Witness Through the Imagination

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Witness Through the Imagination: Jewish American Holocaust Literature.

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Because his family left Vienna in 1924 and fled France in 1940 to immigrate to America, George Steiner escaped the assemblies in public squares of Jewish children awaiting deportation, escaped being forcibly separated from his parents when the trains reached their destinations, and escaped the concentration camp selections, slave labor, starvation, and death. He did not, however, escape survivor guilt. Steiner considers himself "maimed for not having been at the roll call." ¹ The tragedy that befell the Jews of Europe colors his attitudes toward his own children, his views of language, literature, politics, and the human condition.² He writes "My own consciousness is possessed by the eruption of barbarism in modern Europe; by the mass murder of the Jews and by the destruction under Nazism and Stalinism of... the particular genius of 'Central European humanism.'"³ Because the Holocaust rose from within and from the core of European civilization, because "the cry of the murdered sounded in earshot of the universities; the sadism went on a street away from the theaters and museums,"⁴ Steiner has sought to explain
the relationship of the historic event to its cultural context—specifically to the language and literature of the perpetrators of the Final Solution.

To one who thinks seriously about the Holocaust, all hitherto fixed ideas undergo change. Notions of God, of humanity, of law, of place and time are altered. Regarding himself, "an exile everywhere." Steiner differentiates normal time and Holocaust time:

If we reject some such module, it becomes exceedingly difficult to grasp the continuity between normal existence and the hour at which hell starts, on the city square when the Germans begin the deportations, or in the office of the Judenrat or wherever, an hour marking men, women, children off from any precedent of life, from any voice "outside," in that other time of sleep and food and humane speech. . . .

This notion of different orders of time . . . may be necessary to the rest of us, who were not there, who lived as if on another planet . . . to discover the relations between those done to death and those alive then, and the relations of both to us; to locate, as exactly as record and imagination are able, the measure of unknowing, indifference, complicity, commission which relates the contemporary or survivor to the slain.

Steiner's literary criticism is premised on the view "that literature deals essentially and continually with the image of man, with the shape and motive of human conduct." To believe that Auschwitz is irrelevant to the life of the imagination is fallacious. For Steiner it "puts in question the primary concepts of a literary, humanistic culture." The following are recurrent themes in his essays: an explanation of anti-Semitism arguing that the Jews, as the embodiment of conscience, became intolerable to Christian Europe, which sought to rid itself of this visible reproach to its pagan spirit; the relationship of the corruption of the German language to the Third Reich's criminal behavior; international complicity and culpability for Holocaust crimes; repudiation of German Holocaust amnesia; vigorous exposure of postwar German lies regarding Holocaust-era knowledge of Nazi atrocities; and denial of the right of any except survivors to forgive Holocaust crimes.

In Language and Silence (1967) Steiner explicitly examines the relationship of the Holocaust and the culture that produced it. His interest is in language and the damage it has sustained through
corrupt service to political depravity. Steiner contends that language has the capacity to

absorb masses of hysteria, illiteracy, and cheapness. . . . But there comes a breaking point. Use a language to conceive, organize, and justify Belsen; use it to make out specifications for gas ovens; use it to dehumanize man during twelve years of calculated bestiality. Something will happen to it. Make of words what Hitler and Goebbels and the hundred thousand Unterstrumführer made: conveyers of terror and falsehood. Something will happen to the words. Something of the lies and sadism will settle in the marrow of the language. Imperceptibly at first, like the poisons of radiation sifting silently into the bone. But the cancer will begin, and the deep-set destruction. The language will no longer grow and freshen. It will no longer perform, quite as well as it used to, its two principal functions: the conveyance of humane order which we call law, and the communication of the quick of the human spirit which we call grace.

Writing about the Nazi corruption of German, Steiner observes that it is one of the peculiar horrors of the Nazi period that the Nazis themselves recorded the atrocities they committed:

In Gestapo cellars, stenographers . . . took down carefully the noises of fear and agony wrecked, burned, or beaten out of the human voice. The tortures and experiments carried out on live beings at Belsen and Matthusen were exactly recorded. The regulations governing the number of blows to be meted out on the flogging blocks at Dachau were set down in writing. When Polish rabbis were compelled to shovel out open latrines with their hands and mouths, there were German officers there to record the fact, to photograph it, and to label the photographs.

Steiner acknowledges a measure of validity in Elie Wiesel’s call for fictional Holocaust silence and argues, “The best now, after so much as been set forth, is, perhaps, to be silent; not to add to the trivia of literary, sociological debate, to the unspeakable”. However, in the end he, like Wiesel, rejects this view in favor of the effort to understand, to learn from, and to keep faith with the victims, to bear witness to the appalling crimes of Nazism and to testify to the complicity of non-Germans in those abominations. Steiner contributes significantly to the Holocaust fictional canon with three novellas collected under the title Anno Domini (1964) and
The Portage to San Cristobal of A. H. (1982). Evading dramatic presentation of the ghettos and camps, Steiner approaches the conditions of these institutions through character judgments against the Nazis and their collaborators. Occasionally through survivor flashbacks and judgments and through self-incrimination of the villains, but more often through choral judgmental voices, George Steiner's fiction operates as a tribunal, where history's actors stand convicted of crimes against humanity. Whether the scene is a French seaside village, a country mental asylum, or a Brazilian jungle, metaphorically the Steiner stage is the Nuremberg courtroom. Steiner writes like a prosecutor subjecting the witness to historic, psychological, and moral scrutiny.

The stories of Anno Domini explore memories of the war years, the need to keep the memories alive, and the aftermath of a vanished moment of heightened awareness triggered by the war experience. Each story shares the common theme of coping with the delayed disturbance of a man who has suffered psychologically during the war. The Jewish experience emerges in two of the three selections—albeit briefly and somewhat peripherally to the narrative's central focus.

In "Return No More," a Wehrmacht officer—now a prosperous industrialist—returns to the Normandy farmhouse where he was billeted during the war to win a daughter of the family in marriage. Despite his protestations to the contrary, Falk is not sufficiently contrite to suit the family whose son he ordered hanged from their own ash tree. In an effort to convey his own and Germany's wartime suffering, Falk tells the French family of the Hamburg bombing and fire storm when he joined a Gestapo euthanasia squad killing phosphorus burn victims, including a young woman whose face was too severely burned for positive identification, but whom he thought was his sister. Claiming to have learned the value of life in the rural French village, Falk contrasts its idyllic life and his own unsettling experience as a Hitler youth and young soldier in Germany.

I grew up in a kind of very loud bad dream, . . . I cannot remember a time when we were not marching or shouting and when there were no flags in the street. When I think of my childhood all I can remember distinctly are the drums and the uniform I wore as a young pioneer. And the great red flags with the white circle and the black hooked cross in the middle. . . .
School was worse. The drums beat louder and there were more flags. On the way home we played rabbit hunt and went after Jews. We made them run in the gutter carrying our books and if they dropped any we held them down and pissed in their faces. . . . I never finished school. I suppose my final exam came in Lemberg when they told me to clean out a bunker with a flame thrower. I had my graduation in Warsaw, marching with the victory parade. Now the drums never stopped.\textsuperscript{12}

Believing the German people have built a wall of lies to avoid facing their Holocaust crimes, Falk recalls his own period of service in Norway and Utrecht with dismay, the wounds he sustained in Salonika and Kharkov, and admits Nazi atrocities in Salonika, "where he hanged the partisans on meat hooks" (R, 34). This confession to the people he has robbed of a son and a brother is difficult, and Falk responds to their hatred by explaining how easy it would be for him to remain in Hamburg or Hanover, marry a widow with a pension, and be like most Germans who refrain from speaking of the past. "We all have amnesia or perhaps someone put an iron collar around our necks so that we can't look back" (R, 42). Falk's observations echo those Steiner offered in his controversial essay, "The Hollow Miracle," which contrasts the early postwar German acknowledgment of the events of the Hitler era with the post-1948 era and the initiation of economic recovery. The focus on work, productivity, and economic and industrial restoration heralded a new German myth, a myth that denied the crimes of the Nazi past, claimed that the horrors had been grossly exaggerated, expressed ignorance of the Nazi atrocities, and zealously dedicated itself to the principle of forgetting the past. Because Falk shares these Steinerian views and loves the French girl and the serene life she represents, he comes to France to face the horrors, to remember the dead on both sides.

Reactions vary. Eager for reparations, some villagers entertain the idea of accepting the German for a price. Others reject him outright. An aunt, perceiving England, not Germany, as her country's real enemy, welcomes Falk into the family with ceremony and honor. The French girl's embrace of her brother's murderer and her parents' acceptance of their son's assassin strains credulity. At the country wedding celebration, only the bride's surviving brother and his cohorts stand to the side muttering their dissatisfaction. Finally, in an abrupt conclusion, they demand that the lame bride-
groom dance and join him in the dance macabre, administering the punishment he may have unconsciously sought by trampling him to death. The thematic burden of "Return No More," despite its sympathetic rendering of the German, posits that there is no forgetting and no forgiving Nazi atrocity.

The second story, "Cake," is presented from the point of view of an innocent American caught in the Nazi nightmare. He is a graduate student working in Europe on his dissertation when war breaks out. Disgusted by what he perceives to be his own cowardice, he agrees to carry messages for the Resistance. As the Gestapo closes in, the American is hidden in an insane asylum under the protection of an anti-Fascist doctor. There he falls in love with a Jewish girl who is also concealed, until she is denounced by a jealous old patient who fancies the American.

The Jewish tragedy is more prominent in "Cake" than in the other stories of the collection. The story is told through flashbacks of the American as he returns to the asylum after the war; the Jewish material is a recollection of what the narrator witnessed prior to his asylum sanctuary: the Holocaust history of his lover's family as she revealed it to him and his witness of the Gestapo action at the asylum.

Initially the American is not inconvenienced by the German occupation of France. He secures travel permission to Paris so he may work in the rare book room at the Bibliothèque Sainte-Genevieve, and for him life goes on as usual. His first encounter with Nazi brutality occurs in a train compartment when an SS patrol removes two Jews. The American watches intently as the guards tear an old man from his seat, "not in rage, but with venomous pleasure. They pushed him down the steps of the railway car. . . . They struck him with unhurried blows, let him lurch to his feet and kicked him to the ground again." The frightened witness looks on as the girl traveling with the old man lunges at the Nazis, who in turn "held her down and rubbed cinders in her face till it was black and raw" (C, 72). The image of the men rubbing cinders into the girl's hair and mouth, then stripping off her coat as the train pulled away lingers with the American who assumes something beastial will take place in the wood. The American becomes sick to his stomach witnessing the SS tactics. Yet in time he comes to envy the old man and girl, "the torments being wrought on them. Of what I supposed had been done to them once they had been dragged to the SS barracks, and then afterwards" (C, 73).
This odd envy is not based on ignorance for it is the summer of 1941 and people know that those detained by the Gestapo often turn up in the Loire, "their faces and bodies torn" (C, 73). Like the tourist who wants to experience the real Europe, this man feels deprived to be missing the pain in his flesh that others are feeling daily. He scans the censored newspapers for references to hostages, deportations, and the increasing ferocity of German reprisals for French resistance. No longer content to spend his efforts on the violence in literature when real blood flows all around him in the prison camps and Gestapo cellars, the American suppresses his fear and becomes a courier for the underground.

Steiner reveals the special actions taken against Jews in France through the narration of Rahel Jakobsen, the young woman whom the narrator meets in the asylum. Adhering to the traditional pattern of Holocaust realism, he delineates the pre-Nazi normality, its piecemeal disruption, and the horrors of the Final Solution. The Jakobsens were prosperous assimilated Jews living in Brussels. Their home evidenced the cultured life of its inhabitants—a music stand with Chopin études, Chagall paintings, and books in many languages. The family "still went to the synagogue once or twice a year, but in black English homburgs" (C, 89). Encroachments by the Reich first manifested themselves when an uncle and aunt were forced to leave Frankfurt and were allowed to take only one suitcase. Others emigrate. Eventually Rahel was kept home from school and her father stayed home from the Bourse, passing the time tutoring his sons. The servants departed, one marching off with Mrs. Jakobsen's furs. Indignities mounted: in place of milk bottles, the family found parcels of excrement on the door step. The prelude to the end of their charmed existence was when Rahel's mother sewed yellow stars on all their coats and jackets. A man appeared to tell her father that lists of deportees had already been composed, that the destruction of the Jewish community was imminent, and that plans had to be made to try to save the children. Although Rahel begged that her younger brother be taken to safety since his survival would mean continuation of the family name, and only a male is allowed to lead the prayers for the dead in the synagogue, she was chosen for rescue. Her father and older brother were summoned to the Gestapo and presumed lost. At the time of her departure, she had no knowledge of the whereabouts of her mother and younger brother.

In the asylum Rahel frets most over the younger brother,
imagin ing him being sent to those places, unable even to name the dreaded camps. Despite what he hears from Rahel and his own witnessing of violence, the American strives to comfort Rahel with pipe dreams of a civilized Germany, "the land of Schiller and Beethoven; it spoke the language of Rilke" (C, 92). He reminds her of the excesses of World War I anti-German propaganda in an effort to give her hope that Nazi atrocities are exaggerated and that her mother and brother may still be alive, indeed that she will see her whole family again. The American innocent remains undaunted.

Bearing witness to the murder of European Jewry is a common theme in Holocaust literature. Steiner incorporates it in "Cake" through Rahel's plea that the American remember the details of her family history. She made the telling and listening a holy service, for in her anticipated American retelling of the history "she and her family were to have their only survivance" (C, 99). Defying those who swore "that no one would even recall the names of the dead, that their sum would be ash, . . . [that they] would have neither graves nor the fitful resurrection men are allowed in the remembrance of their children" (C, 99), Rahel solemnly narrates the family history for perpetuity. In a beautiful image evoking the Jewish practice of lighting annual memorial candles for the dead, the narrator reflects on Rahel's efforts with great solemnity: "One by one she lit in me the candles for her dead" (C, 99).

Like most of the writers in this study, Steiner raises in this Holocaust story the subject of traditional pre-Nazi anti-Semitism. He introduces the topic through a warning to the American from an elderly female patient who believes he is being deceived and is, therefore, forming an alliance with "a dirty little Jewess." The admonition is a catalyst for the American's spontaneous recollection of the anti-Semitism he witnessed in upper-class America—the enrollment quotas restricting Jews in prestigious private schools, their exclusion from social clubs, the Harvard social prejudice, and finally the ironic recognition that if he lived to preserve Rahel's history, it would be in his mother's Belmont home and in "cousin Peyton's library on Mt. Auburn Street, in the Somerset Club . . . [places where] "living Jews have small welcome" (C, 99). Indeed, the narrator faces his own anti-Semitism, which he characterizes as a universal attitude: "Like most people, I found that Jews left me uncomfortable; I parted from them as from a stiff chair" (C, 94). Defending this statement, he cites one of Steiner's oft-repeated theses explaining a root cause of anti-Semitism: "By their
unending misery, the Jews have put mankind in the wrong. Their presence is reproach” (C, 95). This is an allusion to Steiner’s theme that the Jewish insistence on moral perfectability is a threat to the non-Jewish world, which defies it through their periodic destruction of Jews.

Another recurrent topic in Steiner’s essays, the significance of language to human behavior and psychology, finds expression through gentile attitudes toward the Jew’s use of a non-Jewish language. A student of literature, the narrator was particularly aware of the significance of the Jewish contribution to language and literature. Yet his recognition smacks of hostility, a common phenomenon among educated anti-Semites. The narrator, like George Steiner in his essays and Jean Paul Sartre in Jew and Anti-Semite, observes:

No one can engage in literary studies without being made cognizant of their seducer’s gift for language and their ironic devotion to the abstract. The Jew makes of language a place. He is not really at home in it (how could he be, lacking that tenebrous, immemorial complicity with the stone, leaf and ash of a land, which give to speech its precedent, unspoken meaning?). But he masters it with the nonchalant adroitness of a privileged guest; he chuck it knowingly under the chin. (C, 94)

The narrator’s education in anti-Semitism is brief but pointed. His memory of Rahel and her family remains with him after the girl is forcibly removed from the asylum by the Gestapo, acting on information supplied by the jealous old woman. In his postwar visit to the asylum in the company of his aristocratic, unsympathetic mother, the narrator goes to Rahel’s room hoping against credulity to find her alive. Here he confronts the truth about his Jewish encounter and expresses his grief in a Holocaust image: “I would cry out to her that since she had left me, my life was ash” (C, 111).

The Portage to San Cristobal of A.H. opens with a startlingly dramatic scene: the discovery of Adolf Hitler, in the Amazon Jungle, by a group of Israeli Nazi hunters. The plot centers on removing Hitler from the jungles and swamps to San Cristobal for judgment. Echoing in fragmentary sentences the argument he made in “The Hollow Miracle,” Steiner returns to his theme of Nazism’s pervasive corruption of the German language as manifested in Hitler’s transformation of words into weapons: “They say your
voice could . . . Burn cities. They say that when you spoke. Leaves turning to ash and men weeping. They say that women just to hear your voice, . . . Would tear their clothes off.”14 The leader of the search team warns the men by radio not to allow Hitler to speak during their jungle trek lest they succumb and respond to him sympathetically. Referring to a theory of dichotomies, the team leader, Emmanuel Lieber, advises:

All that is God’s . . . must have its counterpart, its backside of evil and negation. So it is with the Word, with the gift of speech that is the glory of man and distinguishes him everlastingly from the silence or animal noises of creation. When He made the Word, God made possible also its contrary. . . . He created on the night side of language a speech for hell. . . . Few men can learn that speech or speak it for long. It burns their mouths. It draws them into death. But there shall come a man whose mouth shall be as a furnace and whose tongue as a sword laying waste. He will know the grammar of hell and teach it to others. He will know the sounds of madness and loathing and make them seem music. . . . Do not let him speak freely. (P, 45)

Steiner parallels the portage through the Amazonian swamps and jungles with allegoric and historic journeys, charting the Holocaust terrain traveled and interpreted by its victims, its criminal perpetrators, and their acquiescent and passive partners. Like Joseph Conrad’s allegoric use of the jungle in Heart of Darkness, Steiner’s jungle/swamp setting signifies “the inaccessible mystery of what . . . [Hitler] did and who he was, and bringing him out of the jungle means gaining the attention of a forgetful world, long since stricken with historical amnesia.”15

The premise of Steiner’s fantasy is based on the myth that the Fuhrer did not perish in his bunker by suicide, but escaped from Germany to South America. The novel’s structural pattern juxtaposes scenes of the jungle with those from the civilized world. Its rhythms shift from tense altercation between the Jews and the Holocaust architect to the sedate, supercilious, passionless German, French, Russian, British, and American voices of the international intelligence agencies analyzing the advantages and damages that might accrue to their respective nations should Hitler still be alive and returned to civilization.

Although the only overt trial in Portage is Hitler’s, the international community is also on trial and judged corrupt through au-
thorial selection. Indifference and acquiescence of the great powers to Jewish annihilation, a recurrent theme of Holocaust literature, is effectively shown through postwar vignettes of the intelligence services. Steiner's representation of multinational intelligence officers—which often verges on caricature—renders distinctive national sensibilities, political agendas, and idiosyncratic historic interpretations of Hitler's career and the Holocaust. The British concern is primarily forensic; the German concern is legal; the Russian concern is political; the French concern collaborative; the American opportunistic; and the Israeli punitive. These passages are extensions of Steiner's long-term examination of language as a mirror of human psychology. It is through the international characters' use and abuse of language that their national purposes are revealed.

British and American interests in Hitler and the Holocaust are minimally treated. The focus is on Israeli, Russian, German, and French concerns, which relate largely to their desire to conceal past and present collaboration and errors in judgment. The chapter devoted to British interests also develops crucial expository material from the point of view of Evelyn Ryder, a forensics expert who identified Hitler's remains and whose conclusions were generally accepted. In Ryder's dialogue, Steiner reviews the Hitler survival myth: a double is killed in place of the Fuhrer, and Hitler escapes and prepares for a second coming, when the Reich would rise again in response to his voice. Ryder's summary of the nature and progress of the Israeli mission for the benefit of his young colleague provides readers with the historic background of the Israeli mission. Protective of his own reputation for forensic expertise and angry with Israeli persistence in tracking Nazi criminals, Ryder prefers to believe that the team is in error about their captive's identity. His refutation, however, focuses not on forensic science but on Hitler's psychology and style:

I don't see it. Using a double at that point, where it mattered so that the ghastly show be done right. The high note and Valhalla. And how could he be that sure of any other human being, leaving another man to step into his own fire? When everything around him was betrayal... I don't suppose he wanted time to go on, not after him... In the last fire. Sardanapalus. There's a lot of that in German romantic poetry, you know. And he was a romantic. A romantic mountebank. Mad to the heart but with a brightness. (P, 11-12)
Ryder’s interest is in the Israeli trackers, in forensic detail, and not in the historic significance or moral import of the Holocaust or the chase. The Briton’s remarks on the Holocaust are negligible, passionless, and amoral and as such are representative of his government’s Holocaust-era attitude toward the genocide program.

Steiner introduces Holocaust history through Ryder’s recollection of one of the Israelis, Isaac Amsel, whom he knew during the war. While serving under the British command, Amsel managed to get in and out of Poland and tried, to no avail, to persuade the British to bomb the rail lines to the concentration camps. Without a trace of moral consternation, Ryder notes that Amsel tried to get him to “go to the old man and tell him about the ovens. The old man wouldn’t have believed me you know. Not his kind of war really” (P, 9–10). Ryder’s apparent failure to transmit the message says as much about his character as it does about the British high command. Ryder’s tone here is supercilious; he is completely indifferent to his failure even to bring the matter before the British command and indifferent to British immorality in having full knowledge of the genocide plan in 1942 and yet choosing to suppress it. Ryder’s acknowledgment that the same Israeli left the British service to work against their efforts to prevent Holocaust survivors from immigrating to Israel further indicts British policy in the face of Jewish tragedy. The British officer’s unintentional self-incrimination creates a dramatic impact. His inability to recognize the immorality of the position, even in the post-Holocaust period, bespeaks continued British reluctance to recognize its Holocaust-era crime and admit its shameful postwar hindrance of survivors’ immigration to Palestine. Britain’s failure reflects the moral question Steiner pursues in “A Kind of Survivor”—the complicity of non-Aryans in the destruction of the Jews. In the essay, he condemns the Americans and the British for failing to bomb the rail lines to the death camps and the Russians for failing to send advance warning to Jewish communities when they knew of the mass killings in regions already invaded by the Nazis.

Americans surpass the British in greed and ineptitude. In the first instance, an American agent posing as a public relations man gains the cooperation of the spy who is tracking the Israeli team for the British. In the latter case, government officials are the object of Steiner’s satire in a news conference where they qualify and modify every sentence to evade disclosing the truth. Dismayed at being caught off-guard, the Americans determine to honor protocol rather than the moral significance of the capture. Sensitive to the
wishes of the nations party to the Berlin agreements and Nuremberg tribunal, as well as the newly established regimes in Austria, the German Federal Republic and the German Democratic Republic, the Americans consider turning the investigation over to the United Nations. The only interests the Americans fail to recognize are Israel's, the nation representing the people who suffered most from Hitler's policies. The American official maliciously complains of the Israeli government's lack of cooperation with American requests and its silence about its recruitment or support of the search team. To the Israeli reporter's question regarding Israel's successful movement of Hitler to Israel to stand trial, the American offers an unsympathetic comparison to the Eichmann kidnapping. Typical of Steiner's satiric treatment of the United States' failure to act on the moral and historic implications of bringing Hitler to trial, and the particular significance of this event to Israel, is a discussion of Israel's response in the event of the United States interception of the mission and its concern for providing Hitler legal aid for his defense.

The Russian section as well is void of any mention of Hitler's crimes. Here Steiner concentrates explicitly on Russian totalitarianism and the Russian attitude toward Hitler's death in the bunker. The chapter's tension arises from the exchange between a Soviet intelligence officer and a Russian citizen being encouraged, in light of the Israeli discovery, to retract his earlier coerced recantation on the demise of the German leader. The terrified citizen had been tortured and imprisoned in a Siberian camp for eight years for doubting the authenticity of the body presented as Hitler's corpse. Having learned the Gulag lesson sufficiently, the man attributed his doubt to Western propaganda and recanted. Prompted by memories of beatings and freezing temperatures in Siberian camps that achieved his previous false recantation, the citizen willingly obliges his interrogators and concludes in despair: "Hitler was alive. They knew it now. And they wanted him . . . Because he is they ripped out my nails, and sent me to the ice forest" (P, 39). The chapter is an indictment of Soviet manipulation of Holocaust history to suit its political objectives. Truth is lost in the process.

Steiner presents the French position, written in diary form, from the perspective of a self-serving career intelligence officer of a Fascist family that served the Vichy government. In addition to blocking Israel's victory in bringing Hitler to trial, the diarist's
greater interest is in avoiding any dishonor to France. He asserts that "the Jewish organization" has neither privilege over Hitler's person nor the right to bring him to Israel; since that nation had no status "at the time of the said crimes or of the Nuremberg trials . . . [it] cannot be considered a party to the case, though possibly a 'friend of the court' or 'interested observer'" (P, 139). The Frenchman's disregard for the crime against Jewry and the justice of Israel's cause in bringing Nazis to trial exemplifies Western arrogance. Concluding that the only appropriate place to hold the trial is France, he then questions the advisability of a trial because the proceedings could turn farcical, and more to the point, France could be embarrassed.

Why open the old wounds? Things would get said, which all of us know and can, therefore, let be. That Vichy was not his creation, but a structure out of the heart of French history, out of an agrarian, clerical, patriarchal France which has never accepted the Revolution, which loathes the Jew and the Mason, which would, with a shrug, consign Paris to the devil. That to so many of my beloved countrymen—including my esteemed father and Uncle Xavier—it was the wrong war in the first place . . . “Perfidious Albion” and Jewish finance being the real enemies . . . And the larger design: a more or less united Europe, with strong central organs . . . Chancellor Hitler's dream and our current ideal . . . Drieux's testament; still worth reading. 'Millions will have died through a hideous misunderstanding before Europe moves toward that unity which Fascism envisioned, that unity of the Teutonic-Latin genius in the face of the materialist barbarism of the United States and its grotesque imitator, the Soviet Union.' Do we really want that stuff pouring out over the front pages once again, reminding us of our grosser indiscretions? The mass killings—for that's what they were—at the time of the "liberation"? The betrayals before that? The years of the milice, no Germans in that bunch, and of the French camps? (P, 140)

To the Frenchman, who views the mass murder of Jews as a minor indiscretion, the French political image is sacrosanct. Throughout this chapter one hears Steiner's moral indictment of the Vichy government and its continued cover-up.

Counterpointed with French arrogance is German sentimentality. The German perspective is introduced in a scene that evokes the image of the Nazi capacity to enjoy Goethe and Rilke, to admire Bach and Schubert, and yet to work the torture chambers and gas
chambers of Auschwitz. Dr. Rothling, who had been exhilarated by the triumphs of the Third Reich, now despair at the timidity and caution of his daughter's generation; he disdains those who "pretend that they are carrying our national burden, that the past lies on their shoulders and the blood on their forehead" (P, 114). Like his countrymen who proudly served Hitler, Dr. Rothling prefers to erase Nazi crimes from history, to enjoy sweet amnesia, to protect Germans at the expense of discrediting Nazi victims. He regards a Hitler trial negatively, much as the Frenchman does, and is opposed to exposing criminals who have evaded punishment and have successfully integrated into the postwar German society and economy. Rothling tries to discredit those who expose hidden Nazis, charging them with

mere hysteria. Melodrama. Whoever was not in it can have no real knowledge of what it was like, of why we acted or did not act. Those who claim they feel remorse on our behalf are swindlers. They invested nothing of their own conscience in that terrible account. What right have they to draw on it? Any man can say Auschwitz, and if he says it loud enough everyone has to cast their eyes down and listen. . . . So easy to do if you were a child at the time or not even born. (P, 114)

In a prologue to Hitler's defense, Rothling expresses neither personal responsibility nor remorse for his embrace of an immoral regime. Instead, he invokes the "innocent" bystander rationale to defend his colleagues:

When you can have no idea of what it was really like, for most of us, for the decent educated class trying to survive on that other side of the moon. Go ahead, say Auschwitz, Belsen, what have you, put ash on your head, shake your fists in our faces and demand that we do eternal penance. There's a tidy sum in remorse, TV serials to be produced, books for the autumn trade. . . . What would you have done, what fine words would you have cried out at the time? When the brown men stomped by, the bravest of us wet our pants. (P, 114)

This self-serving excuse is not only immoral but reveals the obscenity of the German's nostalgia for the war years. Dr. Rothling recalls with perverse pleasure the combination of violence and beauty during the occupation of Holland: the people hanging from "two perfect rows of poplars, one on each side of the canal. The
vesper bells rang from somewhere in the town. The sound and the fallen leaves came toward me down the dusky water" (P, 115). Similarly, he describes the beauty of the spring light in Norway and crows who "had been at the partisans' eyes and stripped their cheeks" (P, 115). He found these mutilated faces "beautiful to look on, marbled, folded in sleep" (P, 115). He despairs of Germans who wish the Third Reich had never materialized. For him it was an opportunity to live history fully, to live heroically, to "have crossed and recrossed Europe like Napoleon's hordes, have seen Salonika burning and the face of an old man floating, in the Grand Canal. . . . A thousand year Reich inside each of us, a millennium of remembered life" (P, 117). Unlike the repentant German of "Return No More," Dr. Rothling's immorality is measured by failure to feel remorse for German crimes against humanity. He expresses regret only for the diminished lives of postwar Germans who inherited the Nazi ashes. This regret is minor, for Dr. Rothling concludes his ecstatic revery by admitting that he would not trade the past. He regrets only German defeat, not the philosophy or the sins of the Reich. Rothling's thoughts are accompanied by his daughter's music, a dreadful reminder to the reader that a great culture was also a great criminal state, a reminder that Jews heard music as they were shoved into the gas chambers. Thus, this brilliant episode serves simultaneously to link Nazism to the culture from which it emerged and to suggest postwar German nostalgia for the Hitler period.

The press of current affairs interrupts Rothling's revery. He must examine Germany's legal options should Hitler be alive and study the questions of national versus international jurisdiction. He had been asked by his government, in the wake of the Eichmann trial—"that disorderly escapade in Jerusalem" (P, 122)—to study the law in the unlikely eventuality that the rumors that Hitler was still alive prove to be true. He consults a younger lawyer who suggests an international tribunal composed of people who had no direct part in the events, those who were either too young or not yet born. The lawyer suggests that Hitler's advanced years make judicial retribution unlikely and that Hitler "stands outside the norms of law either common or specifically promulgated" (P, 126). Rothling is astounded that a younger man takes this position and argues, "If the codex does not apply to Herr Hitler, . . . then he was absolutely right in claiming that he was above the law, that the law is a bundle of mouse-eaten parchment with no authority over
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the superman or the will of the Volk" (P, 126). Although this outburst appears, at first glance, a criticism of the young lawyer's thinking, it is not, for the older man says he finds it noble, but dangerous. A legalist, Rothling is prepared to manipulate the law to his purpose. Reminiscent of German lawyers and doctors who had no compunctions about cheating and torturing Jews as long as it served the Reich, Rothling balks only at the notion of disobeying established laws. Ethics are irrelevant. Uncomfortable with the management of the Nuremberg hearings, Rothling insists that forms, traditions, and correct judicial procedures be fully exercised should Hitler come to trial. The young lawyer's intent, however, appears more wide-ranging. He worries not only about one individual but about many who could be subject to retribution:

The rise and deeds of Nazism involved the active support, the initiative of many other men, perhaps millions. It was the relationship of Hitler's person to that support, the way in which he obtained and harnessed it, the question of whether responsibility could ever be localized which needed clarification. (P, 127)

The lawyers do not resolve the legal questions; they take refuge in the thought that the rumors of Hitler's survival are unfounded and hence the dilemma merely hypothetical. Eager to dismiss the implications of a trial against Hitler, the Germans seek comfort in evasion, and comfort in the conviction that the importance of Hitler has been exaggerated, and sentimentalized and that there is no need to worry about how or why Nazism dominated Germany. They conclude with the worst kind of arrogance, an arrogance that was at the heart of Aryan racism. They condemn those who persist in raising questions about the past: "They think they're making deep and terrible statements on behalf of the dead. They aren't. They're puffing up their own little lives. Oh it was hell; we were in it up to our eyes—while it lasted. And for a few years more. . . . But now, looking back, . . . I can't help wondering whether it was very important" (P, 129).

In dramatic contrast to the many national voices that focus on the more exciting aspects of tracking Hitler, but have little concern for the crimes or the victims, the Israeli team is the novel's moral register, obsessed with Holocaust loss and bringing its architect to justice. The team includes both choral and primary voices addressing the essence of Holocaust history and its crucial aftermath. Emmanuel Lieber, the team's leader who directs the operation by
radio from Tel Aviv, has worked on the project from its inception thirty years prior to the Hitler discovery, guiding the team from London, Turin, and Tel Aviv. The little that Steiner divulges of Lieber’s Holocaust background appears in the meditation of Simeon, the field leader. We learn that Lieber crawled out from under burnt flesh in a death pit, having witnessed “the fires of Bialka, the children hung alive, the bird droppings glistening on the shorn heads of the dying” (P, 17). Those memories are the well-spring of his dedication to bringing Nazi criminals to account. The tattoo on the forearm is but an emblem of the inner marking the Holocaust has indelibly inscribed on its victims. They are “marked by the things seen. . . . [marked by] a perception so outside the focus of man’s customary vision” (P, 17) as to identify them as a special order of consciousness. Lieber and the others share a solemn oath “to find him, be it at the cost of their lives. Not to return until they had found him or had absolute proof that he was dead” (P, 19). This resolve was taken after years of hunting and shared, but unspoken, doubt about the plausibility of the mission and an even graver doubt about the international reaction if they should succeed. After years of fighting the natural tribulations of jungle, swampland, and human obstructions—such as Stroessner’s hooligans—the Israelis fear that even if they manage to get Hitler out of the jungles and swamps alive, nations will either be reluctant to take him or will not know how to deal with him; they will be reluctant to confront the Holocaust and its political and human significance. The national vignettes amply demonstrate the Israelis’ foresight.

The Israelis pass the time during their jungle ordeal imagining judgment and retribution. Each man, certain of the immensity of Hitler’s crimes and society’s inability to exact commensurate punishment, conjures up his own retribution. Gideon Benasseraf, who is just beginning to use future tense verbs and who is burdened with the memory of seeing one of his children burnt alive and the other led by its mother into the gas chamber, would allow Hitler freedom of movement throughout Israel. “Every single time he wanted food or water or shelter he’d have to ask for it and say who he was” (P, 62). Isaac Amsel, whose father was brutally murdered and who lost three of his own children declares all punishment inadequate:

Because we’ve got Hitler and can tear his nails out and wait for them to grow again the dead will sit up and give themselves a dusting. They won’t. Not one of them. Not if you parade him over every
grave, over every ashpit, not if you dip him in boiling oil six million times. Do you really believe a man can get even for the murder of his children? For what a six year old girl saw before she died. . . . (P, 63)

Amsel resists execution because that would satisfy history and nations would claim the accounts settled, when they can never be settled. Execution would vindicate those who want to forget their own complicity in Nazi crimes against Jewry and attribute all the blame to Hitler. Steiner moves from this view to one that echoes his earlier essay analyses of the roots of Christian anti-Semitism and adapts it to post-Holocaust rationale: “First they nailed up Christ and now Hitler. God has chosen the Jew. For his hangman. Let them carry the blood. We’re in the clear” (P, 64).

The most religious of Steiner’s characters, Elie Baruch, whose name evokes images of the priesthood and blessings, responds to Hitler’s judgment as one would expect of an Orthodox Jew, leaving the matter to God’s superior judgment. Appropriately, his memory of the Holocaust occurs in the context of a philosophic meditation on the nature of evil. Reviewing various theories about God purposefully allowing one small error in the Torahic text—an “unfathomable error, the breach through which evil has rushed on man” (P, 86)—he recalls his own teacher’s theory and in turn the dreadful memory of the righteous man’s brutal death in the Nazi fire pit at Grodny. Like the author who expresses a measure of guilt for missing the roll call of his peers, Elie laments that he ought to have been with his teacher in death, where at least his death would have been quick, rather than this slow deterioration in the Amazon jungle. Elie refrains from speculating on punishment for Hitler. He prays that God will make the team His instrument, but not His substitute: “Do not ask of us, O Lord, that we do vengeance or show mercy. The task is greater than we are. It passes understanding. And whom Thou hast now delivered into our hands, may He be Thine utterly” (P, 22). As Elie and the others discuss carrying the aged Hitler out of the jungle and swamp on their backs if necessary, Elie contrasts the care the Jews must exercise on Hitler’s behalf with the barbarism the Nazis inflicted on old Jews:

Men and women ninety years old. The crippled and the blind and the ones spitting blood. They made them walk barefoot, over the cobbles. And whoever fell behind, they threw water over their feet. So that they would freeze to the stones. And stand there till they
died. Burning alive in their skins. At Chelmno, there was a rabbi, a man of wonders. A hundred years old. And they tore out his tongue . . . and made him hold it before him, and walk. A mile. More than that. Till he came to the fire pit. And they told him: Sing. Sing you man of wonder. (P, 23)

The grotesquity and sadism of the Nazi war against the Jews is treated briefly in the fragmented memories of the survivors and is occasionally relieved by gallows humor, as when the team is discussing carrying Hitler and one member declares, "We'll take turns carrying him. Like the ark" (P, 23). Steiner incorporates Holocaust-era agonies into the postwar context by comparing the jungle slime, disease, physical peril, and general travail the team is undergoing to the recollected suffering in Europe. As he cuts his way through vines, lice-infested plants, and rat-infested swamps, Isaac remembers maneuvering in the sewers under the ghetto wall, all the while fearful that when he raised the cover there would be a Nazi boot in his face.

Isaac Amsel, whose sewer reverie stalks his jungle trek, fantasizes about a painful death for Hitler, a prolonged agony commensurate with what European Jews suffered:

I'd do it so that he knew it was being done. Every thousandth of a second. And done many times. Not all at once. Snap and it's all over. So he'd wonder about the next time. . . . I'd chain him to a stake on top of a pile of wood. So high that he could see beyond the city. And lay a trail of powder or a wick a hundred miles long, winding through every street and coiling around the square. And light it. He'd see the flame traveling nearer. He'd have to watch it for hours. Closer and closer. Just before it reached the faggots I'd jump in front of the crowd and stamp it out. . . . Or hang him on a pulley just above a vat of acid. Each day someone would come, . . . and turn the crank so that some bit of him would dip in the acid. One turn if you've lost a wife, two for each child. I'd jam a prop in his mouth so that he couldn't scream. Till his eyes burst. Or set his balls in a carpenter's vise. For a few minutes each day. Until he fainted. Putting a timetable on his wall so that he would know exactly when the next session came. And skin his leg to make the lampshade in his cell. (P, 61)

This gruesome catalogue is of course a grotesque accumulation, the rantings of a vengeful imagination, but it replicates some of the
atrocities the Nazis inflicted on their Jewish victims. His compatriots point out the absurdity of this fantasy, which leads Isaac to add that he would execute such a plan if he could and keep Hitler alive in order to repeat the process, much as the Nazis sought to degrade, humiliate, and torture the Jews before they killed them.

Worried that they will die before extricating Hitler from the jungle, the team members also fear losing Hitler to other nationals should they survive and succeed. Using an example that is characteristic of the Eastern block's denial of the particularity of Jewish suffering in the Holocaust, one Israeli notes the official Polish biased assessment of Auschwitz:

"Here perished the heroic Polish combatants against Fascism. Here the vanguard of the heroic Communist partisans were executed."
And then in the corner: "Eighty Jewish women from the Warsaw Postal Service were deported here and died." Eighty. No. He'd be their's to try, or parade around the world, or pension off. They wouldn't let us near him. . . . "Now we take over. . . . We might call you to say your piece. Or we might not. . . ." Subtract eighty from six million, and what do you get? Zero. The mathematics of the goy. (P, 26)

John Asher, whose interest began when he heard rumors about the capture of Martin Bormann, is the only member of the team who had no direct Holocaust experience. An English schoolboy during the war, he enjoyed relative safety. The closest he came to experiencing the tragedy the others suffered was playing Macduff in a school production. Leiber selected Asher precisely because he was unmaimed and could therefore be an objective counterbalance to the Holocaust victims on the team. "He was the one in whom interest was stronger than love or hatred or hunger" (P, 134).

In dramatic contrast to John Asher's detachment is Emmanuel Leiber's passionate obsession with Hitler and the Holocaust. Although we never see Leiber, it is his voice and purpose that directs the team and the reader's perceptions of other characters. His is the voice of historical memory and moral imperative. Leiber's narrative argument is a moral, thematic, and stylistic tour de force and would have been even more glorious and dramatic had Steiner chosen it to conclude the novel rather than Hitler's speech. The chapter shifts from biblical diction and cadence to graphic realism and symbolic fragmentation charting the disruptive impact
of Nazism on civilization and the human psyche. Leiber responds to the team's discovery with a prayer of thanksgiving, praising God for prevailing. His anticipation of bringing Hitler to justice is rendered in images of light: light shining over Gilead and Hebron, light radiating to the ends of the earth supplanting the images of darkness associated with Nazism, "Darkness unmoving. Over us and our children" (P, 44).

Returning to the language theme introduced at the beginning of the novel, Leiber ascribes to the belief that all that is God's has its counterpart,

its backside of evil and negation. So it is with the Word, the gift of speech that is the glory of man. . . . When He made the Word, God made possible also its contrary. Silence is not the contrary of the Word but its guardian. No, He created on the night side of language a speech for hell. Whose words mean hatred . . . Few men can learn that speech or speak it for long. It burns their mouths. It draws them into death. But there shall come a man whose mouth shall be as a furnace and whose tongue as a sword laying waste. He will know the grammar of hell and teach it to others. He will know the sounds of madness and loathing and make them seem music. Where God said, let there be, he will unsay. And there is one word . . . one word amid the million sounds that make the secret sum of all language, which if spoken in hatred, may end creation, as there was one that brought creation into being. . . . Perhaps he knows that word, he who very nearly did us to death, who deafened God so that the covenant seemed broken and our children given to ash. (P, 45)

Because he has elevated language to these mythic and cosmic proportions, Leiber urges his men to resist listening to Hitler's speech. He urges them to anticipate his every need and provide it, to gag him, and to stop their own ears as Ulysses did, rather than chance succumbing to the demonic voice, thinking him a man and forgetting his crimes. "That he almost drove us from the face of the earth. That his words tore up our lives by the root" (P, 46).

Structurally this chapter works as the legal prosecution that Hitler evades in the novel as he evaded it in history. Leiber's powerful litany of the tortured and murdered Jews functions both as an indictment of the criminal and a memorial to the martyrs. Its language evokes the concentrationary world of excrement and extremity recorded in such works as Terrence Des Pres' The Survivor. Steiner's selection details aspects of atrocity perpetrated against the Jews to degrade and humiliate them prior to their murder. Il-
illustrating individual suffering, he makes the destruction of the six million comprehensible, while conveying the immensity of the Holocaust through reference to the genocidal mass murders. In a lengthy passage that is similar to but more graphic than Cynthia Ozick's catalogue of the dead in *Trust*, Leiber asks for remembrance:

Tell me that you remember. The garden in Salonika, where Mordechai Zathsmar, the cantor's youngest child, ate excrement; the Hoofstraat in Arnhem where they took Leah Burstein and made her watch while her father; the two lime trees where the road to Montrouge turns south, 8th November 1942, on which they hung the meathooks; the pantry on the third floor, Nowy Swiat xi, where Jakov Kaplan, author of the *History of Algebraic Thought in Eastern Europe 1280–1655*, had to dance over the body of; in White Springs, Ohio, Rahel Nadelman who wakes each night, sweat in her mouth because thirty-one years earlier in the Mauerallee in Hanover three louts drifting home from an SS recruitment spree had tied her legs and with a truncheon; the latrine in the police station in Wörgel which Doktor Ruth Levin and her niece had to clean with their hair; the fire raid on Engstaad and the Jakobsens made to kneel outside the shelter until the incendiaries; Sternowitz caught in the woods near Sibor talking to Ludmilla, an Aryan woman, and filled with water and a piano wire wound tight around his; Branka seeing them burn the dolls near the ramp and when she sought to hide hers being taken to the fire and; Elias Kornfeld, Sarah Ellbogen, Robert Heimann in front of the biology class, . . . so that Professor Horst Kuntzer could demonstrate to his pupils the obvious racial, . . . Lilian Gourevitch given two work passes, yellow-colored, . . . for her three children in Tver Street and ordered to choose which of the children was to go on the next transport; . . . George Benjamin Dorfmann, collector of prints of the late seventeenth century, doctor and player on the viola, lying, no kneeling, no squatting in the punishment cell at Buchenwald, . . . watching the pus break from his torn nails and whispering the catalogue numbers of the Hobbemas in Albertina, so far as he could remember them in the raw pain of his shaven skull, until the guard took a whip; . . . Hagadio, who in the shoe factory of Treblinka was caught splitting leather, sabotage, and made to crawl alive into the quicklime while at the edge Reuben Cohen, aged eleven, had to proclaim “so shall all saboteurs and subverters of the united front.” (P, 46–47)

Steiner's catalogue, composed as one long sentence of fragmented phrases, creates a breathless surge of emotion. His pattern of con-
excluding each entry without finishing its descriptive phrase encourages the reader to complete the thought and reflects the violent disruption in the victims' lives. Reminiscent of traditional Hebrew lamentation poetry, Leiber exclaims and laments the Holocaust with tragic dignity. Like Cynthia Ozick's concentration camp litany in *Trust*, Leiber's discourse counts in a sacred litany and, "like Celan's stuttering and hallucinatory lyricism" [in "Todesfuge"], it also drives language into and beyond ellipsis, finding in fragments of speech a literary form to encompass and express brokenness."^{18}

Psychological abuse, public humiliation, rape, torture, mutilation, starvation, suicide, and variations of murder abound in this seemingly endless catalogue of Nazi atrocities. Lieber's speech, outlining the gratuitous terror that constituted the Nazi universe, shares qualities similar to Steiner's own discussion of death and concentration camps in *Bluebeard's Castle*, where he illustrates the similarity of the Nazi universe to Western civilization's artistic and literary visions of Hell. Comparing Canto 33 of Dante's *Inferno* with the Nazi camps, Steiner writes:

> They are the transference of Hell from below the earth to its surface. They are the deliberate enactment of a long, precise imagining. Because it imagined more fully than any other text, because it argued the centrality of Hell in the Western order, the *Commedia* remains our literal guidebook—to the flames, to the ice fields, to the meat hooks. In the camps the millenary pornography of fear and vengeance cultivated in the Western mind by Christian doctrines of damnation was realized.\(^{19}\)

The problem of Holocaust transmission, which appears as a minor theme in many fictions, is raised here, too. Leiber doubts whether we are capable of ever comprehending the mass killings: "unspeakable because beyond imagining, . . . we can imagine the cry of one, the hunger of two, the burning of ten, but past a hundred there is no clear imagining" (P, 49). Yet it would be immoral to speak only in terms of comprehensible numbers. Thus, he recites the awesome list of death camps and suggests their tragic proportions by referring again to individual losses:

> at Maidanek ten thousand a day; . . . in one corner of Treblinka seven hundred thousand bodies, I will count them now, Aaron, Aaronowitch, Aaronson, Abilech, Abraham, I will count seven hundred thousand names and you must listen, . . . I will say Kaddish to
the end of time and when time ceases shall not have reached the millionth name; at Belzec three hundred thousand, Friedberg, Friedman, Friedstein, the names gone in fire and gas, ash in the wind at Chelmno, the long black wind at Chelmno, Israel Meyer, Ida Meyer, the four children at the pit at Sobivov; four hundred and eleven thousand three hundred and eighty-one in section three at Belsen, the one being Salomon Rheinfeld who left on his desk in Mainz the uncorrected proofs of the grammar of Hittite . . . the one being Belin the tanner whose face they sprinkled with acid from the vat and who was dragged through the streets of Kershon behind a dung cart but sang, . . . the one being David Pollachek whose fingers they broke in the quarry at Leutach when they heard that he had been first violin . . . the one not being Nathaniel Steiner who was taken to America in time but goes maimed nevertheless for not having been at the roll call. (P, 48–49)

In this painful litany of names and places of death, Steiner returns the dignity that the Nazis tried to steal from the Jews before murdering them. Jewish family love and devotion, Jewish scholarship, music, decency, and hard work, attributes of the apostrophes, are dramatically juxtaposed to apostrophes citing German sadism and murder. The passage is aptly introduced and concluded with examples of Jewish veneration for life. Preceding the catalogue is a brief tale of parents who throw their child from a transport with money sewn in his jacket and a note begging for help, parents who know they are destined for the gas, but hope their child will be saved. An epilogue to the sequence is the judgment that Hitler has “made ash of prayer,” and until each victim’s name is recalled and spoken “man will have no peace on earth, . . . for when spoken each after the other, with not a single letter omitted, . . . the syllables will make up the hidden name of GOD” (P, 50). At the center of the catalogue is an autobiographical reference to the Steiner family’s escape from the physicality of hell and, nevertheless, an explicit recognition of being maimed by the Holocaust.

Leiber’s speech encapsulates most of the novel’s themes, including that of non-Aryan complicity in the Final Solution as illustrated by the fate of the child thrown from the death camp transport: betrayed by peasants who took his money and laid him on the railtracks, gagged, feet tied, to await the next train. As Leiber reminds the team that the man in their custody is responsible for all this evil, he also reminds them of the willing collaborators and bystanders to the tragedy:
Oh they helped. Nearly all of them. Who would not give visas and put barbed wire on their borders. Who threw stones through the windows and spat. Who when six hundred escaped from Treblinka hunted down and killed all but thirty-nine—Polish farmers, irregulars, partisans, charcoal burners in the forest—saying Jews belong in Treblinka. He could not have done it alone. I know that. Not without the helpers and the indifferent, not without the hooligans who laughed and the soft men who took over the shops and moved into the houses. Not without those who said in Belgravia and Marly, in Stresa and in Shaker Heights that the news was exaggerated, that the Jews were whining again and peddling horrors. Not without D. initialing a memo to B-W. at Printing House Square: no more atrocity stories. Probably overplayed. Or Foggy Bottom offering seventy-five visas above the quota when one hundred thousand children could have been saved. (P, 50–51)

In this economical speech, Leiber summarizes some of the many sins of the Allies and the Axis sympathizers in their abandonment and betrayal of the Jews—matters others have taken chapters and entire novels to dramatize. The uniquely Steinerian aspect of this assessment is its connection to traditional anti-Semitism and interpretation of the cause of Christian anti-Semitism, "Because we foisted Christ on them" (P, 51). Leiber, like Steiner in Bluebeard’s Castle, views anti-Semitism as the rebellion of natural man against the abstractness of monotheism and the Jewish moral imperatives Jesus repeated in his teachings.

Had Steiner concluded the novel with Leiber’s speech, some sense of justice would have prevailed. Instead, we are left with the affront to justice that marked the Holocaust, an affront to reason and morality that characterized Hitler’s war against the Jews. The novel’s final speech is Hitler’s. Perhaps Steiner’s strategy reflects his assessment of the way in which the Germans and the international community dealt with the implications of the Holocaust in the post-war era. Hitler’s speech is outrageous. It testifies to the failure of the world to learn from the Holocaust and testifies to the persistence of anti-Semitism, which reached new dimensions posing as anti-Zionism.

Alvin Rosenfeld demonstrated, in Imagining Hitler, that the architect of the Holocaust is strangely absent from most Jewish Holocaust literature. Although Hitler’s name occasionally appears as the butt of a curse, in aggressive ghetto wit, in allusion or abstraction, “the principal perpetrator of the war against the Jews is
for the most part missing from the corpus of serious Holocaust literature." George Steiner ended that silence. Not only does Hitler's shadow loom over Steiner's novel, his person is the center of the novel's focus, his crimes the raison d'etre for all the characters, his diatribe the novel's climactic speech.

Steiner alone among the authors in this study treats the personality of Adolf Hitler and concentrates his novel on the themes of Holocaust culpability and bringing Nazis to justice for crimes against the Jews. For this reason, The Portage to San Cristobal of A.H. is constructed as a thriller, with the genre's interest in crime and punishment. Yet Steiner minimizes his use of conventions normally associated with mysteries normally associated with mysteries to pursue a Dostoevskian quest for understanding.

Steiner's demonstration of the relation between Holocaust barbarism and the corruption of language finds dramatic expression in the novel's final chapter. Under the pretense of prosecuting the criminal before the world powers can abduct him, the Israelis prosecute Hitler in the jungle. Ignoring Lieber's instructions to keep Hitler's speech to a minimum, the team allows him opportunity to speak at length. Given Steiner's thematic focus on the corruptive power of language, perhaps it is fictionally mandatory that Hitler speak, but it is equally unfortunate that Steiner awards him the final chapter of the novel. Lieber's dire predictions of the consequences if the villain is permitted to speak are realized, and thus the novel concludes as a demonstration of language gone awry through a villain's malice. A.H. uses language as Hitler did in his Holocaust career, to lie, to distort, to misrepresent, to defile Jews and Judaism.

Characteristic of the fraudulent essence of Hitler's speech is the claim that he learned his racist philosophy from Judaism, specifically from Jacob Grill, a defrocked priest who was the son of a Polish rabbi. Steiner's outline of Grill evokes the historic Christian exploitation of converts to denounce Judaism in public forums. To alert the reader to the bogus quality of Hitler's speech, Grill's ignorance of Judaism is established in an obviously erroneous reference to seventy-two hidden saints of Jewish lore. Given this overt signal and his reputation for distorting language, one may discredit much of Hitler's commentary on Jewish matter as illustrative of ignorance or evidence of malice. The capacity for distortion is amply illustrated in the comparison of his doctrine of Aryan racial superiority to the Judaic principle of convenantal elec-
tion—his fallacious comparison of his Ubermenschen with the chosen people. When Steiner addresses this issue in essay form, the tone is quite different and the distinctions between the two positions are clearly enunciated:

By one of the cruel, deep ironies of history, the concept of a chosen people, of a nation exalted above others by particular destiny, was born in Israel. In the vocabulary of Nazism there were elements of a vengeful parody on the Judaic claim. The theological motif of a people elected at Sinai is echoed in the pretense of the master race and its chiliastic dominion. Thus there was in the obsessed relation of Nazi to Jew a minute but fearful grain of logic.22

Hitler's second thesis is biblical justification for genocide. He claims to have learned from the Bible "a device to alter the human soul" (P, 163)—that is, "To slaughter a city because of an idea, because of vexation over words" (P, 163). Here the language changes from biblical diction to racial propaganda, so characteristic of the historic figure's speech. He asks "what is the Jew if he is not a long cancer of unrest?" (P, 164). Even more authentic is his fusion of the disease metaphor and vermin/sanitation idiom to characterize Jews: "Three times the Jew has pressed on us the blackmail of transcendence. Three times he has infected our blood and brains with the bacillus of perfection" (P, 166). Here Hitler's speech, evoking the Fuhrer's vocabulary of disease and corruption, is linked with Steiner's own theories of the causes of anti-Semitism. Hitler blames the Jews for their idealism, whether it be in the form of monotheism, ethical perfection, or social and economic equality. Hitler's understanding that anti-Semitism is directly related to gentile hatred of the Jewish inventions of God and conscience—affronts to Western paganism—echoes Steiner's own essays. Compare Hitler's words—"Was there ever a crueller invention, a contrivance more calculated to harrow human existence, than that of an omnipotent, all-seeing, yet invisible, impalpable, inconceivable God" (P, 164)—and Steiner's remarks in Bluebeard's Castle:

It seems to me incontrovertible that the holocaust must be set in the framework of the psychology of religion, and that an understanding of this framework is vital to an argument on culture... The holocaust was not the result of merely individual pathology or of the neuroses of one nation-state... There are parallels [to other massacres] in technique and in the idiom of hatred. But not on-
to logically, not at the level of philosophic intent. That intent takes us to the heart of certain instabilities in the fabric of Western culture, in the relations between instinctual and religious life. Hitler's jibe that 'conscience is a Jewish invention' provides a clue. . . . Historians of religion tell us that the emergence of the concept of the Mosaic God is a unique fact in human experience, that a genuinely comparable notion sprang up at no other place and time. The abruptness of the Mosaic revelation, the finality of the creed at Sinai, tore up the human psyche by its most ancient roots.23

Similarly, Hitler echoes Steiner's observations that the Jewish code, setting forth a system for attaining moral perfectibility, affronts man's natural inclination to evil:

We must bottle up our rages and desires, chastise the flesh and walk bent in the rain. You call me a tyrant, an enslaver. What tyranny, what enslavement has been more oppressive, . . . than the sick fantasies of the Jew? You are not God-killers, but God-makers. And that is infinitely worse. The Jew invented conscience and left man a guilty serf. (P, 165)

Building his case against the Jews, he cites the moral and social demands of two Jews: Jesus who demanded man be more altruistic and self-denying and Marx who called for a classless society providing for each according to his needs. This argument also echoes Steiner's analysis of the root causes of anti-Semitism:

Monotheism at Sinai, primitive Christianity, messianic socialism: these are the three supreme moments in which Western culture is presented with . . . "the claims of the ideal" . . . Judaism produced a summons to perfection and sought to impose it on the current and currency of Western life. Deep loathing built up in the social subconscious, murderous resentments. The mechanism is simple but primordial. We hate most those who hold out to us a goal, an ideal, a visionary promise which, . . . we cannot reach, . . . yet, and this is crucial, which remains profoundly desirable, which we cannot reject because we fully acknowledge its supreme value.24

Hitler defends himself on the basis of shared guilt. His argument amounts to an indictment of his collaborators. "When I turned on the Jew, no one came to his rescue. No one. France, England, Russia, even Jew-ridden America did nothing. They were glad that the exterminator had come. . . . Secretly they rejoiced" (P,
167). Hitler describes himself as a man of his times, not a demon, not the quintessence of evil. It was his ordinariness, he claims, that gave him a following of millions who found in him the reflection of their own desires. This assertion is prelude to his final perversion of reason: that he is to be revered as the father of Israel since the Holocaust was the vehicle responsible for the creation of the State.

Would Palestine have become Israel, would the Jews have come to that barren patch of the Levant, would the United States and the Soviet Union, . . . have given you recognition and guaranteed your survival, had it not been for the Holocaust? It was the Holocaust that gave you the courage of injustice, that made you drive the Arab out of his home, out of his field, . . . because he was in your divinely ordered way. . . . Perhaps I am the Messiah, the true Messiah, the new Sabbatai whose infamous deeds were allowed by God in order to bring His people home. (P, 169)

Although postwar sympathy for the creation of a Jewish homeland is an undeniable legacy of the Final Solution, it is absurd for Hitler to take credit as a founding father of Israel. Characteristically, Steiner’s A.H. formulates statements that contain an iota of truth and distorts them to deceive his audience.

Simply put, the speech is disturbing because it echoes neo-Nazi and New Left propaganda. However, it is at the same time a cunning combination of truth, half-truth, perversions, grotesqueries, outright misrepresentations, and lies. In the fashion of Milton’s Satan, A.H. argues his evil is benign because it served to generate good, and he was therefore God’s instrument. Steiner designed this speech as the essence of evil. It is. In that regard it is artistically successful. Because it deals with a topic of recent history that so traumatized the victims and so changed our perceptions of the human condition, it is painful. Many who respect Steiner’s essays on the Holocaust, his literary criticism and much of his fiction, recoil in horror at the literary license he took with Hitler’s character. Representative of the detractors’ opinion is their concern that

the impact is not in the world of apocalypse, as Steiner intended, but in the world in which we live, where arguments of the kind A.H. uses are believed quite seriously by educated people; where propaganda is continually going on to diminish the significance of the Holocaust by blaming the Jews themselves for it in various ways; where, in fact,
the chief effect of Hitler's peroration, presented with an air of awe and unanswerability, may well be to send away some from the theater with anti-Jewish prejudices reinforced.25

Steiner's basic composition strategy for Hitler's speech, fusing A.H. distortions with material from his own essays, leads to the reader's dismay. The artistic flaw inherent in such strategy is the subject of several critical reviews. The most thorough and eloquent are analyses by Hyam Maccoby and Alvin Rosenfeld. Maccoby observes that in playing the Devil's advocate Steiner risks attributing convincing arguments to Hitler that, apart from being uncharacteristic of the historic prototype's racist demagoguery, might be misinterpreted as valid.26 Alvin Rosenfeld strenuously objects to Steiner's attribution of "the authority of his own essayistic voice, but pitched now to express an exuberant mockery of his Jewish adversaries—indeed, a mockery of every major aspect of Jewish antecedence."27 Rosenfeld's criticism is devastating, contending that

the appeal of Steiner's Hitler, in short, is the appeal of cleverly formulated Nazi apologetics in combination with stridently stated anti-Semitic invective, a potent combination in Hitler's day and, if George Steiner's novel is any indication, still available for imaginative appropriation and revivification today.28

Although Hitler has the last speech, his self-description as the Sabbatai links him to a historic false messiah who converted from Judaism to Islam to save his life. The false messiah allusion serves also as a link to Lieber's reference to Nathaniel of Mainz, describing the voice and language of a counter-Messiah negating the Bible and "banishing God from creation," a voice remarkably similar to the fictional Hitler's:

A man whose mouth shall be as a furnace and whose tongue as a sword laying waste. He will know the grammar of hell and teach it to others. He will know the sounds of madness and loathing and make them seem music. Where God said, let there be, he will unsay. (P, 45)

Perhaps Steiner should have adopted Lieber's advice and circumscribed Hitler's speech. Given Steiner's distinguished canon on Nazism, malice cannot reasonably be imputed to him. Instead, an aesthetic defense is sought for a device that fails. If Steiner's intention is to demonstrate Hitler's facility for manipulating language to
distort truth, he succeeds. If his goal in this novel is to convey the tragic dimensions of Jewish suffering and Nazi evil, his success is diminished by the concluding speech. Steiner's critical evaluations of literature invariably consider aesthetics in relation to political and social values. It is surprising, therefore, that he evidences so little sensitivity to the political implications some readers will draw from the A.H. diatribe. Because the speech is left unanswered, readers too remain trapped in the morass of the dark jungle.