Himme encounters an Israeli roach exterminator wearing a T-shirt that reads: “The Eichmann of Roaches” – *is* funny. It is the situational incongruity and innocent absurdity that allows us to laugh knowing that our laughter is anything but disrespectful of the Holocaust and its victims. Our laughter when reading “Himme” is warm. As Jacqueline Bussie (2007) conveys in relation to the laughter of the oppressed, warm laughter does not create a confluence with evil-doers but with the innocence of a *schlimazel*. Indeed, Keret’s roach exterminator in “Himme” is just a *schlimazel* trying to make a living. Bussie’s focal point is on laughter that deconstructs racism. Her discussion of the Holocaust and African American slavery is anchored in Mikhail Bakhtin’s conceptualization of laughter triggered by absurdity. Such laughter brings to the oppressed a much needed sense of freedom and release for it contains a “creative potential to upset the status quo, overcome traditional fears and prohibitions, and empower the disempowered” (15-16).

Humor arising out of situational absurdities experienced by the disempowered is the essence of a brilliantly crafted story by Keret titled “Vacuum Seal” (*The Girl on the Fridge*). It speaks to misfits serving in the Israeli army, who, like the once soldier Keret, cannot be “molded” into soldiery. It is a heartbreaking story garnished with pearls of humor. It tells of a soldier in training who is harassed by a boorish sergeant. His face

showered with spit while being hollered at by the sergeant, Alon Schreiber feels totally powerless. Standards of excellence are set by the sergeant based on the capacity to perform vacuum sealing. In this particular combat unit, vacuum sealing is the key to being a competent soldier. Evidently, Alon Schreiber is a good-for-nothing vacuum sealer in the eyes of the sergeant. “Schreiber, you’re a piss-poor excuse for a human being, a piss-poor excuse for a soldier, and a piss-poor excuse for a vacuum sealer” (38). In an effort to teach Alon a lesson and perhaps even mold him into a decent soldier, Alon Schreiber is ordered to vacuum seal all his belongings: everything, from beddings to clothing, and so he does. Alon vacuum seals every item in sight but does not stop there. Having vacuum sealed his clothes, sheets, towels, the tent, and the mattress he perfects his newly discovered skill by vacuum sealing his body and then his soul. As Keret told Stefan Treyvaud of the Australian *Map Magazine* (March 2003), “humor was always the weapon of the weak.” “You laugh at the things you don’t like in life but you don’t have the power to change.”

Vincent Brook (2012) contemplates laughing and Jewish self-hatred. Brook claims that “Sisyphean absurdity” (168) is not exclusive to Jewish humor but it is integral to what Brook regards as the greatest contribution by Jews to American popular culture. Be it the radio, film industry, vaudeville stage, or television, a disproportionate number of “mega-hit, Emmy-winning, ‘must-see’ shows” (155) feature Jewish characters. *The Larry Sanders Show* sitcom (1992-1998) is perceived by Brook as archetypal in that it represents “the quintessential postmodern HBO sitcom about the behind the scenes and on screen shenanigans of a late night-talk show” (160). Deliberating Jewish self-loathing, as theorized by Sander Gilman (1986), Brook draws a precariously thin line

between self-hatred and self-preservation. It was not Jackie Mason's kind of ethno-racial humor but the *Larry Sanders* type that showed cultural vitality and longevity. Whereas comedic productions with leading Jewish characters such as *Seinfeld*, *Mad about You*, *Friends*, and *Curb Your Enthusiasm* knew much success, and continue to enjoy successful reruns, the *Chicken Soup* show and its "Borscht Belt stand-up comedian Jackie Mason" (155), did not. It was quickly (September-November 1989) forced off the air. As became abundantly clear, sophisticated American Jewish comedy was not about Mason's portrayal of characters saddled with vulgarity and self-denigrating "immigrant speech" (156-157). Sophisticated American-Jewish humor is about self-preservation as in the highly intelligent and cultured image of Jon Stewart.

The Israeli humorist Dan Ben-Amos (1973) rejects the widespread interpretation of Jewish humor as self-loathing. Ben-Amos contends that Sigmund Freud's *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* contributed to the development of self-hatred theorizing in relation to Jewish humor.¹⁵⁵ To an extent, Ben-Amos accepts Gillman's linkage between self deprecation and Jewish humor, and the explanatory idea of Jewish humor representing a cultural response to anti-Semitism. But beyond this link, Ben-Amos rejects overarching theories which go too far in consolidating individuals into "a collective person" (121). Ben-Amos calls for a shift in the perspective on historical Jewish communal society, "from an image of a unified whole to a realistic picture of a complex and segmented group [...] in which individuals identify each other in terms of social roles and subgroup affiliations" (122). It is only through a theoretical modality that does away with Freudian generalizations about Jewish humor that it becomes

possible to establish correlations “between the narrator’s social position and his joke” (123).

Gilman’s (2000) insightful meditation on humor and Holocaust remembrance reflects on several films. Charlie Chaplin’s 1940 portrayal of Hitler as a racist psychopath in *The Great Dictator* is one of the key films discussed by Gilman. Yosefa Loshitzky (2004), too, reviews the comic in Holocaust cinema as in Ernst Lubitsch’s *To Be Or Not To Be* (1942), Roberto Benigni’s *Life Is Beautiful* (1998), and Peter Kassovitz’s *Jakob the Liar* (1999). Loshitzky argues that the comic functions in Holocaust films as means of breaking taboos. Loshitzky maintains that the comic broadens the limits of Holocaust representation thereby “achieving a greater artistic living space” (132).

I believe it is alright to laugh when, for example, we read Lizzie Doron’s 2010 novel-memoir, *Veyom ehad od nipagesh* (And One Day We Shall Meet), in which she recalls her Holocaust survivor mother burning a baked cake and calling it: “Buchenwald delicatessen.” In Berys Gaut’s (1998) analysis of the ethics and aesthetics of humor, what is considered funny “is partly dependent on what is ethical” (61). There is nothing funny about questioning the historicity of Hitler’s war against the Jews. Robert Skloot (1988) agrees and adds that writers, critics, and scholars of literature of Holocaust remembrance are well aware “that comedy can only appear *after* tragedy has been in evidence [...] (italics in text)” (43). As Skloot shows, the idea is not to accentuate solemnity “through contrast with lighter moments or funny characters, nor a hopeful vision of future possibility” (46). Rather, the idea is to energize “our depressed responses” (46).

A clash between the tragic and comic puts into motion critical and ethical responses to Holocaust remembrance. Such is the exact function of humor in the opening lines of “Siren” in which Keret describes “a makeshift stage” that had been put up in a school’s auditorium on Holocaust Day depicting “sheets of black cartridge paper with the names of concentration camps and pictures of barbed-wire fences.” It is not the Holocaust that makes Israeli readers chuckle when reading these lines; it is their familiarity with this type of makeshift décor which is meant to create a solemn and dark atmosphere on a specific date designated as a day of commemoration. (Andrea Reiter’s (2000) discussion of humor in narratives about the Holocaust relates to actual concentration camp situations. This is outside the realm of my thesis. I only wish to make mention of insights I gained from Reiter’s attempt to correlate humor, irony, and metaphoric language with degrees of circumstantial hopelessness. Humor existed in situations that are impossible to imagine. However, as Reiter contends, one must be careful not to sentimentalize such expressions of humor or irony for the truth is that *effective deployment of humor* can only become relevant once a sense of freedom is obtained.)

Humor in Keret’s literature is closely related to the grotesque. Perhaps a good place to start when contemplating the grotesque in Keret’s storytelling is Wolfgang Kayser’s *The Grottesque in Art and Literature* (1957). Ulrich Weisstein’s English translation of Kayser is also of importance for it illuminates the relationship drawn by Kayser between *komisch* and the grotesque. Kayser’s analysis of the grotesque in art and literature extends from Velasquez and Goya, Shakespeare and Victor Hugo, to the drama of *Sturm und Drang*. From the Renaissance to Romanticism, “the abysmal quality, the

insecurity, the terror inspired by the disintegration of the world” (52) was at the heart of the artistically grotesque. The depth of it is revealed “by its confrontation with its opposite: the sublime” (58). If the *komisch*-comic (Weisstein explains that for lack of a better term in English he had to settle for the word “comic”) entrusts us to “the secure level of reality,” the grotesque “totally destroys the order and deprives us of our foothold” (59). Kayser’s analysis of the grotesque is in congruence with the emphasis I put on readers’ receptivity. As Kayser argues, “the grotesque is experienced only in the act of reception.” Moreover, “it is entirely possible that things are regarded as grotesque even though structurally there is no reason for calling them so” (181).

Efficacy, content, and form, come into play when juxtaposing comedic laughter in Shakespeare’s *Much Ado about Nothing* with the mix of horror and laughter at a crowd’s first sight of a grotesque-looking hunchback in Victor Hugo’s *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*. Kayser speaks of Kafka’s “cold” grotesqueness: “man-made world devoid of landscapes, oceans, mountains, rocks, and blades of grass” (147). Kafka’s reader is never quite certain whether to smile or shudder. Similarly, unlike the liberating effect imparted by Keret’s humor, the grotesque in Keret’s literature leaves us feeling vulnerable and unprotected. Keret’s humor provides us with relief and a sense of assuredness that comes with believing that we know better than the boy’s father in “Breaking the Pig.” The grotesque leaves us uncomfortable and unsure how to react.

“Hat Trick” (*Missing Kissinger*) is a disturbing example of the grotesque in Keret’s literature. A first-person narrator-magician is always in the habit of ending his show at birthday parties with his favorite trick: pulling a rabbit out of a hat. While children often find it boring, it was the magician’s favorite. All that changed on a

particularly disagreeable scorching hot day, when the hat-rabbit trick went horribly wrong. Instead of pulling out of the hat the usual adorable fuzzy-looking rabbit, out came a rabbit's severed head: a bleeding head with no body attached to it. Several kids screamed with horror but some were actually thrilled by this grotesque sight.

Dismayed and confused the magician returns to his flat. There are five recorded telephone messages awaiting him with requests that he call back in order to schedule more hat-rabbit trick performances. All the messages left were from parents of kids who witnessed that day's gruesome show. The magician went on to perform until on one occasion, instead of a rabbit's head, a body of a dead baby came out of the hat. The invitations to perform continue to arrive but after the dead baby episode the magician abandons his career. He is overcome with torment and is unable to do anything but languish in bed haunted by the images of the rabbit's head and the body of the dead baby. Why is this happening? Why is this happening to him? Why now? The story ends with the magician being no wiser except for wondering whether perhaps "this isn't the best time for rabbits or for babies either. That this isn't really the right time for magicians" (27). "Hat Trick" is grotesque but in the end the reader is left pondering over the innocuousness of a grotesque magic-hat trick as compared to incessant human-to-human macabre.

Charles Baudelaire (1992) refers to the comic as imitation and the grotesque as creation. Laughter "excited by the grotesque has in itself something profound, axiomatic and primitive, which comes much closer to the life of innocence and to absolute joy than the laughter aroused by the comic derived from social manners" (152). Baudelaire goes on to differentiate between the grotesque as "the absolute comic" and the ordinary comic

as “significant comic.” Absolute comic is closer to nature, grasped intuitively, and encapsulates “fallen humanity.” Significant comic “speaks a language that is clearer, easier for the common man to understand, and especially easier to analyze, its element being obviously double: art and the moral idea” (152). There is much that I extract from Baudelaire’s “absolute comic” and apply onto Etgar Keret’s usage of the grotesque as denoting “a fallen humanity.”

Humor and the grotesque are accentuated in Keret’s writing by his ingenious mastery of the genre of the short story. Keret is a university instructor of creative writing. He told Rebecca Sacks (2012) of the *Paris Review* that, occasionally, he thinks of teaching creative writing as facilitating AA (Alcoholic Anonymous) meetings. Writing is making something out of something which is a lonely endeavor – hence the need for a support group. As it is, Keret is best known for his consummate employment of the genre of the short story. In a 2012 interview with Carolyn Kellogg of the *Los Angeles Times*,¹⁵⁶ Keret pinned down his intellection of the genre of the short story as analogous to “letters sent from the id to the superego.”

Keret spoke to me about his desire to write a novel. For now, however, he is most comfortable with the genre of short storytelling. He told Ramona Koval (2005) that when launching a new story he invariably feels that this time it will be a “huge epic.” Time and again he is surprised at the abruptness with which the narrative comes to an end. Once arriving at an ending, he never has any doubt: this is it. His interview with Koval followed a visit to Sydney. Observing skillful Australian surfers at Bondi beach he was struck by an analogy. He too is always struggling to gain and regain control over his stories; “I just try to catch a wave, to paddle with my hands and legs long enough and

strong enough.” Keret finds some commonality between the genre of the short story and the cartoon: both are intense forms of release. “When I write, I have this kind of zero gravity feeling; [...] you can go wherever you want, and your characters can defy the laws of physics.”

The short story genre as a form of release is essential to understanding Keret’s self-appraisal of himself as a writer. As a child of Holocaust survivors, he remembers always wanting to please others. His mother owned a clothing store and he recalls spending time there trying to make customers feel good about themselves. Keret told Koval he felt it was his duty. Customers would try on clothing items, and no matter how unattractive they looked, and no matter how ill-fitting the clothing, he would find something nice to say: “It matches the color of your eyes, makes you look slim,” and so on. Writing is a release from it all; writing is *not* about pleasing others. “I have something to shout, it is some sort of cry for ambiguity.” Freed from a compulsion to try and please others he can come to terms with audiences or readers who disapprove of his politics. Disapproval comes from both sides of the political divide. Some North American Jews accuse him of not being Zionist enough, and non-Jews argue that he is too Israeli.

Keret told Koval that a reaction to a story titled “Shooting Tuvia” (*The Nimrod Flip Out*) revealed something he had not realized until then. “Shooting Tuvia” is about a boy who is given a dog by a friend for his ninth birthday. The boy-protagonist names the dog Tuvia after a TV personality who is known for impersonating politicians. The dog loves the boy but only the boy. He absolutely hates everyone else. He barks and yelps indiscriminately at anyone who crosses his path. When the boy is away at school, he

does not stop whimpering until the boy returns home. One day Tuvia bit the boy's sister. Shortly after, everyone (but the boy) agreed that Tuvia must go. The boy's father took the dog, drove a distance of one hundred kilometers away from the home and set Tuvia loose. But Tuvia came back in no time and proceeded to bite Grandma. This time the boy's father and older brother took Tuvia to a dump and shot him with an M-16. It took six months but Tuvia returned. He was waiting for the boy at the school yard. There was something wrong with his legs, one eye was closed, and his jaw was paralyzed but Tuvia was back. From then on he stayed with the boy and his family until he died of old age twelve years later.

Keret conveyed to Koval that the real story is in the reaction to "Shooting Tuvia" in Germany. As it happened, the German paper *Die Welt* wanted to publish a story by Keret and asked if he would send them a political story. Keret replied that none of his stories are designated as "political stories" and suggested that the Germans settle for a story Keret thought was interesting. They agreed and he sent them "Shooting Tuvia." Shortly after, he received a telephone call from *Die Welt*. They were enormously grateful and appreciated that after all is said and done he *did* send them a political story. They thought "Shooting Tuvia" was a formidable political story. How so? It was absolutely clear to them that "Shooting Tuvia" is about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with the dog representing the Palestinians, and the father the Israelis. As for the boy, he was a confused bystander who is uncertain about his identity and loyalty. Keret dismissed this as utter nonsense. But the more he thought about it, the more he realized that "Shooting Tuvia" *was* a political story although not the politics *Die Welt's* people had in mind.

I think it was a story about the fact that when you grow up and live in very crazy and very violent surroundings, you don't judge them and you don't

try to change them; you just accept them. There are people in Melbourne that select a café to have a cup of coffee and a slice of cake without being afraid of being blown up by a suicide bomber. I just say to myself that this is life, you know, so I better pick this table and not that one.

Baudelaire (1992) contrasts the short story with the “so exalted a position as pure poetry” (200). This was Baudelaire’s way to convey that the short story format is more easily appreciated by the common reader. Although lacking in rhythm, which is essential in the pursuit of poetic beauty, the short story offers “a multitude of tones, shades of language, the reasoning tone, the sarcastic, [and] the humorous [...]” (201). Keret and I did not talk about poetry versus the genre of the short story. We did, however, talk about the rhythm of the short story. Indeed, Keret, the postmodernist Israeli-Jewish-male-Scheherazade loves the rhythm of *Hebrew* storytelling.

“The Story’s the Thing” (1994) says David G. Roskies in relation to Jewish history. Intonation, diglossia, and wordplay were employed by an array of Yiddish storytellers blurring “the boundary between text and reader” (125). Long before postmodern language deconstruction, Sholem Aleichem’s “stories-in-monologue were also *about* language [italics in the text]” (125). The Holocaust destroyed much of European Yiddish culture and with it the prominence of the genre of the Jewish short story. For some time thereafter the format of the short story lagged behind the novel, novella, and poetry. There were exceptions such as Gershon Shofman’s writings, but as Yosef Oren indicates in a 1987 study of the short story genre in Israeli fiction,¹⁵⁷ regardless of whether authors such as S. Y. Agnon, Amos Oz, A. B. Yehoshua, Amalia Kahana-Carmon, Aharon Appelfeld, and Binyamin Tamuz launched their literary career writing short stories, their aspiration was to be known as novel-writing authors. I believe this is still true about Hebrew literature written in Israel, Keret notwithstanding.

Gadi Taub's 1997 book on rebellious trends in contemporary Israeli culture (*hammered ha-shafuf*) is considered a foundational study of Israeli postmodernism. Taub thinks of Keret as a postmodernist writer in the same way that he thinks of Quentin Tarantino as a gifted postmodern film director. Taub's accolades notwithstanding, Keret rejects Taub's version of postmodernism which somehow attempts to beautify its jarring comfortlessness. Keret suggested to me that Taub is mistaken when he arrogates some nostalgic longings for a lost modernist paradise to Keret's postmodernist writing. The issue is not whether postmodernism is a radical break from modernity. The *only* issue, as far as Keret is concerned, is that to long for modernism – the modernism that among others fostered fascism – is senseless and meaningless. Modernity was all about prompting a person to undertake a journey toward a designated “promised” destination. Postmodernists, too, embark on journeys but whether they arrive at a so-called destination remains undetermined. His short stories afford him the possibility of undertaking many such journeys and not even he knows where a story will lead, how it will end, and where will he be in relation to the narrative.

Martin Scofield (2006) believes Raymond Carver's success as a writer of short stories has much to do with being a gifted poet as well. Carver influenced Keret greatly. Frank O'Connor (1963)¹⁵⁸ contends that compared to the novel, the short story is superior in denoting human life. O'Connor believes the novel is somehow bound to “a concept of a normal society” (17) and needs readers to identify with a hero protagonist. Short stories by Kafka, Gogol, Chekhov, Maupassant, Babel, Hemingway, Turgenev, Joyce, Carver, Ozick, Updike, and Keret, do not have heroes. Instead, there is a sense “of outlawed figures wandering about the fringes of society [...]” (18). The difference between a short

story and a novel “is a difference between pure and applied storytelling (26). A folk storyteller could win the attention of an audience only “by piling incident on incident, surprise on surprise,” and by way of “apprehending a few sentences at a time” (28). The relationship between style and form in the short story “serves to delimit the form, establish the beginning and the end, and heighten the intensity that is so necessary in a story but so embarrassing in a novel [...]” (183). It does not make the short story more real, a misjudgment O’Conner attributes to Lionel Trilling’s appraisal of stories written by Isaac Babel. Babel’s Odessa gangsters did not exist outside the wild imagination of a brilliant, sensitive, and imaginative Jewish man who was blessed with a mind “full of pirates in gorgeous colors” (183). Whatever else Babel’s *Odessa Tales* (1924) or *Red Cavalry* (1926) stories are, they are not realism.

Aside from Babel’s influence on Keret, it occurs to me that the convergence between the two throws additional light on the modernist-postmodernist concurrence. There is much of Babel in Keret’s literature but Babel is driven by ideology, while Keret is about *renouncement of ideology* as a comprehensive entirety of a belief system. Keret’s political leaning is to the Left but this is a predilection which does not represent a total doctrine. Drawn out by O’Conner, Babel is most striking and most animated when feverishly holding on to Communism (which did not save him from Stalin’s Purges) and Judaism. He could be critical of both and yet Babel was the consummate ideologist. Keret, on the other hand, is most compelling when navigating in non-ideological territory. Ideology can be construed throughout Keret’s stories but it cannot be thought of as a total, all-encompassing ideological frame of reference. Perhaps it is possible (and helpful) to think of Keret’s non-ideological political ethics in the way Jacques Derrida

speaks of Lévinas in “Ethics and Politics Today” (*Negotiations* 2002) as a philosopher who entrusted the ethical above the political: “a thinker of the ethical and not the political” (297). Derrida recalls that Lévinas had said to him that “They say that I, that it’s ethics I’m interested in. No; what interests me is the ‘holy [*le saint*],’ saintliness” (297). Derrida notes that for Lévinas, this was the Jewish way.

The political, the concept of the political, not only in political philosophy but in philosophy in general and everything that follows from it, from Plato to our philosophy today, cannot, does not correspond to anything in Jewish thought close to that political idiom, and that consequently, to introduce, to speak of the political inside Jewish thought makes no sense (297-298).

I believe there is something of Lévinas in Keret’s aporetic response to the political as different from taking ethical responsibility.

In an interview with Michelle Johnson (*World Literature Today*, 2008), Keret argues that vocabulary and syntax are always designed “to fragment time and identity.”¹⁵⁹ On a different occasion he conveyed to Atira Winchester (the *Online Jewish Book Community*) that “his relationship with this [Hebrew] language that was in deep freeze for two thousand years is central to his writing.” He prefers to mix high and low registers. His style is minimalist and his aim is to “create an interesting tension inside the sentence.” Ramona Koval (2005) compares Keret’s style to an Escher print: the beginning and end of a drawing, and the beginning and end of a sentence, “are improbably woven together.”

Translating Keret’s work into “foreign” languages is of great concern to the author. Keret and I discussed the issue specifically in relation to English translations; English being the lingua franca for many Jews. As Richard Siegel and Tamar Sofer (1993) show in their study of writers in the Jewish community, this is more than a

translation issue. English is not a Jewish language; Hebrew is. “Hebrew is the substratum of Israeli creativity, and as the language of the Jewish state, is the substratum of Jewish creativity” (14). Marcia Falk is an accomplished translator of Hebrew prayer and poetry. Introducing her 2004 translation of poems written by Zelda Schneurson Mishkovsky, one of Israel’s most loved poetesses, Falk notes that being attentive to the spirit of the text requires not only an intimate knowledge of the work but a passion for it.¹⁶⁰ Sandra Berman (2005) argues in the preface to her work on the ethics of translation, co-edited with Michael Wood, that “translation has itself become an important border concept in the humanities, affecting some of the most salient intellectual and ethical issues of our time” (5). Translations have contributed greatly to our awareness of Otherness “that inhabits languages as it inhabits human society more generally” (4), which is another way of saying that we are now more cognizant of translation being an ethical issue. Misunderstandings, inaccuracies, and “linguistic oppression” have always been with us. Postmodernity has made us cognizant of greater “reciprocity, and therefore creative negotiation, if never perfect resolution, between languages and peoples, between values, enmities and loves” (8).

Naomi Sokoloff suggests in “Teaching Narrative Theory: Etgar Keret’s ‘Goldfish’” (2012) that while “there is no substitute for reading the original,” Keret in translation provides excellent teaching material for university and college students. Beyond the quality of the literature itself, studying Keret introduces students “to elements of narrative theory,” by which Sokoloff means “a contractual relationship between narrator and narrate,” structuring literary text, treatment of time, and reliance on interruptions or textual gaps. Jeffrey Green (1989) debates the issue of being “too close

to the narrative,” (36) something he encounters when translating Holocaust literature written by Aharon Appelfeld. For Green, translating is like acting; “it heightens the experience of reading” (37). Keret and I contemplated Green’s acting analogy. Keret agreed with Green although he qualified things by adding that unlike acting, there is no substitution for what is lost in translating. He offered an example. He tends to switch registers from biblical Hebrew to slang. It comes naturally in Israeli Hebrew but its potency is diminished in translation.

Keret is indebted to his team of translators and maintains close contacts with them. Together they share many tearful instances when compromises have to be made while catering to cultural disparities and attempting to reach as many readers as possible. Appealing to as many readers is an issue Martin Lockshin addresses in a 2006 review of several new English translations of the Hebrew Bible. Lockshin notes that as much as one is committed to conveying the original text accurately and honestly, and being able to resolve differences in structural, lexical, and conceptual semantics, a translator wants to make the translated text readable, intelligent, and refined.

Alluded to previously, philologists and sociolinguists such as Ruvik Rosenthal, Maya Fruchtmann, and Ghil’ad Zuckermann,¹⁶¹ view Hebrew spoken in Israel as an amalgam of biblical, liturgical, and Talmudic Hebrew, as well as lexical and syntactic borrowings from Yiddish, Arabic, Ladino, and several European languages. Nobody denies the wonderment and richness of the modernist renaissance of the Hebrew language but some contend that the “resurrection” has gone too far; that is, there is too much Hebrew slang. In an interview with Rebecca Sacks for the *Paris Review* (May 1, 2012), Keret noted that the development of Hebrew slang followed “a very chaotic and

anarchistic” process of “defrosting” a language that as a spoken vernacular was not in use for quite some time. He is aware of critics who accuse him of contributing to some sort of debasement of the Hebrew language. He disagrees, and I do too. I fully endorse Hanoah Bartov’s overview of Israeli Hebrew in “By the Book” (1993) where he expresses the exhilaration “for the totality of Hebrew in our lives as the most natural thing in the world” (31). Languages and literatures are not in the heavens.

Gabriel Moked writes in *Ah’shav* (Now) magazine (2011) that “digesting” Keret’s Hebrew is comparable to gorging oneself on scrumptious appetizers.” Moked evokes Keret as a storyteller equal to O. Henry and Raymond Carver; an artist who successfully sculptured a sophisticated and trendy niche in Hebrew literature.¹⁶² Expounding on concerns voiced over the widespread popularization of Keret’s *safa razah* (lean register) – sparse lexicon, slang, coarse figurative language, clipped phraseology, intentional syntactic solecism, and improprieties in grammatical construction – Moked concludes that as a literary jargon, Etgar Keret’s so-called violation of Hebrew etiquette is in truth a philological treasure.

Esti Adivi-Shoshan asserts in her review of *Suddenly, a Knock on the Door* (*Ha-aretz* May 21, 2010) titled “Ha-yeush benadam” (Desperation, Man), that Keret’s cutting edge linguistic jugglery is carefully designed as means of propounding a non-elitist bolster to the socially marginalized and the culturally disparaged. “Suddenly, a Knock on the Door” (*Suddenly, a Knock on the Door*) opens with a bearded man pointing a pistol at the narrator-author and commanding him to tell him a story. Agitated and scared, the author says: “I’m someone who *writes* stories, not someone who tells them” (3). And even that, he adds, is not something that can be done on demand. For a split second he

recalls that the last person to demand a story was his son but “my son asked for the story nicely, and this man is simply trying to rob me of it” (3). The armed man persists. He reminds the author that unlike Sweden – his country of birth – in Israel, “if you want something, you have to use force” (3). Sweden, he continues, is not just about IKEA, ABBA, or the Nobel Prize. Sweden is about getting what you want by being polite but this is the Middle East.

The Palestinians asked for a state, nicely. Did they get one? The hell they did. The settlers wanted a dialogue. Did anyone pick up on it? No way. So they started getting physical [...], and suddenly they had an audience. Bottom line, it’s either a story or a bullet between the eyes. (3-4).

Suddenly there is a knock on the door. A young man is standing at the door. He explains that he is conducting a survey on levels of humidity during the summer months and has a few questions he’d like to ask the author. He, too, pulls out a revolver. This armed man is Moroccan; “a war veteran who left pieces of his spleen behind in Lebanon” but right now, he wants a story. “*Vamos* stop making excuses. Sit down over there, and out with it” (5). There are now three men in the room; the writer and two armed men.

How do I always get myself into these situations? I bet things like this never happen to Amos Oz or David Grossman. (6)

Then there is another knock on the door. The Swede and Moroccan instruct the writer to open the door. Pretending to be delivering a pizza, a young man asks the author: “are you Keret?” and when answered in the affirmative, he reveals that he too came for a story. He is not armed with a gun but with a cleaver. All three armed men have come together and they demand a story.

A short one. Don’t be so anal. Things are tough, you know; unemployment, suicide bombings, Iranians. People are hungry for something [...]; we’re desperate, man, desperate. (6-7)

And no realism; they've had enough of realism and want some make-belief fantasy.

Don't you go and dump reality on us like a garbage truck. Use your imagination, man, create, invent, take it all the way. (7)

The author draws a blank. It's been a long time since he wrote a story. "He misses the feeling of creating something out of something" (7). But no story presents itself and just as he is about to give up "when suddenly..." (7) The Swede interrupts, no more knocking on the door. But the author knows; "Without a knock on the door there's no story" (8). Reluctantly the men agree.

You want a knock on the door? Okay, have your knock on the door. Just so long as it brings us a story. (8)

I concur with Steve Almond's of the *New York Times Book Review* (April 13, 2012).

This fictitious-realistic storytelling within storytelling is "a pep talk worthy of Beckett."

The story consolidates "the irrepressible dream logic" of Keret's creative impulse.

The deconstructed art of storytelling is in a story titled: "The Story, Victorious" (*Suddenly, a Knock on the Door*). It opens with an audacious statement: "This story is the best story in the book. More than that, this story is the best story in the world." And how is it that tiny Israel has produced the very best story? Well, why not? "Just as our army is the best army in the world — same with the story" (106). The victorious story is "protected by registered patent" which is "registered in the story itself" (106). What makes the story the best, better than anything Chekhov or Kafka ever wrote is that "one lucky winner randomly selected from among all the correct readers" will receive "a brand-new Mazda with a metallic gray finish" (107). But "Because this story doesn't just tell, it also listens" (107), a winner will also be selected from among those who read the story incorrectly. Understandably, the prize will have to be a cheaper car. To top it all,

this victorious story is attuned to the public's wishes. Once the public has had enough, "this story won't drag its feet or grab hold of the edges of the altar. It will, simply stop." There will be no playing for time, no delays; the story "will simply stop" (107). The rupture and breakdown of meaning and interpretation – the vulgar confluence between the best army and the best story – is painfully obvious.

Lastly, "A Foreign Language" (*Missing Kissinger*) is a story comprised of two overlapping tales into which the themes and ideas delineated throughout my thesis coalesce into an empathetic postmodern narrative on coping with Holocaust remembrance. There are many subthemes to this rather complex and sad story. "A Foreign Language" opens with a father receiving from his two sons a pipe as a gift for his fifty-first birthday.

Dad said thanks, ate a piece of the cake that Mom had baked, and kissed everyone. Then he went into the bathroom to shave. (11)

A dark stifling cloud looms over the home. It does not take long for the reader to suspect that the father's intention is not to shave but to commit suicide behind the locked bathroom door. The reader is told that father always wished he could build a cabin in a Scandinavian forest "mainly because of the quiet." Dad had very low tolerance for noise;

When my brother and I cried as children it bugged him so much that sometimes he just felt like strangling us. (115)

As he often does while shaving in the bathroom, father is humming a Hungarian song from his pre Holocaust days. The narrator-child believes the song goes like this:

Ozo sep? Ozo sep? Okineko seme kek. Okinekp same fakete. Who's the most beautiful? Who's the most beautiful? The one with the dark eyes. He's the most beautiful. (115)

The literary critic Roman Katsman (2005) suggests that the Hungarian lyrics convey the father's fantasy of living a different life; not the life that made him lock himself in the bathroom on his birthday. Suicide, Katsman suggests, is the ultimate human fantasy of instantaneously being in two places. As for the Hungarian song, apart from reverting back to pre Holocaust mother tongue, the reader is somehow forced to trust or mistrust the author to provide an accurate translation and transliteration. According to Katsman, the matter of trust or mistrust between reader and writer, language and translation, language and hermeneutics, is tightly interwoven into the text and its thematic/stylistic composition.

The entanglement of the linguistic layer accentuates the relationship between a father who is estranged from his children and feels he has arrived at the end of his lifeline as a Holocaust survivor. The humanist disconnect is symbolized by the sorrowful unhappiness of father drowning himself in the bathtub, while the child-narrator and his brother argue over whether Dad liked their birthday present. The water in which father has immersed himself speaks a muted language; not Hungarian or Hebrew but an idyllic, untarnished, and imaginary Scandinavian language. "*Bloo-bloo-bloo*, the water in the bathtub murmured in Scandinavian" (117). The older brother cuts through the *bloo-bloo-bloo* sound; "*Nur Gott weiss*, my brother said, showing off his German. *Nur Gott weiss*" (117). Language after the Holocaust is silent and it speaks, conveys and conceals, illuminates and represses, translates and misinterprets, emulates and constructs, builds and destroys. Language of coping with Holocaust remembrance deconstructs itself over and over, again and again.

The narrator of the second narrative is an adult. His girlfriend demands that he tell her that he loves her in a foreign language: “an exotic one.” No matter how hard he tries he comes up empty. “Hebrew isn’t good enough?” (114) he tries. What about Pig-Latin? What if he said he loved her twice? But the girlfriend is adamant and becomes hysterical. At this point, the narrator finds it necessary to impress upon the reader the importance of knowing a foreign language. Some study French or Italian. His older brother studied German at the Goethe Institute. In all, “You never know when a foreign language might come in handy” (113). Their mother is the ultimate proof to the invaluable asset of knowing German. She survived the Holocaust because she was fluent in German. One day, while having intercourse with a German officer, she talked him into sparing her life in German.

And then, when they were doing it, she pulled a knife out of her belt and slashed his chest open, just like she used to open chicken breasts to stuff them with rice for the Sabbath meal. (114)

In less than three pages Keret tells a story that can and ought to be read, disassembled, analyzed, challenged, assimilated, embraced, disputed, expanded, read and reread umpteen times, and still there will be no endpoint; only reiteration and that which is yet to come. Coping with Holocaust remembrance is inculcated into a postmodern text-language-reading-receptivity with two narratives subversively infiltrating each other’s logic and flow. As Keret suggested to me on a lovely day in April 2013, at a café in Tel Aviv, his storytelling is a survivor’s deconstructed story.

Endnotes

¹¹⁰ Aviad Kleinberg, "Gamba behor shel zayit; Etgar Keret," *s'farim, ha-aretz musaf shvu'i* (Ha-aretz, Weekly supplement, June 12, 2002).

¹¹¹ The following is the Hebrew text as it appeared in the daily Israeli newspaper, *Ha-aretz*, March 18, 2012: "ביצירותיו של קרת שזורות יחד ביקורתיות ומרידה במוסכמות ובאידיאולוגיות, לצד חמלה, רגישות ואנושיות אין קץ, והוסיפו כי דווקא הקלילות המדומה מטלטלת את הקוראים והצופים והודפת אותם בעוצמה אל עומקים ותהומות שלא ציפו להם. הכאב והעצב שזורים ברבות מיצירותיו, אך ברובן הבהוב של גאולה ותקווה."

¹¹² The order of stories appearing in *Pipes* and *Missing Kissinger* in the English publication does not always correspond with the original Hebrew collection.

¹¹³ Etgar Keret interviewed by Elad Zeret, *Yediot Aharonot*, June 5, 2013.

¹¹⁴ Michel Kichka, "Azharah: ha-reshima ha-ba'ah hi bikoret hiyuvit al komiks metzuyan; Asaf Hanuka al pi ha-kaytana shel kneler me'et Etgar Keret, hotza'at zmora bitan ve'hotza'at keter," *Ha-aretz*, July 19, 2004.

¹¹⁵ I confess I am guilty of going against Keret's wishes as I *do* teach his stories at Toronto's York University and other adult-learning settings.

¹¹⁶ Much of Israel's code of law was inherited from the British Mandate of Palestine, including the death penalty. However, several years after the establishment of the state, Israel abolished capital punishment, only allowing it during wartime and only for genocide, war crimes, and treason. The most famous and rare case of implementing the death penalty was the execution of Adolf Eichmann in 1962 for crimes committed during the Holocaust.

¹¹⁷ Among them, Micha Yosef Berdichevsky, Uri Nissan Gnessin, Yosef Haim Brenner, Dvora Baron, Shmuel Yosef Agnon, Yehudah Burla, and Haim Hazaz.

¹¹⁸ Natan Alterman, Yehuda Amichai, Dan Pagis, S. Yizhar, Amalia Kahana-Carmon, Haim Guri, Aharon Meged, Shulamith Hareven, and Aharon Appelfeld, followed by Amos Oz, A. B. Yehoshua, Natan Zach, Amir Gilboa, David Grossman, and Dalia Ravikovitch – to name but a few.

¹¹⁹ *Palmach* in Hebrew (פלמ"ח) is an acronym for "attack or strike units" (פלוגות מחץ) established in 1941 as elite (men and women) fighting troops. With the outbreak of the War of Independence in 1948 most *Palmach* units were incorporated into the Israel Defense Force however the myth of the *Palmach*'s ethos of self-sacrifice and bravery persisted long after.

¹²⁰ The United Nations Partition Plan for Palestine recommended for implementation on November 29, 1947 to the United Kingdom (the mandatory power of Palestine) called for the creation of two independent states; Jewish and Arab to immediately follow the end of the British Mandate. The plan was adopted swiftly by the Jewish Agency representing the Jewish people but was just as swiftly rejected by Arab leaders.

¹²¹ This translation (of poor quality as all other translations known to me) can be found at Zionism and Israel Information Center – Historical Documents and References: http://zionism-israel.com/hdoc/Silver_Platter.htm

¹²² For additional reading on the impact of Alterman's "Silver Platter" see Ruth Malkinson and Eliezer Witztum, "Psychological Aspects of Mourning in Historical and Literary Analyses," *Alpa'im*, 12 (1996):211-239 [Hebrew].

¹²³ Tuvia Rübner, cited and translated by Ruth Kartun-Blum (1999):36.

¹²⁴ In 2000, Ehud Barak, then Israel's Prime Minister, ordered the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Lebanon.

¹²⁵ See "An Interview with Agi Mishol by Lisa Katz" (2002) [downloaded on June 3, 2012]

¹²⁶ Agi Mishol, trans. Lisa Katz. *Look There: New and Selected Poems* (Minnesota, Saint Paul: Graywolf Press, 2006):6.

<http://www.poetryinternationalweb.net/pi/site/poem/item/3291/auto/WOMAN-MARTYR>

¹²⁷ See <<http://www.wordswithoutborders.org/?lab=RovnerKeretInterview>>

¹²⁸ In addition to co-editing *Tel Aviv Noir* and writing the introduction, the collection of stories includes a story by Keret titled "Allergies":254-260.

¹²⁹ For a sample of Hanna Yazo's research in English see "Inherited Fear: Second-Generation Poets and Novelists in Israel," *Breaking Crystal; Writing and Memory After Auschwitz*, ed., Efraim Sicher (1998):160-169.

¹³⁰ Ka-Tzetnik's inmate number tattooed on his arm at Auschwitz.

¹³¹ Ka-Tzetnik's *Salamandra* was originally written in Yiddish but translated and published in Hebrew by the author in 1946. It was translated into English by Moshe M. Kohn and titled *Sunshine in Hell* (London & New York: Simon & Schuster, 1955).

¹³² Ka-Tzetnik 135633, *House of Dolls*, trans. Moshe M. Kohn (London: W. H. Allen, 1977).

¹³³ The photo can be found on many websites. It also appears on the cover of Sicher's *Breaking Crystal* and on page 220 in the book.

¹³⁴ Conveyed by Yigal Schwartz at a 2013 conference in Germany, Aini's writing "as an act of survival" is extremely relevant to Keret as are other shared motifs. Nonetheless, Aini's philosophic affinity with Michel Foucault's panopticism – attributed by Schwartz to a worldview passed on to Aini through her father's philosophic remembrance of his experience in Auschwitz – does not jibe with a worldview transmitted to Keret by his Holocaust surviving parents.

¹³⁵ It occurs to me that Gershon Shaked (1989) may have had something vaguely similar in mind when suggesting that the methodological line should run before and after Grossman's *See Under: Love*; before Grossman wrote his masterpiece, and after Hebrew Holocaust literature came to possess "a phantasmagoria that human fantasy can encounter" (312).

¹³⁶ Robert Skloot argues in *The Darkness We Carry: The Drama of the Holocaust* (1988) that in real life, Gens bore his terrible role in a more honorable way than the much maligned Rumkowski of Lodz.

¹³⁷ Amira Hess, "People Who Stutter Understand" (Anashim she'megamgemim mevinim) in *The Bulimia of the Soul* (Ha'bulimia shel ha'neshama) (Tel Aviv: Helicon, 2007:31) cited by Oppenheimer (2010):300.

¹³⁸ Available in Hebrew only.

¹³⁹ Thirty one of Moshe Shamir's early stories, among them "Ha-gimgum ha-sheni," have recently been published by Am Oren in a collection titled: *Moshe Shamir; ve-afilu lir'ot kochavim* (And Even to See Stars).

¹⁴⁰ For further discussion of pedagogy and teaching Holocaust material see Robert Eaglestone and Barry Langford, eds., *Teaching Holocaust Literature and Film* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008) and Marianne Hirsch and Irene Kacandes, eds., *Teaching the Representation of the Holocaust* (New York: the Modern Language Association of America, 2004).

¹⁴¹ Derrida's *De la grammatologie* was first published in 1967. The English translation by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak appeared in 1976 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press).

¹⁴² From the Knesset Minutes, 18 May 1952 cited by Yablonka and Friling.

¹⁴³ Recently, in a documentary filmed several weeks after his father's death, Keret revealed that every night, while sleeping, his father could not stop moving his feet as if he was walking back and forth. The documentary is in Hebrew with English subtitles. It is titled "Cultural Heroes; Etgar Keret What Kind of Animal are You?" and can be viewed on line at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SCcagjPjTbM>

¹⁴⁴ The text used here is the version published in *Jacques Derrida: Acts of Literature* edited by Derek Attridge (1992):181-220.

¹⁴⁵ It is while struggling with Derrida's essay "The Law of Genre" that I came across something Derrida said which helped "liberate" me from "fearing" Derrida. If Derrida can admit that Maurice Blanchot's writing remains "inaccessible to me, as if immersed in a fog from which there came to me only fascinating gleams, and occasionally, but at irregular intervals, the flare of an invisible lighthouse on the coast" (cited by Attridge (1992):221) – then I, too, can feel overwhelmed when attempting to decipher Derrida's writings.

¹⁴⁶ Aviv Gefen is Keret's brother in law.

¹⁴⁷ While not about Israel, the dialectics of individual remembrance that resists collective pressures are articulated exceptionally well by Marita Sturken in *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering* (1997). In its empathic spirit of coping with traumatic remembrance, I bind Sturken's theorizing with Keret's artistic design. One of the most revealing examples in Sturken's discourse is the AIDS epidemic in America's gay community which set in motion a deluge of individualized responses in heterogeneous formats of "political activism, kitsch, folk art, and high culture" (176-177). Once the terrible illness of Hollywood's mega-star Rock Hudson, and the quintessential TV father-figure Robert Reed of the Brady Bunch, could no longer be concealed, collective denial exploded into numerous individualized manifestations of coping. Unlike Keret's marginalized misfits, AIDS became associated with some of the best known artists of the 1980s. Freddie Mercury, Rudolf Nureyev, Alvin Ailey, Arthur Ashe, Tony Richardson, Isaac Asimov, Anthony Perkins, and Ofra Haza were among the fatalities, as was the famous theorist Michel Foucault, and the openly gay politicians Mayor George

Moscone and Supervisor Harvey Milk. Sturken's scintillating argumentation demonstrates how "a movement of personal memories" morphed into traumatic "cultural memory" (176).

¹⁴⁸ Yitzhak Laor, *Poems in the Iron Valley* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1990:81-82) cited by Glenda Abramson, (2003):233-234.

¹⁴⁹ "Throwdown at the Playground" appeared in *Tablet Magazine* in 2009 and is available online at www.tabletmag.com/jewish-life-and-religion

¹⁵⁰ See online conversation between Liz Shulman and Etgar Keret at, <http://mondoweiss.net/2012/etgar-keret-in-ny-times-magazine-trys-on...>

¹⁵¹ Ha-aretz, June 15, 2011, can be found online at www.haaretz.co.il/misc/2.444/1.1177301 [in Hebrew]

¹⁵² In *The Girl on the Fridge*.

¹⁵³ All efforts by several Israeli governments to deregulate *Egged* failed.

¹⁵⁴ Gadi Taub, *Rega, eifo ha-poenta?* *Ha-aretz* May 15, 2002.

¹⁵⁵ Ben-Amos's citations of Freud are from *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, trans. James Strachey in collaboration with Anna Freud (London, 1960). The original German edition was published in 1905.

¹⁵⁶ Carolyn Kellogg, "Book Review: 'Suddenly, a Knock on the Door' by Etgar Keret," (2012).

¹⁵⁷ Available in Hebrew only.

¹⁵⁸ Frank O'Connor is the pseudonym of Michael O'Donovan.

¹⁵⁹ Etgar Keret in an interview with Michelle Johnson (2008).

¹⁶⁰ Falk highlights the challenges of translating Hebrew which does not distinguish between uppercase and lowercase letters, and with punctuation often serving as a clue to the opening and closing of a sentence. In and of itself, this makes translating Hebrew poets who tend to avoid punctuation a greater challenge.

¹⁶¹ For a riveting discussions of current debates over spoken Hebrew, see Ruvik Rosenthal, *Hedvat ha-lashon: sihot al ha-ivrit ha-yisraelit* [The Joy of the Language: Conversations on Israeli Hebrew], (Tel Aviv: Am Oved Publishing, 2004), and Ghil'ad Zuckermann, *Yisraelit safa yafa* [Israeli, a Beautiful Language: Hebrew as Myth], (Tel Aviv: Am Oven Publishing, 2008).

¹⁶² My translation and paraphrasing of Gabriel Moked.

Conclusion

I, may I rest in peace – I, who am still living say,
May I have peace in the rest of my life.
I want peace right now while I'm still alive.
I don't want to wait like that pious man who wished for one leg
of the golden chair of Paradise, I want a four-legged chair
right here, a plain wooden chair. I want the rest of my peace now.
[...]
I don't want to fulfill my parents' prophecy that life is a war.
I want peace with all my body and soul.
Rest me in peace.
(Yehuda Amichai, "In My Life, on My Life," *Open Closed Open*)

I conclude *After 'Postmemory' Coping with Holocaust Remembrance in Postmodern Hebrew Literature* by returning to the ethics of Holocaust representation, and by personalizing the significance of the methodological structure developed in my work and its relatedness to Etgar Keret's storytelling.

Ethical Principle

As I argued in chapter one, taking a stance along the spectrum of approaches to Holocaust representation, from factual historicity to fiction about the Holocaust and its remembrance, presumes an orientation or approach to ethics. Ethics are set into motion when claiming that Auschwitz is a historical aberration that is too evil to fathom. In other words, situating the Holocaust outside the orbit of human history implies that the Holocaust has no relevance to our current lives. At the other end, there are ethical implications to indiscriminate employment of "never again" rhetoric, and to careless use of Holocaust remembrance to justify political interests. The ethical judgment guiding the modality of coping with Holocaust remembrance opposes shrouding Holocaust remembrance with inaccessibility and rejects misusing it for political interests.

Mythologizing the Holocaust because it is too terrifying to contemplate is tantamount to saying that the Holocaust was planned and executed by the gods, or forces of nature, and not by humans. On the other hand, politicizing Holocaust remembrance invariably lapses into rhetoric which equates victimization with righteousness.

Constructing the Modality of Coping with Holocaust Remembrance and Personalization of Etgar Keret's Storytelling

Constructing an academic modality of coping with Holocaust remembrance which encompasses the relationship between philosophy and history as conveyers of moral knowledge, historicity versus imaginative fiction about the Holocaust, postmodern deconstruction of the language of remembrance, and the application of Holocaust remembrance onto real politics – dates back to a personal passage from Holocaust remembrance to coping with Holocaust remembrance. This personal passage from remembrance to coping with remembrance is encapsulated in a process I went through over many years.

Much of it evolves around the significance of an archival document dated May 9, 1942. The document is a deportation order of all Jewish residents of Eisenach, Germany. Paula Seliger, my grandmother, was one of Eisenach's Jews that were to be deported. No longer Paula Seliger but reduced to "*nùmmmer 106 - Eisenach-Stadt transport*," Paula (Frank) Seliger was born in Steinach in 1887. Her brother, Leo, introduced her to a friend by the name: Max Seliger. They dated, married, and moved to Eisenach. Martin, their son (who was to become my father), attended a regular school but on Sundays, he studied Hebrew at the local synagogue. Max enlisted and served in the German army in

World War I but died in 1919. A single mother, Paula did her best to raise her son as a loyal German citizen, and a Jew by faith. Eisenach hosted a small but vibrant Jewish community. A new synagogue was built in 1885. It was destroyed by the Nazis in November 1938 on *Kristallnacht*. Two years earlier, in 1936, Martin, by then an active member of a Zionist youth movement, was encouraged (together with his girlfriend, who was to become my mother) to leave for Palestine. An immigration certificate was obtained for Paula in 1938 but for unexplainable reasons was rejected by the British mandate authorities in Palestine. Paula remained in Eisenach awaiting her fate. On May 9, 1942, when Paula and Eisenach's Jews were deported, a local nun retrieved a copy of the deportation order, and held on to it. Years later, having located the whereabouts of my father, she gave him the document, and he passed it on to me.

The most frightening aspect of the document is its formalism. It is meticulously typed with some added hand-written notations. The names of Jewish citizens to be deported from Eisenach are listed in perfect alphabetic order, beginning with Ella S. August-Lazar, and ending with Ilse S. Zimmer. It is authorized and signed by a person named Adolf Diamant. As noted, Paula Seliger is number 106 on the list. She was deported to Lublin and from there sent to a death camp. I studied this two-page document over and over again as if trying to make my grandmother come to life. But to no avail. Its horrific content always seemed to reveal more about the Nazi fastidious and methodical war against the Jewish people, than about my grandmother.

I researched the Holocaust for years. I jotted down everything my mother and father told me about pre Hitler life in Germany. Eventually, after much hesitation and dread, I mustered the courage to travel to Eisenach. I stood on the exact same platform

from where Paula was taken. And finally I understood. My desperate attempts to excavate a darkened past was not about remembrance but about needing to *cope with remembrance*. It was about being a Jew, a woman, a daughter, a mother, a sister, an educator, and a Canadian-Israeli while having to cope with the knowledge that I will never be able to come to terms with what happened to my family and my people. It was then that I began thinking about coping with Holocaust remembrance as a form of sublimation; a process in which mourning is channeled into creative expressions and acts of moral affirmation. Coping with Holocaust remembrance is not about the ethics of turning the other cheek and forgiveness. The modality of coping with Holocaust remembrance is not anchored in an expectation that the Jewish people be more righteous than others merely because they know all too well what it means to be victimized. Rather, the modality of coping with Holocaust remembrance is rooted in the idea that the ethics of responsibility for the Other provides the Jewish people with palliative sustenance to offset having to live with traumatic remembrance.

It is not sainthood that I have in mind when speaking about the responsibility for the Other. Instead, I have in mind the narrator in Keret's "Pipes" (*The Bus Driver Who Wanted to be God*), who, having created a large enough pipe to crawl into, finds his way to heaven where he discovers hundreds like him who are not particularly righteous, and haven't "spent their whole life being good" (89). They "really don't fit in the world [but] each have their own way of getting to Heaven" (89). Metaphorically, post Holocaust Jews resemble Keret's protagonist who is diagnosed by the school psychologist as suffering from perceptual disorders because he failed to notice that the image of a head shown to him has no ears. After the Holocaust, the Jewish people *understandably* suffer

from “severe perceptual disorders” (86) – as in being “obsessed” with the Holocaust, and as in being consumed by a fear of yet another catastrophe: the destruction of the State of Israel. Having said that, and once again, just like the regular folks in “Pipes” who had to engage in creative ways “of getting here [heaven]” (89), Jewish, and Jewish-Israeli folks need to find creative ways “of getting here” – “here” being cognizant of meaning and implications of having to cope with Holocaust remembrance.

The textual substance of Keret’s voluminous writing is dazzling in its diversification. From “Pipes” (*Pipes*, 1992) onwards, Keret continues to bounce wildly from realism to fantasy, from violence to empathy, and from the grotesque to humor. Throughout it all, he remains steadfast in his faithful devotion to the Other, the square peg in an unwelcoming round set-up. Keret’s protagonist in “Shoes” (*The Bus Driver Who Wanted to be God*) is instructed by his teacher not to touch anything on display at a memorial house for victims of the Holocaust. But driven by an innermost determination to find meaning, he disobeys his teacher and dares to touch. It is the same non-conformity, empathic singularity, and imaginative creativity, that leads the boy to cope with Holocaust remembrance by incorporating the non-presence of a grandfather killed in the Holocaust, into the heart of his everyday life.

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