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## Holocaust Mothers and Daughters

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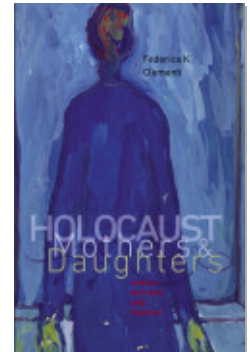
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# EPILOGUE

## Remember What Zeus Did to You

*Holocaust Mothers and Daughters* has surveyed only six of the numerous mother-daughter plots originated by the drama of the Holocaust. Before I can end this work, however, I feel compelled to pay tribute to one last woman, a young German painter who created art as a daughter and died in Auschwitz as a mother: Charlotte Salomon. From southern France, where she had emigrated in the hope of escaping her terrible fate, Salomon was deported to Auschwitz in 1943 at the age of twenty-six. She was gassed on arrival because she was five months pregnant. Her condition made her so inconsequential to the Nazis that they neither used her for work nor wasted the ink necessary to tattoo her arm or register her in their records. Yet if her passage through Auschwitz was too irrelevant to be recorded anywhere by the camp's fastidious bureaucracy, her passage through life and the twentieth century is indelibly marked by her work: the first Holocaust graphic autobiography, *Life? or Theatre?*<sup>1</sup>

We owe the most comprehensive and illuminating understanding of Salomon's life and artistic legacy to the outstanding research of Mary Felstiner. In this epilogue, I intend to zoom in on only one aspect of Salomon's work: the importance she attached to her female genealogy, and specifically how she understood her art (and, indeed, her destiny) as deriving from this genealogy. She wrote: "I was my mother my grandmother, yet, I was all the people in my play. I learned to walk all paths and I became myself."<sup>2</sup>

In 1939 her father (Albert Salomon, a respected surgeon) and stepmother (Paula Salomon-Lindberg, a famous opera singer) had thought it best for Charlotte to leave Berlin and find safety in Villefranche-sur-Mer on the Côte d'Azur, where her maternal grandparents had already emigrated as soon as Hitler had come to power. Salomon's life in France was safe for a period, but it was certainly not peaceful. The frightful news about Nazi abuses against the Jews in Germany made her old grandmother extremely anxious, and, desperate with fear and impotence, she took her own life. At this point, deprived of his wife, alone with his granddaughter in a foreign country, and cut off from the rest of the family by the war, her grandfather, Ludwig Grunwald, decides to initiate

Charlotte into the dramatic story of her maternal genealogy: “This is the fifth time I’ve gone through this,” he blurts out, “Your mother tried it with poison, then she threw herself out of the window.”<sup>3</sup> Salomon, who had been eight years old at the time and had blocked out all memories of her mother, had always been told that she had died of flu. Together with the traumatic loss of her grandmother and this shocking revelation about her own mother’s death, Salomon also discovers that her great-uncle had killed himself; her uncle Schneider had drowned himself in front of Charlotte’s grandmother, his own mother; her great-aunt and her husband had taken their own lives; her aunt Lottie (after whom Charlotte was named) drowned herself at the age of eighteen, a tragedy followed by the suicide of her younger sister Franziska (Charlotte’s mother); her great-grandmother, after many attempts, had succeeded in taking her life; her second cousin, her grandmother’s nephew, had also committed suicide; and finally so had her grandmother. This time, Salomon had witnessed the event.

Was Charlotte to be next in line? Caught between suicide (seemingly destined for her by genetic derangement) and Auschwitz (destined for her by national derangement), what was she to choose? To make reality even more unendurable, Charlotte and her grandfather were deported to the Gurs concentration camp in the Pyrenees in 1940. They were both released after two months, at which point they returned to the Riviera, where Charlotte suffered a severe nervous breakdown. This was attributable both to the historical circumstances and to personal tensions between the two family members. “One year later [in 1941],” writes Salomon about those days (speaking of herself in the third person), “during which the world fell ever more apart, the spirit of this strangely twin-natured creature [Charlotte] was ever more crushed by the proximity of her grandfather, tragically hounded as he was by Fate.”<sup>4</sup> Salomon found a way out of this crisis. She left her grandfather, moved to Nice, and plunged herself undividedly into the composition of a graphic autobiography whose genesis is explained by its protagonist in these words: “Despite her utter weakness, however, she [Charlotte] refused to be drawn into the circle of the straw-graspers . . . and remained alone with her experiences and her paint brush . . . And she found herself facing the question of whether to commit suicide or to undertake something wildly eccentric.”<sup>5</sup> Often refusing to eat or sleep, Salomon began to work feverishly on her magnum opus and finished it in 1942.

As she writes and illustrates her life story, she is aware of the suicidal streak running through her matrilineal history, and she now places herself within it too. Although the represented self in *Life? or Theatre?* is blind to this truth, the representing painter drops clues about those suicidal tendencies in her depiction of the protagonist’s past. Salomon is also aware of the murderous streak

that has pervaded contemporary society and that is about to catch up with her. Between suicide and Auschwitz, then, she chooses painting. Salomon's, like Frank's, is another emblematic case of victims' intellectual resistance to annihilation, and particularly of a woman's artistic act of defiance vis-à-vis impending catastrophe.

*Life? or Theatre?* both puts to the test and parodies the Wagnerian concept of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, a total artwork. It is composed of 769 gouaches accompanied by text, is organized like a musical composition, and contains stage directions like a play or operetta; it blends together images, texts, lyrics, and music. Its originality makes this artwork hard to classify<sup>6</sup>—and perhaps this partly explains why it is often overlooked or forgotten. Like Frank, Salomon infused her work with caricatures, irony, and humor. She responded to her frightful historical circumstances by depicting her life, the central people in it, and the historical context—Germany in the interwar period; Berlin's bourgeoisie and its mannerisms; the rise of Nazism and its ideological, social, ethical, and aesthetic barbarism—through a satirical lens. For instance, when the Jews are expelled from all sectors of life by the Nuremberg Laws, Salomon shows the dangerous imbecility of the German antisemites in a gouache that portrays the Jewish musician Kurt Singer (renamed Dr. Singsong) at the Cultural Ministry appealing for the permission to create a Jewish theater. He finds himself in the waiting room with a large crowd of Nazified Germans (whose looks recall those of Jaroslav Hašek's Good Soldier Švejk) who declare “At last one can breathe again—the air is not polluted by Jews,” while a Jew is standing right in their midst. The scene continues with Dr. Singsong being admitted to the “Ministah for Propagandah,” who likes the maestro's project and thinks to himself, “Yes, this is a good project . . . A pity he's a Jew—must see if I can't make him an honorary Aryan.”<sup>7</sup> All the illustrations to this story are set to a mocking tune: “I am the Ministah for Propagandah! I'm busy night and day, no time for rest or play.”

In another example of her sly humor, Salomon paints the swastikas in scenes of Nazi rallies and parades rotated 180 degrees, a purposeful inaccuracy that derides Nazism by manipulating its symbol. Her swastikas recall somewhat stylized dragons, and they replace the symbol of Nazism as Germany's rising sun with a symbol that reveals the monster Nazism actually was. “For all its tragic content,” Griselda Pollock poignantly remarks, “Charlotte Salomon's *Life? or Theater?* deploys exactly the kind of deadly irony and perverse flippancy that catches the insanity of the era she was forced to live in and to become its artistic witness.”<sup>8</sup> Like Frank, Salomon chooses parodic pseudonyms for her characters while referring to herself in the third person. Her father becomes Dr. Kann and his only daughter, Charlotte Kann; her stepmother, the daughter

of a rabbi, becomes Paulinka Bimbam (bim-bam recalls the opening lyrics of a traditional Shabbat tune); her maternal grandparents are renamed Dr. and Mrs. Knarre; Alfred Wolfsohn, Paula's protégé and singing teacher, becomes Amadeus Daberlohn; the famous Berlin composer and conductor Siegfried Ochs appears as Professor Klingklang, and so on. Although the pseudonyms separate the persons from their names, these performers' identities are the opposite of hidden. Perhaps she chooses this humorous masquerade because, as Michael Steinberg has written, this memoir is not about recuperating any one memory but about reframing one's identity and past once the artist has discovered her family's secrets, in ignorance of which she had unknowingly formed a false sense of self. "As a work of recovery, *Life? Or Theater?* is not in any straightforward way a work of recovered memory, or indeed of memory at all," says Steinberg. "On the contrary, it is a massive and thorough regrounding of a life, and thereby a correction of a pattern of memory that was formed by other people's narratives and quite literally by other people's lies . . . It is a work of history as the production of differentiation, and therefore a correction to that aspect of memory which desires immediacy and identification with its objects and object-worlds."<sup>9</sup>

In her reconstruction of the last moments of her grandmother's life—that is, after her first failed suicide attempt—Salomon depicts herself trying to motivate Mrs. Knarre to live, and it is clear that the words addressed to the grandmother, whom the painter knows did not survive, are equally addressed to the living artist, who is struggling to keep herself from committing suicide by writing her book of life. "So I'll make you the following proposition," Charlotte tells her grandmother, "instead of taking your own life in such a horrible way why don't you make use of the same powers to describe your life? I am sure there must be some interesting material that weighs on you, and by writing it down you will liberate yourself and perhaps perform a service to the world."<sup>10</sup> While Charlotte tries to preserve life via her art, the grandfather has a way of insidiously pushing everybody to a breaking point. "You know, Grandpa," she tells him, "I have a feeling the whole world has to be put together again." To which he brusquely responds, "Oh, go ahead and kill yourself and put an end to all this babble!"<sup>11</sup> As in Frank's work, here—whether intended or coincidental it's hard to tell—we find a trace of the Jewish mystical idea of *tikkun olam*, the repairing of the world, in Salomon's feeling that the world ought to be mended. However, for Salomon, the possibility, or necessity, of mending the world occurs not through mitzvot but through art—or, perhaps, an art turned into a mitzvah.

If art is a necessary and even life-saving force, Salomon's grandfather Ludwig persistently turns a blind eye to it and to his granddaughter's need for art.<sup>12</sup>

However, Ludwig Grunwald, overall portrayed as a negative character, remains a marginal figure, as is Albert, Charlotte's father. Instead, Salomon centers the emotional axis of her life around two important female characters: her grandmother and, most of all, her stepmother Paula Salomon-Lindberg (Paulinka) with whom she developed a strong mother-daughter bond. Salomon-Lindberg was internationally renowned (until the Nazis banned her from performing in public), incredibly well-connected within the high society of her day, and full of charm; she also had a very strong and courageous character. She had been indefatigable in her effort to free her husband from Sachsenhausen, the concentration camp ruled for some time by Rudolf Höss, where Albert had been imprisoned following *Kristallnacht*. Paula had pulled all possible strings and used her fame—"What's the use of my charm if I can't win over anyone I like?"<sup>13</sup>—and eventually won Albert's release. He was forced to walk fifteen miles back home with another prisoner, who did not survive the march.

As she was rediscovering her own place within the story of her matrilineal family, while also framing it within the turpitude of Germany's ideological turn, Salomon found a muse in her substitute mother, to whom she paid an indelible tribute. Paulinka is depicted as strong, decisive, intelligent, and generous. Charlotte clearly loved her dearly. However, we can't but notice that the main and longest section of *Life? or Theatre?* is devoted to the figure of Daberlohn (Alfred Wolfsohn), Paula's protégé. A shell-shocked veteran of World War I and a penniless, brooding musician, Wolfsohn was unlucky and disturbed in equal measure. By hiring Wolfsohn and granting him the essential work papers, Paula had saved his life. Daberlohn is depicted as an adulator of his famous benefactress, as someone who is quite self-centered, with an exalted Christ-like vision of himself and a yearning for other people's admiration, particularly for the worship of young women. Salomon reveals that there had probably been a love affair between Paula and her poor, dejected voice coach. Charlotte found herself "caught between watching them have each other and wanting to have them both."<sup>14</sup> Inevitably, the young Charlotte falls in love with the bohemian artist; he pays attention to her, but his attitude is also ambiguously portrayed as both supportive and mischievously critical of Charlotte's work. Eventually, Daberlohn does seduce the teenage stepdaughter of his benefactor, whose husband was also Daberlohn's patron. However, I believe that the episode of the protagonist's infatuation with the mature man of genius (certainly significant in the life of the teenage girl), an episode depicted years after the affair occurred, is more revealing of a sublimated (and taboo) desire for Paula.<sup>15</sup> Felstiner writes: "Without [Wolfsohn] Lotte Salomon would surely have been a painter, but not of *Life? or Theater?*"<sup>16</sup> And yet the adult artist painting her memory of

Wolfsohn as Daberlohn is paying a tribute to him only in part, as her sarcastic and not entirely positive portrayal of him aligns her with Paula, who did her best to help him but never completely fell under the spell of his tortured charm. Wolfsohn had predicted that Charlotte would soar above mediocrity when he had first seen one of her early works, “Death and the Maiden,” from 1937–1938. Salomon’s “Death and the Maiden,” as Felstiner informs us, owed its origins not to the Schubert Lied of the same title but rather to Charlotte’s ecstatic joy at hearing Paula sing it while she syncopated it at the piano for her.<sup>17</sup> That first drawing, like her only complete and final work, *Life? or Theatre?*, sprung from maternal bonds and not from her adolescent infatuation for Wolfsohn. When the struggling artist—with the ego of a Nietzschean Prometheus and the fiber of a schlemiel—enters the scene, he breaks up the harmonious relationship that Paula and Charlotte enjoyed. It is his ambiguous presence that creates tension between the women and turns them into rivals. Therefore, I would argue that the dramatis persona of Daberlohn, apart from enflaming the young girl’s desire to emerge as an artist, illuminates the problematic and complex relationship between mother and daughter (or between women) and also illustrates the danger a female artist faces of falling victim to the domination of over-controlling male mentors or self-appointed guardians and other Faustian figures, such as Daberlohn.

Ultimately, whatever the truth may be behind this romantic ménage (possibly à trois),<sup>18</sup> Charlotte links her own appreciation for the arts, and everything she knew about navigating contemporary society as a woman, to Paula, not to her first lover. It is in fact through Paulinka, not Daberlohn, that Charlotte had received her passion for music from a very young age, and music penetrates and inhabits every single visual trait of Salomon’s work. Marthe Pécher, the owner of La Belle Aurore, where Salomon was staying while composing her work, reports that while the young artist drew night and day, one could hear her sing and hum incessantly.<sup>19</sup> For the upper middle class to which Salomon belonged, music was far more than a simple form of entertainment: it was the aesthetic language that allowed an expanding civilization to express its utopian dream of transcendence, the dream that worldly ugliness (of which antisemitism was a major component) could be sublimated, and thus overcome, through the salvific beauty of art. This civilization, which seemed to be at its glorious height as Europe ushered in the twentieth century and its promises of prodigious progress, was brought to a halt by the brutality of World War I before descending into total barbarism with the crimes of World War II. In Salomon’s life, music was linked to the figure of Paula, a loving mother and mentor, whose affection Charlotte returned with (almost incestuous) passion, devotion, and admiration.

Felstiner notes that “Paula Salomon-Lindberg’s voice must have moved Lotte’s brush, for most of the work’s several dozen melodies flow straight from a German singer’s repertoire. A number of scenes are accompanied by Bach’s ‘Bist Du Bei Mir,’ a song Paula recorded before the Nazis ended her career.”<sup>20</sup> As Salomon painted her life story in the shadow of the collapse of Western civilization, she was thus listening to this sublime aria whose lyrics, sung by Paula into her ears, declare: “Be thou with me, and I’ll go with joy toward death and to my rest.”

Inspired by the voice of her stepmother, Salomon paints her life under the shadow of her unknown mother and of several women’s suicides, as well as under the threat of a world dominated by violence. She strives to combine, and perhaps reconcile, art (a life force) and her maternal genealogy (a deadly force). Christine Conley writes that Salomon’s struggle is to “[imagine] and [represent] a female subject position that could redeem her maternal genealogy without succumbing to its self-destructive legacy.” Conley goes on to ask poignantly: “How to love and identify with the mother while averting her fate? How to represent a relation of sameness and difference within the economy of the same? This is a dilemma of biographical circumstance that registers most acutely the very terms of woman’s alienation within a patriarchal symbolic, the lack of representational support for the daughter’s desire for the mother and for her mourning of her loss as a loss of self.”<sup>21</sup> Relatedly, the way in which daughters are programmed to rival and distance themselves from their mothers is rooted in the formational myths of matricide—a product of the symbolic order of the father that requires that a daughter (or a son as well) escape (reject, abandon, or kill) the mother. Julia Kristeva seems to accept this scenario unproblematically when she writes: “For man and for woman, the loss of the mother is a biological and psychic necessity, the first step on the way to becoming autonomous. Matricide is our vital necessity, the *sine qua non* condition of our individuation . . . The lesser or greater violence of matricidal drive, depending on individuals and the milieu’s tolerance, entails, when it is hindered, its inversion on the self; the maternal object having been introjected, the depressive or melancholic putting to death of the self is what follows, instead of matricide.”<sup>22</sup> Again, as we saw with Klüger read through the mirror of Snow White, there is no room for mother and daughter together, only an either/or choice between them. This leaves the daughter helpless; once the mother is lost, the daughter has no recourse against this radical alienation from the self because, unlike her brother, she cannot become the father but only speak and act on his behalf. If, as Freud posited, patricide leads to becoming a subject, where does matricide lead? The loss of the mother can only be incorporated but never introjected—and where



introjection (“the work of mourning,” in Freudian terms) fails, the process of mourning cannot take place. Mourning the mother would mean to give symbolic expression to our bond with her, and “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>23</sup> Furthermore, as Marcia Ian remarks in her compelling text on the phallic mother, “insofar as human history is the history of men, and insofar as Freud is a man in fear of shrinking, it is no wonder that he obsessively prevents Mother from moving about either the psychological or the cultural landscape with subjectivity and sadness of her own.”<sup>24</sup>

Luce Irigaray paved the way for generations of feminist scholars toward a deeper understanding of the implications for our sociocultural situation of the annihilation of the maternal generative power through the fantasy of matricide. The myth that is commonly taken as paradigmatic of the loss of the mother, her exile from culture, and the triumph of the symbolic order is the story of the murder of Clytemnestra as transmitted to us, in its most popular versions, through Aeschylus’s *Oresteia* and Euripides’s *Electra*. Clytemnestra, wife of Agamemnon, king of Mycenae, bears him four children: Electra, Orestes, Iphigenia, and Chrysothemis. During the war with Troy, Agamemnon is challenged by the goddess Artemis, who promises to deliver him victory against the enemy (by putting favorable winds in the sails of Agamemnon’s fleet) if he kills his daughter, Iphigenia—which the king proceeds to do, in an act of blind vanity, pushing his hubris beyond forbidden limits. He returns home victorious (accompanied by his mistress, Cassandra), but when Clytemnestra learns what he has done to her daughter, she murders him. Spurred on by his sister Electra, who hates her mother, Orestes revenges his father by killing the queen.<sup>25</sup> Orestes is tried for his crime in Athens and, thanks to Athena’s intercession in his favor, is set free. How could Athena (the motherless goddess) condone so vehemently Orestes’s murder of his mother?

The famous story of the cursed House of Atreus has been the subject of innumerable commentaries, revisions, and studies throughout the centuries. Looking with a fresh new eye at its symbolic significance for the child-mother story in Western culture, Amber Jacobs has argued that the *Oresteia* is but the manifestation of our patriarchal socioculture’s deep-seated desire to do away with the mother. However, the latent primal scene that the story of Clytemnestra covers like a screen is, according to Jacobs, really buried in a much older, and conveniently forgotten myth, one that if uncovered would allow us to understand the root of Athena’s insensitivity toward Clytemnestra’s motives and her exculpation of the matricidal son, Orestes. Jacobs locates the root of our cultural crime against the mother not in the *Oresteia* but in the much older myth

of Metis, the Titaness. The melancholy story of Metis reminds us that Athena was not in fact motherless; on the contrary, she was denied the possibility of introjecting the loss of the mother she once had and thus lost all ties to her maternal genealogy. The myth of Metis, as Jacobs demonstrates, reminds us of what has been forgotten time and again: that the mother has been violently eradicated from our cultural, personal, and collective experience. By tying it to the foundational myth of Metis, Jacobs's interpretation of the Oresteia allows her "to rethink the cultural problem concerning the impossibility of knowing the mother and of the mother knowing herself as a subject with an unconscious, a subject of history, desire, ethics, and genealogy."<sup>26</sup>

Let us briefly rehearse the story. Zeus, father of all fathers, covets Metis, the priestess of wisdom and knowledge who, after trying to escape him by transforming herself into various shapes, succumbs to his violence and is made pregnant.<sup>27</sup> Fearing that Metis might have a son who would one day overthrow him, Zeus cajoles Metis into showing him her famous transformative powers and, as soon as she turns into a fly he swallows her whole. From his belly, Metis, still pregnant, directs Zeus with her knowledge and wisdom. When it's time for Metis to give birth, Zeus's head splits open, and out of it emerges his daughter—his brainchild—perfectly formed, fully armed, and fierce like a warrior: steely Athena, the virgin goddess, loveless and childless. Athena does not know her own origins; the traces of her mother's existence are completely lost. In fact, Metis is never heard of again; her loss is mourned by no one. Zeus has thus triumphantly replaced our connection to that lost generative navel with his narrative of paternal parthenogenesis. Yet every time we look at a representation of Athena, we unknowingly stare at a trace of that lost mother's presence. Athena's armor had been crafted by Metis; it was the mother's gift to her, including the famous shield that bears the effigy of the Medusa. Jacobs writes:

Metis, the pregnant, swallowed mother who is not lost or mourned vanishes to the invisible inside. Her incorporation means that there will be no gap, no void into which a stream of symbolic products can flow, to stand in for and master her absence. Instead, this incorporated mother becomes irreplaceable: no substitute is possible. In this way, she will constitute the resistance to representation, to interpretation, to theory—eradicated from memory and history—the mute grounding from which the paternal metaphor with its sole claim on meaning takes off in all its (defensive) grandiosity.<sup>28</sup>

Jacobs attempts to unearth a generative matricide that could counter the dominant narrative of the Oedipal myth and castration anxiety. She calls for a "new set of unconscious laws" that "will necessarily create a different organization of

culture. . . . [and the resulting unconscious structure] can lead to the possibility of the representation and symbolization of heterogeneous diverse structuring of the mother-daughter relation(s).”<sup>29</sup> It is thanks to Jacobs’s groundbreaking work that I now possess a structure and a language to understand the implicit act of rebellion that the art by the daughters presented in this book embodies and signifies. It is precisely through the staging of the mother-daughter plot (one that is traditionally caged in the binaries of fusion/rejection, love/hate) that these daughters witness not only “what Amalek did to them” (as proposed in the introduction) but also “what Zeus did to them.” They bring attention to two parallel yet profoundly interconnected threads: the story of the Holocaust (Jewish) and the story of the unmourned loss of the mother (universal). In other words, they bring attention to the removal of the mother (the absence of a mother’s law, the unlegislated matricidal prohibition) in the patriarchal historical and socio-symbolic systems.

By acknowledging their matricidal drive in the retelling of their paths to adulthood, Bruck, Klüger, Kofman, Roth, Janeczek, and Frank implicitly acknowledge the absence of the mother in the cultural discourse to which they belong, a mother they are not equipped to represent other than in the process of “killing” her. The mother that the daughter is “programmed” to hate and separate herself from is a simulacrum, the external projection of a voiceless core, concealed in the belly of the speaking Father. These women’s personal narratives struggle to distinguish from among the utterances of the Father what can be traced to the maternal wisdom and knowledge of Metis. Therefore, these daughters’ creative acts attempt the impossible (or, rather, the forbidden): to introject the mother in order to mourn her—and mourning is the healthy response to loss, in psychology. Their creations also contribute to the rebellious attempt to deliver her out of Zeus’s belly, from which there is no escape other than through the mediation of the Father (culture).

Remembering or surviving the Shoah becomes secondary to remembering or surviving the mother in the generative space of these women’s texts. Through remembering the vital navel imprisoned in the belly of the deadly violator, through focusing on the maternal connection, these artists—despite the pressures of male-dominated cultural discourse—set their origins in the generative soil of female genealogy rather than in the degenerate paternity of the Holocaust. Only in reconnecting with their mothers can they grasp the implications of what was done to them, personally and communally; hold onto roots that were brutally severed; and bear witness to what defies the act of witnessing itself—the Shoah.

If God the Father orders the Jews to remember what Amalek did to them, the

concealed Mother compels the daughters to remember what Zeus has done to them as well. Thus, the daughters presented here resisted becoming part of patriarchy's symbolic concealments and affirmed themselves and their mothers as battling, complex, morphing characters (like Metis, who changes her shape in order to save herself) who strategized their own survival and safeguarded their own creations despite the overwhelming forces (of history or society, community or family) that worked to erase them. As I hope to have demonstrated, these women were able to do so through art, through their relationship to psychically charged objects, or simply through humor.

Salomon's operetta ends with these words: "And with dream-awakened eyes she saw all the beauty around her, saw the sea, felt the sun, and knew: she had to vanish for a while from the human plane and make every sacrifice in order to create her world anew out of the depths."<sup>30</sup> And the closing canvas reads: "And from that came: Life or Theatre?"<sup>31</sup>

Not long before she was murdered in Auschwitz, Salomon discovered hidden truths about her mother and embarked on an artistic journey to let not only her voice but the voices of Paulinka and her grandmother emerge "out of the depths" too. In the space of her art, she succeeded in creating the world anew: a new world in which the story of her mother's death is no longer a shameful secret and will not be ignored or forgotten; a world in which the strength of her second mother, Paula, is also honored; and a world in which the loss of her grandmother (no longer explained in terms of matrilineal or female derangement, but of national, ideological, or masculine derangement)<sup>32</sup> can be mourned properly.

Charlotte did not kill herself. But she did kill her grandfather, by serving him a veranol omelette. As Ludwig Grunwald lay in bed, slipping deeper and deeper into death, Charlotte painted the likeness of this man she had once referred to as an "actor," because of the falsehood and hypocrisy that played such a big role in his life and family; as she thus witnessed his passing, Charlotte heard a voice in her head say, "The theater is dead."<sup>33</sup> Charlotte Salomon therefore is not only the artist who creates as a daughter and dies in Auschwitz as a mother, but she is also the only woman, certainly unique among the many we have encountered in this study, who defeats the symbolic Father by the literal killing of the grandfather—the patriarchal figure that haunts her, clips her wings, endangers her life and art with his obsessive, incestuous, tyrannical demands.

Like the other works explored in this book, *Life? or Theatre?* is a book of mothers; they are all present at once, all saved from oblivion, and all saviors of or inspirations for their daughters' art and sense of self. This is especially true of Salomon's biological mother—whose story, having been rewritten, had been

made to disappear. Symbolically, Salomon's work represents the most emblematic attempt to make the vanished mother reappear, and with her the artist herself. The last image of Salomon's masterpiece is a self-portrait of the artist sitting on the beach, facing the sea with her back to the viewer, her expression concealed from us, holding a sketch pad of which only the outline is visible. The words "Leben oder Theater" are painted along the shoulders and back of the subject, whose body is thus turned into a human billboard. The surface of the sketch pad is transparent, and therefore the plane of the seawater and that of the invisible page coincide, blending into one. Water, the symbol of the universal mother<sup>34</sup>—archetypal of the creative potential of the subconscious—is a pervasive presence, especially in the first and last section of Salomon's three-part graphic autobiography. In this last image, the work of art (the sketch pad) and the mother (symbolically represented by the seascape that the artist is capturing) organically penetrate each other: the work of art is the mother as much as it reveals the mother. However, the concealed mother is also present as an infinite unknown, and because the viewer's gaze and the painted subject's gaze are aligned along the same trajectory, Salomon forces us to stare with her into the immensity of this perturbing secret: our mothers.