INTRODUCTION

The Holocaust Universe in American Fiction

Historians, artists, and critics who contemplate the imaginative integration of the Holocaust in fiction recognize its pitfalls. Some critics argue that Holocaust literature unavoidably diminishes the suffering that victims endured. Some believe that only eyewitness accounts are valid. Hannah Arendt, who has written brilliantly on the nature of totalitarianism, believes the horror of life in the concentration camps can never be fully embraced by the imagination, "for the very reason that it stands outside of life and death."1 T. W. Adorno's dictum, "No poetry after Auschwitz," has haunted many. Elie Wiesel and George Steiner have at various times identified silence as the deepest form of respect for the Holocaust victims. Yet the literary careers of both Wiesel and Steiner testify to the paradox of Holocaust-imposed silence and compelled speech. Six million Jewish victims must not be consigned to oblivion. The murdered must be mourned and remembered.

Representative of the immediate postwar American intellec-
tual response to the "age of enormity" is Isaac Rosenfeld's 1948 recognition of the problematics of Holocaust comprehension.

We still don't understand what happened to the Jews of Europe, and perhaps we never will. There have been books, magazine and newspaper articles, eyewitness accounts, letters, diaries, documents certified by the highest authorities on the life in ghettos and concentration camps, slave factories and extermination centers under the Germans. By now we know all there is to know. But it hasn't helped; we still don't understand. It is too painful for the majority—besides, who wants to understand?2

Rosenfeld realized that mankind has, in the Holocaust era, surpassed its historic notions of good and evil, that the Holocaust initiated a condition of "terror beyond evil."3 In the same year, Lionel Trilling addressed the inadequacy of literary response to the Holocaust, even in light of growing knowledge of Holocaust history. Trilling, like Elie Wiesel and the Yiddish poet Uri Zvi Greenberg, recognized that there are no adequate analogues to the Holocaust in history or literature:

Society's resistance to the discovery of depravity has ceased; now everyone knows that Thackery was wrong, Swift right. The world and the soul have spilt open of themselves and are all agape for our revolted inspection. The simple eye of the camera shows us, at Belsen and Buchenwald, horrors that quite surpass Swift's powers, a vision of life turned back to its corrupted elements which is more disgusting than any that Shakespeare could contrive, a cannibalism more literal and fantastic than that which Montaigne ascribed to organized society. A characteristic activity of mind is therefore no longer needed. Indeed, before what we now know the mind stops; the great psychological fact of our time which we all observe with baffled wonder and shame is that there is no possible way of responding to Belsen and Buchenwald. The activity of mind fails before the incommunicability of man's suffering.4

Alfred Kazin speaks for many American Jews when he writes of the intrusion of the Holocaust in his consciousness, describing it as the "nightmare that would bring everything else into question, that will haunt me to my last breath."5 Few Jews have escaped some version of Kazin's nightmare of himself, his parents, his family, his neighbors, and his friends: "fuel for flames, dying by a single flame that burned us all up at once."6 Kazin's nightmare is a manifestation of
George Steiner's observation that "Jews everywhere have been maimed by the European catastrophe, that the massacre has left all who survived (even if they were nowhere near the actual scene) off balance."7

During the late 1960s, a significant change occurred in Jewish-American Holocaust fiction. Early in the decade Holocaust delineation was virtually absent from Jewish-American literature, and by decade's end it was an ever present, though subdued, component of the fiction. In a 1966 essay on Israeli Holocaust fiction, Robert Alter lamented, "With all the restless probing into the implications of the Holocaust that continues to go on in Jewish intellectual forums . . . it gives one pause to note how rarely American Jewish fiction has attempted to come to terms . . . with the European catastrophe."8 Three years later, Lothar Kahn observed "No Jewish writer . . . has written a book without the memory of Auschwitz propelling him to issue warnings, implied or specific, against the Holocaust."9 The sixties marked the beginning of widespread American interest in Holocaust literature and the ensuing decades have witnessed the development of a substantial body of work.

The writers treated in this study did not directly experience the ghettos, camps, and killing centers. That innocence, however, does not deny them the privilege of writing about the Holocaust. Authority is not limited to those with personal suffering. Nor is authenticity guaranteed by personal suffering. Emil Fackenheim, who was incarcerated at Sachsenhausen, asserts that it was not until years later—when he read a study of that camp—that he felt he truly understood his own experience and what had occurred there.10 Deception of the victims was such an integral part of the administrative policies in the camps that it is possible historical accounts could contain information hidden from camp inmates. Authority may be achieved from the will of the artist to learn and shape the material. Although the writers whose works I examine have not directly shared the Jewish experience in Europe in 1939-1945, they share the historic burden of Jewish history. Tradition commands all Jews to consider themselves figuratively present at Sinai to receive the Torah. Contemporary Jews increasingly feel that, geography aside, they were present at Auschwitz. American Jews carry the psychological burden of Auschwitz and Chelmno and Dachau and Bergen-Belsen and Treblinka and all the other Nazi death factories where their relatives died brutal deaths.

A year before the 1948 commentaries of Rosenfeld and Trill-
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ing, Saul Bellow's *The Victim*, a novel whose symbolic underpinnings are delineated in Holocaust images, was published. Although Bellow's approach is muted and includes only one overt Holocaust reference, he addressed the topic while focusing the novel on the related topic of anti-Semitism. Despite their psychological association with the *Shoah*, the writers in this study, with the exception of Saul Bellow, began to write Holocaust literature in the sixties after the Europeans. Perhaps as nonparticipants, Americans believed it would have been presumptuous to deal with subject matter they did not experience directly. Perhaps they believed it was too soon to approach the topic without the benefit of adequate historic analysis. Perhaps since Jewish writers had only recently gained acceptance by the literary establishment, they were unwilling to broach a topic as controversial as the Holocaust.

What accounts for the intensification of the treatment of the Holocaust in Jewish-American fiction at the end of the sixties and through the seventies and eighties? The trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem and the 1967 Arab-Israeli Six Day War appear to have stimulated American interest in the Holocaust. The Eichmann trial, the intellectual debate aroused by Hannah Arendt's analysis of the trial, and her "banality of evil" thesis again brought Holocaust crimes to the forefront of American Jewish thought. Several Israeli writers who "derived their authority from their participation in the War of Independence in 1948"\(^\text{11}\) departed from customary national themes and finally confronted the Holocaust following the Eichmann trial.\(^\text{12}\) The post-Eichmann transformation from Holocaust silence to expression in Israeli literature was paralleled in American writing.

The 1967 joint Arab attack on Israel and its concomitant Nazi-style threats to annihilate Israel provided another catalyst for the development of imaginative Holocaust literature. Since the 1967 and 1973 Arab-Israeli wars, petrol politics has helped fuel international anti-Israeli propaganda, and once again in the twentieth century a large segment of the Jewish people is threatened with extinction. The unthinkable is again thinkable and is the articulated policy of most of Israel's geographic neighbors. When Jean Paul Sartre linked Zionists with Nazis, and a coalition of Third World and Communist countries in the United Nations branded Israel a racist society, Jews were even more threatened by hostile forces. Nations that appeased Hitler in the thirties and forties acquiesce in the seventies and eighties to Middle Eastern terrorists;
anti-Semitism is, therefore, again on the rise, leading scholars and artists to renewed interest in the Holocaust. With the revival of Nazi rhetoric—even in America, where Jews believe they are safe and assimilated, just as German Jews believed half a century ago—many have been moved to think and some to write in the Holocaust framework. Whatever the reason, or aggregate of reasons, we now have in American literature an admirable body of fiction addressing the Holocaust. Although it is interesting to speculate about the confluence of causes that have generated American Jewish Holocaust literature in recent decades, from its historic inception the Holocaust has haunted the Jewish American imagination, and its expression was long overdue.

Historically the German annihilation of Jews is widely interpreted both as the logical outcome of a two-thousand year old European, anti-Jewish tradition nourished by the Christian churches and as a drastic new policy formulated according to a racial doctrine, which asserted that the superior Aryan race had to rid itself of the debasing presence of the inferior Jewish race. After 1933, hatred of Jews was raised to the level of law. Rassenkunde—racial science—dominated Germany's intellectual climate and infiltrated every segment of national life during the Hitler era. Religion, science, philosophy, law, economics, and history recast their old premises to acknowledge the danger of the "jewish poison." Historians generally concur that the success of the war against European Jewry is substantially attributable to the continent's historic Christian anti-Semitism as manifested in anti-Jewish edicts, expulsions, pogroms, and mass murders—all rationalized by the need to keep Christian Europe free from Jewish influence.

Determinist racial theory, contending that human destiny is decreed by nature and expressed in race and that history is determined by the iron fist of race, is bankrupt and has come to naught. As Hitler came to power, the emptiness of Nazi ideology was revealed in rule by brute force and by exploitation of conquered peoples rather than viable social, economic, and political philosophy. Perhaps for these reasons, novelists give minor attention to Nazi racial theory, focusing instead on the Christian attitude toward Jews throughout European history as a primary element in the success of Nazi propaganda and its Judenrein objectives. The causal relationship between historic Christian anti-Semitism and the Holocaust is a recurrent subject of American Holocaust literature. Rather than emphasize the distinctions between Christian
and Nazi anti-Jewish policies, the novelists more often dramatize their similarities to demonstrate the acceptability of the Final Solution in Christian Europe. The writers also make clear the significance of the strategies of Christian anti-Semitism in the implementation of the Final Solution. Each of the authors treated in this study portray the major catastrophes of Jewish history in the Diaspora as annunciations of the Holocaust. Although the novelists acknowledge distinctions in the racial and technological aspects of Nazi genocide and Christian anti-Jewish persecutions, they persistently raise the moral implications of Christian anti-Semitism as a source of Western acquiescence to Germany's war against the Jews and as explanation for the zealous role of non-Germans in facilitating the slaughter of the Jews.

Like the handful of Christian scholars and theologians, such as Henry Cargas and Robert Drinan, who have acknowledged Christian Holocaust culpability, the novelists allude to the similarity of Martin Luther's assertion, "next to the devil life has no enemy more cruel, more venomous and violent than a true Jew," and Hitler's statement in *Mein Kampf*, "I believe that I am today acting in accordance with the will of the Almighty Creator: by defending myself against the Jew I am fighting for the work of the Lord." Like the historian who describes Hitler "reechoing the medieval Christian stereotype of the Jew as criminal, parasite, evil incarnate, aiming at world conquest," the novelists show the analogy between the church's historic efforts to protect the Christian community from Jewish teaching and the German desire for racial purity. Nazi rhetoric is perceived as latter-day racist revision of traditional religious bigotry. Parallels are drawn between the church and Nazi persecutions of the Jews, including the progression from book burnings to human burnings; visual differentiation of Jews from the general population by requiring identifying badges; prohibitions against intermarriage; exclusion from businesses, schools, and professions, and the social and cultural activities of the community; ghettoization; and finally mass murders.

The Holocaust gave rise to unique categories of fictional characters, often classified by their attitudes or job statuses in the concentrationary hierarchy. Wallant's Nazerman, a *sonderkommando* who had to shovel the corpses from the gas chambers into the crematorium, is troubled by memories of brutal *kapos* who herded men to labor; others remember the lessons learned from the *muslims*, the living dead, who were unable or lacked incentive to
practice techniques that might keep them from joining the ranks in the death selections, such as personal sanitation, a spritely walk, or rouging the cheeks in order to look healthier. Leslie Epstein takes the fullest opportunity to explore Jewish and German functionaries, the Jewish ghetto elder and his Nazi-instituted Jewish Council members, Jewish police, resistance smugglers, organizers, fighters, and ghetto workers. A recurring character in the fiction of Malamud and Ozick is the survivor-mentor, whose function is to instruct untutored and lapsed American Jews in the significance of Jewish history, ethics, and sacred literature—or in Potok's and Ozick's cases, to teach in American religious communities. A related role is Wallant's and Bellow's use of survivor as judge and critic of contemporary life. Not infrequently, in the worlds of Ozick, Potok, and Malamud, these survivor-mentors resemble stock figures in Yiddish literature and folklore, and lamed-vov tzaddikim (the thirty-six hidden saints), the Hasidic tzaddik (righteous model) or the rebe. Malamud's last Mohican, a schnorrer (mendicant) survivor, teaches an American artist Jewish history; Potok's boy fashions an imaginary golem to fight Nazis, and Ozick invokes Rabbi Akiva's Bene Brak.

Typically Jewish-American Holocaust literature focuses on the Jewish victims of Nazism and consigns the Germans to verbal oblivion. Concentration on the victims rather than the perpetrators of the crime adheres to the archetypal tradition of Jewish commemorative liturgy, which mourns martyrs and relegates villains to a tangential reference at best, possibly stemming from the liturgical petition to "blot out the names of our enemies." Aside from the historic figures who administer Epstein’s ghetto and Elman’s references to Eichmann’s contrivance of the Brand and Kastner negotiations in 1944, Germans remain peripheral ghosts in Jewish-American Holocaust literature.

Struggle for survival during the Holocaust and during the postwar era constitute significant parallel themes in American fiction. Although American Holocaust fiction devotes considerably less attention to the description and dramatization of Nazi brutality than the works of Europeans and Israelis who directly endured the Nazi terror, dramatic presentation, memory, and nightmare are devices Americans frequently employ to depict the horrors of starvation, disease, excremental filth, medical experimentation, sadism, deportations, and death selections. After witnessing the asphyxiation of his fellow ghettoites in a mobile gas chamber and
their subsequent stripping of gold teeth and hair, Epstein's protagonist struggles to maintain his sanity. Elman's protagonist is deceived in his good faith negotiations to barter his property and wealth for the safe passage of his family out of Hungary. Unlike Epstein and Elman who set their novels in the Holocaust era, most of the writers in this study use recollection and nightmare to record survivors' endurance of Holocaust humiliation and pain. Wallant's protagonist dreams of the surgery he suffered without benefit of anesthetic, remembers witnessing his wife's rape and his countryman's electrocution, and recalls being forced to move the corpses of his family and friends from the gas chamber to the crematorium. Bellow's protagonist speaks of escaping from a mass grave and hiding in a forest from Polish partisans who preferred to complete the Nazi genocidal objective rather than have Jews survive in Poland. Singer's protagonist frequently recalls his concealment in a haystack, and Ozick's recalls his fugitive fears in a convent cellar and barn. Through direct dramatic convention and indirect retrospective revery, American fiction charts the history of degradation that characterized the survival struggle in Nazi-controlled Europe.

The more common and extensive treatment of survival in American fiction is devoted to the problems of postwar survival trauma. After overcoming the horrendous difficulties in the ghettos and camps, survivors suffered from both physical and psychological wounds. Extended postwar physical and psychological debilitation appears in Bellow's *Mr. Sammler's Planet*; Wallant's *The Pawnbroker*; Singer's *Enemies, Shosha, “The Cafeteria, “ “Hanka,” and “The Mentor”*; Malamud's *“The German Refugee”*; Ozick's *The Cannibal Galaxy*; Elman's *The 28th Day of Elul*; Cohen's *In the Days of Simon Stern*; Steiner's *The Portage to San Cristobal of A.H.*; and Potok's *In the Beginning* and *“The Dark Place Inside.”* In addition to depicting the survivors' long-term, Holocaust-generated physical ailments, the writers focus on the depression that stems from the guilt many feel for outliving families and friends; the recurrent nightmares and memories of Holocaust indignities, betrayals, and torture; the loss of faith and rejection of obligatory duties and rituals; and the failure to resume prewar ambitions and professions. Malamud's literary critic loses the ability to communicate in his native language; Wallant's Cracow University professor becomes a pawnbroker; Bellow's artist degenerates into a painter and sculptor of the grotesque; Ozick's aspiring astronomer becomes a
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mediocre educational administrator; Singer's Talmudic prodigy descends to hack essayist. Others suffer identity and religious crises, impairment of the capacity to love and trust others, death or disorientation of the creative impulse. Many are trapped by their Holocaust experiences. Some continue to manifest wartime behavior, such as searching for places of concealment; others dream of revenge; and still others interpret postwar violence in light of Holocaust knowledge. Each of the survivor-protagonists manifests alienation and suffers unbidden memories, nightmares, and psychological disquiet. "More recent novels with immigrant-survivor protagonists are likely to stress the homelessness of the immigrant, his separation from Americans who have not experienced near-death and qualified rebirth as he has." 17 This phenomenon appears in the histories of Wallant's, Bellow's, Cohen's, and Singer's protagonists. Unlike the immigrants of American-Jewish fiction set in the pre-Holocaust period, the postHolocaust immigrants do not seek assimilation and acculturation, but continue instead to grapple with the European past and often labor to preserve their Jewish particularity, history, and tradition. 18

American Holocaust fiction demonstrates the constant change in the human condition and the perspective wrought in the Holocaust crucible. Although all survivors suffer Holocaust trauma, some engage in a regenerative process that takes the form of rebuilding Judaism and the Jewish community in America and Israel. Central to the concerns of the religious survivors is the preservation and transmission of the Jewish past. Potok's yeshiva teachers and scholars try to build new centers of Jewish learning in America and Steiner's Israeli Nazi hunters try to bring Nazis to justice and retain the Holocaust in the historic record opposing forces that would diminish or deny its significance. In the fictional worlds of Cohen, Ozick, and Potok, preservation and transmission of the Jewish sacred legacy is essential to the witness's testimony. Enoch Vand begins to study the Torah and the Talmud. Joseph Brill develops a dual Hebrew/Western curriculum, and Bleilip returns to the orthodoxy he scorned. Potok's rabbis and writers are strengthened in their devotion to Jewish practices and learning; Simon Stern builds a survivors' compound on the Akiva model. Even prewar Anglophile Sammler manifests renewed interest in Jewish particularity and history. Singer's Communists, Socialists, and secular intellectuals often recant and return to the values of Jewish orthodoxy or ethics. In one way or another, these protagonists respond to the
Holocaust tragedy by revitalizing their Jewish identities and commitments. They become committed to "increased emphasis on Jewishness and traditionalism . . . [as] part of the post-Holocaust sensibility."19

Wallant, Bellow, Singer, Steiner, and Cohen create survivor communities that function like a Greek chorus, amplifying the tragic hero's positions and commenting on the actions and opinions of the principal dramatic figures. This device has been particularly valuable for enlarging the Holocaust canvases beyond the protagonist's experience and in incorporating the diversity of Holocaust history and the national peculiarities and operations of distinctive ghettos and camps. Thus, through the extended survivor community, Wallant deals with the Buchenwald and Bergen-Belsen camps; Bellow with the Lodz Ghetto and Buchenwald, in addition to Polish forest partisan units; Singer with the Nazi occupations of Poland and Russia; Steiner with the German, British, French, and Russian spheres of influence as well as various ghettos and camps experienced by a team of Nazi hunters; and Cohen with the French, Austrian, and German experiences.

A minor theme in the fiction is the interpretation of the Holocaust in light of the establishment of an independent Jewish homeland in Israel, the second major event of twentieth-century Jewish history. Although the American novelists neither link the two events politically, suggesting that Israel's birth was an acceptable outcome of the Holocaust, nor suggest that the meaning of the Holocaust is found in the creation of a Jewish state, they often link the perils of contemporary Israeli survival to the threats in the Nazi era to European Jewry. Analogies are often drawn either in character dialogue or authorial voice between Nazi and Arab anti-Jewish rhetoric and propaganda. Bellow, Singer, Steiner, and Elman set portions of their Holocaust narratives in Israel and introduce Israeli Holocaust survivors who parallel Arab rhetoric, war, and terrorist policies to those of the Nazis and proudly contrast Israeli military assertiveness with historic Jewish diasporan passivity in the face of anti-Semitism. Even the non-Israeli Jewish characters in this fiction interpret Israeli political and military policies regarding security according to Holocaust history. Although the topic of Jewish immigration to Israel is generally given short shrift in American fiction, it is a concern of the Holocaust fiction, appearing as a political theme in Bellow's, Elman's, and Steiner's works, and as political and spiritual themes in Singer's and Potok's works.
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A related subject of American Holocaust fiction is the post Shoah status of theodicy and Judaism. Called into question are the three pillars of historic Judaism: God, Torah, and the Jewish people. The Holocaust, more than any other event in Jewish history, taxes the Jew's faith in a just and merciful God and provokes questions about the nature of God, the covenant between God and Israel, and the nature of man. Since the covenant implies a moral partnership between God and His people, the Jew asserts his moral position in these protestations. Jews question the meaning of Jewish identity in our time, whether traditional Jewish responses to evil and persecution are still viable options, and what kind of Judaism is appropriate in the post-Holocaust era.

Jewish novelists write as descendants of the biblical protestors and interrogators of divine purpose. Judaism has a tradition of theological protest dating from the biblical histories of Job, Abraham, Moses, and Jeremiah. Elie Wiesel uses the metaphor of a trial in The Gates of the Forest, a tale of four rabbis who convene a court in their concentration camp to confront God with His sins. The prosecutor announces his intent "to convict God of murder, for He is destroying His people and the Law He gave them from Mt. Sinai." Not unexpectedly, the judges return a guilty verdict. Without the formal trial structure, I. B. Singer also incorporates the theme of judging the Almighty for Holocaust sins. Several characters in Enemies, A Love Story and the heroine of "The Mentor" try to convict the passive deity. Chaim Potok's Israeli Holocaust survivor and George Steiner's Nazi hunter also indict God of crimes against the Jewish people. Richard Elman's Yagodah, a secularist, asks the pertinent questions without the benefit of traditional Judaic learning.

Representative of the major Jewish Holocaust theological and philosophical responses are questioning and protest against God's inaction in the face of injustice. Contemporary theses promulgated by Richard Rubenstein, Emil Fackenheim, Eliezar Berkovits, and Irving Greenberg derive from the biblical and prophetic tradition. Although the moderns categorically reject mi-penei hata' einu, an explanation that posits catastrophe as just retribution for sin, they differ widely in their conclusions. Rubenstein argues that the only response to the death camps is rejection of God, posits the meaninglessness of existence in a universe in which there is neither divine plan nor divine concern, and proposes that the human condition reflects no transcendental purpose. Instead of a covenantal
bond, Rubenstein urges a strong commitment to the survival of the Jewish people. Emil Fackenheim insists on reaffirming God and Judaism, arguing that to do otherwise would give Hitler a posthumous victory. Eliezar Berkovits accepts the uniqueness of the Holocaust in the magnitude of its destruction, but rejects the notion of a consequent unique theological dilemma, since Jewry has throughout its history suffered terrible persecutions and retained faith. Irving Greenberg accepts Holocaust-wrought vacillation between moments of faith and renunciation.

In *After Auschwitz: Radical Theology and Contemporary Judaism*, Rubenstein denies divine will and the world and history as manifestations of divine purpose. Rejecting God and the traditional Jewish theological framework, Rubenstein affirms instead the existential belief that people must create meaning and value. He argues further that with the "death of God," the significance of the community of Israel is more important: "It is precisely because human existence is tragic, ultimately hopeless, and without meaning that we treasure our religious community." For Rubenstein the post-Holocaust Jewish identity is fashioned in "the shared vicissitudes of history, culture, and psychological perspective." One finds the characters expounding this view in "The Mentor," *The 28th Day of Elul*, *The Portage to San Cristobal of A.H.*, and "The Last Mohican."

In *God's Presence in History*, Emil Fackenheim rejects the Rubenstein thesis, countering that a more appropriate response to the Holocaust is to keep God and Israel together. Also rejecting the *mi-penei hata' einu* theory of retribution for sins, Fackenheim does not seek to explain the Holocaust because its enormity transcends all traditional explanations of suffering and evil. In his postwar reappraisal of Judaism, Fackenheim finds Jewish liberal belief in the perfectability of man invalid, but still affirms the orthodox position on the centrality of God in human history and the covenantal bond between God and Israel. Fackenheim's acceptance of the covenant is based on a reading of Jewish history that distinguishes central events as "root" experiences and "epoch making events":

The most powerful incidents, such as those connected with the Exodus from Egypt and the giving of the Torah at Sinai, actually created the religious identity of the Jewish people. These creative extraordinary happenings Fackenheim calls "root experiences." [They] are
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historical events of such a formative character that they continue to
influence all future "presents" of the people . . . these past moments
legislate to every future era . . . They belong to the collective memory
of the people and continue to claim the allegiance of the nation. . . .
[They] provide the accessibility of Divine Presence in the here and
now . . . thus the Jew is "assured that the saving God of the past saves
still." 23

Distinguished from the "root experiences" are those occasions Facken­
heim calls "epoch making events," which are not formative in
that they do not create the essentials of Jewish faith.

but rather they are crises that challenge the "root experiences"
through new situations, which test the resiliency and generality of
"root experiences" to answer to new and unprecedented conditions
and realities. For example, the destruction of the First and Second
Temples severely tested whether or not the commanding and saving
Presence of God could be maintained. 24

The Holocaust is an "epoch making event." Yet Fackenheim con­
tends "the Jew must still affirm the continued proximity of God in
Jewish history . . . and he must affirm the present reality of the
people's 'root experience' of a commanding God (at Sinai) now
commanding Israel from within the Holocaust itself." 25 The reli­
gious Jews in the fictions of Potok, Singer, and Ozick share these
thoughts without expressing them in Fackenheimian vocabulary.
This view is at the heart of Singer's Shosha, Ozick's "Bloodshed"
and Cannibal Galaxy, Cohen's In the Days of Simon Stern, and Potok's
In the Beginning.

Fackenheim takes the Jobian position, "Though He slay me,
yet shall I trust in Him," (Job 13:15) and his rationale is that Jews
are under a sacred obligation to survive as Jews. Jews are "forbid­
den to despair of the God of Israel, lest Judaism perish" and Hitler
be granted a posthumous victory. 26 For Fackenheim, the God of
deliverance is affirmed in the establishment and maintenance of
the State of Israel. What Auschwitz denies, Israel affirms and pro­
vides living testimony to God's continued presence in history. Bel­
low's Sammler and Malamud's Bok come to similar conclusions in
secular terms and the religious devotees in the fiction of Potok,
Ozick, Singer, and Cohen express these convictions in terms more
closely associated with, although not necessarily derivative of,
Fackenheim.
In *Faith after the Holocaust*, Eliezar Berkovits searches the tradition for concepts to help deal with the death camps. He joins Rubenstein and Fackenheim in rejecting the *mi-penei hata' einu* thesis, arguing that it is “an injustice absolute,” but adds, “It was an injustice countenanced by God.” He arrives at this belief through the tradition’s explanation of God’s tolerance of evil known as *hester panim* (Hiding of the Face of God), postulating that occasionally God inexplicably turns His face from man and that such hiddenness is necessary for man to exercise free will, because only by withdrawing from history and abstaining from intervention in the human condition, despite great injustice and evil, does God facilitate freedom of choice. Thus, God suffers evil humanity while allowing the innocent and good to suffer. For Berkovits, this view of theodicy permits the Jew to continue to believe in the deity despite Holocaust reality. Elman’s Alex Yagodah arrives at a similar position at the close of his theological debate. Berkovits further insists that the Holocaust not be treated as an isolated event in Jewish history; he agrees that it must be analyzed within the framework of past Jewish experience. Although Berkovits acknowledges that the Holocaust, like previous persecutions of Jewry, poses questions about God’s providential presence and moral perfection, he disputes the notion that it represents a novum in Jewish history whose essential distinctness creates a new problem for religious faith different from previous persecutions. The continued existence of Jewry in the face of its long history of suffering is, for Berkovits, proof that God exists despite His periodic concealment. The Jew must assess God not simply on the basis of His Holocaust passivity but upon consideration of all history, including the redemptive joy of rebuilt Zion, the “ingathering of the exiles,” in the ancient homeland. Concurring with Fackenheim, Berkovits believes that just as Auschwitz is evidence of the self-concealed God, the rebirth of Israel as a Jewish state and its survival are evidence of “a smile on the face of God.” Illustrating this proposition, I. B. Singer’s survivor-penitent, Shapiro, advances from denunciation of the silent God of the Holocaust era to his spiritual return to a loving God in the rebuilt Zion.

In the essay “Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire: Judaism, Christianity, and Modernity After the Holocaust,” Irving Greenberg inquires where God was during Auschwitz and whether His silence was another instance of hiding His face or whether He ceased to be the God of trust. Greenberg argues that even if we are able to
retain belief in the caring biblical God after the Holocaust, such affirmation is problematic and inconstant, comprising "moment faiths." Like Elie Wiesel, Greenberg acknowledges that since the death camps, there are times when "the flames and smoke of the burning children blot out faith," but these moments of doubt are interspersed with moments of faith. The tension between these polarities of doubt and faith constitute a major thematic interest in American Holocaust fiction and may be seen in the fiction of Bellow, Ozick, Singer, and Malamud.

The Jewish messianic and mystical interpretation that catastrophe requires greater human effort to repair in the face of the hidden God also finds expression in American literature. Lurianic kabbalists respond to Divine self-exile with a call for tikkun (a continual act of human repair and restoration) by means of proper kavanah (intention, devotion, meditation). Human assistance in the achievement of God's purpose is an intricate part of the kabbalistic response to evil. The view that the interruption of divine duty does not excuse human convenantal responsibility finds vital expression in the fiction of I. B. Singer, Bernard Malamud, Arthur Cohen, Cynthia Ozick, Saul Bellow, and Chaim Potok.

The moral dilemma of whether to speak or remain reverentially silent in tribute to the Holocaust victims is resolved in this fiction on the side of the sacred duty to bear witness. Unlike Israeli writers of the Palmach generation—those who fought in the War of Independence, who sought to write an Israeli rather than a Diasporan literature, who sought to separate themselves from the passive ethos of European Jewry, and who experienced the conflict between longing to forget the Holocaust and compulsion to remember—for the Americans, bearing witness and the act of Holocaust transmission itself are central Holocaust themes. After writing six novels on the Holocaust, Elie Wiesel explored the dilemma in *The Oath* and examined the possibility that it might have been better to have remained silent in the face of such evil. Silence might have been the more powerful witness. *The Oath* chronicles his conviction that if a single life is saved by telling the Holocaust story, he is morally obliged to speak, even if in so doing he violates an earlier oath to keep silent, as did the narrator. The novelists represented in this study do not grapple with the dilemma of speech or silence. They and their protagonists are morally committed to bearing witness. If there is any dissent, it is in the manner of articulation. Indeed, some survivor-characters assert that the essential purpose
of surviving is to bear witness. So significant is the role of survivor-witness that characters are specifically designated as scribes, journalists, and teachers. Arthur Cohen’s book is narrated by Nathan, the scribe who brings to his *hurban* narration the dedication of a Torahic scribe. His vision is panoramic, placing the Holocaust in the context of ancient and modern persecutions of the Jews. Bellow’s Sammler abandons writing about aesthetics to concentrate on spiritual studies. On the occasion of the Six Day War, he is compelled to write a journalistic account of the event. Singer’s writer-protagonists record the lives of the dead, chronicle *shtetl* memories to commemorate the Holocaust dead, or act as interpreters or facilitators through whom survivors may tell their histories. Cynthia Ozick’s Enock Vand literally documents the Holocaust in his role as a U.S. government record keeper. In “The Suitcase,” witness testimony is the vehicle for the direct confrontation of a Jew and German. In “Levitation” and *The Messiah of Stockholm* oral history is given. Steiner’s Nazi hunters bear witness by bringing Nazis to trial. Malamud and Potok create survivor-mentors to transmit Holocaust history, Jewish values, and learning. Epstein approaches the issue visually creating an artist and two photographers who record for posterity life and death in the ghetto. As each writer bears witness to the uniqueness of the Holocaust, a dual sense of mission emerges. Not only do they attest to the historic record and commemorate the dead, each warns humanity of its capacity for genocide.

How does literature—an art form people use to bring order to chaos, to impose form on the formless, to explore the vagaries of human thought and emotion—give form and structure to the atrocities of a schematic, mechanized, and socially organized program of annihilation that denies the human values literature celebrates? To structure a creative response to a destructive force is an anomaly. Nothing about the Holocaust is aesthetic. It is a denial of the creative instinct. Just as the Holocaust was beyond normal human experience, so too the imaginative recreation of it demands, many believe, a language and literature somehow different from that which expressed pre-Holocaust suffering. The aesthetic problem is to find language appropriate to the Nazi universe, language to convey a bureaucracy of evil. Literature has long explored evil; it has traced the careers of Machiavellian villains such as Tamberlaine, Macbeth, and Richard III; it has treated obsessive megalomaniacs such as Ahab and Rappaccini, but never before has hu-
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manity, and literature, encountered evil in the magnitude of the Holocaust. Such desolation, it has been argued, required a new artistic style, a new language. "The difficulty," as A. Alvarez suggests, "is to find language for this world without values, with its meticulously controlled lunacy and bureaucracy of suffering." Although there may be no adequate Holocaust aesthetic, there is nonetheless the experience that demands artistic rendition and writers have struggled to create a language and literature to convey some measure of the Holocaust trauma.

The writer's problem is to devise a means of presenting material for which there is no adequate analogue in human history and a subject that many believe is beyond art. There is no archetypal or familiar model, no literary touchstone, no exemplar for Holocaust fiction. Documentary realism would be a mere repetition of the archivists and historians. Writers had to devise methods for fusing documentary matter with refashioned conventional literary models to convey the image of man and the social order wrought by the Holocaust. American writers learned from their European and Israeli colleagues and from the patterns of behavior and responses to extreme experiences described by diarists, archivists, historians, and social scientists and integrated the documentary material with artistic vision. American Holocaust fiction is a literature of hindsight. The creative writers immersed themselves in the voluminous testimonials and diaries that were retrieved from hiding places, ghettos, camps and those that were written after the war in the histories and documents published by Holocaust researchers. Survivors have provided materials novelists have diligently studied—eyewitness accounts of the genocidal capacity of humankind, as well as its capacity to endure.

In his description of Yiddish writers' responses to the catastrophe, David Roskies argues that they had "basically two approaches to draw upon from the fund of ancient and modern sources; one that imploded history, and the other that made the Holocaust the center of apocalypse." A similar principle may be noted in Jewish-American Holocaust fiction, with Singer, Ozick, Cohen, and Potok on the first side of the equation and Malamud, Wallant, Elman, Epstein, Steiner, and Bellow on the second. Writers steeped in Jewish history could draw upon the centuries-long history of persecution suffered by European Jews. Because the Nazis followed church precedent with the imposition of yellow badges, the defiling of Torah scrolls, the burning of synagogues,
the public humiliation of rabbis, the establishment of Jewish ghet­
tos, the expropriation of Jewish property, and the mass expulsions
and murders, and because the Nazis followed historic precedent in
coordinating their violence with the Jewish calendar, some novel­
ists invoke historic persecutions as referents and correspondents—
even on a smaller scale—to the modern disaster. Writers sensitive
to Jewish history commonly invoke the paradigms of destruction
and desecration as imprecise evocations of Holocaust loss. Thus,
Singer invokes the Chmielnicki and Petlurian Massacres and vil­
lains such as Pharoah and Haman; Cohen invokes the Spanish
Inquisition and Ozick the plight of the Marranos and persecutions
in the time of Akiva; and Malamud invokes the blood libel persecu­
tion. Representative of this approach is Arthur Cohen's vast com­
pendium of Jewish history, his disjointed narrative style inter­
rupted by essay entries, philosophic digressions, stories within
stories, and parables, all used to create a background for viewing
the Holocaust in the historic context of traditional European anti­
Semitism. Andre Schwartz-Bart's use of Jewish history in The Last of
the Just, from tenth-century persecutions through the Nazi slaugh­
ter, finds its counterpart in Ozick's Cannibal Galaxy, with its allu­
sions to midrashic Akiva, Uriah, and Zechariah stories, her Egyptian
references, and Ta'anit lessons. At the opposite extreme is Leslie
Epstein who has little interest in traditional Judaism, but a deep
interest in the Holocaust and a particular fascination with the per­
sonality of Chaim Rumkowski, the model for his ghetto elder.
Aside from one scene evoking medieval, church-orchestrated anti­
Semitism, Epstein essentially apprehends the Holocaust as its own
archetype, and rather than compare it with other historic anti­
Jewish persecutions, he introduces a catalogue of literary genres—
the Greek satyr play, the medieval morality play, and Renaissance
drama—to evoke the cultural context of evil; and he fuses that
atmosphere with the Lodz Ghetto as a touchstone of Nazi reality.

History is a creative resource throughout American Holo­
caust fiction, reflecting the artist's primary loyalty to fact while
allowing either the fusion or superimposition of specific events to
convey an imaginative response. Incorporation of historic figures
into the fictional context is a successful device in American Holo­
caust literature. Saul Bellow and Leslie Epstein examine the flam­
boyant and enigmatic elder of the Lodz Ghetto, Chaim Rumkow­
ski; Bellow dramatizes in a brief vignette the simultaneous tragedy
and absurdity of the Nazi universe, and Epstein structures his
novel around the career of the elder. Epstein fuses invented scenes with episodes from the Warsaw, Lodz, and Vilna ghettos reported in Leonard Tushnet's *Pavement of Hell*. He dramatizes ghetto starvation, slave labor, public beatings, the display of tortured bodies as object lessons, public executions, and mass murders. Aside from John Hershey's *The Wall*, it is difficult to identify American fiction that is as heavily dependent and true to the histories and documents chronicling the ghetto experience as is *King of the Jews*. Cynthia Ozick's description of the roundup of Parisian Jews owes much to *Vichy France and the Jews*, and her fantasy about the recovery of the Bruno Schulz manuscript is based on the historic account of one German's protection and another's murder of the novelist. Similarly, Richard Elman's treatment of the Hungarian situation in 1944 reflects a close reading of the Hungarian section in Raul Hilberg's *The Destruction of the European Jews*. Although his incorporation of historic figures is limited to references to the Joel Brand case and the work of Rudolf Kastner and his unsuccessful negotiations with the Allies to exchange war supplies for the lives of thousands of Hungarian Jews, Elman's work focuses on the systematic isolation of Hungarian Jews in 1944 through restrictive legislation and deportations. Elman depicts rape, expropriation of civil rights, and human branding. Despite its faulty chronology, Elman's medical examination and tattooing session suggests the same dehumanization that Primo Levi's *Haftling* feels, recognizing "Nothing belongs to us anymore, they have taken away our clothes, our shoes, even our hair. . . . They will even take away our name." 34

Whereas Epstein and Elman dramatize these events because their work is set in the European sphere during the Holocaust, those whose narratives are set in America use symbolism, memory, nightmare, or survivor dialogue to evoke the same events. "Perhaps," as A. Alvarez noted, "the most convincing way [of delineating the concentrationary world] is that by which dreams express anguish: by displacement, disguise, and indirection." 35 Illustrative of the successful use of the dream device to create Holocaust reality is Bellow's creation in *The Victim* of a disorientation and entrapment nightmare, which assaults the senses with an immediacy and brutality that imitates Holocaust violence. Wallant also uses the dream device in his nightmare series in *The Pawnbroker*: the transport dream in which parents helplessly witness their child drowning in excrement, nightmares in which the protagonist is subjected
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to surgical experimentation without the benefit of anesthetic, and others in which he is witness to an electrocution and his wife's enforced whoredom. Throughout The Pawnbroker, Nazerman's nightmare memories are juxtaposed with American ghetto scenes at key stressful moments to suggest the brutality and sadistic attitude of Germans toward their Jewish victims. Potok uses both dreams and a stream of consciousness reverie to convey an American's response to newspaper photographs of Buchenwald. Writers often turn to the dream device both to convey the displacement, confusion, indirection, and incoherence of the victim during the Nazi period and to serve as a barometer measuring the failure of the victim to repress the past.

In contrast to the indirection of dream and involuntary memory, direct speeches focusing on Nazi crimes are offered by Cohen's survivor-narrator, Nathan of Gaza, who records the history of starvation, disease, and illness among the inmates of Auschwitz; Ozick's Vand, who documents the various camp death tolls for American intelligence services; and Steiner's Nazi hunter, who iterates a long catalogue of Nazi atrocities in his prosecution of Hitler. Similarly, Sammler's recurring recollections of a massacre in front of an open mass grave serve as a persistent reminder of Nazi atrocities.

Although there is no equal in these works for the surreal quality of Jerzy Kosinski's The Painted Bird and Gunter Gras's Tin Drum, fantasy occasionally appears in American Holocaust fiction. Examples of the use of fantasy are found in I. B. Singer's "The Cafeteria," in which the ghosts of Hitler's henchmen are summoned; in "A Wedding in Brownsville," where the dead Jews of an East-European village are revived; Bellow's creation in Mr. Sammler's Planet of a mad scene dramatizing Bruch's Buchenwald-generated psychic disturbances; Ozick's levitation scene; Cohen's projection of a modern Spanish Inquisition; and Steiner's resurrection of Hitler.

Whereas some Europeans felt they had to disrupt conventional literary forms to write Holocaust literature, the Americans often used traditional Jewish and Western forms. Western forms often highlight the connections between Holocaust brutality and the civilization where the brutality took shape and was sustained. Illustrative of this method is Epstein's introduction of Greek, medieval, and Shakespearean models to render his themes of political corruption and radical evil. Conversely, in writings from the
Hebrew and Yiddish traditions, American writers found conventions and language appropriate to the unique Holocaust sufferings of the Jews. Ozick and Cohen introduce the Hebrew midrashic legend, Singer and Potok lamentation liturgy, biblical allusions, Hasidic implications of restoration, and covenant theology to place the Holocaust in the historic context of Jewish martyrdom. A comparative study of methods of Holocaust delineation reveals that Americans share the elegiac, lamentative tone and its parodic countercommentary commonly found in the writing of Jewish European and Israeli writers. Arthur Cohen, Cynthia Ozick, I. B. Singer, and Chaim Potok draw on traditional Hebraic responses to national catastrophe, invoking the collective Jewish memory. These novelists are knowledgeable heirs of the rabbinic literature; their touchstones are Jewish theology and history. Their characters are often located in communities whose values are ultimately Jewish rather than secular. They are more often firmly rooted in the Jewish cultural and religious contexts, and they express themselves in biblical, midrashic, mystical, and messianic themes when responding to the Shoah. They speak in authentic Jewish voices. Adherence to the collective history distinguishes the characters of these authors from the characters in the works of Elman and Wallant, who are generally secular and assimilated rather than religiously or culturally Jewish. In the Holocaust fiction of the latter, attention is focused on the suffering of the individual, whereas in the former, the suffering individual translates his plight into the collective experience, because he is much more attuned to Jewish history. Readers of Cohen's In the Days of Simon Stern and Ozick's The Cannibal Galaxy learn of the history of Jewish martyrlogy, as one also does in Andre Schwarz-Bart's The Last of the Just. Simon Stern and Joseph Brill understand that their destinies are tied to the Jewish people and to Jewish history. They are culturally bound to Jewish civilization despite their diasporan location. Bellow's Arthur Sammler, on the other hand, represents assimilated Jews arbitrarily subjected to catastrophe in Europe because of an accident of Jewish birth, who later choose Jewish association as part of their Holocaust witness. In Elman's trilogy, the characters consistently evidence their lack of Jewish education. Aside from Lilo's countercommentary prayer-parody, biblical allusion is superimposed by the novelist using the omniscient voice, rather than imaginatively integrated as in the fiction of Singer, Cohen, and Ozick. In place of Jewish cultural loss sustained in the Holocaust, Bellow, Wallant,
and Malamud stress historic data, concentrating on the political, social, and psychological ramifications of the Holocaust.

Among the most effective techniques Americans borrowed from Hebrew and Yiddish Holocaust literature is countercommentary. In Against the Apocalypse, David Roskies explicates the fascination of secular Jewish writers with collective catastrophe through the use of parody and the inversion of sacred texts, which emphasizes the subversion of God's principles in the historic context. Thus, the violation of the text mirrors the violation of the covenant. The prayer-parodies in the fiction of Singer and Elman reveal this attitude. Lilo's Kaddish achieves the same forceful expression of anguish that is rendered in the Yiddish and Hebrew writers' irreverent use of the sacred text, and it functions as they do: "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." Roskies offers an important distinction between those who use parody constructively and destructively, arguing that the use of parody is present in

anger deflected through the hallowed texts, a highly mediated and ritualized form of anger. By making the text seem for a while crazy and corrupt, the individual sufferer expands its meaning, allowing subsequent sufferers to enter the breach.

Generally the pattern that follows this inversion is an ode of defiant affirmation, which is clearly present in Lilo's passage, a passage whose sequence mimics prayer allowing her to maintain faith even as the promise is subverted. The angry commentators of the twentieth century share the dismay of the Hebrew poet who played on sound and sense, transposing the traditional petition "Who is like You, O Lord, among the mighty" (elim) (Exodus 15:11) to "Who is like You among the mute" (illemim) to register dissatisfaction with the silent God.

A related phenomenon in Holocaust literature that Lawrence Langer and Alvin Rosenfeld have noted is the revisionary and antithetical tendency in European Holocaust writing to refute and reject literary antecedents. Langer demonstrates the Holocaust-wrought subversion of the Bildungsroman in Wiesel's Night, which inverts the traditional pattern of initiating a young boy into society; Rosenfeld addresses a similar reversal in Primo Levi's Survival in Auschwitz, which renders the concentrationary goal of dehumaniza-
tion and debasement of prisoners. Rosenfeld reads these literary inversions as repudiations of the antecedent literature and culture, "a denial not only of an antecedent literary assertion but also of its implicit premises and explicit affirmations." Perhaps because Americans were not victims, one finds little of that tendency in American writers who remain reluctant to parody literary forms in Holocaust fiction. On the contrary, American writers often use traditional forms and devices, in addition to subversion and parody, to dramatize the connections between the Holocaust and its antecedents in European culture. Leslie Epstein introduces a contemporary, wagon-staged morality play to correlate Christian and Nazi anti-Semitism and incorporates a Greek satyr play to expose Nazi corruption. Rather than suggesting disillusionment with traditional literary forms or the failure of literature to posit rational, humane, moral and ethical ideals, Epstein incorporates these celebrated forms either to emphasize German corruption or, as in the case of his superb production of a ghetto Macbeth, to dramatize the capacity of art to inspire human compassion in the midst of moral decay. Epstein's technique here is illustrative of Jewish American writers' shared antiapocalyptic vision. They write as witnesses against Nazism and witnesses for humanistic values normally associated with literature, even in an age of atrocity.

Whereas European survivor-writers bear witness in their literature to that which they encountered, American writers can only join their colleagues as "the generation that bears the scar without the wound, sustaining memory without direct experience. It is this generation that has the obligation, self-imposed and self-accepted ... to describe a meaning and wrest instruction from the historical."