Witness Through the Imagination

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The subject of Richard Elman's Holocaust trilogy is the tragic plight of Hungarian Jewry in 1944. Hungary was the sole country in which the Nazis knew they were losing the war when they initiated their genocide operation, and it is the only place where the Jews had irrefutable knowledge about the extermination program while they were still free. The Hungarian mass deportations were not carried out secretly, as the previous transports had been, but openly executed in full view of the world. The trilogy focuses on the period when the Hungarian government was responsible to the Germans for carrying out their racial policy, the period when Eichmann and his team of deportation specialists applied the expertise of several years of European deportations in order to maneuver the Jewish community into complete submission and to mobilize the Hungarian government for expeditious destruction of its hitherto protected, native Jewish population. Because Elman's setting is Hungary, he incorporates some of the more distasteful and controversial aspects of the Jewish failure to act decisively during the Holocaust. There are brief references to
Hungarian-Jewish disinterest in the persecution of German and Polish Jews and the passive role of the Jewish leadership. Although Hungarian Jews were quite powerless to act against their nation’s Axis ally, and the narrator distinguishes between their impotence and the West’s purposeful neglect of Jewry’s plight despite its power, he nevertheless condemns Hungarian-Jewish passivity in the face of the systematic slaughter of fellow Jews.

Richard Elman’s chronicle of a family’s ordeal traces the oscillation from hope to despair that characterized the destruction process in Hungary, “an erratic development in which periods of near tranquility alternated with outbursts of destructive activity.” He probes Holocaust profundities and examines characters who react differently to injustice based on their diverse social and psychological backgrounds, which he renders with distinctive voices and sensibilities. The first volume, *The 28th Day of Elul* (1967), relates the Yagodah family’s destruction from the perspective of its surviving son, Alexander Yagodah. The second, *Lilo’s Diary* (1968), is the 1944 journal of a young female ward of the family, the quintessential victim. The third, *The Reckoning* (1969), is a moral and historic accounting, a fusion of a subjective moral assessment and an objective analysis of the economic and political forces contributing to the Holocaust, narrated from the perspective of a mature Holocaust victim, the paterfamilias Newman Yagodah. Although Elman’s original design called only for the first volume, Elie Wiesel convinced him to write Lilo’s story, and then Elman himself decided to add *The Reckoning* to tell the father’s story since the topic of patriarchy and problematical family relationships interested him. After several attempts to write a fourth volume dealing with the perpetrator’s point of view, Elman abandoned the project.

Throughout the trilogy, authorial judgment looms against man and God for grave crimes against humanity and the covenant. Elman’s work is an early example of fiction’s Holocaust-wrought theological and philosophic redefinitions. He asks whether we need to revise our ideas about human nature in light of Holocaust truth and whether the covenantal relation of the divine and human continues in the post-Holocaust era—questions that reflect the crises of faith and human understanding in our time. The survivor probes the meaning of God’s absence in the Holocaust and asks whether a God of mercy and love would countenance extermination of the innocent and whether conventional wisdom about human nature requires reexamination.
To pursue these theological and philosophic concerns, The 28th Day of Elul is structured as a Holocaust memoir, the response of an Israeli survivor to an American lawyer regarding the codicil of a will stipulating that his inheritance of an uncle's estate is dependent upon his allegiance to Judaism. Alex Yagodah's reply to the proviso is the vehicle for dramatizing the problem of religious faith in the post-Holocaust age. Initially Yagodah glibly offers the lawyer an orthodox legal response, "According to Jewish law the son of a Jewish mother is a Jew forever." Ignoring the advice of his mistress, who cynically argues that Yagodah simply tell the American what he wants to hear, he attempts a truthful response, which develops as a treatise on religious faith in the era following an unprecedented threat to covenantal belief.

Catalyst for the protagonist's Holocaust recollection is the legal term liquidation. Enraged, Yagodah explosively juxtaposes the language of estate liquidation and that of Nazideutsch, charging international acquiescence to the German intention to "liquidate" European Jewry as the first step in the genocide of the Jewish people.

"Liquidated! In German liquidiert! Which can also be described as ausgemerzt! or erledigt! . . . Many now use the polite vocabulary. They speak of the holocaust as some regrettable lapse in manners, or, if they are fund-raisers, as if to refer to some heroic event in the Bible or Greek Epic. Although I much prefer the bluntest words for what happened, by now all words are traps. Let us simply say those who were are not any longer; and it wasn't their fault. (E, 12)

Maintaining the legal diction, Yagodah moves quickly to Holocaust judgment. "It will give me as great a joy to help in the liquidation of what remains of Uncle Bela as he . . . was instrumental in helping our enemies register and account for and liquidate us" (E, 15). Alex offers in evidence a brief summary of the destruction of his family and others, including a report of putting people in a "special barracks . . . which was deliberately placed alongside the railroad ties . . . because the Germans hoped to save on Zyklon gas by having the allied bombers do their executions for them" (E, 13). Thus, he explicitly attacks his American uncle and implicitly attacks the West for acquiescing to Germany's grand design to obliterate Jewry. Changing places with the interrogating attorney, witness turns prosecutor putting his benefactor in the dock to investigate
his wartime knowledge of the camps. Alex is contemptuous of his assimilationist uncle who had the timidity to betray Jewish identity for economic mobility, yet now seeks to dictate the religious affiliation of a Holocaust survivor who paid the price of Jewish identity. Continuing his verbal attack, Alex cites complicity in Germany's genocide program exemplified by British and American rejection in 1942 of Jewish pleas for assistance, despite knowledge of the death camps. Similarly, Elman indicts East-European governments that negated their rhetorical condemnation of Nazism through active support of the Nazi genocidal objective. Alex cites specific examples of non-German complicity in Holocaust crimes.

The Slovakian government actually paid Germany a fixed sum for every Jewish soul who was made to leave the mother country on condition that he or she would never be allowed to return . . . every fourth one of Hungary's leaders vacillated between being Jew-killing zealots and cowardly equivocators . . . . There may have been a few nice people among the gentiles but we never saw any of them after 1942. (E, 163–64)

Clig's gentiles watched as the Jews were herded out, "shedding crocodile tears for us, but these we knew would be the first to see what could be looted once we were, in fact, deported" (E, 166).

Alex puts man and God on trial in a bitter response to his uncle's request. Paralleling and surpassing the failure of governments to aid Jewry, looms enigmatic divine failure. God stands accused of dishonoring the covenant by failing His devoted servants, by allowing His people to be shot or bludgeoned into mass graves, to be burned, sometimes while still alive, in crematorium ovens and lime pits. A self-hating Jew who has internalized the anti-Semitic stereotype in order to compensate for his inability to direct his aggression against the logical enemy, Alex directs his criticism against himself and the Jewish community. An acculturated Jew—neither a Wieselian nor Singerian Jew "of faith questioning God because of his faith, the faith of Abraham in God that cannot tolerate injustice on the part of God"—Alex nevertheless raises theological questions of import. Denying neither the authenticity of rebellion nor the authenticity of faith, Alex begins his struggle in denunciation and ends it in acceptance. Although he cannot explain the inexplicable, he concludes, "I believe" (E, 24), echoing the traditional affirmation of faith many victims recited as
they entered the gas chambers. Simultaneously accepting God and protesting His neglect of the suffering, Yagodah, like the believers of Singer and Wiesel, holds God accountable for Holocaust injustices. He wrestles with the terrifying realization of the coexistence of a just and merciful God and an evil creation:

But the Supreme One—does He not stand condemned as the Supreme Murderer in our scheme of things? Perhaps that is why people here say they are “Jews without God.” To be so secularized is to be unforgiving . . . whereas to accept God now one must forgive a Murderer, a Mass Extermination Expert, and if one doesn’t believe, it becomes much easier to pin down blame, to sort and in turn be sorted. (E, 162)

In order that the protagonist’s theological position be understood and the survivor’s post-Holocaust purpose—to “bear witness . . . to the facts of Their death” (E, 25)—be fulfilled, Elman focuses the major portion of the novel on the survivor’s Holocaust memories, cast as flashbacks to his youth. Yagodah’s is a terrible tale of the dehumanization of persecutor and persecuted. As Alex sits under a fig tree in an Israeli settlement, striving to define the precise nature of his Judaic identity, his thoughts turn to Clig, a name closely resembling the Hungarian city of Cluj, but reformulated as an ironic pun on the Yiddish word for smart, clig.8 His consciousness is flooded with memories of his Hungarian past, memories that reflect Jewish impotence in the face of an anti-Semitic power structure. Elman parallels the Yagodah-Skirzeny economic and social feud with the betrayal and murder European Jews suffered at the hands of their countrymen. Corresponding to Hungarian-Jewish history, the Yagodah family’s withdrawal from political reality parallels national self-deception: “Our press told us what we wanted to know. Our press lied, knowing this would please our prejudices” (E, 62). Although Hungary deported stateless Jews from its newly acquired territories (that is, Slovakian, Romanian, and Yugoslavian territories acquired as Hungary’s prize for becoming Hitler’s ally in 1941), until 1944 Hungary protected its native “Magyarized” Jews. Hungary’s sovereignty was respected by the Nazis, “with the result that for Jews the country became an island of safety in ‘an ocean of destruction.’”9 Hungarian Jews lived in relative security among their countrymen until March 1944. It is
true that the young Jews were in labor battalions and generally suffered maltreatment, execution, and high losses, and all Hungarian Jews endured restrictions; however, compared to the Jews of Poland and Germany, they enjoyed a haven of well being, living among the general population rather than being herded into ghettos and concentration camps. The result was self-delusion. After Adolf Eichmann and his staff arrived in Budapest, plans for the deportation of remaining Hungarian Jews were developed and expedited with unprecedented rapidity and intensity.\textsuperscript{10}

Alex tempers his initial criticism of middle class Jews, noting that they “never knew all the horrors of the emigrations and deportations, and some of us lived like the last Acadians” (\textit{E}, 63), but he condemns them, reporting that when they did learn about “crystal night,” they callously dismissed it, rationalizing that the German-Jews had brought disaster upon themselves by intermarriage and assimilation. Alex’s father, himself a parvenu, preferred to look the other way, to ignore German brutality while anticipating the return of German high culture. According to Alex, the family members distanced themselves emotionally from the unpleasant events of Poland and Germany, since “what was happening . . . was quite remote from our town” (\textit{E}, 40). Since Hungary and Germany were allies, business as usual and normal domesticity were the means by which the Yagodahs rationalized and exempted themselves from the real threat Germany posed to Hungarian Jews.\textsuperscript{11} The fictional patriarch, Newman Yagodah, like his historic counterparts in the Hungarian-Jewish leadership, tried desperately to be counted as an Hungarian national. The elder Yagodah was convinced “that the politicians and the ‘responsible classes’ would not allow Hitler to have his way for much longer . . . convinced—in fact—that Nazism was a temporary aberration of the German personality” (\textit{E}, 32). Describing the delusive process, Alex recalls the following:

\begin{quote}
In Transylvania there was no war until 1942. Hungary was left autonomous. No German administrators were appointed. We Jews went about conscious that something somewhere was dreadfully amiss but never absolutely convinced that it would or could affect us. The local authorities from the Ministry of the Interior continued to treat us with the same historic mixture of envy, contempt, and civility. (\textit{E}, 31)
\end{quote}
Alex explains that Hungarian Jews of his class were callous because they wanted to believe they were different from Polish Jews, safe in a country that actually accepted them and would regard them as full citizens. They were optimistic that Hungarian nationalists would protect them and gullible enough to believe that if matters became worse even members of the notoriously anti-Semitic Arrow Cross would make exceptions for their favored Jews. They held these foolish dreams until the mail stopped, shortly after America declared war on Germany.

The weakness in human character that allows one man to take comfort in his safety while another suffers is manifest in Alex’s observation that while working-class, Jewish youths and young women departed in the early transports, he was relieved not to be among them, grateful that his father, a member of the Jewish Council, “pulled strings” allowing him to remain with the family, to spend his time painting his mistress in the French Impressionist style, and to study French and English. Similarly, the self-delusive belief in the safety of Hungarian Jews is evidenced in their faith that they would survive through work. “When the deportations began we were told that people were only going to work in Germany for the war effort, that they would be treated as workers” (E, 68). Those who remained in Hungary accepted the official explanation and concentrated their efforts on survival and accommodating the ever-shifting regulations under Nazi occupation. Writing from the vantage point of postHolocaust hindsight and guilt, Alex distinguishes between his limited wartime knowledge and the information that surfaced from the Joel Brand case—namely, that some Jewish leaders knew about gas chambers as early as 1942, although most of the Hungarian-Jewish leadership did not.

Holocaust reality, ignored because it was happening to German and Polish Jews, eventually becomes the existential condition of Hungarian Jews. With painstaking detail, Elman recreates the “Aryanization” of Hungary and the dehumanization of a subject people that preceded the indignities to be suffered in the concentration camps. Elman’s delineation of the Yagodah fall closely follows the historic account of the demise of Hungarian Jewry documented by Raul Hilberg in The Destruction of the European Jews. Paralleling the historic patterns, Elman introduces the creeping incursions that eventually strip the family of its delusions. He charts a pattern of economic and civic harassment to convey the ever increasing abuses. Local functionaries who had agreeable relations with Jews were
replaced by Nazi sympathizers from outlying districts, who willingly implemented ordinances designed to curtail Jewish civil rights. Ukrainian lackies and German soldiers pursued anti-Semitic measures aggressively, instituting a curfew, placing “defensive guards” in front of Jewish businesses and forcing Jews to register as aliens. As the erosion of Jewish citizenship got underway, the Nazification of Hungary began to take on a momentum of its own and Jews suffered accordingly. Local authorities advised the Jews of Clig to remain indoors for their own safety and to refrain from making the work of public servants more difficult. The Jews obeyed and the anti-Semites went about their business with ease. The police expropriated Jewish property, forced Jews to pay ransom on their homes and special taxes. The government encouraged Hungarian gentiles to benefit from these discriminatory regulations and to reneg their debts to Jews. Further, gentiles were required to leave the employ of Jews or suffer Nazi reprisals. Following the German model, it was a short step from economic harassment to physical abuse. Yagodah’s automobile is expropriated, the household help resigns, his debtors refuse to repay their loans, and eventually hoodlums stone him. The family experiences economic, civil, and criminal harassment replicating the national turmoil, oppression calculated to render the victim populace docile prior to its deportation to the killing centers.

Like other Holocaust chroniclers (Susan Schaeffer, Hana Deemetz, Ilona Karmel), Richard Elman depicts the physical losses of middle-class European Jewry through careful and lengthy descriptions of their pre-Holocaust material opulence, their pleasure in a handsome four-story brick house with a large, extensively landscaped garden. The fragility of Yagodah’s claim is evidenced in the rancor harbored against him by the estate’s former owner, a bankrupt wine merchant who had to forfeit the house to cover a bad debt. Skirzeny manipulates the dangerous political situation to his advantage in order to cheat the Yagodahs of their home. The microcosm of the Yagodah-Skirzeny feud is analogous to macrocosmic Jewish/pro-Nazi Hungarian antipathies.

The parental economic antagonism is extended by the psychosexual rivalry of the younger generation, and both are conveyed in the context of historic European anti-Semitism. Jewish vulnerability is emblematically implied in a homosexual reference to the male rivals and dramatically staged in Lilo’s rape. After spying on the cousin lovers, young Miklos, Skirzeny’s stepson, torments Alex and rapes Lilo. He taunts the lovers, daring them to
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report the attack to the police, whose job and inclination it is to protect the Christian rapist and condemn the Jewish victim for seduction and race mixing. Elman's Miklos, a compendium of Hungary's anti-Semitic sentiments, a man who clearly enjoys the Nazi inversion of justice, may be an allusive evocation of his namesake, Admiral Miklos (Nicholas) Horthy, whose authoritarian, aristocratic regime reflected his sympathy for Italian Fascism and German Nazism. The villain's last name closely approximates that of the pro-Nazi who overthrew the Horthy government to install an even more pro-Nazi force, the RSHA man in charge of special tasks, Oberstrumbannführer Skorzeny.

Analogous to the stripping of Jewish property by Hungarian police and officials prior to deportation, is the elder Skirzeny's systematic attempt to have the Yagodahs legally transfer their wealth to him. Skirzeny and his alleged accomplice demand real property (household goods, personal jewelry) on the pretext of securing papers for the Yagodah's escape. He deceitfully promises escape, as Eichmann promised the Jewish Councils that Hungarian Jews had nothing to fear if all German requisitions for goods and services were met. To the post-Holocaust consciousness, the Skirzeny/Yagodah bartering session evokes the larger political negotiations between Germany and Rudolf Kastner and Joel Brand—the exchange of Hungarian Jews for massive supplies and money for the war effort.

Whereas the elder Skirzeny's extortion is analogous to the Nazi confiscation of Jewish property, the younger's rape of Lilo foreshadows the violence Hungarian Jewry will endure. On the morning following Miklos' attack, the Jewish families of Clig are assembled in the town square to play the prologue to their tragic drama. Were their fate not so horrible, the scene of the self-aggrandizing bourgeois paterfamilias presenting his family to the nation's ruler would be comic. Instead, it is a pathetic demonstration of a deluded assimilated Jew presenting his family for Nazi mayhem. Yagodah wears ceremonial dress, a formal frock coat, striped pants, gray silk four-in-hand tie, and prominently displays his war decorations. He tries to impress the Nazis with his appreciation of German culture and bureaucracy. The scene is a deft delineation of one man's folly, impotence, and desperation, evoking one people's helplessness and another's criminal abuse of power.

The assembly scene is the strongest in the novel, amalgamat-
ing the trilogy themes, benefitting both from documentary authenticity and dramatic presentation. It combines the immediacy of contemporary terror with post-Holocaust knowledge. It is at this stage that the survivor argues that some "should have known by then" what was in store for them; "others—like my father—more than half suspected" (E, 111). Because this is the first time the entire Jewish population is brought together in a public square, ominous speculations arise, but are evaded, for in June 1944 “there were already so many rumors that they became confused with one another” (E, 111). Incorporated in the assembly scene are historic references to the expressed hope of some that Hitler would allow the Jews to emigrate to Turkey and Madagascar in exchange for the ransom needed for the German war effort, which was by then in deep trouble. With the Russian army quickly closing in, survival seemed plausible. “Miracles may not have seemed possible, but our history had taught us to respect the unpredictable” (E, 112). Alex attributes Jewish acquiescence to fear of collective retribution and general confusion. Elman skillfully distinguishes here between the Holocaust-era anger and the fuller understanding of the survivor, as Alex calls upon the American lawyer to avoid judging victims from the perspective of postwar hindsight, implying a condemnation of those who denounce Jews for going to slaughter like sheep. Alex poignantly explains the human predilection for life and hope, even in the face of disaster, taking great pains to outline the unusual circumstances of the victims: “Do not question our beliefs. . . . They grew out of the very life we were leading. Unarmed and ill-prepared, beset by murderers too, we saw and heard many different things. . . . Understand: the condemned man usually thinks there’s another appeal” (E, 112).

The assembly scene is a metaphoric foreshadowing of the concentrationary experience that awaits those who survive the initial selections. As in the concentration camp orientations, the Jews of Clig are stripped of their watches, rings, and coins for the German war effort, kept standing in the sun for hours while German soldiers with bayonets encircle them in the square and other soldiers take positions on balconies with their rifles pointed at the crowd. Just as the duped Jews were herded toward the gas chambers believing they were going to delousing showers, so the Jews of Clig are convinced they are being deported to pay for the sabotage of neighboring Jews. This ruse is used to redirect Jewish hostility from the German enemies toward their coreligionists and to imply
that there is a legitimate reason for the current "action." According to the Nazi rationale, the Germans are simultaneously protecting the Jews of Clig from the temptation to commit sabotage and allowing them advance opportunity for "special atonement." This specious explanation is articulated in Nazi extermination rhetoric, attesting to the real reason for the roundup: "Clig will be cleansed. The infestations will not be allowed to spread" (E, 131).

Although Alex remembers these Jews at their weakest, falling into the Nazi trap and blaming other Jews rather than the real enemy for bringing this punishment on them, he admonishes the American lawyer not to condemn the victims because the American "code of ethics [is] for free men in a free society" (E, 133). Alex testifies to the impossibility of resistance: "Resistance? . . . They are an army and we are a bunch of school children" (E, 122). He rejects the notion that Jews could have organized an effective resistance on the basis that they were unarmed and unassisted, the victims both of anti-Semitic governments and national resistance groups actively working for Jewish annihilation and for German defeat. The bitter survivor informs the self-righteous lawyer that to condemn the hopeless victims for their own degradation is the ultimate obscenity. To accuse unarmed Jews of failure to resist when armed nations like France capitulated and collaborated with the Nazis is outrageous. He argues instead that the free world, which ignored Jewish cries for help, is a guilty partner in genocide.

Returning to Alex's Holocaust-era anger, frustration, and bitterness, Elman dramatizes the son's disgust with the elder's failure to arrange the family's escape when it was possible to leave Hungary. His anger is extended to the Jewish Council of Elders and he mistakenly equates their responsibility with that of the local Germans and those in control in Budapest. Thus, Elman skillfully uses this scene to examine the allegations of some postwar historians who accuse the Jewish Councils of Holocaust complicity. Later, Alex rejects this thesis on the grounds that "it confuses victims with victimizers" (E, 157), arguing that the council members are not deserving of contempt simply because they took responsibility for the welfare of others, and he implies that only an anti-Semite would make such an accusation.

Although Elman does not include the concentration and death camp environments in his trilogy, Alex notes that they were aware of Theresienstadt, the model camp, and he alludes to Auschwitz in the officer's assembly announcement that the able-bodied
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will work and the “unfit can expect special treatment at camps so designated” (E, 132). The justification speech is followed by dispersal orders reminiscent of concentration camp “selections”—the able-bodied were separated from mothers, Jewish elders, children, and those too weak to work. The first male group is sent for physical examinations and the second group to return home and await further instructions. All are told that within forty-eight hours they will be “resettled, given special treatment” (E, 132). They are warned against rebellion, and told that failure to follow orders will “lead to a savage justice” (E, 132). The prophetic diction clearly establishes the narrator’s dual perspective. In line with Hannah Arendt’s assessment of Nazis as bourgeois family men, Elman characterizes the German officer who addressed the assembled Jews in the square as

never more than a petty functionary in the German machine who, . . . had placed highly in the civil service examinations. . . . Such men persist in all bourgeois societies. They are cold, ruthless, methodical, not cruel themselves but always to be found near the scene of cruelty. (E, 129)

Following the concentrationary experience suggested by the officer’s remarks, father and son undergo a dramatic evocation of the concentrationary induction ceremonies. In a predeportation physical examination they encounter the dehumanizing process camp inmates routinely suffered. Medical examination and tattoo identification initiates the transformation from person to object—from citizen to slave—prodded and processed for the enhancement of the Third Reich. The protagonist painfully observes his father’s vain attempt to maintain his dignity by impressing an inattentive German medical officer with his fluent Viennese German and his familiarity with German values. The elder Yagodah’s efforts to distinguish himself from the others whose plight he shares are useless. He is just one of the mass; his wrist is sprayed with a freezing-cold solution, until “the flesh stings, and then turns numb.” Before he can object,

motors whirl like the sound of a dentist’s drill. Your arm is a piece of lead. In just three or four movements of the thing against your flesh the mark is made; and you don’t have time to feel the pain. . . . Only now you have a number on your wrist. (E, 169–70)
Inured by the experience, the Germans view the blue-tattooed Jews “like beef on the hook” (E, 177). For the victim, involuntary tattooing is a realization of his vulnerability. Alex had naively thought of his skin as his personal property and “resented the intrusion.” Elman uses gallows humor to strip the scene of pathos, citing Alex’s bitter self-recrimination:

Like a good little chedarist, I thought I must memorize my new numerals, as if some great teacher had set out an exercise, until it occurred to me: How absurd. When one is in possession of the urtext, memorizing is a foolish waste of time. (E, 178)

Although Elman departs from historic accuracy by staging a tattooing session prior to deportation, the scene offers effective foreshadowing and metaphoric commentary. The tattooing is as integral to the evocation of a concentration camp scene as are the German officer’s “selection” speech and the physical examination. Elman stages the examination scene in the railroad terminal to evoke the boxcars carrying Jews across Europe to extermination centers. Thus, while the scene has dramatic immediacy, it is informed by post-Holocaust awareness. Contributing to this interpretation are the survivor’s short, lyrical passage about cranes fleeing the roof of the terminus building to escape the suffering of earthbound Jews—earthbound, that is, until they go “up in smoke” (E, 161) and his association of Mark Chagall’s floating Hasidim with the Jews who “went up in flames alive” (E, 161).

Under the terrible pressure of the forty-eight hour deportation notice, Yagodah desperately tries to barter with Skirzeny for his family’s escape, offering his estate and furnishings for safe passage from Clig. To insure his gains in the unlikely survival and suit for redress for their losses, Skirzeny has prepared a document stating that the property will pass to him and to his heirs in perpetuity. Furthermore, Yagodah must sign a statement agreeing that the “transaction is being made without duress or force majeur” (E, 203) as a safeguard against criminal accusation should the victorious powers charge him with illegal expropriation. Making the apt postwar analogy with Dr. Kastner’s negotiation with the Allies for supplies for the German war effort in exchange for Jewish lives, Skirzeny offers to facilitate the Yagodah escape from Clig for their property. He agrees to secure papers identifying the Yagodah family as Christians of Jewish descent and arrange their
transportation to safety. Frustrated by his father's delusion that they can pass as Christians and by the consumate uselessness of the ruse, since baptized Jews with four or five generations between them and their Jewishness were being deported, Alex succumbs to an orgy of self and group hatred, blaming his father and Jewish leaders rather than Nazi and Hungarian assassins for their plight. Once the estate exchange is negotiated, Skirzeny betrays the family claiming that there are only papers for eight and Lilo must remain behind, a ruse to provide his stepson with the woman he wants. Yagodah accepts Skirzeny's explanation of limited papers and Lilo concurs that she is the obvious choice to remain because she has the best chance to pass as a gentile maid in the Skirzeny household. Although Lilo understands her uncle's decision, she detests it. Vexed to be left behind at the mercy of her rapist, she rages at Alex, the only person who knows of Miklos' indecent intentions. Alex's half-hearted offer to remain in her stead is ineffective. The family must comply with Skirzeny's demands. To save eight, Newman Yagodah sacrifices one, a clear analogy to the decisions Jewish Councils had to render. The survivor claims to have no use for guilt, but it is clear that he is guilt-ridden. Forever vivid in his imagination is a "cameo of betrayal," an image of Lilo clawing at her face as he and his father are driven away in the last wagon.

Just as the Jews who were sent to the gas chambers were told they were going to "showers," so are the Yagodahs deceived and led into a trap. The memoir concludes with the survivor's summation of Skirzeny's betrayal. He meets father and son at their hiding place to say he has sent the women ahead, a departure from the agreed plan, and instructs the men to remain in a barn where he will send a car for them the following day. When a car arrives, it is bearing soldiers, but because Alex sees its arrival, he is able to escape, only by leaving his sleeping and weakened father behind and running into the woods. Alex Yagodah's remaining war experience is quickly summarized. He wanders in the woods for weeks, living on leaves and tree bark. Eventually he is found by peasants, soundly beaten, and taken in as a servant and sexual slave for a crippled peasant girl. Later, partisans turn him over to the Soviets who initially threaten to kill him as a spy, but spare him that he may serve as an orderly for a political commissar. After recuperation near the Black Sea, he is allowed to go to Turkey where a Jewish rescue service, the Joint Defense Appeal, arranges to transport him to Palestine where he volunteers for military service with the Pal-
estine Brigade and returns to fight in Europe. Following demobilization, Alex visits Clig for a few hours, but he is unable to return to the family home. In Israel, he eventually learns from Jewish agencies of his father’s forced labor and death from typhus in Auschwitz, his mother’s arrest and transport to a detention camp at Mauthausen and then to Auschwitz. In addition, he learns that Lilo perished in the bombing raid that began as his “escape” wagon pulled out of Clig.

Many reviewers have echoed Alex Yagodah’s condemnation of Newman Yagodah for leaving Lilo at the mercy of the Skirzenys. Implicit in this criticism is the assumption that Yagodah exercised freedom of choice. In doing so, they blame the victim. The Jew was without free choice; his dilemma was whether to accept Skirzeny’s conditions and save eight or sacrifice all nine people. The negotiations had included passage for the whole family. It was only at the last moment that Skirzeny presented his ultimatum and that the Jew capitulated. When William Styron’s character, Polish-Catholic Sophie, has to choose which of her children will live and which will be gassed, readers respond sympathetically—never condemning her for assigning one child to imminent death and the other to temporary salvation. Yet when Elman’s Hungarian Jew, who is unaware of the younger Skirzeny’s lust for Lilo, must choose between survival of eight people and the possible sacrifice of one against the certain destruction of nine, he is vilified. Whereas Sophie knew one of her children would die and it was entirely her choice which might survive, Yagodah is given no options. He is told Lilo will stay. While Skirzeny is spared moral judgment, the impotent Jew is damned by his son and by literary critics, who ignore the protagonist’s warnings against fallacious judgments of victims, thus demonstrating the ease of maligning victims rather than condemning anti-Semitic criminals. The novel’s moral dilemma turns not only on the German crime against Jewry, not only on Christian Europe’s ready acquiescence to Germany’s genocidal goal and its betrayal of Jews into the hands of their persecutors, but also on post-Holocaust injustice toward Jewry. That Elman condemns the tendency to blame the victim is evident in his protagonist’s warning to his American correspondent to distinguish between the criminals and their victims. Although Alex finds fault with everyone, he recognizes degrees of guilt, raises critical distinctions between sins of commission and sins of omission. Skirzeny and his sort are guilty of exploiting the victims; the
Hungarians are guilty of surrendering the Jews to the Nazis; the Nazis are guilty of genocide; and Newman Yagodah, the Jews, and God are guilty of sins of omission: Yagodah and his counterparts for their failure to emigrate when they could have and for having good faith in their countrymen’s decency, and God for being false to the covenant.

Although he condemned his father in 1944 for misjudging the Hungarian situation and leaving Lilo to Skirzeny, Alex judges differently in 1961, explaining that his father was neither so foolish to believe all Skirzeny told him nor so callous as to trust him with one of their own. Instead, Yagodah interprets his father’s behavior as a sign of “his powerlessness and impotence and not some truth about his character per se” (E, 256). Similarly, he sympathetically quotes his father’s defense of the Jewish elders forced to cooperate with the Nazis in compiling lists for deportation: “It was better for our own people to make the choices than to allow the Arrow Cross to do so because ... We can at least be more gentle and helpful than they are and consequently make our friends’ ordeals a little easier” (E, 257).

Like Singer in Enemies and Wallant in The Pawnbroker, Elman is starkly convincing in his rejection of easy and painless survivor regeneration. The world’s insistence on Holocaust amnesia or recovery is pathological, as was its acquiescence to the Holocaust. Denuding the subject of sentimentality, Elman often brings new insight to the topic of victimization through dramatizing postwar bitterness and revealing the absurdity of hope for complete recovery from Holocaust ravages. Authentically angry about an injustice that never should have occurred, Alex is justifiably outraged by the atrocities the world tolerated and probably would tolerate again. Yagodah’s resentment mirrors that expressed by the French resistance fighter, Jean Amery, who resents facile reconciliation with the architects of the concentrationary universe. A survivor of Nazi torture, Amery writes contemptuously of “so-called reeducators from America, England, or France” eager to forgive Germany.21 The Frenchman’s distaste for philosophers and psychiatrists who denounce victim bitterness provides an interpretive touchstone for Yagodah’s rancor. Amery argues that to internalize his past suffering and bear it in emotional asceticism would make him the accomplice of his torturers. Like the Auschwitz survivor, Yagodah remembers the evil perpetrated against Jewry, is wary of easy reconciliation, and will not join the criminals in their efforts to
forget or to rewrite history. Writing in the Vietnam era and deeply moved by the moral crisis in American society, Elman indicts failing humankind, indicts the free world for contributing to Hitler's crime, and implies that the world's acquiescence to and complicity in genocide taints its legitimacy to judge the victims.

Few American novelists draw any connection between events of the Holocaust and contemporary Israeli politics. Elman does. Just as Alex expresses religious ambivalence and affirmation, so he vacillates between castigating and championing Zionism. In each instance he is motivated by a history of anti-Semitism and the Holocaust. Just as he vacillates from expressions of positive group identification to self-hate, Alex has become an Israeli citizen, yet occasionally utters anti-Semitic/anti-Zionist propaganda that equals the slander of Israel's worst enemies. One critic describes Yagodah as "a psychological first; an Israeli suffering from Jewish self-hate." Most offensive in this regard is Yagodah's comparison of Israel and Israelis to Nazi Germany and Nazis:

If, therefore, I speak only of those atrocities which made a madhouse out of Europe (and not about what has happened since), perhaps it is because I am forced to believe that it was such events which conditioned all of Israel to the murder of innocent fellahin, the slaughter at Port Said of Egyptian families, the continual border sniping, yes, and the growing militarism, racism, and chauvinism of this place. . . . But since we were the first great modern multitude of Victims of the State, is it surprising that we should have created a modern state of our own in which victimizing others became a way of life? (161–62)

Elman, who supports a Jewish homeland, claims this speech is an illustration of Yagodah's intemperance. In its failure to distinguish between Nazi Germany's genocidal policy toward the Jews and the violence and injustice committed against relatively small numbers of a population, in the context of belligerence between two hostile factions in an ongoing war—a state of perpetual warfare initiated by five Arab states upon Israel's birth as a modern state—lies the same sort of political ignorance that contributed to the Hungarian debacle. Although Yagodah is outrageous here, on other occasions he endorses Israel's right to self-defense, in light of Holocaust history and concerted Arab efforts to destroy Israel. According to Elman: "Yagodah is not quite an Israeli. He still lives in temporary quarters. . . . He accepts shelter with bitterness because there is no place else he can go. No place to return to."
Although Elman does not share the psychological, restorative visions of Bruno Bettelheim and Victor Frankl, he does affirm Jewish collective survival and support a Jewish homeland. Unlike the psychiatrist-survivors, Alex did not rise above the Holocaust, he was and will always remain its victim, describing himself as a “survivor surviving—selfconsciously wish[ing] to affirm... kinship with dung heaps and ashes” (E, 277). Gone are his prewar assimilationist illusions. He can look back at his past for the terror it was and be certain only that cultivated Europeans “inhabited a house of the blind in a country called death” (E, 277). The 28th Day of Elul concludes, as it started, with the subject of a post-Holocaust Jew’s self-identity. Alex observes that if Jewry exists, he is a part of that collective: “I am one of them for sure. What other meaning would my life have? I am a Jew. What else should I call myself save victim?” (E, 276). His experience has taught him the void and left him with terrible awareness. Although Yagodah’s response contains none of the religious erudition of Emil Fackenheim and Eliezer Berkovits, it insists on association with Jewry as the works of these scholars do.

In striving to come to terms with the problem of faith in the post-Holocaust period, Elman explores traditional thematic and stylistic Jewish literary responses to catastrophe: providential interpretation of history; acceptance of a silent, hidden God who remains aloof from human evil to honor the principle of free will; and biblical allusion and countercommentary. That there has been undeserved suffering has been evident to Jews since the biblical period. The history of persecution accounts for modification of the theological concept of retributive justice with the principle of hester panim, God hiding His face:

Awake, why sleepest Thou, O Lord? 
Arise Thyself, cast us not off forever. 
Wherefore hidest Thou Thy face 
And forgettest our affliction and our oppression?  
.................................................................

Arise for our help, 
And redeem us for Thy mercies’ sake. (Psalm 44)

The psalmist’s construction of God’s hiddenness is frequently appropriated in Jewish Holocaust literature to explain divine inaction in time of tribulation and as indication of human evil entirely separate and distinct from divine judgment. Although Elman’s prose
echoes biblical cadence and parallelism, Yagodah's post-Holocaust denunciation of God for crimes against the covenant parodies the psalmist's mournful, supplicating tone.

Only He betrayed us. He profaned us. He took our prayers in vain. He mocked us. He rewarded us with cruelty. He listened but did not hear. He was there and He was not there when we needed Him. He led us into injustice. (E, 24)

By parodying and reformulating the psalmist, the survivor's protest against the Almighty conforms to Jewish literary tradition. This time-honored device consists of radical reinterpretation by means of reformulation or inversion of a text of the canon, which may be interpreted as a means of articulating faith despite the terror of separation from God. In this instance the sacred text is put to irreverant use to issue a protest. In his analysis of classical Yiddish writers' use of liturgical parody—putting the sacred text to irreverant use—David Roskies claims they are motivated by "their desire to imitate the sacrilege, to disrupt the received order of the text in the same way as the enemy, . . . disrupted the order of the world."26 This analysis seems appropriate to Yagodah's reformulation of the traditional celebration of divine attributes. "This technique of imitating the breach of God's promise in the parody of Scripture . . . [using] 'symbolic inversion' and 'countercommentary'" is a basic form of Jewish response to catastrophe, for "to mimic the sacrilege allows the individual to keep faith even as the promise is subverted."27

Yagodah caustically concludes that Chosenness of the Jewish people consists of being chosen to bear the burden of God's long silences and absences from history, being chosen to suffer guiltlessly.

Whoever may have thought he was responsible, whichever way the thing was eventually carried out, in the end only He was responsible. We placed ourselves in His hands and He did not disappoint us. I tell you there is a straight road from the Ark of the Covenant to the ovens at Ravensbruck, Treblinka, Auschwitz, Stato, and the other places, and it is lined on both sides with the bleached bones of my fellow Jews. I believe in those Jews as the work of the Jewish God. Only They will never fail me. I believe in Them far more than I believe in the State. The bony sockets of Their eyes stare blankly past all of us toward the Disaster to which They bear witness as God's
Chosen People. And we, the living, cursed with our lives, bear witness again and again to the facts of Their death. That is why we are here. (E, 25)

The expectation of the righteous to receive God's protection for consistent observance of His commandments is thus ironically and tragically reversed. They are chosen not for earthly salvation, but destruction. In this manner Elman echoes Elie Wiesel's dictum that the purpose of survival is bearing witness to atrocity in order to prevent its repetition. Elman speaks first and foremost as a moralist, affirming the victims and rejecting implications of a providential interpretation of Holocaust history. Since God has granted mankind freedom, He tolerates the sinner and abandons the victim. If man is to act on his own responsibility, God must absent Himself from history or be present without being manifest. Thus, perhaps without intention, Alex Yagodah affirms God by bearing witness to his silence. In a caustic illustration of the peculiar nature of the covenantal relationship that coalesces polarities, man must observe the commandments and God may abandon His agreement.

The volume's title, *The 28th Day of Elul*, and its epigrams from the book of Jeremiah provide interpretive guidelines. Elul, the sixth month of the Jewish calendar, is the period of preparation for repentance. During the last week of Elul, prayers for forgiveness and mercy are recited. Spiritual reckoning is set specifically in the sacred period when God's thirteen attributes were revealed, suggesting that faith is rewarded and that the sinner will be pardoned and accepted back to God. Elul then is the time when a Jew, as he is, even one as spiritually wanting as Yagodah, can come close to God. All that is necessary is that he desire to do so. The Hebrew letters for the word *Elul* suggest a phrase from the Song of Songs referring to the love between God and his people. Since the Holocaust brought that relationship into question and occasioned the examination of the covenantal bond, the combined Elul allusion and Jeremiah epigraphs of Jewish defeat followed by redemption and the novel's Israeli setting insist that despite the severe strain put on the covenant by the Holocaust, the relationship remains intact.

Did not your father eat and drink? He did what was right and just, And it went well with him.
Because he dispensed justice to the weak and the poor,  
It went well with him.  
Is this not true knowledge of me? says the Lord. (Jer. 22:15–16)

The burden of Elman's Book One epigraph from Jeremiah, chapter 22, is the foretelling of the wages of disobedience to the covenant, a warning to those who break the commandments, and a promise of regeneration contingent upon honoring the Mosaic covenant. Jeremiah addresses the need to restore religious ideals of justice and piety. Jeremiah knew disaster was imminent, and in trying to cope with its implications, he pointed the way to preservation of the remnant. Book One deals with Yagodah's Israeli period, signifying the return of the remnant to Israel through flashback to the European period leading up to the devastation of Hungarian Jewry. The biblical lesson of the epigraph, the righteous model of the ancestral way, is an ironic critique of Yagodah's way of accommodation and yet implies the promise of redemption even for this sinner.

Similarly, the Jeremiah epigraph to Book Two corresponds to the Jewish period of exilic suffering under Babylonian captivity and the novel's treatment of invasion, occupation, deportation, and death. At the same time, the passage includes an intimation of redemption in its concluding line, "in the peace thereof ye shall have peace." This passage foreshadows the promise in Jeremiah, chapter 30, foretelling the destruction of the nations in which the Jews were scattered and the return and rebuilding of Jerusalem: "The city shall be rebuilt" (30:10), "and they shall come back from the land of the enemy" (31:10). Jeremiah's polar functions, threatening judgment and promising restoration, suits Elman's treatment of the spiritual return of the individual sinner and the Elul implications of spiritual restoration, as well as the historic manifestations of collective diasporan suffering and regeneration in the Israeli homeland.

_Lilo's Diary_ complements the analytical, historic perspective of the survivor in _The 28th Day of Elul_ and the contemporary socioeconomic assessment of the victim in _The Reckoning_, which fuses personal and documentary perspectives. Whereas the first and third volumes address the collective Hungarian-Jewish Holocaust experience, from anticipatory and retrospective analytical points of view, the second volume shifts from predominantly theological,
politicall, and social themes to chart the psychological trauma induced by dependence and Holocaust anxieties. In accord with this shift of perspective, Elman emphasizes psychosexual imagery and metaphor to convey Nazi violation of Jewish life. Writing at a time when the feminist movement was becoming vocal, Elman decided to "take the liberty of a fiction writer," and opted to construct the second volume not only from a feminine perspective but in Lilo's voice. Lilo's Diary is a young woman's assessment of female and Jewish vulnerability, dramatized first in her role as ward in the Yagodah family and second as fugitive/captive in the Skirzeny household. Through parallels to her own sexual exploitation and social/psychic indignities in both households, Lilo begins to understand Holocaust suffering.

Reminiscent of F. Scott Fitzgerald's self-indulgent, beautiful, spoiled rich girls, so taken with self that they have no love left for others, Lilo is self-serving and narcissistic. But Lilo is not Judy Jones, and the Holocaust is not the American Jazz Age. Lilo is more cerebral, more analytic than Fitzgerald's women; her suffering is more intense and tragic. Orphan in a threatened sanctuary, Jew in Nazi-occupied Hungary, fugitive among enemies, Lilo suffers multiple perils. The young, beautiful woman is a complex, paradoxical creature: suspicious and trusting, passionate and cold, aggressive and meek; more profoundly complex in her self-portrait than she was in her fiancé-cousin's guilt-induced memoir. A major theme in Lilo's Diary "is the impingement of reality on a consciousness trained to abide by self-contained illusions, trained to maintain at all costs the façade of business as usual." The diary entries reveal Lilo's brutally frank assessment of her own contradictions, the hopeless ennui of a liaison with her artist manqué cousin, dependence on a scheming bourgeois guardian who controls her fortune, and ambivalence toward her rapist, whose blond beauty and vivacity Elman modeled on a high-school and college friend who "had the Aryan good looks of a Hitler Jugend and a becoming softness of smile and expression."

Interpreting her life through the prism of Shakespearean tragedy, she writes:

Prince Hamlet chose an antic disposition. It so happens it went poorly with him. My deceit is my apparent simplicity. If I were ever honest and open to a fault it would not go well with me. So I shall never let on what I know to be true. Never shall I declare myself. Never shall I forgive. Never completely give in.
Using the diary as an extended soliloquy, Lilo reveals her own motives, flaws, and foibles; her suspicions about her guardian, whom she suspects has stolen her birthright and embezzled her family's property; her impatience with Alex and her ambivalent feelings toward Miklos. Secretly contemptuous of her uncle, she nevertheless plays the role of admiring, dependent female to his patronizing paterfamilias—counterfeit Ophelia to Yagodah's obliging Polonius. Although Yagodah is self-impressed with his political acumen, he is a mere prattler of political and social platitudes. Lilo's analysis of her uncle seems more objective than Alex's account and is consistent with Hannah Arendt's political and social analyses of assimilated Western European Jewry and as such foreshadows Newman Yagodah's self-assessment in the third volume. Lilo's perception of the elder Yagodah's Holocaust reactions coincides with reported acculturated, middle-class Austrian and German-Jewish sensibilities. Yagodah indulged "his dream—to have the respect of others, to be a man of substance" (LD, 65). And, like self-beguiling German Jews, Yagodah expected his World War I military record to stand him in good stead with the Nazis. Convinced that the war could not last more than another year, that the Hungarians were making secret contacts almost daily with the Allies through the Vatican, Newman Yagodah deceived himself as others did in early 1944 that Hungarian Jewry would escape the fate of Polish Jewry. He believed that Hungarian Jews would enjoy Vatican protection, despite evidence that the Vatican's interests were limited to saving only baptized Jews—hence not Jews, but Christians.36

With a sharper eye and more caustic tongue, Lilo observes and comments on the trilogy's major players, on the disintegrating family, and on the corruption of public institutions. She recognizes that all the inhabitants of the Yagodah household live as prisoners, "each imprisoned within himself, each a victim of his own crass appetites and vanities" (LD, 12). Furthermore, Lilo confronts her own duplicity, confesses to being calculating in personal relations, but rationalizes that her social machinations are necessary for survival. Aware of an orphaned schoolmate who was taken away with the first labor drafts in 1942, Lilo seeks to assure her uncle's protection and, therefore, tolerates his son's sexual advances, thereby placating and manipulating the father. In fact, she measures her strength and will power by her capacity to feign submission to Alex.37 It is for her "a joyous assertion of the will to surrender
Submission to seduction equals survival. Hence, Lilo considers herself in control of the liaison. Just as Lilo's position in the Yagodah household anticipates her role in the Skirzeny household, her rape by Miklos Skirzeny foreshadows his stepfather's violation and betrayal of the Yagodah family, which is, in turn, emblematic of the betrayal and destruction awaiting Hungarian Jewry.

In addition to displaying varied interpretations of the same historic event, the trilogy structure permits Elman to enlarge the Holocaust panorama. Thus, an event minimized in one volume is magnified in another and vice versa. In the accounts of the Yagodah males, the dominant mood is impotence—helplessness of the Jewish community leaders to protect loved ones from Nazi violence. In *The 28th Day of Elul*, the Holocaust survivor claims that the Yagodahs suppressed what they knew of the destruction of Polish Jewry by 1944 to evade facing their own danger, yet the contemporary diarist emphasizes their awareness and fear. In *Lilo's Diary*, the victim writes graphically about known horrors: "Rumors of every kind now exist: Of huge camps where the dead are thrown into cauldrons of lye to make fat while the dying work until they have no more strength. . . . Terrible rumors! Of fusillades, mass executions, epidemics" (*LD*, 32). Contrary to expectations of despair, a surprising voice of resistance emerges in the orphan's revelation of her own strategy for domestic survival and the trilogy's single report of a Jewish resistance movement. Lilo writes of a young cousin determined to join a resistance unit in Croatia. The young man's report of the refusal of the elders in his town to allow the young to burn the local ghetto for fear of mass reprisals parallels Clig's Jewish hierarchy's caution and failure to support violent rebellion—cut off as they were from external support; however, it does add the dimension of resistance—a topic generally overlooked in American Holocaust fiction.

The contrast between volumes one and two is particularly striking in the portrayal of the deportation assembly. Elman detailed the scene in the first volume, engaging the reader in the agonizing wait for information and the victims' anxiety and humiliation. In *Lilo's Diary*, he begins the scene with a reference to its conclusion, "We have no more than forty-eight hours left in Clig" (*LD*, 128). Faced with the reality of deportation, Lilo's sophistication disintegrates into bewilderment and innocent exclamations regarding the injustice of undeserved punishment:
It is so cruel. The wicked are not punished. We are punished. Everyone of us. Mothers. Little children. Old people. Our friends, our neighbors. . . . "There will be no 'exceptions.'" The entire city and its suburbs—"Judenrein." We are herded together like cattle in the principal square. . . . We listen, and then we are sent home again to pack our belongings, told we have no more than forty-eight hours left to us in Clig. Our destinies have been decided. We shall be sent to work elsewhere, those of us who are lucky. (LD, 129–30)

Despite knowledge of Nazi methodology in Poland and her earlier enumeration of death camp rumors, Lilo is dumbfounded, amazed by Hungarian deportations because the war seems so close to its end. Truth gives way to disbelief and self-delusion.

Can it be that they will uproot even the aged? Are none to be spared? It is brutal and senseless. Why now, when our liberators must be so close at hand? How do they expect to profit from any of this? We have been irrevocably betrayed, but by whom? (LD, 130)

Although the shock of a personal encounter with the Nazi apparatus temporarily dulls Lilo's perception, once she regains composure, she assesses the government's agreement to the deportation order and the popular response realistically: "Our neighbors shall be the accomplices to all this. Before we say adieu to them, the looters will be among us" (LD, 131). Yet she notes that Jews cannot expect the gentiles to protect them when men like her uncle do little. As she ponderstheir inevitable doom, she daydreams of finding some brave soul among the Jews of Clig to commit the sabotage allegedly executed by neighboring Jews, which was only a pretext for Clig's punishment. Again, insight corrects wishful thinking and she realizes that the Plevinitz story is "just another lie, told to lull us into not taking up arms" (LD, 131). In a bitter inverse parody of Shylock's "Hath not a Jew eyes" soliloquy, Lilo asks why the Jews are selected for such calumny. And, finally, she asks the same question that occurs to Alex in his post-Holocaust torment, "What is human after all?" (LD, 134). Her answer has all the marks of Holocaust metamorphosis: "To be human is to be abject" (LD, 134).

The Jeremiah epigraph to Lilo's Diary provides an interpretive reading to Lilo's generally clear-sighted explication of personal and public events, her capacity to see through German deceit and Jewish delusion:
The Trial of the Damned

An appalling and horrible thing
is come to pass in the land:
the prophets prophesy in the service of falsehood,
and the priests bear rule at their beck;
and my people love to have it so;
what then will ye do in the end thereof? (Jeremiah 5:30–31)

Among “the prophets [who knowingly] prophesy in the service of falsehood” are the Hungarian officials and German officers who willingly deceived the Jews. Germans appropriately play a minor role in the trilogy, since few were needed in Hungary to implement the Final Solution, because the native government, an Axis ally, was willing to implement the German genocide plan. In addition to the officials administering the deportation in the first volume, the second book adds an officer who is similar to Hannah Arendt’s banal bureaucrat, an otherwise “decent” bourgeois gentlemen caught up in events beyond his control. He is a homesick, war-weary grandfather, who believes he is simply doing his duty. The billeting officer “visits” the Yagodah home, behaving as though he is making a civilized social call. Yet he “talks of arrangements, resettlements, redistribution,” adding “nothing personal against ‘the Israelites’ as a race” (LD, 113). Unlike the wishful thinkers, “people [who] love to have it so,” like the Jewish Councils and Lilo’s aunt who writes a household inventory in expectation of postwar reclamation, Lilo generally acknowledges the full implications of the “appalling and horrible thing [that] is come to pass in the land.”

Whereas Lilo is generally correct in her public assessments, she seriously misjudges when she blames fellow victims rather than the criminal perpetrators for her suffering. Resentful that she is to be left with the family whose son raped her, yet convinced Yagodah tried to include her in the escape group, Lilo determines to make the Yagodahs suffer, to look at her, as they depart to imagined safety. Expressing no rancor toward the gentle who sealed her fate, she blames only her fellow victims, as she had in the earlier rape scene blamed her cousin rather than Miklos. As Alex is inclined to blame his father and the Jewish Council for the predicament of the Jews, so Lilo temporarily condemns father and son. Her misplaced scorn thus echoes the German’s successful transfer of Clig Jews’ wrath from the Nazis and Hungarians to the Plevinitz Jews, the alleged authors of their fate.

With Lilo left behind to be Miklos Skirzeny’s whore, Elman
introduces yet a further perspective to the trilogy—that of a Judenrein Hungary. The elder Skirzeny’s observation that he expects the Yagodahs are “packed in goods trains, and racing to heaven-knows-what destination” (LD, 138) testifies to his betrayal of the Jews and is emblematic of gentile Europe’s knowledge of Germany’s treatment of “resettled” Jews. Lilo understands that the family is destined for death and wonders whether it is proper for her to pray the mourner’s Kaddish for them. This assimilated girl, who doesn’t know the Hebrew prayers, prays “for all of them like a crazy hermit because I miss them all so and, angry as I am, I do not hate them” (LD, 139). She “prays with perfect cynicism, and rage and pity” (LD, 139).

The remainder of the volume deals with Lilo’s rapid physical deterioration. She suffers from dysentery, cramps, hunger, and painful skin irritations. Corresponding to her failing health is Miklos’ diminished interest in her, marked by erratic fluctuations from tenderness to abuse. Finally, her beauty marred, Miklos abandons her. In an ironic turn of events, Lilo’s potential for survival improves as she undergoes a Holocaust metamorphosis from the younger gentile’s whore to the elder’s pawn. Although she has lost favor with Miklos, his stepfather sees her value as his “safe-conduct” when the liberators enter Hungary. Should the Nazi collaborator be pressed to demonstrate his innocence in a war trial, he will have Lilo as evidence of his generosity in saving Jews from the Nazi net.

Although Elman has concentrated his theological theme in the survivor’s memoir, he concludes Lilo’s Diary with a prayer-parody addressing similar issues raised in The 28th Day of Elul, which effectively unites the two volumes. In anger and confusion Lilo prays a perverted pastiche taken from “Hear O Israel,” the central prayer of the Jewish liturgy; Avinu Malkenu, the hauntingly beautiful supplication recited in synagogue services during the ten-day period of the High Holidays, the Days of Judgment; Psalm 23 attesting to God’s goodness and mercy; and the mourner’s Kaddish.

Dear God, Dear Murderer, thy will be done
Thy Kingdom come
Our Father, Our King
Give us this day our Daily Hunger
Our Father which art in Heaven
Curse us, despise us, murder us, betray us
O Lord Our God Thou hast set up a table before us  
In the presence of our enemies  
My cup runneth over . . .  
Yisgadal . . . V'Yisgadal . . . V'yisroman. (LD, 153–54)

Thus, Elman concludes the volume with a brilliant allusion evoking the traditional prayers; at the same time, he suggests through brutal fragmentation and invented diction the disruption of Jewish life wrought by the Holocaust and through their unseemly fusion, an echo of Alex’s biblical countertext. Furthermore, in an appropriate addendum, Elman reminds us of the instigator of the calamity necessitating the parody by shifting to German, a language Lilo believes appropriate to sentimental poetry and carnage and, therefore, appropriate for praying to God, the murderer. Lilo’s prayer-parody echoes the survivor’s indictment of God for his Holocaust passivity, its poetics of sacrilege that echo Andre Schwarz-Bart’s *The Last of the Just* parodic concluding prayer, linking God with the horror of the Holocaust in a roll call of the death camps:


The final volume of the trilogy, *The Reckoning: The Daily Ledgers of Newman Yagodah, Advokat and Factor* (1969), parallels the moral accounting of a bourgeoise parvenu and the society that shaped him with an account of the destruction of Hungarian Jewry in the larger context of the forces leading to and including the Holocaust. Elman’s use of the ledger complements the first-person narrative introduced in the “letters” of *The 28th Day of Elul* and the journal structure of *Lilo’s Diary*. Like the first two, *The Reckoning* is set in Clig, Hungary, in 1944, but substitutes a prewar and Holocaust vantage point for the hindsight of the first survivor’s account; it also adds the economic and sociological analyses of a chronicler educated in the twin crucibles of World War I and the Depression to the second victim’s psychological emphasis.

*The Reckoning* is an assessment of private and public corruption by “a sinner in search of meaning, disclosing . . . the decay of a value system.” Newman reveals himself in this volume as a smug, pompous, venal, calculating, bourgeois business man, a self-cen-
tered and dependent lover, a demanding and deceitful husband, and a loving but ineffectual father. Adept at analysis of social and economic problems, he fails to act on the most pressing political issue of his time. Deception is an integral part of Yagodah’s daily existence: he deceives his Jewish wife, Ilona, to keep her from discovering his gentile mistress, Ileana; he deceives others with his business practices; and he deceives himself by believing the Enlightenment myth—that he is a European among Europeans—and disbelieving the significance of European anti-Semitism. Yagodah’s most tragic failures—limited vision and courage—account for his decision to remain silent about German intentions for Hungarian Jewry.

To pass the time while banned from productive work under the pro-Nazi Hungarian regime, Newman Yagodah, manufacturer, financier, and economic consultant, ponders and parallels his personal history to Jewish-Hungarian history and writes a monograph entitled The Abolition of Poverty. According to Yagodah’s assessment, in the 1930s Europe had

more food, more money, more clothing than ever before, yet—at the same time—hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, . . . were without, lacking, underemployed or unemployed, so undernourished and so discouraged and despondent that some of them, particularly among the gentiles, reached for any straws, in anger, concupiscence, violence.40

Ironically, while Yagodah ponders the European economic failures of the 1930s that contributed to the Holocaust, he fails to assess the current dangers to Hungarian Jews and fails to act in time to save his family. Although he knows the Polish Jews are being incinerated, he works on his manuscript and passively waits for the Allies to eliminate the Nazi stranglehold on Europe in time to save Hungarian Jews from a similar fate.

Yagodah’s ledger is the self-assessment of a man who finally understands that he is and has always been the duped subject of Christian caprice, a second-class citizen of the body politic—a social and economic pariah, an alien among countrymen he would embrace, a Jew estranged from coreligionists who would embrace him. Newman Yagodah is, as his first name implies, the new man, the post-Enlightenment Jew, a representative of a failed social experiment. The experiment failed because Europe dishonored its
promise to accept Jews as full-fledged citizens sharing in the political, cultural, and economic lives of their respective countries. In practice, the Jew's acceptance was always limited. He was free to disassociate himself from Jewish groups and causes, free to fight in Hungary's wars, free to work in a restricted capacity in its economy, but never free to enjoy social relationships with gentile neighbors. To achieve the status of tolerated European, the Jew was free to become a nominal Jew, never free to be a devout Jew and a Hungarian, or Frenchman, or German.

Newman Yagodah is the dramatic embodiment of historian Hannah Arendt's composite of the Jewish pariah—the Jewish social outcast whose political emancipation was incomplete. According to Arendt, "During the 150 years when Jews truly lived amidst, and not just in the neighborhood of Western European peoples, they always had to pay with political misery for social glory and with social insult for political success." Such is Newman Yagodah's situation. Although academic success yielded a positive self-image and admission to the University of Vienna, he was socially ostracized, and he soon realized that cultivated Europeans are also anti-Semites.

The others would not have me. I loved the same things they loved, yet to them I was to be distrusted, an exotic, a figure of scorn. How wrong I was to think that it could have been any different, to think that through my talents and intelligence I might escape the judgments of knaves and viscous scoundrels. At our lectures, which I attended one might almost say religiously, our professors made anti-Semitic remarks religiously, as if hate, too, was the stuff of the curriculum of law, history, philosophy, and physics, and those who did not hate, those who were decent and amiable and opposed such behavior, were regarded by students and authorities as Bohemians, or scoundrels, or dangerous radicals; they too were renegades to the student body I so much envied and admired. (R, 127)

Yagodah's capacity for clear thinking was short-lived. He believed he enjoyed the acceptance of his World War I comrades, with whom he pretended to laugh as they defied death. Still unable to accept the full extent of his exclusion, he reveals himself again as the outsider, remembering being "so thrilled, so vibrant, that they were willing to accept me as one of them, that I was not their Jew; but their comrade" (R, 113). Unlike Hannah Arendt's noble, conscious pariah, who "tried to make of the emancipation of the Jews
the ideal it should have been—an admission of Jews as Jews to the ranks of humanity.”42 Yagodah, like most assimilated European Jews, was content with limited acceptance; he was content with permission “to ape the gentiles or an opportunity to play the par­venu.”43 So grateful was he for a crumb of toleration, that he was satisfied to have his Jewishness forgotten, negated. He was, in essence, content with deception, content to be tolerated at the expense of his real identity. Thus, Elman makes evident that the anti-Semitism that was rife in Viennese society between 1910–1914 was part of the established European tradition, and he implies that this foundation was instrumental in Germany’s successful management of its genocide program—an implication underscored by references elsewhere to the Vatican’s efforts to save baptized Jews in utter disregard for the lives of observant Jews.

The Reckoning, more documentary in tone and detail than the first two volumes, includes data that appear in standard Holocaust histories. Newman Yagodah’s reflections on public events and his personal experiences during the 1930s and early 1940s offer the reader a condensed account of early twentieth-century Hungarian history. Just as Hungarian territorial ambitions are cited as the motivation for the Hungarian-German alliance, Hungarian disenchantment with Germany follows expansionist achievements and the subsequent inability to disentangle itself from Nazi policies. Elman’s treatment of the German invasion emphasizes its dual imperatives: maintaining Hungary in the Nazi orbit by installing pro-Nazi officials and annihilating Hungarian Jewry. Through the vehicle of Yagodah’s recollections, Elman demonstrates the historic progression of Nazi influence in Hungary, an erratic political climate marked by periods of relative Jewish safety and peril corresponding with Hungary’s reluctant and erratic cooperation with the Axis powers—the successive cycles of hope and disappointment, from relaxation of restrictions to aggressive persecution, that preceded the final slaughter.

In marked contrast to the survivor’s diatribe based on full Holocaust knowledge, Newman Yagodah’s ledger is written in the voice of a bourgeoisie sentimentalist who coveted full European citizenship, but now suffers disenfranchisement, a victim caught up in events he can neither fathom nor control. Relatively trivial moral transgressions disturb him because he suppresses his larger outrage—mass murder of Polish and German Jews. Hence, he laments financial corruption in Hungary.
The Trial of the Damned

The most singularly dreadful effect of this war, . . . is that terrible moral reprobacy afflicting all of civil and official life, . . . it is now common practice to bribe, seduce, and corrupt officialdom whereas before it was always something that one resorted to with some hesitation. (R, 36)

Whereas this early observation reflects the relative safety of Hungarian Jews under the Kallay government, his later notes reflect the harsher more repressive measures of the Horthy regime designed to ameliorate Germany's fears that Hungary would desert the Axis and conclude a separate peace with the Allies. Given the choice between German military occupation and a German approved government, Horthy chose the latter and, therefore, pursued an aggressive accommodation to Germany's destructive goals: increased Jewish labor battalions, increased requisition of Jewish goods and wealth, promotion of ever more severe anti-Jewish biases in the professions and economy, and after March 19, 1944, prohibition of gentiles working in Jewish households, sharp restrictions on Jewish freedom of movement, establishment of curfews, and finally, ghettoization in designated areas prior to deportation.

Elman establishes documentary authenticity in his careful correspondence of Yagodah's personal defeat and the public humiliation of Hungary submitting to Nazification. The collapse of the bourgeois paterfamilias parallels the destruction of Hungarian Jewry that began with anti-Semitic press attacks and progressed to "aryanizations" of labor unions and businesses, imposed Jewish "contributions" to the war effort, the institution of discriminatory legislation requiring Jews to add a middle name of Isaac or Sara, systematic separation of Hungarians and Jews, government encouragement of gentiles blaming Jews for the nation's problems and exploiting them. Even non-Jews who were disinclined to cooperate with government anti-Semitic policies were vulnerable:

The new government is using brass-knuckles tactics for the first time against those who would even pretend to be on friendly terms with us: dismissals without notice; accusations of disloyalty; house arrests and, in some cases, transportations and incarcerations. . . . Now employers are held "Judaistic" or "pro-Yid"; to remain on friendly terms with us is considered a "culpable breach of loyalty," and a "defamation of political leadership." (R, 61)
Yagodah's unsettled economic status illustrates the precarious existence of Hungarian Jews. His commercial and professional work is severely limited and finally stopped altogether by government decree. Yet substantial payments to Nazi causes are imposed on him. He must make financial contributions to the German-Hungarian war effort, to the Arrow Cross, the League for Widows of the Fuhrer Legionaires of the Eastern Front, and pay a constant flow of bribes to the director of Public Services, to the Factory Guards Association, and to former friends and neighbors who extort exorbitant payment for services. Since his income is negligible, he is forced to deplete his savings and to barter his home.

It is not inconceivable that Yagodah had some basis for hope that Hungarian Jews would escape the fate of Polish Jewry. While the Kallay government of 1942–1944 expanded the expropriatory process and the Jewish labor forces, it resisted deportations to the Eastern concentration and death camps. Characteristic of Elman's historic accuracy is Yagodah's expectation of special dispensation for military service. Hungarian regulations in force between 1938–1941 allowed exemptions for wounded and decorated military veterans from various discriminatory laws. Yagodah's 1930s wishful thinking regarding the ability of Jews to be Hungarian in public and Jewish in private is paralleled by his 1944 expectation that military service will exempt him from the fate of Jewish non-veterans. Like the German Jews who deluded themselves into thinking the Nazis would spare Jewish veterans, Yagodah, too, thinks his distinguished military record will guarantee exclusion from the fate of Polish Jewry. He discovers instead the reality of being a disposable Jew. His was the delusion of the post-Enlightenment assimilated Jew who mistakenly expected his loyalty to his nation to be reciprocal. Like a cuckolded husband, Yagodah is bewildered by his country's betrayal of its Jewish citizenry.

The reader gains new understanding of the plight of Hungarian Jews from Newman Yagodah's statements about his work on the Jewish Council. The Council references convey German terror and Jewish impotence caused by intragroup animosity, each vying to save his own family from disaster while simultaneously trying to serve the community. The victims' moral dilemma is poignantly dramatized in the elders' realization that to save oneself or one's own family meant another would be lost to fill the deportation quota. Although Yagodah is able to save his son from an early deportation, he must face the wrath of an angry father whose son
was deported. Another irate Jew advises Yagodah: "They are preparing this stew for all of us. Whether you like it or not we are all going to boil inside the very same pot" (R, 87).

The deportation assembly scene, the most heartrending of the first volume, is reconstructed at length in the third, but with significant differences, primarily in the areas of economic and historic analysis and a thorough expository rendering of Newman Yagodah’s earlier life. These details shed light on his contemporary confusion and anxiety. In *The 28th Day of Elul* the assembly scene simultaneously benefits from dramatic immediacy and post-Holocaust insight. It is rendered in great detail to inform the innocent American lawyer of Holocaust history and to convey the progressive humiliation and degradation of a people. As a survivor memoir and reflection, the account is coherently delivered and benefits from a twenty-year historic perspective that parallels it to the concentrationary universe. Conversely, *The Reckoning’s* presentation is fragmentary and diffuse, evoking the confusion and terror of the victims who must make judgments based on Nazi deceptions, Hungarian duplicity, and world wide disinterest. Newman’s assembly rendition dramatizes the victims’ frustration, impotence, confusion, and fear. Unlike the survivor’s diction and gallows humor, which reflect Holocaust irrationality, Newman’s questions suggest prewar concepts of rational behavior and consequence: “What is happening to all of us?” and “How have we deserved any of this?” convey his moral indignation. “To be herded like so many cattle, to be branded like so much scorched and writhing flesh—why us? For what purpose?” (R, 111).

In place of the survivor’s analytic account is the victim’s silent petition:

> No No No not yet please because we are helpless and weak and we really don’t wish to harm anybody, but the world is, ... indifferent to our protestations. ... If we are to be sacrificed, it is a matter of inevitability, declares this indifferent world. But why? For what? What might we have done to make an indifferent world compassionate? (R, 129)

In sharp contrast to the survivor’s bitter understanding of world indifference to Jewry’s slaughter is the victim’s desperate hope for deliverance. In accord with the third volume’s larger sociological and historic approach, its assembly scene becomes a memorial tableau of those to be lost in the Holocaust, a prefunerary elegy for
lives about to be vanquished. Stopping the deportation process in *medias res*, Elman freezes time—as the Jew's wrist is frozen prior to tattooing—to incorporate a flashback detailing Newman Yagodah's checkered history, a childhood scarred by economic and emotional insecurity, an adolescence mixed with the pain of social ostracism and poverty relieved by academic achievement, a courtship beginning in passion and deteriorating into a marriage of social and economic convenience. Alternating retrospective revery with contemporary interruptions, Elman boldly contrasts the promise and vigor of a civilized and productive European life with intimations of approaching debasement and death. The assembly scene provides expository detail on how the crass materialist was forged in the crucible of poverty and social ostracism. The son of a selfish philanderer who deserted his family, Newman Yagodah was raised in his grandfather's household, and after the old man's death, he suffered loneliness as the neglected child of an overworked mother forced to give all her attention to earning a living. Yagodah was a sensitive but troubled adolescent alienated from his boorish brother and his mother's equally boorish lover. Academic success and hard work were the vehicles of his escape from squalor to a profession and marriage above his social class. Although Newman remains an unattractive person even in his own narration, he is more richly drawn, a complex amalgam of the contradictory forces of the early twentieth-century patterns of alternate integration and segregation of European Jews. This portrayal engages the reader's sympathy for Newman Yagodah much more fervently than does his son's account in *The 28th Day of Elul*. The satiric treatment in *Elul* of the elder's preening in the assembly scene gives way in *The Reckoning* to the pathetic collapse of a carefully and painstakingly constructed social demeanor in the decades prior to the Nazi madness.

The assembly digression is further enriched by Yagodah's speculation on how his fate might have differed had he chosen socialism, Zionism, or emigration to America after World War I rather than supporting Hungarian nationalism and joining the ranks of industrial-capitalists. Elman is one of a small company of writers who link the subject of Zionism and an independent state of Israel to their treatment of the Holocaust. Like I. B. Singer's secular Jews, who realize that the only salvation for Jewry is an independent state, Elman's Hungarian nationalist becomes pro-Zionist, writing of the need for a Jewish nation and homeland. However,
since he is so attuned to European life and unwilling in advanced years to emigrate, Yagadah remains a philosophical Zionist and tries to convince his children to leave Europe, stipulating in his last will and testament that they “use the means I have given them to emigrate to Palestine to live out their lives as Jews in a Jewish Nation” (R, 80). The Jewish parvenu, who vainly sought entry to the “respectable” gentile world through professional and business associations and was rewarded with betrayal and rejection, wants a more substantive citizenship for his children. He has neither a significant position in Hungarian society, which is itself in the process of moral collapse, nor an alternative Judaic tradition. As Yagadah prepares for deportation, he rejects his earlier optimism for a tolerant post-Enlightenment Europe and recognizes that the Holocaust is the culmination of centuries of Christian anti-Semitism: “all the martyred dead of our history, the mounds of dust and ashes, the blasted hillocks of graveyards . . . . Before our eyes swirls the future, more clouds of ash and dust” (R, 114).

Yagodah’s assembly square revery ends with an abrupt return to contemporary reality—the urgent need to negotiate his family’s escape. He turns for assistance to Skirzeny, the person who will benefit most from his departure. The extortionist, a representative European gentile, profits from the genocide of the Jews. He agrees to arrange a family escape on the condition that he gains the estate, and a bonus of the estate furnishings, that Yagodah won from him in a business transaction. Accustomed to providing for his family and having others beseech him for assistance, Yagodah is now reduced to dependence on Skirzeny’s mercy.

Significant among the strengths of the trilogy is the recreation of the Jewish-Hungarian plight as an analogue to the death camp experience, without setting the fiction in the camps. Through the assembly roundup and subsequent escape strategy, Elman evokes camp despair and desperation—the bitter loss of control over one’s destiny and the process of becoming subject to malignant whim. Yagodah is neither a tragic hero nor a martyr in the traditional literary or religious patterns because he has no freedom to choose, no freedom to act and bear the consequences. Skirzeny, like Dr. Mengele of Auschwitz, determines who will live and who will die, selects which Yagodah family members will be included in the fraudulent escape plan and which will not. Despite the appearance of Yagodah as a negotiator, he is simply a pawn is Skirzeny’s system of capital gains, as the Jewish elders were pawns of the Germans.
Just as options were severely restricted in the camp universe, so, too, are Yagodah's. The only real choice Yagodah has is whether to cooperate with Skirzeny and try to save eight of nine family members, or refuse Skirzeny's demand for Lilo and condemn his entire family to death. His "choice" is within the Holocaust framework of alternate evils and is not comparable to the moral challenges of free men in ordinary circumstances. Because Yagodah is operating as a victim of Nazism, his behavior must be judged in the same way we would the inmates of the concentration and death camps, as the behavior of persons suffering atrocity. Yagodah's "choice" is similar to that of Tadeusz Borowski's mother in *This Way For the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen*, a mother whose will to live is so strong that she tries to distance herself from her child during the Auschwitz selections because she instinctively senses that she has an opportunity to survive as an unencumbered worker, but is destined for immediate gassing if she remains with her young child; it is also similar to that described by Olga Lengyel, a physician-survivor of Auschwitz, who writes of physicians killing the newborn infants and pretending they were stillborn in order to save the mothers who would otherwise have been sent to death with their infants. Yagodah's pre-camp selection is an evocation of camp brutality, where families were arbitrarily separated for slave labor or slaughter, where parents sometimes had to choose which child should go to the gas chamber first. Yagodah's family selection may also be read as the private analogue to his public position as Jewish Council member. On the private level, he is forced to choose, as he did in the public sphere when ordered to measure one life against another, who will go into a labor or death transport and who will remain behind.

Lawrence Langer, whose observations of Holocaust literature are among the most salient, isolates an important truth of Holocaust reality as it applies to victims and survivors: "the Holocaust has little to do with playing the hero, for victim or survivor... Imposing heroic expectations misinterprets the moment; no triumphant gesture exists"; suffering does not automatically lead to moral growth. "Staying alive in the camps sometimes required the practice of being less than human." One may say the same of those destined for the camps, already tattooed and listed for the transports. From the safety of a reader's armchair, some demand that Yagodah be more than human, save all nine, despite his powerlessness. Rather than the victim, it is the destructive experience that is to be condemned. Rather than the victim, forced to
operate within a system he did not create, perpetrators of the crimes are to be condemned. Yagodah is neither hero nor villain, just an ordinary man caught in extraordinary circumstances. Yagodah's moral dilemma is a projection of camp existence, which often required prisoners to prey upon each other in order to survive. It is not the Jew who barbarized the moral premises by which civilized people live but the Nazis and their willing collaborators. To shift the blame for moral laxity to the Jewish victim is intellectually absurd and morally reprehensible. And Elman has shown us that it is still possible, despite all we know, to fall into the trap of blaming the Jews for every abomination, including Holocaust misconduct. "Heroic defiance, growing into tragic insight, needs a vision of moral order to nourish it, and this is precisely what the Holocaust universe lacks."47 Richard Elman understood this. 'Tis a pity some of his critics have not.

The trilogy gains substance from the manifold ways in which the three volumes intertwine. Elman advances the cause of American Holocaust literature in his explicit inclusions of Holocaust history. Moving past mere delineation of the existential Holocaust experience, he explores the Holocaust's implications for Jewish religious and political survival, employing theoretical discussion, dramatic treatment, and epigraphical allusion to Judaism and Zionism. Further, since he has created characters suffering from self-hatred, hatred predicated on internalizing anti-Semitic prejudices within a culture that postulated polarity between European Jews and non-Jews, the trilogy demonstrates the danger of Jews succumbing to out-group anti-Semitic identification of the sort Jean Paul Sartre describes in Jew and Anti-Semite. Furthermore, both Newman and Bela argue against the false lures of assimilation and urge post-Holocaust Jews to live as Jews in the Diaspora if necessary, but preferably in a Jewish nation. Each incorporates variations of this attitude in his last will and testament, and the family's Holocaust survivors transform the vision into reality.

Like Elie Wiesel, Elman is concerned with the central issue of the Holocaust: how it came to be that one people decided to annihilate another; how it came to be that world opinion condoned this crime; and how, in the light of our post-Holocaust knowledge, we must rethink man and God. Like Wiesel, Elman isolates the inversion of values whereby the innocent are called upon to justify their survival. Elman's survivor-protagonist also shares with Wiesel's survivor in Dawn the vital connection between the violence of the Holo-
caust and the new Israeli consciousness, one fashioned by Holocaust awareness and fused with the lingering presence of the Holocaust dead. Although Elman's survivor did not experience the concentration camp, he shares with Wiesel's characters the notion that post-Holocaust man cannot live by the same values that served him in the pre-Holocaust era. Alex Yagodah shares with the narrators of Wiesel's *The Accident* and Singer's *Enemies* the knowledge that the disintegration rather than the reintegration of the survivor is the primary post-Holocaust existential truth. "Anyone who has seen what they have seen cannot be like the others, cannot laugh, love, pray, bargain, suffer, have fun, or forget."48 The Elman survivor, like the Wiesel survivor and the Singer survivor, is different, maimed and trapped by what he has survived.

Elman's significant contribution to Holocaust literature is noted by Elie Wiesel who wrote, his "ideas are provocative, his outcry uncompromising, . . . [he] touches on the most important human and philosophical questions of our time."49 The trilogy's epigraph, taken from Miguel De Unamuno's *The Life of Don Quixote and Sancho*, accurately mirrors Elman's narrative purpose:

I would open up your breast and in your heart's core, I would make a wound into it I would rub vinegar and salt, so that you might never again know peace, but would live in continual anguish and endless longing.

Unamuno's words provide an apt prologue to Elman's moral scrutiny, his sensitivity to the atrocities in which his fellows were transformed to smoke and ash, and his concern that their suffering may be forgotten, as their pleas for help were unanswered. The author of the trilogy, like the writer of the epigraph, uses the moral imperative of the creative artist to address the elemental anguish of the human heart so that his readers will be touched and moved to think and feel and remember and ask, as the survivor does, "What was it that perished in the camps—Man or the idea of Man" (*E*, 15)?