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## Holocaust Mothers and Daughters

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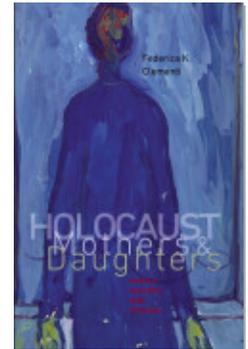
Published by Brandeis University Press

Clementi, Federica K.

Holocaust Mothers and Daughters: Family, History, and Trauma.

Brandeis University Press, 2013.

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# INTRODUCTION

## Remember What Amalek Did to You

The mother is the faceless figure of a *figurant*, an extra. She gives rise to all the figures by losing herself in the background of the scene like an anonymous persona. Everything comes back to her, beginning with life; everything addresses and destines itself to her. She survives on the condition of remaining at bottom.

 **JACQUES DERRIDA**, *The Ear of the Other*

In *Against the Apocalypse*, David G. Roskies shares the following personal story:

Not long ago . . . I visited one of my mother's Israeli friends, Regina, and brought a fountain pen as a gift. Regina, who studied with Eisenstein in Moscow and is the first professor of film history at an Israeli university, tested the pen just as her father had taught her to do in Bialystok before World War I: she wrote the word "Amalek," and then crossed it out. Here was a lapsed daughter of her people heeding the ancient call of Deuteronomy: "Remember what Amalek did to you on your journey, after you left Egypt . . . You shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven. Do not forget!" (25:17, 19).<sup>1</sup>

Of the numerous biblical injunctions to "remember," this one quoted from Deuteronomy by Roskies is to me the most intriguing and profound. Its historical referent is an incident, reported in Exodus, in which Amalek led his seminomadic tribe in a particularly savage and cowardly raid against the Israelites, then in flight from Egypt, attacking their temporary encampment and massacring those incapable of defending themselves—the women and children, the old and infirm. Thus Amalek, a progenitor of Haman, became the symbol of pure evil for the Jews and an enemy not only to Israel but to God, who pledged to annihilate his nation.

But how is one to never forget to forget him? I am fascinated by the idea that we must write his story in order to *unwrite* him from history. Thus the act of writing, so meaningful in the eternal Jewish quest for deciphering history, is both capable of creation and its opposite. This way, remembering for the Jews is established as the act of charging the perpetrators for their guilt while

blotting out the qualities they embody, the unethical message their dreadful and murderous stories carry. To wipe out the “memory” (*zekher*, *zikaron*, meaning remembrance) of Amalek means to wipe out his “name” (also *zekher*). The connection existing between a man (*zakhar*, denoting male in Hebrew), his name, and the memory that carries into his genealogical line is the central concern of chapter 25 in Deuteronomy, which deals with the rules of levirate—according to which a brother-in-law is obliged to take his sister-in-law as his wife, should she be widowed, and devote their first-born son to the memory of the deceased husband and brother by naming the child after him.<sup>2</sup> Within this brief chapter, as Roskies reminds us, the fateful name of Amalek suddenly reappears: it is in the context of illustrating what God abhors (that is, fraud and deceit) and how such abominable crimes should be dealt with (that is, by blotting out forever the memory of their perpetrators). Thanks to the way in which Deuteronomy frames Amalek’s story, his symbolic meaning becomes manifest: we write “Amalek” in order to preempt his posterity (the continuation of his “name”). But blotting out the memory has to do with annihilating the lineage of evil, certainly not with forgetting its effects. “Do not forget!” We must remember to write his name in order to blot it out, and in the act of blotting it out, we etch it all the deeper into our personal and collective consciousness. A distant relative of that ancient injunction, and a product of twentieth-century history, is the post-Holocaust mantra “Never again!” In order to assure that the Holocaust is never repeated, we make sure to repeat its story over and over again in as many variations and different media as possible: “Never again” in history, but “forever and ever” in the Jewish mind.

Although men have been the patrons of the written records of Jewish history throughout the millennia, from the middle of the twentieth century onward, women have picked up the pen and contributed their viewpoints to the archives of Jewish collective memory with an unprecedented engagement. The Holocaust has been retold equally devotedly by men and women alike. Legions of women stepped into the place of disappeared fathers, brothers, or husbands and assumed the responsibility of writing Jewish history, of remembering what “Amalek” did to them personally and collectively. In so doing, women have allowed new, unexpected nuances to emerge from within the all-encompassing Jewish fold, whose dominant voice has traditionally understood itself as male.

The appearance of women’s voices within the Jewish canon on such a large scale has many interesting consequences and developments. The testimony of women has made it apparent that mass historical experiences cannot be looked at only through the flattening lens of cumulative history. Instead, we need to attend to the heterogeneity that is always embedded in such large-scale events.

By paying attention to the subtleties of women's accounts (regardless of the medium in which they are expressed), we have learned that women experience war and genocide differently from men. More than that, we now know that differences in social class, age, degrees of religiosity and assimilation, sexual and linguistic identities, nationalities, and geographical locations of the victims shape each one's experience and memory. Although these distinguishing factors made no difference to the Nazis in terms of their extermination plans (sooner or later, every Jew was going to be annihilated), they could significantly affect the way the victims experienced the genocide, and whether they succumbed to it or were able to resist it and survive (the outsized role that chance and luck played in survival notwithstanding). As the historian Judith Baumel has brilliantly said, reformulating the 1960s feminist motto "the personal is political," "the personal was lethal" during the Holocaust.<sup>3</sup> Baumel's 1998 *Double Jeopardy* pays an invaluable scholarly tribute to the variety, multifacetedness, and multi-layeredness of the Holocaust experience through the lens of gender by interlacing analyses of both Jewish and non-Jewish contributions and collaborations in the fight against or resistance to Nazism and Fascism. She is also among the first scholars to have brought into the mix the distinctiveness of ultra-Orthodox women's experiences, which, due to our widespread inability to "[break] their linguistic and cultural codes, scholars have often found it easier to ignore . . . or to treat . . . marginally."<sup>4</sup> A good example of a historical blind spot with gender-relevant implications is explored by Rochelle Saidel in *The Jewish Women of Ravensbrück Concentration Camp*, where she unveils the horrors that occurred in a single death camp. Because of postwar Eastern bloc politics, the camp had been left grossly understudied for decades, despite the fact that during the war, it had gas chambers of its own and one of the highest murder rates among all concentration camps (second only to Auschwitz-Birkenau). Predictably, and in line with party ideology, the Soviets programmatically minimized the Jewish identity of the prisoners there. However, the distinguishing feature of Ravensbrück was not the Jewishness of its prisoners but the fact that it had been designated as a women's camp, and therefore, the majority of its prisoners (one of whom was American-born Gemma LaGuardia Gluck, sister of New York City Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia) and victims were women and children. According to Saidel, for a very long time this fact was "ignored in memorial exhibits, monuments, and publications in the United States."<sup>5</sup>

According to Joan Ringelheim, thirty years ago no one would have thought to apply feminist theory to the Shoah. "The connection between genocide and gender," she writes, "has been difficult to conceive for some; for others, it has been difficult to construct."<sup>6</sup> The insistence on gender individualization within

the uniform category of victims—a uniformity that is often strictly maintained in order to simplify the ethical divide between the two main camps of any genocidal story, victims and victimizers—still causes some anxiety. Some still fear that gendering the Holocaust would detract from, not add to, our understanding of the catastrophe because it would spuriously entangle us in the dialectics of ideology (read, feminist ideology). Others fear that the intent behind an inclusive and particularized reading of the human experience is to create a hierarchy of sufferance, not a more complex portrait of this sufferance. However, in considering the earlier groundbreaking works of Ringelheim, Carol Rittner, John Roth, Vera Laska, and Marion Kaplan and the more recent scholarship on the subject (by Nechama Tec, Elizabeth Baer, Myrna Goldenberg, Sara Horowitz, Phyllis Lassner, Anna Reading, and others),<sup>7</sup> it seems to me that the most compelling and successful argument is the one in favor of focusing on gender and the minutiae of intimate family portraits as a productive, not detractive, way to observe the devastating effects of the genocide. The focus on the singular, personal, and domestic allows us to trace the genocide’s rippling impacts on the daily lives of its victims. As Lenore Weitzman and Dalia Ofer argue in their momentous edited volume *Women in the Holocaust*, it is precisely “the details of everyday life—the portrait of a woman who saved her single ration of bread for her children, or that of a man who volunteered for forced labor because his wages were promised to his family—that restore individuality and humanity to the victims.”<sup>8</sup> My research aligns itself with this current in Jewish studies. Throughout the last three decades of research, feminist scholars have brought to the fore how the Nazis’ treatment of their victims differed depending on gender and how Jewish men and women experienced the Nazi war against them in unique ways. The present volume hopes to contribute to this strand of feminist theory by observing that women have also written differently than men about their Shoah experiences.

In *Women’s Holocaust Writing*, Lillian Kremer takes fictional and historical texts by men and women and compares their treatment of the same topics. For instance, she offers an interesting example of how stories about children in the ghettos are narrated by different genders: “Male historians and novelists often celebrate the heroism of children as major actors in smuggling operations to supplement the meager supply of food in the ghettos . . . [while i]n ghetto representations by women writers, the focus is unrelentingly maintained on the children’s victimization, starvation, illness, subjection to lethal injection, or deportation to the death camps.”<sup>9</sup> Although *Holocaust Mothers and Daughters* carries forward the work started by Kremer, it also shifts the terms of the inquiry by focusing exclusively on autobiographical texts, mostly memoirs, from several

countries and in several different languages, and examining only the testimony of those women who were directly touched by the Shoah and those who experienced its aftershocks (that is, the second generation). Most importantly, I focus on one central topic whose treatment, I argue, is handled in gender-specific terms in both male and female war writings: the mother. The Jewish mother-daughter bond is the articulatory hinge on which my analysis swings. From the incredibly vast bibliography available, I chose texts that make central to the life of a Jewish daughter the presence, influence, example, and love of a “Holocaust mother.” These authors experienced the genocide with or through their victim-mother, and in looking back at their formative childhood years, they understood the maternal genealogy (biological and adoptive) as the foundational root of their identities as women, Jews, and (when it applies) survivors.

The inspiration for *Holocaust Mothers and Daughters* came from my experience in the classroom teaching Shoah literature to college students. The comments during class discussions showed clearly that the readings offered by my conventional assignments (Primo Levi’s *If This Is a Man*, Elie Wiesel’s *Night*, and Tadeusz Borowski’s Auschwitz chronicles) were teaching students a lot about the horrors of life in Auschwitz but very little about life outside of Auschwitz at the time, or about the Jewish experience in Europe at large. I decided therefore to make room in the syllabus for less prominent wartime texts—specifically, women’s memoirs—and students were very responsive to the new perspectives these had to offer. At that point I began to think comparatively of women’s and men’s Shoah writing. To give a quick example, if we take two comparable Italian postwar classics, Levi’s *If This Is a Man*<sup>10</sup> and Natalia Ginzburg’s *Family Sayings*<sup>11</sup> the gendered differences to which I am referring become apparent. *If This Is a Man* begins at the time of deportation and ends with the liberation of the camps: this strict temporal bracketing contributes to the impression that Auschwitz was indeed a freak parenthesis—a historical bubble, a suspension outside of time and space—rather than part of a longer historical development. Levi lingers neither over the fate of his family members nor over the details of his adult life in Turin before the war. The text opens with the story of his capture by the Fascist Militia in 1943, not for being a Jew but for fighting with the partisans. Once he reveals his Jewish identity, Levi is immediately sent to the camps. All this is covered in a one-page preamble. Levi skips any portraiture of family life before the war; in general, canonic Shoah autobiographies rarely linger over such details, and when they do, they draw family portraits in quite a stylized or idealized manner. Zoë Waxman has pointed out that the tendency to idealize memories of the prewar past can also be understood “as an attempt to emphasize how much was destroyed by the Nazis, and to show that the Holocaust constitutes

more than just the suffering endured in the ghettos or concentration camps, or in hiding; it means the obliteration of individual histories.”<sup>12</sup> As I will show later, Wiesel’s *Night* is a prime example of such a stylized account. Ginzburg’s *Family Sayings*, in contrast, is a text of Jewish memory where family life and national history intersect in ways that do not end up overwhelming the personal in its treatment of the communal. In her memoir we receive an unforgettable portrayal of one Italian Jewish family from long before the war, a portrayal that emphasizes the importance of domestic bonds, daily routines, and the family’s “language” (made up of funny proverbs, personal linguistic quirks, regional inflections, and so on) in which Ginzburg locates identity.<sup>13</sup> *Family Sayings* is not only a war story but an immortal homage to the quirks and humor, weaknesses and resourcefulness, little tyrannies and subversive anticonformism of the memoirist’s mother and father. Unlike Levi, Ginzburg survived in hiding with her children (her husband, Leone Ginzburg, was tortured to death by the Nazis in Rome) and was not deported to Auschwitz, which certainly explains the moments of relative levity in her narrative; spared the camps as she was, such levity was still possible. Nevertheless, there is great value in integrating the vision of events that Levi’s memoir offers with parallel perspectives describing the domestic life that is often obscured in masculine narratives such as his.

Even more so than postwar memoirs, wartime diaries enhance our understanding of the history by juxtaposing viewpoints that vary greatly depending on the location, gender, social status, and age of the writers. The genre of the personal diary or journal is particularly well suited to present details of domestic life. In her analysis of dozens of published and unpublished Holocaust diaries, Alexandra Garbarini notices that diarists “possessed a keen sense of the historicity of their experiences and wrote in their dual capacity as victims and witnesses. Some were concerned with recording the history of their families, in particular, rather than with contributing to Jewish history or European history or human history, in general.”<sup>14</sup> For instance, a comparison between Emanuel Ringelblum’s and Hélène Berr’s journals helps illustrate the wide range of purposes that Garbarini identifies and also proves that the differences in the scopes of diaries were inflected by the gender of the diarists. Through the pages of Ringelblum’s journal, we peek into the bestial, anarchic, corrupt hell of the Warsaw Ghetto, witnessing the apocalyptic fate of tens of thousands of people and the destruction of an entire community through the words of someone who had set for himself the task of leaving behind a record of what the perpetrators wished to conceal from history. Ringelblum was a social activist, a historian, and a prominent international figure in Jewish public affairs. In writing his journal and leading the underground operation *Oyneg Shabes*,<sup>15</sup> which sought

to document Jewish life in the ghetto under occupation in a secret archive, he was keenly aware of his historical role as chronicler of his community's fate, aware that his words might be the only remaining testament for future generations of what had been done to the Jews—men, women, and children; the old and the young—by the Nazis. As chronicler of his community, Ringelblum did not overlook women. With these lines, his journal famously pays tribute to the role of women during the crisis: “Future historians will have to devote a whole separate chapter to the Jewish Woman in wartime. She holds a prominent place in the history of the Jews. Thanks to her courage and endurance, thousands of families are able to withstand these awful times. Lately, we are noticing an interesting development: in some Komitety Domowe [House Committees], women are stepping forward to replace men who, emaciated and exhausted, are leaving the jobs they've held until now. There are some Komitety Domowe entirely run by women.”<sup>16</sup> Contemporaneously, many unknown Jewish men and women all over Europe were also recording their daily experiences under German occupation in personal journals, sometimes just to keep themselves from sinking into despair. One of these was H el ene Berr, a woman in her early twenties from the Parisian petite bourgeoisie who was a talented violinist and a lover of English language and poetry (she was getting her degree in English from the Sorbonne). Her journal, which was published only in 2008, chronicles the way victims clung to daily routines as a way of holding onto a quickly dissolving normalcy.<sup>17</sup> For Berr, these routines—meeting friends, playing violin with her chamber group, visiting her family's country house—took place within the sophisticated yet increasingly circumscribed boundaries of her private Parisian world.

We follow the rather sheltered Berr as she journeys from incomprehension to a full awareness of the enormity of the situation. The journal, particularly the first part, is very self-centered: the writer holds onto her reassuring routines with a youthful insouciance due not only to her age but also to an honest ignorance of political events. Naivet e permeates this first part of her text, until the situation becomes so obviously hopeless that any subconscious effort to deny reality collapses and the despairing H el ene uses her diary to consciously record the horror she witnesses around her. In this way, what begins as a sort of *journal intime* gradually turns into a more intentional historical testimony. “They are separating mothers and children,” writes Berr with mounting panic. “I note down the facts . . . in order not to forget them, because one must not forget. In Miss Monsaingeon's neighborhood, an entire family—father, mother and five children—have killed themselves with gas to escape the roundup. A woman jumped out of a window. They say that several policemen have been shot for having warned people to run away . . . What are the long-term consequences

of this thing that happened the night before last?"<sup>18</sup> Eventually, Berr started volunteering with a local organization to help Jewish children whose parents had been deported. However, despite her work, she had no way of knowing with absolute certainty what was in store for French Jews. She was deported east with her parents on March 27, 1944, when she was twenty-three; none of them returned.<sup>19</sup>

The events she witnessed were but one version of the horrors that were occurring everywhere in Nazi-occupied Europe. Like Ringelblum's chronicle, Berr's journal shows us how people were taken away, suffered, shared their grief intimately with family and friends in their homes, despaired, fled, or took their lives. We also learn of small acts of solidarity from the Christian world. However, Berr did not fashion her journal with the same powerful conviction that sustained Ringelblum—that one day a simple diary would be a monument to the disappeared, an indictment of a history that erased so many victims. In Berr's writings, we sense instead the despair of women who are helpless once the men in their lives are rounded up and taken away, as her father was. Berr is particularly shocked by the fate of the mothers and young children around her to whom she cannot be of any support. She gives us a portrait of the terror that the lack of reliable information produces in the victims, especially women. Moreover, Berr does not position herself or her diary as a bridge between the chaotic experience of the victims and a posterity that will remember and honor their struggles; rather, her perspective is a very personal one, and she is alone in her efforts to figure out each move. Her father, Raymond Berr, seems to be at a complete loss (weakened and traumatized as he is after his brief detention and release from Drancy), and her mother and her connections are of no help. Ringelblum's account is more impersonal. If, as some scholars felt, "Ringelblum went too far in his attempt to write himself out of his *ghetto* narratives,"<sup>20</sup> Berr put herself, her story, and her sentiments at the very center of her narrative. Ringelblum's and Berr's are two versions of the same story: one is delivered by an authoritative and influential leader, the other by an inexperienced and private voice. As Ringelblum reminds us, women played an important role in all aspects of Jewish life during the war; however, very few women held positions of power or visibility comparable to his, largely because such preeminence would have had to be established before the war.

The history and timing of the publication of these two victims' documents reveal something about the perception the world at large had of their roles as witnesses. Of the dozens of people who had earnestly collaborated with Ringelblum to assemble the secret archive, only three were alive after the war. Of these, the former secretary of the Oyneg Shabes, Hersz Wasser, led the

recovery operation that rescued two-thirds of the hidden archive in 1946 and 1950.<sup>21</sup> Berr's journal, as explained in a postscript to the text by Mariette Job, the daughter of the diarist's sister, was typed up after the war by an employee of the Établissements Kuhlmann, the prestigious company Hélène's father had directed. It was in this format that it circulated for decades among the members of the Berr family. In the early 1990s, Job decided to locate the original manuscript, and she found it in 1994 with the help of those who had been close to her aunt during her lifetime. With the permission of her family, Job donated it to the Centre de Documentation Juive Contemporaine in Paris in 2002, and it is now on display at the Mémorial de la Shoah, together with a detailed history of the Berr family. And yet for sixty-three years, this document had survived not as a crucial historical record but as a family's private and intimate treasure. As Kassow points out, "had he survived, Ringelblum would have been the first to insist that Holocaust historiography consider not only the perpetrators and the bystanders but also the silenced voices of the victims. To hear those voices requires an understanding of who they were before the war."<sup>22</sup> In this respect, Berr's diary is quite powerful because of the insights it gives us into the cultural milieu and everyday life of Jews before their annihilation; it is, in sum, exactly the kind of invaluable documentation of Jewish life that Ringelblum himself appreciated and was hoping to save from erasure. Taken together, both diarists deepen our vision of the events: Ringelblum, the social activist and leader who speaks for all those who cannot,<sup>23</sup> and Berr, an unknown woman who, though she can only speak for herself, still helps us see the larger story through her own narrow perspective.

Feminist scholarship has helped us recognize that in the literature and autobiographies of women, the domestic stage is central in peacetime and wartime alike. I couldn't help notice that the same remains true for Shoah memoirs, and hence a desire was born in me to write a book that analyzes the Jewish domestic stage from a female perspective under the alternately deforming and informing pressure of genocide. As feminist analysis has proven time and again, it is in the writing of women that we can best uncover the intimate details of family life because of the domestic origins of women's literary worlds—the female domain historically being the house, not the agora (the public space). Women's narratives center on everyday rituals, domestic geographies, and the quotidian familial details usually removed from traditional male narratives. In women's domestic perspectives, the truth of personal history enriches, reevaluates, and ultimately questions the Truth of History. Hence, "the Jewish historical experience of ordinary women," which was traditionally "subsumed in that of the Jewish community as a whole," and "(like all histories) has been told from the

vantage point of Jewish men,” finally finds room to emerge.<sup>24</sup> Turning to the gender specificity of memory, I challenge the widespread practice of studies in Shoah literature to focus “primarily on the writings of men, whose perspectives have been taken as representative of the experience of all Holocaust victims,” as Marlene Heinemann puts it.<sup>25</sup> It is still the norm that the writings of male witnesses outnumber those of women in practically every Holocaust school curriculum and in most anthologies. For instance, in Lawrence Langer’s important volume on Holocaust cultural production, *Art from the Ashes*, the only woman to appear in the section devoted to firsthand witnessing is Charlotte Delbo, a Christian; in the chapter “Journals and Diaries,” there are no excerpts from Anne Frank’s or other women’s diaries; and, finally, had the section on painters not been limited to those imprisoned in Terezín, it could have been enriched by the inclusion of Charlotte Salomon, who remains unmentioned there and elsewhere in the volume.<sup>26</sup> Only four women (one of whom was not Jewish) are featured in a volume that includes thirty men.

There are stark differences between the style of women survivor writers and their male counterparts. The former are more likely to recount the memories of domestic life and the complex child-parent relationships therein by presenting their own childhood perspective on events; furthermore, female writers tend not to follow the long-standing tradition of talking about victims of injustice in highly idealized terms. The key example of this is the figure of the mother. Women often don’t hide the fact that “hating” their mothers, even during the Holocaust, was as much a part of their relationship as depending on them for life and survival. Therefore, I decided to gather the voices of a group of women who have, in their Shoah-inflected writings, highlighted their difficult relations with their mothers so as to examine how they described these relationships despite or because of—through and beyond—the impact of the genocide. What I make visible is the courageous act of portraying the complex, ambiguous, and sometimes unbearable side of a girl’s love for and inextricable bond with her mother—and vice versa—under the extreme conditions of a great historical upheaval.

In literary criticism as much as in psychoanalytic theory, there is a gap on the subject of the mother-daughter relationship, which tends either to take on the perspective of the mother or to be subsumed under the broader mother-child rubric. Caroline Eliacheff and Nathalie Heinich—a French psychoanalyst and sociologist, respectively—have pointed out: “We can’t rely on established theories [on the mother-daughter topic] . . . Despite the fact that it is a very engaging subject for those who are invested in it, it is strangely very little studied: an overabundance of studies about maternity, filiation, femininity or

female sexuality is contrasted with . . . the almost complete absence of analyses, especially psychoanalytical, of mother-daughter relations.”<sup>27</sup> However, there is no lack of literature on the “Jewish mother”: the stereotype, the myth, the fiction. Oppressive and limiting representations in popular culture cast her either as an insupportable kvetcher—that is, a chronically smothering, over-protective complainer (a staple of Jewish humor, from Eastern Europe to West Hollywood)—or as the epitome of female sainthood, representing an idealized and unrecoverable past (the lost *Yiddishkeit*). Both views, however contrasting, are the products of male imagination; Jewish mothers in Jewish men’s works appear to be either portrayed in archetypal terms or not portrayed at all.

Many American feminist scholars—including Joyce Antler, Sylvia Barack Fishman, Donna Bassin, Margaret Honey, Meryle Mahrer Kaplan, Janet Burstein, Adalgisa Giorgio, and Marianne Hirsch—have engaged in important critical reformulations of the maternal figure (Jewish and non-Jewish) in our culture.<sup>28</sup> All of these authors have played a fundamental role in the creation of a counternarrative for mothers and daughters, especially as it pertains to American and American-Jewish culture. *Holocaust Mothers and Daughters* pushes the bounds of our inquiry into the Jewish mother-daughter plot by daring to touch on the sensitive topic of Shoah memory and victimhood.

The Shoah offers an important observation point from which to study mother-child dynamics. The fates of young children and those of their mothers are never so tightly knitted together as they are in times of war. Typically, children and the elderly remain under the care of women once men leave for the front, but genocide is a collateral war that primarily targets women as the reproductive source of the people designated for annihilation. As Mary Felstiner notes, “genocide is the act of putting women and children first.”<sup>29</sup> Women who entered the concentration camps with children or pregnant were automatically selected for the gas chambers, regardless of their ability to work (a default fate spared to men). “When a Jewish child is born, or when a woman comes to the camp with a child already,” Josef Mengele, known as the Angel of Death of Auschwitz-Birkenau, is reported to have said, “I don’t know what to do with the child . . . It would not be humanitarian to send a child to the ovens without permitting the mother to be there to witness the child’s death. That is why I send the mother and the child to the gas ovens together.”<sup>30</sup>

As mentioned above, the most read, translated, and studied (in schools and universities) Shoah writers still largely remain Elie Wiesel, Primo Levi, and Tadeusz Borowski, joined relatively recently by Art Spiegelman, the author of *Maus*. These writers are taken as the Holocaust’s most authoritative voices. (Anne Frank holds an uncontested place as the most iconic Holocaust victim, but her diary

is rarely treated as a serious work of literature in its own right.) Yet in Wiesel's autobiographical novel *Night*, for instance, the word "mother" makes its first appearance in the text only after we have met the father, the village people, and other secondary characters. The mother's presence exhausts itself in a couple of epigraphic lines. In 1943, with the deportations of the Jews well under way, all we are told is that "my mother was beginning to think it was high time to find an appropriate match for Hilda," her daughter; and when the Germans start arresting the Jews of Sighet, throwing the entire village in a panic, Wiesel notes: "As for my mother, she went on attending [to] the many chores in the house."<sup>31</sup> We see her twice more before she disappears forever in Birkenau, including a fleeting glimpse of her silently walking to her death holding the youngest of her daughters by the hand.<sup>32</sup> There is no further description of her in Wiesel's book.

Likewise, in reading Spiegelman's *Maus*—a work that undeniably made history for its groundbreaking use of comics to represent the Shoah—one is struck by the graphic and textual marginality of women, particularly the mother's side of the story. Spiegelman's mother, Anja, had survived the camps and later committed suicide without leaving a note. She had apparently left a written record of her memories for her son to read one day, but after her death, her husband, Vladek, the central protagonist of *Maus*, burned all of his wife's diaries. "Anja's missing diaries exemplify the marginality of women's experience in constructing a master narrative of the Nazi genocide," writes Sara Horowitz in regard to the mother's absent story, which I believe to be a textual and psychological black hole in *Maus*. Horowitz adds: "Only at the end of the volume does Vladek reveal that after Anja's death, in an attempt to 'make order' with his memories, he burned her notebooks and no longer recalls what she had written . . . In the absence of her own words . . . Anja's story is recoverable only through the reconstruction of Vladek's and Art's memories."<sup>33</sup> By the time Anja took her own life in 1968, however, her son was twenty, old enough to have known more about her than what appears in his text. Had she never mentioned her Shoah past in front of the son? Had he never asked her what had happened to her during the Shoah? The frustrating question remains: what truths did her diaries reveal that Vladek could not allow his son to know? Vladek's disturbing violation of his late wife's voice is hard to come to terms with.

In sum, the widespread tendency of Shoah literature is either to strongly stylize the portraits of the victims or limit the treatment of their trials to the bare minimum. Domestic conflict is often downplayed, denied, or removed in order to keep the narrative focus exclusively on the apodictic distinction between good and evil, victims and victimizers. This tendency may reflect a fear on the part of the witnesses that admitting the flaws of the dead could distract—or,

worse, detract—from their innocence as victims. As the British author Anne Karpf has pointedly noted in her marvelous text *The War After* (a mixture of autobiography, memoir, historical reportage, and biography), “it’s hard to speak about Holocaust survivors in anything but a reverent tone or without turning their suffering into a sacrament. People expect of them abnormally high standards of behaviour, as if a dehumanizing experience might somehow dignify and elevate, and along with the loss of their worldly goods they should also have lost all worldliness.”<sup>34</sup> It often proves too difficult for Holocaust survivors to talk about the victims in any terms other than romanticized ones. Characters in Shoah memoirs then risk remaining one-dimensional; their status of victims eclipses their complex and multifaceted identities.<sup>35</sup> This reverential attitude is picked up by popular culture’s representations of the Shoah, which, more often than not, offer quite uncomplicated portraits of victims or victimizers. One case in point is the award-winning film *Schindler’s List*—a must see in every Holocaust curriculum—in which the victims are universally surrounded by an aura of saintliness that works at subconsciously eliciting the viewer’s pity for their innocence rather than depicting their humanity.<sup>36</sup> This way of understanding victimhood, so deeply rooted in our Western imaginary, is the heritage of our millennia-old culture that elevates all martyrs to the status of saints and that, therefore, implicitly makes only saints the object of martyrdom. I find it crucial, especially in the classroom, to elaborate on the perniciousness of such logic and to remind students that genocide is a crime independent of the personal qualities of its victims.

In contrast to these idealizing tendencies, I gather in this book a group of female Shoah writers who place the mother (often an unlikable mother) and the domestic world at the very core of their texts. I then analyze, through a number of theoretical lenses, the way in which these mothers are ushered onto the historical scene as simultaneously heroic and unbearable protagonists, victims and victimizers, half-crazed women yet life-saving forces, their daughters’ inexorable nemeses but also the origin and *raison d’être* of their art or writing. The portrayals of mothers in the present work are not easy to assimilate for readers accustomed to highly idealized representations of the martyrs of injustice. Mothers in this literature have a history (genealogy) and a story (personal and communal). They may be difficult, oppressive, impossible mothers, but they are also visible mothers.

The daughters’ critical judgment of their mothers in this literature is novel and subversive because it inserts itself disruptively within the frame of the Shoah and the Jewish discourse on memorialization. These daughters resist the temptation to paint an elegiac portrait of their mothers (adoptive in some

cases); rather, they are severely critical of them, highlighting conflict more than heroism, resentment rather than trust, normalcy rather than exceptionality. This is surprising, especially when we consider that the fate of these girls was inextricably intertwined with that of their mothers, biological or not, in whose sole care they were left once the fathers had been killed, deported, or separated from them in the concentration camps. I claim that in remembering the anger and conflicts they felt as children and in staging them as an important component of their textual reconstructions of their personal history and the communal history of the Jews in the Shoah, the authors studied here grant (albeit, in some cases, posthumously) their mothers and themselves an existence outside the genocide, beside and despite that “unholy situation.”<sup>37</sup>

This book contributes to our knowledge and remembrance of the past through a study of daughters’ texts steeped in the experience of genocide. I use the term “daughters” because the writers treated in this book actually speak as daughters and not merely as Jewish women. Their works use the figure of the mother as their central articulatory element.<sup>38</sup> These texts exist because the daughters’ need to have a dialogue with and about their mothers exists.

My analysis of these texts reveals how Jewish patriarchy, patriarchy in toto, and antisemitism were all simultaneously at work in challenging and shaping the way in which women reacted to the imminent danger, as well as the way in which the maternal is seen, conceived of, and experienced by Jewish girls and, consequently, represented in their literature. Furthermore, the objective historical circumstances of the Shoah are complemented by the psychic dynamics at work in the way a daughter relates to her mother, dynamics that are articulated around compulsory enmity rather than alliance and that become all the more problematic when removed from the normality of everyday life and thrown into the chaos of life-threatening, extraordinary events. The simultaneous analysis of both these planes, historical and familial dynamics, in the mother-daughter plot (and in the Jewish daughter’s identity) is the new contribution offered by the present study.

In the texts I select, the Shoah does not allow for a pause in or exception to the psychic script that demands the mother-daughter story end in conflict. This script allows for the symbolic order to stand unchallenged by ensuring conflict among women and the misrecognition or rejection of one’s maternal origins, what Amber Jacobs has described as the uninstitutionalized law of matricide. She elaborates:

Oedipal structuration radically denies the daughter a symbolically mediated relation to her mother. Psychoanalytic feminist research has repeatedly

described the ubiquitous pathological organizations operating within the mother-daughter relation. Clinical accounts of the symptoms specific to the mother-daughter relation tend to describe the psychosexual difficulties in this relation as resulting from collapsed identifications, lack of boundaries, and murderous and suicidal phantasies . . . Separation-individuation between mother and daughter seems to be an area of acute difficulty leading to (at best) a flight to the father and an acceptance of his law as an inevitable defense and escape route from a psychically dangerous symbiotic fusion with the mother.<sup>39</sup>

Although patricide is “legislated” and clearly present to the mind via the Oedipus complex, the failure to acknowledge the disappearance or murder of the mother (the original act of matricide that I address in the epilogue) causes the story of women to be constantly retold within the frame of the father’s discourse, a frame that forecloses the daughter’s loyalty to her female kin and her self-recognition as her mother’s daughter (not only her father’s). But it is the symbolic order itself that produces a daughter’s need to escape the mother. Jacobs continues: “The daughter . . . is cut off from her origin and sequestered in a position in the patriarchal economy that denies her the possibility of achieving a sexed subject position outside the powerful structure of phallic binarism . . . So long as there is no possibility of giving symbolic expression to the mother-daughter relation, the latter will inevitably remain an area of pathology.”<sup>40</sup> Despite the Shoah, the pathological mother-daughter relation is manifested without exception in the experiences of the daughters I examine here. However, I claim that by placing the normality of this conflictual relation at center stage even in the midst of the utter abnormality of the historical situation, these daughters end up exposing the fact that they, like their mothers before them, are limited by the patriarchal frame in what they can represent and how they understand their own history as women. The patriarchal symbolic configuration (in psychological terms) or the patriarchal power-relation structuration (in historical terms) set them up as victims. But when the daughters pick up their pens—that is, when they symbolically gain control of the phallic scepter—in order to reclaim a place in the culture of the father by writing down their war memories and speaking for and to the mother, they finally reaffirm and reappropriate the maternal origination that is otherwise programmatically left unexplored or unproblematized.

Whereas in her seminal work on the war retold through children’s eyes, Sue Vice compares novels narrated in the child’s voice, the books I present here are autobiographical texts written in an adult voice that tries to recuperate and

reconnect to its childhood perspective (the only exception being the narrator in Anne Frank's diary, as I will discuss later). As Vice points out, the characteristic constants in the way children relate and experience the unfolding of incomprehensible and traumatic events include "defamiliarization; errors of fact and perception; attention to detail at the expense of context; loss of affect; indefinite or divided temporality; irony of various kinds; the confusion of developmental with historical events; charged relations between author, narrator and protagonist; and age-specific concerns with the nature of writing and memory."<sup>41</sup> However, given the highly self-conscious nature of these writings, the voice of the adult author intervenes to adjust, amend, correct, or question the impressions of the evoked child. My argument is that it is at the interface between the consciousness of the author's voice and that of the child evoked from memory that the pathological mother-daughter relation (part and parcel of the patriarchal script) is sabotaged by these daughters: that is, this occurs at the generative interface between remembering and writing, between witnessing and creating.

## **THE AUTHORS**

Each chapter in this work is centered on the analysis of one author while also drawing parallels between her and other writers, either contemporaries or predecessors. These analyses draw on several theoretical formulations that help ground my main claims. The first three chapters are based on a close reading of three autobiographical texts, which are interpreted primarily through the analytical lenses of philosophy (chapter 1), psychoanalysis (chapter 2), and child psychology (chapter 3). The last three chapters are broader in scope and thus allow for a more extensive discussion of historical contexts, drawing numerous parallels among the principal texts and other comparable works by Kindertransport refugees (chapter 4), second-generation daughters (chapter 5) and artists who perished in the Holocaust (chapter 6 and the epilogue). Some of the featured authors are relatively unfamiliar to the North American audience. Therefore, I want to briefly introduce here the writers to whom each chapter is devoted and highlight some of the similarities among them as well as the threads that tie the chapters together.

First, a brief word about the organizing principle of this work. World War II and the genocide of the Jews have birthed myriad different stories with many common features but also with many unique variations. I thought it productive, therefore, to identify six broad master plots within the larger frame of the Shoah experience. Consequently, I created six chapters that explore, through literature, each permutation and its effects on the mother-daughter relationship according to the variable circumstances within the larger historical context. The

six scenarios presented in the chapters are: dying in Auschwitz with the mother; witnessing the mother's death in Auschwitz; surviving Auschwitz with the mother; surviving in hiding with the mother; surviving by being sent abroad as refugees (and never being reunited with the mothers and fathers who remained in Europe and were killed); and being born to survivor mothers.

This volume opens with Edith Bruck, a Hungarian-born, Italian-language writer and poet. After the war and a short stay in Israel, she emigrated to Rome, where she still resides. For thirty years she worked in Italian television and published numerous novels and poems, all permeated by her inescapable experience of Auschwitz where, at the age of eleven, she witnessed her mother's murder. The translation of two of her texts into English (*Who Loves You Like This* in 2001 and *Letter to My Mother* in 2006) has recently introduced Bruck to a larger international audience. Two of her poems appeared in 1992 in *A Book of Women Poets from Antiquity to Now*.<sup>42</sup> Prior to the present analysis, only the Italian cultural studies scholar Adalgisa Giorgio devoted significant analytical attention to Bruck's writings, to her literary legacy in Italy and within the larger Shoah canon, and to the mother-daughter relation framed by the trauma of Auschwitz in her work.<sup>43</sup> The starting point of my analysis was dictated by the titles and structures that Bruck chose for her most famous books. The theme of letters and letter writing seems to be the leitmotif that connects them all: *Lettera alla madre* (*Letter to My Mother*), *Signora Auschwitz* (*Mrs. Auschwitz*), and *Lettera da Francoforte* (*Letter from Frankfurt*).<sup>44</sup> The letter is a form that always assumes an interpellation, a call to an addressee. In Bruck's case, the addressee of her Shoah writings is, explicitly or implicitly, her dead mother, with whom she strives to keep an imaginary conversation alive. The maternal apostrophe—the halting call with which the daughter calls out to the mother and urges “Listen!”—is a returning figure in Bruck's prose and poetry. I thus interlace the use of the fictional letter and the dialogue with the dead in Bruck's literature with a philosophical reflection on the rhetorical figure of the apostrophe and of prosopopeia. Irene Kacandes has examined the precious and indeed “capacious concept” of the apostrophe, pointing out that the ancient rhetoricians Cicero and Demosthenes had located the power of the apostrophe in its being “both double and duplicitous . . . because it is mobilized to provoke reaction—though not verbal reply—in those who hear it, not in those to whom it is explicitly addressed.”<sup>45</sup> Bruck's injunction to listen to what she has to say, I claim, is intended for the dead in absentia and therefore ends up eliciting a response (or demanding one) from the living—from us, the readers, the ultimate receivers of her missives to the mother. Bruck's undeliverable letter and her call, “Listen, Mother!” are the epitaphs on the mother's tomb, epitaphs that mark the mother's and daughter's

victimhood at the hand not only of the Nazis in Auschwitz but also, as I show, of the Jewish and patriarchal culture that oppressed them through religion, social hierarchies, and violence.

For chapter 2, I chose Ruth Klüger's story as the model plot for a mother and daughter who survive Auschwitz together. Klüger first wrote her memoir in German under the title *weiter leben: Eine Jugend*; a decade later, she rewrote a new version of it in English and published it as *Still Alive: A Holocaust Girlhood Remembered*.<sup>46</sup> Ever since, Klüger has received much attention from scholars both in Europe and America. Her memoir provided one of the two central testimonial texts (together with Charlotte Delbo's) that Michael Rothberg used to develop his intriguing theory of traumatic realism.<sup>47</sup> Klüger's conflicted identity as a German Austrian and a Jewish German has been explored by Pascale Bos, whose studies of memoirs such as Klüger's and Grete Weil's has explored these narratives' power to "explicitly problematize memory and the limits of language and of imagination in the face of the Holocaust."<sup>48</sup> A more critical assessment of Klüger's text appears in Jerry Schuchalter's *Poetry and Truth*, a work that raises important questions of genre for German-language Shoah survivors' writings.<sup>49</sup>

Klüger was born in Vienna. After her father escaped from Austria early on, when it was assumed that only men were in danger, she remained alone with her mother, with whom she was deported to Theresienstadt, Auschwitz, and eventually other camps, all of which they survived together. Her father was captured in southern France and deported east, where he was murdered. After the war, mother and daughter resettled in the United States, where Klüger became a college professor of German literature. What prompted Klüger to write her story was a near-death experience, this time unrelated to the Shoah. During a summer stay in Germany as director of her American university's Education Abroad Program in 1988, she was run over by a sixteen-year-old boy on a bicycle, and she ended up fighting for her life in a hospital in Göttingen. Klüger came to view this fight as a metaphor for a much bigger combat she was carrying on (almost half a century after the fact) with the entire Germanic nation and its past: "I want to push him [the biker] away with both arms outstretched, but he is on top of me, bike and all. Germany, Deutschland, a moment like hand-to-hand combat . . . Why this struggle . . . why did I return?"<sup>50</sup> While she was recovering in the hospital, memories that she had kept at bay for decades rushed back to her. She then began to write her "difficult" memoir in German, confident that her mother, Alma Hirschel, would never learn of it because, by then an old lady in America, she refused to take notice of all things German. However, *weiter leben* became an immediate literary sensation; it was promptly made widely available in translation all over Europe and Japan. A family friend

who had learned about the book's success through a cousin in Switzerland told Alma about it. Making an exception to her rule, Alma picked up her daughter's German text and "easily found all the passages that were critical of her and was badly hurt. All her neighbors, she said, now knew she was a bad mother."<sup>51</sup> Alma had a point. Her daughter had written a memoir that was not simply a story of Shoah survival, exile, and emigration, but also the story of her emotionally complex relationship with a mother who was both a proto-feminist model and a patriarchal mother: a heroic, determined, brave, strong woman who was simultaneously an overcritical, pathologically suspicious, neurotic parent. In 2001 Klüger's memoir first appeared in America, not as a literal translation but as a new version of the previous memoir, a "parallel book" as she calls it.<sup>52</sup> Caroline Schaumann analyzed the differences between the two texts, the most glaring of which is found in the two versions of the epilogue. The German book ends in Göttingen—memorably, the town from where Heinrich Heine's classic *Harzreise* takes off—as Klüger recounts how the idea of writing the memoir came to her; *Still Alive* ends in Irvine, California, a place that, at last, Klüger can safely call home. *Still Alive* fills us in on what happened after the publication of the German version, and some of the new developments in part affect and alter even the telling of the episodes from the past that the two books have in common. Schaumann's comparison shows that not only have Klüger's memories of the past altered over time, but so have the contexts within which these memories are stored and discussed (discourses on the Holocaust in Europe and America, school curricula, etc.). Schaumann remarks: "Nowadays, discussions of the Holocaust in both Germany and the United States focus on entirely different issues than they did in earlier decades. For instance, one might think of psychiatrists' diagnoses of the 'survivor syndrome' in the 1950s, of the Eichmann trial and the ensuing 'banality of evil' discourse in the 1960s, of the increased attention to Holocaust studies following the TV miniseries 'Holocaust' in the 1970s, of the Historians' Debate in the 1980s, of the emergence of research on women in the Holocaust in the late 1980s, of the intentionalist-functionalist dispute and the Americanization of the Holocaust in the 1990s, and of the increasing attention to second-generation Holocaust representation in the 2000s." Therefore, as Schaumann poignantly concludes, Klüger's two versions of one memory, "*weiter leben* and *Still Alive*, are as much a mirror of their places as of their time."<sup>53</sup>

*Still Alive* is not simply the English version of *weiter leben* but an Americanized version of it. Schaumann points out that "in Klüger's two texts, the Holocaust is conceptualized and verbalized for two different audiences, a German and an American one. Instead of calling for universal lessons, Klüger engages each audience in a dialogue about the Holocaust that is based on the shared

experiences of each culture.”<sup>54</sup> In the years that elapsed between the publication of the two books, more pieces of information about her past began to reach Klüger from various sources (including friends, readers, and colleagues), confirming, contradicting, reshaping, or simply filling in the voids in her own narrative. Klüger had to fit them all together. The puzzle of memory holds more than one solution; its pieces change each time we set out to combine them. Klüger’s two textual variations exemplarily demonstrate the shifting nature of memory. To give an example, the most crucial new piece of information that forced Klüger to revise a “memory” that she had created and kept safe in her mind for decades concerned the death of her father. She had always believed that he had been gassed in Auschwitz, but thanks to a Frenchwoman who got in touch with her after reading *weiter leben*, Klüger found out that her father had in fact been transported farther east to the Baltic States and may have died in transport. Such new facts are introduced in *Still Alive*, which is further complicated and enriched by this enhanced knowledge and by the change in life circumstances that occurred between the writing of the two books: Klüger’s newfound fame allowed (or perhaps forced) the intensification of her dialogue with Germany, the site of her difficult past, and with European people who had their own mixed feelings about national histories and Klüger’s personal story; she became a grandmother; and, most important, she lost her mother, who died in her bed, surrounded by her children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren in 2000. My study will focus on the English edition of Klüger’s survival story because it is in this text that the shared journey of a mother and daughter comes full circle. Not by chance, while *weiter leben* had been dedicated to “den Göttinger Freunden” (to my friends in Göttingen), *Still Alive* is dedicated to the memory of Alma Hirschel, Klüger’s mother.

What is of particular relevance to my project is that *weiter leben* and *Still Alive* are more than just about the memory of the Shoah. If they were, then Alma would not have taken the text so much to heart, nor would Klüger have tried to conceal its existence from her and delayed its publication in English for so long. Through Klüger’s work, the daughter engages in a fight not only with her Germanic past but also with her mother. The daughter’s memories are split into two—those in which she is a victim alongside her mother and those in which she and her mother inhabit two separate, warring camps. Schuchalter is not totally inaccurate when he declares, not without some acrimony on his own part, that “*weiter leben* is suffused with the bile of its narrator and this bile, combined with vitriol, molds the entire work, raising doubts about how reliable the entire autobiography is.” He goes on to characterize Klüger’s work as full of an “unbridled animus towards the most outrageous of regimes—the tyranny

of the maternal.”<sup>55</sup> However, what Schuchalter finds questionable, I find inceptive; and I argue that the daughter’s anger, rather than nullifying her testimony, reveals new truths about both maternal and historical tyrannies.

We must also consider that *Still Alive*, because of its new audience and the chronological gap that separates it from *weiter leben*, has what Schaumann calls a more “compassionate quality”: “Although the incidents of motherly abuse narrated in *weiter leben* also appear in *Still Alive*, Klüger’s rage seems to have been tempered, her voice softened.”<sup>56</sup> Schaumann rightly points out the difference for Klüger between Göttingen, and Europe in general, and America, and California in particular: the latter is home to Klüger, the place she has spent the longest period of her life, established a successful career, brought up her children, and cultivated long-lasting friendships. The fact that Göttingen was the place where she discovered a voice with which to tell the story that had remained buried for forty years and where, because of the circumstances of her hospitalization, she found herself having to deal intimately with German people, to depend on their generosity and help, explains why the book—born out of this important, perhaps cathartic, encounter—should be dedicated to her friends in that town. However, the fact that the revised book of memory, *Still Alive*, was written from home, from a place of safety that had lost its estranging exilic quality, does not completely explain why it should be dedicated to Alma. I suggest that Klüger had an important insight between *weiter leben* and *Still Alive*, between the Göttingen hospital and the campus of the University of California, Irvine, a new recognition by the Jewish daughter of the mother’s position in her life and of her own position with the mother in history. And as this particular recognition is the trail that *Holocaust Mothers and Daughters* follows, the maternal reconciliation envisioned by *Still Alive* determined my choice to work with the English text. Furthermore, it is *Still Alive*, not *weiter leben*, that gives us the mother-daughter story in its entirety. Finally, and most importantly, *Still Alive* displays significant shifts in the author’s style stemming from the physical loss of the mother, shifts that are important for this study.

Specifically, my analysis centers on how Klüger transplants the classic fairy-tale modes of narration—which entail the construction of a “wicked (step)mother” type—into her childhood vision of the surrounding world. Not surprisingly for a German-language author brought up in the *volk*-enamored culture of Goethe, the Grimm brothers, and E. T. A. Hoffmann, Klüger embeds in *Still Alive* numerous references to mythical figures, guardian angels, and fairy tales. To illustrate her narrative technique and its larger implications, I read her story through the theoretical frame of Bruno Bettelheim’s psychoanalytical understanding of fairy tales. Through this frame, I am able to reveal the symbolic

language and narrative strategies through which the psychic world of children—in particular, the Holocaust child—evoked in *Still Alive* is formed. At the same time, I offer a critique of Bettelheim and the patriarchal system that his reading of fables supports, a system that I claim Klüger's conscious manipulations of the enchanted mirror of her memoir aim at exposing. Fairy tales reward the girl who remains meek and submissive to the patriarchal regime (marriage with the prince) and punishes (in quite horrific ways) the powerful woman (witch or stepmother), who is set up as the perennial antagonist of other, less powerful women (innocent maidens and stepdaughters). These stories are supposed to help children make sense of their identity and grow up into well-socialized adults. Through Klüger's case, I demonstrate how these narrative motifs do not help a Jewish girl make sense of her identity or cope with the destructive forces of the Holocaust. In the end, Klüger's text exposes these fairy-tale lessons as utterly misogynistic, coercive, and potentially murderous. They might enrich our imagination and cultural patrimony, but they also poison our sense of self and our perception of reality, and—most insidiously of all—they undermine a daughter's loyalty toward her mother.

Next, to illustrate the case of children in hiding with their mothers, I feature the story of Sarah Kofman, which takes place in Nazi-occupied Paris and is retold in her memoir *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat*.<sup>57</sup> The exceptionality of her story arises from the disruptive appearance of a second mother—the Christian woman who saved her life. The eight-year-old Sarah and her mother had fled to this woman's apartment just minutes before a nighttime roundup conducted by the French police helped consign thousands of foreign and French Jews to German control. Kofman's father had already been deported and, unbeknown to his family, was about to be brutally murdered in Auschwitz. Claire Chemitre (referred to in the memoir as Mémé), the French woman who harbored and saved the lives of Sarah and her mother, developed a profound attachment to the girl and did everything in her power—successfully—to alienate Kofman from her biological mother. A war over the affection of the child between the adult women, the girl's two mothers, ensued and persisted for the rest of Kofman's teenage years. I argue that for the young girl, falling in love with Mémé signified, subconsciously, the recuperation of a symbolic father: Mémé takes total control over her protégées—the mother must accept her rule or risk death, while Sarah follows Mémé's lead, which distances her from her mother; Mémé replaces the lost father as family protector, breadwinner and lawgiver, while at the same time she represents the majority culture, the triumphant Christian world in which the girl could have a safer present and a guaranteed future (were it not for her Jewish identity which, with Mémé's collaboration, she'll work to erase).

Through an impulse of self-preservation, the girl thus falls under the spell of this new, stronger, “winning” mother. This impulse requires the sacrifice of the Jewish mother and the roots she represents, roots that paradoxically include the Jewish Shoah father whom Mémé had come to both replace and preserve.

“Kofman’s texts,” writes Kathryn Robson in her discussion of *Rue Ordener*, *Rue Labat*, “reiterate an irresolvable tension between the need to remember and the will to forget, between the story of the child who survived and the father who did not.”<sup>58</sup> I would reverse the terms posited in the quote from Robson and suggest that for Kofman, as perhaps for all Shoah memoirists discussed in this volume, it is rather the need to forget (in order to live on) that fights against the will to remember (in order not to betray the dead), and that Kofman’s specific struggle is not between the divergent fates of child and father but the inner struggle of the surviving daughter to overcome an intolerable sense of guilt. The daughter is capable of keeping the father “alive” (through Mémé’s symbolic substitution for him) only at the cost of sacrificing the mother (the Jewish past). I offer an interpretation of *Rue Ordener*, *Rue Labat* as a confession, as a book of public penance and of intimate sacrifice(s): Kofman’s auto-da-fé.

We owe to Alice Jardine an important interview conducted with Kofman and published in English in 1991.<sup>59</sup> However, only since her death in 1994 has Kofman’s intellectual legacy begun to be seriously examined by some of the most important contemporary analysts, such as Kelly Oliver, Tina Chanter, and her life-long friend and colleague, Jean-Luc Nancy.<sup>60</sup> A volume was released in 2007 that collected excerpts from Sarah Kohman’s longer works and, most importantly, her autobiographical short pieces.<sup>61</sup> So far, only seven of her twenty-five scholarly texts on the thought and legacy of some of the illustrious fathers of Western civilization have been translated into English.

Chapter 4 takes up the stories of the Kindertransport refugees, who remained the least studied and discussed casualties of the Holocaust until the 1990s. It is to these victims that Milena Roth’s extraordinary memoir, *Lifesaving Letters*, the central focus of my analysis, calls attention.<sup>62</sup> In 1938, after long internal political negotiations, the British government allowed about 10,000 Jewish children from Central Europe to enter Great Britain. Left behind in countries occupied by the Nazis, most of their families were unable to obtain similar entry visas and, as a result, were murdered. The orphaned refugees speedily assimilated into their new environment. Their host families, the British school system, and British society at large aided in this assimilation, partly owing to the country’s Victorian monocultural ideal of Englishness as well as a remaining antisemitism, which did not encourage Jewish children to retain their cultural heritage. For the most part, it took almost half a century for the children (Kinder) to

overcome their survivor's guilt and begin to tell their experiences (the exception being Lore Segal, who published an autobiographical Kindertransport novel in 1964).<sup>63</sup> For a long time, the plight of these children did not figure as part of the Holocaust story because the circumstances of their survival seemed to delegitimize the Kinders' experience in the Shoah. Therefore, I thought it relevant for my study to briefly survey the history of the Kindertransports and highlight two of their relevant aspects that, ironically, are in diametric opposition to each other. On the one hand, as scholarship on the subject by Tony Kushner, Bryan Cheyette, David Cesarani, Phyllis Lassner, and Richard Bolchover among others has already demonstrated,<sup>64</sup> a specific brand of British antisemitism existed that represented an obstacle before and after the war for Jewish refugees, whose successful integration and assimilation tacitly required a total erasure of their past. On the other hand, Great Britain distinguished itself by accepting refugees who were being denied access visas by other free nations, and it was the unprecedented involvement of women at all levels of the bureaucracy who made this rescue operation possible and successful. Roth's memoir permits a fascinating examination of both of these aspects—British antisemitism and the colonization of the foreign subject, together with the antifascist stand of an entire nation that allowed the survival of a small yet vital portion of the Shoah victims.

After surveying many memoirs and stories of Kindertransport refugees, I couldn't help noticing that they all have one compelling aspect in common: the relevance of objects in the lives of these exiles. The fleeing children had been allowed to carry no more than two suitcases, and these contained the only material things that would remain of their European past after the war. I call these "memory objects" (*objets de mémoire*, a permutation of Pierre Nora's concept of *lieux de mémoire*<sup>65</sup>), and I propose that they are sites that make it possible to trace specifically feminine ways of bonding and memory making. These were objects from the house, simple objects with domestic roots: a teddy bear, a family Bible, a pillowcase, a special blanket, a father's belt, a mother's piece of jewelry. Often it was the mothers who chose the objects and most likely packed them as well—in a panicked rush, heartbroken or numbed by fear. In the chapter on the Kindertransport, I raise the question of whether the domestic, and therefore feminine and maternal, character of these memory objects has been and remains an obstacle to their representation and presence in Holocaust museums and other memorialization sites (all of which are strongly informed by a patriarchal, masculine conception of memory and history). As Reading has demonstrated, the main Holocaust museums in the West have only recently started to find an appropriate collocation for women's specific experiences in their exhibits, thanks to the direct involvement and expertise of feminist historians such as

Ringelheim and Marion Kaplan.<sup>66</sup> Most Shoah memorial sites, however, are still greatly lacking in this regard.

On top of these material or maternal connections, I look at Roth's *Lifesaving Letters* from other perspectives. Hers is another story of a double motherhood, but it is of a very different kind from Kofman's. In Kofman's case, two mothers existed simultaneously and tore apart the daughter's loyalties and sense of self, but Roth's British savior, Doris Campbell, never replaced the biological mother in the heart of the refugee girl. Roth's narrative is shared between the first-person voice of the daughter and the first-person voice of the Holocaust mother, through the reproduction in the text of the letters that her mother, Anna Rothová, exchanged with her British friend Doris, who eventually saved Roth's life. Anna kept writing to Doris up until her deportation to Theresienstadt; she was later sent to Auschwitz, from where she and her husband, along with their extended families, never returned. As in Kofman's case, here again we have a young Jewish girl's forced assimilation into a Christian environment that requires that she demonstrate gratitude and forgetfulness. We also see the culturally bridging figure of a second mother. Unlike Mémé, however, Doris Campbell—that “benevolent” woman with a “strange sadistic undertow, the punishing Victorianism, with which they'd all been brought up”<sup>67</sup>—never became a mother to Roth in the emotional sense of the word because of her detached and cold character. This disposition made Roth feel unwelcomed and lacking in some essential qualities, set apart for being a foreigner, a Jew, and a stranger.

To be sure, there is no lack of memoirs written by these former child refugees. Yet only in recent years has scholarship caught up with this aspect of the war, and some crucial studies have finally analyzed both the historical context and the testimonies of the Kindertransport. In 2004 the journal *Shofar* devoted an entire issue to the Kindertransport rescue operation. Phillys Lassner dedicated a large section of *Anglo-Jewish Women Writing the Holocaust* to the analysis of this chapter in British and Jewish history through a literary perspective. And Iris Guske, Vera Fast, and Ann Byers have written three recent monographs devoted to the Kindertransport.<sup>68</sup>

Next, in chapter 5, I delve into the experience of Holocaust survivors' children, the Shoah's second generation, who lived through the aftershocks of the catastrophe. The post-Holocaust mother-daughter relationship that I take as paradigmatic is found in the memoir *Lezioni di tenebra* (Lessons of darkness), by Helena Janeczek.<sup>69</sup> Janeczek was born in Munich, where her Polish Jewish parents had relocated after the war, but she now lives in Italy, where she became a successful writer and leading intellectual figure. Her memoir recalls her

experience as a Jew brought up in postwar democratic Germany; it explores her multilayered identity together with the relationship between exile and language in present-day multicultural Europe; and, finally, it explores the ethical and humanizing role that collective and personal memory, particularly Jewish memory, can still play in European society.

To better understand the mechanics of such memory, I turn to the work on postmemory by Hirsch. She coined the interesting, and by now canonic, neologism “postmemory” in the late 1990s, and in a recent book, she revisits the term and describes it thusly: “‘Postmemory’ describes the relationship that the ‘generation after’ bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before—to experiences they ‘remember’ only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply, and affectively as to *seem* to constitute memories in their own right.”<sup>70</sup> The field of postmemory studies has seen an incredible proliferation of scholarly works in the last two decades that tackle the issue of inherited trauma from a number of disciplinary angles—in particular, the literary, sociological, and psychoanalytical ones. Significant work on the subject has been produced by the Israeli psychotherapist Dina Wardi, who specializes in the therapeutic treatment of children of survivors.<sup>71</sup> Alan Berger has devoted an important volume *Children of Job* to what is now referred to as second-generation literature.<sup>72</sup> Scholars have not yet reached a consensus as to whether children of victims and children of perpetrators should be grouped together in one camp (of asymmetrical yet analogous relations), or whether the term “inherited trauma” (the stress being on trauma) can be justifiably applied to both groups.<sup>73</sup> During the last fifteen years in America and Israel, Efraim Sicher, Dan Bar-On, Helen Epstein, Geoffrey Hartman, and numerous others have interwoven academic research and personal experience—as Jewish secondhand victims themselves—to contribute to the formation of an indispensable corpus of historical and personal considerations on the inheritance of trauma and the long-term effects of genocide(s) on the human mind and on our social systems.<sup>74</sup>

Through a comparison of Janeczek’s work with some of the best-known postwar memoirs by women born or raised in America, England, or Canada, my study showcases the problematic and ambiguous nature of the identity-making processes that marked the experience of postwar European Jewish women. The strongly conflicted and deeply moving mother-daughter relationship in Janeczek’s memoir is contextualized in the historical and philosophical framework of Jewish exile and diaspora in Europe. I read this relationship through two pivotal tropes of the diasporic or migrant experience: food and language. Janeczek’s text exemplifies the complexities of both. As a young girl, she suffered

from eating disorders and other pathologies due to her low self-esteem and poor self-image, which her memoir clearly relates to the tyrannical, controlling, and smothering attitude of her mother. *Lezioni di tenebra* is a study of both the mother's damaged psyche and the effects of these damages on the daughter. In particular, Janeczek reflects on the way the expressions of love, anger, or fear of the mother appear through her choice of language—the way in which she switches from German to Polish, Yiddish, or even Italian or French depending on the mood she wishes to express or the lessons she intends to impart to her daughter. Janeczek receives from her mother the Shoah's "lessons of darkness" that persecute instead of teaching anything and that leave an insatiable void in the survivors' lives and in the lives of their children as well.

My book ends, almost counterintuitively, with the case of Anne Frank. Frank's autobiographical epistolary (meant to be published after the war as a memoir of a young girl in hiding) is unusual when compared with the other memoirs, but it epitomizes many of the themes that emerge from the previous Jewish mother-daughter models. The famous diary boasts unique features of its own that could not be left unexplored in a discussion about the mother-daughter bond as defined by the Shoah tragedy. Frank is the rebellious daughter who writes about (and against) family, against the war, against the patriarchal world she intuitively will hinder her dreams of independence one day (a day that never came for her), and who, like her mother, perishes in a concentration camp. She is the writer without hindsight, her chronicle perpetually stuck in a present tense that knows no future. Here we encounter a brilliant young writer who is struggling to overcome her adolescent conflict with her mother while at the same time striving to survive a most brutal attack against her person, her family, and hence the very same mother against whom she struggles. We are left with a phenomenal description of a Jewish family in times of extraordinary hardship from the pen of an artist who is a blooming woman. Frank's writings (her diary and *Tales from the Secret Annex*)<sup>75</sup> squarely belong in the canon of Holocaust witnessing. They are also centered on the family, in particular the conflict between daughter and mother—a conflict that the aspiring writer knows how to connect to and distinguish from the effects of the contingent historical upheaval. In this closing chapter, I show how the famous mother-daughter conflict and father-daughter worship in the diary is not as clear-cut as it is usually understood to be. Instead, I claim that the creative act of life writing, even for such a young author in the midst of adolescent turmoil and war, allows Frank to gain a new understanding of herself and of the Other. It is through writing that she slowly begins to look beyond the bad mother of the Oedipus complex and discover a new horizon—a different, productive rather than destructive, mother-daughter bond. I also

show how the reader's propensity to take the negative descriptions that the girl gives of her mother at face value has influenced the way Edith Frank was viewed by friends and critics after the war. Many used unflattering terms that they uncritically took from the mouth of Anne the icon (the child martyr, not the complex writer), whose legacy they were trying to safeguard.

Building on the trailblazing work of Rachel Brenner and Denise De Costa,<sup>76</sup> my chapter on Anne Frank interprets the act of writing or producing any art in times of extreme, life-threatening circumstances as a courageous strategy for psychic, ideological, moral, and even physical resistance to annihilation. Esther "Etty" Hillesum, H  l  ne Berr, Simone Weil, Charlotte Salomon, Anne Frank, and scores of other victims engendered a host of cultural responses and went on creating art despite art's utter impotence, despite the incongruity of making art amidst the annihilation of a people and a civilization. Yet to disregard, as some do, these last testaments on the grounds that annihilation triumphed over creation, or that these writers did not survive the events they described, seems to me an act of expropriation that strips the victims of their subjectivities.

Indebted as it is to the strictly psychoanalytical reading of Frank's diary by Katherine Dalsimer,<sup>77</sup> my study turns to one particular aspect of Frank's art that has not been analyzed before but that is as ancient as the human community, an aspect that is usually associated with men but that is a significant characteristic of the diary: humor. Aristotle defined wit as "cultured insolence"<sup>78</sup> because since times immemorial it has been used to ridicule those in power and because, ultimately, it is laughter that bonds together the oppressed and enables them to attack and even defeat tyrants (at least, in the eyes of history). Frank did not defeat her murderers, but she left embedded in her interrupted book this very potent quality. And, as I show using Sigmund Freud's theories on humor and narcissism,<sup>79</sup> humor allows the teenage girl to reconnect with her parents and bridge the gulf that seems to separate her from her mother; to begin to see herself as part of the larger world beyond the basic family circle; and, lastly, to hold on to a humanist conception of society and history—one that, as Langer has cynically though correctly pointed out, did not save her, but without which, I believe, life for her would have been inconceivable.<sup>80</sup> It is through the evaluation of humor in Frank's worldview and narrative voice that I propose a different understanding of the famous conflict between her and her mother.

### **CHARGING PATRIARCHY**

By sustaining their focus on mothers and their personal and domestic stories, the women featured in *Holocaust Mothers and Daughters* foreground the fact that the Shoah did not happen in a vacuum. The implementation of the Holocaust came

after years of growing antisemitism in Germany, which in turn had accrued over centuries of Judeophobia in Christian Europe. From a women's perspective, however, I venture to say that being targeted as Jews by this genocide was one more expression (the most extreme) of patriarchy's oppressive attitude toward them, neither a recent invention nor one specific to the Nazis: Jewish women were oppressed as Jews and as women. The war happened within the patriarchal mind-set of Europe—imperialistic, hegemonic, and controlling. As the literary historian Gill Plain writes, “The act and idea of war itself . . . [represent] both the self-destructive impulse of a patriarchal society and the ultimate achievement of its competitive rationale.”<sup>81</sup> Western patriarchal society marginalizes the voices of women, children, and those who do not fit into the dominant categories—Jewish and non-Jewish; Judaism, as part of the same sociocultural system, has functioned in much the same way.<sup>82</sup> From a Jewish woman's perspective, the war collapsed into one phenomenon various strata of domination and persecution: the antisemitism of a portion of Christian society, the specific targeting of women by genocide, and the universal threat of war (which traditionally leaves women defenseless and uses them as spoils for the victors). In such a context, the varying degrees of a Jewish woman's religious orthodoxy, her assimilation into a given culture, and her subordination to or relative independence from certain power structures could determine her chances of survival. Bruck, for instance, shows us a portrait of an utterly impotent mother whose blind religiosity and crippling poverty, together with her geographical isolation and lack of community support, worked in concert to prevent her escape. She was in no position to get up-to-date information about political events, and she probably would not have considered it her place to do so (politics and world affairs being the business of men); and her dependence on her husband's guidance (despite his constantly being away in search of work) reduced the chances that she might have been able to take some kind of action before it was too late. To be sure, no one was prepared enough for the apocalypse that was about to unfold, but certain factors made women less prepared than men. Klüger poignantly remarks: “The catastrophe seemed to have come out of the blue sky, even though, with hindsight, everyone recited the forewarnings with relish. Politics was not meant to be a feminine domain, and in my mother's Czech finishing school they didn't teach the girls how to read a newspaper critically any more than they instructed them on how to delouse the heads of children.”<sup>83</sup> Auschwitz is understood by the writers I present here as one of the many products (undoubtedly the most monstrous) of the oppression produced by male-dominated history, a history that often sacrifices women. The writers I discuss explicitly connect their mothers' state of semipermanent hysteria, paranoia, neurotic anxiety, and fear for

their children's safety to very concrete sociohistorical roots, and these roots only pierce through the Shoah—they do not begin or end with it.

From the numerous existing Jewish memoirs, journals, and other records produced during and after the war, there emerges a picture of mothers as usually quicker to panic but also more likely to take seriously the mounting threat of Nazism and Fascism than their husbands were. These husbands generally tried to minimize the danger, keep calm, and not show fear, probably so as not to scare the people in their charge. Historians confirm this impression. "Gender made a difference in deciding between fight and flight," writes Marion Kaplan. "In the early years, Jewish women were more sensitive to discrimination, more eager to leave Germany, more willing to face uncertainty abroad than discrimination and ostracism at home . . . We see anxious but highly energetic women, taking note of the political and social environment and strategizing ways of responding."<sup>84</sup> Judith Baumel writes: "Jewish women often sensed the need for emigration long before their male counterparts, possibly because of their closer contact with grassroots anti-Semitism, their lack of business and political ties and their family-oriented identity which heightened their perceptions of the changes in Germany . . . For many, the decision to leave [Germany was taken] by the women of the family."<sup>85</sup> For instance, the former maid of the Frank family in Frankfurt reported this anecdote in a postwar interview with Ernst Schnabel: "It must have been 1929 . . . at lunch, I asked Mr. Frank who these brownshirts [Hitler's storm troops] were. And, you know, Mr. Frank just laughed and tried to make a joke of the whole thing, and although it wasn't very much of a laugh and not much of a joke, he did try. But Mrs. Frank looked up from her plate, she did, and she fixed her eyes on us and said: 'We'll find out soon enough who they are, Kati.' And that was no joke, and it wasn't said like a joke."<sup>86</sup> Apparently, "Jewish women," as Baumel points out, "perceived the far-reaching implications of Nazism faster than their male counterparts and were less likely to indulge in self-deception regarding its temporary nature."<sup>87</sup> Klüger recalls an episode (similar to the one that took place in the Frank's household) in which her father brings home the new German currency with which the Nazis had replaced the Austrian one and explains the new money while doing a hilarious imitation of the invaders' pronunciation (different from the Austrian variation). "In brief, we had fun," Klüger writes. "My mother indicated that this was scandalously childish behavior in desperate times. I didn't understand what she meant and wondered if she was right . . . or if she was being a spoilsport."<sup>88</sup> Although women were rightly scared by the desperate times, their worries could easily be dismissed by the surrounding world as expressions of female overexcitability or feebleness. Fear, being culturally understood as unheroic, is also categorized

as female, shameful, or hysterical. Fear is actually a healthy mechanism of self-preservation, although women's panic is often scorned, deflated, or altogether dismissed.<sup>89</sup> In her graphic autobiography, Charlotte Salomon (who was gassed in Auschwitz at the age of twenty-six) depicts with love and sympathy a grandmother who was looked at as a typical oversensitive nineteenth-century woman, a rich and sophisticated Berliner with feeble nerves whose fears were paternalistically shushed by a distant and supercilious husband. As soon as Hitler came to power in 1933, the grandmother had forced her husband to escape Berlin and move to the Côte d'Azur, where Salomon eventually joins them in the false hope that they will all be safe in southern France. Salomon portrays the grandmother as she was in the late 1930s, in France, curled up by the radio listening to a report on the "terrible excesses against Jews in Germany." The caption to this illustration reads: "Mrs. Knarre [the pseudonym Salomon uses for her grandmother] spends all her time sitting by the radio," and a dialogue between her and her husband follows: "Grandmother: 'Oh Dear, what times we live in—will I ever see "her" [Charlotte] again?' Grandfather: 'Don't upset yourself, it won't help matters. I believe in Providence—and what is to be will be' . . . Grandmother: 'She [Charlotte] must come here as quickly as possible!'"<sup>90</sup> Although the grandmother has her way, and Salomon is sent to them by her worried parents, this is not enough to calm the grandmother's shaken nerves or to reassure her that from now on everything will be fine. She seems to understand better than the others the horror that is about to reach them. "Old Mrs. Knarre tries to hang herself in the bathroom. The awful pain that has pursued her throughout her life but had been kept somewhat in abeyance seems to have resurfaced into full consciousness as a result of the raging war," writes Salomon, "and she feels her sharp intellect and self-control . . . breaking up against a greater force."<sup>91</sup> The grandfather, despite having already experienced many deaths by suicide in the family, unwisely dismisses his wife's attempt: "It seems to be only a passing attack."<sup>92</sup> However, the grandmother's agitated response to the doom facing them isn't a passing instance of *Weltschmerz*. She tries again almost immediately, and this time she succeeds in killing herself.

*Holocaust Mothers and Daughters* underscores the value of understanding the Holocaust as an integrated part of a history of oppression rather than as a freak explosion of bottled-up sentiments and resentments on the part of (any) one nation or people against another. The writers discussed in the book focus our attention on the tentacular reach of oppression beyond Auschwitz, and in spite of it. As an adult intellectual in the 1970s and 80s—a woman with an impressive publishing record and a position at the very center of the postmodern current as a peer and friend of Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, Jean-François Lyotard, and

Jean-Luc Nancy—Kofman felt isolated and insufficiently recognized because of the sexist French academic system that kept her on the margins for a long time. “I’m a university professor but only a *maître de conférences* [untenured professor],” she lamented in an interview, “in spite of my nineteen books—this must be kept in mind.”<sup>93</sup> And in a footnote in that published interview, she wrote: “This year, the Université de Paris I—Pantheon—Sorbonne once again refused to promote me to professor. The ‘scandalous injustice’ of this refusal led to a unanimous protest on the part of all the famous contemporary philosophers and the entire French press.”<sup>94</sup> Eventually, a couple of years before her death, Kofman was made a full professor.<sup>95</sup> Klüger has also complained about the racial and sexual prejudices, as well as the not-so-veiled signs of suspicion and even contempt that she experienced early in her academic career as she was trying to establish herself as Germanist in America.<sup>96</sup>

For the Jews, the Shoah was a universalizing force, in the sense that all of them without distinction were victims of it. Life before and after the war was, by contrast, dominated by all sorts of *distinguos*, as Bruck makes sure to point out repeatedly in her works. Bruck’s many autobiographical books and poems talk about how both parents and their children had to endure many forms of humiliation and degradation, not only from the antisemitic world surrounding them but also from wealthier Jews. Her father was a pariah in both the Christian and Jewish world. Bruck’s autobiographical stories and poems portray an ineffectual father and a desperate mother left alone, battling poverty and dejection and faced with the challenge of raising her many children by herself in a small village on the easternmost frontiers of Hungary. She was a patriarchal mother, instilling in her daughters lessons she herself had been taught: to be good wives, not to sin, to keep a Jewish home, and to abstain from desiring anything more. However, the most pernicious form of oppression, according to Bruck, was her mother’s unflinching religiosity. The mother in Bruck’s writings is portrayed as utterly subjugated to God and the consequent hierarchies of male rulers: father or husband, king or rabbi. In her daughter’s perception, she was a victim of them all long before the Nazis came to deliver the last and fatal blow against her. In the autobiographical *Lettera*, the narrator talks of an uncle who sexually molested her when she was a child (we are left to wonder whether this is fiction or part of the author’s life experience, or something that happened to her sisters or people she knew);<sup>97</sup> after Auschwitz, one of Bruck’s husbands physically and mentally abused her; and in Israel, a stranger raped her. Her foreignness and poverty remained a crushing force in her life for a long time. She faced anti-semitism in the Hungary of her childhood as well as in postwar, contemporary

Italy; today, she still feels somewhat isolated and unwelcome, both in the Christian world (her books constantly take up the issue of her nonbelonging) and in the infamously hermetic Italian Jewish community (one very different from the Ashkenazi world of her mother). In an interview in Rome in 2007, she told me: “A foreigner remains a stranger for the rest of his life. I will never be considered ‘one of them’ by the Italian Jews, never!”

The author who more than any other delves into the position of women in the patriarchal world before and after the war is Klüger. Rather than shaping her memoir to fit within the confines of the Auschwitz parenthesis, Klüger emphasizes the tensions that worked against women in society regardless of the Nazis. In fact, of the five parts into which *Still Alive* is divided, only one deals specifically with the conditions of internment in the camps. Compelling sections of *Still Alive* braid the ever-present Holocaust shadow together with the masculinist world of Judaism, “which reduces its daughters to helpmeets of men and circumscribes their spiritual life within the confines of domestic functions,” sardonically concluding that “recipes for gefilte fish are no recipe for coping with the Holocaust.”<sup>98</sup> Klüger denounces the attitudes of Americans (both Jewish and non-Jewish) toward Shoah survivors, especially women survivors, who after the war, she explains, had to justify themselves for having lived when so many Jewish men did not: “I felt inferior, saw myself through the eyes of others . . . [A]t a time when women were constantly put in their supposed place, it was natural for a young refugee to question her own value. In my family the women had survived, not the men. And that meant that the more valuable human beings had lost their lives.”<sup>99</sup>

While still in Germany after the war, waiting for a visa to emigrate to the United States, Klüger started to attend school again, where she was wounded by the contemptuous remark of a teacher who claimed that girls have no sense of honor. Klüger writes: “While Germans had to revise their judgment of Jews, however reluctantly and sporadically, they didn’t even try to revise their Nazi-bred contempt for women.”<sup>100</sup> Once in the safety of America, Klüger makes it crystal clear that though the survivors were finally free from Auschwitz, they were still in a world not very different from the one they had known before the war. From a woman’s perspective, in what way had society truly changed from the 1930s to the mid- or late 1940s? “The return to peace,” Sheila Meintjes, Anu Pillay and Meredith Turshen point out, “is invariably conceptualized as a return to the gender status quo irrespective of the nontraditional roles assumed by women during the conflict.”<sup>101</sup> In America, for instance, the postwar era tried to reestablish the role of women as goddesses of the home, striving to push them

out of the workforce to make room for the men who had returned from the front and to stabilize society on the pillars of the patriarchal family model. “War must be seen,” Plain insists, “not as the demise but as the rebirth of patriarchy. Between 1930 and 1950 the cycle comes full circle from the decadence of the old, through the apocalypse of war, to the birth of the new. The new, however, is not different; it does not represent change. It is instead the infant patriarchy, nurtured on the breast of women’s wartime labour—a breast which it must inevitably reject. In the new era of the 1950s women are safely back in the home, stabilizing the shaken male ego, and effectively marginalised from the concerns of the symbolic order.”<sup>102</sup>

In the literature presented here, we encounter a strong distrust of those patriarchal tenets that sustain the Western sociocultural system. Before the war, Jewish fathers were part of (and therefore complicit with) the old patriarchal system; during the war, they became victims of the new order that the Nazis’ and Fascists’ ideology was shaping. In either position, though, the fathers were of no help to their daughters: either they were supporting a male status quo that oppressed women, or because of historical circumstances they were incapable of protecting the women in their care. In *Still Alive* we read:

I had spent my life among women, and this didn’t change in New York. In my family, in the camps, and even after the war, men had been at the periphery of my life. It was true that from that periphery they called the shots because they had the power, and my mother never ceased to assure me that a woman needed to marry someone who’d provide for her. But her own example was different. From the beginning of the Hitler period until the time I left her, she was without a husband. Before and after she was a wife. But I knew her in the postwar time as a working woman, and under the Nazis her men had been powerless and had perished.<sup>103</sup>

The writers in my study had fathers who either died in the war or remained ineffectual figures after it. The fathers of Bruck, Kofman, Klüger, and Roth never returned. Janeczek’s father survived, but he shrank away (sadly and quietly) from the lives of his wife and daughter and is largely absent from his daughter’s postwar memoir. Frank’s is the exceptional case in that everybody in the family died except her father, who became a kind of receptacle for all the other victims’ stories, as well as the steward of his daughter’s legacy. He turned his life into an act of continuous witnessing of the tragic lot of those he loved but could not save.

These, of course, were Jewish fathers, whose role inside the family and the

world at large had been injured and altered by hatred and genocide. As we know, both men and women shared tribulations and heroisms, victories and unimaginable losses, during the six-year-long conflict. Many women played a role in the war as partisans, discreet saboteurs, spies, good Samaritans who risked their lives to hide the Jews, parachutists, and volunteer nurses.<sup>104</sup> Baumel notes: “As in the case of German-Jewish women, Jewish mothers in occupied Poland were usually the driving force in trying to find havens for their children. Through former neighbors, the underground movements and even the Church, mothers in ghettos made contact with people willing to hide their children . . . Here too, gentile Polish women were instrumental in saving these children . . . Nannies and household maids were often devoted to their families and saved them, or at least their children, where possible.”<sup>105</sup> Roth’s and Kofman’s mothers are perfect examples of women who organized the rescue of their children against impossible odds. Anna Rothová, Roth’s mother, understood the gravity of the situation immediately after the annexation of the Sudetenland by Nazi Germany. She had traveled to England in her youth before getting married, and the bonds she had formed and maintained with women there meant the difference between life and death to her only daughter. Rothová had obtained a visa for herself to escape Czechoslovakia, but she had chosen to stay behind, unwilling to leave her husband in Europe by himself. Kofman’s mother, Fineza, had been able to connect to the underground resistance, and the partisans helped her place all her children with various French saviors across the countryside. She also found an ideal haven for herself and her daughter in downtown Paris, the heart of Nazi-occupied France, in the apartment of Mémé. Fineza Kofman was an observant Jew, the wife of a Polish rabbi, and she knew little French. She was a devout executioner of her husband’s desires in the home, yet, as I will show in chapter 3, in her daughter’s memoir we glimpse small acts of decisiveness and even rebellion that provide two insights into the mother’s situation. On the one hand, she was endowed with remarkable practical sense and wisdom; on the other hand, these qualities could be nullified at any time by the power of her husband, whose decisions would invariably outweigh her objections. Rabbi Kofman practically gave himself up for arrest in the hope that his self-sacrifice would spare his family. But this was a gross miscalculation. His wife intuited this and opposed her husband’s decision, but her logic was overridden by the rabbi’s will to do as he saw fit, with dire consequences.

In both Roth’s and Kofman’s stories, the place of honor is occupied by two Christian women who selflessly opened their houses to persecuted Jews. These female figures enrich the mother-daughter plot examined here by presenting

alternative scenarios of a double motherhood and split loyalties on the part of the daughter. During the war, such rescuers constituted a tiny minority, and thus their courage was all the more extraordinary. Doris Campbell was a strong woman who had decided to take action and obtained the acquiescence of her husband, who as a rule delegated all domestic decisions to his “bossy” wife. Mémé, in contrast, was not married; she demonstrated her total independence by defying her family’s insistence that she not risk her own, and everybody else’s, life to shelter two Jews in her apartment. Wives and mothers like Doris Campbell, Mémé, Anna Rothová, and Alma Klüger clearly break the rule of the patriarchal system that forbids women to take matters into their own hands or decide what to do for themselves.<sup>106</sup>

Frank displays a similar independence, though her case is an anomalous one. Young and inexperienced as she may have been, the walled-in girl in the attic had begun to develop a clear sense of the world’s expectations and demands on her as a woman. She responds to the pressures from the surrounding world with heightened affirmations of independence, rebellion, and self-reliance. Quickly falling out of love with Peter, she chooses to be a writer rather than the sentimental heroine of the secret annex romance. She is perceived by the other people in the hiding place as a spoiled brat at best, at worst a seditious element to be reined in before it is too late. The characters of Petronella van Daan (Auguste van Pels), her husband (Hermann van Pels), and later Dr. Dussel (Fritz Pfeffer) are there to speak for the controlling forces of the outside world that the author is preparing herself to combat after the war. She rightly foresees that her desire to be independent and pursue a career of her choosing will not be greeted enthusiastically by the outside world, even after the defeat of the Nazis.<sup>107</sup> “You know way too much about things you’re not supposed to,” begins one of the many harangues from Mrs. van Daan and Dr. Dussel: “You’ve been brought up all wrong . . . You’d better hurry if you want to catch a husband or fall in love.” To this, Frank adds the following insightful comment: “They apparently believe that good child-rearing includes trying to pit me against my parents.”<sup>108</sup> From her teenage perspective, she is able to glimpse the problematic nature of gender and power imbalances even within her terrifyingly constricted daily world: “One of the many questions that have often bothered me is why women have been, and still are, thought to be so inferior to men. It’s easy to say it’s unfair, but that’s not enough for me; I’d really like to know the reason for this great injustice!”<sup>109</sup> Of course, she lacks the hindsight that is available to the other survivor writers included here, who use their adult understanding of these difficult and oppressive dynamics to put into focus, examine, and critique their childhood circumstances decades later. In

revisiting their childhood selves from a distanced perspective, they make sense of their relationships with their mothers much better than the girl in the Amsterdam attic could with her restricted vision. The most compelling suggestion that comes out of these self-examining texts (Frank's diary among them) is that larger changes must occur in our sociocultural and sociosymbolic systems to ensure that "never again" apply not only to the Nazis and the Holocaust but also to the societal conditions that made both these aberrant phenomena possible: to wit, gender imbalance and inequality of all kinds.

#### **"ODE TO A FOUNTAIN PEN" : CAN WOMEN'S WRITING WORK AGAINST OBLIVION?**

Imbedded in women's autobiographical writings—even those concentrated on the communal trauma of a genocide that unites all victims, as Shoah stories do—are traces of those tensions that arise in women's lives each time a woman attempts to carve out a space (artistic, occupational, political, and so forth) for herself in society and let her experiences emerge. It is relevant, for example, that—at some point and with varying degrees of emphasis—all the women discussed in this book mention that their desire to write or to achieve a better place in life had been discouraged, thwarted, or ridiculed by someone around them. Bruck, Kofman, and Klüger battled against their mothers' open aversion to their artistic propensities from a very young age. Janeczek's mother does not appreciate her daughter's desire to be a writer and makes sure to control her by interfering with her work, telling her what to delete and what to include in her manuscript (see chapter 5). In *Tales from the Secret Annex*, we read of an argument that exploded among the people in hiding when Anne and Margot Frank angered the van Pels and Dr. Pfeffer for wasting their time reading and writing rather than occupying themselves with more feminine chores. "It'd be better for the children [Anne and Margot]," Frank reports Hermann van Pels (nicknamed Mr. van Daan in the diary and *Tales*) as saying, "if they helped out . . . instead of sitting around all day with their noses in a book. Girls don't need that much education anyway!"<sup>110</sup> Roth practically had to suppress any aspirations to rise in British society because as a foreigner, an orphaned girl, a Jew, and a former refugee, she was given to feel that she should keep a low profile and be grateful for what had already been given to her, rather than asking for more. Her mother had ardently wished to go to college, but she had been marked from birth as the child who would help out in the family's trade; similarly, Roth's grandmother had been taken out of school to work as seamstress, helping to support the family and her brother's studies so that he could become a doctor. Bruck la-

ments that her mother perceived her desire to write poetry as almost sinful and would not listen to her when she recited or read aloud to her mother. Klüger admits that her mother “considered [her] career an embarrassment” and that “my father’s generation didn’t pay much attention to small children. My mother claims that he was crazy about me, but that’s like staging and then retouching a family photo. I know better.”<sup>111</sup>

Mothers coming of age in the harsh, competitive, unsentimental world of early-twentieth-century bourgeois Europe—a world marred by a Victorian conception of human relations that, if stifling for everyone, was particularly so for girls—were as a result often cruel and oppressive themselves. For example, Roth writes of her English adoptive mother: “Doris actually wished me to fail and forecast my downfall daily . . . She couldn’t bear anyone to have any success she had not had herself. This extended to her own daughter, but not to her two sons.”<sup>112</sup>

In this literature, there is no evading the struggle with one’s gender and one’s national, religious, and social identity. These writers’ acts of witnessing display a different conception of victimhood, history, and Judaism, one that places them in a unique category that breaks the bounds of other preconceived rubrics we traditionally use—such as Jew, survivor, and woman. These Jewish mothers and daughters embody a compromise with a tradition that would rather ignore the historical woman and her experience while honoring her as a discursive symbol or valuing her only for her reproductive indispensability. These women strategize to keep themselves and their children alive, and they fight for their rights both in the inimical Christian world and in the limiting Jewish one. The daughters who become writers of their own history are already an exception—if not also a threat—to the *récit* that Jewish and non-Jewish traditions have constructed of and about themselves. Also in these autobiographical texts, we find authors who, as Suzette Henke writes in her book on the therapeutic power of women’s autobiographical practices, attempt “to fashion an enabling discourse of testimony and self-revelation . . . Women daring to name themselves, to articulate their personal histories in diary, memoir, and fictional form, reinscribe the claims of feminine desire onto the text of a traditionally patriarchal culture. In so doing, they begin to celebrate a semiotic discourse and a maternal subculture that has always generated experimental modes of feminine self-invention.”<sup>113</sup>

Of course, the question remains: How can one attack patriarchy without attacking the Jewish father, the victim of the Nazi extermination plan? How are we to split our loyalty between ideology (history) and biology (family)? The writings

of these survivor daughters (and survivors' daughters) are marked by intolerable pain at various levels: rehashing traumatic losses and experiences; returning to the "place" (trauma) of one's utter impotence and vulnerability, unable to affect the past and yet compelled to make that terror visible to others; and evoking the dead to bear witness to their victimhood while resisting the temptation to deny one's ambiguous feelings toward them, which can prove acutely painful. Writing is not exactly, *pace* Henke, a healing process in these Shoah autobiographies. Henke uses the term "scriptotherapy" to describe the healing power of autobiographical writings about traumatic experience. "Autobiography could so effectively mimic the scene of psychoanalysis," she argues, that "life-writing might provide a therapeutic alternative for victims of severe anxiety."<sup>114</sup> However, I would argue that in these texts there is also a resistance to therapy insofar as it promises a cure and a diagnosis (knowledge, from *diagignoskein*, or to know thoroughly). Representations of genocide must be configured in ways that hinder catharsis: representationality is disempowered in that it is no longer capable of generating knowledge. I detect in the testimonies of these daughters a resistance to catharsis and to healing, and this resistance operates through admitting the mother into the text. I do not disagree with Henke or other scholars who rightly detect in diaristic or autobiographical writing a positive impact on the life and psyche of the writer, especially those disempowered by society. I simply suggest that the extraordinariness of the Holocaust may challenge our understanding of the human psychic relation to artistic creation. Concerning diaries written by the victims during the war, Garbarini poignantly offers the following observation:

The experiences that Jews had undergone by that time [the second and harshest phase—and the final years—of the Holocaust] attenuated the therapeutic function of writing . . . Indeed, Jews who were writing diaries during the latter years of the war struggled with the relationship between their experiences and the representation of their experiences much as survivors and scholars would after the war . . . They, too, considered their diaries representations that transformed their experiences into the symbolic order of language, or narrative, and this realization made some diarists uneasy. Instead of a window that rendered their experiences plainly visible to others, they perceived their writing to be distanced from their experiences. Yet rather than open up a self-affirming space, the distancing reinforced their feelings of isolation from the outside world. They feared their experiences were ultimately incommunicable and would remain, therefore, incomprehensible.<sup>115</sup>

Garbarini's assessment is equally valid for all the writers I examine here. A prerequisite for healing in Henke's scenario is the idea of telling or writing one's story to an absent listener who is imagined as validating and sympathetic. Often, Shoah victims' writings, and certainly the postwar texts discussed here, do not seek such an alliance with the reader, though they do invest the reader with the heavy burden of accepting their testimony, the injunction to hear and remember. These texts do not aim to reproduce the dynamics of the psychoanalytical session; rather, they mimic the dynamics of the mother-daughter relationship. Bruck's imagined interlocutor is her mother, who represents neither a validating nor a sympathetic ear to the daughter's anger. The fictional dialogue is not between the wounded author and a messianic Other, but between the wounded daughter and a mother whose very appearance in the dialogue guarantees that the wound, reopened by remembrance, will never heal. The wound of memory remains open.

What particularly touches me in the quote from Roskies with which this introduction opened is the mention of a fountain pen, the one he brings as a present to his mother's friend, Regina. Roskies ends his anecdote about Regina with these words: "A quarter century of Yiddish secular life in Vilna followed by another quarter century of professional success in communist Poland had done nothing to dim what Regina had learned about memory from an ultraorthodox father in Bialystok. Memory is an aggressive act."<sup>116</sup> With the fountain pen, a woman duplicates the tradition passed down by her father, simultaneously making that patriarchal tradition her own and inserting herself into it. As Bella Brodzki aptly reminds us, "to appropriate by means of the word has been a divine privilege rarely accorded women."<sup>117</sup> As if to highlight this appropriation, two of the authors treated in this book explicitly mention a deep connection to their fountain pens. Kofman begins her war memoir with these words: "A fountain pen, that's all I have left of [my father] . . . [I]t lies on my desk before my eyes, it compels me to write, to write."<sup>118</sup> Fifty-two years earlier, under the heading "Ode to My Fountain Pen," Frank had written the following enthusiastic words in her diary: "My fountain pen was always one of my most prized possessions; I valued it highly . . . Me, Anne Frank, the proud owner of a fountain pen."<sup>119</sup> Kofman's fountain pen, standing in for the disappeared father, compels the daughter to go on writing about victimhood and about a past she feels obligated to make known. Frank's fountain pen disappears one day when it accidentally gets mixed together with scraps of food wrapped in some old newspapers and is thrown into the burning stove. The owner works through the pain of her loss by penning these words that, for us today, vibrate with tragic irony:

I'm left with one consolation, small though it may be: my fountain pen was cremated, just as I would like to be someday!

Yours, Anne.<sup>120</sup>

Two broken fountain pens; two victims; two struggles against oblivion deploying a different kind of Jewish memory—a feminine memory that has no claim over Jewish ritual or history but that works, from its marginal position, at challenging both.

Etymologically, *zakhar* (Hebrew for “male”) and *zekher* (Hebrew for “memory”) are related “as we might expect of a patriarchal society,” explains Amos Funkenstein, “in which ‘nation,’ ‘community,’ or ‘assembly,’ is always exclusive of women. The male alone (*zakhar*) constitutes the memory (*zekher*).” Personal memory is, according to Funkenstein, the act of drawing out of a cultural collective repository the necessary linguistic signs and codes to instantiate it. Yet he also observes that “the analogy between language and memory is not seamless.”<sup>121</sup> Hence, though daughters can write themselves into history only through the instrument of the father, I claim that they succeed in delivering themselves from the place of forgetfulness assigned to them within the symbolic order by invoking the mother as an instrument of memory.

Carmel Finnan has examined how identity is constructed in the *now* of writing through the crucial continuity that memory (as much as history) assumes between past and present.<sup>122</sup> Traditionally, memory has been the underdog of historical exploration; personal memory has been kept either out of the empirical examination altogether or relegated to an extremely marginal position. “History and memory,” writes David Myers, “have often been cast in dialectical opposition to one another, the former connoting the quest for objective knowledge of what actually happened in the past and the latter marking the subjective use of the past to sustain a vision of individual or collective identity.”<sup>123</sup> However, Shoah autobiographies have helped elevate the historical importance of personal memory and of the victims’ perspective on trauma. As Michael Rothberg notes, “autobiography and history supplement each other without bringing forth the totality of the event.”<sup>124</sup> Indeed, the Shoah writer needs history as much as history needs the Shoah writer. In women’s autobiography, the home, as an intimate domestic and maternal space, is revealed in its strategic public function as a political and historical location as much as a psychic one. The process of self-representation in these texts is not limited to history, but it makes central the complex and ambiguous configuration of personal memory and psychic history.

In the process of writing this book, I discovered a different way of conceiving of historical and familial restoration, of honoring the memory of the Other—of, in sum, loving the mother. I learned that it is possible to retool an archetype (the Jewish mother), turning it inside out so as to reveal hidden seams whose strength resides in their ambiguous, intricate, and interrelated nature. These hidden patterns in the mother-daughter plot are ultimately, for a daughter's art, generative articulations.



ART SPIEGELMAN, *Maus: A Survivor's Tale* (New York: Pantheon, 1996), 147.