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Third-Generation Holocaust Representation

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Published by Northwestern University Press

Aarons, Victoria & Berger, L..

Third-Generation Holocaust Representation: Trauma, History, and Memory.

Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2017.

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CHAPTER 7

“There Were Times When It Was Possible to Weigh Suffering” *Julie Orringer’s The Invisible Bridge and the Extended Trauma of the Holocaust*

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.

— DANIEL MENDELSON, *THE LOST*

At the close of Julie Orringer’s novel *The Invisible Bridge*, the American-born granddaughter of Holocaust survivors Andras and Klara Lévi recognizes not only her family’s fortuitous gains, but also their immeasurable loss. For all those who, like her grandparents, survived the war and succeeded in reassembling their lives, there were those who did not, those whose fortunes were extinguished, their fate prescribed, as one of Orringer’s characters laments, by a “crazed Führer dreaming of a Jew-Free Europe.”¹ Unlike her grandparents, whose good fortune brought them to America, allowing them to “cross an ocean and live in a city” where they might raise their children “without the gravity . . . without the . . . tragedy that seemed to hang in the air like the brown dust of bituminous coal” in Europe’s aftermath of war, there were others for whom such opportunities were made impossible, “tied as they were,” as one of the

novel's central characters sadly recognizes, "to a continent intent upon erasing its Jews from the earth" (Orringer 593, 511). For this grandchild of survivors, this third-generation witness to history who comes only belatedly to such a calculation of loss, such understanding not only involves an acknowledgment of the remote facts of history—"she'd learned about that war in school" (596)—but, even more crucially, an awareness of the immediacy of that history, the imprint and scope of her family's loss on her own, as yet unformed, life. In *The Invisible Bridge*, Orringer, like her fictionalized character, the granddaughter of Holocaust survivors, speaks to the transference of loss and the ways in which the traumatic rupture of the Holocaust does not conclude with those who survived the events, nor with the children of survivors born in the direct aftermath of the war, but rather spills over into subsequent generations, carrying the weight of history into the future. As Orringer, in discussing the impetus for writing the novel, states: "I come from a family of Holocaust survivors, which is to say that I come from a family irrevocably changed by the war. The losses are irremediable, the scars are permanent, and the effects can be felt acutely three generations down the line."² *The Invisible Bridge*, characteristic of third-generation literary representation of the Holocaust, is a novel framed and bound by generations, generations shaped by the ongoing traumatic history of the Holocaust. Here the Holocaust is an inheritance bequeathed to and readily embraced by the third generation in an attempt, not only to keep alive the memory of the Shoah, but to assert the continuity of generations in the face of the pathological attempts to eradicate the world of Jewish life. As Orringer insists, "It was a tale that demanded telling."³

The Invisible Bridge is, as noted, a characteristically third-generation narrative. It reaches into the past to extend the memory of the Shoah and to give weight and presence to those otherwise lost to history. Orringer, like other Holocaust writers of her generation, writes from a deeply personal connection to the past and from an urgently felt compulsion to carry on the obligatory task of transmission. As Orringer reveals in an interview: "I feel really lucky to have been able to write this novel . . . I think one of the transformations that occurred was I started out thinking this is a story that would be fascinating to tell. But I realized, my God, this is a story that has to be told, and it took on that feeling of necessity."⁴ For Orringer and others of the third generation, the necessary exigencies that motivate

such telling emerge from the obligation to bear witness to a memory not their own, but a memory nonetheless that, like an invisible bridge, connects the past to the present, linking generations and traversing the chasm, the gulf made by time, place, and the contingencies of birth and chance. These are indelible stories unchanged by time or distance, for, as one of the survivor's in Orringer's novels admits, "Nothing would change what had happened—not grief, not time, not memory" (Orringer, 593). The bridge may be invisible, but in Orringer's novel, which insists on the viability and persistence of generations and of transferred memory, its scaffolding is held in place by narrated lives, as the third-generation character in *The Invisible Bridge* reveals, that emerge as the half-lived "strands of darker stories . . . absorbed through her skin, like medicine or poison. Even when she wasn't thinking about those half stories, they did their work in her mind" (596). Third-generation writer Dreifus, in ready accord, speaks to the seductive hold of such memories on later generations, stories, like memories, that hold no geographic, temporal, or experiential bounds: "I'll go so far as to suggest that for all of us, even two generations later, in the United States or Canada or Great Britain or wherever our grandparents were able to raise our parents and, eventually, watch us grow up, the stories—fragmented or not—have done their work in our minds. If they hadn't, it's unlikely that these books would have been written."⁵ These are stories that become for the third generation the impetus for and the motivating factor in imagining the novel into being. Although, as the narrator at the close of third-generation Canadian writer Alison Pick's novel *Far To Go* guardedly admits, "What I'm telling you—haltingly, I realize—is that this is just one way it might have happened."⁶ For what is lost in transmission reasserts itself as a haunting preoccupation among writers of the third generation.

The Invisible Bridge is a novel of the fate of Hungary's Jews under Nazi occupation. It is based on the experiences of Orringer's grandparents, Hungarian Jews who survived the Holocaust and who, at the end of the war, left the rupture of Europe, and, like the central characters in the novel, immigrated to America where they raised their family. There remained, as one of Orringer's characters concedes, "no future for them in Hungary" (Orringer, 591). Orringer, in constructing the plot of the novel, draws, in particular, upon the life of her maternal grandfather, a Hungarian Jew born in the small town of Konyár in eastern Hungary,

who in 1937 arrived in Paris to study architecture only to be forced to return when scholarships were revoked for Jewish students. Like the novel's central character, Andras Lévi, a young Jewish scholarship student who falls in love with and eventually marries a Hungarian Jewish woman living in Paris, Orringer's grandfather, upon his compulsory return to Hungary, was conscripted into the forced labor service in the Hungarian army. For Orringer, who had only known the broad outline of her grandparents' history, her grandfather's direct testimony was the impetus for the novel that would emerge: "Being able to talk to him about his experiences in forced-labor camps was the only thing that made it seem possible for me to write about it . . . I don't think I could have imagined this as fully as I wanted to had it not been for the fact that there are still people alive who can give first-hand accounts" (Behe). Like other third-generation narratives, *The Invisible Bridge* is the product of both family stories and extensive research into what Orringer refers to as the little known and "often overlooked" story of Hungary's Jews during the Shoah (Behe). Part of the impetus for this novel stems from the lack of public knowledge about the specifics of Hungarian Jewish history. As Orringer suggests:

Not many people know about the Hungarian Jews' conscription into forced labor battalion, whose work was to support armies intent upon eradicating the Jews and their allies. And not many people know that Hungary wasn't occupied until March of 1944, when Hitler's defeat was all but certain, and that its Jewish population survived largely intact until that point, despite strict anti-Semitic laws and widespread anti-Jewish practices; the horribly efficient deportations that followed brought more than half of Hungary's Jews to their deaths in a matter of a few months. (Simons)

This gap in the story of the fate of Hungarian Jewry under the Nazi occupation, a fate that included the roundup and deportation to Auschwitz of over 400,000 Hungarian Jews, becomes an opening into history for Orringer's novel, an opening into the collective experience of all those who suffered as the individuals of her extended family did. And so, like other writers of her generation—Alison Pick, Daniel Mendelsohn, Andrea

Simon, for example—Orringer memorializes those members of her family who survived as well as those lost. In the words of Alison Pick’s narrator, “And so I inscribe them here, the family I never knew” (Pick, 308).

In modeling the central characters and staging the novel’s main events on the fate of her grandfather’s family, Orringer both memorializes individual lives and recounts the historical conditions to which Hungary’s Jews were subjected. With careful attention to detail, Orringer’s novel chronicles the escalating antisemitic fervor, the systematized enactment of anti-Jewish laws and decrees, the closing in and preying upon Hungary’s vulnerable Jewish population, the deportation and forced labor in Hungarian work camps, and the destruction of lives, conditions that before conducting extensive research and listening to survivor stories Orringer understatedly admits, “I underestimated just how awful it was” (Behe). Hearing her grandparents’ stories of their experiences both before and during the war seems to have provided Orringer with transformative and catalyzing moments of discovery. She explains the decisive impetus for writing the novel in this way:

What drew me to the story was hearing about my grandfather’s experiences when he was younger. Despite the fact that I grew up in a Hungarian family, I just didn’t know much about what had happened to Hungarian Jews during the war. Like a lot of families with Holocaust survivors, those years just weren’t discussed in my family. My grandparents certainly alluded to them and I heard bits and pieces about their survival, but I didn’t really have a sense of the whole picture because my grandparents didn’t talk about it. Once I started asking them questions about what had happened, they really wanted to tell their story. They wanted the novel to be written.⁷

Here Orringer speaks to the fragmented and belated ways in which the grandchildren of Holocaust survivors come to the details of their grandparents’ experiences. Unlike the second generation, who grew up under the direct shadow of the Holocaust, the third generation must consciously choose to wrest such information, not only from the defenses of memory and the unpredictable masks and obscurities of time, but from the fading cultural memory of and preoccupation with the events of the

Holocaust. To be sure, the second generation was often met with silence, survivor parents who wanted to protect their offspring from the horrors of the past and raise them unimpeded by that history and its painful memories. However, for the second generation, there was no intervening filter between the direct witness of events and those who followed. As Melvin Jules Bukiet affirms, “For the Second Generation there is no Before”; the Holocaust is the defining point of origin.⁸ And although it may be, as Bukiet suggests, “a tainted inheritance, secondhand knowledge of the worst event in history,” the legacy of the Holocaust by all accounts shaped an indelible part of their identity (Bukiet, 18). As second-generation novelist Thane Rosenbaum writes of one of his characters, the anguished child of survivors, “the entire experience [was] coded in his brain, forever.”⁹ This may be a generation born after the war, but, as Rosenbaum suggests, “secondhand is enough.”¹⁰

For the third generation, contrastively, the memories of the Holocaust are less direct, increasingly filtered through and by time, distance, and by the imprint of those more proximate, immediate tensions involved in navigating the competing demands of contemporary life. As the general cultural impact of the Holocaust recedes, the imperative to keep telling its stories in all their aspects and with an eye on particularity of person and place becomes increasingly compelling for third-generation writers. In distinguishing among the generations affected both directly and indirectly by the Holocaust, Bar-On proposes, “The Holocaust charged survivors with two basic responsibilities: the first, explicitly expressed as an obligatory act, to remember, preserve, and transmit this terrible experience from one generation to the next; the second, to overcome what happened and serve as living evidence that the Nazi attempt at annihilation had ultimately failed.”¹¹ And the third? The third generation must either bypass the filtered narratives passed on to them by their parents, who shape those events through their own traumatic identification, or attempt to measure the stories of their parents against the waning memories of their grandparents. In either event, the third generation comes to such stories through a kind of traumatic interference, events filtered, more often than not, piecemeal, through the events and blockades of the intervening decades. The third generation, then, must turn from one life and deliberately walk into another. After all, as Judith M. Gerson and Diane Wolf, in their introduction to their sociological study of collective

memory, propose, “not every generation has the same memory of the Holocaust because of its respective historical positions and life experiences.”¹² Dreifus, in distinguishing the second generation’s approach to this history from that of the third, proposes, “rather than focusing on the sequelae of this family experience on their own lives and psyches . . . they have spun stories grounded in their grandparents’ prewar and wartime European worlds” (“Looking Backward”). While the focus of such narratives may end, as does *The Invisible Bridge*, with the grandchild’s emergence and identification with the events and personalities he or she uncovers, such a coming of age begins with the lives of those whose fortuitous survival brought one generation to the point of departure and another to the point of self-conscious origin. Such indebtedness is not lost on the grandchildren of survivors. As Orringer puts it, “Any American Jew descended from Holocaust survivors is here because of great and good fortune and of course the fortitude of the men and women who managed to survive those times of great uncertainty” (Rom-Rymer).

The impulse to reconstruct a coherent narrative from the fragmented, niggling pieces of stories and observations is both a process and product of coming of age for the third generation. Pick’s narrator in the novel *Far To Go* steers a course into the past with “only a fraction of the story” (85), and Orringer’s third-generation character in *The Invisible Bridge*, having contended for most of her young life with only portions of stories, cryptic references reluctantly alluded to by her grandparents “in lowered voices” (597) will try to take up the burden of transferred memory. Orringer’s own desire for “a sense of the whole picture” and her conviction of the insufficiency of the “bits and pieces” of her grandparents’ stories echo the certitude of her third-generation character at the close of *The Invisible Bridge*, a character who, coming of both imaginative and intellectual age, “wanted to hear the whole story . . . She would ask . . . She was old enough now to know” (Orringer, 597). Instead of fragments, random pieces of stories, this character, like others of the third generation, wants to enter into the contours of memory, to identify with her grandparents’ lives, if only for the space of a coherent, unfolding narrative. Speaking in the voice of her author, the grandchild of survivors, at the end of the novel, will insist that “it was time”; in defiance of a history that would obliterate her family, she will not be silenced. Their story will not die with them.

Such insistence is born of the anxious certainty that the generation of survivors is itself coming to an end. As one of Pick's characters ruefully acknowledges, time is running out, and "too late" is irrevocable: "People disappear. Despite all the information available to us . . . We can guess what happened but we cannot say for certain. And there is nothing to be done about it now anyway, so late in time" (Pick, 85). While the second generation—the children of survivors—grew up under the watchful gaze of those who experienced the events of the Shoah directly, the third generation is faced with the imminent end of such direct testimony and also direct access. "Soon," Pick's character will conclude, "there'll be nobody left to remember" (308). And, inevitably, "nobody left to remember" carries with it the risk of silence, nobody left to tell. Caught up in the contingencies of one's own time and circumstance, there is, as Mendelsohn admits, "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."¹³ This sense of belatedness and its accompanying disease is born of an awareness of history's imprint on others as well as on one's own identity. It takes shape as the dawning apprehension that one may have inadvertently deflected important knowledge that defensively precludes what Hirsch refers to as an "affective link," a "living connection" to the past,¹⁴ "information" that, as Mendelsohn concedes, "you need" (Mendelsohn, 73). For a contemporary generation of American Jews, those approaching the Holocaust from an increasingly distanced vantage point, as Debra Kaufman suggests, "memory is fast becoming history."¹⁵ And so the generations trailing behind in an urgent sense of obligation take up memory and its transmission.

Second-generation writer Bukiet argues that "memory" is the wrong word in this context: "'Memory' is the mantra of all the institutions that reckon with the Holocaust, but memory is an inaccurate term. For anyone who wasn't there, on either side of the barbed wire . . . thinking about the Holocaust is really an act of the imagination. All we know is how little we know" (Bukiet, 16). In agreement, second-generation memoirist Hoffman suggests that "It has become routine to speak of the 'memory' of the Holocaust and to give this putative faculty privileged status; but most of us, of course, do not have memories of the Shoah, nor, often,

sufficient means for apprehending that event.”¹⁶ To be sure, those who were not present for the unfolding of events of the Holocaust cannot in any literal measure of the term “remember” such incidents. One cannot, after all, remember that which he or she did not witness. Indeed, as Hirsch affirms, “We do not have literal ‘memories’ of others’ experiences, and certainly, one person’s lived memories cannot be transformed into another’s” (Hirsch, 31). Given the inevitable constraints of language and perception, “memory” is an inexact term to describe the way in which post-Holocaust generations absorb and transmit the events that they do not, in fact, remember. That being said, the term “memory” has a useful place in these discussions, especially when conceived of differently, as more fluid and as a way of talking about the ways in which the transferential process of identity formation is carried out through internalizing certain essential and defining aspects of the generational past. Holocaust representation is not a fixed script; in order to insist on the conscientious articulation of the Holocaust into the present, discursive boundaries must be more fluid. The generic boundaries between history and fiction must especially be fluid and are so for third-generation Holocaust writers. The ideal of remembrance becomes, not just a matter of the known facts, the institutional history of the Holocaust, but of histories still needing to be revealed, both personal and general. These histories are built from a combination of discovered historical data, often from personal sources and the recollection of such, but also from visits to places and archives. Because we lack the precise vocabulary to identify the unique relationship that post-Holocaust generations have to the event, we require a metaphor that will approximate the way in which post-Holocaust generations identify themselves with the collective and individual traumatic imprint of the Holocaust. We need a way of talking about the motivated connection post-Holocaust generations have to the Holocaust, both for the purposes of identifying and shaping that relationship as well as to identify their means of representing those events, of bearing witness to both the transformation of history and the ways contemporary generations envision themselves as Jews in a post-Holocaust world. That metaphor is “memory,” but understood generically as the mixing of memoir and fiction.

Thus memory as a central critical metaphor operates in the same way that we “remember” the more quotidian events of our more proximate

familial pasts, those moments we transferentially identify, occasions in which we may not have been literally present, but we are made affectively present through iterations of stories, photographs, artifacts that have been handed down throughout the generations. Memory as a trope becomes a means of mediating loss and arbitrating distance and temporality. Here the trope of memory intercedes between remembering and forgetting, both personal and collective, willed and unconscious. Memory is thus a trope of mediation, an intervention into traumatic rupture and the intergenerational extension of trauma. Constructed memory is thus a means of keeping the past alive in the present, a means by which awareness is transferred to a dimly known, compellingly arresting part of one's imagined identity. Post-Holocaust narratives written by the third generation, a generation twice-removed from the events it imaginatively evokes, are authorial constructions of the process of memory and discovery. For this generation of Holocaust writers, as Diane Wolf proposes, "notions of the Holocaust are mediated through the memories of others and through the production of Jewish collective memory."¹⁷ Thus the trope of memory allows those with a generational and historical distance from the Holocaust to speak posthumously about and through the memories of others. To this end, adjectival modifiers appended to memory such as "post" or "after" help in making those relationships clearer, as Hirsch suggests, "qualifying adjectives and alternative formulations that try to define both a specifically inter- and transgenerational act of transfer, and the resonant aftereffects of trauma" (Hirsch, 4). Here Hirsch's construction of the term "postmemory" effectively approaches what remains after memory and is a useful placeholder for the process of intergenerational and transgenerational participation in the prolonged identification of shared trauma. "Postmemory," as distinguished from memory, accordingly:

describes the relationship that the "generation after" bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before—to experiences they "remember" only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to *seem* to constitute memories in their own right. Postmemory's connection to the past is thus actually mediated

not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation . . . These events happened in the past, but their effects continue into the present. (Hirsch, 5)

Thus the troping of memory comes as close to an indirect, affective memory as one can. Troping creates the shape of memory, as Hirsch says, “an uneasy oscillation between continuity and rupture” (5). Such a structure opens itself up to the possibility for the articulated emphatic relation to others, as an act of *rachmones*, acts of compassion fundamental to Jewish ethics, and also as a response to fear. Such is part of the process of midrash and lamentation, a process of mourning “for what could never be returned” (Orringer, 535) and constitutes the rhetorical motivation for the midrashic mixing of history and fiction in third-generation writing.

Propelled by such an imperative, the third generation—the generation that will see an end of survivor testimony—in an attempt to prevent the kind of historical amnesia and absence that might otherwise result from an acquiescence to silence, a surrendering to the convenient and seductive immediacy present, will, with anxious agency, compile whatever resources it has at hand—as Dreifus catalogues, a matter of reading “histories and testimonies,” collecting stories (“Looking Backward”)—in an attempt to create a narrative out of the fragments of memories related, stories told.

This urgently felt obligation to participate in shared memory leads Orringer to *The Invisible Bridge*, a novel of classical realism drawing on the conventions of the Victorian novel, with its attention to realism, its particularizing of a character’s maturation, and its depiction of large historical moments. The intersection of detailed historical accounts and imagined lives is set within the framework of the conventions of the *bildungsroman* of the nineteenth century, its epic proportions beginning before the outbreak of the war against the Jews in Europe and ending on another continent in the aftermath of that war, its consequences having been accessed. Orringer, in an interview, explains the design for the novel in this way:

I wanted to write a 19th century novel: a big sprawling book in which we follow a character through a *bildungsroman*-like transformation. On the other hand, I also wanted to write a very

contemporary novel . . . sprawling and lush like the 19th century novel, but that also brings a contemporary sensibility to the characterization and the language. In adopting that form, I also had to think about ways I could subvert it or break it open. Part of that happens through the language, part of it through the subject matter and part of it is through the fact that there's no moral explanation or reason for what happened. (Rom-Rymer)

Thus, in *The Invisible Bridge*, we find the comfortably recognizable generic and subjective structures of classic realism subverted by the ruptures of genocide. For all the while that Orringer's characters are building their lives, we know that they are plummeting toward a war that will destroy those lives. As is characteristic bildungsroman, *The Invisible Bridge* patterns itself on a central character's education and self-formation, in this particular case, the psychological and moral maturation of the central surviving Lévi brother, Andras. In fact, the novel begins with Andras Lévi setting forth from home on a journey to begin his formal education in Paris and, by happenstance, his less formal but no less seminal informal education in the ways of the world: his burgeoning friendships with other students at the school of architecture, his tutelage in appropriate conduct and comportment, his exposure to political ideologies, his introduction to the backstage practices of the theatre, and his first and sustaining love affair. The early chapters of the novel establish the conditions and encounters for the psychological, sexual, political, and cultural awakening that in many ways transforms Andras Lévi. However, Orringer disrupts conventions long before the central character is able to benefit from his education, for abruptly the novel's plot will shift. The possibilities for a narrative arc of fulfillment are aborted. Andras's developing maturation comes to a sudden halt by the escalation of fascism and the encroachment of a war that directly targets him, his family, and the other Jews in his company. Thus the novel will shift direction; instead of an ascending evolution toward self-recognition and an acceptance of stable values and social structures, the novel descends into chaos. Andras is thrust out rather than initiated. Individual lives are eclipsed by the strangulations of fascism and war. In many ways *The Invisible Bridge* is an anti-bildungsroman, a reverse coming of age for an entire civilization, an era foregrounding the most heinous capabilities of humankind. If this

is a novel about a gradual dawning of human motive and potential, then it is so as an awakening to those all-too-human counter-elements, oppositional impulses that subvert its design, civilization's death drive. As Orringer puts it, "*The Invisible Bridge* moves forward through time like a nineteenth-century novel, but what it's pulling its characters toward is the horrific disaster of the Second World War . . . a kind of contemporary tension in that juxtaposition of linear narrative structure with the illogic and madness of that war" (Rom-Rymer). Orringer thus destabilizes the conventions of the nineteenth-century bildungsroman and surrenders her characters to those historical conditions that would subsume them. In collapsing the genre, Orringer thematizes the collapse of a world through the dissonant elements that control the unfolding of the novel.

Orringer's attention to realism, to the vivid and detailed descriptions of the prewar landscape of her grandparents' lives, accentuates this thematically charged, generic dissonance. Orringer's reproduction of the history, culture, and ethos of the prewar era all contribute to the dismantling of that world that she will never know but that she reimagines: the researched details and descriptions of Paris's art deco and art nouveau architecture, its cultural arts—ballet, tap dance, theatre—the bohemian life in Paris's Quartier Latin, the École Spéciale d'Architecture where her grandfather briefly attended school on a scholarship, Budapest's rich urban and rural settings, all are set against the encroaching fascism that will subvert all of it. This attention to detail characterizes the impulse of third-generation writers, whose narratives are motivated by twin impulses: to present with as much accuracy as possible the historical facts of the Holocaust and to particularize the experience, that is, to recreate the individual lives of their families. Thus this literature intersects the compass of history—its project and scope—and the individual histories of those who lived those events. As Orringer suggests of her approach to the novel: "The details were important to me. I wanted to learn the names of the birds in the trees and the small side streets—all the things my grandparents would have taken note of in their world . . . I wanted to learn the history on the large scale but I also wanted to learn a little bit about the smaller news events that came to my characters' attention as they were going about their lives" (Rom-Rymer). In this way, *The Invisible Bridge* engages both the personal and the collective experience of the Holocaust, drawing upon those elements that would have possibly

framed her grandparents' daily lives and those facts of the larger history that impinged upon them. In researching the conditions of those Jews, like her grandfather, conscripted into the labor camps, Orringer uncovered newspapers that had been written by members of the forced labor battalions. She describes her "find" in this way:

When I went to the National Jewish Hungarian Archives in Budapest, I asked the archivist to pull anything out of her files that might give me insight into life in the camps. She pulled down this very dusty box from one of the shelves and inside it were hand-typed or hand-written newspapers that the men had made while in the labor camps. The most surprising thing was not the existence of the papers but the darkly comedic tone of the papers . . . I knew when I came across those papers that I wanted them to be part of the narrative development of the novel, not just window dressing. (Rom-Rymer)

The wider, more encompassing scope of history in the making of individual histories—stories of personal anguish and loss—collide in Orringer's novel. The overlay of the imagined lives of individuals upon catastrophic history prevents Orringer from romanticizing the lives of those who witnessed the events she so closely and attentively describes. And the third-generation novelist here participates in what is a collaborative effort to get it right, that is, to confront the past by imaginatively reconstructing her grandparents' lives. Their lives become transformed into fragments of narratives, "So many stories," as third-generation memoirist Andrea Simon will acknowledge in her attempt to piece together her grandmother's history.¹⁸ The intervening years since the end of the war has amassed "so many stories," testimonies, both oral and written accounts, documentaries, cinematic productions, memorials, and the like, all part of a vast project of truth gathering, of representation and transmission, aimed at grappling with the ethical, moral, political, and cultural implications of the Shoah. Because a contemporary generation lacks specific memories of the events it wants to disclose, it must rely on an imagination, as Gerson and Wolf suggest, "filtered through a variety of sources including records and documents, memoirs and narratives of the destruction written and compiled by survivors, perpetrators, and bystand-

ers, and contemporary research, textual accounts, and artistic portrayals of the Holocaust” (Gerson and Wolf, 6). Thus, for each new generation, the tasks of sorting through the sheer volume of information and finding new forms of expression are made increasingly difficult. And it is, for the third generation, often an uneasy acquisition of such knowledge, its transmission complicated by how much one cannot know. Orringer speaks to the deficiencies in representation, to the limits of the imagination for not only those who were not direct witnesses but those removed by the vastness of yet another generation. Her grandmother’s response to an early draft of the novel exposes the fundamental inadequacies in imagining that which, despite years of accumulated research at hand, cannot be known by any measure of found knowledge: “She took me through all the ways things were worse than I was even able to imagine . . . It was pretty awful” (Behe). How, then, does one come close to approaching “worse”? How, that is, does one represent suffering and atrocity at the historical and cultural remove of yet another generation?

The intersection of imagined stories and personalities of individual characters and the recreation of historical events provides *The Invisible Bridge* with its real force, its rich and compelling intensity. Orringer constructs the lives of her characters, as she puts it, with “the weight of history behind the . . . story” (Rom-Rymer). Characteristic of survivor writing and post-Holocaust narratives, her novel is a blending of generic alternatives—classic realist characterization, the chronicle, thematized settings—characteristic of historical fiction. In an attempt to confront the realities of the historical events and, at the same time, create characters who might draw the reader into an empathetic engagement with individual lives and thus individual loss, Holocaust and post-Holocaust writers characteristically merge otherwise disparate genres in an attempt to bridge the gap for the more distanced reader, distanced temporally, spatially, and experientially, all the while trying to remain faithful to history. As Holocaust scholar Berel Lang suggests, “The pressures exerted by [the subject of the Holocaust] are such that the associations of the traditional forms—the developmental order of the novel, the predictability of prosody, the comforting representations of landscape or portrait in painting—are quite inadequate for the images of a subject with the moral dimensions and impersonal will of the Holocaust. Thus the constant turning in Holocaust images . . . to the blurring of traditional genres

not just for the sake of undoing them but in the interests of combining certain of their elements that otherwise had been held apart.”¹⁹ Such a “blurring” or merging of genres in Holocaust literary representation allows both reader and writer to see history through the lens of recreated individual stories and, chiasmatically, to access individual stories and thus reanimate individual lives within the constraints of history. The ethical demands of both representation and reckoning required of both writer and reader when contending with the subject of the Holocaust are such that a means must be located, as Wiesel has suggested, to bring the reader “to the other side.”²⁰ That is, Holocaust literary representation must enact the very conditions it evokes. Holocaust narratives, in other words, must create the conditions of trauma, of uneasy and disrupted anticipation. In response to a question regarding her choice of a novelistic representation of Hungary’s Jews under Nazi rule rather than a nonfiction account, Oringer suggests that “Fiction has the ability more than any other art form to really place the reader inside the character’s experience When we read a piece of historical nonfiction, there’s a sense of foreknowledge of what comes later. In this case, even though the reader knows what comes later, the character doesn’t know and he’s able to inhabit a more innocent space than I would have been able to communicate otherwise” (Rom-Rymer). In other words, the blending of the facts of history and fictional characterization and the conventions of plot design set the conditions for the kind of dramatic irony that directly involves the reader in an act of transference, in, that is, the anxious anticipation of events that he or she knows will arrive—indeed, have already been dreadfully played out—but also in an act of witnessing them anew, alongside the character. Thus, while the fictional invention of character, motive, and possibility shape the novel’s unfolding, as Lang insists, “history,” as it must “has the last word” (Lang, 39).

Thus *The Invisible Bridge* chronicles the situation confronting Hungary’s Jewish population from 1937 to the end of the war: the meticulously researched and documented depictions of the dire conditions for Jewish prisoners in forced labor battalions, the Hungarian Labor Service; the Jewish work units clearing minefields for the fighting units marching behind them; the murderous actions of the Hungarian Arrow Cross; the expropriation of Jewish property; Hungary’s *Numerus Clausus* (Closed Numbers) legislation restricting the access of Jews to universities; the

First Jewish Law of 1938, introduced by János Makkai; the bombing of the bridges over the Danube; the underground satiric newspapers written by the Jewish prisoners in the work camps; the efforts of Miklós Horthy, Regent of Hungary, to resist Hitler's pronouncements, as well as other historical details that bring to life the realities of that epic in Hungarian-Jewish life. Clearly Orringer, like others in her generation, wanted to get it right, to depict the ethos of both prewar and war years with as much accuracy as possible. We see this same impulse, too, in third-generation Sara Houghteling's novel of the Nazi looting and appropriation of Jewish art, *Pictures at an Exhibition*. In an epic sweep, Houghteling offers a blending of history and fiction, the Holocaust viewed simultaneously through the wider lens of history and through the individualized loss and grief of characters whose lives are shaped by that history as it unfolds. Like Orringer, Houghteling relied on her grandparents' postwar descriptions of France, the stories of survivors, documentaries, and also on extensive archival research in Paris in order to preserve the accuracy of detail. Here the plundering of art from museums and galleries and the attempts by biographical people such as Rose Valland, the French curator of the Jeu de Paume Modern Art Museum, a woman upon whose life Houghteling's character Rose Clément is based, to protect such art from the Nazis speaks metonymically to that greater loss, the loss of Jewish life and culture. Within these historical moments—Houghteling's pre and postwar Paris years and the escalation of antisemitism in Hungary—individual lives emerge, lives that were transformed by the events of war. As Orringer says of the role of her grandparents' lives in conceiving of *The Invisible Bridge*, "The details . . . were important to me . . . The same is true of the history" (Rom-Rymer).

The unfolding history of antisemitic legislation and the occupation of Hungary by the Nazis provide the theatrical landscape for Orringer's novel. Against this backdrop, the lives of characters drawn from her grandparents' lives and the lives of their family and friends take shape. It was through the writing of the novel, as Orringer suggests, that she was able to appreciate more fully the intersection of the personal and the collective:

My family's experiences became real to me in a way they hadn't before. Part of what I found so difficult was not only sorrow for

the characters I had created—in the end they are just figments of my imagination—but much more importantly, I experienced the real misery of understanding, finally, what happened to my grandparents and that whole side of my family. It's one thing to hear bits and pieces but it's another thing to be living the life of the characters for a couple of years and begin to see those lives break down. You really start to see that it wasn't just this large scale tragedy, but an infinite series of tiny tragedies that added up to something completely beyond our imagining. (Rom-Rymer)

Here the imagination is contained within the depiction of actual events, and the world in which her grandparents and other Hungarian Jews found themselves ensnared becomes in the novel the stage against which the dramatic action is set. In doing so, Orringer creates a balance between identification and distance; the wider view of history sets the parameters for the microcosmic view of individual lives and loss.

As *The Invisible Bridge* opens amid the landscape of prewar Hungary in 1937, with the three Lévy brothers, Tibor, Andras, and Mátyás optimistically preparing to launch themselves into the future, we know that future will be aborted, for the stage is set long before the novel opens, the war waiting for them to walk into, the inexorable opening to catastrophe. Already Europe is on the precipice of war, the rise of fascism, the seeds of antisemitism, and the systematic stages of regulations against Jews closing in. Even as Orringer's characters embark on their futures, the events have already occurred that will arrest them. Indeed, the novel's opening line suggests what will unavoidably follow: "Later he would tell" (Orringer, 3). From the novel's very beginning, then, both characters and readers are on the edge, anticipatory of the impending doom that will gain momentum throughout the novel. And although the opening chapter will find Andras Lévy boarding a train for Paris in pursuit of his great fortune in having been admitted to the *École Spéciale d'Architecture* with a scholarship, his early departure by train is a harbinger of things to come. In fact, this initial scene bodes ill, not only for the Lévy family, but for all of Hungary's—indeed Europe's—Jews. Rather than signifying escape and mobility, boarding the train early on in the novel presages the rupture of families and the chaos and destruction that will soon follow. Andras, bidding goodbye to his brother Tibor at the train's platform, is

momentarily made uneasy: “The idea of boarding a train to be taken away from him seemed as wrong as ceasing to breathe” (15). Transportation by trains will become a pattern in the novel, from its early promise of flight to forced containment, from beginnings to endings, since ultimately the trains become boxcars that, leaving “daily for the west, returned empty,” only to be “filled again,” a mass deportation, “so many departures,” destined for concentration camps, hard labor, death (554). And this time there would be “no way, no time, to say goodbye” (*ibid.*). Trains run through this novel, from the initial flight from Hungary to France, to those deportees fleeing Paris, and finally to entrapment and death. Indeed, such a corrupted symbol of mobility in post-Holocaust literature can only be seen through its antithetical other: not safe passage, freedom, mobility, and escape, but rather, captivity, containment, extinction.

Like other recurring Holocaust topoi, such modes of transport have lost their normative meaning, the referent indelibly changed, making this trope a measure of just how transformative, how mutating such an experience was and continues to be. Here the reference to trains becomes a metonymic substitution of one word for a totality of anguish. Contained in the simple noun “train” is a roster of horrors, a history of misery, a dismantling of the conventional meaning of the word in which individual, collective, and historical memory converge. Characteristic of post-Holocaust narratives, language and its associations are reconceived to identify the uniqueness of this particular experience. Trains, as other signifiers of the Shoah, become implicated in language and in history. Thus, in beginning with movement outward, Orringer sets the stage early in the novel for the kind of closing in that the reader knows will follow. Although Andras’s father assures him, “‘It’s a blessing you’re going to Paris . . . better to get out of this country where Jewish men have to feel second-class . . . I can promise you that’s not going to improve while you’re gone, though let’s hope it won’t get worse’” (18), we know from the start that these tracks lead only to the destruction of millions. Orringer thus establishes the basic structure of fear that unhinges the characters from their domestic and cultural moorings and sets the stage for the psychic estrangement and dislocation so characteristic of third-generation narratives. As Bar-On suggests, “Even though the impact of this rupture may have diminished over time, the residue of fear can still be felt in most

of the third generation's life stories" (Bar-On, 329). Here, in the opening chapters of *The Invisible Bridge*, Orringer thus provides us with a retrospective account of something that has already occurred, yet we must go back to a time and place before, as Hoffman puts it, "such knowledge," that is, a landscape before its corruption. This return to prewar Europe characterizes third-generation narratives, part of a genre of Holocaust writing that, as Roskies suggests, "unfolds both backward and forward."²¹ In doing so, this literature achieves the classical realism of historical fiction and, in dramatizing the escalation of retrospective anticipation, erodes the boundary between the past and the present, the living and the dead, creating a felt authenticity that shows the impact of memory's hold on the imagination. It both speaks to the distance between the events and our memory of them and collapses such distance.

The collapse of time and time's distinct associations and configurations are a recurring preoccupation among third-generation writers, who attempt to navigate the layered striations of the past within the contours of the present. That is, third-generation narratives pay distinct attention to structures and dispositions of time. In some ways, time is seen to be clearly demarcated, separated in discrete stages characterized by a distinct "before" and "after." While, as Bar-On proposes, "survivors and many of their children find it impossible to move back and forth between the past and the future, between remembering and forgetting, between life and death," (329) the third generation, from its telescopic spyhole of distance, views the past as discrete narratives. It does so, we think, in order to insist on a "before" and "after," that is, a world that did not begin and end with the Holocaust. Contrastively, as we see in survivor narratives, both pre and postwar conditions tend to be overshadowed by the dismantling of war and the dissociative, psychic repercussions that follow, "the present," as Wiesel's semiautobiographical narrator in "An Old Acquaintance" uncomfortably finds, forever caught "in the grip of all the years black and buried."²² Here, as elsewhere in survivor narratives, there is no stable shape to memory; rather, memory arrests time, creating conditions in which, as Wiesel's character Gregor in the novel *The Gates of the Forest* attests, "The past became present, everything became confused with everything else: beings lost their identity, objects their proper weight."²³ Here the past does not become *the* present, but rather "becomes present," is evoked and reanimated through the return of trauma.

Time can only occupy the space and immediacy of the moment. The future is forever “mortgaged” to the past (Gates, 221).

For the second generation, the past, too, for the most part, lacks distinct properties; instead its traumatic imprint spills over into the lives of the children of survivors. Characteristic of second-generation reckoning, the point of anxious origin is constituted by references to the Holocaust. As Hoffman, in *After Such Knowledge*, makes very clear, “In the beginning was the war. That was my childhood theory of origins . . . The world as I knew it and the people in it emerged not from the womb, but from war” (3). Thus we find with the second generation a conflation of their own identity formation with the effects of the Holocaust on their parents, lives permanently shaped from the very beginning by events that preceded them.

The point of origin for the third generation, however, is not the war, its influence, as we have suggested, only belatedly acknowledged. Perhaps because there seems to have been, at least in the developing consciousness of those separated from the survivors by a generation, a geography, and a “history,” a period in their own lives, to borrow Hoffman’s term, “before such knowledge,” they project such discrete entities of time onto their understanding of the past. Moreover, such temporal distinctions purport to help in understanding their own separation from their grandparents’ past all the while making claims to their indebtedness and generational inheritance of this legacy. Thus British writer Natasha Solomons, in the novel *Mr. Rosenblum Dreams in English*, will describe her survivor-refugee character’s life as “divided into two—a neat line severed each half. There was the old life in Germany that was *before*. Then, there was the new life in England, which was *after*. Sadie thought of her existence purely in these terms of *before* and *after* but this left no room for *right now*. Her life was a blur of other times.”²⁴ It is, however, never a “neat line,” as this character wishes, since the weight of the Holocaust is the measure against which the new lives of the characters in this as in other Holocaust narratives are evaluated. In their quests for a reconstruction of the past and a hoped-for established link to their families and their legacies, the third generation will reiteratively reference a life before the Holocaust, as if in the iteration that life might be invoked, might, in other words, militate against the experience of the Holocaust. Such attempts, as one of Dreifus’s characters, in the short story “*Mishpocha*,”

knows all too well are not without their complications: “whenever David tried to go back, even to a time after the Worst, to the years between his parents’ departure from Europe and his birth Over Here, [his mother] closed up . . . Eventually, David had stopped asking. Now, he’d no longer have the chance.”²⁵

But the third generation characteristically will attempt to return to a time “before,” to an imagined time before “the worst,” but, true to its compulsion for historical accuracy, not a golden age, but one marked by growing fear and the tightening grip of fascism. Such attempts to trace the survivors’ journey back to a time before the onset of war is motivated, in large part, by the felt obligation of the third generation not to lose their extended family members to history, but rather, to bring them back, if only for the moment of narrative discovery. Rachel Kadish’s third-generation character in the novel *From a Sealed Room*, upon her accidental encounters with an unknown Holocaust survivor in her building, comes to realize that “Survivors aren’t proof of anything. She wasn’t just some symbol . . . She was a *person*.”²⁶ Thus, in an attempt to wrest individuals from the void of history, from a history that would otherwise eclipse them, the third-generation writer typically begins his or her journey to uncover that which was lost by returning imaginatively to a time before the “worst.”

Thus Orringer’s novel of Hungary’s lost Jewish population begins not with Germany’s march into the Sudetenland, nor with France “fallen . . . under the Nazi flag” (Orringer, 327), nor with the Tripartite Pact establishing the Axis powers, nor with her grandfather’s compulsory separation from his family and conscription into forced labor in the Hungarian army, nor with the trench digging project of the *munkaszolgálat* company (labor service) where Tibor Lévy and other conscripted men were commanded to dig ditches in front of which, as reported by Tibor, civilians were “lined up . . . Hungarians. Jews, all of them. They made them strip naked and stand there in the freezing cold for half an hour. And they shot them . . . Even the children . . . Then we had to bury them. Some of them weren’t dead yet. The soldiers turned their guns on us while we did it” (418–19). Instead *The Invisible Bridge* begins in 1937, where Andras Lévy, beginning his architectural studies, meets his future wife Klara Morgenstern, before the fall of France, the occupation of Hungary, and the systematic murder of Europe’s vulnerable Jews. But

even as Andras leaves Budapest to embark on his journey to Paris, with his father's blessing and assurances of a future of opportunity, his enthusiasm is tainted with disquieting and anxious misgivings of seemingly isolated but disturbing reports of antisemitic scapegoating. Riding "westward in the darkened railway carriage," Andras is assaulted by a lurking apprehension: "He found himself thinking of a newspaper story he'd read recently about a horrible thing that had happened a few weeks earlier in the Polish town of Sandomierz: In the middle of the night the windows of shops in the Jewish quarter had been broken, and small paper-wrapped projectiles had been thrown inside. When the shop owners unwrapped the projectiles, they saw that they were the sawn-off hooves of goats. *Jews' Feet*, the paper wrappings read" (18). Such incidents, Andras fears, are not as contained as they might at first appear; nor can such acts be dismissed as the crude antics of provincial and unsophisticated ignorance. Indeed, the novel will move from this and other seemingly negligible acts of cowardice and rancor to extreme and pathological fanaticism. These initial murmurings and rumors of scapegoating will soon escalate, the cultural moment on the precipice of encroaching tyranny. "The seeds," as Andras rightly suspects, "were there" (18). Indeed, Andras's journey will take him into the locus of the oncoming terror, through "Germany, into the source of the growing dread that radiated across Europe" (20).

The Invisible Bridge presents a portrait of an era, a period of prolonged and worsening fear and tyranny. The novel both takes its time in laying out the escalating dread and widening encroachment of restrictions placed upon Europe's Jews and catapults us there. Orringer achieves this seemingly paradoxical tension between a deliberate unraveling of life and a hastening of disaster through the detailed itemization of laws and measures against Jews by fascistic layering of the malevolence experienced by her characters. Orringer shows palpably the shrinking world of Andras and Klara and their respective families. Their options and movements become increasingly circumscribed against the backdrop of cities and towns preparing for war. Even though Hungary avoids the actual war until late, 1944, there is a sense of disaster impinging on the daily lives of Orringer's characters, one made all the more dramatic by the abiding sense that Hungary's Jews, though persecuted both legally and in the encounters of daily life, might be spared. But the reader knows what the

characters fear, and Andras's attempt at safe passage is viewed against a country preparing for war:

He tried to enter a café near the station to buy a sandwich, but on the door there was a small sign, hand-lettered in Gothic characters, that read *Jews Not Wanted* . . . From the platform of every small-town German station, Nazi flags fluttered in the slipstream of the train. The red flag spilled from the topmost story of buildings, decorated the awnings of houses, appeared in miniature in the hands of a group of children marching in the courtyard of a school beside the tracks. (20–21)

Here Orringer illustrates the tightening noose of Nazi control, from vague rumors of vandalism and prohibitions, to antisemitic propaganda, to quotas, and to proscribed anti-Jewish legislation: “One by one they read that Jews must be removed from positions of influence . . . and that they should cease to exercise authority . . . that Jewish organizations . . . must be dissolved . . . that the rights of . . . citizenship must be taken away from all Jews, who must henceforth be regarded as foreigners . . . and that all Jewish goods and belongings should become the property of the state” (99). Orringer shows the systematic, step by step targeting of Europe's Jews, the closing in of their worlds until “that elusive ghost, safety” disappeared entirely (234).

Orringer makes it very clear that such activities are the culmination of long-standing bigotry and deep suspicion directed against Jews, the “seeds” that have now begun to show the extent of their spoilage: “He, Andras, had been born a Jew, and had carried the mantle of that identity for twenty-two years . . . In the schoolyard he'd withstood the taunts of Christian children, and in the classroom his teachers' disapproval when he'd had to miss school on Shabbos” (371). Schoolyard taunts aside, the derision and scorn that accompanied Andras throughout his childhood is ill preparation for the kind of antisemitic abomination underway: “People . . . starved and crowded to death in ghettos. People . . . shot by the thousands,” people rounded up and deported to hard labor and to death camps (427). And here Orringer shows Hungary's Jews to be defenseless in the face of such pathological fanaticism and fascism. In peopling

the history that she chronicles with characters based on her family, Orringer makes all the more emphatic the vulnerability of Hungary's Jews who, like Andras Lévy, "wanted to believe that Hungary might remain a refuge at the center of the firestorm" (371). Such wishful thinking, however, is shown to be a perilous fantasy born of the naïve hope that decency and intervention will prevail. Thus Orringer, primarily through the character of Andras Lévy, shows this to be, mercilessly, "a dangerous time for illusions" (429).

From the dawning apprehension of the spread of fascism throughout Europe and the late but inevitable fall of Hungary to the Nazis, to the confinement and incarceration of the central characters, the second half of the novel erupts into a maelstrom of violence, terror, and despair. Orringer's novel shows the accidental and fortuitous possibilities of the continued existence of her characters, not all of who will survive the massacre. So much of survival, as Orringer discovered, depended on the contingencies of fortune, chance, inadvertent timing, and accidental encounters. As she acknowledges:

The more I talk to people who survived those years, the clearer it is to me is that so much of existence hinged on tiny things. Anybody who survived did so because of a series of fortunate coincidences. A lot of the stories that my family told while I was growing up had to do with these amazing coincidences of geography or accidental connections . . . Part of the mechanism of survival during the war was that you had to rely to a certain extent on felicity and the unexpected because so much was out of your control. While to contemporary readers it might seem miraculous, but survival during those years was often due to those felicities and coincidences. (Rom-Rymer)

Orringer situates such a reckoning from the point of view of Andras Lévy, who, unlike the unhappy fate of his brother Tibor, will survive, will reunite with his wife and children, and will enter into a future whose "aperture . . . beyond the war seemed to contract by the day" (Orringer, 574). But Andras's survival in the novel is testament to survival's own tenuousness. Orringer writes:

A hundred times it might have been the end. It might have been the end when the wagon arrived at the work camp . . . It might have been the end, again, on the day their group of a hundred men failed to meet its work quota . . . It might have been the end when the food at the camp ran out . . . It might have been the end if the men at the camp had had time to finish their project, a vast crematorium in which their bodies would be burned after they had been gassed or shot. But it was not the end. (566)

The repetition in this catalogue of horrors might be understood as both mantra and prayer. “It might have been” posits the conditional, “might,” in relation to that which was certain, “the end,” certain, that is, for others, for those whose luck ran out. The reiteration of “it might have been the end” paradoxically poses both possibilities simultaneously. “It might have been the end” for Andras Lévy, as it was for others, but fortuitously, against all the odds, it was not. The repetition of “it might have been” picks up momentum in this passage, concluding not with its probable conclusion, but rather with the simple, exhausted statement, “But it was not the end.” The rhythmic yet numbing, dulling repetition of “it might have been” incongruously establishes the conditions for finality, yet the passage turns on itself, ironically at its close, thus both giving and taking away. What “might have been” thus speaks to the reality of the peril and fortuitous survival, lives made conditional by war.

Thus *The Invisible Bridge* draws to a close with an assessment of loss and grief by those who survived; the result is an astonished reckoning of the vastness of such devastation both on a collective and individual scale. Yet for Andras, “In the end, what astonished him most was not the vastness of it all—that was impossible to take in, the hundreds of thousands of dead from Hungary alone, and the millions from all over Europe—but the excruciating smallness, the pinpoint upon which every life was balanced. The scale might be tipped by the tiniest of things: the lice that carried typhus, the few thimblefuls of water that remained in a canteen, the dust of breadcrumbs in a pocket” (558). The “excruciating smallness” of individual lives stands in this novel as a metonymy of the sheer scale of the catastrophe. The Nazis had become for millions of Jews the arbiter of fate, but that fate was played out in individualized, quotidian ways, ways that become the preoccupation of the personalized focus of third-

generation Holocaust writers like Orringer. As the staggering numbers of dead are tallied,

It began to seem as though no one could be exempt from mourning, as though no period of mourning would ever be long enough . . . How was anyone to understand a number like that? Andras knew it took three thousand to fill the seats of the Dohány Street Synagogue. To accommodate a million and a half, one would have had to replicate that building, its arches and domes, its Moorish interior, its balcony, its dark wooden pews and gilded ark, *five hundred times*. And then to envision each of those five hundred synagogues filled to capacity, to envision each man and woman and child inside as a unique and irreplaceable human being . . . each of them with desires and fears, a mother and a father, a birthplace, a bed, a first love, a web of memories, a cache of secrets, a skin, a heart, an infinitely complicated brain—to imagine them that way and then to imagine them dead, extinguished for all time—how could anyone begin to grasp it? The idea could drive a person mad. (536)

And here, the magnitude of loss, its attendant grief and despair, and the traumatic rupture in the lives of those who carry with them the memory of these events are passed along intergenerationally as the story of the lives of individuals, lives lost and lives arbitrarily spared.

For this is also an American novel, a novel of generations spilling over onto a new continent, a new world that, as Klara Lévy insists “was their place now. They would use it in their fashion, live or die by their own actions” (432). The novel’s brief epilogue concludes with the granddaughter’s story, an American-born child conceived without the fear, dread, and uncertainty that hung over Europe during the war years. Finally, this is a novel that insists on generational continuity. Characteristic of third-generation Holocaust narratives, *The Invisible Bridge* speaks to the endurance of generations, part of a long tradition of Jewish ethics and survival. Orringer’s connection to the past, to a traumatic history, like other third-generation writers, is relational; she situates herself in the ongoing continuity of generations. Thus Orringer’s novel concludes with the grandchild’s awakening, her dawning recognition of her grandpar-

ents' felicitous survival and the implication of their history on her own life. Their very resolve in continuing the generations is viewed by this grandchild of survivors as nothing less than courageous. As Orringer says of her own grandparents: "It became even more incredible to me to think about what my grandparents went through knowing that they were going to bring children into this incredibly uncertain world. In fact my grandmother gave birth in October of 1944 while Hungary was under Nazi occupation. She remembers being in utter terror as she was in labor in the hospital giving birth to her baby and pleading with her Nazi doctor not to hurt her baby . . . The horror of that is just unimaginable to me" (Rom-Rymer). Moreover, her grandparents' survival, their staying power and fortitude in the face of extinction, evokes, for her third-generation character at the novel's close, as it must have for Orringer, by her own admission, its frightening antithesis. Aware of the tenuousness and precariousness of her birthright and that of her newborn child, the beginning of a fourth generation, Orringer speaks to the historically uncertain likelihood of her family's ongoing lineage: "It was even more unbelievable to me after I had given birth. I looked at my new baby after he was born and thought, 'my God. The set of circumstances that resulted in your being here are so unbelievably fortuitous.' It was one of the greatest pleasures of my life to be able to bring him to Miami Beach where my grandmother lives and introduce him to my grandmother and say 'this baby is here because you managed to survive'" (Rom-Rymer).

Bar-On asks, "What are the aftereffects of the Holocaust on the descendants of survivors? Which aspects of the Holocaust experience . . . were transmitted" to the third generation? (Bar-On, 331). The vestiges of fear and loss preoccupy the narratives of the third generation who write against the backdrop of the threat of generations discontinued, extinguished. Loss is the motivating force impelling these narratives, "identity," or "memory narratives," as Debra Kaufman explains, that "reflect a past still alive and still invested with emotional connection and value" through the "ongoing process of imagining and continuing the Holocaust" (Kaufman, 40). Such narratives are haunted by a palpably felt absence of those lost and irrevocably mourned. This absence creates a gap in the narratives of family histories, an emptiness where there once was presence, where a presence is longed for. The third-generation quest to uncover and resurrect the past and those who peopled this tragic history

leads to a discovery that acknowledges absence, acknowledges, that is, what cannot be known for certain but is felt nonetheless. The presence of those who survived calls attention to those who disappeared. The discovery that the granddaughter of survivors at the close of Orringer's *The Invisible Bridge*, makes, for example, while alerting her to an important understanding of her grandparents' past and thus her own identity, results in a necessary correction, an adjustment to her conscious assessment of what is missing from this picture of her life. The felt presence of her grandparents summons a conspicuous absence:

But then there was the other great-uncle, the one who had died. He'd had a wife, and his son would have been her father's age now. They had all died in the war . . . All that was left of that uncle was a photograph taken when he was twenty years old . . . He didn't look like someone who expected to die. He looked like he was supposed to live to be a white-haired old man like his brothers . . . Instead there was just that photograph. And their last name, a memorial. (Orringer, 597)

In this absence all that remains for the third-generation witness beyond the reach of direct memory is a photograph, an image that stands in for her missing relative and for all the affective traces that his absence calls forth in the possible but maimed futurity of the family.

In the literature of third-generation writers, found objects representing the past—as elsewhere in Holocaust narratives—take on the weight of memory, embodying, as Hirsch suggests, the “ghostly remnants from an irretrievable lost past world” (Hirsch, 37). Such images, photographs, artifacts, and objects from the past, as Hirsch proposes “enable us, in the present, not only to see and to touch that past, but also to try to reanimate it,” thus creating a continuing presence where there might otherwise be absence (Hirsch, 37). Such objects are tangible evidence of a world and lives that once existed; as Hirsch notes, they “authenticate the past; they trigger memories and connect them indexically to a particular place and time” (186). Discovered objects function as memorials, but also as mnemonic focal points, sites of entry and discovery. Objects become found legacies for those generations who attempt to uncover the past in order to make sense of and identify with the experiences of those

who lived through that time, as Hirsch proposes, those “still . . . trying to scrutinize the objects, images and stories that have been bequeathed to them—directly or indirectly—for clues to an opaque and haunting past” (178).

Objects as sites of discovery and recognition recur throughout post-Holocaust narratives. Artifacts such as maps, photographs, diaries, letters, and other objects exist as material substance in the place of absence, providing clues to the past. They are, of course, as Hirsch maintains, “fragmentary remnants” of a past otherwise obliterated, incomplete but valuable portions of the story (37). While such artifacts function in part as testimonials to the dead, they are not static; rather, they take on a life of their own as each embodies a story, a narrative or narratives that unfold from the found object. As Hirsch suggests, “testimonial objects” become vehicles of imaginative historical transmission (Hirsch, 178). They speak of and to the lives in which they were embedded and carry with them the hermeneutic potential of reconstructing those lives, or at least of carrying them, and all that they represent, into the present and thus the future. Such artifacts provide an indirect, oblique path to a reconstructed past and thus to the issues of moral reckoning that past raises.

Such fragments of lives, these shards and broken pieces of the past, come to constitute a beginning place for discovery and can locate sites of traumatic rupture. Evocatively, in the prose poem “Erika,” William Heyen, the American-born nephew of two uncles who were members of the Nazi party, makes a pilgrimage to what was once the location of the concentration camp at Bergen-Belsen where thirty thousand Jews were exterminated and where, years later, the poetic speaker, walking the grounds past the site of what were once mass graves, comes upon the groundskeeper. Caring for the grounds where he “tills the soil or replaces a brick along a walk or transplants a tree or rakes through the Erika,” the heath plant that blooms among the graves, the caretaker unearths found objects:

a rusty spoon,
 or a tin cup,
or a fragment of bone,
or a strand of barbed wire,
 or a piece of rotten board,

or the casing of a bullet,
or the heel of a shoe,
 or a coin,
 or a button,
or a bit of leather
 that crumbles to the touch,
or a pin,
or the twisted frames of someone's glasses,
 or a key,
or a wedding band. . . .²⁷

This list of objects, each itemized separately in a single line, gives each item its singular weight and representative moment in both poetic and real fictive time, objects that, as Hirsch suggests, “survive the ravages of time and the destruction wrought by violent histories” (Hirsch, 247). Rather than a list separated by “and,” each item is introduced with the conjunction “or,” offering a choice. But, of course, this list both offers a choice and, through its repetitive utterance, suggests a random scattering of arbitrary things, insignificant in the value of each singularly, but in their collectivity, their repetitive accumulation, represent the stuff of history, both individual and collective. Together they create a narrative of destruction and loss, the artifact, like the photographic image, as Hirsch suggests, signifying a “disembodied wound” (174). Here such artifacts, objects of mourning, stand in for those who once inhabited the space of the camp, those who once lived among the Erika, the “bell-heather” (Heyen, 62), and the murderous implementation of the Nazi execution of the Final Solution. Objects thus provide points of departure, but also points of return; they represent points of origin, especially for those who have come in search of some manifestation of the past.

The narrator in Binnie Kirshenbaum's short story “Who Knows Kaddish” inadvertently comes upon a remote Jewish cemetery in southwestern Germany, where she is a visitor. Walking among the graves, reading the names and dates of those who died, the narrator realizes that the year 1939 marks the end of the line for those interred in the cemetery. Coming upon the last grave, the narrator is brought up short by the implication of the last date of entry. “Then, there in 1939,” Kirshenbaum's narrator realizes, “the Jews stopped.”²⁸ The absence in the cemetery speaks

more emphatically than the presence of those named graves. The implication of the date is not lost on her:

Clearly, they hadn't planned to stop. This cemetery, far more empty than not, is evidence that they planned to be born, to love, to marry, bear children, and they planned for their children's children; they planned to live and to grow old and die here because they got themselves plenty of cemetery plots for generations to come. Only there weren't any generations to come . . . Poof. Gone and never to return. (Kirshenbaum, 181)

Here the grave stones and, by extension, the absence of such markers are recovered objects that, in their materiality, their presence to sight and emotion, ironically and disturbingly bespeak loss. Fixating on such material items allows the writer of post-Holocaust literature to speak posthumously through the artifacts of others, even if such artifacts are unnamed and unidentified. "All these orphaned objects," as Mendelsohn describes them, give voice to loss but also, paradoxically, to durability and to a kind of staying power of memory (Mendelsohn, 38). For the third generation, confronting such artifacts reiteratively is both a reaction to and a working through of the extended trauma of this particular history. In the 2011 Israeli film *The Flat*, directed by Arnon Goldfinger, the grandson of Holocaust survivors now deceased is preoccupied with his grandparents' belongings he discovers in going through their now vacant apartment. Items he has lived among, items that until now escaped his attention, are given meaning by the stories they, pieced together, reveal. Such stories provide not only an opening, moments of discovery, into his grandparents' lives before and during the Holocaust, but in doing so, create for the third-generation witness an identity and a past.

Unearthing such finds, figuratively and literally, is part of the third generation's quest for return, both forensically and affectively, to the site of an extended family's past. From that return they will stake claims to their own history and generational endurance. Artifacts and stories become receptacles of memory and meaning, part of the lineage of historical trauma and personal cathexis to it bequeathed to them. Through this historical and affective inheritance they will, with persistent resolve, pursue in order, as one of Dreifus's characters puts it, "to recover all those

that had been lost” (“*Mishpocha*,” 159). In doing so, as Alison Pick’s narrator in the third-generation novel *Far To Go*—like Daniel Mendelsohn, Andrea Simons, Margot Singer, Erika Dreifus, Julie Orringer, and other writers of the third generation—reverently acknowledges, “I inscribe them here, the family I never knew” (Pick, 308).

