Third-Generation Holocaust Representation

Aarons, Victoria, Berger, Alan L.

Published by Northwestern University Press

➡ For additional information about this book

https://muse.jhu.edu/book/48943

On the Periphery

The "Tangled Roots" of Holocaust Remembrance for the Third Generation

> It seems that the impact of the family legacy continues into the third generation. The grandchildren of survivors are still deeply affected by their elders' experiences, memories, accounts.
>
> —EVA HOFFMAN, *AFTER SUCH KNOWLEDGE*

> From the psychoanalytic point of view the Jewish people can be seen not only as a socio-religious group, but also as a group united by a common trauma.
>
> —MARTIN S. BERGMAN AND MILTON E. JUCOVY, *GENERATIONS OF THE HOLOCAUST*

"The origin of a story is always an absence," intones the narrator of third-generation writer Jonathan Safran Foer's novel, *Everything Is Illuminated*, the story of a young man in search of his grandfather's past.[1] This search will take the narrator out of his familiar middle-class American life into the unknown and unstable territory of the Ukraine, but also, more significantly, into the perilous terrain of Holocaust memory, a quest taking him not only out of place, but out of the comforts of proximate, recognizable time as well. He, like others of his generation, follows, to borrow a term from the Canadian poet and novelist Anne Michaels, a "blind guide," steering a tortuous course along the ruins of uncertain and

indistinct memory without the benefit—or burden—of direct escort.[2] While the children of Holocaust survivors—the second generation— grew up as "witnesses to an uncompromising trauma that held the parents hostage," as second-generation writer Thane Rosenbaum suggests, the third generation must navigate with an inexact, approximate map, a broken narrative.[3] Theirs is a "re-created past," a matter of "filling in gaps, of putting scraps together."[4] The American-born storyteller of *Everything Is Illuminated*, like other Holocaust narrators and writers of the third generation, begins his sojourn with an absence, a chasm where a narrative once existed, a hazardous opening into which individual histories have fallen. As Andrea Simon, in her memoir *Bashert: A Granddaughter's Holocaust Quest*, laments, for the grandchild of Holocaust survivors, "The Holocaust is one big empty hole."[5] And it is a hole into which the third generation, with painstakingly unswerving descent, will fall. These are writers, who, as third-generation writer Erika Dreifus puts it, "born in or on the edges of the 1970s . . . have published . . . narratives inspired . . . by their grandparents' encounters with Nazism, and by their own Holocaust-related family histories of war, immigration, and survival," writers for whom stories of the Holocaust have existed on the periphery of their consciousnesses, an outline casting remote shadows around the margins of their lives.[6] It is this periphery upon which the third generation trespasses in an attempt to capture memory and fill the ever-widening gap between those who directly suffered the events of the Holocaust and lived to recount their experiences and those for whom that particular history can only be imaginatively reconstructed from an approximation of that time and place, events excavated from the "shards" of memories, as one of novelist Ehud Havazelet's characters reveals, "refracting no more than their miserable incompleteness."[7]

The Dilemma of the Third Generation

Third-generation stories are more often than not overheard and unevenly pieced together, stories that, like the old photographs of unknown and long deceased relatives in Margot Singer's collection of short fiction, *Pale of Settlement*, "bore no resemblance" to the known world, "as if they'd come from another century, another world."[8] French writer Henri Raczymow here clearly articulates the problem for post-Holocaust generations:

A parenthesis was formed by the before and after, the prewar and postwar; it was a frame in whose center lay silence . . . Only silence could evoke the horror. . . . I could, though only in my imagination, conjure up life before, claim to remember a Poland unknown and engulfed, whose language I had heard but never spoken. I could also portray what happened afterwards. . . . But what happened between the before and the after, when the drama was played out, when all disappeared, was off limits to me. I had no right to speak of it. . . . My question was not "*how to speak*" but "*by what right* could I speak," I who was not a victim, survivor, or witness. To ask, "By what right could I speak," implies the answer, "I have no right to speak." However, as any psychoanalyst will tell you, the time comes when you have to speak of what is troubling you. (Raczymow, 102)

These are generations that grew up under the watchful if secreted gaze of both the living and the dead—those who, like the granddaughter of Holocaust victims in Thane Rosenbaum's novel, *The Golems of Gotham*, grew up in "A house haunted by abandonment . . . A haunted Holocaust house" (143), filled with ghost stories and whose alliterative reverberation arrests forward movement, reeling us back in history and making emphatic the final sound of the H's aspirated exhalation. The third generation, unlike the preceding generation, the children of Holocaust survivors whose lives, unbuffered, were the direct, unmediated measure of their parents' survival, must reconstruct events from, as Canadian writer Alison Pick discloses, incomplete, oblique, cryptically coded, and elusive knowledge, "only a fraction of the story."[9]

Thus such attempts at knowledge-making are patchwork, weaving together the strands of stories—"so many jumbles of memories," as Andrea Simon puts it—in an attempt to create a unified narrative out of fragments (Simon, 260). The modes of discovery must draw upon a collage of sensations, affects, competing and broken memories, implied and circuitous hints, sideways references and whispered asides, a whiff of knowing, as if the information were bracketed within imaginary dashes, forethought and afterthought, an endnote, a postscript to loss. Attempting to create a coherent narrative from fragments seized haphazardly, the granddaughter of Holocaust survivors in Julie Orringer's novel, *The In-*

visible Bridge, appears as a watcher, an intuitive interpreter of her grand-parents' "history":

> They had lived through the war. Every now and then it drifted into their speech: *During the war*, and then a story about how little they'd had to eat, or how they'd survived the cold, or how long they'd gone without seeing each other. She'd learned about that war in school, of course—who had died, who killed whom, how, and why . . . She'd learned other things about the war from watching her grandmother, who saved plastic bags and glass jars, and kept bottles of water in the house in case of disaster . . . and who, at times, would begin to cry for no reason. And she'd learned about it from her father, who'd been hardly more than a baby at the time but who could remember walking with his mother through ruins.[10]

Thus the third generation must gather knowledge piecemeal, from vague references, indirect stories, conversations overheard, oblique observation, and from documents, abstract "histories." Above all else, this is a generation for whom unconscious accommodations and emendations are a requirement for living among or belonging to those who experienced considerable trauma, all the while fearing, as the third-generation narrator of the 2011 Israeli film *The Flat* does, that "the meaningful things were always left unspoken."

The third generation, not unlike the second generation, as Henri Raczymow suggests, is caught in something of a "double bind," caught, that is, "in the abyss between [the] imperious need to speak and the prohibition on speaking" (102–3). And even if this "prohibition" is self-imposed, the tension between the need to bear witness to the past and the anticipated taboo against doing so creates the conditions for fraught self-reckoning and anxious expression among the third generation, an anxiety born from their awareness of their woefully incomplete knowledge and their likely transgression, a fear of intrusion and fraudulent appropriation. But, as we know, that which is taboo is all the more the object of fantasized desire. Thus the literary products of this third generation of Holocaust writers are narratives—memoirs, novels, short stories, quasi-historical accounts—that cast a backward glance over lives and his-

tories lived and lost, family histories that, as the granddaughter of Holocaust survivors in Rosenbaum's *The Golems of Gotham* discovers, "are so big, the future can't overshadow the past" (42). For this grandchild, as well as others in the literature of the third generation, the Holocaust "is always present and real, even though it happened a long time ago" (ibid.). Because of the receding proximity of the events of the Holocaust for a generation moving apace into the clamor and confusions of the twenty-first century, the discovery and transmission of such stories, exacted and extended memories, become all the more urgent, "before you lose the chance" (254), as one of Ehud Havazelet's characters cautions in the novel *Bearing the Body*. These narratives expose an anxious fear of belatedness, of late arrival to an inheritance, of a moral birthright that has bypassed them. "Do you understand what happens . . . when memory fails?" warns one of Margot Singer's characters in the short story collection *Pale of Settlement* ("Deir Yassin," 105). But such foreboding is countered by the rueful acknowledgement of one of Rosenbaum's third-generation characters that "the past does not walk away without a fight."[11]

There is a very distinct sense among the writing of the third generation that time is running out. The truth, as the grandchild in Thane Rosenbaum's novel *The Stranger within Sarah Stein* uneasily comes to recognize, is that "survivors aren't like cats . . . After a while, time and luck run out. Survivors don't have that many lives" (130). In light of the inevitable end of direct testimony, as Jacob Lothe, Susan Suleiman, and James Phelan ask in *After Testimony: The Ethics and Aesthetics of Holocaust Narrative for the Future*, once the last of the witnesses have disappeared, "Will the Holocaust become, perhaps for the first time, truly 'past history'?"[12] What, in other words, comes "after" direct testimony? The award-winning Israeli writer and daughter of survivors, Nava Semel, captures this fraught moment in her novel *And the Rat Laughed*. A granddaughter interviews her nameless Tel Aviv grandmother, who had been a hidden child during the Shoah, about her experience for a school project. This interview sets in motion the novel's central question: "What happens to memory when it depends upon its 'original owner'?"[13] How does one reclaim a memory that is not one's own?

The narratives of third-generation witnesses reveal anxiously motivated patterns of attachment and pursuit, narrative journeys, both imagined and real—both physical and psychic—back to the point of trau-

matic origin. These are fraught journeys largely because of the lack of direct knowledge and the confusions between fact and imagined reality. The more temporally distanced from the events of the Holocaust, the more tenuous the stories become—stories of stories told, second- and third-hand versions of names, places, and the unfolding of events. In such instances, as the late psychologist Dan Bar-On suggests, there are, to be sure, "historical" truths that describe "what happened"—but there are also "narrative truths"—"how someone tells what happened."[14] It is through such "intergenerational transmission" that "one generation's story can influence and shape the stories of the next generations" (Bar-On, 335–36). Furthermore, it is one thing to know the overarching historical narrative, the big picture, and another to find the individuated particulars of personal and distinct family histories. As Andrea Simon admits of her attempts to locate the fate of her grandmother's family in what was once the village of Volchin in Belarus: "I know that these facts are as elusive as the scattered ashes of my massacred relatives—ashes that lined village ditches, ashes that clung to crematoria walls, ashes that blanketed forest floors, ashes that have dissolved into nothingness" (xv). Admittedly, such "after" knowledge, both real and fantasized, takes shape in the stories acquired by the third generation through competing versions, mired accounts, and in the interstices of fantasy. As one of Margot Singer's characters demands of another in the short story "Deir Yassin": "You think you can just go and dig up the truth like some potsherds or Roman coins?" (105). Memory, of course, cannot be reified; memory is not the thing itself, but rather an aftertaste of the event, undercurrents, and impressions that one can only imagine from afar, a flashing series of isolated images. Where does memory end and fantasy begin?

The literature of the third generation might be thought of as a mystery narrative with the writer as the dogged sleuth, "digging around in the ruins of memory," to borrow a phrase from the survivor Ida Fink, but also tunneling backward through time and space, all the while aware that time is running out.[15] And, in some cases, the places themselves, like those who once inhabited them, are lost to obscurity, a kind of vanishing act, as the granddaughter in Rosenbaum's novel *The Stranger within Sarah Stein* suspects of her grandmother, as if hiding were a natural instinct: "She was smart about secrets . . . secrets of her own, and secret hiding places . . . It was like she disappeared" (38). For Rosenbaum's

narrator, this much is certain: "The Chosen People and the People of the Book are also the People Undercover. There were so many reasons to hide" (65). The inheritance of this generation is loss. As one of Singer's narrators acknowledges, "The places her mother talked about had vanished into a pink blotch that spread across the top of the map that pulled down over the blackboard in Susan's classroom like a window shade. Vilna, Lwów, Bessarabia, Belarus. The Pale of Settlement. You couldn't go to those parts of the world any longer. They were gone" (188). How is one to locate people and places that are no longer there?

For Singer's third-generation character, "Of the city her grandparents had known, there was hardly a trace" (35). This acute sense of loss and longing is reflected in third-generation novelist Nicole Krauss's observation that "it has something to do with—or everything to do with—the fact that my grandparents came from these places that we could never go back to because they'd been lost . . . And people were lost. My great-grandparents and lots of great-uncles and aunts died in the Holocaust. I don't know; maybe it's something that's inherited in the blood, a sense of a loss of that thing and a longing for it."[16] As the very title of Alison Pick's novel understatedly suggests, the distance that the third-generation writer must travel—emotionally, imaginatively, and logistically—is, indeed, "far to go."

Despite these complexities and difficulties of both discovery and transmission, there has been an outpouring of writing by yet another generation of writers representing the Holocaust. These works speak to the urgent compulsion to continue the memory of the Shoah, to secure its protected passage into the future. But what kinds of stories will writers with such a tenuous link to the facts of the Shoah tell, and how will these stories be received in the public consciousness? How, as Jakob Lothe and others ask, "will writers and filmmakers who may have no personal connection to the event engage with that history: what kinds of stories will they tell and will they succeed in their effort to keep the public memory of the event from being lost?" (Lothe, 1). These stories are fractured by distance and inaccessibility, hampered by a tentative grip on "knowing." As one of novelist Rachel Kadish's characters acknowledges, there is a kind of sterility in the information they have received: "I dredge lessons learned in Hebrew school: *We will remember the six million, we will preserve the memories, in our hearts we keep them alive*. I shake my head

with confusion. How pallid, how insulting these phrases seem. *Always remember, never forget,* the Hebrew school teachers urged us. I want to ask them, What can that possibly mean?"[17] How might such depleted platitudes and rote formulaic prescriptions cross the affective divide? How, in other words, might a contemporary generation coming of age in the decades following the turn of the twenty-first century engage with that history? What stories will they tell?

Third-Generation Questions

For this third generation, the point of origin is not the war, nor direct devastation. The third generation did not grow up with a ready repository of stories; they were not the generation exposed, to borrow a term from Rosenbaum's novel, to "second hand smoke."[18] At the beginning for the third generation are questions, gaps, openings, and uncertainties. Third-generation Swedish writer Johanna Adorján begins her imperfect and therefore incomplete investigation of her grandmother's survival with a fugue of questions to which there are no clear answers: "How did she manage to hide herself? . . . How did she contrive to escape the ghetto and the concentration camp? . . . Why did she have [forged papers] and my grandfather did not? How did my grandmother survive the war?"[19] Such questions lack an interlocutor who might provide the key to the enigmatic riddle of her grandmother's improbable but fortuitous survival. But the condition of absence here does not deter the litany of questions that plague the granddaughter, adrift, untethered to a lifeline that was so precariously maintained by her grandmother, now severed, as if, in the simple act of asking, the questions will be answered, intuited, or absorbed, a repetition compulsion for which the questions themselves are a sort of mantra or prayer to contain the fear of the unknown, the terror and dread of the unrestrained imagination. We find a similar compulsion to ask questions in an attempt to reconstruct history in Daniel Mendelsohn's memoir, *The Lost: A Search for Six of Six Million.* Of the murdered daughter of the great uncle he never knew, a young woman who, before her capture, fought with the partisans, Mendelsohn will insistently soliloquize: "Which hills? Which partisans? When? How? Had she been hiding, too? Impossible to know."[20] Psychoanalytically, such repetition, even in the face of the obvious knowledge that such

queries will result in still more unanswered questions, is a symptom of the attempt to master the sensation of loss, to control, as it were, the traumatic outcome. Repetition, here, labors to do the work of frustrated remembrance.

Third-Generation Novelists and the Holocaust

Unlike Lot's wife, the third generation runs the risk of turning into pillars of salt if they do *not* look back. They are the new bearers of Shoah representation. But what does it mean to look back from a distance of three score years and ten? How do third-generation authors represent the Shoah when they lack personal memory of the Jewish catastrophe? In short, third-generation works represent the Holocaust through indirect means, as Jessica Lang argues in her insightful article, "*The History of Love*, the Contemporary Reader and the Transmission of Holocaust Memory." Lang notes the common thread in the Holocaust writing of authors born in the 1960s or after, whose "fiction regularly refers to and incorporates events from the Holocaust, but it also balances and counters these references with other narrative strategies or counterpoints."[21] Furthermore, third-generation authors view the Holocaust "as an indirect part of the narrative, one balanced by other, also important histories" (Lang, 46). For example, Michael Chabon's *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay* has three foci: American social-cultural history in the first half of the twentieth century, corruption in the comic book industry, and the Shoah. The third generation makes pilgrimages to what Pierre Nora terms "sites of memory," engaging in extensive archival research, and conducts interviews in its quest for further factual knowledge about the Holocaust.

The recognition of a distinctive third-generation Holocaust representation also extends to cinematic works. Israeli filmmaker Arnon Goldfinger's *The Flat*, for example, articulates a grandson's quest for details concerning his late survivor grandparents' Holocaust experiences. Cleaning out their apartment, he discovers voluminous correspondence between the decedents and a German who had served as Adolph Eichmann's assistant during the Shoah. Responding to an interviewer's query about the response in Israel to the coming end of the generation of survivors, Goldfinger reveals that he was "very much afraid of Yad Vashem's response . . .

because in the film you don't see anyone from the first generation." However, after a showing of *The Flat* in Jerusalem, Goldfinger was told by a Yad Vashem representative: "Arnon, this is the way now. These are the films we're looking for, because you present a new stage of the connection between the current generation and the Holocaust."[22]

The growing body of literature by the third generation includes memoirs and fictional narratives spanning continents and languages and is characteristically shaped by the literary conceit of the quest, a pursuit beginning and ending with the intersection of history and personal stories. Dominick LaCapra notes: "the Shoah and the attendant phenomena constitute a traumatic series of events with which we are still attempting to come to terms."[23] Third-generation writing might be thought of as quest narratives, in which the grandchild of survivors returns to the grandparent's place of residence before the onset of the Holocaust or to the site of the grandparent's displacement and harrowing experience in concentration camps, ghettos, forests, and decimated villages throughout Europe. These are quest plots that attempt to seek out and wrest hold of the unfolding of events with the hope of some disclosure and arbitration. David Roskies and Naomi Diamant, in discussing Mendelsohn's *The Lost*, describe the quest of post-Holocaust writers of the third generation as a "reverse journey—from present to severed past and from New World to Old."[24] Such quests reveal the impulse to return to the scene of the crime and thus put to rest unanswered questions that, as Roskies and Diamant suggest are not interested in revenge fantasies, but rather, "Just the thing itself: who did what to whom, where, when, how, and—possibly— why. This is the place of no return, and it takes years and miles and megabytes to get there" (Roskies, 163). And even then, as Daniel Mendelsohn uneasily suspects, "there might still be other clues" (Mendelsohn, 74).

These are very personal questions that begin and end with individual family members, questions that already assume the "big picture" but that are missing the particularized shape of suffering. Thus personal narratives, individual stories of lost family members, become a way into the enormity of the historical reality of the Shoah. As one of Havazelet's characters concedes, "The past loomed at him, seeped across the walls and floor. It was no longer something to be recalled from a distance—it was there in front of him, to walk into if he dared."[25] These are quests that both originate and conclude with the present and attempt to forge a

connection among generations, a compulsion to reanimate the fractured family by means of the orderliness of historical reconstruction. "All these people," Simon says in her memoir *Bashert*, and "So many stories—mine included—interweave through each other. Our roots may be tangled, but the main branch is far-reaching and strong. It extends from the Old World to the New, from shtetl to metropolitan city, from east to west, from one century to another, and across rivers and seas and oceans" (257). These are travels that often begin in the recognizable security and familiarities of ordinary, unexceptional daily life in the decades surrounding a new millennium. Yet, at the opening of Simon's narrative of her quest to locate her grandmother's past, the icons of familiar industrialized American life inevitably take on the sinister shape of images of another world. Simon's journey begins at home where "Frigid blasts seem to belch from New Jersey smokestacks, catapult like cannonballs across the Hudson, gathering momentum through the narrow branches of barren linden trees, and burst through my poorly sealed Riverside Drive windows" (1). Such images of smokestacks against the barren trees become harbingers of suffering and annihilation and are ominous reminders of another world that evocatively take her back in imagined time.

Such "time travels"—spatial, temporal, linguistic, imaginative—take the shape of "return narratives" that Marianne Hirsch suggests hold "the promise of revelation and recovery," but inevitably "defer any possibility of narrative closure."[26] Works of the third generation include memoirs such as Daniel Mendelsohn's *The Lost: A Search for Six of Six Million*, Andrea Simon's *Bashert: A Granddaughter's Holocaust Quest*, Felice Cohen's *What Papa Told Me*, and Johanna Adorján's *An Exclusive Love*. Short stories such as "A Hat of Glass," by Nava Semel (a second-generation writer who writes of the third and succeeding generations) and "Until the Entire Guard Has Passed" by Leah Aini return to the backdrop of the Shoah, as do collections such as Margot Singer's *The Pale of Settlement* and Erika Dreifus's *Quiet Americans*. Among the novels that have as their subject the Holocaust from a third-generation perspective are Julie Orringer's *The Invisible Bridge*, Alison Pick's *Far To Go*, Nava Semel's *And the Rat Laughed*, Nicole Krauss's *The History of Love* and *Great House*, Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything Is Illuminated*, Michael Chabon's *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Klay*, Rachel Kadish's *From a Sealed Room*, and Sara Houghteling's *Pictures at an Exhibition*.

This third wave of literary representation of the Holocaust is primarily characterized by narratives either written by third-generation Holocaust writers, specifically, that is, the grandchildren of Holocaust survivors, or by those, more broadly defined, who explicitly approach the subject of the Holocaust from a third-generation perspective, that is, narratives that engage the third generation as part of, as Eva Fogelman puts it, this "phenomenal intergenerational dialogue."[27] These are writers who, as Jessica Lang argues, "mark a second transition" in Holocaust representation, "or another remove from the eyewitness: the first transition from eyewitness to a recounting by the witness now becomes, as the Holocaust enters history, an *indirect* relation to the original eyewitness" (46). These are writers who are at a third-generation remove from the Holocaust, who are both subjects of historiography and belated objects of the histories they would uncover.

Writers of the third generation have either an actual or imagined kinship with those direct witnesses of the Holocaust. The reference to "generation," then, in this context is familial as well as cultural. And it might usefully encompass those writers who are not by date of birth in the third generation themselves, but create characters who are third-generation witnesses to horror. Here we might also include such second-generation writers as Anne Raeff and Thane Rosenbaum, both of whom posit third-generation figures who seek to better understand themselves in the context of the burden of the legacy of the Shoah. Raeff's *Clara Mondschein's Melancholia* tells a three-generation story: survivor grandmother, Ruth Mondschein who works with a patient at an AIDS hospice, her daughter Clara who was born in a fictive displaced person's camp, and Deborah Gelb, her bisexual granddaughter.[28] Geographically, the novel is set in both Europe and America. Psychologically, Clara's melancholia transfers onto her daughter who wishes that she, too, had been born in a concentration camp. Rosenbaum, whose more recent work extends to a new generation of Holocaust expression, creates fictional narratives that enjoin three generations and for whom the Holocaust exists as a centrally defining feature of their lives: the survivor, his or her children, and grandchildren. After all, as one of his characters insists, the families of survivors are "morally entitled to a third generation" that carries the story of the Holocaust with them, generations bound together in the recognition of shared suffering and the necessity for accountability and moral and ethi-

cal reckoning (*Golems*, 304). And, even though, as Jessica Lang suggests of third-generation expression, "the representation is less immediately proximate, more abstract," it is no less defining of identity, no less haunting, and equally imperative as the events of the Holocaust recede from public consciousness, displaced by the vagaries and fashions of our time (Lang, 45).

To be sure, the transmission of Holocaust memory does not end with the literature of the survivor or with that of the second generation. As Roskies and Diamant put it, "It did not take a generation for a literary response to the Holocaust to be born. But it took at least two generations for its history to acquire a shape . . . It is a story . . . without an ending" (Roskies and Diamant, 8). The memoirs and works of fiction in response to this developing, open-ended history are the stuff of both anxiously realized fantasies and fraught identity formation for the third generation. Since these are stories wrested from the past, transmitted indirectly and often through the filter of an interceding and mitigating generational focus that stands cautious guard over that history and its narratives of grief and loss, the ensuing generation of voluntary witnesses is compelled, as we suggest, to act as literary detectives. Unlike the second generation, who grew up with the survivors and struggled against another world directly bequeathed to them in the ubiquitous shadow of the Holocaust, the third generation must go in active search of the stories from the past and the challenges to personal agency that they present. If the second generation suffers from, as Raczymow contends, a memory "shot through with holes," then how much more so for the third generation of Holocaust writers attempting to piece together a coherent narrative out of such chasms of memory (Raczymow, 102). This is a generation for whom bearing witness is a conscious, deliberately enacted choice. Members of this generation can be understood as, to use Geoffrey H. Hartman's felicitous phrase, "witnesses by adoption."[29]

Thus, this literature features a careful attention to detail, numbers, places, dates, and identities, as if the recreation and visualizing of the particulars will fill the empty spaces created by time and distance. The college-age American student studying abroad in Israel, in Rachel Kadish's novel *From a Sealed Room*, unpredictably comes upon a newspaper left on her doorstep, dated March 3, 1951. She finds herself unable to decode the significance of the words before her:

I turn the newspaper over on my bare knees and read the first column of listings. The small, mottled print is difficult to decipher, but with patience I make my way through it. Manya Probman, of Lodz, arrived in Jaffa this month, seeks any family or friends. Itzik Simion, age twelve, of Krakow I. L. Peretz School, lost parents Rachmil and Clara in Birkenau, seeks sister Rosa, last known of in Warsaw. The listings go on and on, giving ages and nicknames, home villages and school graduation dates. At the top of each column the instructions are repeated: Those who find the name of a loved one can contact the Program for Family Reunification in Tel Aviv at the address listed here . . . Near the bottom of one column, a single name is underlined in muddy pencil. Feliks Rotstein. Seeks sister Lilka, last known in Dachau, or any person with information on her whereabouts . . . I stare at the newsprint, waiting for it to reveal more. It doesn't. (Kadish, 182–83)

An outsider to history, born long enough after the war's end that other histories have intervened, this character looks back only to see a vast, cavernous empty space, an absence.

Thus names, places, and details matter. In, for example, her historical novel of the Nazi occupation of Hungary, *The Invisible Bridge*, Julie Orringer shows the intersection of history—the history of the war against the Jews—and personal histories, the lives of individual men and women, lives traumatized by loss but sustained by their deep connections to others. This carefully researched novel is an elegy to those who died, a refusal to let the names of the victims of the Nazi genocide disappear. There is a stunning moment at the novel's close when those Hungarian Jews who survived the war fill the synagogue searching for names of families and friends, and it is in the seemingly endless recitation of names that the author recreates the devastation and enormity of loss that Hungary's Jews—indeed, all of Europe's Jews—experienced:

Hungarian Jews were being exhumed from graves all over Austria and Germany, Ukraine and Yugoslavia, and, whenever it was possible, identified by their papers or their dog tags. There were thousands of them. Every day, on the wall outside the building,

endless lists of names. Abraham. Almasy. Arany. Banki. Böhm.
Braun. Breuer. Budai. Csato. Czitrom. Dániel. Diamant. Ein-
stein. Eisenberger. Engel. Fischer. Goldman. Goldner. Gold-
stein. Hart. Hauszmann. Heller. Hirsch. Honig. Horovitz. Idesz.
János. Jáskiseri. Kemény. Kepecs. Kertész. Klein. Kovacs. Langer.
Lázár. Lindenfeld. Markovitz. Martón. Nussbaum. Ócsai. Paley.
Pollák. Róna. Rosenthal. Roth. Rubiczek. Rubin. Schoenfeld.
Sebestyen. Sebök. Steiner. Szanto. Toronyi. Ungar. Vadas. Vá-
mos. Vertes. Vida. Weisz. Wolf. Zeller. Zindler. Zucker. An al-
phabet of loss, a catalogue of grief. Almost every time they went,
they witnessed someone learning that a person they loved had
died. Sometimes the news would be received in silence . . .
Other times there would be screams, protests, weeping. They
looked day after day, every day, for so long that they almost forgot
what they were looking for; after a while it seemed they were just
looking, trying to memorize a new Kaddish composed entirely of
names. (Orringer, 582)

Here this list of names is punctuated precisely. Rather than being part of
a stream, connected with commas, a long indistinct and uninterrupted
sound, each name is followed by a period, a precisely generated caesura,
whose weight and space punctuate, resonate, and make emphatic each
irreparable, singular, individual loss, a particularity of sorrow. At the
same time, the list itself, the strangulated and lengthening alphabet of
mourning, speaks to the huge, endless, almost unimaginable numbers
murdered, an asyndeton of grief.

   In particular, such specificity shows itself to be an urgent preoccupa-
tion for those of the third generation whose grandparents are no longer
living. The second generation characteristically has direct access to infor-
mation from survivors, who both tell their stories unsolicited—say, for the
child of Holocaust survivors in Rosenbaum's collection of stories *Elijah
Visible*—or respond to direct questions—for example, Art Spiegelman's
survivor father in *Maus*. The third generation, on the other hand, retrieves
information mediated through their parents or other family members or
must resort to research, to combing through documents that provide the
skeletal blueprint for the logistical outline of events, but leave out what
the third-generation sojourners really want to know: the stories of their

families, their own singular loss. Simon writes of her quest to trace her grandmother's vanished life before the Nazi occupation that caused her grandmother to flee Poland: "I try to reconstruct her life. I try to find the school, the well-appointed apartments, the crowded tenements and narrow courtyards . . . I read modern tourist books with little mention of the Jews; I search maps; I question the guides. No one recognizes the street names . . . Have the names, like the houses and streets, been destroyed like all the rest of Jewish Warsaw?" (18). These are very personal narratives, individuated quests. Here the desire for detailed knowledge takes the form of literally retracing the steps of those who lived through or succumbed to the massacre. "I need to know," insists Simon in her memoir. Thus, her quest will take her to the village in which her grandmother lived and beyond, onto the tracks of the death march and mass killings in the forest of Brona Gora, where she imagines her grandmother's family and neighbors to have been murdered, a history covered over in a mass grave: "Little by little," she reveals, "I'm getting a picture of the events concerning the murder and destruction of Jews in the area around Brest. Little by little, I'm getting a picture of events leading up to the transport to Brona Gora, from the Kobrin ghetto to the Bereza Kartuska ghetto" (162). The repetition of "little by little" here, as throughout the narrative, makes emphatic just how "little" the narrator does and can know and thus calls into question the problem of knowing, the disposition and character of such knowledge and the complex motives for possessing it.

The Search for Details

The third generation's fixation on specificity and on unearthing the particular details of absent family members is apparent in the subtitle of Daniel Mendelsohn's memoir, *A Search for Six of Six Million*. Unlike the vast and nameless scale of six million murdered, a referent routinely issued to articulate the annihilation of two-thirds of Eastern European Jews, a number that in its abstraction runs the risk of effacement or of becoming a placeholder for individual lives lost, six, on the other hand, is a number that one can put a "face" on, a number that can, in the third generation's quest for recovery, be "found." Six of six million both suggests the magnitude of the devastation and focuses in on the personal, the individual. The specific reference makes emphatic that names matter.

So, too, it is harder to locate one's own kinship amid millions; it is more tangible, more material and relational, among six. Thus, in order to avoid the Holocaust and its victims from becoming abstractions, representative figures of suffering at an unbridgeable remove, the third-generation quest is a search for specifics, for the particulars of experience. However, as Mendelsohn discovers, the search for details, for specifics, is, in fact, self-contradictory, counter-definitional, since, as Mendelsohn explains, specific means "particular to a given individual," and thus he will never quite grasp the totality of the experience of his unknown relatives because, as he puts it, "their experience was specific to them and not me" (Mendelsohn, 502). Paradoxically and impossibly, Mendelsohn belatedly comes to realize that

> For a long time I had thirsted after *specifics*, after *details* . . . the concrete thing that would make the story come alive. But that . . . was the problem. I had wanted the details and the specifics for the *story*, and had not—as how could I not, I who never knew them, who had never had anything *but* stories?—really understood . . . what it meant to be a *detail*, a specific . . . Precisely because I had never known or seen them I was reminded the more forcefully that they had been specific people with specific deaths, and those lives and deaths belonged to them, not me, no matter how gripping the story that may be told about them. (502)

Here the encounter with the otherness of the lost family members is an encounter with the incompleteness of narrative representation in the face of loss. Such loss is abstract in its scope and searing in the concrete attempt to engage it.

Such quests for the particulars, to locate individuals, however, are compulsory and, in some ways, compensatory attempts to offset the haunting and chronic condition of loss. Thus, like Andrea Simon, Jonathan Safran Foer, Erika Dreifus, and Daniel Mendelsohn, Johanna Adorján will return to the exact location of the crime, the site of suffering and annihilation, as depicted in her memoir *An Exclusive Love*, in order to "get it right." These pilgrimages are motivated by attempts to excavate the relics of the past, to dredge up remembered events, places, and those who inhabited them. Such a pursuit finds a metaphorical kinship

in Freud's discussion of uncovering that which has been forgotten, in which such "reconstruction resembles to a great extent an archaeologist's excavation of some dwelling-place that has been destroyed and buried or of some ancient edifice."[30] The excavation metaphor is at the heart of the pursuit of the past in two senses. On the one hand, the quest is a process of discovery, of uncovering the past, excavation as extraction, just as the geologist Athos, digging for relics in the "acid-steeped ground," will unearth and rescue the orphaned refugee Jakob Beer (Michaels, 5). On the other hand, such excavation becomes a matter of erecting, an attempt to recreate and thus meticulously reconstruct the past, to build it back up, erected laboriously, much like the "architecturally elegant stone synagogue . . . built during the 15th century" in the city of Brest, whose substantial Jewish population was destroyed, but a community that Andrea Simon will attempt to resurrect, as if her stories, like the stone architecture of the synagogue, will rebuild that which was so tragically lost (Simon, 163).

However, such attempts at discovery and reconstruction ultimately are inadequate, partial and incomplete, since they constitute a remote, muted, and muffled knowledge. As Mendelsohn comes to recognize at the seeming close of his search for his lost family, "There is so much that will always be *impossible to know*, but we do know that they were, once, themselves, *specific*, the subjects of their own lives and deaths, and not simply puppets to be manipulated for the purposes of a good story" (Mendelsohn, 502). Mendelsohn's response to the discovery of his grandfather's brother and family suggests an anxious suspicion that the stories, too, are artifacts, presumptuously appropriated by a generation who has made their lives into stories, usurped them for their own purposes.

In the absence of her grandparents, Johanna Adorján will seek knowledge from any available source, but not without a deep-seated fear that she has transgressed some essential and prohibitive boundary, an interloper trespassing on forbidden ground: "I feel like an intruder," she confesses, "a thief trying to take something from the people who have agreed to talk to me about my grandparents. Almost every time I ask a question I feel discourteously inquisitive. As if I were sticking my nose into what's none of my business. Why should I want to know how my grandparents spent their lives? Who am I to try finding out things that they didn't talk about, some of them perhaps very private?" (Adorján, 102). But what is

private here? What is public? What are the parameters of such a distinction? Having uncovered an increasing accumulation of facts and artifacts of his missing relatives' past, Mendelsohn nonetheless admits the inadequacy of such knowledge: "I'm pleased with what I know, but now I think much more about everything I could have known, which was so much more than anything I can learn now and which now is gone forever . . . There's so much you don't really see, preoccupied as you are with the business of living; so much you never notice, until suddenly, for whatever reason . . . you need the information that people you once knew always had to give you, if only you'd asked. But by the time you think to ask, it's too late" (Mendelsohn, 73). The striking sense of loss is accompanied here by remorse, a regret that the trove of discoveries is too little too late, but also a contriteness born of missed opportunities, time squandered in this "business of living." Andrea Simon, in recognizing her belatedness in pursuing her grandmother's life—taken up, as she was, with her own—implores, "Why hadn't I listened more carefully to her stories?" (24).

What remains when acquired memory, memory at two removes, fails, pushed to its limits? Adorján, returning with her father to Mauthausen, the concentration camp where her grandfather was incarcerated and subjected to hard labor, describes the irreconcilable landscape as measured against her imagination. Approaching the site of her grandfather's agonizing internment, she sees, rather, "Gently rolling green hills. And on top of one of the hills, like a toy castle, lies the former concentration camp of Mauthausen, now a museum. It looks harmless, like a miniature model of something much larger. As if the scale had slipped—it's so easy to see the full extent of the place . . . a small door is fitted into the right-hand side of the gate, and stands open. Anyone can go through it—it works both ways, in and out . . . but everyone who goes in will come out again . . . There's something about it that suggests a holiday camp, the place is so peaceful, the birds twittering, the sun shining" (Adorján, 7–8). Indeed, there is something about her perception of the scale that cannot provide an adequate measurement; the extent of suffering is, for the grandchild of this survivor, unattainable. Thus she has difficulty reconciling the evocative landscape of the present, with the rote, indifferent recitation of the camp guide, with the place of horror it once was and which she thought she might be able to capture, to wrest from the cavity of the past and thus, to a certain extent, control. But here, at the contem-

porary site of Mauthausen, present conditions would seem to eclipse the past, a seemingly willful, deliberate, even pastoral erasure of both history and, for the third-generation traveler, a patrimony.

Post-Holocaust generations are mostly guided by stories told by parents and grandparents, cautionary tales with which they might navigate an historically detailed, emotionally explosive past. Thus stories told become inevitably mixed with stories imagined, taking on the defining weight of anxious projection and the uncanny. As Eva Hoffman, the daughter of Holocaust survivors, suggests in *After Such Knowledge*, such stories make up a child's vision of the fantastic and the real. Her parents' stories, as she provocatively puts it, "registered themselves as half awful reality, half wondrous fairy tale. A peasant's hut, holding the riddle of life or death; a snowy forest, which confounds the senses and sense of direction. A hayloft in which one sits, awaiting fate, while a stranger downstairs, who is really a good fairy in disguise, is fending off that fate by muttering invocations under her breath and bringing to the hiding place a bowl of soup . . . These components of horror became part of a whole generation's store of imagery and narration, the icons and sagas of the post-Holocaust world."[31] Here the topoi of the fairy tale of one generation become the nightmare reality of another's. Both are familiar, but a disjunction exists between reality and fantasy. The context for the story diverges as does its interpretive possibilities. The adolescent granddaughter of Holocaust survivors in Rosenbaum's novel *The Stranger within Sarah Stein*, in attempting to piece together those secretive and enigmatic tales from another time, considers the stories of "kids stowed away in convents and in Catholic schools, hiding in haylofts, and buried in holes in the ground. Hide and go seek was not a game during the Holocaust; it was how you lived. Never being found was the endgame" (66). Such "artifacts of a different world"—at times remnants tossed out in chance conversation and fragments of stories often overheard—as one of Havazelet's anguished characters maintains, become part of the language of entry into the world of Holocaust representation, like the Yiddish "words here and there" (*Body*, 288) haphazardly and instinctively spoken by the survivor in Rosenbaum's novel, left behind "like breadcrumbs for the dead" (*Stranger*, 76).

Understood in the context of the Holocaust, the stock figures, emblems, and place settings of the formative narratives of one generation,

here become transformed into the actualities of survival and death, escape and capture. The comforting emblems of childhood fantasy— barns, haylofts, forests, fairy godmothers—morph into duplicitous icons of wrenching fear and disorientation. The disjunction between image and meaning creates an uneasy tension between the known and un-knowable worlds. One of Singer's third-generation characters, wander-ing the grounds of Auschwitz where her grandmother's sister perished, is arrested by the knowledge that "she'd probably died here in this place," which, disjunctively, "felt as unreal as any other family story" (Singer, 29). Similarly, in trying to conjure the fate of the Jews in Brona Gora, Simon, on her quest for her grandmother's interrupted life, is brought up short by the limits of her imagination in the face of such enormity: "the premeditated annihilation of 50,000 people required the complicity of hundreds, if not thousands, of Nazi professionals, German soldiers, local auxiliary police, railroad personnel, church officials, government figures; and farmers, villages, and city residents—average citizens of every type. This is too overwhelming to contemplate" (Simon, 186). In the absence of direct experience, familiar icons, predictable linguistic signifiers, and, in many cases, immediate survivor testimony, the third generation, those "grandchildren of Job," to borrow a term from Alan L. Berger, must rely on competing narratives, on the overlapping unevenness of stories. As Mendelsohn acknowledges in his memoir *The Lost*, "I was rich in keep-sakes, but had no memories to go with them" (182). Here one hopes to fill the gaps formed by the retreating threads of memory with imagined, re-created stories, midrashic moments and impulses, since, as one of Ehud Havazelet's characters uncomfortably maintains, "You don't fill an absence by taking more away" (*Body*, 23). But the attempts to fill the absence reinforce it as a dreadful, unthinkable remainder, uncannily real and uncomprehendingly distant.

Such stories then—those pieced together narratives, stories overheard and sought out—become, for the third generation, an invitation to iden-tification, a complicated projection of one's own fears and desires onto another. Third-generation narratives project the trauma of identification, where suffering becomes the object of fantasized desire. Simon's mem-oir, for example, is interrupted by a very disturbing moment in which she describes a nightmare she has during her compulsive search to unearth her unknown relatives: "What can't be properly expressed finds a way to

insinuate itself . . . I begin to have nightmares . . . In my dreams, I'm running naked through forests, and I awaken right before catastrophe with a palpitating heart and drenching perspiration . . . Certainly the terror I felt was nothing like what the victims felt. I tell myself, over and over, that this is something that must be told—for them" (Simon, 186–87). But the excavation of the past also fulfills an absence in herself, an emptiness that can only hope to be satisfied through her identification with the other, the object of her desire and longing, but dread and fear, as well. There are, indeed, consequences to such discovery. In Orringer's novel *The Invisible Bridge*, we find a similarly conflicted, dream-state transmission of transgenerational trauma. Here the grandchild of survivors is awakened from troubled dreams in which she is witness to her grandparents' abject fear: "A few weeks ago she'd had a dream from which she'd woken shouting in fright. She and her parents had been standing in a cold black-walled room, wearing pajamas made of flour sacks. In a corner her grandmother knelt on the concrete floor, weeping. Her grandfather stood before them, too thin, unshaven. A German guard came out of the shadows and made him climb onto a raised conveyor belt . . . The guard put cuffs around his ankles and wrists, then stepped to a wooden lever beside the conveyor belt and pushed it forward. A meshing of gears, a grinding of iron teeth. The belt began to move. Her grandfather rounded a corner and disappeared into a rectangle of light, from beyond which came a deafening clap that meant he was dead . . . That was when she'd shouted herself awake" (Orringer, 596). Here Orringer's third-generation, internally focalized character absorbs the trauma and unconsciously participates in the translation of its memory, the dream being an unconscious attempt to resolve some of her deeply held fears and anxieties.

Symptomatic of such traumatic displacement is a kind of psychic breakdown of the distinction of self and other, a cathection of the third generation's obsession with knowledge onto the absent grandparent or unknown family members. As one of Singer's third-generation characters imagines when looking at a photograph of her grandmother, "Now she gazes up through time at me and I gaze down at her. What am I looking for . . . I am looking for myself" (Singer, 41). She is looking for herself in the other, a projection of her own fears of loss and abandonment onto another, who becomes the fraught object of her desire. The author perhaps displaces her own apprehensions about abandonment and sorrow

onto the lost or murdered. Such identification is an attempt to control, in part, her fear of the unknown and unknowable, a fear of what was possible. At another moment in Simon's *Bashert*, the author, upon receiving information about one of her grandmother's cousins shot in the Volchin massacre, exposes not only her distress but also her projected anxiety: "This unbearable information comes to me again; again, it cinches a knot around my neck; my breath suddenly stops. And I see her, a dark girl with my eyes, running in a circle, flailing her arms and then gathering them around her, trying to paste the clothes to herself permanently. Ida, the girl with my eyes" (66–67). The author here conjures the dead girl into reality and sees herself in the other, "with my eyes" a metonymic representation of the narrator's own attempts at self-protection. She is swept away by her imagination and her incapacity to control the past, to wrest the traumatic events from history and thus make them her own, in other words, to rewrite the past in order to make it bearable.

Thus we find in this literature a recurring pattern of identity formation, of affectively imagining oneself in others, others in oneself. Symptomatic of this affective transference is the iteration of the stand-in or proxy. Simon, for example, in reference to her presence in the village once home to her murdered relatives, vows, "I have come for them" (130). This replacement takes the form of anguished empathetic projection as she psychically assumes her grandmother's wound, so much so that she conjures her absent grandmother into being and identifies with her, displacing her own anxiety and fear onto her grandmother and, chiastically, attempting to take on her grandmother's certain fear: "We walk a few feet and stop. My head vibrates with noise . . . The sound of my grandmother sobbing" (23). Here, the memoirist is not only a time traveler but in a sharply imagined moment she will share the physical space with her grandmother, who, in her absence, is made present. In a pattern of dissociative moves, those on a quest for the stories of those who have vanished and are lost to them will detach from the immediacy of their own lives. Arnon Goldfinger, the third-generation narrator of *The Flat*, learning of his grandparents' escape in the prewar years and the murder of his grandmother's mother in Theresienstadt explains his complicated relief at such knowledge: "For the first time in my life, I have a past," one invented by the projection of fear and the desire to control it.

The third-generation witness by adoption tries to uncover and expose

the past and, at the same time, rewrite its ending. Thus, when stories are withheld, the response is characteristically one of a sense of deprivation and the fear of rejection. Adorján, in response to her grandfather's reluctance to talk about the past, feels repudiated, cast out: "If I am to be perfectly honest, that makes me not only sad but even a little angry. For he stole a part of my identity as well, deprived me of an essential part of my sense of self, bequeathed me a gap in my identity that seems like a mystery. I lack a piece of myself. Something is missing, and I don't even know exactly what. Such a pity for something to disappear" (75). What is missing is an inarticulable sense of loss, an absence where some indeterminate component ought to be, the examined motive, perhaps, for the ethical comportment and constitution of character.

For the third-generation seeker, adrift without the anchor of first-hand testimony, the stories, however cryptic, limited, and fragmentary, determine the shape of memory. Stories provide an opening into the past and also an affirmation of continuity. Adorján describes her experience traversing her grandfather's passage from concentration camp to death march to liberation as one of bewildered recognition of durability and permanence in the face of projected loss: "my overriding thought is: but my grandfather survived it. He did survive it . . . Thousands died on these marches. I am shaken . . . but also relieved . . . and I am the granddaughter of this man" (11, 17–18). And even though the stories of their grandparents' experiences, often met with resistance and disguise, are hard to retrieve and harder still to hear, the stories are embraced as a means of memorializing the dead, commemorating those who survived, and finding an appropriate response to the atrocities, denying the Nazis a posthumous victory. To this end, the conflicted granddaughter in Singer's collection of stories involving three generations of Jews, *The Pale of Settlement*, will, with reiterative, anxious resolve, beseech her mother, "Tell me a story": "Her mother told her bedtime stories. The stories were about her mother's childhood and they were always sad. Her mother would sit on the edge of the bed and smooth her hand along the quilt. Once upon a time, she would begin, as if the stories might be made-up tales . . . Her mother's stories gave her a hollow feeling behind her ribs, as if there was a trapdoor inside her that dropped open to her mother's pain. But she asked to hear them anyway" (188, 190). She is a child who, frightened by an experience, obsessively talks about it in an attempt to

neutralize the event and thus the fear. The iteration of "Tell me a story" that runs throughout the literature of the third generation suggests the ways in which the retrieval of the past and the anxiety about knowing the events that shaped the lives of parents and grandparents extend well into the third generation, showing itself to be a defining preoccupation and illocutionary ritual that has shaped the psychic worlds of these Holocaust descendants (204). These are stories that, as one of Dreifus's characters says, "weave back through the decades," catching future generations up in "the ancestral tide that swept [them] along a similar stream."[32]

Psychologist Eva Fogelman has argued, however, that the third generation should not be considered a part of the tide swept along in the protracted "intergenerational transmission of trauma." In "Third Generation Descendants of Holocaust Survivors and the Future of Remembering," Fogelman argues that, while "it took two generations—forty years—for the silence to be broken, for psychological denial to erode, and for survivors to have an audience that did not silence them the moment they attempted to share the stories of their horrific experiences . . . what is transmitted to 3Gs [third-generation descendants of Holocaust survivors] are values, worldview, family interaction and love—not trauma." The third generation is not, Fogelman argues, "suffering from 'silent scars.'" Joseph Skibell's *Blessing on the Moon* creates magical realist tropes in introducing Chaim Skibelski, the novel's protagonist who is murdered on the novel's first page. Chaim subsequently embarks on a post-mortem pilgrimage that tells the story of the Shoah. To be sure, there has been a paradigm shift in the literary transmission of trauma from the second to the third generation. And this shift is manifested in the ways that the stories of the past are interpreted by each subsequent generation and the extent to which the second and third generation view the impact of the Holocaust on their own development and comportment. We don't want to make too much of the distinction among post-Holocaust generations. It is not clear—nor can it be—where one generation ends and another begins. And certainly any such forced distinctions end up futilely running in circles.

The Holocaust, however, remains the lens through which post-Holocaust generations view the world. It persists as the defining moment in time. As Alan Mintz puts it, "The Holocaust . . . constituted a 'tremendum,' an event of such awful negative transcendence that it

cleaved history into a before and after. That we view the present through a profoundly altered lens goes without saying, but we also cannot escape viewing the past through the medium of this terrible knowledge."[33] Thus, finally, the second and third and no doubt fourth generation, and so on, are descendants of that defining moment in Jewish history, as they are of other moments in the long history of Jewish survival. All Jews are, in the ongoing post-Holocaust era, part of a transgenerational continuum of witnesses to the Holocaust, if only in vigilant attention to and moral reckoning of memory of the Shoah, its victims and its survivors. As Saul Bellow's character Ravelstein, his stand-in for the philosopher Allan Bloom, says in the novel of the same name: "We, as Jews, now knew what was possible."[34] "Knowing what was possible" consistently emerges as the remainder of dread and moral horror in the transmission of Holocaust knowledge.

That being said, we wish to call attention to some noticeable differences between direct memory and generational memory, between remembered events and those that are transferred onto a subsequent generation by those who directly experienced the events and lived to tell the tales. Such distinctions are useful if only in terms of demonstrating the range and depth of such memories as they are judiciously and justly carried into the future. In the literature of the second generation, for example, we find a deep ambivalence toward the stories bequeathed to them, stories and histories that, by their weight and enormity, have eclipsed their own lives. As the son of Holocaust survivors in Havazelet's novel *Bearing the Body*, protests, "Another history, not his, not one he'd ever know, sifted its weight over him like ash," like the ashes of the dead (133). For this second-generation son of survivors, the past, "insistently hovering" (130), overshadows his own anxiously contrived freedom to live in the world unencumbered by his parents' tragic past, a history from which he wants to sever himself. Semel's short story "A Hat of Glass" stresses the survivors' concern about transmitting their traumatic legacy to the second and third generations. Her protagonist, a nameless Israeli survivor grandmother reflects: "There, a great darkness emerged. They say: it will heal. They say: I will be healed. I am grateful for the sun and for the new light, but on the children's heads, my anguish and torment sit like a hat of glass."[35]

But autonomy and self-invention are largely the stuff of delusion in

any event, and for the child of survivors, in particular, the Holocaust is shown to be the measure of personhood, where all tracks begin and end. As second-generation writer Melvin Jules Bukiet unequivocally affirms, "In the beginning was Auschwitz," the physical and psychic point of origin for all that follows.[36] For Eva Hoffman, too, "In the beginning was the war. That was my childhood theory of origins . . . For me, the world as I knew it and the people in it emerged not from the womb, but from war . . . For I was born in Poland . . . and so soon after the cataclysm as to conflate it with the causes of my own birth" (3). We find in the literature of the second generation characteristically a fraught confusion between self and other, resulting, in large part, from, as Bukiet suggests, a defining condition in which "the most important events of your life occurred before you were born" (Bukiet, 18). For the second generation, the Holocaust is, as one of Thane Rosenbaum's characters insists, elemental to the very fabric of his felt composition, his DNA, "forever coded with the filmy stuff of damaged offspring, the handicap of an unwanted inheritance."[37] For the second generation, caught in an anxious state of seductive resistance, a push and pull between the twin impulses to fulfill their obligations to their parents and to fashion their own lives free from the strangling tentacles of the Holocaust, the past in the shape of the Holocaust has been indelibly grafted upon them, defining and controlling the very shape of the psychic and physical space they inhabit.

Thus, while for the second generation, the beginning was the fact of Auschwitz, whose gates opened into a world of reinvented time that held a monopoly over the fabric of the past and the shape of the future, for the third generation the beginning was set in motion, as the title of Hoffman's memoir suggests, "after such knowledge." As Gerd Bayer attests, "As time moves away from World War II, memory takes on a different quality as it becomes transformed from direct witnessing and the resulting testimonials to archival and mediated forms of remembering that carry the responsibility of firmly embedding the Holocaust in the cultural memory of later generations."[38] "Memory" defines the paradigm shift and the generational move from survivor writing to second-generation witnessing to the transmission of memory by the third generation. For the survivor, the past exists in the immediacy of the present, since it's a lived past, whose memories are an ineradicable part of the ongoing texture of the survivors' lives. Survivor testimony—in whatever form it takes—is the

most direct and unswerving path to the originating trauma of the Shoah. Even survivor memory is, at times, imperfect, mediated by time, intervening, restorative events, as well as the powers of sublimation and the defenses of forgetting and deflection. For example, Primo Levi observes the greater part of the witnesses, for the defense and the prosecution, have by now disappeared, and those who remain, and who (overcoming their remorse or, alternately, their wounds) still agree to testify, have even more blurred and stylized memories, often, unbeknownst to them, influenced by information gained from later readings or the stories of others. That being said, survivor memory locates us in the midst of the experience and carries with it not only a detailed chronological unfolding, but an emotive, affective response.

What comes after direct memory is that which Marianne Hirsch has notably characterized as "postmemory," the source of which "is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation . . . the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood nor recreated."[39] These are stories, both surreptitiously and explicitly imposed upon a second generation, that have, to a significant extent, usurped the unfolding, linear narratives of that generation's making. The beginning of time stands as sentry, admonition, and portent to those born in its aftermath. As Nadine Fresco suggests in "Remembering the Unknown," the second generation "feel a vertigo when confronted by the 'time before,' the lost object of a nameless desire, in which suffering takes the place of inheritance," a "phantom pain," about which "one remembers only that one remembers nothing."[40] Thus an indirect pain has been transferred onto the second generation, who, conflicted by ambivalent feelings toward an unwanted legacy that seems to eclipse their own lives, proceed into the future with the weight of the Holocaust and their parents' suffering as guide, a most sufficient Charon to that other world.

One of the central, distinguishing features of second- and third-generation responses to the legacy of the Holocaust is exactly this ambivalence. Second-generation literature reveals both anger toward what is portrayed as an interrupted life, a life beholden to the past, and fear, fear of failure and inadequacy in response to their parents' trauma. To

this end, Bukiet refers to the "cosmic responsibility" of the offspring of survivors, those children born in the 1950s and who came of age in the rebellious 1960s, but whose mutiny—defiance against authority, social and political institutions—like everything else, was overshadowed, shown to be an unforgivable transgression, because, as Bukiet rhetorically asks, "how could you rebel against these people who endured such loss? Compared to them, what did you have to complain about?" (Bukiet, 14). What is there to battle against in the process of character formation, when the battles are so inconsequential, the spoils so insignificant? The corrosive influence of the Holocaust casts upon them an unwieldy burden of responsibility from which they cannot escape. Bukiet acknowledges: "Other kids' parents loved them, but never gazed at their offspring as miracles in the flesh . . . Other kids weren't considered a retroactive victory over tyranny and genocide" (14). So the past is either railed against, which poses difficulties since there is no one in the proximate vicinity to rail against and thus get some kind of satisfaction, however negligible. Or the specter of the past is shown to be the source of phobic, obsessive, and dissociative panic and discomfort, as we find in so many of the characters who emerge in second-generation literature. Rosenbaum's Adam Posner, for example, trapped in the elevator-turned-cattle car in the short story "Cattle Car Complex," has a traumatic episode, through an extreme identification with his parents, in which he directly experiences an ordinary elevator as a cattle car, prompted by his unconscious to feel the claustrophobic terror his parents felt.

We suggest that, in the space between the second and third generation, the debilitating anger at a life usurped and eclipsed by the past has diminished, if not disappeared, replaced by an immense sense of loss and absence, a void where family narratives once existed, "family trees . . . axed away," as one of Dreifus's characters laments (Dreifus, 138). To be sure, anger continues to erupt, though it is far less encumbering, and loss and absence are not the only stuff of discomfort. Perhaps the arrival of another, fourth, post-Holocaust generation not only joins in the dialogue but shares the burden of carrying the weight of the past. There is surely something to be said about the advantage of further custodians, additional guardians of historical truth. But this much is certain: the literature that emerges as part of an ongoing dialogue with the second generation reveals a pressing desire to reclaim an inheritance from which it feels

severed. If the "beginning" for the second generation was Auschwitz, the chronic and uncontainable awareness of the atrocities of the Holocaust, then the point of departure for the third generation is loss, a bewildered loss that comes, paradoxically, "after such knowledge," to borrow Hoffman's term. Instead of the un-detoured transfer of stories from those who experienced the traumatic events to a captive generation of direct descendants, the third generation seems to be grasping at "strands of darker stories," as one of Orringer's characters in *The Invisible Bridge* reveals: "She didn't know how she'd heard them; she thought she must have absorbed them through her skin, like medicine or poison. Something about labor camps. Something about being made to eat newspapers. Something about a disease that came from lice . . . half stories" (Orringer, 596). "Something," of course, suggests in its imprecision, its antithesis, its oppositional antagonist. These are memories, as Henri Raczymow acknowledges, "handed down . . . precisely as something *not* handed down" (Raczymow, 103). Memory looks different for this generation; it takes a changed shape: an indistinct rather than an indirect memory, diluted, yet surreptitiously "absorbed." And, despite the desperately figured wish of one of Ehud Havazelet's characters that you "can't lose what you never had," loss and the anxieties that derive in large part from a sense of being untethered from the past, a feeling complicated by the fear that the Holocaust will become a mere abstraction, thus slipping from this generational grasp into obscurity, become anxiously-figured preoccupations for a new generation of Holocaust representation (*Body*, 132).

Part of the psychic and genre problems in post-Holocaust discourse resides in locating and articulating an appropriate response to the horror, a representation that does not transgress and distort the actualities of history and family narratives. If, for the second generation the pressing concern was how to navigate one's life with such knowledge, the question for the third generation is what comes "after such knowledge"? In making a distinction between Hirsch's "postmemory" and Hoffman's "after such knowledge," Gerd Bayer, in his provocative study of third-generation Holocaust cinema, interestingly proposes that "the 'after' in this phrase has a significantly different relationship to the past from the 'post' in postmemory. The latter defines itself through a sense of belatedness that puts the zero degree of memory at the moment of the trauma. The former phrase firmly holds on to the present and looks for a place of

memory within everyday life. The memory of trauma after such knowledge thus places the past alongside other aspects of life . . . in order to guarantee its place in the cultural memory" (Bayer, 132). We think that Bayer makes an important distinction here in the way that both memory and trauma are transferred to the third generation, "a new attitude toward memory that moves beyond the notion of postmemory while remaining committed to the project of remembering the past and creating an ethical response" to atrocity (116). This is not to say, however, that Hirsch's identification and definition of postmemory are obsolete in the case of third-generation transmission of memory. Surely Hirsch's initial proposition, that postmemory captures the way in which "memories of cultural or collective traumatic events and experiences" traverse both temporal and spatial boundaries, applies to continuing post-Holocaust generations. Such "memory," does not erode with time, but rather, gathering momentum, as Lisa Appignanesi suggests, "cascades through the generations."[41] As Jonathan Safran Foer's narrator puts it in *Everything Is Illuminated*, "memory begat memory begat memory" (258). Postmemory's "often obsessive and relentless" though "indirect and fragmentary nature" offers a focus of imagination for generations well beyond the direct descendants of Holocaust survivors (*Family Frames*, 22–3). Indeed, "postmemory" and "after such knowledge" coalesce in the continuing transmission of the traumatic legacy of the Holocaust, both "post" and "after," as Hirsch suggests, providing useful "qualifying adjectives and alternative formulations that try to define both a specifically inter- and transgenerational act of transfer, and the resonant aftereffects of trauma . . . These events happened in the past, but their effects continue into the present" (*The Generation of Postmemory*, 4–5).

That being said, postmemory, always unstable and unreliable, takes on increasingly capricious and variable shapes as we move further from the events of the Holocaust, as we lose the privilege of eyewitness testimony, and as the stories become even further mediated by an intervening generational filter. In other words, as Bayer notes, "postmemory changes as additional generations come to be exposed to its remembered content" (Bayer, 117). Indeed, we argue that "postmemory" is reconfigured and refashioned "after such knowledge." The response to stories of atrocity by a contemporary generation of Holocaust writers and memoirists, while bearing the imprint of many of the previous generation's anxieties and

preoccupations, moves beyond the intergenerational transmission of a singular trauma that controlled the appropriation of such knowledge to an answering form of representation less immediate, less proximate. If, as Hirsch suggests, "'postmemory' reflects an uneasy oscillation between continuity and rupture . . . a *structure* of inter-and transgenerational return of traumatic knowledge and embodied experience . . . a *consequence* of traumatic recall but . . . at a generational remove," how much more so for a generation not once but twice removed from the point of traumatic origin?[42] As Jessica Lang points out, the third generation comprises the "logical successors to the second generation of Holocaust writers. As such, these writers mark a second transition, or another remove from the eyewitness: the first transition from eyewitness to a recounting by the witness now becomes, as the Holocaust enters history, an indirect relation to the original eyewitness" (Lang, 46). To this end, the third generation finds itself engaging in a tenuous balance between identification and distance. On the one hand, there is the compelling impulse to understand the particulars of the events as experienced as familial, that is, to identify affectively with the suffering of members of one's family, however remote. This is a kind of ancestral identification and affective reach. On the other hand, there is a very clear, if regrettable, sense of the vast abyss between "then" and "now," a spatial, temporal, and emotive distance that must be traversed, a journey, as one of Dreifus's characters comes to realize, to "the upside-down world of that time" (Dreifus, 89). What's lacking for this generation in the "knowledge" that comes "after such knowledge" is the emotional fabric of lives, the affective response that invites them inside the lives of those who came before but slipped away, an affective escort that allows them to witness these lives alongside their own histories.

The third generation struggles to find the representational means of closing the distance between the "time before," the "time after," and the immediacy of the present. Thus, unlike the second generation, for whom the Holocaust tended to overshadow their own histories—lives, as Hirsch suggests, that were in large part "shaped by the attempt to represent the long-term effects of living in close proximity to the pain, depression, and dissociation of persons who have witnessed and survived massive historical trauma," and histories that "'bleed' from one generation to the next" (*Postmemory*, 34)—we note that Spiegelman subtitles vol-

ume one of *Maus* "My father bleeds history." Thus the literature of the third generation reveals an almost obsessive pattern of contemporizing the Holocaust, of negotiating the Holocaust as a parallel event to other, more contemporary, tragedies. As Lothe, et al. remark, "We are nearing an age 'after testimony,' an age where first-person accounts by Holocaust survivors will no longer be forthcoming . . . But to come 'after' also implies an obligation to the future," to *turn* the history of the Holocaust into a measure of the world we live in now (2).

Thus, in this literature, the Holocaust is viewed alongside events that are more familiar to the third-generation writer, more decipherable and contiguous. In Nicole Krauss's novel *The History of Love*, a Holocaust survivor's grief intersects with an American child's tragic loss of her father to cancer. Here the one narrative becomes a conduit to the other. The Holocaust in this novel becomes the lens through which we understand and articulate suffering. In Havazelet's novel *Bearing the Body*, the drug-related death of an American-born son of Holocaust survivors in 1995 takes us back in time to the devastation in Europe; the violence in contemporary society memorializes the shattered families and the enormity of loss wrought by the Holocaust. Here the one event happening in real time is an opening to step into the moral abyss of the Holocaust. Dreifus's story "Homecomings," contextualizes the Holocaust in more proximate events, the 1972 terrorist attack on Israeli athletes in Munich, where, as one of her characters despairingly affirms, "the Jews are again the targets" (Dreifus, 93). Rachel Kadish, in her novel *From a Sealed Room*, locates the Holocaust against the backdrop of other, more contemporary moments: the Gulf War, racial tensions and poverty in America, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Holocaust, we suggest, is less positioned in relation to these other events, but rather, the point seems to be that the Holocaust is simply always present, always there, as a fearful measure of what was possible. For these writers, the one more immediately recognizable and familiar tragedy evokes the other. The Shoah becomes the final measure of tragedy. As Gerd Bayer suggests, an approach to navigating the Holocaust attempts to "bridge the gap to the present, thereby making traumatic events of the past relevant for the present," thus wresting the Holocaust from oblivion as part of a continuum of memory and representation (120). There is, however, a danger in any attempt to make the Holocaust relevant, if by relevant we mean accessible to a distant

audience of spectators for whom the events of the Holocaust recede into another pattern of horrors, just one more example of atrocity. As Bayer acknowledges in his discussion of contemporary Holocaust images in cinema, "Finding the right balance between presenting traumatic memories and connecting them to the reality of later generations without turning them into nostalgic commodities remains an ethical challenge" (130). The care required to avoid making the Holocaust just one more in a list of tragedies, of making it a metonymy of atrocity, risks flattening the representational demands of bearing witness. To this end, Mintz distinguishes between exceptionalist and constructivist models of Holocaust representation. The exceptionalist model, as Mintz proposes, "is rooted in a conviction of the Holocaust as a radical rupture in human history," one that "discovers in the Holocaust a dark truth that inheres in the event . . . [a] vision . . . not open to being coopted and constructed for other needs and purposes" (39, 40). The constructivist model, on the other hand, "stresses the cultural lens through which the Holocaust is perceived" (39). From a constructivist perspective, as Mintz suggests, "The Holocaust may in fact be an unprecedented event in human history, yet it is in the nature of individuals and institutions to perceive even unprecedented events through categories that already exist," and thus, "the point of departure is the assumption that beyond their factual core, historical events, even the Holocaust, possess no inscribed meanings; meaning is constructed by communities of interpretation—differently by different communities—out of their own motives and needs" (39–40). The positing of these two divergent perspectives speaks to the necessity of creating a balance between remaining faithful to history and to the uniqueness of the Holocaust as it occurred and conceptualizing it within a proximate cultural context as a means of keeping Holocaust memory alive.

In the literature of the third generation, while the Holocaust is often depicted in relation to or alongside of more proximate events, the effect, we think, is less to match or to join recent historical events with the brutalities and atrocities of the Holocaust, but rather to create fitting conditions to return to the moral baseline, both the point of departure and the final measure of suffering. Such parallel stories are not for the purposes of comparison, but rather for affective access, as Bayer suggests, "situating it in a space of emotional proximity that allows and even demands ethical

responses" (131). The more proximate events provide an available and reachable language of pain. The "spectator" to horror is given an authorized entry into the past. In this regard, the Holocaust becomes a point of measurement for other tragedies, creating a kind of perspectival reach.

Despite Eva Fogelman's protestation that it is time for the term "intergenerational transmission of trauma . . . to be retired," the literature of the third generation insists on picking at the threads of trauma, especially the trauma of severed or fractured identification and consanguinity. As Alan L. Berger suggests, "Third-generation writings embrace a variety of genres, each of which portrays a distinctive angle of vision as respective authors work through their traumatic legacy . . . The shape-shifting shadows of the Holocaust continue to impact the identity of this generation. Their Holocaust-related writings are simultaneously a way of mourning relatives they never knew and an attempt to understand their Jewish identity."[43] This attempt to refurbish identity, we add, is prodded by the fear of its loss, at the same time creating the added burden of being vigilant about turning its obsession into pathos.

What happens at the end of the quest for discovery in these narratives? What is one to do with the story once imperfectly pieced together? What is the relation between teller and the story he or she tells? Dan Bar-On, in staged conversations with Holocaust survivors and their children and grandchildren living in Israel, identifies five stages of working through their response to the events that preceded them. Bar-On itemizes them as follows: "Knowledge: an awareness of what happened during the Holocaust, and, if their family was involved, what happened to them during that time"; "Understanding: the ability to place a knowledge of the facts within a meaningful human, historical, social, or moral frame of reference"; "Emotional response: the emotional reaction to this knowledge and understanding"; "Attitude: the attitude toward what happened based on this knowledge, understanding, and emotional response and their implications for the present and the future"; and, finally, "Behavior: the effect of knowledge, understanding, emotional response, and attitude on specific behavior patterns in relation to the past, the present, and the future" (17–18).[44] What strikes us as particularly germane to our discussion of what the third generation makes of such knowledge is the move beyond an awareness of the general outline of events and even the involvement of one's direct or extended family in the Holocaust to

the effect of such knowledge, how one responds to and acts upon such discoveries. At the close of Mendelsohn's painstaking journey to recover his lost relatives, the author stands at the physical site of the place of death of the uncle and cousin he never knew:

> It is one thing to stand before a spot you have long thought about, a building or shrine or monument that you've seen in paintings or books or magazines, a place where, you think, you are expected to have certain kinds of feelings that, when the time comes to stand there, you either will or will not have: awe, rapture, terror, sorrow. It is another thing to be standing in a place of a different sort, a place that for a long time you thought was hypothetical, a place of which you might say *the place where it happened* and think, it was in a field, it was in a house, it was in a gas chamber, against a wall or on the street, but when you said those words to yourself it was not so much the *place* that seemed to matter as the *it*, the terrible thing that had been done, because you weren't really thinking of the place as anything but a kind of envelope, disposable, unimportant. Now I was standing in the place itself, and I had had no time to prepare. I confronted the place itself, the thing and not the idea of it. (Mendelsohn, 501)

Here, once again, we find a kind of surrogacy. The writer stands, literally and figuratively, in the place of his murdered relatives. But he, unlike those who came before him, can walk away. The memoirist is confronted with the shock of recognition, yet he cannot possibly recognize a place he has never been. The place and his presence there are both uncannily recognizable and foreign, what is familiar and what is concealed. As Freud proposed, "*Heimlich* exhibits one which is identical with its opposite, *unheimlich*. What is *heimlich* thus comes to be *unheimlich*."[45] In encountering the place, "and not the idea of it," Mendelsohn confronts his own fears. Any stable resolution to these quest narratives is neither possible nor, we suspect, desirable. Rather these third-generation quests are marred by paradoxes, incongruities, the implausible, and the all-too-real. Their open-endedness confirms their aims as ethical acts meant to project into a future.

"Are these my grandmother's footsteps or my own?" one of Margot

Singer's characters uneasily asks (39). In concluding both her journey and her narrative, Simon reflects on the motives for her persistence in her quest: "I think of why this search has preoccupied me, why it has transported me across geographical and time barriers. I think of my obsession with my grandmother's life—how and why she survived, what she inherited from her mother, what she transferred to my mother, what my mother transferred to me, and what I have transferred to my daughter" (232). As Simon comes to discover, "What began as a search for missing facts, for missing relatives, ultimately became a search for myself . . . The branch was long and tangled, but I found my end," an "end" that she will hand off to the next generation with caution and vigilance (258). This search, thus, carries her back in time. But it also establishes ethical constraints and guidelines for future generations. In looking back, we inevitably pave the way for the future. As Mendelsohn puts it, "We always turn around to stare at what lies behind us, which is to make an impossible wish, a wish that nothing will be left behind, that we will carry the imprint of what is over and done with into the present and future" (503). Thus, bearing witness is always an incomplete project. The memory of the Holocaust cannot be generationally contained—neither can its accompanying trauma.