

‘Appointments to Keep in the Past’

**History, Memory and Representation
In British Fiction of the 1990s
Writing About the Holocaust**

**By
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Abstract

The thesis examines British fiction of the 1990s, focusing on the ‘novel of history’. It contributes to the analysis of recent and contemporary British fiction, joining work by John Brannigan, Steven Connor, Peter Childs, Dominic Head, Rod Mengham, Nick Rennison and Alan Sinfield. Whilst these critics have written about the centrality of the historical novel, the significance of the Holocaust and its use in fictional narrative remains relatively under-theorised. Issues surrounding memory and representation and their relation to history are central to an understanding of how British 1990s Holocaust novels dramatise the events of the ‘real’.

In this regard, the thesis contributes to the theory that the 1990s British novel often ‘looked backwards’ over the waning century. Fiction attempting to represent the Holocaust has made a significant contribution to this ‘taking stock’. A number of issues arise surrounding the complex relationship between historical ‘event’ and ‘imaginary’ text. Given the extremity of the Holocaust and the persistence of it as a ‘secular-sacred’ discourse, such issues are further problematised. The central theme is how British writers in the 1990s, given their temporal, spatial and familial distance from the event, have negotiated the ‘limits of representation’ inherent in the aesthetic apprehension of the Holocaust.

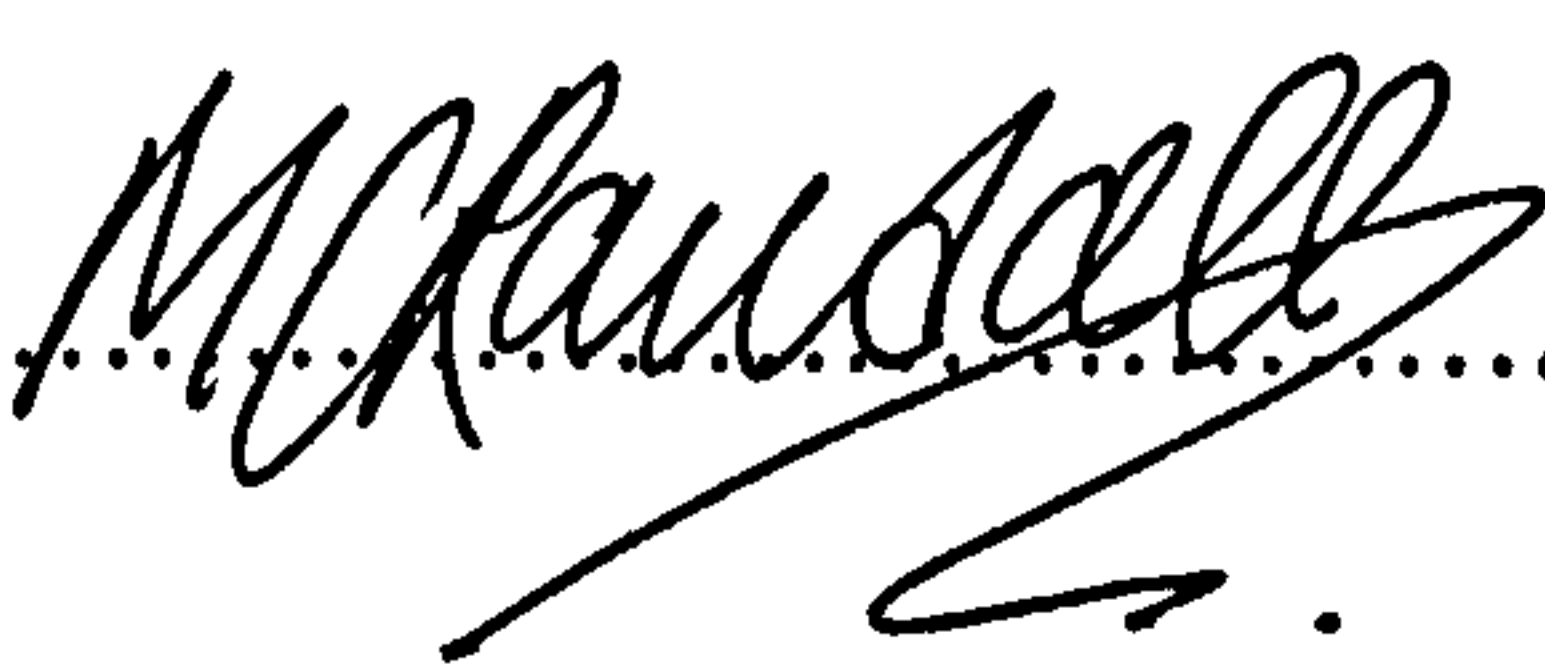
The fiction under discussion is by Martin Amis, Justin Cartwright, Robert Harris, John King, Caryl Phillips, Michele Roberts, W.G. Sebald, Rachel Seiffert, Zadie Smith and D.M. Thomas. The ‘apocalyptic turn’ that many have characterised as emblematic of the 1990s is interpreted as a turning back to an ‘apocalypse’ that has already taken place. Tropes of fragmented temporality, absence and presence, the sublime, articulation and silence, trauma, atrocity and the inherent problems of retelling the past are interpreted in relation to each individual text. Recent writing on the representation of the Holocaust also informs the central arguments of the thesis. Work by Saul Friedlander, Geoffrey H. Hartman, Berel Lang, Dominick LeCapra, Daniel R. Schwarz and Sue Vice discuss both the enduring legacy of the Holocaust and the areas of contention surrounding the ‘speaking’ of the event. Holocaust representation will thus provide a ‘bridge’ between analysis of the historical novel since 1989 and theoretical work on imagining the ‘Final Solution’.

The thesis title is taken from Sebald’s *Austerlitz* and alludes to the theme of contemporary writers making imaginary and ethical ‘journeys’ back to the ‘dark heart’ of the century. It also suggests something of the impulse to remember and ‘serve witness’ to a generation of survivors. In conclusion, the thesis argues that despite the hegemony of postmodern concepts of the ‘textuality’ of history and the instability of narrative, the Holocaust embodies a fundamental challenge to cultural and political relativism. The novels embrace and argue back against postmodern literary strategies, and in doing so reveal how ethical and aesthetic issues of representation are profoundly ‘tested’ in context of the Holocaust.

Author's Declaration

I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of the University of Gloucestershire and is original except where indicated by specific reference in the text. No part of the thesis has been submitted as part as any other academic award. The thesis has not been presented to any other education institution in the United Kingdom or overseas.

Any views expressed in the thesis are those of the author and in no way represent those of the University.

Signed..... Date *2nd March 2006*

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This thesis owes a large degree of debt to my family and friends, but most especially to my brother, David Randall. Throughout the research he offered highly perceptive comments on individual chapters and engaged in illuminating conversation concerning issues of literary theory, history and politics. Without his input the present thesis would not have developed in the way that it did.

Finally, naturally, this work is dedicated to my father.

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Introduction

Writing and the Holocaust in the 1990s

In the introduction to *Image and Remembrance: Representation and the Holocaust* (2003), Shelley Hornstein and Florence Jacobowitz write a 'summing up' of the subject of the Holocaust and representation:

The debates surrounding issues of representation are underpinned by the suggestion that a form of discourse is bounded by what can be imagined. It is limited by knowledge that is imaginable and is shaped by preexisting schemas. To acknowledge that the Holocaust was an unprecedented catastrophe of inconceivable proportion suggests that it defies representation. This concept of representation assumes that one can only represent what it is possible to conceive; that language is limited by what is known and that events that test these limits and exceed them demand a new language.¹

The writers argue back against these theories. They suggest that concepts of realism have been too rigid and the relationship between an artistic work and a real event is far more complex than such a position assumes. Nonetheless, their recognition of what is, has been and will continue to be the fundamental issue surrounding fictional representations and the Holocaust is a useful starting point. Many writers and critics have suggested that there is something 'unimaginable' about the Holocaust and 'preexisting schemas' – most centrally realism – are insufficient or even inappropriate to represent the event. The 'uniqueness' of the Holocaust – or, perhaps preferably, the 'unprecedented-ness' of it – means that something will always remain beyond the reach of the artist. The Holocaust, in this analysis, is a profound 'test' of the limits of what can be 'known' and what can subsequently be represented of that knowledge.

These key theoretical issues inform the present thesis, which will read a number of British novels published between 1989 and 2001 that have attempted to represent the Holocaust. How they each 'test' the 'limits' of representation will form the central argument. The following chapters seek to understand why a significant number of British

authors – whose own relationships to the event are generally, though not exclusively, tangential – have decided to represent the Holocaust. Steven Connor has suggested that many modern and contemporary writers have turned to history to explore ‘the possibility of conferring sequence, direction and narratability upon the past and on the present in relation to the past’.² The British novel of the 1980s and 1990s has been characterised by texts ‘looking backwards’ at the past. The historical novel, in other words, can be seen to be the exemplary contemporary text. Connor also argues that the historical text has been a genre in which writers have tried to ‘inspect their own increasingly complex times’.³ Thus, there are two distinct but interrelated areas that Connor suggests are characteristic of much recent historical fiction. Firstly, there is the complex issue of how best to understand and represent the ‘chaos’ of the past. Secondly, there is the desire to utilise the events of the past to ‘shed light’ upon the political, cultural and social discourses of the present.

The opening quotation from Hornstein and Jacobowitz suggests some of the ways in which the Holocaust problematises these theories of the historical novel. Of course, in one evident way, the Holocaust is not ‘unspeakable’ at all. In the years since the liberation of the camps in 1945, it has been ‘spoken’ of in a vast amount of ways. A full account of such titles is beyond the scope of the present thesis but even a cursory glance at a selection shows the diversity of works responding to the Holocaust. The autobiographies and memoirs by writers such as Jean Améry, Charlotte Delbo, Primo Levi and Elie Wiesel have exerted a tremendous influence upon the growing knowledge of the Holocaust. These works contributed to the value increasingly placed on the testimonial voice. Personal memory in these texts contributes to and even becomes history. Alongside these survivor texts are the historical studies that have further explored the workings of the Nazi system. Raul Hilberg’s *The Destruction of the European Jews* (1961), Lucy Dawidowicz’s *The War against the Jews, 1933-1945* (1975) and Martin Gilbert’s *The Holocaust: A History of the Jews in Europe during the Second World War* (1986) are just three examples from the broad analyses of the ‘Final Solution’. Added to these are examples of more specific studies such as Hannah Arendt’s *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (1963), Robert J Lifton’s *The*

¹ Hornstein & Jacobowitz, eds, *Image and Remembrance: Representation and the Holocaust* (Bloomington [US]: Indiana University Press, 2003), p. 3.

² Steven Connor, *The English Novel in History: 1950-1995* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 199.

³ Ibid. p. 199.

Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide (1986)⁴ and Daniel Jonah Goldhagen's *Hitler's Unwilling Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (1996). As will be seen throughout the present thesis, these historical studies, amongst many others, have provided historical evidence for the novels under discussion. One of the most pressing issues in Holocaust writing, namely that of historical accuracy, is partly a product of the intertextual tensions between historical record and imaginative representation.

Historians have relied increasingly upon survivor, bystander and perpetrator testimony to inform their respective histories of the event. The ways in which intimate and traumatic memory has become one of the most crucial 'voices' in the historical understanding of the Holocaust will inform the thesis as a whole. The lone survivor voice – most famously embodied in the diaries of Anne Frank⁵ – has come to dominate histories of the Holocaust. Annette Wieviorka has written about the 'emergence of the existential witness'⁶ in the Eichmann trial⁷ where personal testimony – subjective, candid, invariably traumatised – becomes history. The significance granted to this testimonial voice has grown over the years and as Wieviorka points out this has been informed by the 'social imperatives of collective memory'.⁸ The 'existential witness' embodies their traumatic experience:

Now recognition of what happened can occur in the presence of the 'real', the real location of the crematoria, the real person who had been deported. Now the witness is less the bearer of knowledge about the destruction of the Jews, than a man or woman who embodies an experience.⁹

Such a 'faith' in the testimonial voice has been further confirmed in the work of writers and survivors such as Levi and Wiesel. In these instances of testimonial evidence supplanting conventional historiography one can see how memory was privileged in the years following the end of the war. These are individual histories that are validated by

⁴ For more on Lifton's study and its impact see chapter six (pp. 161-2 & pp. 175-6) in the present thesis on Martin Amis's *Time's Arrow*.

⁵ For more on Anne Frank's life and writing see chapter eight (p. 209 & pp. 215-17) on Caryl Phillips's *The Nature of Blood*.

⁶ Annette Wieviorka, 'From survivor to witness: voices from the Shoah' (pp. 125-41) in Winter, Sivan, eds, *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 137.

⁷ See Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York [US]: Viking Press, 1963; repr. Penguin, 1994).

⁸ Wieviorka, p. 138.

their uniqueness. This particular individual at this specific moment remembers his or her experiences in the past. And each testimony contributes to a fuller and larger understanding of the Holocaust.

Wieviorka goes on to describe the intense intimacy that such testimonies engender in the listener. This is where imaginative literature comes closest to resembling survivor testimony: the sense of one individual 'sharing' their experiences with another and implicitly asking for attention, empathy and recognition. This is an ideological shift and one that has occurred as knowledge of the Holocaust has grown. The shift can be thought of as being one from the individual professional expert interpreting the events of history, making narrative connections, presenting archival and documentary evidence, and who remains, to various degrees, 'outside' history, to the more heterogeneous, fragmented 'mosaic' of survivor, bystander and perpetrator voices. Wieviorka sees these voices as representing 'narrative fragments',¹⁰ and as such they contain many epistemological dilemmas, but they are also highly suggestive of certain kinds of modern fiction in which multiple, conflicting perspectives make up a novel's narrative. The attempt by novelists to approximate these voices is one of the defining characteristics of the fiction of the Holocaust. The fragmented narrative voiced by many disparate characters, particularly those characters traditionally considered 'outside' conventional history is another example of this 'mosaic' structure, in 1990s British fiction as a whole. David Mitchell's *Ghostwritten* (1999), for example, is a novel constructed out of different and apparently unconnected voices divided by time, geography and ideology. Mitchell, in often subtle and oblique ways, makes connections between these apparently divided people. Similarly, Adam Thorpe's *Ulverton* (1992) ranges across centuries to tell the story of a fictional town in the south of England.

Perhaps especially in the case of Wiesel's *Night*, particular distinctions between fiction and memoir have been blurred.¹¹ This has relevance for considerations of the efficacy or otherwise of Holocaust fiction. But furthermore, the testimonial voice – the witness of history – has profoundly influenced the ways in which the Holocaust is understood. As James E. Young points out, much imaginative literature strives to manufacture the 'testimonial authority' of these voices because many authors fear that the 'rhetoricity of their literary medium inadvertently confers a fictiveness onto events

⁹ Ibid, p. 138.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 140.

themselves'.¹² The survivor voice brings with it an undeniable existential gravity that fiction aspires to. The 'slippages' between history, memory and fiction have generated many controversies, as will be seen in the case of D.M. Thomas's *The White Hotel*. The 'testimonial authority' that Young speaks of, particularly in the examples of the 'Demidenko Affair' and Benjamin Wilkomirski's *Fragments*, has represented an especially troublesome concept due to the authors' alleged duplicities, omissions and manipulations.

Before returning to an appreciation of further Holocaust representations, it is instructive to contemplate these controversies and to see how they anticipate some of the anxieties inherent in literary narratives aspiring to or even utilising the 'authority' of the survivor. In 'The Demidenko Affair and Contemporary Holocaust Fiction',¹³ Sue Vice offers an overview of this case and suggests ways in which it has resonance for discourses surrounding authenticity and authority in Holocaust writing. As Vice points out, this scandal, like other controversies in Holocaust representation, involves 'plagiarism, antisemitism [sic], inauthenticity, appropriation and historical revisionism'.¹⁴ In Australia, in 1994, what was assumed to be a fictional autobiography, Helen Demidenko's *The Hand that Signed the Paper* was published. The book deals with an alleged war criminal on trial for atrocities committed at Babi Yar. The novel was well received and Demidenko won literary prizes and appeared on TV talk shows. On these programmes, she pointedly appeared in Ukrainian national dress. It was later revealed that 'Demidenko' was in fact a pseudonym for Helen Darville whose mother was British and who had no Ukrainian relatives. It was also discovered that Darville had relied upon survivor testimonies included in, for example, Martin Gilbert's history of the Holocaust.¹⁵

This is a key issue, and some of the British Holocaust fictions include 'Author's Notes' at the beginning or end of the main text emphasising the research and historical accuracy and the author's personal relation to the event that underpins the fictional

¹¹ For more on Weisel's memoir-novel see in particular Schwarz, *Imagining the Holocaust* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1999; repr. Palgrave, 2000), pp. 45-73.

¹² Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation* (Bloomington [US] Indiana University Press, 1988; repr. 1990), p. 51.

¹³ Included in Leak, Paizis, eds, *The Holocaust and the Text: Speaking the Unspeakable* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 2000), pp. 125-41.

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 125.

¹⁵ In an intriguing intertextual coincidence, certain 'plagiarised' passages were taken from the 'documentary fiction' *Babi Yar* by Kuznetsov, the same source for Thomas's *The White Hotel*. Indeed, as Vice points out, 'Demidenko' was a name censored by the Soviet authorities from Kuznetsov's original text. See Vice, *Holocaust Fiction* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 41.

elements. Once amendments were made Darville's book was re-published, although not in Britain. But more pressing than these issues was the sense that Darville had adopted an 'inappropriate' point-of-view. In other words, she was deemed to be 'unqualified' to write about the subject in the way that she chose to. Alongside the controversies surrounding Wilkomirski's *Fragments*, where the author was accused of having fabricated personal memories of the Holocaust, one is able to see how the 'Final Solution'¹⁶ appears to be put under an ethical pressure unlike other historical events.¹⁷ These controversial titles by 'Demidenko' and Wilkomirski also cast light on the British novels being discussed here. Aside from Martin Amis's *Time's Arrow*, D.M. Thomas's *Pictures at an Exhibition* and, to some degree, Caryl Phillips's *The Nature of Blood*, the novels under discussion have generated little or no controversy on similar ethical and historical grounds. As Vice argues, books such as Wilkomirski's are controversial because of their 'generic uncertainty'.¹⁸ This 'uncertainty' arises because of the blurring of distinctions between autobiography and fiction.

The issues arising from the controversies following publication of Wilkomirski and Darville's texts can still be felt in the ways in which many of the novels have been written. The blurring of distinctions, for example, between testimony and fiction, evident in Wilkomirski and Darville (and to some extent in Kosinski's *The Painted Bird* and Keneally's *Schindler's Ark*) is much less of a factor in the British novels of the 1990s. Perhaps the most direct and intimate and 'present tense' of Holocaust writing – the diary – exemplified in the case of Anne Frank but also of Chaim A. Kaplan and Emanuel Ringelblum, has conspicuously not been fictionalised to any great degree. The British novels display a wide range of genres and literary strategies in their attempts to represent the Holocaust. And although the first-person voice is evoked in the texts – alluding to the dominance of the 'testimonial authority' of the survivor – none of the writers attempts to mimic the diary form (apart from sections in Fergus O'Connell's *Call the Swallow*). Again, this may have much to do with a sense of 'cultural taste', implying that survivor testimony is sacrosanct and resistant to fictionalisation. Additionally, given that certain genres and forms are 'off-limits' for the contemporary novelist, these texts reveal efforts

¹⁶ Robert S. Wistrich in *Hitler and the Holocaust: How and Why the Holocaust Happened* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2001; repr. Phoenix, 2002) writes: 'In Hitler's genocidal racist ideology, the redemption (*Erlösung*) of the Germans and of 'Aryan' humanity depended upon the 'final solution' (*Endlösung*) of the 'Jewish Question'.' (p. 2)

¹⁷ See Renata Salecl, 'Why Would One Pretend to be a Victim of the Holocaust' in *Other Voices*, v 2, n 1, Feb 2000 at www.othervoices.org/2.1/salecl/wilkomirski.html

to render traumatic experience in 'new' narrative patterns. One example of this is the trope of a character in the present day 'returning' to the past of the Holocaust and confronting 'hidden' truths. These truths are 'buried' and require new emplotment in the contemporary. This can be read in Rachel Seiffert's *The Dark Room*, Michèle Roberts's *Daughters of the House*, Justin Cartwright's *Masai Dreaming*, Christopher Hope's *Serenity House* and Allan Massie's *The Sins of the Father*.¹⁹ These narratives re-enact the author's own distance from events and literary enquiry into the past.

To return to the overview of Holocaust representation, one can add to the personal testimonies and historical studies many films and TV documentaries. Perhaps the two most significant examples and certainly the most discussed, are Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* (1985) and Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* (1993).²⁰ Key areas of debate in Holocaust representation have been discussed surrounding these two very different films. Lanzmann's documentary, for example, does not contain a single frame of actual footage from the camps, and relies instead upon the testimonies of a number of survivors, witnesses and perpetrators. *Schindler's List*, based on Thomas Keneally's equally controversial Booker Prize winning novel, *Schindler's Ark*, was and remains the most widely seen and most contentious 'fictional' text dealing with the Holocaust. Again, in these and other films, such as Roberto Benigni's *Life is Beautiful* (1997), Louis Malle's *Au Revoir les Enfants* (1987), and Roman Polanski's *The Pianist* (2002), major areas of intellectual concern have been discussed. To a degree, despite the mainstream appeal of *Schindler's List*, it is Lanzmann's film that best exemplifies and problematises these issues. The director's reliance on and commitment to the testimony of individuals, and his refusal to represent the brutality of the camps, confirms the cultural and political

¹⁸ Vice, p. 164.

¹⁹ Allan Massie's *The Sins of the Father* (London: Hutchinson, 1991) is ostensibly a romance set in the 1960s. The two lovers though, Franz and Becky, discover that Becky's father, Eli Czinner, is a survivor of the camps and that Franz's father, Rudi Kestner, was a renowned member of the SS, living prosperously in Argentina. After Eli informs the Israeli authorities of Kestner's existence (despite Eli's blindness he recognises the German's voice), Kestner is arrested and extradited to Israel for a war crimes trial. Franz travels to Israel, speaking with his father who tells him of his war experiences, observing the 'new' Israel (embodied in the characters Rachel and Luke) and continuing an epistolary relationship with Becky. Kestner is tried in Jerusalem. Through the testimony of a woman who was routinely raped by Kestner and a speech made by Eli himself, Kestner is convicted and eventually hung. In similar ways to Schlink's *The Reader*, Massie's novel explores the generational divides and also the political, social and religious motivations behind the trials. The implications of the novel's title are explored, particularly through Franz's confused and often ambivalent relationship with his father whose mixture of justification, denial, omission and lingering anti-Semitism are 'sins', in less destructive, but still as profound ways as his sins in the war.

²⁰ For further analysis of these two films see chapter three (n. 270 & pp. 147-51) of the present thesis on Justin Cartwright's *Masai Dreaming*.

significance given to such voices and reflects concerns about the ability of language (either verbal or visual) to represent experiences of the Holocaust.

There have been a huge number of novels and short stories written by survivors, children of survivors and, of particular importance for the present thesis, authors with no direct personal involvement with the event. The issues of accuracy, authority, historical evidence, the ambiguities of memory, representation and taste, are further worked through in these texts. As almost all critics, historians and philosophers have alluded to, Theodor Adorno's dictum – 'After Auschwitz to write a poem is barbaric'²¹ – has been defined as the key starting point for analysis of imaginative literature and the 'fictionalising' of the Holocaust. Questions of aesthetic pleasure (i.e. can there be such a thing as a 'beautiful' piece of Holocaust writing?), narrative resolution and the representation of extreme suffering are implicated in Adorno's phrase. As Lawrence L. Langer points out, all fiction, indeed all aesthetic responses to the Holocaust, potentially 'alter' the truth of the real. He writes: 'Art in its essence invites us to see life other than it literally was, since all art, even the most objective naturalism, requires selection and composition, thus altering the purity (or, in this instance, the impurity) of the original event'.²²

Memoirs by Amery, Levi and Delbo utilise fictional strategies so that their work can appear both 'literary' and autobiographical (and historical). Traumatic memory informs the structure of the texts and strategies commonly associated with fiction (e.g. dialogue, metaphor, character, drama and suspense) are utilised. One can see, for instance, in the controversies surrounding Jerzy Kosinski's 'novel', *The Painted Bird* (1965) how issues of authorial authenticity and historical accuracy have had an added importance when the Holocaust is involved.²³ What seems to have been at stake is how far Kosinski elaborated upon his own individual experiences. Given how iconoclastic and playful many postmodern historical novels have been, it might seem surprising that modern and contemporary novels should be judged against this criterion. Vice, for

²¹ Adorno quoted in Schwarz, (2000), p. 22. As James E Young points out, Adorno subsequently retracted this maxim after reading Celan's 'Todesfuge'. In Laqueur, W, ed, *The Holocaust Encyclopedia* (New Haven [US]: Yale University Press, 2001, p. 396.

²² Langer, *Admitting the Holocaust: Collected Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 99.

²³ For more on *The Painted Bird*, see Wernick Fridman, *Words and Witness: Narrative and Aesthetic Strategies in the Representation of the Holocaust* (Albany [US]: State University of New York Press, 2000), pp. 77-80; Sharon Oster, 'The "Erotics of Auschwitz": Coming of Age in *The Painted Bird* and *Sophie's Choice* (pp. 90-124) in Bernard-Donals, Glejzer, eds, *Witnessing the Disaster: Essays on Representation and the Holocaust* (Madison [US]: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003); Schwarz (2000), pp. 173-194; Vice, (2000), pp. 67-89.

instance, sees that 'the quest for biographical accuracy is necessarily doomed to failure' and that the most fruitful way to read Kosinski's text is as an 'autobiographical fiction'.²⁴

In many respects, these controversies have abated as subsequent generations of writers have approached the subject from a temporal and emotional distance. Nonetheless, it is revealing that these issues have been intimately linked with representations of the Holocaust. Fiction by survivors such as Kosinski's *The Painted Bird*, Tadeusz Borowski's *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen* (1959), Ida Fink's *The Journey* (1990) and Cynthia Ozick's *The Shawl* (1980), have been read in relation to the ways in which the authors' experiences underpin the fictional narratives. Or to put it another way, how the fictional narratives 'alter' the memories of the historical event. A recent example of survivor fiction is Louis Begley's *Wartime Lies* (1991), which was received with high critical praise, won major literary prizes and has not attracted controversy in the way that earlier 'autobiographical fictions' about the Holocaust have. This may have much to do with the not insignificant issue of the passage of time. But also what seems to be crucial in these fictions is the efficacy and honesty of their various and very different representations of atrocity.²⁵

The sense that some imaginative works might be deemed to be 'disrespectful' to the memories of those who died in the Holocaust has been relevant in discussions about how best to represent the event. Linked to this ethical problem is a formal question of what genres or art forms are 'suitable'. The collective 'moral pressure' that seems to emanate from the event – part of what some have argued is a 'sacralising' impetus – insists, through the voices of writers such as Weisel, George Steiner and Lanzmann, that Holocaust representation be scrutinised in ways that other historical representations rarely are. Since 1989, novels such as Julian Barnes's *A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters* (1989), Thorpe's *Ulverton*, Louis de Bernière's *Captain Corelli's Mandolin* (1994) and Lawrence Norfolk's *The Pope's Rhinoceros* (1996) have, often in comic ways, commented on the 'telling' and 'retelling' of history. Whether the Holocaust is resistant to such revisionary writing is a question that will be returned to later in the present chapter. As Daniel R. Schwarz points out, the 'intelligibility of history, even the

²⁴ Vice, p. 67.

²⁵ Vice writes: 'No such scandal has accompanied Louis Begley's *Wartime Lies*, despite its equally ambiguous relation to 'real' events and its propensity to show Polish bystanders in an unflattering light. *Wartime Lies*'s extra twenty-five years in the making, and the different effect of its prologue, which makes the issue of truth and fiction a part of the text itself, are sufficient to alter its context of reception'. (p. 80)

place of evil in history, depends on reconfiguring it in imaginative and aesthetic terms'.²⁶ Fictional representations have contributed to the 'intelligibility' of the Holocaust. There are many intriguing 'slippages' between genres and disciplines, and these have contributed to the sense that all Holocaust representation – simply because it is attempting to 're'-present massive atrocity – risks ethical censure. The tenets of classic realism, for instance, have arguably been found to be insufficient in representing the event. The imaginative works created by the children of Holocaust victims and survivors, and those who have no direct relationship with the event, negotiate the demands of historical accuracy with their own fictional strategies.

This fiction of non-survivors continues these ongoing efforts to represent what has become, in James E. Young's phrase, the 'emblematically modern event' of the late twentieth century.²⁷ The controversies that have continued surrounding Kosinski's novel are played out in these fictions, particularly and most infamously, in the case of Thomas's *The White Hotel* (1981). Thomas, whose *Pictures at an Exhibition* (1993) is analysed in chapter five, was embroiled in a controversy that began over the issue of plagiarism and then became one surrounding ethical issues of authorial integrity and misogynistic 'bad taste'.²⁸ Whilst these areas of debate concerning Thomas's novel are beyond the boundaries of the present thesis, one can take from the controversy some telling examples of how the 'Holocaust novel' has often been called into question.²⁹ *The White Hotel* has been interpreted as an example of 'historiographic metafiction'. Linda Hutcheon's hugely influential description is of modern and contemporary fiction that reflects a 'postmodern ironic rethinking of history'. This literature therefore displays a 'theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs', and this contributes to a 'rethinking and reworking of the forms and contents of the past'.³⁰ It would seem that the 'trouble' with Thomas's novel is partly ethical and also partly formal. Not only have Thomas's moral attitudes towards the Holocaust been called into question, but also the literary rhetoric he uses to express his narrative. This underlines

²⁶ Schwarz, p. 37.

²⁷ Young, 'The Arts of Jewish Memory in a Postmodern Age' (pp. 211-25) in Cheyette, Marcus, eds, *Modernity, Culture and 'the Jew'* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), p. 211.

²⁸ For more on the misogyny of *The White Hotel* see Kappeler, *The Pornography of Representation* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1986), pp. 84 – 100.

²⁹ For more on *The White Hotel* see: Vice, *Holocaust Fiction*, pp. 38-66; Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust*, pp. 53-7; Rebecca Scherr, 'The Uses of Memory and the Abuses of Fiction: Sexuality in Holocaust Fiction and Memoir' at <http://www.othervoices.org/2.1/scherr/sexuality>; Bran Nicol, *DM Thomas* (Tavistock: Northcote House, 2004), pp. 30-44.

³⁰ Hutcheon, L, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1988) p. 5.

what might be thought of as a cultural 'dis-ease' with certain aesthetic forms representing tragedy or what is culturally thought of as 'tragic'.

The sense that Thomas's novel transgresses particular ethical 'limits' is central to these opening considerations about the representation of the Holocaust. These 'limits', Thomas himself argued, were very much a part of the construction of the novel. As Vice points out, Thomas relied heavily upon a prior text – Kuznetsov's *Babi Yar* (1970), a documentary novel concerned with the murder of 33,000 Jews in September 1941 in a ravine near Kiev in the Ukraine³¹ - when describing such atrocities.³² In this regard there were 'limits' to Thomas's imagination – limits of cognition and also limits of ethical 'good faith'. The events of Babi Yar appear 'unimaginable' in terms of their startling brutality and sadism. Furthermore, the author 'retreats' to the facts of history, in particular the testimonial witness voice, rather than risk fictionalising (and by implication trivialising) the real. Thomas was accused initially of plagiarism, or more accurately, of not appropriately citing his sources.³³ He was also accused of rendering the subject and the experiences of those involved as pornographic. Thomas's conflation of Freudian analysis, eroticism and the Holocaust in a postmodern historiographic metafiction 'tests' these limits profoundly and explains why *The White Hotel* remains a paradigmatic text for analyses of Holocaust representation.

Inga Clendinnen sums up her reservations about Thomas's novel:

When D.M. Thomas chose the mass shootings at Babi Yar as pivot and the dramatic denouement of his long, fraught and intricately worked novel *The White Hotel*, and despite his attempt to invoke authenticity and acceptance by the reproduction of the words of one of the few survivors of that most barbarous massacre, the effect was immediate: the queasy trivialization not of the events, but of the writing which sought to exploit them. The extraordinary coda, which involved the revivification and reunion of people we had seen murdered in a heavenly 'Israel', only compounded catastrophe.³⁴

Added to the feeling that Thomas had trivialised the event by the way in which he inserted direct quotations from Kuznetsov and included (and subtly altered) descriptions

³¹ Laqueur, W, ed, (2001), p. 51.

³² Vice, pp. 40-4.

³³ In the Penguin paperback edition of *The White Hotel* published in 1982, there is an acknowledgement of the text's use of Kuznetsov's book.

³⁴ Inga Clendinnen, *Reading the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999; repr. Canto, 2002), p. 164.

of the massacre in context of Freudian analysis, are concerns about the redemptive ending. Whilst Thomas's final enigmatic chapter is open to many interpretations³⁵ it is valuable that the issue of narrative conclusion has been raised. Clendinnen's distaste for *The White Hotel* is largely ethical – Thomas's postmodern rewriting of real testimony and his ambiguous 'happy' ending are deemed inappropriate. The 'limits' of representation are, in Clendinnen's view, transgressed in *The White Hotel* in unacceptable ways. Some of these reservations seem to be as much about Thomas's literary strategies as any perceived moral lapse.

Very few of the British novels of the 1990s have attracted as much opprobrium as Thomas's novel, or for that matter the work of Darville and Wilkomirski. One way of interpreting this is through the filter of a theoretical position that sees the Holocaust as an historical event re-interpreted for the 1990s. Kirby Farrell, for example, sees Spielberg's *Schindler's List* as being partly 'about' certain social, political and cultural concerns in the contemporary.³⁶ Farrell adds: 'We live by indirection, always compensating for what we finally cannot bear. Every culture invests in symbolic immortality. Immersed in the rules and rituals of cultural perpetuity, we compulsively tell stories that flatter our imaginative control'.³⁷ This seems especially true in the case of *Schindler's List* that has at its centre an 'heroic' industrialist who 'saves' his Jewish workers and achieves what amounts to almost 'saintly' status by the end of the film.³⁸ In this case, *Schindler's List* is unusual in that it has a redemptive, 'happy ending'. This may have much to do with the film's success and accessibility. But, referring back to Farrell's comments, *Schindler's List* may also reflect some of the decade's discourses surrounding victimisation, trauma, racism and the 'sacralising' of the Holocaust which the film reflects and contributes to. As Farrell argues, despite the perceived absence of redemption, consolation and hope in the Holocaust, it is revealing that the best known example of Holocaust 'art' is a film that threatens to, in Nicola King's words, negate the 'disruptive effect of that violence on the nature of time'.³⁹ In other words, *Schindler's List* does not articulate the profound rupture

³⁵ See Nicol, *D.M. Thomas*, pp. 42-3.

³⁶ Kirby Farrell, *Post-traumatic Culture: Injury and Interpretation in the Nineties* (Baltimore [Us]: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).

³⁷ Ibid, p. 236.

³⁸ An intriguing parallel with the narrative and emphasis of *Schindler's List* is a recent film concerned with the Rwandan genocide: *Hotel Rwanda* (d: Terry George, 2004) UK, USA, SA, IT. At the centre of the film is hotel manager, Paul Rusesabagina, who, like Schindler, protects and saves many people from certain death through his skills of diplomacy, legerdemain, intuition, luck and deals. The hotel in the film can be understood in part as representing a similar 'haven' to that of Schindler's factory.

³⁹ Nicola King, *Memory, Narrative, Identity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), p. 24.

to memory and history that the Holocaust represents. The film is broadly realist and is structured in conventional terms. With a narrative trajectory that seeks to wrench hope from Schindler's 'victory', it ends with a number of 'real' survivors laying stones on Schindler's grave in Israel.

Farrell, along with Andreas Huyssen⁴⁰, argues that the 1990s can be usefully compared to the *fin de siècle* decade of the 1890s, sharing with that decade a sense of decadence, nostalgia and loss. Huyssen writes that the original trauma of the Holocaust has been re-enacted through the 1980s and 1990s. He argues that 'the unchecked proliferation of the trope itself may be a sign of its traumatic ossification, remaining locked in a melancholic fixation that reaches far beyond victims and perpetrators'.⁴¹ This 'melancholic fixation' with the Holocaust in the 1990s may point to one way of reading the British Holocaust novels under discussion. As Huyssen points out, 1993 was called 'The Year of the Holocaust' because aside from the release of *Schindler's List*, the year also saw the opening of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC.⁴² The 'unspeakability' of the Holocaust, then, is a largely figurative expression suggesting something of the event's inherent horror. By the 1990s, the British novels under discussion joined a much wider set of art forms that attempted to represent the Holocaust that was being 'changed' in the channels of collective memory.

Isabel Wollaston provides a résumé of how an 'industry' has built up over the years.⁴³ Wollaston, like Huyssen, argues that memory is central to the burgeoning apprehension of the Holocaust. She writes that an individual is culturally compelled to remember, but she goes on to stress that there are a multiplicity of events and a multiplicity of methods of remembering. Also, one must add that the very act of remembering and communicating that memory, is a highly ambiguous and deeply problematical human activity. Wollaston writes that the growing cultural preoccupation with authenticity, acceptability and respectability is related to this prevailing discourse of historical uncertainty. Linked with these issues are other concerns about primacy and ownership, decorum and taste. Importantly, Wollaston describes the process of ritualisation and mythologisation that has grown as the Holocaust has been remembered. It has become a 'highly ritualised exercise with its pantheon of martyrs, heroes and

⁴⁰ Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (London: Routledge, 1995).

⁴¹ Ibid, p. 256.

⁴² For more on the museum see Laqueur, (2001), pp. 657-61.

villains, its canon of sacred texts, its sacred spaces, its rituals, and its myths and taboos'.⁴⁴

The Eichmann trial, described in Hannah Arendt's seminal work, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, was influential in changing many attitudes, not only towards the Holocaust but also to the legal and moral power of the witness/survivor testimony. Added to this event, Wollaston cites the 1967 Six Day War between Israel and Palestine as politicising an entire generation of Jewish people and in America, the screening of the mini-series *Holocaust* on TV in 1978 contributed to the growing knowledge of the event. One can add to these examples the contributions of historians and academics mentioned earlier in the present chapter. Wollaston describes the many and varied ways of remembering as 'communities of memory'.⁴⁵ This suggests the plurality of perspectives and ideological positions that have amassed over the years and the British novels of the 1990s can be read in relation to these ways of understanding. The major danger in the proliferation of these 'communities' is the possibility of misrepresentation. Misrepresentation lies at the centre of so many of the issues inherent in the 'speaking' of the Holocaust. Wollaston distils two distinct approaches to the representing of the event and these two perspectives can be seen to underpin many of the debates and discussions.

The first approach to representations of the Holocaust is the 'purist' approach. This perspective embodies the sacred nature of the event. It acknowledges the limits of language and emphasises the unique Jewish experience. In contrast, the 'populist' approach valorises the 'something better than nothing' perspective, encouraging representation and interpretation of the event, however 'bad' or 'inappropriate'. Whilst these are evidently broad categories, they underpin the consistent concerns of all writing and thinking about the Holocaust. One way of understanding these issues is to see them connected with postmodern theories. In this respect the Holocaust is a meta-narrative, not one single event, and hence there are various 'communities of memory'. This is certainly true of the many voices speaking of their experiences. Lanzmann's *Shoah* is constructed entirely around these voices, offering individual perspectives and personal accounts. As Wollaston points out, though, there is a danger of lapsing into postmodern relativism. Some have seen that a possible conclusion to deconstruction and postmodern thought is

⁴³ Isabel Wollaston, 'A War Against Memory? Nativizing the Holocaust' in Levy, M, ed, *Remembering for the Future: The Holocaust in an Age of Genocide* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001).

⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 502.

⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 505.

that it becomes unequivocally relativist. In this climate of postmodern revisions of narrative, history, memory and representation, one can understand why the Holocaust has become a 'test case' for theories surrounding the making of meaning. It has been 'spoken' and continues to be 'spoken', but its status as an unequivocal site of the utmost brutality and unimaginable suffering suggests fundamental areas of complexity and contention in postmodern theory.

Along with Wollaston, Peter Novick has written about the ways in which the Holocaust has been 'framed' in specific cultural and historical contexts. In his controversial *The Holocaust and Collective Memory* (2001), Novick looks at the ways in which individuals and groups in the United States, Jewish and non-Jewish, apprehended, debated, represented and defined the Holocaust in the years following 1945. Novick, writing about the manner in which Anne Frank's diary was adapted for stage and screen in the 1950s, states: 'Every generation frames the Holocaust, represents the Holocaust, in ways that suit its mood'.⁴⁶ Novick tracks the changes in how the Holocaust has been remembered since 1945, and his suggestion that its status, description and understanding have gone through radical transformations is provocative and revealing. In this reading, one can see that the Holocaust is, like any historical event, subject to re-evaluation and re-presentation. The 'mood' of a particular epoch, Novick argues, defines how the historical event will be recalled, and indeed, what 'lessons', if any, will be 'found' in its description. The postmodern consciousness may be seen to have heavily influenced the collective perception of the Holocaust in recent years.

In an inversion of Adorno's infamous dictum, Stephen Baker has written that 'to write poetry after Auschwitz is postmodern'.⁴⁷ This is in response to the contention that the postmodern cannot recover an authentic historical experience. In other words, the Holocaust is the most extreme example of an event in history that cannot be apprehended in postmodern representation. Baker's phrase suggests that 'poetry' – a term that requires to be widened to include all aesthetic representation – after Auschwitz (a synecdoche for the Holocaust) is a flawed but necessary attempt to 'remember' the experiences and voices of the event through a postmodern, therefore self-conscious, *re*-presentation. As Saul Friedlander has argued: 'Postmodern thought's rejection of the possibility of identifying some stable reality or truth beyond the constant polysemy and self-

⁴⁶ Peter Novick, *The Holocaust and Collective Memory* (Boston [US]: Houghton Mifflin, 1999; repr. Bloomsbury, 2001), p. 120.

⁴⁷ Stephen Baker, *Fiction of Postmodernity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), p. 138.

referentiality of linguistic constructs challenges the need to establish the realities and truths of the Holocaust'.⁴⁸ The tension appears to lie in the 'stable reality' – the historical 'real' – that lies 'beyond' representation. The Holocaust 'tests' how representation can render the real, particularly given the challenges that postmodern thought has posed. The 'realities and truths' of the Holocaust are at stake in these considerations.

The sublime, or more accurately, the postmodern sublime, has resonance for the representation of the Holocaust. The 'excess' of the event can be thought of as a 'negative sublime', of a meaning or knowledge or felt experience that cannot be contained within, at least conventional, modes of representation. An example of this can be read in Amis's *Time's Arrow* in which the reversed chronology of the narrative is a formal attempt to express the temporal rupture that the Holocaust represents. The ironic 'return' to Auschwitz alludes to its irrevocable existence in history and its persistence in the contemporary. Amis's novel, in its formal postmodern experimentation, seeks to find ways to represent the 'unimaginable' real of Auschwitz. The text's intention is – through the bleak ironies of its reversals – to parody the Nazi testimony that justifies the killing as healing. Amis's novel, though, also hints at the impossibility of language to 'contain' such brutality and an ethically 'upside down' world in the camps. *Time's Arrow* is emblematic of the tensions between how to represent the Holocaust and how to acknowledge the impossibility of this task.

These thoughts should not suggest that there is an unproblematic opposition between realism and postmodernism. Many critics, in writing about the contemporary novel, have suggested significant examples of 'cross-pollination' between genres, styles, narratives and issues of representation. This may have something to do with a broad cultural sense that questions of 'Britishness' have radically changed and, as John Brannigan argues, the 'new' nation is 'as yet unnameable and unmappable'.⁴⁹ One of the results of these new ways of thinking about 'Britishness' might be a more multiple, heterogeneous, eclectic literature. A trope that articulates this discourse is the multi-voiced, multi-perspective novel that is a major example of British 1990s fiction. David Mitchell's *Ghostwritten* (1999)⁵⁰, Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting* (1993) and Iain Sinclair's *Downriver* (1991) are examples of novels shared between differing voices and

⁴⁸ Saul Friedlander, 'Introduction' in *Probing the Limits of Representation* (Cambridge [US]: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 4-5.

⁴⁹ Brannigan, *Orwell to the Present: Literature in England, 1945-2000* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2003), p. 204.

⁵⁰ Mitchell's more recent *Cloud Atlas* (2004) is constructed in a similarly fractured and shared way.

perspectives. Nick Rennison's description of Sinclair's novel being a 'vast compendium of lives and stories past and present'⁵¹ is an apt summing up of the effect of these and other novels such as Patrick Neate's *Twelve Bar Blues* (2001) and Graham Swift's *Last Orders* (1996). These novels are all very different in terms of scope and subject matter but what they share is an appreciation of the polyphony of contemporary Britain. Furthermore there is a prevailing sense that the 'grand narratives' of political ideology, philosophy, racial and national identity, gender and sexual identity and religion have been gradually replaced by micro-narratives, individual perspectives and hybridity. A consequence of these fragmented narratives is, perhaps paradoxically, that many of these novels reveal the inter-connectedness and inter-dependence of the separate voices rather than their difference and isolation. As will be seen in the present thesis, Thomas's *Pictures at an Exhibition*, Phillips's *The Nature of Blood* and Seiffert's *The Dark Room* utilise this multi-voiced narrative perspective.

Before returning to Langer's writing on 'Auschwitz literature', one can see how a realist novel comes to terms with the 'limits of representation' in the case of a text that remains, due to the author's nationality, outside the parameters of the present thesis. Bernhard Schlink's 1997 novel, *The Reader*⁵², exemplifies the complex relationship between the contemporary and the past, problematised in the context of the Holocaust. Schlink is a German writer, and hence his proximity to the Holocaust might provide him with a 'special' insight into how the past impinges on the present. The novel filters post-war German society's shame and guilt through the unreliable narration of Michael Berg, a researcher in legal history. Michael describes an erotic relationship with an older woman, Hanna Schmitz when he was an adolescent. Michael becomes the eponymous 'reader', narrating texts of the European canon to Hanna as she broadens his sexual education. Michael reveals that Hanna, after suddenly disappearing, was arrested and tried for her role as an SS guard. Despite his intimacy with her, Michael observes the trial with detachment and dispassion. Hanna appears perversely indifferent to her fate. It is revealed that she and her fellow SS were responsible for the deaths of a number of women who were locked in a church near Auschwitz. Hanna is blamed for writing a false report, and Michael realises that she is illiterate and hence could not have written it. But Hanna does not admit to this 'shame' and Michael, in shame, does not intervene on her

⁵¹ Rennison, *Contemporary British Novelists* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), p. 155.

⁵² Bernhard Schlink, *The Reader*, trans. by Carol Brown Janeway (London: Phoenix, 1997; repr. 1998).

behalf. She is sentenced to 18 years in prison. On the eve of her release, after she has learned to read, she commits suicide.

Schlink's novel engages with a generation's sense of horror and shame at their parents and grandparents who were involved in the war. Massie's *The Sins of the Fathers*, Roberts's *Daughters of the House* and Seiffert's *The Dark Room* all dramatise in various ways a similar battle between the generations. Schlink's novel, written in the first person and generally realist in terms of structure and language, explores the contemporary writer's own 'distance' from the events. Bill Niven has described *The Reader* as being akin to an 'autobiography of shame'⁵³, and it is this sense that the novel is as much about both an individual and a national 'shame' as it is about the Holocaust that arguably separates it from the British novels under discussion. This 'shame' is a belated, traumatised, response to the knowledge of the Holocaust. Michael's shame at having been sexually and romantically intimate with a woman involved in war crimes reflects a generational shame directed at those who were responsible for the Holocaust. Another aspect of the novel's engagement with the 'belatedness' of individuals and groups returning to the Holocaust is what Collins Donahue refers to as the 'emotionally anaesthetised'⁵⁴ nature of Michael's narration. This numbness and detachment permeates the novel and suggests the cultural and political crisis that grew through the 1970s and 1980s in Germany.

The Reader does not explicitly represent the Holocaust at all. Hanna's crimes remain largely 'off-stage'. This is apposite in that its very absence from the text suggests the ways in which the Holocaust 'haunts' the present. Its reality is contained within personal testimony. But the nature of testimony is problematised by the trope of 'numbness' and detachment that characterises Michael's narration. Michael hopes to keep himself 'outside' ethical judgement and an acknowledgement of his own collusion. He is a highly unreliable narrator, avoiding certain issues, confronting others, but only through a potentially endless spiral of philosophical questions in relationship to his country's past, his relationship with Hanna, and whether he should inform the authorities of Hanna's illiteracy. Michael sees his numbness as being a shared post-Holocaust malaise:

⁵³ Bill Niven, 'Bernhard Schlink's *Der Verleser* and the Problem of Shame' in *Modern Language Review*, 98 (2), April 2003, p. 390.

In the rare accounts by perpetrators, too, the gas chambers and ovens become ordinary scenery, the perpetrators reduced to their new functions and exhibiting a mental paralysis and indifference, a dullness that makes them seem drugged or drunk. The defendants seemed to me to be trapped still, and forever, in this drugged state, in a sense petrified in it.⁵⁵

Michael's, and the novel's, apparent inclusion of all – perpetrators, bystanders, survivors, subsequent generations – as being afflicted by this existential detachment remains controversial. In effect, Michael suggests that all have been 'numbed' by the Holocaust. This includes individuals such as himself who lived in the aftermath of it but were not involved. The 'revulsion, shame and guilt'⁵⁶ is spread across the nation.

The 'doctrine' of numbness, Collins Donahue argues, is 'in fact a kind of mystification', one that has been 'celebrated as moral achievement'.⁵⁷ Furthermore, he writes that the novel's alleged ethical sophistication is a 'postmodern valorisation of ambiguity *per se*'.⁵⁸ The ethical 'ambiguity' that Collins Donahue associates with the postmodern is seen as being inappropriate for a novel 'about' the Holocaust. *The Reader* is not a postmodern novel in terms of its form, style and structure. But perhaps its perceived moral relativism is an aspect of the postmodern and its relation to the Holocaust, an event that many see as being unequivocally 'evil' and 'closed' to any kind of re-evaluation. Whilst the present thesis seeks to counter this sacralising position by arguing for literary texts' inherent ability to re-present the Holocaust in a multiplicity of ways, Collins Donahue's criticism focuses attention on the troubling results of Schlink's novel (not least the author's apparent equation between reading and moral reasoning). The 'numbness' that Michael feels and that he identifies in the people around him, is problematical in that it joins together the perpetrator and the victim. This ethical blurring can also be read in Thomas's *Pictures at an Exhibition*.

Hanna's conviction is confirmed when at the trial she refuses to admit to the 'shame' of her illiteracy, and through her silence she condemns herself. Hanna is incapable of recognising her crimes and is unable to take ethical responsibility for her actions. Niven sums up this central aspect of the novel: 'But as long as Hanna remains

⁵⁴ William Collins Donahue, 'Illusions of Subtlety: Bernhard Schlink's *Der Verleser*' in *German Life and Letters*, v 54, no 1, 2001, p. 76.

⁵⁵ Schlink, p. 101.

⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 102.

⁵⁷ Collins Donahue, p. 62.

⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 77.

illiterate, her self-obsessed shame blocks her capacity for empathy, the pre-requisite to moral sensitivity. In acquiring literacy, she overcomes shame, releasing the blockage on this empathy'.⁵⁹ Once Hanna does 'discover' her moral sensitivity she kills herself, apparently in recognition of her complicity in Nazi crimes. She achieves this moral knowledge when she is in prison where she reads the work of Levi, Wiesel and Améry. The novel's title takes on added resonance. Michael's relationship with Hanna involves him in reading aloud to her. At the time, he does not make the connection between his reading and her illiteracy. Reading is equated with the development of a moral view of the world. Hanna learns to 'read' history, and by doing so and realising the part she has played in it, cannot live with her own guilt.

The testimony, written by a mother and daughter who survived the burning church, is read as a book that 'creates distance'. Michael sees this detachment as being a natural human response to traumatic experiences. The survivor's testimony is 'sober' and is not 'corrupted' by 'self pity'.⁶⁰ Schlink suggests that Michael's own testimony is similar in tone to that of the survivor memoir. Indeed, the opening line of the novel suggests a 'victim consciousness': 'When I was fifteen, I got hepatitis'.⁶¹ Michael's impulse to relativise suffering, to see everyone on the same continuum of trauma, informs the narrative of the novel. This is a position that threatens to undermine the suffering of Holocaust survivors. It also seems to vindicate Michael's own 'numbed' sense of self that he gradually begins to equate with the German race. Hanna is 'numbed' by her lack of ethical understanding – linked to the fact that she cannot read. Michael is 'numbed' by his generation's digging up of the war years. Martin Swales has written that *The Reader's* 'governing register is one of not knowing, not understanding, not remembering, not reflecting'.⁶² Despite Michael's efforts at interrogating his and Hanna's behaviour, he is unable, and perhaps reluctant, to penetrate the events of the past. Michael's 'numbness' is a version of the collective belated trauma, of a nation coming to terms with its own recent history.

Lawrence L. Langer writes:

Some literature of Auschwitz, in a desperate retreat from charges like these about the infection spreading from the very existence of the place, seeks

⁵⁹ Niven, p. 391.

⁶⁰ Schlink, p. 118.

⁶¹ Ibid, p. 1.

⁶² Martin Swales, 'Sex, shame and guilt: reflections on Bernhard Schlink's *Der Verleser* and JM Coetzee's *Disgrace*' in *Journal of European Studies*, 33, (1), 2003, p. 13.

vindication in a countervision that would restore moral health to the victims, imposing shame and accusation on the culprits alone.⁶³

In other words, the concomitant danger to Schlink's perceived moral relativism is to reduce the complexities of the historical event to 'evil' perpetrators and 'good' victims. In earlier allusions to the denouement of *Schindler's List* one can see how such issues surround narratives that posit redemptive or heroic endings. Langer's evocative image of Auschwitz representing an 'infection' that emanates from the place and its status as a metaphor of suffering and violence suggests how writers have approached the subject. It might be understandable that some writers have constructed a 'countervision' where the inverted 'morality' of the Holocaust is returned to normality. This question of redemption and consolation is problematised in *The Reader*. In a letter she leaves after her suicide, Hanna asks Michael to donate the last of her savings to the daughter who survived the church fire. Michael visits the daughter in America but is rebuffed:

I told her about Hanna's death and her last wishes.

'Why me?'

'I suppose because you were the only survivor.'

'And how am I supposed to deal with it?'

'However you think fit.'

'And grant Frau Schmitz her absolution?'

At first I wanted to protest, but Hanna was indeed asking a great deal. Her years of imprisonment were not merely to be the required atonement: Hanna wanted to give them her own meaning, and she wanted this giving of meaning to be recognized. I said as much.⁶⁴

It is the daughter's refusal to grant posthumous redemption to Hanna that emphasises the novel's appreciation of the differing moral responses to the 'news' of the Holocaust. *The Reader* problematises the ethical dilemmas of memory, shame and responsibility and as such might be a specifically 'German' novel. Seiffert's *The Dark Room*, in particular its final section, engages with a similar cultural 'return' to the war years: in effect one generation judging another. Seiffert, whose mother is German, might be seen as responding to the event in arguably more 'intimate' ways than other British writers. Sebald's *Austerlitz* also seems to occupy a similar marginal position: the author was born in the Bavarian Alps but was resident in Britain from 1970 until his death in 2001. The

⁶³ Langer, p. 95.

⁶⁴ *The Reader*, p. 210.

more strictly 'British' writers under discussion have not dramatised this national examination.

The question remains as to why British writers have returned to the subject of the Holocaust. Given the controversies that have arisen over previous fiction, particularly fiction written by writers with only a tangential relationship to the event, it appears perplexing that a number of British Holocaust fictions have emerged in the 1990s. One way of understanding British Holocaust novels is to see them as part of a broad literary and cultural movement towards the past. John Brannigan has identified a growing trend of 'elegiac prose, condition of England novels, historical fictions and valedictory narratives'⁶⁵ and Rod Mengham describes the 'fragments of the history of various communities'⁶⁶ that characterises contemporary historical writing. The novel of history is a dominant genre in British 1990s fiction and one that includes a wide variety of interpretations of the past. War, both the First and the Second, has been a major preoccupation for British writers in the 1990s and the Holocaust is a theme intimately linked with this cultural 'looking back'. Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient* (1992), Helen Dunmore's *The Siege* (2001), Louis de Bernière's *Captain Corelli's Mandolin* (1994) and Tim Binding's *An Island Madness* (1994) are each concerned with aspects of the Second World War. A popular novel such as Sebastian Faulks's *Charlotte Gray* (1998), ostensibly focused on espionage and resistance in France, also includes a significant sub-plot that alludes to the Holocaust.⁶⁷

Faulks's *Birdsong* (1993) is set during the First World War, a subject that has exerted a similar influence on writers in the 1990s. Perhaps one of the most revered examples of this concomitant 'war literature' is Pat Barker's *Regeneration* trilogy (1991-5). Barker's interest in trauma and the memories of loss in these novels echoes much writing on the Holocaust. Other novels deal with the inter-war years, offering a liminal vision of history 'haunted' by the memories of the First and proleptically 'haunted' by the forthcoming Second World War. Major sections of Elaine Feinstein's *Loving Brecht* (1992), Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* (1989) and his *When We Were Orphans* (2000) and Ian McEwan's *Atonement* (2001) are set in the 1930s and explore these intermediary years between the two major 'ruptures' of war. Similarly, a number of

⁶⁵ Brannigan, p. 75.

⁶⁶ Mengham in Lane, Mengham, Tew, eds, *Contemporary British Fiction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003), p. 7.

⁶⁷ For more on *Charlotte Gray*'s relationship to the Holocaust see n. 147 (p.58) in chapter one of the present thesis.

British novels have returned to the 1950s to inspect the post-war and early Cold War years. These include McEwan's *The Innocent* (1990), Laura Spinney's *The Doctor* (2001), Andrew Miller's *Oxygen* (2001), John Banville's *The Untouchable* (1997) and Gordon Burns's *Alma Cogan* (1991). The Second World War, as will be seen in chapter one in regard to Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*, is a key, if not the central, turning point in British history. In these respects it perhaps seems less unusual why a number of British writers have turned to the Holocaust. The novel of history, and in particular the history of the twentieth century, has been characterised by a cultural 'taking stock' of political events. Perhaps inevitably, novels 'inspired' by the war have exemplified this.

A way of understanding the British Holocaust novel is to interpret the event as having 'ruptured' the collective consciousness in marked and profound ways. Alvin H. Rosenfeld sums up this theory:

Holocaust literature occupies another sphere of study, one that is not only topical in interest but that extends so far as to force us to contemplate what may be fundamental changes in our modes of perception and expression, our altered way of being-in-the-world. What needs to be stressed is this: the nature and magnitude of the Holocaust were such as to mark, almost certainly, the end of one era of consciousness and the beginning of another.⁶⁸

If there is indeed a post-Holocaust consciousness, a 'way-of-being-in-the-world' that is fundamentally different from the pre-war years, then perhaps the survivors, writers, critics, historians and artists who have sought to represent it are involved in a complex process of framing and defining this changed consciousness. The novelists' nationality might be seen to be less important than the larger issue of an epistemological and ontological 'breach' or 'rupture' that has shifted knowledge. The 'return' to the Second World War is recognition of the radically altered post-war 'way-of-being-in-the-world'. The Holocaust has become the primary synecdoche of such changes. Rosenfeld continues:

The human imagination after Auschwitz is simply not the same as it was before ... How we are to live with such knowledge is another matter, but there is no denying that possessed with it or by it, we are, in some basic ways, *different* from what we might have been before ... With the advent of Auschwitz, the necessary distance that once prevailed between even the most

⁶⁸ Alvin H Rosenfeld, 'The Problematics of Holocaust Literature' in Bloom, H, ed, *Literature of the Holocaust* (Broomall [US]: Chelsea House, 2004), p. 21.

extreme imaginings and human occurrence closes. Following upon that closure, the eye opens to gaze unbelievably on scenes of life-and-death, death-and-life, which the mind cannot rationally accept or the imagination take in and adequately record. Stunned by the awesomeness and pressure of event, the imagination comes to one of its periodic endings; undoubtedly, it also stands at the threshold of new and more difficult beginnings.⁶⁹

Auschwitz has shifted both consciousness and language. Rosenfeld's description of the metonymical 'eye' that cannot comprehend what it is seeing alludes to the events of the Holocaust that seem to surpass what can be witnessed and, subsequently, what can be understood. The evocation of a collective imagination coming to an 'ending', and therefore demanding 'new and more difficult beginnings', confirms what many have argued is the key aspect of Holocaust representation. Simply put, previous models of realism are not sufficient for representing the Nazi 'Final Solution'. Texts such as *The White Hotel*, *The Painted Bird* and *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen*, have pointed towards 'new' aesthetics required to represent those experiences. A film such as Lanzmann's *Shoah* embodies another way of representing memory, particularly traumatised memory. The very absence of explicit imagery from the camps and the ghettos shows how the film is aware of the radical caesura at the heart of events.

How the British Holocaust novels of the 1990s have contributed to this 'new' poetics forms the spine of the present thesis. Lawrence L. Langer writes that the Holocaust 'continues to contradict the premises of form and of language itself, resulting in a split that may in fact define the bond between the writers and this material, and our possible access to it'.⁷⁰ The 'problem' in the representation of the Holocaust is how to articulate the experiences of those who endured the camps, experiences that are 'beyond' previous limits of understanding. The danger is to fashion a narrative that, in Nicola King's words 'recuperates violence or atrocity into a chronological sequence which negates the disruptive effect of that violence on the nature of time as common sense imagines it'.⁷¹ This would be a fiction that restores temporal, spatial and therefore narrative coherence to a historical event that radically ruptured those very conventions. In chapter six and chapter seven of the present thesis, this problematic will be more fully analysed in response to the controversies surrounding *Time's Arrow* and *Pictures at an Exhibition*.

⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 22.

⁷⁰ Langer, p. 105.

Daniel R. Schwarz writes that the issue of Holocaust representation is whether there is 'the possibility that we can recall and narrate the unspeakable'.⁷² Schwarz recognises the twofold problematic with the difficulties in accurately remembering the event and then being able to narrate it. He alludes to the importance and centrality of narrative as a means of giving history 'intelligibility'.⁷³ The kinds of narrative used to 'speak' the 'unspeakable', and the tropes inherent in them, are persistently open to a questioning of how they render the experiences of the Holocaust. If one accepts Rosenfeld's assertion that the Holocaust has irrevocably altered the post-war consciousness, and narratives 'dealing' with the subject have had to negotiate the 'limits' of language in order to express such experiences, what might one of these narratives look like? A writer does not want to 'domesticate the implausible and unthinkable', as Schwarz describes it.⁷⁴ An example from the British fiction of the 1990s that serves as a starting point for further enquiries into the issue of how narratives represent the Holocaust is Christopher Hope's *Serenity House* (1992). This novel, a black comic satire set in Britain in 1990, has at its centre an ex-Nazi, Max Montfalcon, living incognito in a home for the elderly of the novel's title. A brief analysis of the text's tone, characterisation and narrative tropes will help to explicate some of the themes previously discussed in relation to the 'speaking' of the 'unspeakable'.

The novel tells the story of Montfalcon and the 'plot' that threatens to reveal his identity as a Nazi involved in war crimes. Montfalcon's son-in-law, Albert Turberville, is an ambitious MP who is involved in the War Crimes Bill.⁷⁵ He suspects Montfalcon's fabricated identity (the latter refers to his old self as 'young von F') and seeks to expose him as a Nazi. Running parallel to this story is a plot surrounding Jack, a young American who works in a theme park resembling Disneyland. Jack is brought up on a diet of violent videos and stories told to him by his guardian, Marta. Marta is a survivor of the camps and more importantly a survivor of medical experiments carried out by Montfalcon. Jack is excited by her stories of suffering and extreme violence and he

⁷¹ King, (2000), p. 24.

⁷² Schwarz, (2000), p. 12.

⁷³ Ibid, p. 23.

⁷⁴ Ibid, p. 38.

⁷⁵ In Lacqueur, ed *The Holocaust Encyclopaedia* (2001) David Cesarani writes: 'An All-Party Parliamentary War Crimes Group was set up in November 1986 to lobby for an investigation [into suspected Nazis resident in the UK], and an official inquiry was ordered in February 1988. Its report, released in July 1989, verified the presence of suspected war criminals in Britain and recommended that action be taken in more than 100 cases ... After protracted debate a war crimes bill was introduced in Parliament in March 1990. It became law in May 1991, in the teeth of opposition from the House of Lords. Police war crimes units were then set up in Edinburgh and London'. (p. 681)

leaves America to work at Serenity House in London. He is subsequently revealed to have committed the murders of a number of its inhabitants. Max, beset by memories of his experiences in the camps, escapes the authorities and leaves for America, where he kills Jack in a theme park called 'The Magic Kingdom'. More important is the black comic tone of the prose and the ironic connections Hope makes between the past of the Holocaust and the present of rest homes and theme parks. Montfalcon is a comic character whose irascible nature and commitment to a fantasy of English identity – embodied in his adherence to Fowler's *A Dictionary of Modern English Usage* – makes him a vivid and entertaining 'monster'.

Given what the present chapter has so far explored in relation to representing the Holocaust, *Serenity House* might be assumed to have been a remarkably controversial novel. The notion of a 'Holocaust comedy' seems to be at best, an oxymoron and at worst reprehensible. Hope makes jokes, for example, at the expense of Montfalcon's haunted and eruptive unconscious. He wakes in the middle of the night from a nightmare and is found muttering about numbers in a disoriented state: 'I had nothing whatever to do with the missing numbers. This is hard to understand. I know that. People who weren't there cannot understand. Ever'.⁷⁶ There are small but revealing puns around heavily weighted Holocaust 'words'. Montfalcon is escorted around possible homes with his daughter and son-in-law:

'I have to use the lavatory.'

'We'll find one inside.'

'I don't need it then. Our primitive ancestors exposed their old and dying on the hillside. Some people call it cruel. But I tell you it was a bloody sight more humane than sticking them away in geriatric ghettos. Tell me – who does the selecting here?'

'Selecting?' Albert, concentrating on squeezing the Jag between two red Ford Escorts, found difficulty dealing with the question. 'What are you talking about, Max?'

'In all these institutions there's always somebody who does the selecting.'

'Selecting for what?'

'For who lives and who dies'.⁷⁷ (My Emphases)

As will be seen throughout the thesis, certain key words, images and phrases, in the context of writing about the Holocaust, carry with them particular and specific meanings. This is an example of the ways in which many of the writers convey the experience of

⁷⁶ *Serenity House*, p. 10.

the Holocaust. It can be thought of as a visual, epistemological 'shorthand', relying, as the author is, on the prior knowledge of the reader to, as it were, 'fill in' the rest of the image. In this example, it appears that Montfalcon is speaking about issues in the present. But his use of the trigger-word 'selecting' suggests an entirely different meaning, connoting the infamous 'selection process' at camps such as Auschwitz.⁷⁸ The brief reference to 'ghettos' similarly reveals the unconscious of Montfalcon subtly betraying his past experiences.

The home's Matron takes Montfalcon down to a cellar where the luggage of the inhabitants is stored. Through the twisted perception of the ex-Nazi these objects are imbued with traces of the Holocaust: 'The hill of leather gleamed softly. It seemed to breathe, exhaling the bouquet of decades: cowhide, pigskin, alligator and kid. **The memorial mountain of dead skins.** Each bag, case, valise, trunk, portmanteau carefully and clearly labelled'.⁷⁹ The text makes ironic connections between the horror of the Holocaust and the comparative 'serenity' of 1990s Britain and America. This reaches its apotheosis in the final chapter that describes Montfalcon's pursuit of Jack in the theme park in Florida. Hope makes explicit his satirical trope of aligning the old people's home and the theme park with the use of euthanasia and the existence of the camps.

Hope also portrays 'The Magic Kingdom' in similar ways to the descriptions of the 'selections' and the 'luggage'. Words and phrases weighted with connotations of the Holocaust are intended to create an ironic effect in the context of the precise antithesis of the camps. The opening sentence of this climatic chapter sets the satirical tone: 'The incoming contingents still arrived by **train**'.⁸⁰ Later, Hope includes a sentence that evokes people arriving at the camps: '**Guards** carefully placed, never letting the newcomers out of their sight as **train** after **train** drew up to the **ramp** and the arrivals stepped onto the platform to be artfully funnelled towards the **camp** itself'.⁸¹ The text makes an allusion to the notorious clock at Treblinka station:

One believed one was on a real train bound for a real destination. Platform tickets, ostensibly offering new arrivals the choice of a stay lasting, perhaps,

⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 47.

⁷⁸ Primo Levi in *If This Is A Man* (trans. by Stuart Wolf, Abacus, 2004) describes the selections after arriving at Auschwitz: 'A dozen SS men stood around, legs akimbo, with an indifferent air. At a certain moment they moved among us, and in a subdued tone of voice, with faces of stone, began to interrogate us rapidly, one by one, in bad Italian. They did not interrogate everybody, only a few: 'How old? Healthy or ill?' And on the basis of the reply they pointed in two different directions'. (p. 25)

⁷⁹ *Serenity House*, p. 53.

⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 221.

⁸¹ Ibid, p. 221.

three days. It seemed one remembered similar soothing deceptions in other facilities long ago. A complete station, with waiting rooms and timetables. A clock whose hands were frozen at six. Six in the evening or six in the morning? No one ever knew. But never anything on this scale. The turnstiles clicked behind one.⁸²

There are allusions to ‘chimneys’,⁸³ ‘camp authorities’,⁸⁴ to a ‘camp orchestra’,⁸⁵ and to the theme park’s insistence upon marking visitors with a number on their wrists – ‘To show one has spent time in the camp’.⁸⁶ Hope utilises a grotesque irony to emphasise the parallels between Montfalcon’s Nazi past and the present of theme parks. *Serenity House*, though, risks censure for trivialising the camp experience by comparing it with the simulated ‘camp’ of the Disneyland-like theme park.

Another aspect of Hope’s black comic approach is to counter-balance these ironic parallels with evidence of the ‘real’ experience. For example, when Marta tells Jack in America about her war experiences, Hope’s prose changes to accommodate the tone of a survivor’s testimony:

First there was the selection on the ramp. Then the doctor rides the ambulance across to the showers. Then he decides how many pellets. Then he checks the result. That’s when they put on the gas masks. And it was so funny – even if they looked like doctors first – because when they put on the masks they all looked like pigs. Afterwards forms to fill in. How many treated? How many teeth pulled? The dentists from hell got busy then. Some of the teeth always went missing. But with the people who’d owned them first gone missing too, how were they to be found? Two things were known about the place where we were. The doctor who wasn’t a doctor was a good enough man. And he was rich.⁸⁷

The direct, plain style of Marta’s testimony alludes to a survivor’s voice and memories. It offers an ethical contrast to Montfalcon, Jack, the home and the theme park. One of Hope’s satirical targets is the commodification of the Holocaust. The final chapter shows how many of the same tactics used by the Nazis are re-employed in a trivial and vacuous manner by the designers and owners of the ‘Magic Kingdom’. This trope is further explored in Jack’s numbed, vicarious and perverse response to Marta’s stories. Jack

⁸² Ibid, p. 222.

⁸³ Ibid, p. 222.

⁸⁴ Ibid, p. 223.

⁸⁵ Ibid, p. 224.

⁸⁶ Ibid, p. 226.

⁸⁷ Ibid, p. 81.

cannot associate these narratives of suffering and intense violence with the 'real'. He has been desensitised by watching endless hours of pornography and snuff films and is unable to make the appropriate ethical responses (like Hanna in *The Reader*) to Marta's traumatised memories. This is underlined when Jack finds some Nazi memorabilia at a market. These include some of Montfalcon's letters and such instruments as callipers and syringes. Jack watches as a stallholder shows him one of the syringes:

If you look carefully, you'll see a deposit adhering to the side of the glass. We'll leave it to the laboratory tests to prove it. But I'll lay a hundred to one we'll find phenol traces. It's rather yellow, you see? It would have once been a kind of pinky yellow. Directly into the heart it was injected ... If we can show that there is phenol in these syringes then the value quintuples. Oh, happy days!⁸⁸

Nicola King has written that many might assume that tragedy would be the most appropriate genre for representing the Holocaust but that a kind of black or 'gallows' humour might reveal truths about the event.⁸⁹ King argues that *Serenity House* is partly concerned with a cultural dissociation between the 'real' of the Holocaust and the simulacra of postmodernity. She suggests that Jack's infantile excitement at Marta's memories of the camps is 'a blackly comic paradigm of how Holocaust memory might now be dissociated from its context, fractured, difficult if not impossible to transmit, its effect impossible to determine'.⁹⁰ The 'Holocaust memory' has been attenuated in a postmodern culture embodied by Jack's amoral, sadistic and thoughtless solipsism. King goes on to suggest that the Holocaust's 'earlier atrocities have been superseded by a contemporary addiction to mindless violence fed by the media and a soulless consumer culture'.⁹¹ Despite this reading, King concedes that Hope's central satirical conceit finally doesn't convince. This is based, simply but effectively, on the observation that people are not forced to go to theme parks. But King suggests that the question of whether a representation of the Holocaust is offensive or inappropriate or even inaccurate is as much about tone as it is about form.

⁸⁸ Ibid, pp. 89-90.

⁸⁹ For more see Mark Cory, 'Comedic Distance in Holocaust Literature' (pp. 193-203) in Bloom, H, ed, *Literature of the Holocaust* (2004).

⁹⁰ King, 'We Come After ...' in Luckhurst, Marks, eds, *Literature and the Contemporary: Fictions and Theories of the Present* (Harlow: Longman, 1999), p. 99.

⁹¹ Ibid, p. 99.

Equally, Amis's *Time's Arrow* received a mixed critical reaction, some critics considering it an 'inappropriate' response to the gravity of events. Conversely, it was defended on grounds that it 'shook' readers out of what might have become an unexamined reverence for the 'sacred' nature of the Holocaust. One might argue that black comedy conceivably articulates this profound sense of rupture as successfully as more obviously 'sensitive' genres. Slavoj Žižek, discussing Benigni's *Life is Beautiful*, writes:

Paradoxical as it may sound, the rise of the holocaust comedy is correlative to the elevation of the holocaust [sic] itself into *the* metaphysical, diabolical Evil – the ultimate traumatic point at which the objectifying of historical knowledge breaks down and even witnesses concede words fail them. The holocaust cannot be explained, visualised, represented or transmitted, since it marks the black hole, the implosion of the (narrative) universe. Any attempt to locate it in its context, to politicise it, equals an anti-Semitic negation of its uniqueness. [Author's Italics]

Žižek continues, suggesting one consequence of this 'sacralising' impulse:

[T]his very depoliticisation of the holocaust, its elevation into the properly sublime Evil, can also be a cynically manipulative political strategy to legitimise certain practices and disqualify others. It perfectly fits today's culture of victimisation: is the holocaust not the supreme proof that to be human is to be a victim not an active political agent and that proclaiming oneself a victim is the *sine qua non* of speaking with authority.⁹²

The 'sacralising' of the Holocaust is in part a political discourse. The disqualification of some forms and responses to the event suggests a gradually strengthening hegemony surrounding the policing of Holocaust representations. It is a question of testing the aesthetic response against a set of ethical imperatives, one of which is a comic approach to the event. Žižek's comments suggest a number of further inroads into the subject of Holocaust representation, not the least of which is the growing sense that the genocide symbolises a 'black hole' in the historical and individual imagination. Its status as a 'metaphysical, diabolical Evil' has developed throughout the post-war years. One of the most pressing results of this phenomenon is that certain genres and representations will

⁹² Slavoj Žižek, 'Camp Comedy' (pp. 26-9) in *Sight & Sound*, Apr 2000, v10, No.4, p. 27.

be deemed 'unsuitable' because they are perceived to have not taken the subject matter 'seriously'.

Serenity House, as Nicola King suggests, is an attempt to show how the Holocaust has come to be commodified or 'Americanised'⁹³ and, embodied in the character of Jack, its reality has been attenuated and diminished. But Hope's text also risks a facile comparison between homes for the elderly and theme parks of the 1990s and the Nazi concentration camps. Žižek argues that, in effect, the urge to a particular and arguably narrow poetics of Holocaust representation has determined that artists will either turn away from the subject altogether or seek increasingly radical forms with which to represent the event. One of the most critically acclaimed examples of Holocaust representation is Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, which tells its story through the medium of the 'graphic novel'. The mixing of real experiences and memories of Spiegelman's father with the aesthetic form of the 'comic strip' is one of the central factors in critical writing on *Maus*. It might initially seem that such a 'low' popular form as 'commix' couldn't accurately represent the Holocaust. But many critics have praised *Maus* precisely on the grounds of its complexity of representation and its radical use of the conventions of the 'graphic novel' to reflect the memory-work between father and son.⁹⁴

Steven Connor has written about an 'apocalyptic' trope in much modern and recent British writing. Connor's comments help to situate the 1990s British writers within a post-war and post-Holocaust consciousness. Many writers and thinkers interpret the event as incommensurate, disorienting, morally inverted and finally incommunicable. Given such imperatives, the writer of Holocaust fiction seeks to impose narrative order and coherence upon what appears to be 'beyond' reason. Connor makes the connection explicit in his following paragraph:

The experience of the Second World War and its aftermath provided a particular, historically unprecedented set of fears and misgivings with regard to history. The effect of the discoveries of the concentration camps in which the Nazis had pursued their systematic programmes of extermination, combined with the knowledge of the huge power of the atomic bombs

⁹³ For more see Harold Kaplan, 'The Americanization of the Holocaust' (pp. 309-21) in Levy, M., *Remembering for the Future* (2001).

⁹⁴ For more on *Maus* see LaCapra, *History and Memory after Auschwitz* (New York [US]: Cornell University Press, 1998) (pp. 139-79); Young, 'The Holocaust as Vicarious Past: Art Spiegelman's *Maus* and the Afterimages of History' (pp. 23-45) in Bernard-Donals, Glejzer, eds, *Witnessing the Disaster* (2003); Glejzer, 'Maus and the Epistemology of Witness' (pp. 125-37) in Bernard-Donals, Glejzer, (2003); Rothberg, *Traumatic Realism* (Minneapolis [US]: University of Minneapolis Press, 2000), pp. 202-19; Schwarz (1999), pp. 287-302.

dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, rapidly produced a sense that the unimaginable had taken up residence in history.⁹⁵

This 'unimaginable', in other words, the apocalyptic, having already taken place during the war is fundamental to an understanding of why British writers turned to a subject that had been felt to be 'off-limits' or at the very least highly problematical. But Connor's reading suggests a starting-point for thinking about the fiction of the 1990s as, in part, a fiction that, aside from 'looking backwards', was also confronting an apocalypse that had 'brought to light' a knowledge that subverted previous notions of war, the nation state, race and industry.

Connor goes on to discuss the nature of the apocalypse in narrative. The apocalyptic narrative is concerned with endings or what Connor refers to as 'absolute ending'.⁹⁶ Because of the Holocaust and Hiroshima/Nagasaki, the 'absolute ending' has become a reality rather than simply being something feared for at some imminent but still future date. The move from eschatology to reality that this apprehension of the apocalypse represents poses problems for narrative:

The challenge of absolute ending for narrative lies in the fact that it both discloses and perturbs the ordinary expectations of ending; namely the satisfaction of completeness within continuation. Absolute ending seems to offer the terrifying prospect of an ending without appendix, without the possibility of resumption or transcendence, or of the smallest sliver of aftermath in which the ending might be known as such.⁹⁷

It must be stressed that Connor is writing about the portent of the apocalypse⁹⁸, the unimaginable 'absolute ending' occurring, without warning, in the near future. But the Holocaust, seen as a temporal breach, is an event that undermines traditional concepts of cause and effect and the logic of linearity. Thus, it is an apocalypse that has already taken place. The anxiety that Connor sees as being endemic to the idea of an apocalyptic, and therefore final, non-redemptive, ending can be transferred 'back' onto the Holocaust. In other words, the British writers of the 1990s are expressing a more familiar end-of-the-

⁹⁵ Connor, p. 199.

⁹⁶ Ibid, p. 200.

⁹⁷ Ibid, p. 200.

⁹⁸ For more on apocalyptic thinking see Castells, M, *End of Millennium* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998); Fernandez-Armesto, *Millennium* (London: Doubleday, 1995). Also see R.G. Clouse, 'Millennialism' at

century, *fin-de-millennium* anxiety. Instead of looking to the imminent future, these novelists have returned to the past of the Holocaust because it has come to represent an 'apocalyptic hell'. In doing so, the novels dramatise this belated return to the apocalyptic past with characters in the present, or, at the very least, after the fact, coming to terms with knowledge of the Holocaust.

There are a number of British novels that articulate this sense of the apocalyptic away from the issues and imagery of the Holocaust. Aside from reading the apocalyptic as being a trepidation for a future date of destruction, and the implications for narrative that this implies, one can also understand the apocalyptic imagination as one that, in Lee Quinby's words, expresses itself through images of 'cultural decline, urban chaos, and ecological devastation'.⁹⁹ This is a secular apocalypticism that has entered the cultural consciousness, perhaps most especially in the United States. But there are examples of apocalyptic writing in British 1990s fiction. Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting*, with its focus on heroin addiction, unemployment, economic decline and HIV/AIDS can be thought of as apocalyptic with these subject matters but also through its amoral, cynical and black comic approach to them. Similarly, Laura Hird's *Born Free* (1999) portrays an Edinburgh family enduring personal problems and urban decay. The perceived cultural decline can be read in other novels such as Gordon Burns's *Fullalove* (1995), Alan Warner's *Morvern Callar* (1995), and James Kelman's *How Late it Was, How Late* (1994). These novels are apocalyptic in the sense that Britain, perhaps particularly Scotland, is shown to be in post-Thatcherite political decline. Many of these novels adopt an angry, satirical and bleak view of class relations, national identity and cultural discourses of the 1990s such as celebrity, the fragmentation of the family and economic inequality.

The connotations of the 'apocalyptic imaginary' are many and varied and these attest to Quinby's description of apocalypse having an 'unusual elasticity' of meaning inherent in it.¹⁰⁰ Lucy Ellmann's *Man or Mango? A Lament* contains elements of apocalyptic imagery but also captures a 'return to the apocalypse'. The novel is an apocalyptic satire that is in part constructed around a series of ironic juxtapositions. Ellmann utilises lists, extracts, quotations and pictures to create a frequently disorienting collage of intertexts. Although not a Holocaust fiction as are *Time's Arrow*, David

<http://mb-soft.com/believe>; J.P. Kirsch, 'Millennium and Millenarianism' at <http://www.newadvent.org>; L. Quinby, 'Apocalyptic Fits' at <http://dhushara.tripod.com>.

⁹⁹ Quinby, 'Apocalyptic Fits'.

Hartnett's *Black Milk* and Massie's *The Sins of the Father*, Ellmann's novel does begin with an authorial statement that suggests the text's underlying 'message':

Future historians will condemn us as the people who managed to live right after the Holocaust, who went about our daily lives – eating, sleeping, peeing, pooing – as if nothing had happened, as if human affairs were still worth worrying about. As if the end of the world had not already come and gone.¹⁰¹

Ellmann articulates the sense of belatedness and also of a perceived cultural indifference and amnesia. The 'end of the world' has already happened. The world is post-Holocaust, and therefore also post-Apocalyptic. Ellmann describes a number of atrocities including the killing of babies and deaths in the gas chambers. She then considers the shocked aftermath of this reality:

All the lives that ended in those camps! It wasn't just one incident that could become padded by forgetfulness: it was the final one. We bear their shock on our shoulders, unquenched, unappeased. Old women who'd expected to die in their beds, children who'd expected to *live*. It's too late now to comfort them, too late. We have to live with that.

The Nazis didn't invent annihilation – nature exalts in it – but they were the best list-makers.¹⁰²

Ellmann includes an extract from a genuine document (a trope also used in Harris's *Fatherland* and Thomas's *Pictures at an Exhibition*) that details valuables 'handed over to the Nazis'. This is followed by one of the most famous quotations from Wiesel's *Night* that ends; 'Never shall I forget that nocturnal silence which deprived me for all eternity of the desire to live ... Never'.¹⁰³ Wiesel's status as a survivor and one of the most acclaimed writers on the Holocaust acts as a contrast to the accusation of amnesia in subsequent generations. Ellmann's use of juxtaposing 'found' documents, intertextual quotations and fictional prose produces unexpected and sometimes ironic connections. Or rather, the reader has to 'make' meaning by comparing and contrasting these passages. Ellmann's novel enacts some of the themes and tropes common to British Holocaust fiction of the 1990s. Firstly, a symbolic 'return' to an apocalypse already situated in the historical and the imaginary. Secondly, a sense that the Holocaust acts as a

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Lucy Ellmann, *Man or Mango? A Lament* (London: Review, 1998), p. 11.

¹⁰² Ibid, p. 11.

¹⁰³ Ibid, pp. 12-13.

signifier of the 'real' in opposition to certain strains of postmodern thought. Thirdly, that the Holocaust remains a 'presence' in the 1990s literary text in part, aside from its traumatic nature, because of its 'challenge' to representation.

The Holocaust is a 'site' or 'prism' through which such issues are discussed. At the same time writers grapple with the representation of a real that remains 'unimaginable' and 'inexpressible'. Connor writes, for example, that the apocalypse is 'as much a challenge to our capacities to conceive, represent and narrate it, as it is to our will to avert it'.¹⁰⁴ If one inverts the temporal assumptions of this comment, one can see echoes of the concerns about the conception, representation and narration of the Holocaust. Connor likens the apocalypse to the 'unthinkable' and argues that at its heart the apocalyptic narrative has a 'purpose' of 'deterrence'.¹⁰⁵ Given that the Holocaust has already taken place, this deterrence is not of the same nature as the 'forthcoming' apocalypse. But one can understand deterrence as one of 'future' genocide. In other words, the oft-repeated adage of 'never again' is one of the presiding discourses that influence the majority of Holocaust representation. Imagining the unimaginable whilst wishing its deterrence is applicable to the 'apocalyptic' writing of the Holocaust. Equally, the impulse to 'turn away' and to remain silent is perhaps superstitious. In other words, that if one does not speak of it, the event will fade from memory and from history, as will its potential to recur.

Connor suggests a link between these apocalyptic imaginings. He describes the fear that representing the nuclear apocalypse, and of narrating an absolute ending, can unintentionally mirror Cold War rhetoric:

Seen in this way, there might be a kind of blasphemy involved in attempting to represent the event of annihilation ... There is an equivalence here between the potential annihilation of nuclear disaster and the actual entry of mass extermination into history, in the Jewish Holocaust of the Second World War, an equivalence signalled in the shared word 'holocaust'.¹⁰⁶

Connor's use of the term 'blasphemy' is significant. Earlier it was discussed that there had been a 'sacralising' impulse in certain discourses in representing and honouring the

¹⁰⁴ Connor, p. 201.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, p. 201.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, p. 202.

dead of the Holocaust. But the ethical imperative to avoid ‘profaning’ the event and the memories of those who survived is a persuasive discourse. Connor continues:

In both cases, there exists a compulsion to shelter the event from representation, to maintain it in a condition of sacred virtuality. It is almost as though, having once become historical, the horror of mass annihilation must nevertheless be kept out of history, lest it become habituated as a repeatable event or idea. Of course, this necessity only arises because the event has in fact taken place, and the possibility of planning for it and doing it again has entered history.¹⁰⁷

It is understandable that the Holocaust has, in some quarters, been ‘sacralised’ and ‘kept out of history’. As Connor suggests, there are the two compulsions to ‘narrate the unimaginable and the unspeakable’ and to ‘hold off from imagining and narrating’.¹⁰⁸ Connor problematises this binary further by suggesting that the post-war years, with the knowledge of the Holocaust growing incrementally, is a period like no other in recorded history. This ‘means the habituation of a double-bind in which we simultaneously must and must not narrate a kind of absolute ending that we anyway cannot and cannot not narrate’.¹⁰⁹ The imperatives of speaking and not speaking – or of representation and non-representation – inform a reading of the future apocalypse and of the ‘past’ apocalypse. Its ‘absolute ending’ poses problems to a narrative art such as the novel, and each of the texts under discussion in the present thesis works with and around such a dilemma. In, for example, *Masai Dreaming*, Justin Cartwright dramatises the ethical and aesthetic dilemmas of a screenwriter attempting to write about the real experiences of a woman killed in Auschwitz (whom it is revealed actually committed suicide after having been released). The novel narrates the tensions between speaking and not speaking. It also narrates what can and can’t be said. At crucial points, the screenwriter’s imagination and research fail him and he, and the novel, is left with silence.

These issues are more pronounced when seen in light of writers who, because of age and geography, have little to do directly with the experiences of those who died and those who survived. The distance between event and representation has grown, and the issues of accuracy and taste, bearing witness and the ‘impossible’ task of speaking the unspeakable are urgent. Peter Middleton and Tim Woods have argued that texts are

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, p. 202.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, p. 202.

‘forms of prosthetic social memory’, acting as examples of ‘public memorial space’.¹¹⁰ Ian McEwan’s *Black Dogs* dramatises this distance and incomprehension. Although only obliquely concerned with the Holocaust, *Black Dogs* includes a sequence that symbolises how the contemporary mind grapples to come to terms with knowledge of this ‘absolute ending.’

The narrator of *Black Dogs*, Jeremy, recalls the year that he first met his wife, Jenny Tremaine, on a cultural delegation to Poland. Jeremy reluctantly accompanies Jenny to the concentration camp at Majdanek.¹¹¹ Jeremy suggests that it is no longer a ‘monument’ but is ‘a disease of the imagination and a living peril, a barely conscious connivance with evil’.¹¹² The couple walk in silence, observing the watchtowers, huts, wire cages filled with shoes and the incinerator. Jeremy considers that the sheer scale of the deaths denies ‘the imagination its proper sympathies, its rightful grasp of the suffering’.¹¹³ He cannot comprehend the size of the atrocity and hence he feels like a tourist. He senses a disturbing intimacy with the ‘dreamers of the nightmare’ and feels an ‘inverted admiration’ and a ‘bleak wonder’ at the terrible brilliance of the Nazi ‘Final Solution’, its ‘energy’ and its ‘dedication’. “‘How’”, Jeremy asks, “could one begin to call it a mistake?””¹¹⁴ This scene represents the dilemmas facing the contemporary individual when trying to comprehend the Holocaust.

McEwan foregrounds the personal accounts of public events – or, at least, the remnants of those events. It is significant that Jeremy and Jenny’s visit coincides with their burgeoning romance: the novel insists that the realms of the personal and the political are interdependent. Jeremy’s uneasy feeling of tourism and his expression of a reluctant ‘admiration’ for the efficiency of the camp are placed in the ‘ordinary’ context of a day’s trip only undertaken to be with Jenny. McEwan’s novel engages with the problematics of memory and how such ambiguities contribute to ‘new’ ways of interpreting the past. The central motif of the novel provides a pivot on which turn such

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, p. 203.

¹¹⁰ Middleton & Woods, *Literatures of Memory: History, time and space in postwar writing* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 5.

¹¹¹ In *The Holocaust Encyclopaedia* (2001) Majdanek is described thus: ‘Prisoner-of-war and extermination camp outside Lublin in southern Poland. Majdanek began operation in October 1941 as one of the largest camps in Eastern Europe, with seven gas chambers. Its inmates included Soviet prisoners of war, imprisoned and deported Belorussians and Poles, and Jews from throughout Europe. Approximately 360,000 inmates died there: about 215,000 from starvation, abuse, exhaustion, and disease and about 145,000 from gassing or shooting. Most of the installations, but not the gas chambers, were destroyed before the Red Army reached the camp in July 1944’. (p. 409)

¹¹² Ian McEwan, *Black Dogs* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1992; repr. Vintage, 1998), p. 110.

¹¹³ Ibid, p. 110.

disputes over meaning. Ostensibly the black dogs are fierce animals that Jenny's mother, June, encounters in France in 1946. This incident precipitates her belief in god. But also the dogs come to represent a latent 'evil' in Europe. Peter Childs summarises this aspect of the novel: 'The book uses the dogs of its title (who have supposedly been trained by the Gestapo not only to attack but to rape) as an emblem or manifestation of a primal evil that will periodically surface in Europe'.¹¹⁵

The novel examines the importance of these dogs and offers the competing interpretations of the animals as articulated by June and her husband, Bernard. June is so shaken by what she has experienced that she turns to a religious interpretation, seeing them as visitations and symbols of a pervasive evil. In direct, irreconcilable contrast, the sceptical, materialist Bernard dismisses such a perspective – he argues for 'truth' and the 'facts' and cannot countenance his wife's mythologising of the dogs. McEwan presents a fundamental split between spiritual and political ideologies. June and Bernard accuse the other of absolutism and the marriage deteriorates because of such irrevocable differences. The significance of the dogs, and their connection with the Nazis, is underlined by the shadow they cast over the subsequent years. McEwan suggests that both readings of the dogs have some credence. The Gestapo who arrived at the French town to track down resistance hideouts, it is discovered, owned the dogs. The town's Maire recalls the invasion:

They moved around the area, and we never knew when or where they'd turn up next. They made themselves very public with these dogs, poking into everyone's business. The idea was intimidation, and it worked. Everyone was terrified of these dogs and their handlers. From our point of view, it was difficult to move about at night, with the dogs patrolling around the village.¹¹⁶

It is telling that McEwan's text reverts to the veracity and immediacy of personal testimony to substantiate the rumour that the dogs were the property of the Gestapo. This trope emphasises the material and political reason for the dogs' existence and their potential violence.

Because of the debate about these animals – Jeremy's belated position of 'author' is a further mediation between the event and the representing of the event – they act as

¹¹⁴ Ibid, p. 111.

¹¹⁵ Peter Childs, *Contemporary Novelists: British Fiction since 1970* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2005), p. 165.

¹¹⁶ McEwan, p. 158.

metaphors but also as a figurative site through which the questions of re-narrating history are discussed. If one extrapolates from this reading of the dogs to see them as metonyms of the Holocaust, *Black Dogs* dramatises the way in which the contemporary mind attempts to re-present the traumatic past. The dogs have been mythologised to embody a virulent evil. But also the dogs are real and were trained by the Gestapo. They are part of history and politics, the 'real' of the Holocaust. By the end of the novel, Jeremy appears to agree with June that the dogs are redolent of a deeper malaise at the heart of the continent. He suggests that he has a choice to see them 'not as animals, but as spirit hounds, incarnations' that appear 'on the retina in the giddy seconds before sleep'. The dogs in this dream/nightmare, despite receding into the shadows and the mountains, 'will return to haunt us, somewhere in Europe, in another time'.¹¹⁷

Connected to the historical reality of the dogs, 'surrounding' the dogs, as it were, are a number of conflicting stories attempting to explain their presence. The couple's visit to the remnants of the concentration camp only inspires confusion, anxiety and an inability to fully understand the underpinning reasons for such a place. Jeremy can be read as a figurative surrogate author of the 1990s. The text of *Black Dogs* is in part a working through of his attempts to write the various histories he is presented with, both personal and political. All that is left for Jeremy to make sense of is the camp at Majdanek and the witness testimonies of those who encountered the black dogs. His bewildered, uncomprehending response to the camp and all that it signifies parallels the sense that writers in the 1980s and 1990s felt a twofold urge in relation to the Holocaust. On the one hand there was a pervasive cultural and political 'looking back' and 'taking stock' of the Second World War and more specifically the Holocaust. This increase in representations of the events coincided with historical and critical re-evaluations of how the Holocaust is thought about and discussed. The issues inherent in representation and historical reality, particularly traumatic and violent, were central to this cultural debate.

On the other hand, there remains the dichotomy between this development of representation and a sense of the 'impossibility' of just such a concept. These two discourses are interdependent. One way of reconciling these apparently divergent theories is to suggest a representation of the Holocaust that represents whilst all the while acknowledging an 'excess' of the real that cannot be contained in that representation. This might be thought of in terms of Michael Rothberg's conception of a 'traumatic

¹¹⁷ Ibid, pp. 173-4.

realism'. He defines the aesthetic response to the Holocaust as being one that focuses attention 'on the intersection of the everyday and the extreme in the experience and writing of Holocaust survivors'. This 'new' realism 'mediates between the realist and antirealist positions on Holocaust studies', and points to a representation of the extreme that suggests a poetics of Holocaust art.¹¹⁸ How the British Holocaust novels of the 1990s have negotiated a 'traumatic realism' will form the basis of the present thesis.

Sue Vice writes that novels of the Holocaust are often 'scandalous' in that they 'invariably provoke controversy by inspiring revulsion and acclaim in equal measure'.¹¹⁹ Intriguingly, few of the novels under discussion have provoked a 'scandal', apart from the novels by Amis and Thomas. This may well be due to the kinds of representation that can be found in these texts. There is very little direct, explicit representation of violence, trauma and suffering. Many of the novels reflect the present-centred position of the author: the narrative dramatises a 'return', though memory work and testimony, to that past from the perspective of the contemporary. Related to this aspect of Holocaust fiction has been the use of the Freudian concept of *Nachträglichkeit*.¹²⁰ This concept can be translated as 'afterwardness', and is suggestive of the ways in which authors have turned to the subject of the Holocaust in the 1990s. *Nachträglichkeit* unsettles the belief that one can uncover the past as it was. As Nicola King has observed, *Nachträglichkeit* offers a productive model for memory that is akin to theories surrounding narrative structure.¹²¹ The theory suggests an active reworking of memory, and also acknowledges the 're-writing' and 're-evaluating' of a memory. *Nachträglichkeit* troubles the 'truth' of the first event¹²². In traumatic memory the experiences of that first event may not have been fully assimilated, and 'return' in the present, awaiting narrative structuring and the coherency of form. But this form must constantly acknowledge its own incomplete nature.

¹¹⁸ Rothberg, *Traumatic Realism* (2000), p.9.

¹¹⁹ Vice, *Holocaust Fiction* (2000), p. 1.

¹²⁰ In Bullock, Trombley, eds, *The New Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought* (London: Fontana, 1977; repr. Harper Collins, 1999) *Nachträglichkeit* is defined: 'Freud's 'theory of deferred action', in which the memory of past events is reconstituted in conformity with the present intentions, fears and desires of the subject. The past is not recalled 'as it was', but in a form and context which is useful to the subject *now*. It is thus an act of intentionality and is part of the life-project of the subject, since the way the past is recalled is operative in forming the way that the future is intended'. (p. 557)

¹²¹ King, (2000), pp. 11-32.

¹²² Jacques Derrida writes in 'Différance' (Rivkin, J. & Ryan, M, eds, *Literary Theory: An Anthology* [Oxford: Blackwell, 1998; repr. 2000]): 'The structure of delay (*retardement: Nachträglichkeit*) that Freud talks about ... describes the living present as a primordial and incessant synthesis that is constantly led back upon itself, back upon its assembled and assembling self, by retentional traces and protentional openings. With the alterity of the "unconscious", we have to deal not with the horizons of modified presents – past or future – but with a "past" that has never been nor will ever be present, whose "future" will never be produced or reproduced in the form of presence'. (p. 400)

British Holocaust fictions have 'come late' to the narrative re-working of the memories of the event. This belatedness is a major contributing factor to the tropes, metaphors and narratives that characterise these texts. But these novels also reflect other discourses surrounding the representation of the Holocaust. *Time's Arrow*, with its reversed chronology that inverts the quotidian and the world inside Auschwitz, evokes (and satirises) the elusive testimony of the perpetrator whilst also engaging with the sense of the Holocaust symbolising a temporal breach or rupture. Seiffert's *The Dark Room*, in its third part, dramatises one generation's response to the revelations of the previous generation's in the war. In contrast, Harris's *Fatherland* imagines a victorious Germany where the Holocaust has been officially banished from history, remaining hidden from many inside and outside the counterfactual totalitarian state. One can see, in just these three examples, how such narratives reconfigure time in their fictions whilst adhering strictly to historical fact and document. In this regard, all the Holocaust fictions of the 1990s aspire to what James E. Young has called the 'texture of fact'.¹²³ Young is writing principally about documentary fictions such as Keneally's *Schindler's Ark*, but the phrase has resonance for the novels under discussion. These texts rely heavily upon fact, reality and truth and at the same time show how access to such concepts is difficult and fraught with tensions, particularly when that past is as traumatic as the Holocaust.

The British Holocaust fiction of the 1990s 'tests' the limits of representation from a perspective shaped by the discourses that have developed and grown in the post-war years. The huge 'burden' of the reality and truth of the event forces writers into a vigorous engagement with the ethics of writing history, in particular violent history. As Vice has written, because of the 'irreparable tragedy' of the Holocaust, fiction of the event loses 'novelistic staples such as suspense, choosing one's ending, constructing characters with the power to alter their fate, allowing good to triumph over evil, or even the clear identification of such moral categories'.¹²⁴ Holocaust writers have had to pursue different kinds of fictional strategies to represent the experiences of those that lived through and died in the Nazi 'Final Solution'. These factors present their own problems to the fiction writer, not least the dangers of rewriting the past through, say, a prism of the Jews being seen only as passive victims, or even recuperating a fascination with violence and 'evil' that unconsciously glamorises the perpetrators. The relationship between fiction and fact in the context of the Holocaust is always one of tension, the

¹²³ Young, (1988), pp. 59-60.

¹²⁴ Vice, p. 3.

historical event presenting challenges to any writer seeking to 'fictionalise' what has become a dominant cultural metaphor of a variety of concerns and discourses.

One final example of the British fiction of the 1990s' relationship with the event can be found in David Hartnett's novel, *Black Milk*. An author's 'Afterword' underlines the historical facts behind his fictionalising of the ghettos, the work of the Judenrat,¹²⁵ the 'resettlements', and the underground uprisings in Warsaw. Following this, Hartnett writes:

There was never any Jewish ghetto exactly like the one evoked in this story; the people who inhabit it too are all imaginary. But I have tried to suggest how it – and they – might have lived and died, fifty years ago, in Europe. My title derives from Paul Celan's poem 'Todesfugue' [sic].¹²⁶

Hartnett follows the historical background of his novel with an 'admission' that intermingling with these facts are fictional and entirely imaginary characters. He is keen to stress the historicity of his novel – that its fictional elements are firmly rooted in research and historical fact. Hartnett makes the point that his fiction owes more to history than to imagination. This 'Afterword' captures the commitment British writers of the 1990s have displayed towards the historical real of the Holocaust. Perhaps because of the chronological and geographical distance between writers and the event, hastened by the cultural discourses of the *fin de siècle* and a wider cultural looking back, such declarations are understandable. Hartnett privileges the history that informs the fiction, stressing the reality of the novel and performing what might be seen to be a highly 'un-postmodern' gesture towards origins and truth.

Finally, Hartnett's title suggests another aspect to the writing of the Holocaust in the 1990s. *Black Milk* takes its title from Paul Celan's poem 'Deathsfugue', one of the most famous and most discussed texts of the Holocaust.¹²⁷ Celan, a survivor who eventually committed suicide, further contextualises Hartnett's novel and provides the reader with a layer of intertextuality. One can see, in this brief but telling instance, something of the relationship between the fiction of the 1990s and the representation of

¹²⁵ Wistrich (2002) writes that Heydrich in 1939 'ordered the setting up of a Council of Jewish Elders in each Jewish community, an administrative body consisting of authoritative personalities and rabbis.' These were known as '*Judenräte*' who were 'mediating between the fearfully oppressed Jewish population (who often resented their power) and the Nazi authorities to whom they were wholly subordinate' (p. 81).

¹²⁶ Hartnett, D, *Black Milk* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1994), p. 262.

¹²⁷ The opening lines of Celan's poem (1947): 'Black milk of daybreak we drink it at evening/we drink it at midday and morning we drink it at night/we drink and we drink/we shovel a grave in the air there you won't lie too cramped'. Included in Friedlander, (1992), pp. 257-8.

the Holocaust. Firstly, Hartnett foregrounds his own research and attempts to clarify how this history and fact informs the inevitable elements of fiction he has utilised. Secondly, the direct reference to Celan's canonical poem, suggests the intimacy between the testimonial voices of those who 'were there' and the fiction that is inspired by it. Furthermore, Hartnett's 'Afterword', like those in *Time's Arrow*, *Fatherland* and Fergus O'Connell's *Call the Swallow*,¹²⁸ reflects and anticipates anxieties that have grown up in the post-war years concerning postmodern re-readings of history, fiction, memory and representation. Those anxieties inform the novels under discussion, and the ways in which these texts assimilate, argue back against and imaginatively represent the events of the Holocaust form the central argument of the present thesis.

¹²⁸ O'Connell's *Call the Swallow* (Cork [IR]: Collins Press, 2002) includes an Afterward that begins, 'With a book like this whose subject is the *Shoah*, it seems to me terribly important – indeed mandatory – that the reader is clear which parts are fiction and which are not'. (p. 378)

Chapter One

‘Before the war we. After the war he. During the war they’ The Return of the Repressed in John King’s *England Away*, Michèle Roberts’s *Daughters of the House* and Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth*

In Michèle Roberts’s *Daughters of the House*¹²⁹ the Holocaust appears to play a tangential role in the text. In contrast to, say, Hartnett’s *Black Milk* or Massie’s *The Sins of the Father*, novels in which the ‘question’ of the Holocaust is a fundamental aspect of the narrative, *Daughters of the House* can be legitimately read with little or no reference to the event. In Clare Hanson’s essay ‘During Mother’s Absence: The Fiction of Michèle Roberts’, for instance, scant mention is made of the novel’s relationship with the Holocaust,¹³⁰ instead Hanson concentrates on the novel’s ‘story of a struggle over the meaning of the feminine’.¹³¹ The Holocaust, or rather the way in which Roberts describes it in terms of it being a hidden, literally ‘buried’ secret in France is merely one among many themes. Hanson proves it can be ‘relegated’ in significance in comparison with, say, the themes of feminine identity, the difficulties of familial relations and the ambiguities of religion. The very concept of a ‘Holocaust novel’, like all generic terms, is not in any way fixed or closed. The question remains, though, as to how *Daughters of the House* ‘accommodates’ the Holocaust given its concern with ‘other’ subjects.

Roberts’s novel deals with the persistence of the Holocaust, and in this respect it shares a ‘haunted’ narrative with other fiction of the 1990s. Nick Rennison has written that *Daughters of the House* is concerned with ‘marrying past and present’ and ‘creating intricate webs of connection between [its] characters’ current circumstances and the histories which have led them there’.¹³² These histories are revealed to be part of a ‘guilty

¹²⁹ Roberts, M, *Daughters of the House* (London: Virago, 1993; repr. 1995).

¹³⁰ Hanson, C, ‘During Mother’s Absence: The Fiction of Michèle Roberts’ (pp. 229-47) in Werlock, A.H.P, ed, *British Women Writing Fiction* (Tusaloosa [US]: University of Alabama Press, 2000). See especially pp. 238-41.

¹³¹ Ibid, p. 238.

¹³² Rennison, *Contemporary British Novelists* (2005), p. 139.

past' that is made up of 'collaboration and murder' hidden from the view of the present.¹³³ The 'guilty past' haunts the 'daughters', Thérèse and Léonie, but on a wider scale Roberts shows how it haunts the villagers who have 'buried' the knowledge of their collaboration with the Nazis and their role in the deaths of a Jewish family. Furthermore, this past haunts France, and by extension, Europe. *Daughters of the House* portrays a 'haunted' present in relation to a traumatised past and in this it shares a narrative trope with two other 1990s British novels that utilise the Holocaust and the Nazi period as an historical, or even traumatic 'trace' in the contemporary.

Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*¹³⁴ links events in the late 1990s with the war experiences of its two central male characters, Archie Jones and Samad Iqbal. Archie and Samad encounter a French scientist at the very end of the war who is suspected of being involved in Nazi euthanasia and sterilisation programmes. Rather than assassinate the scientist, Archie spares him only to confront the man fifty years later at the launch of a genetically engineered mouse. The French scientist, Dr Perret, and his apparent involvement in war crimes is something that might be colloquially referred to as 'unfinished business'. Samad, insists to Archie, after they have first learned of Perret in 1945, upon the doctor's collusion with the Nazis:

He's a scientist, like me – but what is his science? Choosing who shall be born and who shall not – breeding people as if they were so many chickens, destroying them if the specifications are not correct. He wants to control, to dictate the future. He wants a race of men, a race of indestructible men, that will survive the last days of this earth. But it cannot be done in a laboratory. (WT: pp. 102-3)

Smith stresses the ways in which these attitudes find their expression again in the last years of the century. Perret is one of the 'threads' of history, linking the experiences of the war and the Holocaust with those of 1999, significantly the last year of the century. More specifically, the Nazi ideologies that included racial eugenics, as Samad points out, find an apparently more benign but no less significant expression years later.

Archie's decision not to kill the scientist ('Dr Sick') in 1945 – a decision based on his naïve but compassionate humanism – echoes over the subsequent years to recur in 1999. Dominic Head describes this aspect of the novel as Smith's sense of 'the messy,

¹³³ Ibid, p. 139.

¹³⁴ Smith, Z, *White Teeth* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2000; repr. QPD).

but particular history' of postcolonial Britain.¹³⁵ The Holocaust, or more accurately Nazi scientific experimentation, is one historical influence on a 'diverse and secular' present.¹³⁶ In one respect, this is a theme that unites much contemporary historical fiction: that history never 'goes away' but returns or continues to exist, in the present day. As Peter Childs points out in relation to *White Teeth*, not only the present but also any hope for the future relies upon the influences of the past.¹³⁷ This is emphasised at the end of the novel when the genetically engineered mouse escapes the public launch after Archie has been shot. But also, as Childs suggests, the end of *White Teeth* connects many of the disparate plots and narratives, including that of Archie's refusal to kill Perret. Smith emphasises this confluence of stories by citing significant historical dates that hold meanings for the various characters. Childs writes:

Archie's defining year is 1945, because of his fateful encounter with Dr Sick and his moment of pivotal bonding with Samad, but also because Archie appears to have no other history – he knows nothing of his heritage but remembers and understands how he shares in the key event of recent British 'triumph' (and the last British Imperial one): the victory at war to which his generation returns for its sense of identity but which means little to those growing up in the twenty-first century, all of whose histories must now be acknowledged to have been characterized by myriad pasts, by diaspora, migration, and cross-fertilization.¹³⁸

Thus there are ways of reading texts about the war and the Holocaust that have parallels with other contemporary British novels that, like *Daughters of the House*, allude to the experiences of the Holocaust and dramatise its 'traumatic trace' in the present.

Archie's encounters with Dr Perret can be read as a metaphor for many British literary responses to the war and the Holocaust. Archie decides not to take Perret's life and so allows Perret to inculcate himself back into history, and by chance into Archie's life. The Nazi past 'refuses to die' and returns in surprising and symbolic ways. 1945 was the year when the extent of the genocide became more widely known through photographs and films of the newly liberated camps and through the voices and

¹³⁵ Dominic Head, *The Cambridge Introduction to Modern British Fiction, 1950-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 236.

¹³⁶ Ibid, p. 237.

¹³⁷ Childs, (2005), p. 215.

¹³⁸ Ibid, p. 216.

testimonies of those who witnessed its aftermath.¹³⁹ Hence, the 'triumph' that Childs sees as a key aspect of the war's legacy in Archie's mind is problematised when discussed in relation to the revelations of the genocide. Steven Connor writes that with the knowledge of not only Auschwitz but also the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, there was a strong post-war feeling that 'the unimaginable had taken up residence in history'.¹⁴⁰ Writers returning to the war in the 1990s are 'returning' to represent that historical 'unimaginable'. Britain's 'triumph' in the war is severely tested by the discovery of the death camps by the Allied Forces.

This highly uneasy, ambiguous historical return to 1945 and what it might or might not mean to the present day, is captured in John King's *England Away*. Like *White Teeth* and *Daughters of the House*, King's novel is not a 'Holocaust fiction' in the sense that it is primarily concerned with the historical event. *England Away* is the third title in a trilogy of novels by King that explore the attitudes, relationships and lifestyles of a small group of football fans. *The Football Factory* and *Headhunters* are the first two novels of this trilogy that track the political, cultural, sexual and philosophical outlooks of a group of working class men of different generations. *England Away* is concerned with these characters' relationship with 'abroad', and in particular Europe. Issues of race, gender and national identity are discussed, as are the characters' various and often complex attitudes towards war and colonialism. The novel's principal narrators, Tom and Harry, are travelling to Berlin for a fight with German hooligans. Bill Farrell is a veteran of World War Two and is reluctantly going to a military reunion in London. Bill gradually reveals his traumatic memories of the war, which include how he killed a German youth and how he may have witnessed the aftermath of a rape. King contrasts Bill's recollections of the Normandy landings and his experiences of the discovery of the camps with the attitudes of Tom, Harry and their friends. The hooligans' journey across the sea to the European mainland is an ironic re-enactment of Bill's own journey in 1944-5.

Bill is a signifier of the reality of war. His experiences, despite his avowed reluctance to confront them, are set in opposition to the simulacra of battle that the hooligans engage in (a factor further underlined by the video game 'Smart Bomb', that Harry plays at the end of the novel). Tom and his friends, influenced by tabloid rhetoric

¹³⁹ In Jan 1945, Auschwitz was liberated by the Soviet army. In April 1945, the Buchenwald concentration camp was liberated by the US army. In the same month, the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp was liberated by the British army. (Wistrich, *Hitler and the Holocaust*, p. 305)

and intensely patriotic, see themselves as part of a noble 'island race' heritage. Bill's reluctance to return to his own traumatic past suggests the depth and incommensurability of what he has seen and lived through. *England Away* engages with this contrast between the 1945-generation epitomised by Bill and the generation that spent their formative years in Thatcher's Britain. John Brannigan writes about King's 'thugs' as being 'an inevitable consequence' of their nation's past. They are 'the last vestiges of a post-imperial hangover, in which its citizens can only express their patriotism through racism and violence'.¹⁴¹ The Holocaust acts as a 'sinister echo' in the strands of narrative and its significance reveals tropes that are played out in other British Holocaust fiction. This phrase – 'sinister echo'¹⁴² – is taken from Sebald's *Austerlitz*, a novel analysed in chapter three of the present thesis. Austerlitz describes the memory of the Nazi occupation with this revealing phrase and the character's 'return' to the past to more fully understand the 'echo' is an apt metaphor of 1990s novels that dramatise such a 'journey'.

Bill feels that what he has experienced in the past are fundamentally 'unimaginable' (*EA*: p. 32) memories and the most 'buried' of them remain largely unarticulated and un-represented. He met his wife in the 'insanity of a concentration camp' where she was 'right at the bottom, raped and starved almost to death'. (*EA*: p. 276) Gradually and reluctantly he begins to 'open up', but there remains a profound feeling that most of his memories will remain undisclosed: Bill himself suggests that 'the strongest memories were often the ones you never shared'. (*EA*: p. 31) His witnessing of the after-effects of the Holocaust and his intimacy with the brutality and randomness of violence in the war are in stark contrast to the novel's contemporary football hooligans. Tom, for example, recalls being in a Parisian bar when a chant goes up amongst many of those there: 'Spurs are on their way to Auschwitz'. (*EA*: p. 28) This casually racist allusion to the Holocaust signifies the distance these characters are from the event. 'Auschwitz' has become one more reference point in a nationalistic creed that these men evoke with indifference, their unreflective anti-Semitism used to belittle Tottenham Hotspur supporters. But King's novel stresses the vast differences between reality and representation where the war and the Holocaust have been reduced to ideologically loaded signifiers. Bill's empirical experience of the war provides the novel with a moral centre – one that revokes the 'Auschwitz' of the football fans' chant.

¹⁴⁰ Connor, (1996), p. 199.

¹⁴¹ Brannigan, (2004), p. 79.

This dilemma of the distance between the real and representation for Tom, Harry and their gang is dramatised when some of the men visit the Anne Frank museum in Amsterdam. Initially Tom considers the history behind the museum in racial/national terms:

Can't imagine the English standing aside. We're just not like that. I know we call Spurs yids and that, but it's different. There's no real feeling because we're not religious. No, the English don't kill women and kids. We're hard, but fair. (EA: p. 131)

Following their visit, one of Tom's friends, Kevin, recalls a trip he made to the concentration camp at Dachau in Germany. He describes it as merely a 'big, flat space' where he 'couldn't feel anything'. (EA: p. 132) But in the museum there are photographs and information that help to fill in this 'space'. Kevin is surprised that he 'couldn't get a feeling' and that he 'couldn't imagine what had happened'. (EA: p. 133) He suggests that the events are beyond his, and by implication others', comprehension. He is troubled by how people around him respond to their exposure to the knowledge of the historical events: 'It was as though nothing had happened. We knew it had, but it didn't feel like it. *I suppose you had to be there*'. (EA: p. 133) [My Italics] Bill Farrell was 'there', and yet, as King stresses in Bill's own testimony, the ex-soldier is reluctant to explore his own past too deeply and even more reluctant to talk about it.

The 'numbed incomprehension' that Kevin expresses is paralleled by Bill's 'silence' when he thinks about his proximity to the atrocities. Bill is torn between wanting to remember and the concomitant urge towards forgetting. He also recognises his complicity in reinterpreting, and hence potentially, distorting memory:

I have my version of events and one thing I have learnt and observed through the years is how history is reinvented. It isn't just the people who make a living from the subject, because in some ways it is the people who were there as well. I hope I haven't done this myself. (EA: p. 193)

Bill expresses a sentiment that is a consistent trope in much contemporary British fiction that deals with the inter-related issues of memory and history. He also underlines the difficulties facing the historian and the 'ordinary' witness. Bill is a witness and yet he recognises how memory can be shaped and ordered to suit a particular interpretation. His

¹⁴² Sebald, *Austerlitz*, trans. by Anthea Bell (Berlin [Ger]: Carl Hanser Verlag, 2001; repr. Penguin, 2002),

traumatic memories erupt into his mind and he speaks of them as being 'slow and cruel'. He feels as if he is being 'tortured slowly' (EA: p. 207) by them. Although Bill 'speaks' about the war, there is a sense that more silence remains:

It was hard to remember things how they were rather than how you wanted them to appear. This especially applied to the war. There were so many impressions and sights he'd pushed down, applying a gloss finish. It was the only way to survive such a thing. (EA: p. 40)

This silence revolves around Bill's recognition of his own role in killing and also of his wife whom he met in the camps. He sees her 'with the shaved head and broken ribs' but 'he wouldn't think of that, because he preferred looking at the lights coming on outside and the peace of the evening'. (EA: pp. 40-1) This tension between remembering and forgetting, seen in Seiffert's *The Dark Room* and Sebald's *Austerlitz*, is a significant trope in British Holocaust fiction and is also a defining aspect of Roberts's *Daughters of the House*.

England Away identifies the vast differences between Bill's traumatised memories of the war and the jingoistic, racist celebrations of violence and the rhetoric of war as articulated by Tom and his friends. The younger generations are reared on the simulacra of war – in propaganda films, children's toys and video games – and 'Auschwitz' has become an emptied-out signifier, 'floating' ever further from history. This has been exacerbated by the passage of time – a growing distance between the present day and the 1940s. But King suggests that some 'excess' inherent in the event will remain unexpressed or even inexpressible. The Holocaust is a traumatic historical 'echo' that for subsequent generations, has become a cultural metaphor which can be utilised for different purposes. Bill Farrell remains uncertain as to how helpful remembering is. Tom's friend's muted disbelief when he tries to imagine the Holocaust is another kind of silence.

Daughters of the House contributes, like *White Teeth* and *England Away*, to a literature that acknowledges the persistence of the Holocaust in the present day. The 'return of the repressed' in *White Teeth*'s handling of the Nazi sympathising doctor and the struggles with articulation and representation in *England Away* are two themes that inform *Daughters of the House*. The 'sinister echo' of the Holocaust is also an aspect of Roberts's narrative in which two cousins (who may or may not be sisters), Léonie and

Thérèse, and who have been estranged for over twenty years, are reunited in the house in Normandy where they used to spend summers as children. Thérèse has been a nun living in a convent whilst her cousin has married a local man, Baptiste, and has had children. Thérèse's return to the house – she intends to write her autobiography – precipitates a 'return' to their shared past in the immediate post-war years. The central section of the novel is set in the 1950s and explores the sexual and religious awakening of the two young girls. The novel explores the secrets, lies and suppressions that at first unites and then undermines the young girls' friendship.

Léonie and Thérèse, following the death of Thérèse's mother, Antoinette, both 'see' visions of a Virgin Mary figure in the woods near the house. This is one of the first 'secrets' that bind the girls together but also precipitates the beginning of their estrangement. These visions contribute to the novel's examination of the tensions between religious and pagan ideologies. The girls' visions also represent two competing representations of femininity. Linked to these visions is the prevailing sense of other secrets that reside 'beneath' the surface of the house, the village and, by extension, France.¹⁴³ Throughout the middle section of the novel, Roberts gradually reveals them and in doing so emphasises the text's 'archeological' view of history. The novel exposes the levels of collusion and collaboration that signifies the 'guilty secrets' the villagers have been eager to keep hidden. The central event of the war, the girls discover, was that of a Jewish family on the run from the Nazis who arrived at the village to hide only for them to be betrayed and re-captured. They were then taken out into the woods and killed. It is subsequently discovered – following the orders of the local priest who has demanded that a stone shrine be taken down – that the bones of the Jewish victims are, in Léonie's words, 'mixed up more than ever before'. (DH: p. 137) Thérèse discovers that her mother, Antoinette, helped to hide the remnants of the statue in the cellar of the house

¹⁴³ For another novel that deals with French complicity with the Nazis see Sebastian Faulks's *Charlotte Gray* (London: Hutchinson, 1998; repr. Vintage, 1999). Although, apart from *Fatherland*, a more 'popular' text than other novels under discussion in the present thesis, Faulks's text does include an intriguing example of how the actual events of the Holocaust seem to resist types of representation. Towards the end of the novel two Jewish children who the novel's main character has been attempting to save are condemned to deportation. Their traumatic train journey is described – a common trope in novels dealing with the Holocaust – and at the moment of their arrival at the gas chambers the narrative abruptly ends: 'Now they were naked. It was very cold in this room. Jacob took André's hand and found that there was already something in it – a tin soldier. André kissed Jacob's shorn head, the stubble tender on his lips. There was another room, another door, with bolts and rubber seals, over whose threshold the two boys, among many others, went through icy air, and disappeared'. (CG: p. 460) As Middleton/Woods point out in *Literatures of Memory* (2000) this lacuna in the novel occurs because the boys 'cease to be present for the realist perspective of the novel'. (p. 20) In other words, the boys' death in the gas chambers cannot be 'accommodated' within the novel's otherwise strictly realist perspective.

and Léonie reveals that she knew the priest had informed the Germans about the location of the Jewish family but that she had kept this to herself.

These revelations that begin to accumulate towards the end of the novel encompass private and public concerns. The private secrets include the possibility that the two girls might be twin sisters: their mothers, Madeleine and Antoinette, themselves sisters, appear to have lied about Léonie's father who she believed to have been English but may have been Louis, Thérèse's father. These and other secrets are 'mixed up', like the Jewish bones in the grave. After the new grave that was built to accommodate the Jewish family's remains has been desecrated with swastikas – another sign that history has not been 'finished with' like the hooligans' chanting in *England Away* – Léonie muses upon this 'return of the repressed' in what might be the novel's epigraph:

The grave in the cemetery had been forced open, made to give up its dead. At the same moment mouths had opened to shout words that Léonie had tried not to hear, tried to believe no one still spoke, would ever utter again ... Murderous red signs painted on the headstone of the grave. Léonie had to look steadily at what was rising up in her village, out of the grave of the war, the unburied and the undead arriving to lay hands upon them all, claim them for its own. (DH: p. 170)

The war is part of what is 'rising up' from the past. *Daughters of the House* interprets the village's collusion in 'burying' their guilt as a futile gesture. The more traumatic the past the more likely it is to be resurrected. The 'mixed' public and private histories that are at stake are incomplete and often ambiguous narratives that require acts of interpretation and articulation. The final chapter of the novel – each one is named after an object on Léonie's inventory of household goods – is titled 'The Words' and these words are the necessary utterances that must be attached to events to give them meaning. Léonie sees that 'history was voices that came alive and shouted'. (DH: p.171) These ghostly voices belong to the Jewish family that the young girl heard praying in her old bedroom (in a language she does not understand), but also these are figuratively the buried voices of history that demand to be heard. Until this occurs, the Jewish family remains outside of history, without names or narrative. The last 'words' (DH: p. 172) of the novel are the returning of identity and history – of language – to people otherwise guiltily forgotten and hidden. Léonie has also 'found' the words so she can speak and subsequently write her history.

The Holocaust is one 'trace' of the past that is linked with other smaller but still profound hidden histories that the two girls find themselves involved in. The desecrated graves suggest that anti-Semitism continues to exist in a country struggling to confront the issues of some of its residents' collaboration with the Nazis. With no direct or explicit description of the events, *Daughters of the House* looks at the ways in which the victims of the Nazis are 'heard' in the subsequent years. They represent the history that underlies all the possible competing authorised and unauthorised interpretations of the past. Léonie is especially antagonistic towards Thérèse's plans for going back to their childhood. She threatens that, 'if you tell any more lies about the past I'll kill you', (DH: p. 23) and accuses Thérèse of being a 'ghoul' who is 'picking over what's dead and gone, what's best left undisturbed'. (DH: p. 24) British 1990s Holocaust fiction is in a similar position. Most of the novels under discussion 'look away' from the violence of the event but the 'sinister echo' of this violence 'erupts' in the memories of those who endured the Nazis.

What is in dispute is who tells the history and what that particular 'version' chooses to omit. Roberts shows how the tensions between forgetting and remembering are played out in the post-war years. Victorine, the household's maid, is the individual whose version of events initially dominates the girls' view of the past. She tells them that 'everything was topsy-turvy then' (DH: p. 42) and that they will only understand when they are older. (DH: p. 43) Léonie likens Victorine's casual allusions to the war as being akin to a 'sort of bookmark which divided the pages of history', (DH: p. 44) this phrase suggesting the 'textuality' of the past. Victorine's speaking of the war, though, is as characterised by silences and ellipses, as it is by disclosure and detail. This silence and reluctance to fully return to the past means that Victorine has apportioned blame to the wrong 'collaborator' – she tells the girls one of the local women who works in a bakery was the informer. She has 'misread' history because there are so many crucial aspects of the past that have not been spoken, or for that matter, written down. Thérèse recognises the gaps and omissions in her memories of this past when she tells Léonie her reasons for writing her memoirs: 'I thought if I wrote down what happened to me when we were children it would help me decide what it is I've got to do. But there's so much I've forgotten. You'll have to help me remember'. (DH: p. 23)

This sense of the history of their childhood being a collaborative effort, at best and at worst a site of competing versions of 'truth', is matched by the village's responses to the girls' differing visions and also in the complex 'mixing' of their respective parents. Initially, Léonie believes that the past is a comparatively simple narrative to understand.

She has been inculcated with a particular version of events in which ‘the war was terrible for everybody’, and that everyone knows who the collaborators were. (*DH*: p. 27) Naturally, the more she pieces together the strands of the narrative of the past, the more ‘mixed up’ the truth seems to become. Roberts stresses the complexities of the telling and re-telling of history throughout the novel – from the differing views of the ‘visions’ through to what was or wasn’t hidden in the house’s cellar. (*DH*: p. 49) But the shallow grave that is discovered underneath the shrine that the priest orders to be destroyed is the ‘truth’ that cannot be hidden. Léonie persists in asking questions about this discovery of the bones, but she is constantly confused and unable to comprehend the political and cultural practices of what is only recent history.

An important conversation occurs after the bones are found when Léonie asks Victorine as to their identity. Victorine tells her that they are probably Jewish bones. The young girl is further confused and Victorine wonders why she hasn’t learned any of this in school. Léonie replies, ‘the war’s too modern for us to do in history’. (*DH*: p. 119) *Daughters of the House* dramatises a particular transitional period in which the war and by extension the Holocaust, is in an aporetic state. In other words, it is ‘too modern’ for history and too close and traumatic to be appropriated into memory. The ‘collective memory’ of the locals is a guilty one and many of the villagers hope to ‘bury’ the more difficult aspects of that past as deeply as possible beneath the ground. The novel discusses the ways in which different individuals and groups, for often conflicting reasons, seek to impose a narrative structure and meaning upon the past in order to justify both those events and the present day. In other words *Daughters of the House* dramatises the Freudian concept of *Nachträglichkeit*.¹⁴⁴ This ‘deferred action’ or ‘belated response’ to the trauma of the event suggests ways in which British 1990s fiction can be interpreted.

As Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan point out, the collective remembrance of war is a ‘composite of narratives’ that are ‘infused with horror as well as honour’.¹⁴⁵ They add that this collective remembrance is a ‘quixotic act’ which is both painful and subject to inevitable ‘decomposition’ over time.¹⁴⁶ *Daughters of the House* is partly concerned with the ‘quixotic act’ of remembering, especially traumatic events. It is the figure of

¹⁴⁴ For further discussion of this concept and its relationship to the Holocaust see n. 125 (p. 46) to the introduction of the present study.

¹⁴⁵ Jay Winter & Emmanuel Sivan, ‘Setting the framework’ in Winter/Sivan, eds, *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century* (2003), p. 9.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p. 10.

Rose Taillé who offers Léonie the fullest account of the history that is 'too modern' for her to learn about at school. Rose's husband, Henri, was killed along with the Jewish family. Rose comes to the house occasionally to work and to look after Léonie. She tells the young girl about how the Nazis rounded up Jews in France:

They kept the Jews in a sports stadium outside Paris. Packed in with hardly any food or water. Of course lots of them died. Then they were sent to the camp at Drancy, and from there they were put on trains and sent to Auschwitz to be gassed. (DH: p. 126)

Rose speaks further of these train journeys and stresses that knowledge of such events was available 'afterwards' but only for 'those who wanted to know'. (DH: p. 126) She goes on to describe the arrival of the Jewish family and how Rose and her husband sheltered them. She tells Léonie that the identity of the informer remained unknown. Rose speaks of the collective desire to 'move on': 'And then once the war was over people wanted to forget. But I can't'. (DH: p. 127)

Rose's final comments suggest a lack of choice or agency. People, she says, 'wanted' to forget, but the evidence of the murders and the knowledge that someone informed upon the family rises up to the surface against their collective wishes. Rose's conviction that the memories will not leave her, even if she wanted them to disappear, confirms the novel's sense that the traumatic past (both private and public) simply will not 'die'. In other words, the villagers want to forget because of their sense of guilt, and Rose may wish to forget, but what is repressed will return because of its incomplete, unfinished and traumatic nature. This confirms what Ernst Van Alphen writes in relation to traumatic memory, that in contrast to other kinds of memory, it does indeed 'rise up' in often unforeseen ways: 'Trauma is failed experience, and this failure makes it impossible to *voluntarily* remember the event'.¹⁴⁷ [My Italics]

The local priest's desire to build a plain headstone, for example, and the fact that the Jewish family's bones and those of Rose's husband are 'mixed up', signifies the ways in which events have been hurriedly repressed. Added to this is the sense that any monument or shrine cannot stand in for memory. Also the novel is defined by disputes over the veracity and accuracy of memory. Thérèse and Léonie's discussions about what should and shouldn't be remembered exemplify these debates. Even as Léonie tries to

¹⁴⁷ Ernst Van Alphen, 'Caught by Images: Visual Imprints in Holocaust Testimonies' (pp. 97-113) in Hornstein, Jacobowitz, (2003), p. 102.

avoid the past that Thérèse's return inevitably stirs, she is herself implicated in it. She denies Thérèse's assertions about her confused lineage and accuses her of not caring about 'those dead Jews'. (DH: p. 158) Because Thérèse admits to having misled everyone about her 'visions' Léonie implies that everything else she says cannot be believed. Léonie argues that the past, whatever it might or might not be, should be forgotten: 'We can't live in the past. We've got to get on with our lives'. (DH: p. 159) Not only the Holocaust fiction but also more broadly the historical fiction of the 1990s is often predicated upon such a problematic opposition.

Daughters of the House treats the Holocaust as a metaphor for the difficulties in remembering and forgetting. What is at stake in the text is history – or rather disputes over who 'tells' that history. In this regard, Roberts's fiction highlights a number of key points in the vexed relationship between the present and the past. These can briefly be summed up as: a) The persistence of the past – its 'presence' in the present; b) The different and sometimes competing examples of historical 'evidence' that are needed to bring the past to life; c) The sense that there is always an 'excess' within history that remains unrepresentable; d) The implication that traumatic history will always 'return', however buried it might be; e) The tensions between articulating (remembering) and silence (forgetting). The present chapter will sum up how these aspects can be read in the novel and then will analyse how such issues impact upon theories surrounding the representation of the Holocaust. One of the central questions implicit in much critical writing on the Holocaust is whether, because of its violence, size and devastation, it 'tests' these issues more than other events. Or, in Saul Friedlander's words, although the Holocaust can be represented and interpreted like any other historical occurrence, one must remember that one is 'dealing with an event that tests our traditional conceptual and representational categories, an "event at the limits"'.¹⁴⁸

Firstly, Roberts underlines the persistence of the past in the present. The secrets that the villagers have conspired to keep hidden cannot be contained and 'return' in various guises. This is connected with the second theme of the 'competing evidence' that one has to inevitably rely on to piece together the fragments of the past. The past 'haunts' the present and its truths can be found in texts, documents, voices and objects that embody history. The Jewish family's bones are the indisputable evidence of the atrocity that was committed, but there are other examples of the evidence of the past. For

¹⁴⁸ Friedlander, 'Introduction' (1992), pp. 2-3.

example, Léonie as a ten-year-old discovers that Madeleine kept a 'baby book' of photographs: the young girl 'discovered that she had a past'. (*DH*: p. 34) Similarly Thérèse reads the letters that Antoinette wrote to the Sœur Dosithée at the convent, (*DH*: p. 123) which fill in the gaps inherent in memory and are examples of the 'textuality' of memory that Roberts has hinted at elsewhere in the novel. The third aspect of historical representation – that of an 'excess' which always remains unrepresented – is intimately linked with the novel's treatment of the effects of the Holocaust on subsequent generations. *Daughters of the House* is predicated upon a tacit acknowledgement of a lacunae in the rendering of history, or more specifically, traumatic history.

This aspect of historical representation is linked to the fourth issue, namely that of the traumatic history that belatedly returns. In Roberts's novel, the trauma of the event 'returning' places it alongside other Holocaust fictions that make connections between trauma and history. The 'shallow grave' that holds the bones of those murdered by the Nazis is a signifier of the hidden, unexpressed, but still profoundly 'felt', trauma that rises to the surface or is discovered. Connected to this is the last aspect of historical representation in the context of the Holocaust, that of the tensions between remembering and forgetting. *Daughters of the House* dramatises the attitudes and points-of-view that represent these responses to the speaking and the 'not-speaking' of the past. The traumatic nature of the past bypasses such considerations given the involuntary nature of it. But the characters all have investments in whether the past is 'spoken' or not spoken. Léonie, for example, recalls how she listened to the Jewish family in the room in the house where they hid:

They had chanted prayers in a language she could not understand. They had called out their own names and the name of the informer who had betrayed them. Léonie knew the names of the three members of the Jewish family, and she knew the name of the person who had led them to their deaths. She had heard them, night after night when she was ten years old. She had put the words away in here and left them because she was afraid. (*DH*: pp. 170-1)

Her fear of the implications of these 'words' forces her to bury their meaning 'inside' her. She wants to forget the 'evidence' of what she has heard, and hence it remains unspoken and unwritten and therefore is not able to be included in history. The names of the Jewish family are similarly not spoken, as if their identities remain forever mysterious and unavailable for representation. Léonie is resistant to the past being

resurrected. Roberts stresses the impossibility of it remaining hidden whilst acknowledging its incomplete nature.

As is seen with the withholding of the Jewish family's name, Roberts's text exemplifies some of the ways in which the Holocaust has been seen as a 'limit event' in relation to these issues of history and representation.¹⁴⁹ Roberts's decision not to include the name of the Jewish family has a dual effect. Firstly, it evokes the absence of the Jews from the post-war world – without names in the text, they are not properly accommodated into the historical account of what happened. Secondly, and more importantly for this analysis of historical representation, the anonymity of the family implies a 'limit' to what can and cannot be sufficiently represented. The novel articulates a 'belatedness' to the ways in which that past is recuperated into the present and also highlights the limits to how such a history can be 'redeemed'. In the broader context of theoretical writing about the Holocaust and representation, this theme has much resonance, especially the suspicion that lingers in public discourses about the historical event's 'special' or 'unique' essence. This contentious argument of uniqueness underpins all of the five issues surrounding historical representation.

With regard to the first point concerning the persistence of the past in the present it would seem unarguable that the history of the Holocaust continues to 'live' in the contemporary world. As has been noted by many writers on the subject, including Harold Kaplan in his essay 'The Americanization of the Holocaust',¹⁵⁰ the event, far from being seen as another (particularly traumatic) moment from history, has been utilised to argue all manner of political, ethical, nationalistic, epistemological and cultural theories. Kaplan's essay ostensibly argues back against Peter Novick, whose study *The Holocaust and Collective Memory* (1999) analyses the reasons why the Holocaust has become an 'industry' in the United States. In relation to the persistence of the past in the present, or more specifically the presence of the Holocaust in the present day, Kaplan's arguments point to a way of thinking about how and why the event has come to loom so large in the contemporary consciousness. Whilst Novick sees political and cultural manipulation at the heart of the 'Holocaust discourse', Kaplan argues that the concomitant rise in the historical and cultural value of personal testimony 'works against dehumanized history

¹⁴⁹ Dominick LaCapra, 'Approaching Limit Events: Siting Agamben' (pp. 262-304) in Bernard-Donals, Glejzer, eds, (2003), p. 262.

¹⁵⁰ Kaplan, 'The Americanization of the Holocaust' (pp. 309-21) in Levy, M, ed, (2001).

and the social sciences afflicted by the dominant use of numbers and distractions that move further and further away from the felt quality and meaning of experience'.¹⁵¹

The growing importance placed upon individual testimony (the 'witness' of history) can be paralleled with changing social and cultural attitudes towards the Holocaust. In contrast to writers who have argued that the event is beyond conventional meanings and interpretations – in effect, that it is 'outside' history and thus unable to be comprehended as an historical event – Kaplan writes of the need to recognise mourning as a way to affirm the identities of the victims, but also those of subsequent generations confronted with the 'monument of facts' that has built up over the post-war years.¹⁵² He speaks of a sense of 'joining' and 'sharing' in history, and in doing so, 'to preserve being ... in time and place, to survive against extinction'.¹⁵³ In these and other respects – most especially that Kaplan aligns himself to the faith that there are 'lessons to be learned' from the event – the essay argues against Novick's thesis. Kaplan's essay also points to one way of understanding why the Holocaust remains such a presence in the contemporary world. He accuses Novick's work as being imbued with 'the nihilism of reductive scepticism'.¹⁵⁴ More than simply the legalistic need for personal testimony in the post-Holocaust prosecutions of 'crimes against humanity', Kaplan perceives an ethical imperative in the kinds of knowledge that can be taken from individual testimony. Implicit in Kaplan's argument is that the individual survivor/witness voice was intended by the Nazis to be silenced forever.

This is one argument that privileges the rise of the personal individual testimonial voice and its significance for the history of the Holocaust. The various individuals and communities coming to the subject 'belatedly' ties the event in with recent developments in reading trauma and history. This goes some way to 'explain' the relative growth in writing on the Holocaust in recent years. Cathy Caruth has argued, through readings of Freud, that trauma is a way of understanding history.¹⁵⁵ She writes:

In its most general definition, trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena. The experience of the soldier faced with sudden

¹⁵¹ Ibid, p. 311.

¹⁵² Ibid, p. 314.

¹⁵³ Ibid, p. 313.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 314.

¹⁵⁵ In Pat Barker's *Regeneration Trilogy* (1991-95), for example, particularly the first novel *Regeneration*, the text dramatises trauma in relation to the First World War.

and massive death around him, for example, who suffers this sight in a numbed state, only to relive it later in repeated nightmares, is a central and recurring image of trauma in our century.¹⁵⁶

This definition of trauma as history has obvious resonance for Roberts's novel – and for that matter, much of Holocaust fiction. The 'uncontrolled repetitive' appearance of Holocaust images and 'evidence' returning unbidden in the present day suggests another way of understanding why the historical event continues to have so much presence. Along with the *fin-de-millennium* conviction that the Holocaust is the 'central ... trauma in our century', there is the psychoanalytical interpretation that the belatedness of traumatic memory can act as a theory for the comparative belatedness of writing about the event in the 1990s.

The second factor in some of the important aspects of historical representation is that of the 'competing evidence' of history. Regarding this issue one must acknowledge the various strands of postmodernist challenges to historiography that have influenced recent intellectual investigation. Ian Gregson, in *Postmodern Literature*, writes that the Holocaust has become 'an obsessive focus for postmodern writers and thinkers'.¹⁵⁷ The phrase 'competing evidence' points towards the undermining of the 'grand narrative' interpretation of history, the faith in the transparency of historical narrative to reveal fixed truths in the past and the belief that those fixed truths are simply 'there', awaiting an untroubled presentation (rather than re-presentation). Or, to put it another way, the event, as Gregson, like Friedlander, suggests, has been increasingly used as a 'test case' or 'limit event' in order to explore more fully these postmodern theories of history. Historical representation and the Holocaust are part of the postmodern sense of a highly problematised 'real'.

Gregson cites Lyotard's influential 'incredulity towards metanarratives' as a central tenet of the postmodern, but goes on to stress how Lyotard links this with historical events. Gregson writes that 'Auschwitz is a crucial event for Lyotard because its stark, appallingly cruel irrationality destroys the belief in rational human progress achieved through increasing knowledge'.¹⁵⁸ These readings prefigure the third aspect of historical representation, that of the 'excess', or negative sublime, of the Holocaust. As Gregson points out, Lyotard's conviction that Auschwitz is a 'sign and its referent is

¹⁵⁶ Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore [US]: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), p. 11.

¹⁵⁷ Ian Gregson, *Postmodern Literature* (London: Arnold, 2004), p.1.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p. 8.

lost',¹⁵⁹ combines the 'competing evidence' and the 'excess' of postmodern historical theories. Gregson argues that Lyotard's writing around the 'sign' of Auschwitz underlines the 'post-ness' of poststructuralism. In other words, that 'Auschwitz' has destroyed any previous consensus surrounding a shared understanding of the sign and has 'replaced it with stark mutual incomprehension'. There is 'no common language in which it [Auschwitz] can be formulated'.¹⁶⁰ To return to the earlier taxonomy of issues of historical representation, convictions in the hermeneutic interpretation of locating the past in unequivocal terms is unsettled. Similarly, the Lyotardian issue of 'Auschwitz' retaining an essence that is beyond language suggests an 'excess' that cannot be conveniently co-opted into conventional, realist, linear representation.

History, or rather traditional concepts of the research and writing of history, is thus a much more complex and much less certain ('scientific') discipline. In the case of the Holocaust, there appears to be something intrinsic and 'essential' about its 'nature' that, in effect, lends itself to such a view of history. Geoffrey H. Hartman, for example, writes that the Holocaust has no real limits of representation but 'limits of conceptualization'.¹⁶¹ Hartman argues the most celebrated Holocaust art 'makes us feel there is something that cannot be presented'.¹⁶² This is the evocation of the 'excess' – that which is 'felt' but cannot be presented, represented or even communicated. Rather than Kantian notions of the sublime that include themes of nature's greatness and of an awe-inspiring magnitude inspired in the individual, Hartman writes that the post-Holocaust world can be defined by a collective sense that 'something in human behaviour is alien to us'.¹⁶³ These issues of a negative sublime and an excess of representation at the heart of writing and thinking about the Holocaust are postmodern in the broad sense that they suggest radically changed ways of understanding history. It is striking that so many of the novels under discussion dramatise this sense that something will always elude the contemporary interpretation of history, and in particular, the trauma and atrocity of the Holocaust.

The penultimate issue of historical representation is that of the 'return' of the past as a repressed truth or set of truths. Stephen Smith argues that Auschwitz, as a

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 8.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 8.

¹⁶¹ Geoffrey H. Hartman, 'The Book of the Destruction' in Friedlander, ed, (1992), p. 320.

¹⁶² Ibid, p. 321.

¹⁶³ Ibid, p. 322.

synecdoche for the Holocaust, asserts its presence in the contemporary mind despite imagination's desire to transcend it. He goes on:

That is, the memory of destruction, or of that which is destroyed, is the more persistent as it is the memory of the forgotten or the explanation of that which is still inexplicable. Paradoxically, it is the memory of the Holocaust which threatens its memory most, as the real memory of the Holocaust, which is absent memory, encompasses the impossibility of remembrance.¹⁶⁴

These intimations of the 'persistence' and the 'return' of the event are described in a terminology familiar in Holocaust studies. They also suggest one of the many eerie and disturbing elements of Holocaust memory – that it is 'absent' and 'inexplicable'. The 'excess' that invariably characterises Holocaust writing can be understood as the experiential voice that cannot be retrieved. This is a memory that remains in silence and is both 'impossible' to retrieve and 'inexplicable'. In this regard, one can appreciate the profound value of survivor testimony and understand how it has come to be seen by some as far preferable, and, so to speak, ethically superior, to fiction.

In this context, the 'excess' of Auschwitz – the ways in which meaning cannot be ascribed to its historical reality – has become a persuasive discourse in Holocaust studies and one that recalls much of the fiction under discussion. If in some fundamental ways the synecdochic 'Auschwitz' does embody a negative sublime resistant to representation, then it is understandable how such an 'anti-knowledge' has come to signify the traumatic, belated 'return' of history. One way to understand how these concepts of the 'excess' and 'return' of Holocaust history is to see that, as Stephen Smith has argued, the subsequent representations of the event threaten to ossify as the years' distance between the present and the past grow. One might argue that even though these archetypes and cultural assumptions can be read in many Holocaust texts, still an 'excess' remains to be represented as the writer is forced to concede that it is beyond representation. Or, such 'sacred spaces' and 'myths and taboos' are examples of the aporia that Auschwitz embodies.

The final aspect of historical representation in relation to the Holocaust is the opposition between remembering and forgetting. Another way of seeing this complex theme is to consider the tensions between silence and speech. Sara R. Horowitz, for example, has written an entire study dealing with the tropes of silence and muteness:

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 446.

Voicing the Void: Muteness and Memory in Holocaust Fiction (1997).¹⁶⁵ The urge to remember the Holocaust has been remarkably strong and as the twentieth century came to an end, there was a sense that remembering and speaking were becoming more urgent. In many Holocaust fictions, the narrative conflict between the impulse towards remembering and speaking the past is set against the impulses towards forgetting and silence. *Daughters of the House* dramatises not only the split between generations but also between the two sisters: Thérèse wants to explore and understand the past, whereas Léonie is keen to resist her 'archaeology' of history. This ethical debate underpins much Holocaust theory and has informed many of the developments in writing and thinking about the historical event. It is no coincidence that one of the adjectives most commonly associated with the Holocaust is 'unspeakable'. It is also a word that critics and writers have attempted to re-align in relation to remembering and forgetting the event.'

The traumatic details of the Holocaust seem to be too repulsive - quite literally 'beyond words'. The knowledge of such atrocity cannot be accommodated into language and thus cannot be spoken. Leak and Paizis, in their introduction to *The Holocaust and the Text: Speaking the Unspeakable*, argue that not only is the alleged 'unspeakability' of the Holocaust a misnomer given the wealth of time devoted to doing precisely that, but also because there is an ethical imperative to 'speak' of it.¹⁶⁶ Whilst the 'unspeakable' (repulsive, objectionable) events of the Holocaust must be acknowledged (suggesting its sublime 'excess'), the importance attached to the speaking/remembering of these experiences is crucial. As Peter Haidu points out, the stress that many have put upon the significance of silence in Holocaust discourses is that silence was exactly what the Nazis wanted. This is what Haidu calls 'Himmler's narrative program of silence'.¹⁶⁷ In other words, Himmler's intentions were to have 'silenced' every witness.¹⁶⁸ In this context of the real intentions of the Nazis, silence (non-speech, non-memory) is a noun weighted with cultural and political meaning.

Daughters of the House, alongside *England Away* and *White Teeth*, fictionalises many of these historical and literary concerns. Dominick LaCapra has written that the Holocaust has been 'both repressed and "canonized"' in the recent past, and it often

¹⁶⁵ Horowitz, *Voicing the Void: Muteness and Memory in Holocaust Fiction* (Albany [US]: State University of New York Press, 1997).

¹⁶⁶ Leak, A, & Paizis, G, (2000), pp. 2-3.

¹⁶⁷ Peter Haidu, 'The Dialectics of Unspeakability' in Friedlander, S, (1992), p. 294.

¹⁶⁸ In particular see Himmler's 'Posen' speech dated 3 October 1943. Haidu interprets this text in 'The Dialectics of Unspeakability' (as above) on pp. 284-94. See also Lang, B, *The Future of the Holocaust:*

functions as a more or less covert point of rupture between the modern and the postmodern'.¹⁶⁹ This statement suggests the 'test-case' interpretation of the Holocaust. The evocation of it representing a profound 'rupture' in history, understanding and memory is central to an appreciation of the effects that the Holocaust has had upon theories of writing history. Roberts's text narrativises questions concerning the persistence of the past in the present, the 'competing' stories told about that past, a 'negative sublime' residing in the memories of the event, of the unbidden 'return' of traumatic history, and of the tensions between remembering and forgetting. The 'trace' of the Holocaust is one that returns to problematise the present, as has been seen in the texts by King and Smith. Léonie, at the very end of Roberts's novel, is tormented by the 'words' that will 'speak' the buried past, and she stands outside the bedroom door in the old house and imagines the ghosts of the dead waiting there:

She had the idea that Thérèse was waiting for her on the other side of the door, along with the Jewish family and Henri Taillè. Her father Maurice was with them too. All she had to do was go in and join them, listen to what they had to say, unravel and ravel the different languages they used. (*DH*: p. 172)

This suggests the position subsequent generations are in when trying to understand the 'voices' of the Holocaust. Roberts's description of both 'un' and 're' raveling those voices and words underlines the complexities and difficulties in attending to such a traumatised and 'buried' past.

Between History and Memory (New York [US]: Cornell University Press, 1999), pp. 33-7 and Bauer, Y, *Rethinking the Holocaust* (New Haven [US]: Yale University Press, 2001; repr. 2002), pp. 21-3.

¹⁶⁹ Dominick LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma* (New York [US]: Cornell University Press, 1994; repr. 1996), p. xi.

Chapter Two

‘They talk about millions of dead’ Investigating the Crime in Robert Harris’s *Fatherland*

Robert Harris’s *Fatherland*¹⁷⁰ is unusual in comparison with the other novels under discussion in that it is a genre text rather than a ‘literary’ one.¹⁷¹ Harris, the author of other successful thrillers that merge popular narratives with history, such as *Enigma* (1995) and *Archangel* (1998), has re-imagined a counterfactual history through the filter of a German victory in the Second World War. Set in 1964 on the eve of Hitler’s birthday, homicide investigator, Xavier March, who is initially investigating what appears to be an art fraud perpetrated by a small group of once prominent Nazis, gradually discovers that the real ‘crime’ he is attempting to solve is the Holocaust. March pursues a number of clues and attempts to unravel a complex plot that leads him to the ‘wasteland’ (*FL*: p. 380) of Auschwitz. Despite the systematic efforts of Hitler’s government to hide what happened in the war, March uncovers documents that confirm his worst suspicions. With the Gestapo following him, March walks where the death camps once stood:

And then he saw it. Almost buried at the base of a sapling: a streak of red. He bent and picked it up, turned it over in his hand. The brick was pitted with yellow lichen, scorched by explosive, crumbling at the corners. But it was solid enough. It existed. He scraped at the lichen with his thumb and the carmine dust crusted beneath his fingernail like dried blood. As he stooped to replace it, he saw others, half-hidden in the pale grass – ten, twenty, a hundred ... (*FL*: p. 382)

March’s discovery of the ‘crime’ of the Holocaust echoes many previous fictional detectives bringing to the surface what once was hidden, but in *Fatherland* the ‘case’ is a traumatic and violent historical event. March is employed as an investigator but

¹⁷⁰ Robert Harris, *Fatherland* (London: Hutchinson, 1992; repr. Arrow, 1993).

¹⁷¹ Another example of a thriller/detective genre dealing with the Nazi period is Philip Kerr’s trilogy of novels collected as *Berlin Noir* (London: Penguin, 1993). The three novels – *March Violets* (1989), *The Pale Criminal* (1990) and *A German Requiem* (1991) – involve private detective Bernie Gunther, and are set in the years leading up to the war and in its immediate aftermath.

figuratively he joins many other individuals from 1990s Holocaust fiction who seek to bring the truth to the surface as they examine the past. Indeed, Léonie in *Daughters of the House* is one such detective manqué who seeks to uncover the secrets of the past.

The brick that March picks up at the site where Auschwitz once stood is 'concrete' evidence of the crime that Hitler's 'Greater German Reich' has striven to conceal. Despite its 'crumbling' consistency, it is 'solid enough' for March to finally 'know' the terrible secret that has been kept from him. The 'lichen' that covers it suggests age and the 'carmine dust' signifies the blood of those who died in the camps. March sees countless other bricks in the grass that evoke the numbers of people who were killed. The brick is a residue of the material reality of the Auschwitz death camps. It is also the last piece of the puzzle that March was first presented with at the beginning of the novel. Figuratively, he has been putting these bricks together and they have formed a part of the new knowledge of what Hitler's power is built on. This knowledge, rather than 'closing' the novel and bringing the disparate elements of the plot together, drives March towards what appears to be suicide: 'He took off his cap and threw it, sent it skimming across the grass the way his father used to skim flat stones across the sea. Then he tugged the gun from his waistband, checked to make sure it was loaded, and moved towards the silent trees'. (*FL*: p. 383)

Given its popular thriller genre, *Fatherland*'s comparatively bleak ending suggests something of the novel's relationship with the truth of historical reality. Harris mixes real and fictional characters and imagines a counterfactual history (in a sense, a history that reflects the 'future' Hitler envisaged for Germany) that extrapolates upon 'what might have happened' if certain events had been concluded in different ways. In Ann Parry's words, *Fatherland* 'both changes and confirms contemporary history'.¹⁷² The novel's rendering of this dystopia – through dialogue, radio broadcasts and newspaper stories – suggests a world of paranoia, propaganda, state-governed violence and cultural oppression. But, as Parry suggests, Harris's detailed and convincingly realistic portrait of a Nazi-dominated Europe also confirms the reality of history. Harris achieves this partly through a judiciously referred to 'back-story' based on reasoned extrapolation. For example, Hitler, after peace with Britain in 1944, explodes a rocket above New York in 1946 following the Americans' use of the Atomic Bomb in

¹⁷² Ann Parry, 'Idioms for the Unpresentable: Postwar Fiction and the Shoah' (pp. 109-24) in Leak/Paizis, (2000), p. 115.

Hiroshima and Nagasaki. King Edward and Queen Wallis head the monarchy. Joseph Kennedy is, in Harris's 1964, approaching a possible second term as American president.

Ann Parry focuses on the tension between counterfactual fictionalisation and historical reality in *Fatherland*. The 'dual temporal perspectivism' evident in the novel's narrative – a duality between what the reader knows to be true and what might have been true, given different circumstances and outcomes – creates an active imagining of what 'was' and what 'might have been'.¹⁷³ In other words, the reader provides the truth behind official propaganda reassuring society that the Jews were simply 'moved east'. Parry goes on to argue that the absence of Jewish characters in the novel underlines Harris's assertion that the 'Final Solution' was a success in his counterfactual world. She writes that Harris's narrative is an effective representational tool in order to express the truth of the 'banishment of the Jews', as seen in *Daughters of the House*. It is their absence from the text and from the fictionalised Germany that articulates an absence that would have been the case if indeed Hitler's virulent racial laws had prevailed as he had planned. Also, *Fatherland*'s narrative structure, Parry suggests, represents some of the inherent problems confronted by any writer attempting to describe an event that threatens to thwart representations of it. The 'unpresentability' of the Holocaust is articulated through a number of tropes, motifs and devices that all express this sense of ethical and aesthetic limits. *Fatherland*, then, is a 'persistent attempt ... to implicate that which is both beneath the surface and beyond any familiar temporal dimension'.¹⁷⁴ Despite its status as a popular political thriller, Parry reads an effective rendering of the presence of the Holocaust through metaphors of absence, distance and the hidden or submerged. A caveat is that the Jews' absence in the novel reduces them to another imposed 'silence' and that they remain voiceless victims.

Parry's sense of 'that which is beneath the surface' and the unsettling of 'any familiar temporal dimension' captures how *Fatherland* represents the hidden and 'unspeakable' reality of the Holocaust. As will be discussed later in the chapter, tropes of things, people and events being hidden, locked away or buried predominate in the novel and suggest a noir crime world in which the corrupt and violent truth of a society dwells beneath the surface. The rupture of temporal dimensions that many associate with Auschwitz is also expressed in the inverted temporal reality of the novel. The periodicity of the text suggests a sense of being 'out of time' and 'outside' of history. This is the

¹⁷³ Ibid. p. 116.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid. p. 116.

‘future’ that Hitler envisaged for Germany and Europe, and hence it is a future that was thwarted by the Allies’ victory. And in this ‘future’, a further truth of the Nazis’ obsession with hiding the traces of the ‘Final Solution’ is played out. The difficulties of assimilating the truths of the Holocaust and accurately representing them is dramatised in *Fatherland* through the crime being buried in hidden paper-work and the fact that people are frightened to even mention the Jews’ fate. Parry interprets this aspect of the narrative as being redolent of the continuing failure of European culture to acknowledge the full extent of the systematic murder of a race.

March’s investigation of the crime of the Holocaust reaches its climax when he eventually arrives at the land where the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camps once stood.¹⁷⁵ This ‘wasteland’ suggests how successfully the Nazis in this counterfactual history have hidden the ‘evidence’ of their crimes. Harris alludes to other ‘clues’ throughout the novel, but these refer to the real beyond the fictional. March has to make some sense of these clues, but it is only with his discovery of documentation and his arrival at the land where Auschwitz once stood that he fully comprehends the crime (and when he does he apparently commits suicide). An early example of such clues occurs when Harris describes a photograph that March finds behind old wallpaper when he moves into his apartment. It is dated 1929 and is of a young family. March experiences a ‘vague and growing uneasiness’ and searches the landlord’s records. He discovers that the father’s name was Jacob Weiss and that he and his family vanished without trace in 1942. Weiss means ‘white. A blank’, (*FL*: p. 38) and it is from this point that March begins to be increasingly disaffected with his job and his superiors. The family name is a synecdoche for the ‘blank’ of the Jewish fate at the hands of the Nazis.

This disaffection is crucial to Harris’s use of March as a sympathetic central character. Despite being a homicide investigator with the ‘Kriminalpolizei’, and therefore a nominal member of the SS, March displays little loyalty to the regime. He is an establishment figure who expresses cynicism about the system he works for, and hence he can legitimately be seen as a sympathetic character already marginalised when the novel begins. March’s growing sense of anxiety about the post-war Germany he is living and working in (and therefore condoning), and his general scepticism towards the official version of past events, is dramatised in his tense relationship with his ten-year-old son, Pili. March and his wife are estranged and March’s time with his son is characterised by

¹⁷⁵ See pp. 41-44 in the introduction of the present thesis for an analysis of a similar scene in Ian McEwan’s *Black Dogs*.

a lack of communication and profound ideological differences. March, fulfilling many of the attributes of the 'classical' detective figure, is cynical, individualistic and fiercely moral.¹⁷⁶ His son is a preternaturally zealous member of the Hitler youth who challenges his father's 'asocial' (*FL*: p. 31) position and eventually betrays him to the authorities at the novel's denouement. (*FL*: p. 344) March can be sympathetically portrayed as a character relatively untainted by the worst excesses of Hitler's Germany. He is also one of the few fathers in the novel who isn't corrupted by the Nazi ideology. This 'land' of 'fathers' is a patriarchy based on murder and mass death.

It is March's unwillingness to believe all he reads in the newspapers and what he hears on the radio that leads to his further investigations into the case. The 'secret' that lies beneath the initial art-fraud case March is presented with is contained in the vanishing of the Weiss family but it is also articulated in the 'truth' of what the official version of the deportations has disseminated. March talks to a fellow U-boat submariner, Rudolf Halder, who is writing a history of the 'German Army on the Eastern Front'. (*FL*: p. 47) Halder speaks of the 'resettlement' programme and the fate of people being moved from their homes:

Halder turned his head and glanced around furtively, to make sure he was not overheard – 'the German look', people called it. 'They also had to cope with the Jews being expelled from Germany and the western territories – France, Holland, Belgium.'

'Jews?'

'Yes, yes. Keep your voice down.' Halder was speaking so quietly, March had to lean across the table to hear. 'You can imagine – it was chaos. Overcrowding. Starvation. Disease. From what one can gather, the place is still a shithole, despite what they say'. (*FL*: p. 51)

The 'open secret' is interpreted as being one of 'resettlement' and dreadful deprivation rather than genocide. Harris suggests something of the 'unspeakability' of what may or may not have happened 'in the East' – its potential horror is captured in a glance and a whisper and a rumour. In *Fatherland*, the Holocaust is the unimaginable excess of what the characters already believe to be a terrible situation for those involved in the 'resettlement'. The sense that a crime has been committed but that its nature or its

¹⁷⁶ Peter Messent writes in *Criminal Proceedings: The Contemporary American Crime Novel* (London: Pluto Press, 1997) that the archetypal American detective is invariably described in a 'terse, tough, and coolly descriptive style' that articulates the individual's 'hard boiled' and 'ironically detached' persona. (p. 7) See also Stephano Tani, 'The Doomed Detective' (pp. 320-28) in Nicol, ed, *Postmodernism and the Contemporary Novel: A Reader* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002).

essence remains unidentified informs the narrative. *Fatherland* presents an imagined world in which the events of the Holocaust remain perpetually 'off-stage' for much of the novel – the implication of such a strategy being that its events cannot be contained within a conventional thriller narrative trajectory.

There are other ways in which Harris alludes to the reality of the Holocaust in this counterfactual society. *Fatherland* mixes fictional characters such as March, Charlotte Maguire and Halder with real historical figures. The three men involved in the art fraud case – Joseph Buhler, Wilhelm Stuckart and Martin Luther – were all prominent members of the Nazi party and all attended the infamous Wannsee Conference in January 1942 when official plans for the 'Final Solution' were set in place.¹⁷⁷ The novel's 'villain' is another real character, Odilo Globocnik. Globocnik committed suicide in 1945, but in *Fatherland*'s alternative history he is alive in 1964 and working as an SS Obergruppenführer. Globocnik was an important figure in the planning and execution of the Holocaust and hence carries with him an historical weight of real violence. In Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, Globocnik, in direct charge of Operation Reinhard,¹⁷⁸ is described as being one of the 'famous Jew-killers from Poland'.¹⁷⁹ He effectively administered Operation Reinhard from his headquarters in Lublin and was at the centre of the killing process. Harris's novel extrapolates from the historical reality but does so with evident caution: the narrative convinces the reader largely through its use of the real and then allows fictional characters to inhabit the same milieu. This is a literary device common to much recent, in particular American, writing and includes novels such as E.L. Doctorow's *Ragtime* (1976), Don Delillo's *Libra* (1988) and James Ellroy's *American Tabloid* (1995). Although perhaps less prevalent in Britain a novel such as Giles Foden's *The Last King of Scotland* (1998), in which Nicholas Garrigan becomes the doctor of the Ugandan dictator, Idi Amin, similarly mixes historical fact with fictional characters.

¹⁷⁷ Dr Josef Buhler was the Secretary of State of the General Government (see Arad, Y, *Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka: The Operation Reinhard Death Camps* (Bloomington [US]: Indiana University Press, 1999), pp. 12-13). Dr Martin Luther was an Under State Secretary for the Foreign Office (see Wistrich, RS (2002), p. 110 & p. 112). Dr Wilhelm Stuckart was Undersecretary in the Ministry of the Interior (see Arendt, H, (1994); p. 113). The 'fourth man' involved in the case, Friedrich Kritzinger, also attended the Wannsee Conference

¹⁷⁸ In Laqueur, W, (2001), 'Aktion Reinhard German code name (adopted in commemoration of Reinhard Heydrich after his assassination in May 1942) for the systematic killing of Polish Jews that began in March 1942 and concluded in November 1943.' (p. 530)

¹⁷⁹ Arendt, p. 179.

Globocnik's involvement in atrocities serves as a reminder that despite the pleasure inherent in imagining a counterfactual history, the Holocaust 'haunts' the generic text. The ethical responsibility felt by writers when describing the events of the Holocaust defines categorically how they will approach, if at all, the actual events themselves. Harris, like many other writers, does not directly represent the Holocaust in the same way that, say, D.M. Thomas does in *Pictures at an Exhibition* or Martin Amis in *Time's Arrow*. Harris's strategy to position the reality of the Holocaust in the context of a fictionalised alternative history as something 'outside' of the present of the text suggests other interpretations. Through the figure of Globocnik, Harris imagines how successfully the architects of the Holocaust 'covered their tracks' and were able to rise still higher in the Nazi party. Globocnik's efforts to silence those who might speak out about the Holocaust represent a truth about both the Nazi commitment to secrecy surrounding the death camps and their efforts to disguise the truth.

Globocnik embodies the bureaucratic mindset of the efficient Nazi and threatens March with his atavistic violence. Nebe, March's superior, tells him why Globocnik ('Globus') was nicknamed 'the submarine': 'Because he had a submarine engine hooked up to a Polish basement during the war, and used the exhaust fumes to kill people. Globus likes killing people. He'd like to kill you. You should remember that'. (FL: p.151) Towards the end of the novel, following March's realisation that the crime he is investigating is the fate of the Jews, Globus, in a mocking rebuke, having tortured March, responds to March's use of the names of the death camps:

'They're just names, March. There's nothing there any more, not even a brick. Nobody will ever believe it. And shall I tell you something? *Part of you can't believe it either.*' Globus spat in his face – a goblet of greyish-yellow phlegm. 'That's how much the world will care'. (FL: p. 364)

Globocnik's conviction that not even a single brick remains of the camps is contradicted by the novel's climax. But his comment that the camps are just 'names' alludes to the difficulties felt by individuals, groups and states to comprehend the magnitude and meaning of what happened inside the camps. The names of the camps signify death and deprivation but also cannot fully represent the depravity and atrocity enacted there. If Globocnik symbolises the venal Nazi whose violence and contempt helped the planning and administration of millions of peoples' lives, Harris's narrative, like so many Holocaust fictions, struggles to contain the excess of Auschwitz. The use of real Nazis

such as Globocnik offers an effective verisimilitude. The use of rumour and anecdotal evidence found in various dialogues involving March and others is another device utilised to evoke the 'unimaginable'. Harris also includes official Nazi documentation and what Inga Clendinnen refers to as the 'mythic potency' of certain words, phrases and images that in the context of the Holocaust 'are instantly charged with explosive, undifferentiated emotional force'.¹⁸⁰

The present chapter will analyse Harris's use of what might be called the linguistic 'signifiers' of the Holocaust. First, however, a brief analysis of *Fatherland*'s inclusion of official documents and testimony to evoke the Holocaust will emphasise the 'absence' of genocide – and by implication the difficulties in representing it – and how its 'presence' prevails in Harris's Hitlerian Germany. March visits a bank in Switzerland in the hope that he will be able to discover what Buhler, Stuckart and Luther were hiding in a security box in the bank's vault. He finds a painting by Leonardo da Vinci but no further clues. March then realises that Luther retrieved something from the box and took it back to Berlin, and is convinced that it is documents that he is now searching for:

He pictured them in wartime Berlin – sitting in their offices at night, circulating memos and minutes in a perpetual bureaucratic paper chase, building themselves a paper fortress. Millions of Germans had fought in the war ... But these old men had fought their war – had bled and expended their middle age – *on paper*. (FL: p. 228)

March visits the 'Reichsarchiv' and is shown around by Halder, who tells March that they are walking on the 'history of the Fatherland'. (FL: p. 242) Halder agrees to help March and leads him down to the Interior Ministry Files. This represents a journey down 'below the surface' of Hitler's Berlin. Down corridors, the two men make their way to the core of the official files. March compares this subterranean experience with being below-deck on an aircraft carrier: 'The depths of the Reichsarchiv reminded him of that: low ceilings strung with lights, the sense of something vast pressing down from above'. (FL: p. 245) The 'history of the Fatherland' is now all around them, but as Halder reminds March, only certain aspects of recent history are filed here. 'Bad' history – events that might contradict or undermine the regime – is burned in a furnace. Such an image has connotations of the fate of many of the Jews.

¹⁸⁰ Clendinnen, (2002), p. 166.

The documents that March discovers form a hidden history of the Holocaust. There is an invitation to the Wannsee Conference in late 1941 – it was postponed until 20th January the next year – from SS Obergruppenführer Reinhard Heydrich, Himmler's deputy.¹⁸¹ There is a much-photocopied document of Goering's directive to Heydrich from 31st July 1941. This includes the foreboding references to 'the solution of the Jewish problem' and a 'final solution' (*FL*: p. 253) that stops short, inevitably, of explicitly mentioning murder and genocide. These discoveries rely upon the reader's prior historical knowledge. In Harris's 'Author's Note', the novelist confirms that all of those individuals he named as attending the conference were indeed there. The documentation signifying the existence of the Wannsee Conference – and the fact that 13 of the 14 men who attended are dead – suggests to March that the 'Endlösung', (*FL*: p. 256), or 'Final Solution', was a reality that the authorities have striven to cover up ever since. Conversely, the documentation confirms that the crime March has been investigating is the crime of the Holocaust – a knowledge that is held by the reader but not by the novel's protagonist. *Fatherland* presents the reader with an unusual fictional detective – March knows, fundamentally, less than the reader does because he cannot imagine or believe that such extermination occurred.

He is convinced that Martin Luther, who has been assassinated and is the last to die of those who went to the Wannsee Conference, brought something back from Switzerland. With the American journalist, Charlotte Maguire, March, effectively an outlaw on the run from the Gestapo, visits the baggage area of the airport in the hope of finding one last clue. He discovers a brown leather case that Luther dropped deliberately in order to avoid being found with it. Once it is unlocked, March smells the 'odour of a long-sealed filing cabinet or desk drawer' (*FL*: p. 306) and is 'unlocking' the secret of the criminal 'case' at the same time. He is also unlocking a hidden and suppressed history. The documents virtually tell the story of the planning and execution of the Holocaust, and as such, signify the bureaucratic reality of the genocide. This moment recalls other similar scenes in British Holocaust fiction. For example, there is Austerlitz's realisation of his own 'submerged' proximity to the Holocaust in Sebald's text, and the uncovering of Jewish bones in the local cemetery in *Daughters of the House*. Likewise,

¹⁸¹ In Laqueur, (2001): 'Heydrich, Reinhard (1904-42) Chief of the RHSA (Reich Security Main Office). Heydrich played a pivotal role in planning the Final Solution. He ordered the concentration of Polish Jews in ghettos, planned the deportation of German Jews, and organised the *Einsatzgruppen* (mobile killing units). In January 1942 he convened the Wannsee Conference ... Heydrich was assassinated by Czech

in Seiffert's *The Dark Room*, Micha uncovers his grandfather's involvement in atrocities, and in Cartwright's *Masai Dreaming*, Curtiz discovers that Claudia committed suicide rather than having died in Auschwitz. In these texts, the moment of discovery is enacted through tropes of revelation, evidence being buried either in the earth or in peoples' memory and through silence, avoidance and lingering guilt. All suggest that the Holocaust past, and by extension history, exists 'somewhere' and can indeed be retrieved.

The documents that March finds inside Luther's case testify to the reality of the Holocaust and provide *Fatherland* with a representation of its planning, instigation and processes of killing. There is a 'dispatch' from the German Ambassador in London who reports President Joseph Kennedy's comments 'upon the Jewish question': Kennedy allegedly says that he understands Nazi policy because of his experience at a restricted Boston golf club, implying the widespread antipathy towards Jews. (*FL*: p. 309) There is a works requisition letter from the 'Central Construction Office' in Auschwitz requesting urgently the 'delivery of a gas door 100/192 for corpse cellar I of crematory III'. (*FL*: pp. 310-11) Also included are a sketch of Auschwitz-Birkenau drawn by Luther; a railway timetable containing times for journeys between Theresienstadt and Auschwitz, Grodno¹⁸² and Treblinka; and a telegraph informing various leading Nazi bureaucrats how 'special trains' are to be re-used: 'After each full trip cars are to be well cleaned, if necessary fumigated, and upon completion of the programme prepared for further use'. (*FL*: pp. 316-17) Harris intersperses these documents with March and Charlotte Maguire's efforts to escape the Gestapo and to smuggle the evidence out of Germany. March reconstructs the journeys of the victims and begins to calculate the numbers involved and, as the thriller action gathers pace to the plot's climax, deduces the full nature of the crime. In this respect, he bears a striking resemblance to a historian gathering documentation or even the novelist researching the Holocaust.

March compares and contrasts the official sanitised minutes of the meeting at Wannsee and the 'real' minutes that set out 'the final solution of the Jewish question', seeing the euphemistic official language as 'the grease for sliding round unpleasantness, the funk-hole for avoiding specifics'. (*FL*: p. 320) The last document is Luther's 'notes on a visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau'. This is a fictional document – confirmed in Harris's

parachutists in June 1942 while serving as deputy head of the German military administration in Prague.' (p. 279)

¹⁸² Grodno (now Hrodna in Belarus) fell to the Nazis on 23rd June 1941. See Laqueur (2001), pp. 60-6.

‘Author’s Note’ – but one based on historical fact. Luther describes the barracks and the observation towers and a ‘selection process’ involving Jews from France. This includes the ‘disinfecting’ of prisoners and then the insertion of Zyklon B. Luther writes:

Only sound of a muffled drumming coming from the far end of the room, from beyond the suitcases & the piles of still-warm clothes. A small glass panel is set into the oak doors. I put my eye to it. A man’s palm beats against the aperture & I jerk my head away.

Says one guard: ‘The water in the shower rooms must be very hot today, since they shout so loudly’. (FL: p. 325)

Luther goes on to describe the ‘mountains of belongings’ of the victims (revealing in an aside that he, in fact, stole the brown leather bag that March finds the documents in), the piled up bodies, the work of the *Sonderkommando*,¹⁸³ and the incineration room. Luther concludes: ‘The operation thus self-supporting; the secret self-sealing. Biggest security headache – stink from chimneys & flames at night, visible over many kilometres, especially to troop trains heading east on main line’. (FL: p. 326)

Harris justifies his fictional documents by stressing that he has done so on ‘the basis of fact’. (FL: p. 386) Luther’s explicit and terse witnessing of the killing process at Auschwitz convinces through its precise detail and its detached abbreviated style. The ‘Author’s Note’ calls attention to this mixing of fact and fiction, of real and imagined documents. Certainly there is no sense that Harris risks being accused of either plagiarism in the sense of the D.M. Thomas controversy (see the ‘introduction’ and chapter seven of the present thesis) or even departing from the truth. Harris’s novel is a particular kind of generic popular thriller with recognisable tropes such as the dogged detective, a female ‘love interest’, and a cast of unrepentant villains. Its alternative history, though, confirms the ‘real’ of the events of the Holocaust. Harris adheres strictly to the facts of Auschwitz, and despite the fictional status of Luther’s ‘notes’, what he witnesses is the truth of the killing process. Tellingly, this is the only time in the novel that Jewish people actively appear in the text. The telegrammatic prose is shorn of emotional response and therefore mirrors the other bureaucratic missives included in the text and signifies the lack of pity in Luther’s perception of the Jewish victims. The

¹⁸³ I.C.B. Dear in Dear, Foot, eds, *The Oxford Companion to World War II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) writes: ‘*Sonderkommandos* (special detachments) was the name of *Einsatzgruppen* sub-units. But it was also used to describe squads of inmates in the death camps ... who were used by their guards as work parties to clear the gas chambers and bury or burn the victims. They were given extra food and privileges, but were eventually shot to cover all traces of what they had been forced to do’. (p. 797)

absence of the Holocaust in Hitler's Germany, as imagined in *Fatherland*, is made present by the inclusion of this document that accurately portrays a bureaucratic and industrialised system of killing. The Holocaust has not been named, historicised or even acknowledged in this world and therefore the documents are a vital source of evidence. To March the documents signify a hidden 'unspoken' history and the text relies upon them to confirm the real in amongst the fiction.

One final document in this section of *Fatherland* links Harris's use of real and fictional papers to the second aspect of the novel's representation of the Holocaust. March finds a circular from an SS-Gruppenführer on the 'utilisation of cut hair'. This document orders that 'all human hair cut off in concentration camps should be utilised'. Furthermore, he reads that hair 'will be processed for industrial felt and spun into thread' that will be used to 'make socks for U-boat crews'. (FL: p. 327) Harris demonstrates the capitalistic attitudes underpinning the killing process – little or nothing involved in the genocide was left to waste. The 'thread' that comes from victims' hair represents the thread that ties March, inextricably, to the Holocaust. Initially, March's time in the U-boat suggested another aspect of Harris's tropes of submersion and memory being buried beneath the surface but this discovery implies the unconscious complicity of many during Hitler's regime. This usage echoes Clendinnen's 'mythic potency' of certain phrases and words used in context of the Holocaust.

Sue Vice, writing in relation to Amis's *Time's Arrow*,¹⁸⁴ describes what she calls 'triggers',¹⁸⁵ referring to Lawrence Langer's analysis of certain words such as 'train', 'gas', 'shower', etc. Langer argues that these words potentially 'deplete', and at the very least 'limit', the writer's vocabulary.¹⁸⁶ Vice argues that in the case of the reversed chronology of Amis's text,

rather than performing a 'depletion', the double-voicedness of such words offers increased, multiple meaning. For one thing, each occurrence is the site not just of reversed time, but of circular or even palindromic time. We only recognize these terms because we know where they come from; in the universe of the text, these events have not yet happened, but, therefore, everyone knows about them.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁴ See chapter six in the present thesis for a fuller analysis on Amis's novel.

¹⁸⁵ Vice, (2000), p. 15.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid, p. 16.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, p. 16.

In other words, the narrator of *Time's Arrow*, unaware for most of the text that his/her host, Unverdorben, will become a Nazi doctor at Auschwitz, uses these 'trigger' words with apparently genuine innocence. The Holocaust is 'back there' in time and hence such words are not freighted with significance and meaning. Amis's use of these phrases signifies a 'bleak knowledge' in the reader and suggests the 'future' to the narrator: 'A third thing makes the trigger slip: nail-clipping. It's the odour the sallow rinds give off, as they cook and crackle in the fire ... (TA: p. 59)

As Vice points out, the narrator's host, at this point he is named Tod Friendly, is unaware, at least explicitly, of the Holocaust and how he/she will be involved in it. The negative irony that Amis employs throughout the text – the distance between the narrator's understanding (in reversed time) and what 'actually happened' (in historical reality) – 'reminds' the reader of what is to come. Or to put it another way, such images are a portent of what has already occurred. The 'triggers' that the narrator speaks of – Friendly sees reports of Holocaust atrocities, he hears German being spoken – culminate in the banal image of the cutting of his toenails. The smell of them after they have been sent into the fire recalls the smell of Auschwitz. Amis does not explicitly state this, and still the novel's narrator is ignorant of what is to come. But the trigger phrase, 'as they cook and crackle in the fire', is suggestive of bodies being disposed of in the camp crematoria. Also, the sense of toenails being unnecessary, unwanted, something to be rid of and discarded suggests Nazi ideological perceptions of Jewish people. Amis represents the Holocaust through key words, phrases and images that have become loaded with special meaning. The 'double voicedness' that Vice argues is present in Amis's use of trigger words can be usefully compared to Harris's *Fatherland*, a novel that is also defined by an unusual temporal schema.

Given *Fatherland*'s crime-thriller genre it might be unsurprising to see that Harris uses trigger words as 'clues' that point back towards the central crime. The author's use of rumour, suspicion and conjecture amongst many of the characters in the text echoes some of the real responses of people during the first few years of the war. These whispered projections – some as denial, some as ignorance, some as hope – recall the reality of the fate of the Jews. But also there are moments when Harris uses trigger words, phrases and images to consistently underline the reality of the Holocaust and its material absence in the counterfactual Hitlerian society. For example, in a seemingly casual aside, he hints at a particular aspect of the Holocaust. March is driving round Grunewald in Berlin. He muses upon how modern Germans have returned to the forests

from where they had emerged, centuries before, as warring tribes: 'The Germans were a race of forest-dwellers. Make a clearing in your mind, if you liked; the trees just waited to reclaim it'. (FL: p. 79) It is clear that Harris is alluding to Auschwitz-Birkenau, camps that were situated very close to woods for purposes of secrecy. The symbolic power of the trigger word, 'trees', in this fictional context of a post-Holocaust Germany, returns the reader to knowledge of the part woods trees and forests played in the killing process. For example, Jan Piwonski, in Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah*, describes the trees of Sobibor where a death camp was built in 1942:

That's the charm of our forests: silence and beauty. But it wasn't always so silent here. There was a time when it was full of screams and gunshots, of dogs' barking, and that period especially is engraved on the minds of the people who lived here then. After the revolt the Germans decided to liquidate the camp, and early in the winter of 1943 they planted pines that were three of four years old, to camouflage all the traces.¹⁸⁸

Harris's apparently casual description of the Germans as 'forest-dwellers' and the image of a 'clearing in your mind' that will be eventually swallowed up by the trees, is redolent of the ways in which the Nazis made much of the cover of trees. Birkenau camp built near to the existing Auschwitz camp was named after the woods that surrounded it.¹⁸⁹ Harris's use of the trigger image of 'trees' and 'clearings' is an indirect and metaphorical way of representing the Holocaust. The narrators are unaware of the symbolic power of, say, the woods. In the counterfactual world of *Fatherland*, the trees are, figuratively speaking, witnesses to the atrocities. They stand in for the 'absence' of the Holocaust in Harris's imagined dystopia. They are also clues to the crime, but they are clues that resist understanding because March is, in effect, outside of history: he cannot bring to the woods the same interpretation that the reader can. A smaller but no less striking example occurs when the real-life Globocnik threatens March: "'You have no witness,'" was all he whispered. "You have no witness. Not any more"'. (FL: p. 152) In the context of the Holocaust not being spoken about directly, Globocnik's warning that there are no witnesses left to the crime echoes Nazi rhetoric that there would be no survivors of the killing to testify to what had happened. Such clues contribute to March's dawning realisation that he has been systematically lied to over the years: "'What do you do," he

¹⁸⁸ Lanzmann, *Shoah: The Complete Text of the Acclaimed Holocaust Film* (New York [US]: Pantheon Books, 1985; repr. De Capo Press, 1995), p. 6.

said, “if you devote your life to discovering criminals, and it gradually occurs to you that the real criminals are the people you work for?”” (*FL*: p. 213)

Harris utilises these clues of symbolic power in a chapter that provides March with a hallucinatory portent of the information he is close to uncovering. March arrives at the Gotenland station to find Globocnik and others standing around a severely decayed corpse. Globocnik maintains that this body is Luther’s, but it is revealed later that it is in fact the body of a drifter used as a decoy. Harris employs words and images of ‘mythic potency’ to hint at the real crimes that Globocnik was involved with. March realises that the Jewish prisoners were sent to the East from this station. This is emphasised in Harris’s description of ‘the clank of wheels and couplings, a bleak whistle’. (*FL*: p. 258) Trigger words surrounding ‘trains’, ‘stations’, ‘platforms’, etc, in similar ways to Hope’s *Serenity House*, suggest some of the most powerful connotations of the Holocaust. March interviews one of the locomotive drivers who confirms that ‘derelicts’ are often attempting to escape the authorities:

At first, March could make out nothing, except a line of cattle-trucks. Then, almost invisible in the shadow of the train, he spotted a movement – a shape, running jerkily, like a marionette; then another; then more. They ran along the sides of the wagons, darted into the gaps between the trucks, waited, then scampered out again towards the next patch of cover.

[...]

March watched as the stick-figures worked their way to safety – then suddenly the rails were vibrating, there was a rush of wind, and the view was cut off by the sleeper train to Rovno¹⁹⁰, accelerating out of Berlin. The wall of double-decker dining cars and sleeping compartments took half a minute to pass and by the time it had cleared the little colony of drifters had vanished into the orangey dark. (*FL*: p. 261)

The sequence precipitates March’s discovery of the documentation that proves the nature of the crime, and his ‘vision’ provides him, or, more accurately, the reader, with a ghost-like portent of the ‘departures’ to the East.

The ‘derelicts’ signify the other marginalised figures that came to the yards some twenty years before. They run in amongst the ‘cattle-trucks’ – a phrase linked with the deportations of people from Poland and Germany. More and more figures emerge from the shadows evoking the numbers of people involved in the deportations. These are

¹⁸⁹ Martin Gilbert, *The Holocaust: The Jewish Tragedy* (London: Harper Collins, 1986; repr. Fontan, 1987), p. 286.

¹⁹⁰ Rovno (also known as Rowne) is now known as Rivne in Ukraine. See Gilbert (1987), p. 92 & p. 209.

‘stick-figures’; an image resonant of the prisoners’ starved and emaciated bodies. They are momentarily hidden from view by a train made up of ‘double-decker dining cars’ – suggestive of high living and leisure, in direct contrast to the earlier ‘cattle-trucks’. By this stage March is close to seeing how such a scene recalls his own nightmare that the Jews’ transport ‘East’ was much worse than hitherto believed. Up to this point the truth of the Holocaust has remained at the level of speculation and hearsay. March though is pursuing more than these symbolic intimations of what happened. He needs ‘documentary proof of what happened to the Jews’. (FL: p. 271) He follows a ‘paper trail’ towards the heart of the crime. But Harris also provides intimations, by way of trigger words, burdened with but not negated by the Holocaust, of the catastrophe that has been successfully hidden by the authorities.

In conclusion, one can read Harris’s *Fatherland* as an example of a particular kind of popular crime thriller. It is a counterfactual text, and therefore can be interpreted in light of how generic conventions limit its narrative. But it is also a Holocaust fiction and thus displays a number of tropes and aesthetic decisions that it shares with other Holocaust novels. Central to this is Lang’s ‘moral order’. This order is best seen in Holocaust fiction’s adherence to history, and its aspiration to a condition of the historical. Lang writes that Holocaust texts can be characterised as displaying an ‘imagination’ that is ‘set within the limits of history’.¹⁹¹ *Fatherland*, despite its counterfactual version of history, which is a ‘Nazified’ version of history, adheres strictly to factual evidence. It is the discovery of this factual evidence that allows March to solve the case, even though it precipitates his own crisis leading to his stunned discovery of the bricks of Auschwitz camp. Harris’s ‘Author’s Note’ alerts the reader to what is factual in the novel and what is fictional. This attention to producing documentation of historical evidence is an example of how *Fatherland* recognises the facts of the Holocaust. The authenticity of Harris’s research, and furthermore his imagined extrapolations upon historical record, is manifested in the real historical figures that populate the text. It is also captured in the use of Nazi documentation and, more indirectly, in the use of trigger words, phrases and images that are metonyms for the Holocaust.

Berel Lang writes that much Holocaust fiction exhibits ‘a common extraliterary conscience’. This can, in Lang’s words, be read as ‘representation within the limits of

¹⁹¹ Lang, *Holocaust Representation: Art within the Limits of History and Ethics* (Maryland [US]: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000) p. 29.

history, history within the limits of ethics'.¹⁹² In some respects, *Fatherland*, with its thriller plot, its detective hero and its alternative 'what if?' narrative, might be accused of exploiting or even distorting historical facts about the Holocaust, in the same way that a comedy or a fantasy novel concerning the Holocaust might.¹⁹³ But Harris's novel does display an 'extraliterary conscience' and it these limits regarding representation, history and ethics that form the novel's rendering of the event. In other words, *Fatherland*'s adherence to the historical – an ethical decision – and its crime-thriller genre, merge to posit an Orwellian future. Consequently, the unearthing of the terrible secret fulfils two primary functions. Firstly, it confirms (and significantly deepens) the conventional crime diegesis of mystification, ratiocination and revelation. Secondly, it reflects, through this central metaphor, something of the ways in which later generations approach and discover the truths about the Holocaust.

¹⁹² Ibid, p. 34.

¹⁹³ See Skibell, J, *A Blessing on the Moon* (New York [US]: Algonquin, 1997; repr. Abacus, 1999). Skibell's novel utilises fantasy tropes to describe the posthumous journey of Chaim Skibelski, murdered by the Nazis, through a surreal alternative reality. The novel can be usefully compared with Kosinski's *The Painted Bird*.

Chapter Three

‘Appointments to Keep in the Past’ Time, Memory and Trauma in W.G. Sebald’s *Austerlitz*

W.G. Sebald’s 2001 ‘memoir novel’,¹⁹⁴ *Austerlitz*,¹⁹⁵ is concerned explicitly with two inter-related concepts: memory and identity. It is the ‘inter-relatedness’ of these themes, the sense that one foregrounds the other, that represents the central motif in Sebald’s text. *Austerlitz* offers a series of reflections upon time, memory and trauma and sees the Holocaust as the fundamental aporia of the twentieth century. Through a series of barely uninterrupted monologues (that abandon the strict conventions of syntax and punctuation), Jacques Austerlitz, a peripatetic expert in architectural history, relates to an unnamed narrator, (‘Sebald’), his thoughts on a wide variety of subjects but especially the deepening memories of his childhood. Austerlitz gradually reveals himself to be a solitary melancholic whose identity and sense of self are profoundly fragile constructs. Over years of growing anxiety, depression and recognition of some kind of a trauma buried in his past, Austerlitz slowly reveals the ‘secrets’ of his life. He hopes that such fragments will enable him to fix an identity that is to be found in an acknowledgement of the trauma of history: ‘Since my childhood and youth, he finally began, looking at me again, I have never known who I really was’. (AU: p. 60)

Austerlitz’s memories are conglomerations of textual research, personal testimonies taken from interviews conducted years after events, aleatory sensual memories inspired by various environments, and retrieved remembrances from buried/repressed moments in his (and others’) past. These pieced-together fragments contribute towards Austerlitz’s burgeoning sense of self as he uncovers truths about his childhood. But Sebald’s text – which, unusually, includes photographs, diagrams and maps that complement the prose – whilst testifying to such an intimate connection between memory and identity, also emphasises the traumatic and deeply ambiguous

¹⁹⁴ In *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), Chris Baldick defines ‘memoir novel’ as ‘a kind of novel that pretends to be a true autobiography or memoir’ (p. 150). Although *Austerlitz* often blurs many of the distinctions between memoir and fiction, this definition is helpful in underlining that Sebald’s text represents a hybrid literary form.

consequences of such explorations. As has been seen in relation to *Fatherland* and *Daughters of the House*, Austerlitz insists upon the necessity of 'digging up' the past whilst making explicit the uncomfortable truths that such excavations reveal. Austerlitz has buried memories of his childhood in 1930s Prague. Through the painful process of confronting his memories he begins a cautious 'rebuilding' of his own identity. More tellingly, it is the memories of others – through interviews and through reading – that Austerlitz comes to 'remember'. He fills in the 'hole' of what happened to his parents in 1939 and such narratives lead him closer to the Holocaust.

'Sebald' first meets Austerlitz in Antwerp in 1967. Through their friendship, there are long periods when the two men have little or no contact. Chance meetings break these absences when the conversation is taken up again as if there has only been a brief pause in time. Austerlitz begins by discoursing on an eclectic variety of subjects: military architecture, the distressing nature of political torture, his own physical and mental deterioration. Gradually he begins to relate his personal memories. Austerlitz associates such memories with flinging the doors open on 'childhood terrors', (AU: p. 33) and it is these terrors that make up the main body of his remembrance. Austerlitz's memory-work is akin to that of an analysand talking to a therapist (a role that the peripheral narrator fulfils). The ways in which Austerlitz approaches the buried truths of the past dramatise a trajectory of gradual revelation. A remembered scene or event or character begets another memory that has been linked in Austerlitz's unconscious through unusual and enigmatic connections. The 'flow' of memory is articulated through the appearance of a random series of fragments of the past.

To appreciate this narrative form one can take an extract from the text to see how the 'palimpsest' quality of the prose evokes the twists and turns of an individual piecing together memories. Austerlitz recounts the time he spent talking to his childhood nurserymaid, Věra, in the hope of shedding light upon the 'disappearance' of his parents. After a traumatic vision of his mother, Agáta, whom he only dimly recalls, he goes for a walk in a nearby Prague public garden:

The path wound uphill, describing wide curves through the grass, which was wet with dew. Halfway up I met an old lady with an overfed, reddish-brown dachshund which was not very good on its legs and stopped now and then, staring with its brow furrowed at the ground ahead of it. The sight of it reminded me that on my walks with Věra I often used to see old ladies of this

¹⁹⁵ Sebald, W.G., *Austerlitz*, trans. by Anthea Bell (Berlin: Carl Hanser Verlag, 2001; repr. Penguin, 2002).

kind with bad-tempered little dogs, almost always wearing wire muzzles, which may have been the reason for their mute ill-will. Then I sat on a bench in the sun until nearly midday, looking out over the buildings of the Lesser Quarter and the river Vltava at the panorama of the city, which seemed to be veined with the curving cracks and rifts of past time, like the varnish on a painting. A little later, said Austerlitz, I discovered another such pattern created by no discernible law in the entwined roots of a chestnut tree clinging to a steep slope, through which Věra had told me, said Austerlitz, I liked to climb as a child. And the dark-green yews growing under the taller trees were familiar to me too, as familiar as the cool air which enveloped me at the bottom of the ravine and the countless windflowers covering the woodland floor, faded now in April, and I understood why, on one of my visits to a Gloucestershire country house with Hilary years ago, my voice failed me when, in the park which was laid out very much like the Schönborn gardens, we unexpectedly came upon a north-facing slope covered by the finely cut leaves and snow-white blooms of the March-flowering *Anemone nemorosa*. (AU: pp. 229-31)

The 'periodic sentence'¹⁹⁶ effectively mimics Austerlitz's digressive manner of speech, flitting, as he does, from one thought and one subject to another. Another effect of these long sentences is to evoke a sense of inter-connectedness: Austerlitz's memories flow back and forth with little linear logic, and a subsequent air of serendipity informs the accumulating thoughts and feelings. T.J. Clark describes Sebald's prose as being defined by 'undulating, hypnotic sentences' that articulate a 'tangled restlessness and torpor'.¹⁹⁷ Sebald reminds the reader that a distinctive voice is being rendered on the page with rhythmic, urgent sentences.

These periodic sentences in the quoted passage signify Austerlitz's complex anamnesis. Following another troubling memory recalled for him by Věra, Austerlitz walks round a public garden. It is often on such walks that more memories emerge, inspired by the immediate environment surrounding him. He notes that the trees have been changed since he was a child. This foregrounds the subsequent use of trees throughout the extract as a motif. He sees a dachshund that recalls for him a brief glimpse into his childhood when he saw similar dogs. This 'restlessness' is interrupted by a moment of stillness in which Austerlitz observes the city of Prague and likens its map of streets to the cracked varnish of a painting. He compares this metaphor to the roots of

¹⁹⁶ In *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (2001) Baldick defines the 'periodic sentence' as 'a long sentence in which the completion of the syntax and sense is delayed until the end, usually after a sequence of balanced subordinate clauses'. (p. 189)

¹⁹⁷ T.J. Clark at <http://www.threepennyreview.com/sample/Sebaldsympos>

a tree. This is a palimpsest of memory, sensory impression and imaginative creativity that has added a 'present tense' feeling to the remembering. These images are akin to layers of Austerlitz's discursive thought processes. The roots of the tree inspire a childhood memory ('filled in' by Austerlitz's own intermediary of the past, Věra) that leads to another memory of a walking trip in Gloucestershire ending in an example of Austerlitz's fragile psychic and physical state. He momentarily loses his voice, apparently when confronted by a slope of beautiful flowers. Sebald's prose expresses the gradual 'building up' of memories and sensations that reach an enigmatic epiphany when Austerlitz is not able to speak – an ironic trope that underlines the urge Austerlitz feels towards 'voicing' the 'silence' of the past. To put it another way, Austerlitz continually 'speaks' the past and yet is always aware of what Middleton and Woods refer to as the 'unrepresentable excess' inherent in memory and history.¹⁹⁸

Conventional theories surrounding time and space are subverted and re-evaluated in Austerlitz's presentation of the workings of his memory. The metaphor of the palimpsest is crucial to an understanding of Sebald's efforts to render the fluctuation of remembrance. The present and the past co-exist on a new temporal plane of experience. The back-and-forth nature of Austerlitz's memories reflect this: in the extract, as elsewhere in the text, he appears to move seamlessly between a present tense of the monologue and a past tense that is never fixed. Also, Austerlitz's extreme sensitivity to his immediate surroundings inspires more connections and patterns. The connection Austerlitz makes between the 'pattern' of the city and the 'pattern' of the tree's roots is an example of the collapsing of temporal and spatial conventions. Prague is Austerlitz's home, one that he was forcibly removed from before the outbreak of war. Its labyrinth of streets and houses (various labyrinths recur throughout the text) are connected with the roots of the tree. The allusion to 'roots' emphasises Austerlitz's connections with the city whilst also representing the sense that he has been 'up-rooted': what was once buried is now above the surface of the earth. The 'hidden' past is gradually making itself known to Austerlitz as he moves through a labyrinth that is both memory (the past) and sensory experience (the present). He is achieving a perplexing sense of being 'haunted' and the proximity of the past in the present leads to an 'excavation' of his trauma.

Lawrence L. Langer writes that the Holocaust experience contravenes Kierkegaard's maxim that life is lived forwards and understood backwards. Langer

¹⁹⁸ Middleton/Woods, (2000), p. 81.

argues that 'we live it backwards in time and once we arrive there, we find ourselves mired in its atrocities, a kind of historical quicksand that hinders our bid to bring it forward again in a meaningful future'.¹⁹⁹ This evocative sense that the Holocaust's relation to previous ideas of time and space and memory is controversial and potentially problematic for analyses of the relationship between literary representations and the Shoah. If the Holocaust, by virtue of its 'uniqueness', its special place in history and time, is an atrocity beyond the conventions of understanding memory and time, how can it be represented at all, let alone adequately? The 'historical quicksand' that Langer describes captures the intrinsic problems in any representation of the Holocaust and the phrase also has much resonance with Sebald's text. *Austerlitz* is a 'memoir' concerned with the reconstruction of an identity through memory. But Austerlitz's memory, and hence his identity, is intimately connected with the 'historical quicksand' of the Holocaust. His journey back narrativises the problems literature and historiography encounter when emplotting and understanding the Holocaust.

Many of the British 1990s Holocaust novels dramatise theories surrounding temporal proximity and distance from the event. Amis's *Time's Arrow* inverts conventional concepts of time and its passing by pulling its 'innocent' narrator back to the reality of Auschwitz. Time's 'arrow' is hurled back and hence the meanings of '*l'univers concentrationnaire*'²⁰⁰, once arrived at, are both subverted and, more disturbingly, endorsed. In this respect, *Time's Arrow* evokes a sense that the Holocaust is inevitable in time and that the journey towards Auschwitz is inexorable and unavoidable.²⁰¹ Amis's novel reifies the 'looking back' trope that informs Holocaust fiction. Roberts's *Daughters of the House*, O'Connell's *Call the Swallow* and Seiffert's *The Dark Room* contain narratives in which characters confront the past through a necessary yet painful 'digging up' of buried secrets (*Daughters of the House* literalises such a metaphor, as does Anne Michaels's *Fugitive Pieces*).²⁰² Time exists in the

¹⁹⁹ Langer, (1995), p. 6.

²⁰⁰ This phrase comes from Primo Levi's *The Drowned and the Saved* (London: Michael Joseph, 1988; repr, Abacus, 1989), p. 5.

²⁰¹ This reading of Amis's novel suggests that *Time's Arrow* confirms theories some critics and writers hold that the Holocaust, seen from particular historical perspectives, was inevitable. For more on Amis's novel see chapter six of the present thesis.

²⁰² Sue Vice writes that the Canadian poet Michaels, whose *Fugitive Pieces* is her first novel, 'diverts its attention to the world of the spirit and the transcendent'. By doing so, with its highly allusive and lyrical prose, the novel 'seems to be a way of trying to wring aesthetic and meaningful comfort from an event which offers no redemption of any kind'. (*Holocaust Fiction*, p. 9) For more see Ellen S. Fine, 'Intergenerational Memories: Hidden Children and Second Generation' (pp. 78-92) in Levy, (2001); King, (2000), pp. 119-49.

memories of those who lived through the war and who have suppressed them. An interloper, often of a later generation, acts as a catalyst for excavating these memories. He or she 'brings them to light' in the present. The past appears to be waiting for the detective/explorer figure to find, unravel, and piece together so as to make a coherent narrative.

Sebald's *Austerlitz* performs a qualitatively different relationship to time and the past. Austerlitz's monologues mimic a particular manner of speaking and, through metaphor and motif, enact an intimate relationship with the past. It is this intimacy that Austerlitz is pursuing: his desire is to know his parents in a way denied to him in the past. Austerlitz writes of somatically experiencing the 'current of time' and of life being lived on the same temporal plane. The future already exists, waiting to be fulfilled. Similarly, utilising an apposite metaphor of keeping 'appointments in the past', history is seen as 'places and people who have some connection with us on the far side of time, so to speak?' (AU: pp. 359-60) He recalls, for example, that Emyr Elias, the Calvinist preacher who Austerlitz grew up with in a small village in Wales, told him the story of the 'submersion of the village of Llanwddyn'. (AU: p. 70) Elias tells Austerlitz about the 'forty other houses and farms, together with the church of St John of Jerusalem' that were drowned beneath a lake created when a dam was finished in 1888. (AU: p. 71) Austerlitz imagines the villagers 'still down in the depths, sitting in their houses and walking along the road, but unable to speak and with their eyes opened far too wide'. (AU: p. 72)

He feels a deep empathy with these drowned people:

At night, before I feel asleep in my cold room, I often felt as if I too had been submerged in that dark water, and like the poor souls of Vyrnwy [Llanwddyn] must keep my eyes wide open to catch a faint glimmer of light far above me, and see the reflection, broken by ripples, of the stone tower standing in such fearsome isolation on the wooded bank. (AU: p. 74)

Austerlitz aligns himself to those trapped in a limbo state, living their lives under the canopy of the sea but able to glimpse the 'light' of the living. The passage also foreshadows a later recognition that, on a train journey between Würzburg and Frankfurt, he sees a similar tower on a river known as the Binger Loch. He understands that this tower had been unconsciously 'stored' as he made the same journey as a child, after he had been sent away from Prague in 1939. The tower in Lake Vyrnwy in Wales has an

uncanny connection with the tower on the lake outside Frankfurt. Also, the submerged people manifest themselves as ghosts above ground. He hears stories of these ghosts who suffered untimely deaths:

The dead almost always walked alone, but they did sometimes go around in small troops; they had been seen wearing brightly coloured uniforms or wrapped in grey cloaks, marching up the hill above the town to the soft beat of a drum, and only a little taller than the walls round the fields through which they went. (AU: p. 75)

These 'ghostly processions', Austerlitz is told by the village's cobbler, Evan, are kept apart from the living by 'nothing but a piece of silk'. Austerlitz takes this mythology to heart, feeling that some submerged truth is hidden from him, and that his perception of reality is akin to an 'invisible twin brother' walking beside him at all times: 'the reverse of a shadow, so to speak'. (AU: pp. 75-6)

This sense of being haunted is mirrored when Austerlitz visits Terezín (Theresienstadt) where he thinks his mother may have been sent. Increasingly convinced that he is getting closer to his mother and her destiny, he again considers how he experiences time:

It does not seem to me, Austerlitz added, that we understand the laws governing the return of the past, but I feel more and more as if time did not exist at all, only various spaces interlocking according to the rules of a higher form of stereometry, between which the living and the dead can move back and forth as they like, and the longer I think about it the more it seems to me that we who are still alive are unreal in the eyes of the dead, that only occasionally, in certain lights and atmospheric conditions, do we appear in their field of vision. (AU: p. 261)

These ghosts appear to be observing, and perhaps implicitly judging, the living. Austerlitz believes in a timeless present, a 'field of vision' that flattens out conventional distinctions that separate events in history with the contemporary. This profound haunting reaches an apotheosis when he walks around the town of Terezín. He is certain that his mother was deported there in December 1942, along with sixty thousand people incarcerated in a square kilometre:

[W]hen I was out in the deserted town square again, it suddenly seemed to me, with the greatest clarity, that they had never been taken away after all, but were still living crammed into those buildings and basements and attics,

as if they were incessantly going up and down the stairs, looking out of the windows, moving in vast numbers through the streets and alleys, and even, a silent assembly, filling the entire space occupied by the air, hatched with grey as it was by the fine rain. (AU: p. 281)

These ghosts remain in the ghetto as reminders of the atrocities and tragedies of the Holocaust. They have suffused the air and refuse to disappear.²⁰³ It is the 'excess' of the Holocaust, its rupture in the continuity of time that has left the dead to inhabit the present. Sebald also honours such 'forgotten' lives in this metaphor of ghosts by suggesting that their 'untimely' deaths, and their continued presence in the town, signify the return of the repressed and the scrupulously hidden crimes of the Nazis.

The palimpsest of memory and time that Austerlitz pieces together in order to restore his identity reflects theoretical positions on the relation between narrative and time. Middleton and Woods have written about such theories, and their over-view of concepts surrounding the nature of memory illuminates Sebald's descriptions of time and most pressingly 'Holocaust time'. Middleton and Woods argue that older models of memory are not sufficient to describe the 'radical changes in social time and space' that they see as having evolved in the post-war years.²⁰⁴ They invoke the postmodern rejection of history as grand narrative and its concomitant challenges to subjectivity and logocentrism. Furthermore, Middleton and Woods argue that Freud's theory of *Nachträglichkeit* is a key to understanding such changes. The ways in which traumatic memory and *Nachträglichkeit* coalesce and complement each other are especially illuminating when read in the context of Sebald's *Austerlitz*, as are the 'new models' of memory that they describe.

Middleton and Woods use Pat Barker's 1991 *Regeneration* as a reference point for an analysis of how fiction dramatises and scrutinises what are referred to as 'realist personal memories'.²⁰⁵ These, they write, have been studied in cognitive psychology, and, as in the anamnesis covered in Barker's novel, such personal sharing memories are linked with strong emotions and accurate recollections. The significance of details in such memory-work is striking: the predominant belief is that memory is 'fundamentally realist' in its quality, focus and narrative trajectory. The realist literary text and the

²⁰³ A similar sense of the Jewish dead 'haunting' the present whilst also honouring what has been lost can be found in the photographic projections of Shimon Attie. For a further analysis of his work and its implications see 'Second Sight: Shimon Attie's Recollection' by Berel Lang in Hornstein, Jacobowitz, (2003), pp. 22-30.

²⁰⁴ Middleton/Woods, p. 81.

²⁰⁵ Ibid, p. 88.

personal memory share this significant aspect in their form: 'It [memory] convinces us of its fidelity to what probably happened by its narrative bric-a-brac, as much as the historical accuracy of its costume, idiom, objects and landscapes'.²⁰⁶ In essence, it is the 'telling' detail, the recognition of minutiae and specificity that provides 'evidence' of a faithful rendering of a scene, event or dialogue. The realist text relies upon such fidelity to create verisimilitude in the reader's imagination. Likewise, the individual attempting to convince another of a personal lived memory may well use similar rhetorical strategies to evoke the 'reality' of his or her remembrance.

Further to these shared tactics of the personal memory and the realist text is the duality of psychoanalytic terms defining methods of 'seeing' one's memory. By way of a reading of Freudian theory, Middleton and Woods identify these as being 'field' and 'observer' memories. They link these perspectives with narrative points-of-view in literary texts. They define the 'field' memory as being akin to the first-person narrative, where individuals find themselves 'inhabiting' and 'living' their memory. In contrast, the 'observer' memory is where the individual sees his or her self in the scene that is witnessed as a whole. This follows the conventions of a third-person narrative. Middleton and Woods argue that 'realist fiction makes extensive use of this duality, presenting events in the third person as if they were observer memories for various characters, and using the first person for field memories'.²⁰⁷ Such a distinction has particular resonance with Holocaust fiction that often differentiates between 'observer' memories and the more intimate (and, implicitly, more 'truthful') 'field' memory of individual testimony. In David Hartnett's *Black Milk*, for example, the first-person narrative is clearly shown to be qualitatively different (even, perhaps, ethically different) from the other narrative forms in the text.²⁰⁸ In one sense, the testimony, both in the social/political arena of Holocaust discourse and in the fictional text, is treated as the 'truthful' account of the events. Its intense subjectivity and its apparent ingenuousness are signifiers of a deep truth.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 89.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 89.

²⁰⁸ David Hartnett, *Black Milk* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1994).

²⁰⁹ Stephen Smith writes in 'The Trajectory of Memory: Transgeneration and the Pitfalls of Narrative Closure' from *Remembering for the Future* (2001): 'If the act of witnessing salvages a part of that which was destroyed, it makes possible the reclamation of fragments of memory, thus avoiding absolute forgetting and hence absolute death. Historical research, archeological [sic] findings, sociological study, anthropological research and museological enterprise, can and will reveal dimensions of the past, but only the survivor can reclaim that past through acts of *memory*. The survivor conveys what happened in their own particular past, rooted in personal, familial and communal experience. Theirs is not a memory

Autobiographical memory typically appears to be a 'reliving' of the individual's experience during that earlier moment. It occurs in a specific time and place: 'Autobiographical memory is articulated through the re-enactment in tangible locations of space and time'.²¹⁰ An autobiographical memory must be recollected in a particular time and place with reference to oneself as a participant in the episode. Experiencing here and now something that happened before, at another time and place, is a familiar concept of understanding how individuals remember specific moments from their past. It is a form of mental time-travel. Such a theory has resonance for understanding realist fiction's adaptation of these ways of understanding memory:

The past is understood to be a place located in a time accessible to the re-enactment of memory [...] the past is a memory of time and space, conditioned by the mechanisms of identity formation and the repression of trauma to whose vicissitudes memory is subject.²¹¹

Middleton and Woods suggest that a belief in memory's retrieval in realist fiction, such as Barker's *Regeneration*, is in tension with a sense that the memory-work utilises contingent 'cues'. These cues rely upon both the semantic systems that frame (limit) the memory and the general environment in which the retrieval (of a specific memory) is made. In other words, these 'episodic memories' are not merely residing in one's consciousness awaiting retrieval – a theory, Middleton and Woods suggest, common to much realist fiction. The memory is ultimately reliant upon the necessary interpretative frameworks and the influences of the environment in which the subject chooses to remember.²¹²

Austerlitz's traumatic memory is 'present' in the past awaiting his retrieval of it for subsequent reliving and interpretation. At one point, he employs what is a familiar metaphor for the workings of memory. He describes 'the moment when the shadows of reality, so to speak, emerge out of nothing on the exposed paper, as memories do in the middle of the night, darkening again if you try to cling to them'. (AU: p. 109) Aside from the connections throughout Holocaust discourse between memory and photography (not to mention Sebald's own use of photographic evidence in the text), this metaphor appears

constructed around data or observation, but of the impact of whatever the data was upon their own life and that of their communities'. (p. 437)

²¹⁰ Middleton/Woods, p. 90.

²¹¹ Ibid, p. 90.

²¹² Ibid, p. 91.

to substantiate belief in the comparatively simple act of excavating already existing memories. But Sebald's text employs a more complex and ambiguous view of memory and its meanings. Austerlitz's memories of the first five years of his life in Prague before being evacuated 'exist', in the sense that he is able, with outside help, to piece them together and construct an imperfect but still coherent narrative of what happened. But Sebald suggests that memory-work is contingent upon a version of *Nachträglichkeit*, especially in relation to buried trauma.

Austerlitz gradually begins to see his memory as an imperfect but necessary mosaic of 'traces' of the past and the influences of the environment. Austerlitz's palimpsest construction of memory, his piecing together of fragments of not only his own life but of history,²¹³ is contingent upon his precise location and the intense feelings that arise as he moves through the landscape. His life, he acknowledges, has been characterised by 'unrelieved despair', (AU: p. 178) and this is inspired by what he calls the 'vortex of past time'. (AU: p. 182) The sense of the past being 'buried' – figured by the story of the submerged Welsh village – is a significant motif. But Austerlitz recognises that he is being 'haunted' by the dead, which their burial (their repression) has not silenced. He is convinced by this phenomenon and captures its eerie essence when he describes his journeys around London. He recalls visiting Liverpool Street Station, likening it to a 'kind of entrance to the underworld'. (AU: p. 180) He watches the commuters moving about in what he sees as an 'eternal dusk' (AU: p. 181) and describes the 'marshy meadows' on which the station stands that once it is frozen over, allows people to skate there. (AU: p. 182) Austerlitz recounts the buildings that have stood at surrounding sites over the years, including the hospital for the insane popularly referred to as Bedlam, a place that instigates another moment of 'haunting' for him:

Whenever I was in the station, said Austerlitz, I kept almost obsessively trying to imagine – through the ever-changing maze of walls – the location in that huge space of the rooms where the asylum inmates were confined, and I often wondered whether the pain and suffering accumulated had ever really ebbed away, or whether they might not still, as I sometimes thought when I felt a cold breath of air on my forehead, be sensed as we pass through them

²¹³ Sebald implicitly links his character with European culture and history through the polysemy of Austerlitz's name. 'Austerlitz' is the site of a famous battle (p. 96) and the name of a railway station and quay on the river Seine. (p. 376 & p. 380) He also discovers that he shares his name with a Laura Austerlitz who gave evidence revealing war crimes in Trieste (p. 96) and a renowned spring water in Marienbad. (p. 295) Furthermore, it is revealed that Austerlitz is an abbreviation of the original family name 'Austerlitzová' – suggesting, figuratively, that the character has lost part of himself. (p. 215)

on our way through the station halls and up and down the flights of steps.
(AU: p. 183)

Austerlitz continues this motif of the city as necropolis when he imagines the London churchyards swelling to bursting-point with the dead. In an image that figuratively evokes the Holocaust, he describes a world where the dead are moving out to 'less densely populated' areas of the city. Still over-crowding dictates that 'all the bones in the cemetery lie jumbled up together', an image that recalls the 'mixed up' bones found in the hidden grave in Roberts's *Daughters of the House*. Austerlitz confirms this anxiety-ridden impression when he goes on to speak about the corpses 'brought to light' during the building of Broad Street station. He admits to going to the site on a number of occasions and of taking photographs.²¹⁴ (AU: p. 184) He speaks of feeling 'as if the dead were returning from their exile and filling the twilight around me with their strangely slow but incessant to-ing and fro-ing'. (AU: p. 188) Austerlitz's incomprehension confirms the 'belatedness' of his understanding. He is ineluctably drawn, for example, to railway stations but cannot associate this compulsion with his own past. He suspects the presence of the dead everywhere he travels, but again is uncertain of precisely why he should respond to the world in such an uncanny manner.

He speaks of his bewilderment in light of such experiences and gradually reveals the nature of his trauma. Before moving on to discuss his complex rendering of this fundamental rupture in his life, the chapter will return to Middleton and Woods' writing on the subject of identity and trauma. Middleton and Woods write that Barker's *Regeneration* is committed to the realist genre because of two dominant theories surrounding the nature and meaning of memory. These are that identity is predicated on, and formed by, memory and that memory can be repressed and influence one's identity. Realism, as a literary reflection of such theories, depends upon the belief that the past is 'locatable' in memory and that it can be 'relived' in images and dialogue 'located in time and space'. Middleton and Woods refer to this sense of an identity being located in the past as a widely held belief in a 'coherent and communicable *curriculum vitae* of genuine

²¹⁴ A photograph of three skulls and a skeleton lying in mud and murky water accompanies this scene. In the 'reality' of the memoir, one can assume that the photograph is indeed one taken by Austerlitz himself. Sebald uses photographs, pictures and maps as visual footnotes to the main text. They also provide an added layer of verisimilitude – in a sense they act as evidence throughout the narrative of Austerlitz's experiences. For example, when he speaks of visiting a museum of veterinary medicine he reveals that he still has the ticket he bought there. Included in between Austerlitz's account is an apparently authentic ticket stub. (AU: p. 370) This is a strategy used in Sebald's other work.

memories'.²¹⁵ The theory of memory being equated with identity confirms an even more fundamental sense that any harm done to the clarity and coherence of these memories will have a deleterious effect upon the individual called upon to remember.²¹⁶

Middleton and Woods write that one of the key elements in this version of how memory works is 'communicability'. *Austerlitz* is concerned with how its protagonist wrestles with the possibility of 'speaking' his past and through this act of mending his 'broken' identity. Middleton and Woods refer to this aspect as the 'narrativisation of memory'.²¹⁷ Intimately linked to difficulties of speaking the 'unspeakable' are what Middleton and Woods argue are 'failures of space and time at the moment when a memory was conceived'.²¹⁸ In the specific case of Holocaust survivors, this relates back to the confused and brutal conditions under which they lived. Because of these traumatic breaches in conventional space-time dimensions, along with the inevitable and understandable emotional and physical turmoil, some survivors' testimonies are incoherent. In other words, they have not been successfully rehearsed to form a recognisable narrative. Furthermore, such traumatic rupture also profoundly affects their sense of self and the formation of a 'stable' identity. This trope of the fragmentation of an individual self broken by a traumatic experience can also be read in *The Nature of Blood*, *Pictures at an Exhibition* and *Time's Arrow*.

Middleton and Woods suggest that a traumatic event 'overwhelms the capacity of the mind to process the emotions and thoughts it produces, with the result that the entire event is repressed and, therefore, out of reach of the conscious mind'.²¹⁹ But, rather than the popularly held conviction that through therapy or even hypnosis such a repressed memory can then be articulated thoroughly and accurately, Middleton and Woods write that such a belief is flawed. They allude to the example of alien abduction narratives and sexual abuse scandals in which questions of truth and falsehoods persist. They write that such a 'preoccupation with accuracy may represent an unfulfilled wish to come to terms with the difficulty of locating the past in contemporary history'.²²⁰ Dubious therapeutic

²¹⁵ Middleton & Woods, p. 92.

²¹⁶ Middleton & Woods go on to analyse the significance of the veracity of memories and the link between them and the re-building of an identity through a brief reading of Benjamin Wilkomirski's *Fragments: Memories of a Childhood, 1939-1948* (New York [US]: Schocken Books, 1996; repr. Picador, 1997). For a further consideration of this text's controversial handling of theories of memory and the Holocaust, see (pp. 5-6) of the introduction.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

methods have degraded the recovered memories of a subject and the longing to accurately 'find' the past. The problematical areas of models of repressed traumatic memory and its retrieval through narrativisation (aided, and even 'inspired', by therapists) are such that one has to retain a degree of scepticism when listening to 're-memories'. The rise of popular simplifications of the speaking of repressed memory has become an orthodoxy that prevails in many readings of the workings of memory.

This 'delay' inherent in theories of traumatic memory has many affinities with the structure of narrative. Such a convergence of trauma and narrative returns one to the concept of *Nachträglichkeit*. Through an appreciation of repressed memory, Middleton and Woods write that a kind of 'analytic anamnesis' is required to 'undertake the moral work of recovery'.²²¹ *Austerlitz* seems at first sight to dramatise such a 'journey' of anamnesis. The narrator acts as analyst, allowing Austerlitz to explore his memories and 'mend' his broken identity. Linked to this is the sense that Austerlitz's memories are heavily reliant upon two factors: first, the immediate environment that he inhabits and second, the textual/anecdotal/testimonial evidence of the past that 'fills in' the gaps in his own personal remembrance. The concept of *Nachträglichkeit* is helpful in understanding the work of anamnesis, and to some degree Sebald's text engages with the theoretical meanings inherent in *Nachträglichkeit*'s problematising of traditional notions of time, space and causality. As Middleton and Woods argue, it is the second event – the remembering itself – that is the cause of the remembered event. In other words, the 'worked through', observer memory – the mediated memory – is a narrativised memory that is caused in the present, invariably by a high moment of emotional tumult. Thus, the 'force of the initiating event cancels the intervening time as its memory residues remain in the timeless unconscious'.²²²

Middleton and Woods concede that the notion of trauma in these contexts of theorising about memory and time has become a dominant discourse in postmodernity. Certainly, one would want to resist a slide into 'unchallengeable dogma'.²²³ There is no simplified and immediately coherent access to the past and to one's memories. But there has been a conviction that history can, to some extent, be understood as a history of trauma. The 'temporal discontinuity' evoked by Middleton and Woods through readings of Freud, and in particular Derrida, has resonance with *Austerlitz*'s portrayal of time. The

²²¹ Ibid., p. 100.

²²² Ibid., p. 103.

²²³ Ibid., p. 104.

linear conception of time that Middleton and Woods identify as being a defining aspect in much realist fiction is challenged and subverted by other kinds of fictional practice. However, before moving on to an analysis of Middleton and Woods' theories' relation to the remembering and representing of the Holocaust, it is appropriate to contemplate how the Holocaust acts as the central trauma in Austerlitz's memory. The earlier comments on the process of remembering – the present act redefines the past event – anticipate Sebald's efforts to dramatise what is a highly introspective process.

In what ways is Sebald's *Austerlitz* a Holocaust fiction? Thus far, the analysis has been almost exclusively concerned with its perception of memory, time and identity. The Holocaust is intimately related to these themes and represents the central trauma of the text. The event is seen to be ineluctably part of past, present and future maps of the continent. These 'maps' are topographical – Austerlitz restlessly moves across Europe. But they are also cultural and interior maps: 'cultural' in the sense that Austerlitz is constantly searching for clues in books, libraries, museums and official documents for clues to his past,²²⁴ 'interior' in that Austerlitz is embarked on a process of self-discovery. He begins to piece together a narrative of the past – a narrative that is incomplete and characterised by lacunae – and, he believes, he is re-constructing what he has always suspected to be an unfinished, traumatised identity.

In the most basic sense, Austerlitz was fortunate to have missed the Holocaust. It is revealed that his mother succeeded in putting him on a *Kindertransporte* on which he was taken to Britain and eventually the Welsh village where he was brought up with little or no knowledge of his origins.²²⁵ Austerlitz's incompleteness is linked unequivocally to this moment of departure from his home. In a simplified sense, this is Austerlitz's trauma – his exodus from Prague and his dissociation from his family. His memory-work is twofold: initially he seeks to remember as much as possible about those first five years that he spent with his parents (most especially his mother, Agáta), and then he tries to supply narratives for what happened to his parents after he had left for Britain. In doing so, he uncovers a social history – that of the traumatic events of the Holocaust. The

²²⁴ Austerlitz refers, amongst others, to the following books: Jean Améry's *At the Mind's Limits*, Claude Simon's *Le Jardin des Plantes*, Kafka's *Diaries*, Balzac's *Colonel Chabert*, Adler's *Thereseinstadt 1941-1945* and *Heshel's Kingdom* by Dan Jacobson. The book also alludes to cinema, in particular *Die Nibelungen*, dir. Fritz Lang (Ger, 1924), and *Toutes la Mémoire du Monde*, dir. Alain Resnais (Fr, 1956).

²²⁵ In *The Oxford Companion to World War Two* (2001). I.C.B. Dear writes: 'But before it [The Final Solution] started the Refugee Children's Movement set up what became known as the *Kindertransporte*. It arranged for German and Austrian children – whose lives were at risk, whose parents were willing to part with them, and whose expenses could be guaranteed – to travel to the UK; and from November 1938 to September 1939 nearly 10,000 children, 9,000 of them Jews, were transported to safety'. (p. 162)

public/private histories aid his self-analysis and locate him in time and space (in effect, he historicises himself). These memories also excavate Holocaust histories that have profoundly altered memory and collective national identities. The traumatic loss felt by Austerlitz is translated into the wider cultural loss felt by millions.

Austerlitz speaks of his estrangement from the rest of society, his failing eyesight and his crippling bouts of depression. And increasingly he attributes these and other afflictions to 'all the suppressed and extinguished fears and wishes I had ever entertained'. (AU: pp. 192-3) He becomes aware that the research he has conducted over the years has stalled at the nineteenth century. It is as if he cannot bring himself to confront the architectural and cultural modernism of the twentieth century and the ways in which a recognition of such changes would precipitate a 'slide' towards the Holocaust (the word that Austerlitz can barely bring himself to utter). He is aware of the 'constant suppression of the memories surfacing' in him. (AU: p. 198) The use of the trope of memories and lives being submerged and awaiting discovery is evident, as is the sense that their 'constant suppression' leads to Austerlitz's complete nervous breakdown.

His moment of anagnorisis is appropriately serendipitous:

I was listening to two women talking to each other about the summer of 1939, when they were children and had been sent to England on a special transport. They mentioned a number of cities – Vienna, Munich, Danzig, Bratislava, Berlin – but only when one of the couple said that her own transport, after two days travelling through the German Reich and the Netherlands ... only then did I know beyond any doubt that these fragments of memory were part of my life as well. (AU: p. 200)

It is through this aleatory revelation that Austerlitz begins to 'slide' back into the past. He has had his early life censored and hidden from him. In one sense, the narrative of Austerlitz's digressive monologue changes to include an incremental piecing together of the 'fragments' of memory that hitherto have characterised his powers of remembrance. But this chance moment of revelation does not merely inspire an outpouring of recollections that lead towards an inevitable climax of redemptive and consolatory 'therapy'. Sebald's view of memory and memory-work is decidedly ambiguous. Austerlitz has merely opened up the possibility of 'restoring' the repressed past into coherence and understanding. But it is also the 'shadow' of the Holocaust – the intense pressures that the event puts upon memory and history – that troubles the route and the outcome of his submerged past.

Austerlitz returns to Prague and investigates official archives in the hope that he will find evidence of his and his parents' lives before, during and after the Nazi invasion.²²⁶ He walks around the city and finds himself 'back among the scenes of my early childhood, every trace of which had been expunged from my memory for as long as I could recollect'. (AU: p. 212) He meets his old nurserymaid, Věra, who shares her memories of his mother and father, Agáta and Maximilian, an actress and a member of the Czech Social Democratic Party. Such memories as she passes on to Austerlitz cause him to feel that his life is 'unravelling headlong' before him. (AU: p. 216) Věra recounts her memories, and Austerlitz begins to connect these fragments of anecdotal evidence with his burgeoning awareness of a past that had been buried in his memory.²²⁷ But aside from half-remembered and highly impressionistic fragments of memories, Austerlitz is aware of the traumatic knowledge of his parents' fates after he left Prague. In one sense, he is trying to remember events that physically he could not have experienced. Furthermore, as Austerlitz 'closes in' on the truth of his mother's life, the Holocaust seems to resist representation and Sebald's text self-consciously replicates the aporia at the centre of his life and, more figuratively, European history.²²⁸

Austerlitz discovers that his father left Prague the day before the Nazis invaded. His Jewish mother finds life immediately truncated by increasingly punitive anti-Semitic laws. It is at this point that Austerlitz, in the summer of 1939, is sent away on a *Kindertransporte* to the comparative safety of Britain. Agáta endures the 'invisible terrors' (AU: p. 247) and characterises hers and thousands of other lives as being, in a

²²⁶ Paul Latawski in *The Oxford Companion to World War Two* (2001) writes: 'For Czechoslovakia, the Second World War effectively began with the signing of the Munich agreement in September 1938, when Britain, France, Germany, and Italy called for the cession of the Sudetenland to German control ... In the west, Sudetenland proper, with its heavily fortified borders, was incorporated into Germany while Poland seized the small industrial and mining border district of Teschen ... where the Polish minority lived. In the east, Slovakia ... became a vassal state of Germany; Hungary acquired pieces of Southern Slovakia and Ruthenia; all that remained of Czechoslovakia was Bohemia and Moravia which was occupied by the Wehrmacht on 15 March 1939'. (p. 216)

²²⁷ This complex variation on narrative voice creates syntactical and grammatical idiosyncrasies. For example: 'And I remember, Věra told me, said Austerlitz'. (AU: p. 226) Sebald dispenses with conventional syntax throughout the text but in these instances the reader is presented with a striking point-of-view, or rather points-of-view. The personal pronoun 'I' signifies Věra telling her anecdote in the recent past. The past participle 'told' signifies that Austerlitz is recounting this at a later stage to the principle narrator ('Sebald'). 'Sebald' is retelling what Austerlitz has said in the first person narration of Věra's story. This is a small example of the complex temporality of the narrative voices in the text but also further proof of the intense, comma-filled 'flow' of Sebald's prose.

²²⁸ It is also tempting to read Sebald's text as an argument for understanding the Holocaust as a conclusion to European Enlightenment thinking. This is especially expressed through Austerlitz's thoughts on the significance of European architecture. For example, Austerlitz speaks of the 'wonder' that one feels when confronted with a huge building but this wonder, he argues, is also a 'form of dawning horror, for

familiar metaphor, 'lived below sea level'. (AU: p. 249) She is sent to Theresienstadt (Terezín).²²⁹ Austerlitz's train journey to the town draws him 'closer' to his mother and her eventual destination and he sees himself 'going further and further east and further and further back in time'. (AU: pp. 262-3) He walks around the town (which, like Austerlitz, was renamed after the Nazi invasion) and encounters a ghostly, silent and largely empty place. This uncanny 'haunting' is compounded by the inclusion of a number of eerie photographs of Terezín. And it is at this point of his visit that he experiences another of his epiphanies. He realises that his 'avoidance system' has helped him to deny and repress the truth of the Nazi Holocaust and his relationship to it. The Holocaust has been little more than 'blank spaces' on his 'otherwise well-developed sense of topography'. (AU: p. 278) He visits a local museum, and yet, 'despite his acknowledgement of the tragic reality of the ghetto and the ghosts he feels still reside there, Austerlitz remains fundamentally ignorant of the truth:

I understood it all now, yet I did not understand it, for every detail that was revealed to me as I went through the museum from room to room and back again, ignorant as I feared I had been through my own fault, far exceeded my comprehension. (AU: p. 279)

Austerlitz knows that his mother was interned in Terezín but finds no consolation in his discovery. He is unsettled by this partial uncovering of the buried past and feels increasingly guilty that he has been 'living the wrong life'. (AU: p. 298) Sebald stresses that Austerlitz is far from being liberated by his excavation of his mother's past. Indeed, he slips deeper into depression. The 'belatedness' of the dawning recognition of his and his parents' past reveals Sebald's narrativising of theories surrounding traumatic memory. Austerlitz's psychological and emotional dilemma is that he is compelled to

somehow we know by instinct that outsize buildings cast the shadow of their own destruction before them, and are designed from the first with an eye to their later existence as ruins'. (AU: pp. 23-4)

²²⁹ For more analysis of the ghetto at Theresienstadt see, amongst many others, Arendt, (pp. 80-1, 119-20), Gilbert, *Holocaust Journey: Travelling in Search of the Past* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1997; repr. Phoenix, 1998), pp. 83-103. I.C.B. Dear in *The Oxford Companion to World War II* writes: 'Theresienstadt was the German name for the walled town of Terezin in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. Situated 56 km. (35 mi.) from Prague it was opened as a camp for Jews in November 1941 on the orders of Reinhard Heydrich, after its Czech inhabitants had been expelled. Called a ghetto by the Nazis, it contained elderly Jews unfit for hard work and certain categories of privileged Jews (war veterans, distinguished individuals, senior civil servants). As such it acted as a suitable cover for those implementing the Final Solution and representatives of the International Red Cross Committee were even allowed to visit it. But it was really a transit camp and out of the 141,162 Jews who were sent there 88,162 were subsequently deported to death camps, 1,623 were released to Sweden or Switzerland in 1945, but 33,456 died there. At the end of the war 16,832 remained alive as did a few thousand non-Jews who were also incarcerated there'. (p. 865)

‘remember’ and yet the ‘acting out’ of these traumatic memories merely repeats or re-enacts the original trauma. He sees his mental decline in terms of being trapped in a cycle of repetitive reliving of psychological torment:

[At] night I was plagued by the most frightful anxiety attacks which sometimes lasted for hours on end. It was obviously of little use that I had discovered the sources of my distress and, looking back over all the past years, could now see myself with the utmost clarity as that child suddenly cast out of his familiar surroundings: reason was powerless against the sense of rejection and annihilation which I had always suppressed, and which was now breaking through the walls of its confinement. (AU: p. 322)

Austerlitz collapses and is admitted to a hospital where he is treated for his breakdown. It is at this most abject moment in his life that Austerlitz begins to reconstruct a history of the ghetto where his mother was sent. In doing so, he also begins the tentative reconstruction of his identity.

Sebald’s text dramatises, through the ‘detective’ work of Austerlitz, many of the ambiguities recognised by writers who have studied Holocaust memory-work. Stephen Smith, for example, writes that ‘Auschwitz’ (acting as a synecdoche for the Holocaust) asserts its presence despite the imagination’s desire to transcend it. He goes on:

That is, the memory of destruction, or of that which is destroyed, is the more persistent as it is the memory of the forgotten or the explanation of that which is still inexplicable. Paradoxically, it is memory of the Holocaust which threatens its memory most, as the real memory of the Holocaust, which is absent memory, encompasses the impossibility of remembrance.²³⁰

Smith identifies two crucial aspects of Holocaust memory and history. First, there is the obvious but no less tragic realisation of the physical absence of those who would have remembered what happened. Second, given their absence and others’ survival, there is the dreadful inexplicability of the camps. Sebald’s text seeks to individualise these concepts of ‘absence’ and ‘inexplicability’. Austerlitz’s mother is absent and hence her memory and her potential witnessing of events have gone. Austerlitz attempts to piece together this ‘absence’ through a variety of sources whilst rarely losing sight of the fact that she will remain opaque and mysterious to him. Similarly, it is the ‘impossibility’ of his mother’s experience, that the reality of Theresienstadt ghetto will always resist

²³⁰ Stephen Smith, ‘The Trajectory of Memory’ in *Remembering for the Future* (2001), p. 446.

representation because of its essential indescribability. In other words, something will always remain out of reach for the individual on the 'outside' of the real experience. These theories are also implicated in the Nazi programme of extermination that sought to end all memory of the camps: through murder, through a careful erasure of evidence, and through perpetrators' denial. Austerlitz wants to 'find' his mother in a past that is defined as much by absence – not only of individual lives but also the physical remains of the mass killings and transportation – as by presence.²³¹

Austerlitz's re-memory of his mother's deportation and life inside the ghetto reaches an apotheosis in a 12-page continuous sentence that describes in detail some of the realities of Theresienstadt. This list is taken from Adler's 1955 account of the ghetto. Austerlitz's 'memories' of the historical events that he was saved from are textual. Sebald emphasises Austerlitz's distance by revealing that Austerlitz had to laboriously translate the book from the German in order to make sense of it. He says that he has had to unravel this history 'syllable by syllable'. (AU: p. 330) The long sentence that ensues is Austerlitz's own textual translation²³² of Adler's historical research, as reported to the 'Sebald' narrator who relates it back to the reader. Austerlitz describes the varied professions and nationalities that were taken there. He speaks of the workshops and mini-industries that went to make up the 'ghetto's internal economy'. (AU: p. 333) He lists the plethora of diseases that beset the ghetto, the psychological torture that many endured, and the hundreds of dead bodies that were piled on top of each other. He relates the impression of 'crazed administrative zeal' which informed the system that ruled the ghetto. (AU: p. 337) Austerlitz then relates Adler's description of the terrible irony of the SS forcing a 'vast cleaning-up programme' for the arrival of a Red Cross commission. (AU: p. 339) A simulacrum of an 'agreeable atmosphere' (AU: p. 340) of an ordinary small town is created in which Red Cross members witnessed 'spotless pavements' on which walked 'friendly, happy folk who had been spared the horrors of war'. (AU: p. 341) He ends this evocation of the ghetto by stating that the Nazis filmed this simulated Theresienstadt after the Red Cross had left.

²³¹ The text's photographs and diagrams also articulate the mutual polarities of absence and presence. On pp. 328-9, Sebald includes a map of Theresienstadt ghetto. This serves to validate the truth of the real town, emphasising its presence in time and space. It also suggests absence in that much like Austerlitz's photographs of the town, there are few signs of lives being lived. Similarly, the Theresienstadt stamp included on p. 335 evokes both the town that existed before the Nazi invasion and the end of that very town (the stamp's picture is of a countryside idyll).

²³² This aspect of Sebald's prose – in which a narrator offers a reading or precis of another text or texts – is familiar from his other hybrid texts mixing fiction, memoir and travel writing together. These titles include *Vertigo* (1997), *The Rings of Saturn* (1995) and *The Emigrants* (1993).

The startling length of Austerlitz's sentence²³³ enacts a number of themes that are central to the text's relationship to time and the telling of history (and memory). The Theresienstadt sentence figuratively captures a 'breathlessness' in Austerlitz's delivery. It is as if he dare not pause for fear of forgetting, or if there might be an interruption or impediment to the insistent 'flow' of his monologue. Also the sentence calls attention to the 'monumental' nature of the real event through its excessive length. Austerlitz's 'memory' of these events is not based on direct witnessing but through the mediation of an historian's painstaking research (which is an amalgam of different sources). His submersion in these facts does not do much to 'resurrect' the figure of his mother. Something resists being 'fixed' in historical chronicle. Is Austerlitz's mother a metonym for the pervasive sense of the unrepresentable essence of the Holocaust? Seen in one way, Austerlitz's retelling of Adler's account of the ghetto is, despite its length and detail, incomplete and lacks a coherent narrative. Agáta's absence, the enigma of what happened to her, is central to the text's sense that some elements of the past will always be out of reach. The 'Theresienstadt sentence' corroborates the atrocious reality of the ghetto and the many deaths that ensued, but it also acknowledges, through the ghostly figure of Austerlitz's mother, that public history and private memory always leave something 'unspoken' or 'unrepresentable'.²³⁴

In a last effort at 'finding' his mother, Austerlitz watches a copy of the Theresienstadt film. What he sees isn't strictly an historical document. It is a 'fiction' created by the SS for the rest of the world to see, a very deliberately rehearsed performance of an ordinary European town. Austerlitz is disappointed that he cannot see his mother. He decides to have the film slowed down to four times its normal speed. This creates a ghostly, submerged quality:

The men and women employed in the workshops now looked as if they were toiling in their sleep, so long did it take them to draw needle and thread through the air as they stitched, so heavily did their eyelids sink, so slowly did their lips move as they looked wearily up at the camera. They seemed to be hovering rather than walking, as if their feet no longer quite touched the ground. (AU: pp.345-8)

²³³ See also pp. 204-5 in the present thesis.

²³⁴ These concepts are connected with theories surrounding the sublime, in particular Dominic LaCapra's notion of the negative sublime in *History and Memory After Auschwitz* (1998).

Added to this eerie quality of altered time are the now more noticeable damaged sections of the film and the transformed sound where a once 'merry polka' is changed to a 'funeral march dragging along at a grotesquely sluggish pace'. (AU: p. 348) This 'subterranean world' (AU: p. 349) recalls the other hidden worlds that Austerlitz has evoked. The slowed time-scale articulates the rupture in temporality identified as being part of the trauma of the Holocaust. It is also a small act of defiance: Austerlitz witnesses another layer of the film's palimpsest, according it different, clearly more sympathetic, readings of what were simulations aimed at disguising the truth of the ghetto.

Austerlitz thinks he can see a woman's face that might be the face of his mother in the audience for a concert in the film. His uncertainty is mixed with a profound hope that it is indeed Agáta. It is no more than a glimpse and Austerlitz knows that he cannot be sure that it is his mother. This handful of slowed-down frames and a photograph that he finds in Prague of a young anonymous actress who worked between 1938 and 1939, (AU: p. 353) are what he is left with. Věra is sure that the photograph of the actress is Austerlitz's mother but a residue of doubt remains. Austerlitz has unravelled much of his mother's past life – to some degree her photograph is a poignant signifier of both her presence in time but also her profound absence. Austerlitz's exile and isolation is not lessened by his explorations of the past. The scene of trauma has been 'worked through' to an extent through a variety of sources, readings, interpretations and re-enactments. But the novel articulates the impossibility of catharsis or release from the past in its final pages. It is this concluding aspect that exemplifies a view of some of the fundamental problematics of remembering the Holocaust.

Austerlitz is remaking his own identity through a cautious reconstruction of his mother's fate. And although there is an implication that he has achieved the beginnings of tentative reconciliation with his own history and the history he narrowly missed *Austerlitz* ends on an enigmatic note of ambivalence. The narrator recalls reading a book by Dan Jacobson in which the author searches for information on his grandfather, Rabbi 'Heshel'. Jacobson describes his childhood in South Africa and in particular the diamond mines near his home. He remembers being able to walk right up to the edge of the vast pits and how terrifying this was:

To realize that there was no transition, only this dividing line, with ordinary life on one side and its unimaginable opposite on the other. The chasm into which no ray of light could penetrate was Jacobson's image of the vanished

past of his family and his people which, as he knows, can never be brought up from those depths again. (*AU*: p. 414)

This metaphor of the 'vanished past' defines the troubling yet crucial act of 'digging up' memory and history. Austerlitz gets closer to his mother through the reconstruction of her traumatic past, but some essence remains elusive and beyond retrieval. This aporia in the remembrance of the past is felt especially in the reconstruction of the Holocaust. The event continually defies, or rather, continually challenges historical and fictional representation. This is not to suggest that the Holocaust is 'unrepresentable' but that some events, experiences and traumas, because of their temporal rupturing and their violence, remain outside conventional areas of representation. Jacobson's image of an apparently limitless abyss in which memories and histories of his ancestors are buried captures much of the experience of Austerlitz who also finds that the dead – the dead of the Holocaust – haunt the landscape, buildings and memories of Europe.

Austerlitz's palimpsest memory does aid his 'recovery'. But it is a recovery predicated upon an often fragmentary narrativising of memories which are 'formed' through a variety of sources and mediations. The 'childhood terrors' that haunt Austerlitz are traumatic because they await narrativisation, a process that the novel mimetically reproduces through its syntax and apparently 'chance-like' structure. Although he does 'speak' his memories, there is little sense that Austerlitz's exile and isolation has ended. Sebald's text resists the popular notion of a 'simple excavation' of memory. Austerlitz 'locates' his private memories, and through this process he reveals the 'absent' memory of the Holocaust. The persistence of the Holocaust's 'unrepresentable excess', its incommensurability, informs his personal investigations into the past. A reading of this aspect of the text is that Austerlitz's identity – and by extension the identities of all the children of victims and survivors – is rooted in the rupture and aporia of the Holocaust. To put it another way, Austerlitz's retrieval of the past will always be characterised by not being able to know everything. The importance of the 'delay' in his response to the past suggests the belatedness of trauma.

Austerlitz has endured a 'failure of space and time'. This rupture fragments his identity and it is only years later that he begins the journey 'back in time'. Sebald stresses the necessity of this process of returning to the past whilst also suggesting that the past is located in landscape, in buildings, in photographs, and in the testimonies of those who remember. Austerlitz returns to the physical reality of the places where atrocities

happened and hence returns to the submerged and hidden memories of the Holocaust victims. Another reading is to contemplate the tropes of ghosts and haunting that suggest a continual 'return' of the Holocaust in every part of Europe. This prevalence of traumatic memories emphasises the persistence of those whose lives were destroyed by the Nazis. But Sebald resists any consolatory or redemptive narrative. Austerlitz neither escapes nor is completed by this memory-work. The Holocaust is shown to be pervasive and at the same time unknowable and beyond certain limits of representation. The text dramatises the problematics of apprehending a history of atrocity, death and trauma. Austerlitz's compulsion to remember and reconstruct his private past and its distance/proximity to wider historical events is a vital yet ultimately ambiguous process of 'working through' and 'speaking of' traumatic history.

Chapter Four

‘Photos are Difficult, Painful’: The Problematic Memory in Rachel Seiffert’s *The Dark Room*

Andreas Huyssen, in *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia*, writes: ‘The past is not simply there in memory, but it must be articulated to become memory’.²³⁵ Huyssen is writing about post-war Germany and its problematic and often highly controversial relationship to the events of the Holocaust. He describes a postmodern culture that, despite the privileging of space over time, is still haunted by memory, in particular traumatic memory. Huyssen identifies a public contradiction between a perceived waning of historical consciousness and a ‘boom’ in memory (or the memory industry), often organised around debates surrounding national identity. In other words, the culture of amnesia battles against the culture of memory. This has been felt most profoundly in post-war Germany (hastened by reunification in 1989) where public discussions have invariably been focused on the politics of remembering. As Huyssen points out, the privileging of memory over history has been the most prominent discourse in *fin-de-millennium* European cultures. And he stresses that this shift from history to memory represents ‘a welcome critique of compromised teleological notions’.²³⁶

Huyssen’s comments can be used as a starting point for a further analysis of Holocaust fiction and its treatment of history and memory. The inherent ambiguities surrounding the ‘articulation’ of memory, for example, are, at one stage or another, played out in the majority of British Holocaust fictions. In *Daughters of the House* the ‘speaking’ of memory is the start of a ‘speaking’ of history. *Fatherland* contains a trope of its characters barely able to whisper their fears and suspicions about what happened in the war. In Harris’s counterfactual text, memory has been officially replaced by a prescribed ‘history’ that is revealed to be a highly faulty narrative of events. Thomas’s *Pictures at an Exhibition* further problematises traumatic memory by emphasising not only its inherent unreliability but also the instability of individual psyches that are

²³⁵ Huyssen, (1995), p. 3.

²³⁶ Ibid, p. 6.

‘doing’ the remembering. In these examples of the cross-fertilisation between memory and history, one can see how representation becomes a crucial factor. Michael Rothberg writes that an engagement with the history of the Holocaust necessarily involves ‘exploring a more general contemporary fascination with trauma, catastrophe, [and] the fragility of memory’.²³⁷ 1990s British Holocaust fiction has dramatised this ‘fragility of memory’, and has, in a number of cases, described the disputed ways this fragile memory becomes, or rather informs and provides, a foundation for history.

The cultural and political shift from history to memory and its implied unsettling of conventional teleological assumptions reflects tropes of literary fiction where private memory and public history are set in opposition. These discourses’ relationships to the Holocaust act as a site of constant historical evaluation. The inherent difficulties concerning memory and ethical readings of the past are dramatised in the third and final part of Rachel Seiffert’s 2001 novel, *The Dark Room*.²³⁸ The text is constructed of three separate but subtly interlinked sections but it is the third part that is most concerned with the Holocaust. The story is set in Germany in the late 1990s and focuses upon 31-year-old university lecturer, Micha Lehner. Micha discovers through conversations with his grandmother – ‘Oma’ – that her husband, his grandfather, Askan Boell, was a member of the Waffen SS and may have been involved in war crimes. The narrative follows Micha’s investigations into the past and looks at his compulsion to reveal, against the wishes of almost everyone around him, Askan Boell’s precise involvement. Micha begins with library research and then takes a journey to a small village in Belarus where he believes his grandfather was stationed, and where, it is gradually revealed through conversations with a local man, Jozef Kolesnik, that Askan Boell killed Jews in 1943.

The narrative contains many of the elements identified in Huyssen’s thoughts about post-war German society’s attitudes towards memory and history. It also follows a familiar pattern of anamnesis that is a distinct trope in much of the Holocaust fiction analysed so far in the present thesis. Micha begins his research (which is in dialogue with his own personal memories of his grandfather) in confusion and ignorance. He uncovers the truth of ‘what happened’ through conversations with witnesses and perpetrators. Finally, with his new knowledge of history, Micha approaches a tentative, ambiguous reconciliation with the events of the past. The metaphorical motif in the novel’s title shows how this narrative trajectory informs the meanings of the text and links the three

²³⁷ Rothberg, (2000), p. 3.

²³⁸ Rachel Seiffert, *The Dark Room* (London: William Heinemann, 2001; repr. Vintage, 2002).

subtly connected sections. In the first story the 'dark room' is where the central character, Helmut, processes the photographs he has taken of pre-war Berlin and the radical changes the city undergoes as Hitler takes power.²³⁹ From this 'dark room' come representations of the reality Helmut witnesses (most vividly in his consistent photographing of the railway station). However it would be an over-simplification to see the image of the dark room as being one of an opposition between darkness and light. The metaphorical journey from ignorance to epiphany is ambiguous in all three stories, but is perhaps most aptly summed up in a sequence from 'Helmut' that reveals Seiffert's intentions to question assumptions around an event and the representation of that event.

Helmut is walking the city streets with his camera, hoping to see a suitable subject. He follows the sound of voices and comes to some waste ground:

There are trucks and uniformed men, shouting and pushing. There are a hundred, perhaps a hundred and fifty people, some milling, some striding, some standing still. Helmut crouches behind a low wall and begins to take pictures. Through the lens he sees possessions scattered; clothes, pots, boxes, sacks, kicked and hurled across the earthy ground. An officer stands by a jeep screaming orders, sharp voice frightening Helmut further behind the wall. He wipes sweat from his palms on to his trousers, fingers weak, he rests the camera on the bricks and looks quickly around. (*DR*: pp. 36-7)

The people being pushed onto the trucks are Gypsies. The soldiers tear jewels from the women's ears and hair. The scene is one of chaos, panic and violence. Helmut rapidly takes photographs, eager to seize the moment, but he is seen by a soldier and is ordered to stand up. Terrified, he runs away. Back in the darkroom he is furious that the pictures he has taken do not reflect the reality of his experience:

Helmut remembers the scene ... and he sees that the photos are unclear. That these photos could easily be passed over as a few people milling about on waste ground. That they convey none of the chaos and cruelty which had his hands shaking and sweating, and which had spurred him to fill almost two rolls. (*DR*: pp. 39-40)

²³⁹ For another novel that uses the photographer as a figure through which the rise of the Nazis is dramatised, see *The Pardon of Saint Anne* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1997; repr. Vintage, 1997) by William Palmer. Among many articles and essays on the role of photography in representing the Holocaust, see Hornstein, Jacobowitz, (2003), and in particular, Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer, 'War Stories: Witnessing in Retrospect' (pp. 137-52), Carol Zemel, 'Emblems of Atrocity: Holocaust Liberation Camps' (pp. 201-19) and Monica Bohm-Duchen, 'The Uses and Abuses of Photography in Holocaust-Related Art'. (pp. 220-34)

Helmut searches the pictures for a glimpse of an image that represents the event he witnessed, but he cannot find any and so discards the photographs. His representation has failed to articulate the 'truth' of reality. Rather than the turmoil he witnessed, he sees only a 'still, silent, and oddly calm group'. (*DR*: p. 40)

Seiffert questions the veracity of representation and calls to attention the troublesome 'version' of reality that is contained within representation. This can partially be understood as a tacit acknowledgement of the urgency of the photograph and its use as ethical and legal evidence. Photographs initially helped to 'prove' the existence of the camps and what had happened there. They were also used in the subsequent trials to help 'prove' identities and act as visual indictments. Inga Clendinnen writes about photography as being a mechanism of representation that is 'melancholy', 'ominous' and 'poignant' because of its fixing of an 'irretrievable past'. In the context of the Holocaust, these aspects of the photograph are felt more profoundly:

The photographs relating to the Holocaust are melancholy, poignant and ominous to an exquisite degree, as they catch men, women and children huddled at railway stations, harassed into cattle trucks, or trudging down roads towards vaguely glimpsed clusters of buildings, trees and tall chimneys.²⁴⁰

The photograph inevitably frames, and narrows, the field of vision. Because of this, its relationship to reality is necessarily subjected to questions of authenticity: its 'truth-claims' are examined in light of the posed or fake photograph. It is easy to see how such dilemmas impact more profoundly when understood in the context of studying and writing about the Holocaust. Also, as Clendinnen points out, because of the apparent 'truth' of photographs, 'we come to refer to them with the unconscious fluency we reserve for personal memories'.²⁴¹ In other words, photography is often thought of as a direct or even unmediated reflection of reality and therefore a more accurate representation of memory.

Berel Lang's evocation of representational 'limits' is changed when regarding the Holocaust. Lang disputes the often-repeated maxims concerning the 'indescribability' and 'ineffability' of the Holocaust. He asks, given that the form and content of a representation unquestionably impacts upon the object/subject of that representation,

²⁴⁰ Clendinnen, (2002), p. 172.

²⁴¹ *Ibid*, p. 173.

whether the Holocaust makes any more demands, be they ethical, aesthetic, ontological or epistemological:

Because if there is characteristically a significant relation between the subject or occasion of representation ... and the form by which it is expressed, then it would follow that the identifying features of the Holocaust – what makes it distinctive historically and morally – would, and should, also make a difference in the modes of its representation. What the event was, in other words, would also limit or even close out certain possibilities to the artist while opening the way to others.²⁴²

In effect, the ‘events’ dictate the kinds of representation that will most forcefully reflect the ‘truth’ of their occurrence. The ‘limits’ that are set upon the representation of the event are therefore central in ethical and historical discourses. The Holocaust, perhaps more than many recent and contemporary historical events, has a vast and growing stock of representations, and these contribute to further understanding. The event’s limits, though, appear more proscriptive because of the prevailing sense of its fundamentally ‘unique’ barbarity and horror. What Lang refers to as ‘dignity or integrity of truth’ is the pressing issue in the Holocaust, and any individual’s or group’s representation has been held to a careful and rigorous scrutiny.

The Dark Room dramatises these limits of Holocaust representation. Initially, in ‘Helmut’, problems arise when the protagonist attempts to capture the ensuing violence and atmosphere of confusion and fear that was taking over Berlin (and much of Europe) at the time.²⁴³ In the second section of the novel, ‘Lore’, Seiffert continues this motif of the photograph and shows how its role in the ‘reckoning’ of the Holocaust in the post-1945 years became more pressing and politicised. Lore is an adolescent girl in 1945 in Bavaria who finds herself looking after her four brothers and sisters after their Nazi-sympathising parents are arrested. Lore has to protect and guide her family through war-torn Germany in order to reach their grandmother who lives in Hamburg. They are hungry, exhausted and constantly under threat,²⁴⁴ and they witness the havoc and destruction of the war as it comes to an end. Lore leaves her brothers and sisters and

²⁴² Lang, B, (2000), p. 5.

²⁴³ A possible intertext for the ‘Helmut’ section might be Christopher Isherwood’s *Goodbye to Berlin* (London: Penguin, 1939; repr. 1969)). The novel charts the rise of the Nazis in Germany and includes in its opening paragraphs its most famous line: ‘I am a camera with its shutter open, quite passive, recording, not thinking’. (p. 7)

²⁴⁴ See the introduction (pp. 8-9) of the present thesis for a discussion of Begley’s *Wartime Lies* and Kosinski’s *The Painted Bird* in relation to the role of children in Holocaust literature. See also chapter six on *Time’s Arrow*.

visits the town centre. There she sees a crowd and goes over to see what they are all looking at. Photographs are stuck to a plank nailed to the trunk of a tree. Lore sees 'a picture of a rubbish heap, or it might be ashes'. She moves in a little closer:

The pictures are of skeletons ... Hundreds of skeletons; hips and arms and skulls in tangles. Some lying in an open railway carriage, others in a shallow hollow in the ground ... People. Lying naked in rows. Skin thin as paper over bone. Dead people in piles with no clothes on. (DR: p. 103)

Lore reasons that these people must have starved, but she cannot get the images out of her mind. Later, after they have befriended a young man, Thomas, who helps them survive, she overhears a conversation on a train in which people discuss the news filtering through to society about the truth of the extermination camps:

- I'm not saying these camps didn't exist. Every country has its own prison system, after all. I'm just saying they didn't kill people.
- And the pictures of the bodies?
- It's all a set up. The pictures are always out of focus, aren't they? Or dark, or grainy. Anything to make them unclear. And the people in those photos are actors. The Americans have staged it all, maybe the Russians helped them, who knows. (DR: p. 175)

Seiffert shows the incomprehension of some Germans when confronted with the evidence of the camps. The photograph is the central source of information (and condemnation) in a post-war reckoning where Nazi subterfuge, denial and disguise were rife. Here, perhaps due to the overheard characters' anti-Semitism or simply disbelief, the content of the photograph's image exceeds any reasonable notion of reality. This, Seiffert suggests, is one of the fundamental dilemmas inherent in representing the Holocaust – namely, its sheer unimaginable quality.²⁴⁵

As Lore has reached Hamburg and been taken in by her grandmother, a complementary scene occurs on a tram. Two women are reading a newspaper and Lore sees the same kind of photographs again: 'Dark and blotchy on the thin paper, and familiar, too. Skeleton people. Wire fences and gaunt faces and piles of bones and shoes and spectacles'. Lore asks the women if the bodies are in fact those of actors. She is told

²⁴⁵ Inga Clendinnen in *Reading the Holocaust* (2002) when discussing the power of Holocaust photographs writes: 'The best known are those taken after the opening of the German camps like Belsen and Buchenwald ... There we see humanity distilled. Usually we can stare at pictured eyes with impunity as

that they are Jews and that they are dead: ‘-They killed them. With gas and guns’. (DR: p. 202) The women feel that Lore isn’t old enough to see such horror. They tell her that the perpetrators were ‘bad men and they are in prison now, where bad men belong’. (DR: p. 203) Lore is troubled by the suspicion that her parents, in particular her father, were complicit in such atrocity. She sees photographic portraits of some of the perpetrators and thinks that the men resemble her father. Through this trope, the narrative articulates the difficulty of the visual image to ‘capture’ the truth of the Holocaust. Lore passes from disbelief to a reluctant and ambiguous recognition of what has happened. The photograph’s representational proximity to the event means that it is both ‘closer’ and more truthful. And yet because of its necessary selecting and framing is, problematically, open to interpretation.

These questions reach their logical conclusion in the third and final part of the novel that looks at the contemporary response to the Holocaust and how guilt and shame are apportioned many years later. In this respect the novel shares the theme of a post-war Germany’s wrestling with its traumatised past with Schlink’s *The Reader*. In Berel Lang’s theoretical overview of the ‘limits’ imposed upon representation of the Holocaust, these questions inevitably involve discussion of ethical ‘readings’ of the Holocaust. The characters in Seiffert’s novel are each attempting to ‘read’ the events happening around them. The limits of representation that Lang writes of are expressed in the problems of interpretation that surround the photograph – from Helmut’s frustrations with his inability to capture the essence of a moment to Lore’s incomprehension at the pictures she sees of the camps. The question is one that Lang also confronts: how best to represent an historical event in which the facts seem to ‘speak for themselves’? One has seen in respect of other Holocaust fictions that often writers utilise tropes of silence and absence – metaphors of indirection – to articulate this sense that there will always be things that resist representation.

Lang disputes the theory that ‘established genres and aesthetic conventions’ are invariably the ‘fulcrum for the artist to move from’. In other words, genre and convention in art act as a starting-point. The expectations and restrictions imposed upon the artist when he or she turns to a genre offer opportunities to create new and even radical modes of representation. Lang argues:

they gaze from the frame as if through a window. These eyes are different. They lock on ours. They accuse us of living ignorantly, comfortably, while they were dying’. (p. 25)

But in the case of Holocaust images this has quite plainly *not* been the case, and the reason for this also seems clear: the pressures exerted by their common subject are such that the associations of the traditional forms – the developmental order of the novel, the predictability of prosody, the comforting representations of landscape or portrait in painting – are inadequate for the images of a subject with the moral dimensions and impersonal will of the Holocaust.²⁴⁶

The ‘traditional form’ of the novel, he suggests, might not be an adequate or suitable mode for representing such events. Lang is keen to clearly delineate a moral difference between historical and aesthetic (or creative) writing. But here, he suggests that there might be formal limits that militate against even the most ambitious of artists to fully render the reality of the Holocaust. Such a theoretical question is central to any discussion of Holocaust fiction – in effect, there are very definite limits, and these limits necessarily dictate the form of the representation.

Lang goes on to argue that this ‘essence’ of the Holocaust has signified a notable use of what he calls ‘*difference*’ (author’s italics):

[T]he use of silence as means and metaphor, to obliqueness in representation that approaches the abstraction of abstract painting without yet conceding its goal, to the uses of allegory and fable and surrealism, to the blurring of traditional genres not just for the sake of undoing them but in the interests of combining certain of their elements that otherwise had been held apart.²⁴⁷

Lang suggests that the historical realities of the Holocaust have contributed to new hybrid genres. This has been seen in the case of Spiegelman’s *Maus* and Lanzmann’s *Shoah*, texts that mix particular forms (respectively, the comic book and the documentary) in order to find new ways of articulating memory and the memory of horror. The three stories in *The Dark Room* are self-contained and share no characters or story lines. Seiffert relies upon recurring motifs and images to link the stories together. In a broader sense, the novel tells a more ‘epic’ story, that of the German twentieth-century from the points-of-view of people who played only small parts in history. The novel opens in 1921 with the birth of Helmut and ends in the spring of 1999 as Micha takes his young daughter to see his grandmother. These are ‘woven’ together through the use of the dominant metaphor of the title, and the reader is asked to make thematic connections and move back and forth through the chronology of the narratives. Similarly, the novel

²⁴⁶ Lang, p. 12.

²⁴⁷ Lang, p. 10.

utilises Lang's identifying of 'silence' and 'obliqueness' as rhetorical devices throughout the narratives. *The Dark Room* seems to confirm Lang's sense that conventional and generic modes of representation have proved to be of little use in capturing the reality of Auschwitz.

Lang writes that it is the adherence that Holocaust representation has to the facts that demands a moral order. It means, also, in the aesthetic realm, that genres and forms will inevitably be altered and hybridised in order to respond better to the historical reality. Lang writes:

There are undoubtedly many directions to which reflection or memory or the imagination may turn in the aftermath of the Holocaust, but the one direction on which any such movement is dependent is in knowing and following the contours of what the event was, as it was and how it came to be. And that dependence, which on the face of it is both logical and chronological, in my view also attests to a moral order.²⁴⁸

Holocaust fiction has a moral responsibility to adhere, at the very least, to the facts of historical record. The fictional text is thus bound by the historical actuality of the Holocaust. But, as Lang points out, by definition, the author of fiction 'selects' and 'composes' reality, and by doing so makes it new. Hence, one is returned to the vexed question of representation. It is a question that energises historical writing almost as much as it does fictional writing. Hayden White, through his influential theory of 'emplotment', sums up this central dilemma:

[I]f every story must be said to have a plot, and if every emplotment is a kind of figuration, then it follows that every narrative account of the Holocaust, whatever its mode of emplotment, stands condemned on the same grounds that any merely literary representation of it must be condemned.²⁴⁹

In other words, all representations, be they historical, fictional or visual, are figurations of the real event, and hence are, to a greater or lesser degree, 'departures' from the truth of that event. Given this recognition of the uncertain and potentially hazardous distance

²⁴⁸ Lang, p. 11.

²⁴⁹ Hayden White, 'Historical Emplotment and the Problem of Truth' in Friedlander, ed, (1992), p. 47. See also White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore [US]: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987).

that representation exposes between the signifier and the signified, the genre of the novel might be seen as a particularly apt and enlightening test case in such analyses.

Micha begins his research, reading academic and historical accounts. He also reads survivor testimonies, diaries and journals and newspaper clippings. But even at this early stage, like Helmut after photographing the Gypsies, he is troubled by the ways in which any representation fails to capture the horror of the events:

Reaching for the next book on the pile, Micha glances over what he has written. He stops short, alarmed. His notes are impassive; words on a page. He writes again; *more visible, more vulnerable*, pressing hard with his pen. He underlines it; *spat and laughed*; but even with emphasis it still feels feeble; all wrong. Micha thinks his notes should say more, not less, than the books. Should reveal something about himself. But beyond discomfort he has nothing to show; no ready response. (DR: p. 232)

Along with photographs and films, Micha immerses himself in the archives and historical documents of the Holocaust. He continually sets his own personal memories of his grandfather with images of Nazis and stories of atrocity. Initially, his own memories are fond and resonate with familial love, but these are troubled by the notion that Askan Boell might have killed Jews. Micha becomes increasingly self-righteous. He is especially angry about the silence that prevails in his family and in the broader reaches of German society: 'They [the Lehner family] didn't talk about the war, the Holocaust; they didn't really talk about the past at all'. (DR: p. 228)

Seiffert establishes a number of thematic oppositions: between the 'darkness' of the past and the 'light' of contemporary understanding; the belief in a dignified and 'polite' silence and full disclosure; the intimacy of private memory and the 'document' of public history. Each opposition is played out through the quasi-detective narrative of Micha's investigations into his grandfather's past.²⁵⁰ The centre of the Holocaust – the 'heart of darkness', as it were – has often been evoked when critics discuss the historical events. Seiffert plays this narrative out in the 'Micha' section where the central character moves from ignorance to knowledge, and in doing so, unravels the 'mystery' at the centre of the story. Micha is investigating a crime, or rather, he knows that a crime has

²⁵⁰ For more on the parallels between the 'detective' figure and Holocaust fiction see chapter two on *Fatherland* in the present thesis.

been committed and arrives at a truth, like March in *Fatherland* and Leonie in *Daughters of the House*, through personal involvement.

Seiffert 'holds back' the final 'clue' to Micha's investigation. The hidden can be interpreted as the 'repressed' that needs to be 'returned' to the consciousness, to the present, of the individual. The 'Helmut' chapter takes place before the atrocities, and 'Lore' takes place towards the end of them and immediately after the war. The threat of confronting the Holocaust directly, of articulating, or rather, having the trauma articulated, is what provides the narrative with its drama and tension and also its cultural resonance. It is also apparent that Micha, like many other characters in 1990s Holocaust fiction, reflects the position of the author 'returning' to the past and trying to make sense of it. These characters, including Curtiz in *Masai Dreaming*, March in *Fatherland*, Jacques Austerlitz and Roberts's Thérèse and Léonie in *Daughters of the House*, all can be read as surrogate authors inspecting and interrogating the 'hidden' events of the Holocaust. Micha, like all members of his generation, has knowledge of the Holocaust, but he also feels the burden of history, a burden that mutates into a belated sense of guilt, like Michael in *The Reader* and March in *Fatherland*, concerning his unwitting collusion with the Holocaust. He questions such knowledge when he angrily challenges the school routine of remembrance: 'Every year it's the fucking same. The students read survivors' accounts. Everyone cries these "we didn't do it" tears. Then the essays get marked, the displays are packed away, and we move right on with the next project'. (DR: p. 288)

In contrast to Helmut and Lore, Micha has access to the truth of the Holocaust. His exploration of the past is thus a different kind of return to what was once hidden. Micha wants to know about his grandfather's role in the killing: ' – *I want to find out if he did anything. Killed anyone. – Any Jews, you mean? – Anyone. Jews. Yes*'. (DR: p. 242) The 'secret' seems not only buried beneath the weight of the millions of other deaths but is also buried by Micha's family and the records and documents themselves. Given these tropes of 'digging up' the past and returning to the scene of the repressed, the narrative in 'Micha' has to grapple with the intrinsic dilemmas of representation once the 'secret' of the horror has been acknowledged. Micha's journey of discovery into the 'present-ness' of the past is partly a gradual recognition of the need for, and the inherent difficulties in representing, what Inga Clendinnen refers to as the 'repetitive cruelties, the blank anguish of pain and despair' of the Holocaust.²⁵¹ Lea Wernick Fridman refers to

²⁵¹ Clendinnen, (2002), p. 3.

this as the 'historical horror' of the 'Final Solution', adding that writers are compelled to 'cast light on the appalling, the confounding' realities of the genocide.²⁵² Similarly, Alvin H. Rosenfeld, in an allusion to George Steiner, sees that 'Nazism was a literal staging of hell on earth',²⁵³ and that all who approach it are confronted with profound dilemmas of representation.

Micha travels to Belarus, his train journey a metaphorical trip back into the past, and meets a veteran of the conflict, Jozef Kolesnik, and his wife. After Kolesnik's initial reluctance to answer questions about the time – '- It was many years ago. A bad time. I am an old man. Please go away' (DR: p. 282) – Micha convinces him to talk about the war years. Increasingly driven by feelings of 'rage and shame', (DR: p. 291) Micha enters another 'dark room', this time at the Kolesnik house in Belarus. Slowly Kolesnik speaks of what happened in and around the village in the war. He describes the ghettos and the killings:

- *Who did the shooting then?*

The old man frowns, irritable.

- Like I said, police, SS, everyone.

- *Waffen SS?*

- Don't remember. Probably. It was in the woods, to the south, beyond the river. They were buried there.

- *When in '43?*

- Late summer.

- *Late summer.* (DR: p. 325)

Micha wants to ask Kolesnik about his grandfather but is too frightened of what he might learn. Seiffert reveals the conflicting compulsions between the two men through these question-and-answer sessions. Micha is driven to exposing his grandfather's complicity and possible murders and to turn away from the horrors – he continually exhorts Kolesnik not to share any details of the killings. On the other hand, Kolesnik is equally torn between silence and articulation – the more he 're-remembers' the trauma, the more truth he tells.

Micha's ambivalence in excavating the crimes of the past is redolent of a wider nervousness in society surrounding the 'telling' of the history of the Holocaust. His

²⁵² Wernick Fridman, (2000), p. 2 & p. 4.

²⁵³ Alvin H. Rosenfeld, 'The Problematics of Holocaust Literature' in Bloom, (2004), p. 38.

investigation inevitably uncovers more than he desires to know. Kolesnik confesses that he himself was involved in the killings:

- I knew German, so I translated, for one and a half years, nearly two. It wasn't regular, the work. But I translated for the SS, for the police. So I knew, you see? What they were doing.

The old man nods to himself, briefly.

- And then I shot Jews. Other people too, partisans, but mainly Jews.
- *I see.*
- I know what we arranged. I said I didn't want to talk about it, but that was when I thought you knew [Kolesnik believed that Micha had come to the village to expose him as a collaborator]. I realised it is impossible to talk about these times unless you know. So I thought I could tell you and then we could go on. (*DR*: p. 323)

The 'proximity' Micha felt when he suspected that his grandfather was a murderer is compounded by this admission by Kolesnik, who, along with his wife, Micha has befriended. But Kolesnik insists upon a fundamental gulf between them: 'It is difficult for me to tell you. I can never explain and you can never understand. I was thinking today that this is good. It is good that you cannot know what was in my head. You are too different'. (*DR*: p. 339) Kolesnik's confession is, like many other similar confessions made by perpetrators, a partial admittance and a partial denial. He wants the past – both his memory and the social history of it – to remain inexplicable and beyond analysis. Furthermore, it is the 'absence' of so much truth and the concomitant 'silence' in his confession that is the most telling aspect of his articulation:

- Even before I did it. The first killings, people talked about them, in the town here, Belarussian people, but then they stopped. Everyone knew it was going on and no one spoke about it. I knew it was happening and I never said anything. (*DR*: p. 347)

This opposition between the articulation and silence of memory is one of the most pervasive discourses of Holocaust studies. Berel Lang, in discussing this aspect of Holocaust texts, writes that although 'no Holocaust writing gives preference to silence', it is,

silence [that] arguably remains a criterion for all discourse (Holocaust or not), a constant if phantom presence that stipulates that whatever is written

ought to be justifiable as more probative, more incisive, more *revealing*, than its absence or, more cruelly, its erasure.²⁵⁴

Lang raises the issue of texts (and, by extension, groups, cultures, even nations) remaining silent. An impulse behind this silence might be a sense of decorum or 'good taste' but it is nonetheless an ideological silence. What is not said and what, perhaps, is felt cannot be said are expressions of silence that are pitted against articulation, disclosure and candid testimony.

Kolesnik and his wife 'speak' about 'not speaking'. They describe memories of the past whose present was defined by a compulsion to forget – both on SS orders and through psychological self-preservation. Linked to this are the difficulties inherent in putting into words such terrible actions from the past. The Kolesniks' taciturnity and fragmented descriptions reflects their own inability to fully comprehend what they did (and didn't) do. Kolesnik suggests that there is not 'enough sadness and no punishment' (*DR*: p. 356) for his crimes. But Micha still needs to know about his grandfather. He shows Kolesnik a photograph of Askan Boell and asks if he recognises the man:

- *Jozef?*
- He killed people. I am sorry, Michael. He killed Jews and Belarussian people.

Micha is glad he can't see his Opa, glad that Kolesnik looks away.

- *You saw that?*
- Kolesnik rubs his eyes.
- I know that he did.

[...]

- *How do you know?*
- 1943. The ones who were here then. That's what they were here for. All of them, all of us.

[...]

Micha watches as Kolesnik rests his face in his large hands. He listens to the voice which comes through the gaps in the old man's fingers.

- There were so few who didn't do it. I could tell you all the names and faces who didn't do it because there were so few. (*DR*: pp. 362-3)

Micha's discovery that his grandfather was responsible for many deaths is the logical culmination of his journey back to the past. The 'truth' has been uncovered and through Micha's examinations he has also facilitated a return of the repressed – the articulation of

²⁵⁴ Lang, (2000), pp. 18-19.

traumatic memories. But the novel unsettles any sense of telos. Indeed, the conclusions to Micha's investigations suggest yet more silence, absence and aporia.

Micha is convinced that he knows the truth. This truth is captured for him both in the photograph he has of Askan Boell and in Kolesnik's memories of the time:

I have the photo. I can say: that's Askan, he was my Opa. Married to my Oma, even then. And father to my mother, and later my grandfather. And all the while a murderer, too. How do I know that? I was told by a friend. Where is my proof? I have no reason not to believe it. There are no pictures of him holding a gun to someone's head, but I am sure he did that, and pulled the trigger, too. The camera was pointing elsewhere, shutter opening and closing on another murder, of another Jew, done by another man. But my Opa was no more than a few paces away. (DR: pp. 370-1)

Micha states that the photograph of his grandfather is proof – he has returned to it throughout the narrative in the hope that he will 'see' the crimes written on Askan Boell's face. But also the trope of the camera 'taking' shots of reality, of recording it, and hence acting as a tool of historical archives, is utilised in Micha's thoughts to show that there are times when it is 'looking' elsewhere. Or, to put it another way, the camera cannot be everywhere at once and cannot record all that happens in history. Micha feels as if he has moved out from the 'dark room' of ignorance and has 'processed' the truth of his grandfather's involvement in the Holocaust. But Seiffert offers a telling coda to Micha's apparent certainty after he hears news that Kolesnik has died and he returns to Belarus to attend the funeral.

Micha is taken by Kolesnik's widow to see the grave, and after they have done this she walks Micha out of the village. They go to the nearby forest in silence – Kolesnik's widow cannot speak English. She is crying as she points to a clearing:

Micha looks and then he sees it. It's like a blow to the head.
He stops walking and Elena turns round. She looks at him, tears flowing now. Micha puts his hand to his mouth; feels the wet breath on his palm; the hot, spinning feeling that comes with it. Elena raises her arms, one hand at her shoulder, the other a fist in the air in front of her. She mimes shooting with a rifle, but Micha already knows.
He shouts. She makes the bullet noise, a puff of lips and air. (DR: p. 385)

Her gesture refers to the site where the Jews were shot and killed in 1943. The weight of what happened there seems to be captured in this small action. It could be interpreted as being dismissive or insensitive or even malicious in the same way that some locals, as in

Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah*, admit to having drawn their fingers across their throats as the trains filled with Jews passed by.²⁵⁵ Another way of seeing this climatic moment is that the gesture intimates its very obvious failing and inadequacy, the massive scale of the misery and suffering that was perpetrated there. In this respect, Seiffert's culminating narrative suggests that for all concerned the 'heart' of the Holocaust always, finally, resists realist representation. Furthermore, it resists articulation or, at the very least, problematises the language needed to convey the horror. In other words, the Holocaust is an 'excess' that cannot be fully controlled and brought back into representation. Seiffert's imagery is an effort to represent and to articulate traumatic memory, whilst at the same time, in all three narratives, alluding to aporias of meaning, experience and pain.

In conclusion, Seiffert's novel engages with the central difficulties of precisely how an artwork can represent an historical event that appears to exceed all previous modes of reference and all possible aesthetic forms. It is Seiffert's novelistic sense of an absence in writing and describing the Holocaust that is central to the text's ambiguous sense of the concept of the limits of representation. Ernst Van Alphen, amongst others, has written about this problematic and controversial theme and his thoughts on the metaphorical 'charge' of the Holocaust bear repeating at length in light of the issues raised by *The Dark Room*. Van Alphen quotes Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi who, in a similar metaphor to Lyotard's, has suggested that the Holocaust was akin to an earthquake that destroyed everything, including the tools needed to measure the size of its devastation:

The destruction of the ability to measure destruction results in Auschwitz's fundamental ambiguity as a historical site and event, as well as a symbol: forever caught in the ambiguity of its signifying force, Auschwitz can never be more than a symbol of what can no longer be symbolized. For we have lost the measure to decide of what Auschwitz is a symbol. In this sense, too, Auschwitz, and the Holocaust for which it synecdochically stands, cannot be represented. For the metaphorical principles of language have ceased to function. As a metaphor, /Auschwitz/ is overdetermined: "it" is so rich in meaning that nothing can be metaphorically compared to it. On the other hand, /Auschwitz/ is underdetermined as a metaphor, because it has no precise, measurable meaning. As an "empty" metaphor, it cannot illuminate new or unexpected aspects of human existence, as metaphors are called upon to do.²⁵⁶

²⁵⁵ See *Shoah* (Fr, 1985) d Claude Lanzmann. Also, pp. 27-30 in screenplay (1995).

Van Alphen goes on to discuss the differences between 'static' and 'dynamic' attitudes towards memory and their respective parallels with narrative. His words are helpful in showing the theoretical climate that Seiffert's novel is a part of. The sense that the Holocaust 'can never be more than a symbol of what can no longer be symbolized' is very apparent throughout *The Dark Room's* tropes of the difficulties inherent in representation. If the photograph in the narratives acts as a metaphor for these representational problems, then the 'progression' from the dark room of the past to the enlightenment of the present is a deeply ambiguous and contingent one. Throughout the narratives, photographs are sources of evidence and truth but also sites of contestation and interpretation. This is apt in that the photograph, by definition, limits and frames the scrutinised object/subject, and hence is only one interpretation, and also that the photograph's relationship to reality is intimate and immediate. This is also related to the relative absence of photographs of the 'inside' of the camps. These only afford fleeting glimpses into the process of gassing, the work of the *Sonderkommando* and the disposal of bodies. In effect, the absence of such photographs heightens the sense of an aporia at the centre of the event.

The paradoxical nature of the Holocaust, as Van Alphen suggests, demands 'other' kinds of representation. It is too full of meaning and emptied of all reference – hence the central difficulties it poses to representation. Seiffert's novel, like much 1990s British Holocaust fiction, never directly represents the atrocities. 'Auschwitz' lies 'beyond' the text. *The Dark Room* uses tropes of representation to underline that its status as being 'beyond' immediate empirical evidence does not stop it from being central to contemporary history and fundamental in the unsettled discourses of history and ethics. If the novel ends in tentative redemption (as do *The Nature of Blood* and *Pictures at an Exhibition*) – Micha bringing his daughter to see his grandmother – the text is far from exhibiting a consolatory telos:

Dilan [Micha's daughter] waves. Micha can feel her weight shifting gently against his neck. Lets himself enjoy this moment, down here with his daughter, humming and waving, steadying herself with a small hand pressed on the top of his head.

- Is she there, Papa?

Micha's eyes smart. Watery. Blurred vision against the blinding sky.

²⁵⁶ Ernst Van Alphen, 'Caught by Images: Visual Imprints in Holocaust Testimonies' (pp. 97-113) in Hornstein, Jacobowitz, (2003), p. 1

- *Yes. Can you see?*

- Yes.

Dilan doesn't sound too sure, but she keeps waving, and Micha keeps his eyes on the tiny speck of movement which comes in reply. (*DR*: pp. 390-1)

These last images stress the novel's trope of witnessing and therefore 'seeing' the truth. Micha's 'blurred vision' is a metaphor of the difficulties of 'seeing' the past (which is represented by Micha's Grandmother). The contradictions and complexities of traumatic history have been excavated, often against advice and common opinion, and in the process of such exposing Micha has forced out into the open a set of 'new' truths that perpetuate the histories of the Holocaust. He has certainly passed from the 'dark room' of ignorance to the comparative 'light' of understanding and recognition. But the novel argues for representation and articulation of the event whilst remaining cognisant of the inherent problems of truth and ethical limits that the Holocaust imposes upon such efforts.

Chapter Five

‘People are linked by the Universal Spirit’: Commodifying the Holocaust in Justin Cartwright’s *Masai Dreaming*

In Justin Cartwright’s 1993 novel, *Masai Dreaming*, journalist Tim Curtiz, commissioned to write a screenplay about a French anthropologist and victim of Auschwitz, Claudia Cohn-Casson, considers the implications of making a ‘populist’ film about the Holocaust:

I am assuming too much. Not even the French know the whole story with all its ambiguities. And they probably don’t want to hear it. The wider audience wants this story to flatter them, by presenting them with a simple conflict of love and duty, good and evil. They don’t want some morbid exploration of the inexplicable.²⁵⁷

Curtiz is under pressure from a Hollywood producer, S.O. Letterman, to write a script that articulates a sense that ‘people are linked by the universal spirit’. (*MD*: p. 91) Curtiz is deeply suspicious of such a universalising tendency surrounding the events of the Holocaust and spends much of the novel resisting Letterman’s (and by extension, mainstream culture’s) urge to find redemption and consolation in a narrative that ends with Claudia being killed in Auschwitz (although it is subsequently revealed that she survived the camps, only to commit suicide a little time later). Curtiz is further concerned with the ethical and epistemological issues inherent in any representation of the Holocaust. He pursues the facts of Claudia’s life, hoping that as long as his research is accurate he will be absolved of blame when these are placed alongside the more fictional aspects of the film he knows Letterman is imagining. But increasingly he is troubled by the tension between historical fact and fictional recreation: ‘I would feel better knowing as many [facts] as I can before I start making things up. Because of – well, because of where she ended up’. (*MD*: p. 192)

Cartwright’s novel can be read as a text concerned with, amongst other issues, two interrelated themes that are fundamental to recent Holocaust writing, both fictional

and critical. Firstly, *Masai Dreaming* dramatises (and satirises) what might be termed the 'Hollywoodisation' of the Holocaust.²⁵⁸ Curtiz, sensitised to the subject through his intellectual and emotional investment in Claudia's life, struggles to write a screenplay that adheres to the facts of the historical events and fulfils his task to complete a 'filmable' script. Secondly, Curtiz, again through his involvement with Claudia, the Masai people and his re-telling of the past, comes to question the very nature of Holocaust representation. He wants to avoid a vulgarisation of the 'dreadful knowledge of the death camps', (*MD*: p. 183) and is concerned that Holocaust representations *per se* run the risk of glamorising, aestheticising, trivialising or, perhaps worst of all, distorting the suffering and tragedy endured by millions of people. Hence Cartwright's novel dramatises two of the key discourses in Holocaust writing, and the ways in which the author sets out such narratives and ideological questions will be discussed below. Also, Cartwright's subtle problematising of these issues - especially through the intense difficulties surrounding writing about both public and private histories - will be shown to reflect literary themes highlighted in British Holocaust novels of the 1990s.

Tim Curtiz,²⁵⁹ who has written a journalistic piece about the infamous Drancy²⁶⁰ concentration camp in Paris, is commissioned to write the screenplay for a movie called *Masai Dreaming* about the life and work of Claudia, who was undertaking research for her PhD thesis with the Masai people in and around the Rift Valley in Kenya and Tanzania. Curtiz has travelled there to meet the last few surviving people who knew her. There is Fairfax, an ex-lover whose relationship with Claudia is gradually revealed to have had hidden complexities, and Lady De Marr, a friend. And there is a village laibon, a Masai whose brother was killed in a staged lion-hunt that was filmed for a documentary (*Lords of the Savannah*) made by an American producer, Waindell Leavitt. Curtiz interviews these and other people and slowly pieces together Claudia's life from when she came to Africa in 1936 up to and including when she left to return to France in 1944 to find her father, Léon, and her young brother, Georges. The text is structured around a

²⁵⁷ Cartwright, *Masai Dreaming* (Macmillan, 1993), pp. 220-1.

²⁵⁸ For further reading see Norman G. Finkelstein, *The Holocaust Industry: Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering* (London: Verso, 2000; repr. 2003).

²⁵⁹ The character's surname suggests an allusion to Michael Curtiz (1888-1962), the director of *Casablanca* (US, 1942). Curtiz is often seen as little more than a 'hack' director rather than a legitimate *auteur*. To some degree, one can read *Casablanca* as an ironic intertext to Cartwright's novel in terms of its World War Two theme, its (North) African setting and its romanticising and individualising of historical events.

²⁶⁰ In Laqueur, (2001): 'Drancy Transit camp in a Paris suburb with approximately 70,000 French Jews during the course of the war. The prisoners were held at Drancy, which was created from a converted apartment complex, prior to their deportation to extermination camps in Poland. The French police administered Drancy until July 1943, when the SS took over.' (p. 159)

number of different points-of-view. There are Curtiz's first-person chapters that detail his growing ambivalence about writing the screenplay and his identification with Claudia and the Masai people. Then there are chapters written in the third-person that are concerned with S.O. Letterman. These are strikingly different in style and represent the novel's satirical intentions: Letterman is revealed to be a vulgar populist who is busy interviewing young French actresses for the role of Claudia:

In his own way he is something of an expert on the private lives of actresses. Young actresses dwell in a quandary. They are strongly moved to express themselves outside the confines of their lovely young bodies, while, of course, conscious that a large part of their appeal lies just there. They are very aware, too, that what Letterman is presenting to them is not just a script and a lot of money, but an intimate relationship with himself. This relationship is evidently not to be confused with a sexual relationship; it is just that once you have entered into an artistic liaison of this intensity, the sexual shenanigans are likely to follow. (*MD*: p. 117)

Letterman represents a crass, sentimentalised, priapic and insensitive mainstream (or Hollywood) attitude that Curtiz pits himself against.²⁶¹ Cartwright's use of free indirect discourse in these chapters creates an ironic distance between Letterman's misguided convictions and those implied convictions of the 'author', or more accurately, Curtiz. Interspersed between these two narrative points-of-view are extracts from what one gradually assumes are fictional representations of Curtiz's research. In a sense, these come to represent the avowed 'truth' of what happened in the past, but in another sense, they represent Curtiz's planned screenplay. Cartwright does not employ a conventional screenplay layout and hence highlights the difference between Curtiz's aspirations for the film and what we imagine to be the finished version that stars Mel Gibson and Julia Roberts and is ironically presented as 'Un film de S.O. Letterman'. (*MD*: p. 2) Furthermore, some of these extracts retell events that are beyond the knowledge of Claudia's friends and lovers. One might interpret these aspects of the narrative as extracts from an imagined novel that acts as a meta-commentary on *Masai Dreaming's* central dramatic conflict. The fictional accounts, made up of empirical research, interviews and

²⁶¹ Cartwright underlines Letterman's partly symbolic role in the novel through possible connotations of his surname. Firstly, the film producer recalls David Letterman, the famous American chat-show host who arguably embodies the celebrity class in recent American popular culture. Secondly, there is a pun on a 'man of letters': the irony is that S.O. Letterman reveals himself to be singularly unlearned, whose

imaginative reconstruction, are something like the 'truth' that acts as an ethical opposition to Letterman's 'Hollywoodization' of Claudia's life.

One of the ways in which *Masai Dreaming* dramatises this conflict is through the tense, epistolary and telephonic relationship between Curtiz and Letterman. In some respects the two central themes in the novel's treatment of the Holocaust merge together in this opposition. Letterman believes that by 'universalising' and popularising Claudia's life – and hence departing, to some degree or another, from the strict facts of the past – the film will reach a wide audience and offer a meaningful, redemptive message. Curtiz, as he finds out more about Claudia's life, resists this vision of art and history and he remains ambivalent towards his own sense of being an inappropriate person to be writing about the subject. Furthermore, he is uncertain as to precisely what he is writing about. Is it the autobiography of Claudia, a French anthropology student? Or is it a story of colonial relationships with the Masai? Or, perhaps most problematically, is it a Holocaust story? It is this aspect of his research, and his burgeoning sense of intimacy with Claudia, that most troubles Curtiz. To put it another way, Curtiz gets 'closer' to the Holocaust – he returns to the past, another's past, hoping that he will understand something of what happened. But despite his deeper knowledge, and a more intimate relationship with Claudia and her surviving friends, Curtiz remains uncertain as to how to represent Claudia's fate: her journey to, incarceration and death, or so he assumes, in Auschwitz.

Letterman and Curtiz thus reflect two opposing views of artistic representation and historical accuracy. Cartwright prefigures this theme by foregrounding a number of the issues and discourses that inevitably arise throughout the narrative. In the quotations at the beginning of the novel, Cartwright includes one from the sociologist, Emile Durkheim: 'Social man is the essence of civilized man; he is the masterpiece of existence'. (*MD*: p. iii) This projection of 'social man' is played out through the novel in various readings of society and communality. The Masai are compared and contrasted with the colonial Europeans who live among them, with Letterman who is representative of American values, and with the people and events in Nazi-occupied Europe. Hence, Durkheim's notion of 'civilized man' is questioned (and satirised) throughout the novel. The Masai, initially seen through colonial eyes as 'primitive' people, act as a counterpart to the excess, violence and prejudices of the 'civilised' other. They also reflect back upon the Jews, to some degree another 'homeless' or rather 'stateless' people, as a social group

aesthetic instincts lean towards the populist and the consolatory as opposed to the 'truth' that Curtiz is attempting to achieve. Thirdly, Letterman seems to echo Claude Lanzmann, the director of *Shoah*.

vulnerable to attack and oppression. The idea of a 'masterpiece of existence' is problematised in *Masai Dreaming* by showing that the ideological dualities of 'civilised' and 'primitive' in the twentieth century are profoundly troubling concepts.

Following Durkheim, Cartwright includes a quotation from the French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss. This suggests that the 'concept of humanity' – that of seeing people as making up a species beyond race or religion – is a comparatively 'modern' invention and that it is 'by no means widespread'. By including this quotation, Cartwright suggests a further questioning of Letterman's belief (mimicking the colonial ideology) that the 'grand narrative' of 'humanity', far from being a natural, inherent and indisputable (even scientific) concept, is in fact a construct. *Masai Dreaming* dramatises this questioning of a 'species consciousness' mainly through the relationship between Letterman and Curtiz. But it also emerges through Curtiz's reading of Claudia's research into the Masai. Claudia was particularly interested in the exchange of gifts as a social practice and its possible meanings. Fairfax tells Curtiz that he was suspicious of Claudia's faith in the Masai being linked 'to a universal spirit', (*MD*: p. 159) and Curtiz, whilst observing the laibon 'communing' with his cattle and goats, remains unconvinced:

Claudia had concluded that the rituals of life have a social significance: they are what make us human. Incontrovertible, but so what? *Arbeit Macht Frei. Hände Waschen, Nicht Vergessen.*²⁶² These were the social strictures of the lager which, as an anthropologist, she must have found impossible to understand. They were drawn from a deeper and darker place than this whiskery, milky, dungy communion with the cattle. (*MD*: p. 162)

Claudia's urge to connect the everyday social practices of the Masai is a 'universalising' tendency that sees life as being made up of meaningful events with an inherent telos and a sense of significance and shared experience. Claudia's inspiration may well come from a solidarity that she feels with the Masai – and an antipathy towards colonial attitudes articulated by the film-maker Leavitt – but Curtiz cannot reconcile such a faith in common practices and common humanity with the knowledge of Auschwitz. He also worries that this Holocaust knowledge reflects a 'rupture' in understanding, an event so singular in its systematic violence as to break all previous theories of existence. Hence, Claudia's faith in anthropological and sociological knowledge is, in Curtiz's eyes,

²⁶² In Primo Levi's *If This is a Man & The Truce*, trans. by Stuart Woolf (London: Penguin, 1979; repr. 2004) these phrases are translated as, respectively, 'work gives freedom' (p. 28) and 'wash your hands, do not forget'. (p. 46)

unsettled and even perhaps destroyed, by the Nazi Holocaust. The 'grand narrative' of humanity and civilised man is a highly imperfect, if not pernicious, ideological construct, impossible to maintain given the horrors of Auschwitz. At the heart of Curtiz's dilemma is his seeking to understand what for him remain 'the unknown and unknowable' (*MD*: p. 109) events of the Holocaust.

The third quotation at the start of *Masai Dreaming* is by Claudia's teacher Marcel Mauss, and hints at the rupture in knowledge that the Holocaust represents:

One thing that, fundamentally, we never foresaw, was how large modern societies that have more or less emerged from the Middle Ages in other respects, could be hypnotized as Australians are by their dances, and set in motion like a children's roundabout. This return to the primitive had not been the object of our thoughts. (*MD*: p. iii)

The implication is that 'civilised' societies can be returned to 'the primitive'. The connection with the rise of the Nazis and their powerful hold over much of German society suggests latency within individuals and groups to be 'hypnotised' and act in shocking ways. Curtiz is constantly troubled by how Letterman's intentions for the film imply common human decency, an over-arching sense of goodness and consolation to be found even in the events of the Holocaust.²⁶³ For Curtiz, Claudia's eventual fate negates any such efforts at redemption, just as the Holocaust negates any such grand narratives. The blurring between civilised and primitive states, as Mauss's note of surprise hints at, adds to this lingering confusion in Curtiz's mind. Curtiz is troubled by what conclusions he is obligated to make concerning human behaviour as he writes the screenplay. In one respect, he sees the Masai as a 'civilised' alternative way of living as opposed to the 'primitive' behaviour of the Nazis and many Europeans. But he also entertains grave doubts even about Claudia's research, sensing its elisions and lacunae.

Curtiz considers that Letterman's crass impulse to universalise human behaviour,

stands for that human striving which exists as a counter to the banality of human life in the suburbs and malls of our countries. According to this

²⁶³ This aspect of Letterman's vision suggests comparisons with Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List*. *Masai Dreaming* was published in 1993, the years of *Schindler's List*'s release. Letterman's impulse to make a mainstream and redemptive Hollywood movie recalls Spielberg's artistic choices. Furthermore, Curtiz, as he is watching the film *Masai Dreaming*, describes the vivid colour of a scene at Auschwitz: 'It is also the only colour in this scene: the rest of the frame is black and white, a horribly unsettling effect'. (*MD*: p. 289) This parallels the infamous scenes in which Spielberg isolates a young girl in a red coat, the single moment of colour in an otherwise completely black and white film (but one that comes directly from Thomas Keneally's 1982 novel [London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1982; repr. Coronet, 1983; pp. 141-7]).

flattering theory, the audience are players in a bigger drama. The human spirit is trundled on to reassure them that they are still party to the heroic, which cynical people might think has departed the suburbs some time ago. (MD: p. 93)

Curtiz believes that in Letterman's hands Claudia's story will be traduced. Similarly, the story of her relationships with the Masai (there is some evidence that she may have had a romantic relationship with a Masai warrior) will, through this reductive point-of-view, be distorted or even suppressed in favour of more populist narratives. Norman G. Finkelstein writes that the Holocaust has, over the years since 1945, been 'refracted through an ideological prism'.²⁶⁴ This 'ideological prism' has dictated the ways in which the Holocaust is written about, publicly discussed and remembered. One of the dogmas that Finkelstein describes is that of viewing the Holocaust as a singular and unique event. One of the many consequences of this is to 'de-historicise' it, interpreting it as lying 'outside' of history. This is linked, Finkelstein argues, with a sense that the Holocaust is universal because it is unique. Its perceived uniqueness and its perceived universalism are intimately linked together.²⁶⁵ This chapter will return later to Finkelstein's arguments against the commodification and 'sacralisation' of the Holocaust, but for now one can see how such controversial theories bear upon the central themes of *Masai Dreaming*. Curtiz is fully aware that the main driving impulse behind Letterman's urge towards universalising Claudia's life is commercial, but he also sees that it is a tendency inherent in western culture.

The final quotation at the start of the novel is from the Nazi 'Eight Ordinance' dated 'Paris 29 May 1942'. The language of Nazi bureaucracy describes the yellow six-pointed star forced on Jews. In the context of the previous three quotations, this seems to confirm and contradict much of what has been alluded to. This is a voice from Durkheim's 'social man' and 'civilized man', a voice that seems to contradict any sense of common humanity or universal spirit. But the Nazi decree does seem to confirm Mauss's tentative recognition that a 'return to the primitive' in 'large modern societies' had not been an 'object' of sociologists' studies. Cartwright's use of these quotations emphasise the ambiguity and conflict that *Masai Dreaming* brings to bear on such issues. To return to Finkelstein's critique of contemporary discourses surrounding the representation of the Holocaust, one can see that Curtiz, acting as a surrogate 'author'

²⁶⁴ Finkelstein, p. 41.

²⁶⁵ Ibid, pp. 41-7.

throughout the book, is searching for ways to represent Claudia's life. He is constantly concerned that he is trying to describe the 'unknown and the unknowable', (*MD*: p. 109) whilst at the same time trying to resist universalising, sacralising or commodifying the historical events.

For Curtiz, it is Claudia's 'death' at Auschwitz that determines how the film will be constructed. The necessary fabrications and narrative distortions of fiction cannot, Curtiz feels, be applied to Claudia's life because of the Holocaust.²⁶⁶ In one respect this is an example of the 'sacralising' that Finkelstein feels has arisen, particularly since the 1960s. Curtiz recognises the conventions of 'one hundred minutes, no room for interior monologue, unequivocal scenes of love, grandeur and horror', (*MD*: p. 169) but at the same time is keen to get to the facts and reveal something about the 'unknowable' Holocaust (or the unknowable Claudia). Curtiz sees that the 'world is made up of stories of wretched betrayals and wrong turnings and destructive love affairs', (*MD*: p. 192) but pursues the 'facts' of Claudia's life, hoping that he might discover the 'secret' of the past. As in many of the Holocaust novels discussed in the present thesis, *Masai Dreaming* dramatises an archeological historicising. Curtiz 'digs' beneath the surface of the present to 'find' the secrets of the past.

The two dilemmas that Curtiz and the novel work through are thus interrelated. Curtiz's resisting of Letterman's 'Hollywoodising' of the subject matter is partly due to his adherence to the 'facts'. But his ideas for the screenplay are rejected by Letterman as being 'sub-Bergman', and indeed, at one point, Curtiz sees that popular films 'rely completely on romantic versions of the human condition'. (*MD*: p. 210) He feels, too, a need for a redemptive ending: 'So Claudia being taken off to the ovens must be an uplifting story which flatters them [the audience] by suggesting they would have been on the right side'. (*MD*: p. 211) *Masai Dreaming* suggests that this urge towards constructing consolatory or redemptive narratives upon real historical events is an ideological impulse. In other words, the 'Hollywoodising' of the Holocaust, represented by Letterman (and by his earlier colonial alter ego, Leavitt), seeks to impose narrative structures and particular political and social meanings on what is a highly complex and profoundly troubling moment in history. Again, Curtiz questions this task: 'How do you make a movie about things so bestial? How do you make art – artifice – out of this?'

²⁶⁶ Cartwright satirises Letterman's inability to understand these arguments when he cites Sydney Pollack's *Out of Africa* as a template for how he conceives *Masai Dreaming*. Chris Peachment, identifying crucial

(MD: p. 243) This enquiry follows in a lineage that stretches back to Theodor Adorno's infamous argument that no poetry can be written after Auschwitz.²⁶⁷ In fundamental ways, the very notion of an artistic or fictional representation of the Holocaust is called into question.

Cartwright makes this theme explicit towards the end of the novel. Letterman, bereft after an unsatisfying and unsettling sexual relationship with an actress he has been auditioning for the role of Claudia, discusses the contribution of French intellectuals in analysis of the Holocaust. He considers the French to be 'all Jews in a way, charged with making judgements'. These ethical judgements, Letterman observes, invariably surround the issue of representation. He speaks of 'Claud [sic] Lanzmann [sic], and Louis Malle',²⁶⁸ filmmakers who are engaged in the contemporary debate. The producer cites Lanzmann as an influence:

Lanzmann's film, *Shoah*, a documentary about the Polish camps, is a towering work. Lanzmann spent eleven years on it. It is from him that Letterman has taken the idea of the endlessly moving cattle truck. In *Shoah*, Lanzmann repeats the images of the hardware of the extermination camps, particularly the trucks, endlessly to get over the enormity of the deed. Letterman agrees with Elie Wiesel that Auschwitz negates any form of invention. His movie is based firmly on the facts. From that the art can follow. Claudia's life and death are real. But the French have elevated the subject beyond reality, to a philosophic and intellectual plane which – he now sees – absolves them from thinking about the reality. (MD: p. 248)

Letterman aligns himself with Lanzmann's film whilst at the same time parodying what he perceives as French intellectuals' pretensions, their 'sacralising' of the subject. Furthermore, he suggests that this 'elevating' of the Holocaust diverts attention away from a national recognition of France's own involvement in the Occupation. Ironically, Letterman also aligns himself with Wiesel's controversial strictness in wanting to separate the event from art – a view that Curtiz would have more affinity with. But perhaps what is most telling about this quotation is Letterman's knowledge of (and

casting errors, writes in *The Time Out Film Guide*: 'For all that it may come out of Africa, the film's final destination is not many miles from Disneyland.' (p. 779)

²⁶⁷ For further readings of Adorno's quotation see, amongst many others: Schwarz, (2000), pp. 22-3; Lang, (2000), pp. 5-6; LaCapra, (1998), pp. 181-2; Hartman, *Holocaust Remembrance* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), pp. 19-20, p. 25; Vice (2000), p. 5; Clendinnen, (2002), p. 166.

²⁶⁸ Malle made two acclaimed films concerned with the Nazi Occupation of France and the Holocaust: *Lacombe Lucien* (1974) and *Au Revoir les Enfants* (1987).

homage to) Lanzmann's documentary. As has been noted, *Shoah* has become the definitive cinematic Holocaust text, and its aesthetic and ethical decisions have been interpreted as paradigmatic in relation to the issues surrounding Holocaust representation.

Shoah also acts as a meta-commentary on the problems that Curtiz and Letterman face in the novel. A brief analysis of *Shoah*'s form and content will help to further illuminate Cartwright's thematic intentions, and will also suggest ways of seeing how *Masai Dreaming* negotiates the debates surrounding Holocaust representation. In her essay, 'Film as Witness: Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah*'²⁶⁹, Shoshana Felman describes the documentary as a 'film about witnessing' and one that 'offers a disorienting vision of the present, a compellingly profound and surprising insight into the complexity of the *relation between history and witnessing*' [author's italics].²⁷⁰ This foregrounding of Lanzmann's conviction that the survivors, witnesses and perpetrators of the Holocaust offer a unique perspective on the events captures the essence of the film and its self-avowed ideological aspirations. *Shoah*, made between 1974 and 1985, is composed almost entirely of interviews with those directly involved, in various different ways, in the Holocaust. As Felman argues, *Shoah* is primarily concerned with the nature of witnessing and testimony. But it is also a film, and as such its visual structure is crucial both in underlining the themes of witnessing and testimony (their inherent value and their inherent crises) and in creating cinematic signifiers of the 'presence' of the Holocaust in a post-Holocaust world. Along with its obvious and necessary memorialising of individual testimony and its accumulation of personal stories, many of them unbearably painful, *Shoah* has become a test case for the visual representation of the Holocaust. As Letterman suggested in the earlier quotation, *Shoah* has profoundly influenced his film, *Masai Dreaming*. But Letterman's inclination to universalise the Holocaust, and his drive to create an uplifting message from Claudia's life and death contradicts such an artistic and ethical aspiration.

Shoah is a film that, in Felman's words, is 'an exploration of the differences between heterogeneous points of view, testimonial stances which can neither be assimilated into, nor subsumed by, one another'.²⁷¹ It is a fragmentary text that relies upon its power through use of direct interviews, and in the cases of a number of survivors

²⁶⁹ In Hartman, *Holocaust Remembrance: The Shapes of Memory* (1994), pp. 90-103.

²⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 91.

²⁷¹ Ibid, p. 93.

and witnesses, these testimonies are recorded at the actual sites where they endured their trauma. For example, Lanzmann invites a middle-aged man, Simon Srebnik, to return to Chelmno where he miraculously survived. Srebnik's testimony – his memory of events that happened some 30 or more years before – is articulated (and witnessed) in and around the place in which he endured such terrible mental and physical abuse. Florence Jacobowitz describes this aspect of the film, with its strikingly long takes and panning shots, as representing the 'temporal collapse' key to the film's view of a 'continuous present'.²⁷² Lanzmann sets out a rigorous and thematically consistent formal 'map' in which the viewer is asked to contribute to meaning through the use of montage, highly detailed testimony, recurring motifs (like the train/train-tracks image that Letterman acknowledges as an influence), and stately ('memorialising') tracking, zoom and panning shots. *Shoah* interpellates the viewer with a modernist seriousness. Daniel R. Schwarz refers to Lanzmann as being like a 'district attorney methodically presenting evidence of past crimes to the grand jury of his viewers'.²⁷³

Lanzmann's *Shoah* represents (and delineates) many of the arguments and discussions surrounding Holocaust representation. Jacobowitz writes that the film 'constructs itself around an absence, a void, the annihilated, and tries to make absence felt'.²⁷⁴ She describes *Shoah*'s 'insistent registration of corroborative evidence' as 'an act of resistance to obliteration, forgetting, revision, a counterattack against an act of destruction that was masked and ignored'.²⁷⁵ Despite representing an act of commemoration, Jacobowitz describes the film's tone as being one of 'helplessness and defeat'. She goes on to write of its 'overwhelming sense of doom', articulated in a filmed world 'as closed and sealed as the fate of the victims it mourns'.²⁷⁶ Consequently, a number of *Shoah*'s philosophical and formal elements can be identified. There is its sense of temporal and spatial collapse inherent in dealing with the 'rupture' of the Holocaust. There is also a concomitant recognition of a continual present whereby trauma is 'relived' and 're-enacted'. Lanzmann's cinematic style is self-consciously austere and seeks to articulate these theories of the broken boundaries of time and space through filmic properties. And finally, one sees *Shoah*'s acknowledgement of a profound

²⁷² Florence Jacobowitz, 'Shoah as Cinema' in Hornstein, Jacobowitz (2003), p. 19.

²⁷³ Schwarz, p. 24.

²⁷⁴ Jacobowitz, p. 8.

²⁷⁵ Ibid, p. 11.

²⁷⁶ Ibid, p. 16.

void and absence defining each testimony and each narrative, a void that emphasises the film's deliberately demanding atmosphere of helplessness and defeat.

These interpretations of Lanzmann's film are helpful in suggesting ways of reading *Masai Dreaming's* dramatising of the issues surrounding Holocaust representation. Letterman's belief that he is planning a 'major and symbolic movie to close this troubled century' (*MD*: p. 183) implies that, despite his references to Lanzmann and *Shoah*, he is actually hoping to make *Schindler's List*. In fact, Cartwright portrays Letterman as being trapped in a particular generic and conventional way of constructing narrative and story. Letterman is convinced of the efficacy of this approach: 'It's such a human drama, the pull of family, the counterweight of love, played against the dreadful knowledge of the death camps'. (*MD*: p. 183) Just as Spielberg's film contrives a consolatory and redemptive climax, Letterman envisages his own film as offering a similar 'message' to his audience.²⁷⁷ By contrast, Curtiz is troubled by what he sees as Letterman's populist sentiment. Curtiz is much more sensitive – deepened by his growing sense of Claudia's life – to Lanzmann's cinematic vision of non-representation of the historical events. Certainly, Lanzmann's decision not to use any archive footage is perhaps one of his most influential artistic choices and one that has inspired (and contributed to already existing) debates about the use of direct and explicit images from the camps. To put it another way, Spielberg's film, at one crucial and highly controversial moment, enters Auschwitz on a train filled with terrified Jews. Indeed, the camera follows them into the 'showers' themselves (only for them to survive). Lanzmann's film, by contrast, refuses to use such explicit imagery and trusts the personal testimony and the contemporary footage of the remnants of camps, of train stations, of memorial sites and villages.

Curtiz attempts to negotiate Letterman's own vision of the film through his research and interviews with Claudia's contemporaries. Cartwright dramatises these 'alternative' fictionalisations of Curtiz's research and in one respect such passages do indeed resist Letterman's view of how the narrative should follow Claudia's plight and how it should be resolved. It is also here that Cartwright comes closest to depicting the Holocaust. Furthermore, the debates identified earlier about Lanzmann's *Shoah* and Spielberg's *Schindler's List* are dramatised in *Masai Dreaming*. The issues of absence and presence – in other words, of how to, or even whether to, represent the excesses of

²⁷⁷ For more on Spielberg's film see Rothberg, (2000), pp. 222-47. Also, Schwarz (2000), pp. 209-35.

the Holocaust – are explicit. How Curtiz resists, and perhaps even yields to, Letterman's fear of 'some morbid exploration of the inexplicable', suggests ways in which contemporary British novels challenge and collude with certain ways of thinking about Holocaust representation. Jacobwitz suggests that Lanzmann's film should be acclaimed for its 'invention of a form of cinematic discourse that activates the imagination to evoke the unimaginable in a manner uniquely its own'.²⁷⁸ If so, how does one judge *Masai Dreaming*'s aesthetic and ethical decisions surrounding its representation of the Holocaust, given its own commentary on such issues of form and content discussed between Letterman and Curtiz?

At the beginning of the novel, Curtiz is watching the film *Masai Dreaming* in Paris. Mel Gibson (as Fairfax) arrives in a biplane to greet the Masai. It transpires that this opening scene concerns Gibson/Fairfax returning to tell the Masai of Claudia's death in Auschwitz. This scene fades into a scene set on a racing locomotive:

We are now inside the train. At first it is hard to make out what is happening. There are human shapes lying on the floor. Then we make out two people standing, their heads nodding. Now we know immediately what we are meant to know, because these are orthodox Jews, praying and nodding, and we are in a cattle truck in the night. (*MD*: p. 5)

Gibson's participation is a sign that the financiers have embraced Letterman's vision of the film. Despite this, Curtiz appears to be describing the film, in particular the cut from the 'colour of the African scene' (*MD*: p. 4) to the Jewish people on the train in favourable terms. This is confirmed at the end of the novel when, following the main action of the narrative, the reader is returned to the climax of the film. There are scenes of Claudia and her young brother, Georges, arriving at Auschwitz, and Curtiz, in an aside, reassures the reader that the scene was actually filmed in Czechoslovakia. The camera then picks out the infamous sign, *Arbeit Macht Frei*, that Curtiz calls 'the sickest fucking joke in the history of humanity'. (*MD*: p. 289) Following this, the camera rises up where there is a glow in the sky that signifies the smoke rising from the crematorium. Curtiz, again in parentheses, alludes to the film's controversial production and tells the reader that Letterman 'bought a surplus steel blast-furnace to achieve this effect'. (*MD*: p. 289)

²⁷⁸ Ibid, p. 7.

The 'film' cuts to Gibson/Fairfax flying in past the Mountain of God to the sound of the Masai singing. The Masai greet Gibson/Fairfax. He tells the laibon that the Germans have killed Claudia but that she wrote a letter for him to pass on to the laibon and the Masai as a whole. The letter says:

I am in the hands of the Germans. I do not know what they will do with me. But whatever happens to me, I will never forget you. You have taught me that we all share one, universal spirit. Whatever happens to me, I wish that you may have many cattle and plentiful green grass. And wherever God takes me I will dream of you. (*MD*: p. 290)

This represents the climax of the film. Masai singing comes onto the soundtrack and only shadows are left on the screen. Cartwright ends the novel on an enigmatic note: 'We have joined them up there under the mountain, on the screen'. (*MD*: p. 291) This line can be interpreted in many ways. The plural pronoun 'we' seems to suggest simply the audience that Curtiz has viewed the film with. But, given Claudia's earlier appeal to the 'one, universal spirit', it can plausibly be argued that 'we' does indeed refer to humanity. This 'we', Curtiz implies, have communed in some way with 'them', the Masai who have been transformed into shadows, 'up' there (on the screen) but 'under' the mountain. Letterman's own sense of the universal spirit – qualitatively different from Claudia's but nonetheless implicated in such a point-of-view – has been vindicated. Curtiz, despite his reservations, appears to be intensely moved by the juxtaposition of images and music that achieves an effect of aesthetic and thematic power. Up on the screen, the Masai represent a utopian drive, or more simply an idyllic existence, whose perceived 'innocence' stands for an alternative good as set against the Nazi Holocaust that has taken Claudia away from their haven (protected by the mountain).

Although it would seem that Letterman's film of *Masai Dreaming* is fatally compromised with its romantic and epic *mise en scene*, its Hollywood stars and its redemptive 'message', Curtiz refrains from satirising it as much as one might have predicted. But another way of interpreting Cartwright's final line is to suggest that 'we' – the human race – have indeed joined the 'shadows' up there on the screen. These 'shadows', though, are merely representations of the Masai. There is a 'universal spirit', but it is illusory and transient, a simulation of commonality and shared values rather than a 'real' understanding of difference. This reading is suggested by the novel's last word – 'screen' – a word that alludes, obviously, to the cinema screen but can also have

connotations of partitions, of being shut off from one particular area (or way of thinking). This 'screen' might be read as being merely an ornamental divide (or even a smokescreen). The audience, therefore, are separated by it rather than connected by it. Cartwright is critiquing Curtiz's collusion with this process. His contribution to the screenplay (although it is uncertain as to the extent that his material was used by Letterman) has helped to create this 'screen' that exists between the real historical events and the cinematic representation of them.

After the prologue describing the film itself, Curtiz writes what are apparently the subsequent scenes. Claudia's father is described sitting in a cattle truck leaving Drancy bound for Auschwitz. Curtiz interrupts this scene: 'I hardly need describe the conditions. Although they are so frightful – unspeakable – you will not be surprised'. (*MD*: p. 12) Familiarly, the concept of 'unspeakability' is introduced early on. The historical reality cannot be spoken about. One aspect of this bind of silence is to acknowledge the impossibility of describing such traumatic historical moments. Another is tacitly to side with a certain kind of literary writing that privileges indirection and metaphor – a 'looking away' – as a means of articulating or signifying a 'truth'. It also presupposes, and relies upon historical knowledge on the reader's behalf: that the reader already knows, to some degree, what it was like. A further problematic in this and the other sections is to what extent are these Curtiz's own imaginings of what the screenplay will be like? Or are they projections of the film he aspires to make? Or do they represent an alternative literary version of his in-field research?

One can certainly see these chapters as Curtiz's 'dreaming' of *Masai Dreaming*. They may or may not represent the actual finished film – the reader is only directly privy to the beginning and the ending. Curtiz constructs the ending of the film in his mind long before the reader is made aware that this does become *Masai Dreaming*'s climax. (*MD*: pp. 83-4) It is tempting to see the sections fictionalising Claudia's experiences as being dreams and acts of the imagination. For example, when Curtiz is lying alone in a tent at dawn, he pictures Claudia lying in her hut. Through this imaginative connection, Curtiz feels that he is closer to Claudia and to an understanding of her motivation and inner life. He seeks to reconstruct her life and, by extension, reconstruct the past through a use of factual information – his research – and imaginative empathy. He imagines certain scenes that take their cue from facts and details but 'elaborates' on them to construct a

narrative.²⁷⁹ As the novel continues, the text seems to match Curtiz's work on the screenplay, or, more accurately, the proposed or possible screenplay, the fragments of which he sends to Letterman (who remains largely dismissive). He pieces together turning points and certain scenes, creating dialogue, providing thoughts and desires, granting significance to one particular moment over another. Curtiz utilises his authorial skills to impose a structure upon the aporias and elisions of history. He writes: 'All I have to do is get a few facts, give them some colourful detail and write the script. Nobody ... expects me to come back to answers to unanswerable questions'. (MD: p. 162)

Whilst, for example, Curtiz is re-imagining Claudia's romantic and sexual relationship with Fairfax, such imaginative fabrication seems comparatively benign.²⁸⁰ It is when Curtiz begins to imagine and 'write' Claudia's time in Paris, and her subsequent journey to the camps, that one begins to understand the issues and tropes surrounding Holocaust representation and its relationship to fictional practices. Curtiz relies upon 'records of the last transports published by Serge Klarsfeld's organization in Paris', Claudia's letters to Fairfax, and a brief account of her time in Paris by a 'member of the resistance'. (MD: p. 212) Curtiz must extrapolate upon apparently flimsy information and evidence. He fictionalises Claudia's father, Léon, and her brother, Georges, and attempts to create a vivid sense of those last days in Paris before expulsion. These are written in present-tense prose that reads like a hybrid between a novel and a screenplay. Curtiz is fully aware of his 'slippery perspective' (MD: p. 222) on Claudia and her history. But he strives to honour her – to an extent, Curtiz is attracted to Claudia – and goes on to describe her attempts to convince her father to leave. Léon remains certain that he can negotiate with the Nazis, a belief based on what he perceives as their innate sense of logic and decency. Claudia attempts to escape with her brother.²⁸¹

²⁷⁹ The most well-documented example of a Holocaust documentary fiction is Keneally's *Schindler's Ark* (1982). The blurring of generic lines between historical documentary and literary fiction in Keneally's text is particularly resonant and the book – contentiously the winner of the Booker prize that year – pre-empted a number of issues that surround and inform Holocaust writing. For a further analysis see Vice, *Holocaust Fiction* (pp. 90-116); Schwarz, *Imagining the Holocaust* (pp. 209-35).

²⁸⁰ With the help of Fairfax, Curtiz dramatises the trial of Tepilit, the laibon's brother. This singular travesty of justice – Tepilit is eventually hanged – is compared and contrasted with the gigantic numbers of innocent victims in Nazi Europe at the same time. Claudia is incapable of saving Tepilit, just as she is incapable of saving her father and her brother.

²⁸¹ In an interesting aside, Claudia and Georges's train 'arrives at Austerlitz' (MD: p.237). For further discussion as to the significance of Austerlitz station see chapter three (n. 220, pp. 102-3) in the present thesis on Sebald's novel.

Curtiz's screenplay/novel follows, in short inter-cut scenes, Claudia's and Georges's thwarted efforts at escape. These passages are intended to suggest what the visual representation will look like:

Claudia and Georges stand up. They leave the train and join a small and growing gang of the detained, guarded by gendarmes on the platform. They stand there, nervous and ashamed, a wretched group which reminds us of the pitiful photographs of the arrests of Jews in the Warsaw ghetto. Particularly Georges in his cap and belted coat. (MD: p. 238)

Curtiz appeals to a prior knowledge of war and Holocaust photography,²⁸² and describes Léon's inevitably doomed attempts to reason with the Nazi authorities. Curtiz again finds difficulty in writing about what is to come. Indeed, his apparent ethical and artistic dilemma mirrors much of what has been discussed in relation to how 'explicit' Holocaust imagery should be. His inability to find a suitable way to capture this 'unimaginable' horror is significant:

How do you make a movie about things so bestial? How do you make art – artifice – out of this? The only way you could begin to express this horror would be to murder a child actor on camera. Take an eleven-year-old boy and infect him with TB and then castrate him, and then, some weeks later, take out his spleen and his kidneys without anaesthetic, and then inject him with some unspeakable filth you have developed on other children, who inconveniently died, and then remove all his clothes, his empty scrotum not yet healed, photograph him for the medical record and then garotte him by hanging him on a hook to die in nine or ten minutes. (MD: p. 243)

Curtiz is responding to the infamous statement – *Hier ist kein warum*²⁸³ – and his anger leads to a vision of a pornographic 'snuff' film that mimics the physical torture and abuse of the Nazis. The excess and extremity of this vision of a Holocaust representation, at least theoretically, suggests a logical conclusion to any image of suffering and violence.²⁸⁴

²⁸² For further discussion about the significance of Holocaust photography see chapter four in the present thesis on Seiffert's *The Dark Room*.

²⁸³ This is taken from Primo Levi's *If This is a Man* (Abacus, 2004). Levi has recently arrived at Auschwitz: 'Driven by thirst, I eyed a fine icicle outside the window, within hand's reach. I opened the window and broke off the icicle but at once a large, heavy guard prowling outside brutally snatched it away from me. 'Warum?' I asked him in my poor German. 'Hier ist kein warum' (there is no why here), he replied, pushing me inside with a shove'. (p. 35)

²⁸⁴ Curtiz's disgusted description echoes Pier Paolo Pasolini's highly controversial 1975 film *Salò, o le Centoventi Giornate di Sodoma* (*Salo, or the 120 days of Sodom*). Geoff Andrew writes in *The Time Out Film Guide* (London: Penguin, 2000): 'Pasolini observes with unflinching gaze the systematic humiliation

Curtiz's effort to trying to re-imagine that suffering and violence is a pertinent symbol of the problems surrounding the re-presentation of the trains, the camps, the crematoria and the killing pits. Rather than any explicit camp imagery, he relies upon metaphor to achieve an emotional impact (if this is indeed what he is pursuing). On the train, Claudia comforts her brother with a Masai song:

In this madhouse, it does not sound particularly strange. Georges sleeps. We see his face; his lips move and he raises his nose involuntarily as if gasping for air. It is a portent of things to come.

Claudia sings, her voice choking, her eyes drowning. (*MD*: p. 251)

Curtiz's proleptic 'a portent of things to come' captures how the screenplay relies upon the audience's ingrained knowledge of what awaits the characters.²⁸⁵ Also, these are directions for visual representation, and as a consequence Curtiz is striving to tell the story through montage and imagery. Claudia's singing pre-empts the later Masai singing and is another example of the film – in both Curtiz's and Letterman's conception – being constructed to make connections. These connections are crucial for the film of *Masai Dreaming* to emphasise Claudia's relationship with the Masai and also to suggest the cross- continental, quasi-spiritual connections between one oppressed race and another.

A more troubling aspect of this scene is the use of words such as 'gasping', 'choking' and 'drowning'. Quite explicitly, Curtiz wants the audience to think forwards to the characters' eventual fate at Auschwitz. One can see this as cinematic shorthand, but also one could argue that it is a crude and reductive example of symbolism that relies upon hindsight. The problems for cinematic representation of the Holocaust suggest wider concerns about how the eschatological aspects of events are described. Despite general lingering concerns about the process of fictionalising real historical events, Curtiz's reservations are at their most pronounced when he considers Auschwitz. Indeed, it is debatable how successfully the film that Cartwright describes, through such symbolic metaphors, captures the stark horror of the camp. Curtiz's film relies upon prior knowledge, and perhaps on a well-established sense of foreboding about what is to be

and torture of beautiful young girls and boys, herded into a palatial villa by various jaded, sadistic members of the wealthy upper classes'. (p. 913) In *The Film Handbook* (Harlow: Longman, 1989), Andrew writes: 'As a purported analysis of the workings of Fascism the film is woefully shallow; as voyeuristic spectacle, it suffers from the same sickeningly sadistic impulses as the bourgeoisie it purports to indict; as an expression of its maker's disillusionment with humanity, it is indeed salutary.' (p. 215)

²⁸⁵ For further discussion of this proleptic/analeptic aspect of Holocaust fiction, see chapter six in the present chapter on Amis's *Time's Arrow*.

encountered. At another railway station, for example, a train awaits the Cohn-Cassons: 'We see the cattle truck, open doors gaping. They bring to mind the ovens which are to come'. (MD: p. 255) Curtiz's film, despite his resistance to Letterman's 'Hollywoodizing' tendencies, could represent simply another way of saying much the same thing. The shadow that Auschwitz casts over each and every scene in the film suggests intimations of the inexorable end-point. The language of the film that Curtiz writes is intimately bound to a historical reality. But this language is also weighted with a portent that only the audience is privy to. This portentousness informs the film and places the audience in an uncomfortable position of epistemological superiority.²⁸⁶ Unbeknownst to Claudia and her family, this train is 'on the road to hell', (MD: p. 257) and hence every one of their actions is imbued with a sense of impending tragedy.

Curtiz acknowledges some of these artistic and ethical demands. At this moment in the screenplay, or rather the suggestions for the screenplay that are included in the novel, he appears to break off just as the train is beginning its journey to Auschwitz. As he has stated before, he is deeply uncomfortable about going 'through the gate marked *Arbeit Macht Frei*'. This unease is articulated through a reference to Durkheim's assertion that 'the facts are wrong'. Curtiz goes on to agree that facts don't 'confer understanding'. He uses an example taken from Resnais' *Nuit et Brouillard* (*Night and Fog*)²⁸⁷ where one can see a 'close-up of the scratches made by the victims on the concrete roof of the gas chamber' that signify their attempt to 'climb up a pyramid of bodies'. (MD: p. 262) Curtiz argues that this fact is undeniable but that it 'explains nothing'. It implies a qualitative difference between the fact of documentary and the meaning of narrative fiction. But Curtiz is also suggesting that such a fact is strictly the domain of the documentary. He is certain that nobody 'could write about or film such horror'. (MD: p. 263) Inherent in this argument is a belief that there are core aspects of the Holocaust that resists any representation – even in the genre of documentary. Curtiz's own ethical boundary is the limits of Auschwitz – a 'fact' that challenges understanding.

²⁸⁶ It may also be an example of Michael Andre Bernstein's theories surrounding 'backshadowing' and 'foreshadowing' in writing about the past. See chapter two in the present chapter on Harris's *Fatherland* for further discussion concerning these theories.

²⁸⁷ Roger Greenspun, in Laqueur, ed, *The Holocaust Encyclopaedia* (2001), writes: 'At another extreme [in comparison with Lanzmann's *Shoah*], Alain Resnais's *Night and Fog* is one of the first and, at 31 minutes, one of the shortest films to contemplate the Holocaust. There are no interviews – just a narration written and read by Jean Cayrol, himself a camp survivor. Calmly the film compares the camp sites as they appear in 1955 – peaceful, pastoral, empty, shown in soft colours – with the camps at their liberation, the old black-and-white footage, not so familiar in 1955, edited into images of a terrifying beauty'. (p. 123)

Despite these profound reservations, Curtiz does write scenes that occur on the train. Furthermore, another reading of the film's title emerges when Curtiz's screenplay makes – through the suggestiveness of montage and dialogue – a connection between the cattle trucks that Claudia and Georges are on and the cattle of the Masai on the savannah. At this moment, Claudia 'dreams' of the Masai, and their way of life seems to her to be a paradise compared to what she is enduring: 'They [the Masai] love cattle. Cattle are for them more important than anything else. That is what they want from life'. (*MD*: p. 273) The perceived simplicity and peace of the Masai culture is set against the humiliation of the 'world' Claudia and her family are entering. The last section that details this screenplay dramatises their arrival at Auschwitz. Curtiz describes the ramp and the floodlights. There are thousands of waiting people and SS guards, some carrying whips. Luggage is sorted and men are marched away. Georges is seized by a Kapo and is 'lost almost instantly.' Curtiz writes that '[a]bove the huge camp there is a glow in the sky, the sort of thing given off by an oil refinery or any industrial complex working through the night'. (*MD*: p. 281) These scenes take the audience up to the camp gates but not inside. As in other Holocaust fictions, actually 'entering' Auschwitz is resisted. A consequence of this 'turning away', of, in a manner of speaking, representation 'failing', is that the horror of what awaits Claudia and her family is 'unimaginable'.

The reader remains uncertain as to whether such scenes appeared in the final version of *Masai Dreaming* – as has been noted, the opening and closing sections of the novel play out Curtiz's own response to the finished Letterman film. This uncertainty is also reflected in the novel's last melancholic irony. Following the descriptions of Claudia's last hours at Auschwitz, Curtiz, after Fairfax's death, is told by Lady De Marr that Claudia did not in fact perish in the camp. Fairfax, desperate to discover whether there was any chance that she was still alive, travelled to Auschwitz after the war had ended. Lady De Marr tells Curtiz that Fairfax was able to follow her tracks from letters she dropped out of the train (some written phonetically in Masai). Fairfax distributes photographs of Claudia and eventually finds her in a sanatorium in Paris: 'He was shocked. She looked fifty-five. She weighed sixty pounds and was recovering from God knows what. Tom said that when she saw him she had convulsions. The doctors had to sedate her'. Fairfax is then demobbed and takes Claudia on a sailing trip to Mombasa, but she 'jumped over the side two days out of Cape Town'. Curtiz is informed that he can now have the letters that Fairfax was intending to give him and that Fairfax wanted 'the story to end at the gates of Auschwitz'. (*MD*: pp. 282-3) The letters confirm that Claudia

did indeed believe that she was going to die in Auschwitz, that she dreamed of the Masai, and that she loved Fairfax.

Cartwright emphasises the contrast and conflict between the real of history and the 'real' of the fictionalised text that relies upon that real. The historical facts of Claudia's life and death do not conform to Curtiz's sense of 'what happened'. In one respect, Claudia's suicide unsettles Curtiz's previous conviction that she died in Auschwitz, although one might suggest that she did indeed die symbolically at the camp – she could not continue to live with that horrifying knowledge.²⁸⁸ Fairfax, because of this, wanted Curtiz to leave Claudia to 'die' in Auschwitz – he wanted the fictional version of Claudia's life to be different from the truth, even as the truth informs the narrative of her death. One can see how Curtiz's troubles with writing in and around truth and fiction, between facts and understanding, find a culmination in these final revelations. There is the 'fact' of Claudia's liberation from the camps, her eventual partial recovery with Fairfax, and her subsequent suicide. And there is the attempt at 'understanding' that Curtiz (and even Letterman) hope to bring to Claudia's life and death. In one reading of these narrative themes, it would seem that Curtiz is partially reconciled to Letterman's version of *Masai Dreaming*. The film differs, necessarily, from the real facts, and yet, at the same time, it offers reflections and interpretations on history for the audience. The 'excess' of historical reality – symbolised in Auschwitz – remains, for reasons of taste, but also for reasons of the limits of representation, 'beyond' the realm of art and historical document.

In conclusion, Cartwright's *Masai Dreaming* dramatises two interrelated issues: the intrinsic artistic and ethical dilemmas surrounding the fictionalising of history, and the 'Hollywoodization' of the Holocaust. Curtiz is characterised as being an imaginative writer assigned the troubling task of fictionalising Claudia's life and a researcher/historian who is diligently searching for the 'facts'. The difficulties of both responses (themselves often merging and using elements from each way of reading the past) are concluded when Curtiz sees that something will always remain in the realm of the real. This will inevitably elude artistic representation. Auschwitz, as a signifier of disturbing and complex historical reality, can only be represented up to a point (Curtiz cannot 'enter the gates'). This 'excess' remains inscrutable and cannot readily be brought into the artistic and historical tropes of representation. Something of this aspect to the

²⁸⁸ The Nazis spare Claudia's father because of his earlier commitment to appease them and his conviction that the Nazis were 'reasonable'. Claudia refuses to see him when she recovers with Fairfax.

novel is captured in Stephen Smith's argument that the 'duty' in Holocaust representation is 'to pursue comprehension while preserving its incomprehensible nature'.²⁸⁹

Similarly, and ambivalently, Curtiz's personal worries concerning Letterman's mainstream tastes, and how they will impact on the film's treatment of highly difficult subject matter, appear, at the novel's end, to have been partly reconciled. One way of reading this theme is that Curtiz is given a privileged glimpse – through personal interviews and access to Claudia's letters – into the 'facts' of the historical. Even though the film *Masai Dreaming* does appear to be compromised and ends with some kind of redemption (aspects that Curtiz himself has undoubtedly contributed to), Cartwright appears to suggest that this is inevitable. The 'truth' of Claudia's life and death can be imagined and represented but only up to a point. Letterman's populist attitudes may well be crude but they do not significantly alter the facts and certainly do not 'fill in' the gaps of Claudia's existence. By extension, *Masai Dreaming* argues that there is indeed something in the complexities of history – a truth, a fact, an understanding – which always and necessarily eludes representation. The novel argues that the Holocaust, with its temporal rupture, systematic genocide and 'unimaginable' horror, always offers profound and even insurmountable obstacles to fully representing it.

²⁸⁹ Stephen Smith, 'The Trajectory of Memory' in *Remembering for the Future* (2001), p. 445.

Chapter Six

‘I Recognized Room 1 from my Dreams’: Returning to Auschwitz in Martin Amis’s *Time’s Arrow*

In *Holocaust Fiction*, Sue Vice ends her chapter on Martin Amis’s *Time’s Arrow* by comparing it with its most influential intertext, Robert Jay Lifton’s 1986 study, *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide*. Amis, in *Time’s Arrow* and in interviews, acknowledges Lifton’s text as central to the process of writing about the Holocaust.²⁹⁰ Amis’s reliance on *The Nazi Doctors* has been pointed out by many critics and for Vice it is a crucial example of intertextuality, itself a central aspect of Holocaust fiction. Vice emphasises the specific ways in which Amis utilises information from Lifton’s book and how *Time’s Arrow* reformulates historical reality into a highly formalised postmodern fictional narrative. Furthermore, Vice is especially interested in the manner of Amis’s use and reconfiguration of two important theories of Lifton’s surrounding the doctors who worked in the camps. The first is a perceived sense of an individual’s dissociated self, a ‘split’ or second self, constructed in order to preserve the individual psyche; hence the two selves, the Auschwitz self and the non-Auschwitz self, remain separate. This ‘doubling’ process is used alongside a second coping strategy, that of ‘numbing’, in which the individual, invariably in testimony, appears to have buried or even banished guilt and responsibility for their actions.

These theories that seek to ‘explain’ the behaviour of doctors and medical staff in Auschwitz and other camps have been highly influential since the publication of Lifton’s study. Amis’s novel owes much of its narrative power – along with its reversed chronology²⁹¹ – to these interpretations of psychological denial. The schizophrenic self of

²⁹⁰ In an interview with Jonathan Noakes in *Martin Amis: The Essential Guide* (London: Vintage, 2003), Amis talks about his motivation for writing about the Holocaust: ‘You don’t, you shouldn’t go there if you don’t want to go there, but I think it would be unusual for a writer placed as we are now are at the beginning of this new century not to be interested in extreme human behaviour. It’s one of the great mysteries, isn’t it? The enormous band of human behaviour – that we can produce a Shakespeare and a Hitler. You do not see such contrasts in the animal kingdom ... Human beings effloresce in incredibly different directions and degrees, and I don’t see how you could fail to be interested in that. It is all telling you what it is to be human, and that is the subject’. (p. 24)

²⁹¹ Amis has evoked the concept of reversed time in an earlier short story, ‘Bujak and the Strong Force or God’s Dice’ (pp. 25-48) in *Einstein’s Monsters* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1987; repr. Penguin, 1987). At the end of the story the narrator, Samson, discusses another character, Bujak’s, theories concerning matter

Odilo Unverdorben is the unnamed narrator who follows Unverdorben from death in the United States through to being a doctor alongside Mengele in Auschwitz. This helpless 'passenger' witnesses his/her 'host's' life from 'inside'. The narrator resembles Unverdorben's 'soul' or conscience. This 'conscience' is suppressed and remains unheeded throughout the novel as the narrative and all consequent human actions are reversed and the reader is taken back inexorably to Auschwitz. Amis's literary strategy of splitting his narrator from the central character achieves a dramatic representation of this phenomenon. And given the narrator's incredulity and confusion towards Unverdorben's actions – until 'they' reach Auschwitz itself – *Time's Arrow* also suggests the numbed conscience familiar from many perpetrator testimonies. The reversed chronology (influenced by intertexts such as *Slaughterhouse 5* by Kurt Vonnegut²⁹²) radically changes the world before Auschwitz and, most problematically, during Auschwitz.

It is this aspect of *Time's Arrow*, the chapter entitled 'Here there is no why' (pp. 124-45) that is set in Auschwitz, which will form the subsequent analysis. Amis's decision to go 'inside' the camps and describe the various killing processes is both an unusual and a controversial one. Many Holocaust novels refrain from explicitly describing such violence: Thomas's *Pictures at an Exhibition* being a notable and problematic exception.²⁹³ As was noted with Justin Cartwright's *Masai Dreaming*, for example, the very idea of 'going through the gates' becomes part of the novel's discussion of Holocaust representation. Curtiz, that novel's central protagonist, is increasingly anxious not to follow Claudia into Auschwitz. He implies that there are things – obscene events, acts of barbarity, moments of intense cruelty – which simply cannot be contained within one's imagination, let alone a mainstream Hollywood film. There are many critics who have contemplated the relationship between aesthetic forms

in the universe: 'Einsteinian to the end, Bujak was an Oscillationist, claiming that the Big Bang will forever alternate with the Big Crunch, that the universe would expand only until unanimous gravity called it back to start again. At that moment, with the cosmos turning on its hinges, light would begin to travel backward, received by the stars and pouring from our human eyes. If, and I can't believe it, time would also be reversed, as Bujak maintained (will we move backward too? will we have any say in things?), then this moment as I shake his hand shall be the start of my story, his story, our story, and we will slip downtime of each other's lives [...]'. (EM: p. 47)

²⁹² Amis alludes to a 'certain paragraph – a famous one' (TA: p. 175) in Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse 5* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970; repr. Panther, 1972). Billy Pilgrim, the novel's central protagonist, comes 'slightly unstuck in time' and watches a film of American bombers in World War II backwards: 'American planes, full of holes and wounded men and corpses flew off backwards from an airfield in England. Over France, a few German fighter planes flew at them backwards, sucked bullets and shell fragments from some of the planes and crewmen. They did the same for wrecked American bombers on the ground, and those planes flew up backwards to join the formation'. (p. 54)

²⁹³ See chapter seven of the present thesis for more on *Pictures at an Exhibition*.

and the representation of Auschwitz. Lawrence L. Langer, for example, underlines this fundamental problem:

We must confront it [Auschwitz] on *its* terms, not ours, leaving behind traditional casts of characters [...] In our search for the *meaning* of Auschwitz, to our dismay, we meet often only its absence; what we have to forgo to establish contact with such barren terrain is the theme that absorbs most writers who venture into it.²⁹⁴

The literature that Langer gestures towards, with its generic innovation and its proximity to an 'absence', a 'barren terrain' that challenges all previously identified aesthetic forms, suggests texts that at the very least acknowledge the lacuna of Auschwitz. The recognition of a caesura in representing Auschwitz recalls David Patterson's writing about the significance of silence: '[T]he novelist struggles to impart a voice to silence – and to hear a voice from within that silence. In the Holocaust novel silence is always a character, and the word is always a subject matter'.²⁹⁵

It is revealing to see how Amis's *Time's Arrow* reflects Langer's view of a Holocaust literature that describes Auschwitz in ways that articulate the very 'impossibility' of doing so. Langer offers a caveat to this sense of newly created forms in that such a text should not dwindle into 'merely a game with ideas'.²⁹⁶ Amis's novel has been interpreted as being a successful literary experiment that articulates and dramatises some of the theoretical problems inherent in the representation of Auschwitz. But it has also been criticised for not being a Holocaust novel at all, being rather, a postmodern literary exercise that 'uses' the Holocaust. Given Amis's decision to 'go through the gates' and describe events that the majority of Holocaust novels turn away from, these are controversies that have particular resonance. *Time's Arrow* displays a highly experimental narrative strategy, but how successfully do these formal decisions evoke the 'absence' that is Auschwitz? And furthermore, how do such aesthetic innovations change or even distort the truth of the industrial killing process: in positive transformative ways or negative reductive ways?

Amis's subtitle for *Time's Arrow* is 'The Nature of the Offence', a phrase written by Primo Levi that underlines Amis's authorial intentions to understand the motivations

²⁹⁴ Lawrence L. Langer, 'The Literature of Auschwitz' in *Admitting the Holocaust: Collected Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 90.

²⁹⁵ David Patterson, *The Shriek of Silence: A Phenomenology of the Holocaust Novel* (Lexington [US]: University Press of Kentucky, 1992), p. 5.

²⁹⁶ Langer, pp. 92-3.

behind the Holocaust.²⁹⁷ Aside from Levi representing an intertext for Amis, this quotation suggests another possible reading of the novel. The central conceit of time's arrow being figuratively thrown backwards is underlined by an investigation into why the Holocaust happened. This effort at ethical interpretation is vindicated at the very end of the novel in Amis's 'Afterword':

The offence was unique, not in its cruelty, nor in its cowardice, but in its style – in its combination of the atavistic and the modern. It was, at once, reptilian and 'logistical'. And although the offence was not definingly German, its style was. The National Socialists found the core of the reptile brain, and built an autobahn that went there. Built for speed and safety, built to endure for a thousand years, the *Reichsautobahnen*, if you remember, were also designed to conform to the landscape, harmoniously, like a garden path. (TA: p. 176)

The 'nature of the offence' is 'reptilian' and 'atavistic', cruel and cowardly, but it is also 'modern' and technologically innovative. There is a play on the word 'nature': the 'nature' of the Nazi mind that is corrupt, deluded and aggressive compared and contrasted with the expansionist industrialised efforts to control and reign over 'Nature'. This Romantic concept of 'Nature' is a trope used throughout the novel as a moral counterpoint to the mechanised death factories of Auschwitz. Amis argues that the 'nature of the offence' is comprehensible and available for subsequent generations to understand. Furthermore, given that the novel is written from the perspective of a perpetrator, or at the very least a perpetrator's 'hidden' conscience, *Time's Arrow* explores the 'nature' of what might be thought of as the inexplicable 'other' that is the split Nazi mind.

'Here there is no why' describes in vivid detail a number of scenes that are elsewhere only alluded to or described in 'factual' (historical) language or placed within figurative or metaphorical rhetoric.²⁹⁸ A defence against charges of voyeurism or bad taste is that such scenes are written 'backwards'. Images that might have been 'unbearable' in ethical or even visceral terms have arguably a changed impact on the reader. As with the rest of the novel, one has to 'turn' the scene around in order for it to make sense. A consequence of this engagement is to be forced into bringing an amount

²⁹⁷ See Chapter One of Levi's *The Drowned and the Saved* (London: Michael Joseph, 1988; repr. Sphere, 1989) which is entitled 'The Memory of the Offence' (pp. 11-21).

²⁹⁸ See Christopher R Browning, 'German Memory, Judicial Interrogation, and Historical Reconstruction: Writing Perpetrator History from Postwar Testimony' (pp. 22-36) in Friedlander, S, ed, (1992).

of prior knowledge to the camp sequence. Amis's structural reversal demands that the novel's uncomprehending narrator only begins to 'understand' the world when Unverdorben arrives at Auschwitz. Unverdorben's pre-war role as a doctor has meant he has caused people harm, as opposed to when he is in Auschwitz, he 'cures' patients and brings them back to life. This echoes many perpetrator testimonies that preface responsibility to superiors, a commitment to 'getting the job done', and even a muted but still tangible pride in the running of the camps as reasons for their behaviour. *Time's Arrow* parodies the perpetrator testimony that is invariably fashioned from an inability to fully confront decisions and actions taken in the camps. But it also forces the reader to re-configure the events that occurred in the Auschwitz universe.

Langer's cautionary reminder that Holocaust writing can potentially drift into 'merely a game with ideas' is, to some degree, resisted by Amis's adherence to the facts (which he has gleaned from the sources that he assiduously cites at the end of the book). John A. Dern, who sees the text as being an 'anti-novel' rather than a Holocaust novel, argues that *Time's Arrow* just 'happens to include one of humanity's greatest failures. The Holocaust as a subject is subordinate to the inversion [of time] itself'.²⁹⁹ Inga Clendinnen, with slightly different emphasis, writes that *Time's Arrow* succeeds in its representation of Auschwitz because it moves 'skimmingly through the swift manipulation of familiar clusters of icons',³⁰⁰ these icons – whose 'mythic potency' is found in much of British Holocaust fiction – do not alter the fact that Amis represents acts, events and behaviour mostly absent from Holocaust fiction. Clendinnen's reservations, for example, surrounding 'Daddy'³⁰¹ by Sylvia Plath and the 'Babi Yar' episode in Thomas's *The White Hotel*, deal with the poem's incommensurate comparison between personal suffering and mass murder and Thomas's 'exploitative' appropriation of survivor testimony. Clendinnen valorises what she refers to as texts that display a 'glancing reference to an existing bank of ideas, images and sentiments' or work simply by 'indirection'.³⁰² Clendinnen considers Amis's text to be one that achieves its effects through tropes of 'invocation' and 'indirection'. Amis's invocation of many canonical Holocaust texts confirms Clendinnen's analysis, but given *Time's Arrow's* Auschwitz

²⁹⁹ John A. Dern, *Martians, Monsters & Madonna: Fiction & Form in the World of Martin Amis* (New York [US]: Peter Lang Publishing, 2000), p. 128.

³⁰⁰ Clendinnen, (2002), p. 165.

³⁰¹ Plath's poem is discussed in Young (1988), pp. 117-33. There are two other 'Holocaust' poems in Plath's oeuvre, 'Lady Lazarus' and 'Mary's Song'.

³⁰² Ibid, p. 164 – 5.

chapter, a legitimate concern remains as to how 'indirect' the novel's gaze is in relation to brutality and atrocity.

Stephen Baker has suggested that although Amis does risk reducing Auschwitz to a 'textual predicament', ultimately the reversed narrative reflects and comments upon Nazi justification for war crimes.³⁰³ The fact that the novel's narrator is unable to articulate (or even acknowledge) a clear ethical evaluation of Unverdorben's actions seems to substantiate this reading of Amis's text – and underlines Clendinnen's view of the novel's 'indirection'. But in another way, as Baker endorses, Amis's representation of Auschwitz is, fundamentally, a narrative distortion of history. Given the intense pressure writers feel to ensure that their imaginative renderings of the Holocaust have a basis in the facts of the historical events, Amis would appear to have taken a huge ethical risk. But, given the inevitable and intended narrative distortions of Amis's prose, what is actually described is historically accurate and highly detailed. The facts of the killing processes are authentically researched, yet the reader's response to them has been problematised by the altered temporality. The narrator expresses the liberating effects of this inverted world, and these reflect a large proportion of perpetrator and bystander testimony. But the reader who approaches the text with an amount of historical information about the killing reads against the narrator's witnessing and, ideally, is forced to confront the horror of the Auschwitz experience anew.

Baker confirms this reading of *Time's Arrow* when he writes that, despite being a postmodern text, the novel argues against postmodern theories of history as textuality. Amis achieves this, Baker asserts, through recognition that there does indeed exist a reality outside of the text. The 'playful regurgitation of the past' familiar from many postmodern and historiographic metafiction is contested by Amis who gestures towards 'an identifiable, external reality which art transforms'.³⁰⁴ In other words, *Time's Arrow* makes an assertion about textuality and reality that appears un-postmodern – that real history (people, events, social change) exist outside of and beyond the inevitable but not final textuality of history. Hence, in 'Here there is no why', Amis's art – his literary strategy of reversed chronology and his highly stylised figurative language – 'transforms' the reality of Auschwitz. Still, the effect of these literary and ethical decisions remains unclear. If Amis does 'transform' real history, how does such a transformation render the reality of Auschwitz given Amis's attention to historical fact? Or, as James E. Young

³⁰³ Baker, (2000), pp. 145-6.

³⁰⁴ Ibid, p. 149.

writes, how 'wary of the potential displacement of hard history by its novelistic versions',³⁰⁵ does one have to be when reading about the gassing process at Auschwitz? A closer reading of the Auschwitz chapter in *Time's Arrow* will open up this and other questions surrounding the representation of such horror.

Unverdorben's entrance into Auschwitz is, in actuality, a return. This return reminds the reader of what was, in normal chronology, his escape:

Beyond the southern boundary of the Lager, in a roofless barn, I slipped out of our coarse travelling clothes, the fleece-lined jacket, the peaked cap, the pistol. The motorbike I found earlier, wedged into a ditch. Oh how I soared out of there, with what vaulting eagerness, what daring. (TA: p. 124)

The narrator, in the camp, identifies much more with Unverdorben – the use of the personal pronoun signifying a greater sense of empathy and a joining together of the dissociated selves. This unification is inspired by what Unverdorben's parasite consciousness sees as the 'preternatural purpose' of the Nazis that is summed up by the 'gaping universe' (TA: p. 126) of Auschwitz. This 'purpose' is to 'dream a race', to 'make a people from the weather' with 'gas, with electricity, with shit, with fire'. (TA: p. 128) Death and torture, in the 'real time' of Auschwitz, in the logic of reversed time, are interpreted as benign, even celebratory acts of creation. Amis echoes the generic Nazi testimony that insists not only upon innocence and ignorance of what went on but also a justification for the 'Final Solution'. The casual tone of the narrator's voice also suggests an ethical distancing, or more accurately, an ethical misreading of events. This laconic voice describes the most harrowing abuses in Auschwitz in an awe-struck, 'childish', tone of voice. The disparity between the ingenuous voice and the workings of the camp situates *Time's Arrow* in a lineage of Holocaust fictions that use the 'child's' perspective.³⁰⁶

In other words, Amis's Holocaust novel, like other Holocaust fictions, strives to achieve something of what James E. Young refers to as 'documentary authority'.³⁰⁷ This 'authority' comes from a variety of sources. Amis's citing of canonical texts is one way of establishing a documentary integrity. Also the voice of the novel's narrator mirrors (and parodies) the tone of the generic Nazi testimony that is coloured by 'innocence',

³⁰⁵ Young, (1988), p. 6.

³⁰⁶ See Andrea Ritter, 'The Holocaust as Seen through the Eyes of Children (pp. 83-96), in Leak, Paizis, eds, (2000).

³⁰⁷ Young, p. 53.

denial and a lack of ethical reasoning. Another way of achieving this authority is, as Clendinnen suggests, a judicious use of icons, words, phrases and images that have, over the years, been suffused with meaning in the context of the Holocaust. *Time's Arrow*, unlike, say, Keneally's *Schindler's Ark*, is not a work of 'documentary fiction', though. Amis's novel is a piece of fabulation and imagination. Indeed, its postmodern 'playfulness' – the novel is at times, especially in the early part of the narrative set in the United States, surreal and humorous – might militate against its 'documentary authority'. But Ann Parry argues that it is precisely because of Amis's reversed chronology which confirms *Time's Arrow*'s 'articulation of the caesura' of Auschwitz. This forces the reader into a 'new way of thinking' because the 'traditional metaphysical frame is disrupted'.³⁰⁸ Amis describes events based on documentary evidence but through the prism of the reversed chronology, one that necessarily produces irony. How this ironic disparity forces the reader into a 'new way of thinking' about the killing process in the death camps will form the subsequent analysis of the Auschwitz chapter.

What are the effects of Amis's complex re-writing of these 'unspeakable' events? A striking example occurs early on when the gassing process is described. The ovens firstly are compared to a 'tragically burly insect eight feet tall and made out of rust'. (TA: p. 129) Certainly there are allusions to the racial epithets and ideological comparisons made between Jews and insects and vermin. There may be also a reference to Kafka's short story, 'Metamorphosis', that can be read as an allegory of how Jews are reduced to little more than bugs.³⁰⁹ But there is also a sense of Amis writing 'beyond' the reality of the ovens – his simile departs from the stark horror of the crematoria. The fact of being 'inside' Auschwitz might confront the writer with sufficient problems of representation. But Amis's stylised language seeks to transform the real, and hence risks accusations of 'distorting' the thing itself (and the act that it signifies). The next rhetorical question that follows the insect simile arguably reinforces Amis's implied efforts to 're-imagine' the

³⁰⁸ Ann Parry, 'The caesura of the Holocaust in Martin Amis's *Time's Arrow* and Bernhard Schlink's *The Reader*' (pp. 249-67) in *Journal of European Studies*, xxix (1999), p. 254.

³⁰⁹ Many critics have read Kafka's work in relation to the Holocaust. Despite Kafka's death in 1924, some critics have seen allegorical and premonitory tropes in his writing, perhaps especially in the short story 'Metamorphosis'. In a footnote, for example, in *History and Memory after Auschwitz* (1998), Dominick LaCapra describes the Nazi ideological impulse towards thinking of the killing of the Jews as 'pest control'. Nazi dehumanising of the Jews caused them to be thought of as 'vermin'. LaCapra adds that Kafka's story 'offers in some small way an uncanny prefiguration of these problems' (p.29n). Schwarz, (2000), offers comparisons between Kafka and Aharon Appelfeld's *Badenheim 1939* (pp. 249-70). Schwarz goes on to argue that one of the central intertexts in Art Spiegelman's *Maus* is Kafka's 'Metamorphosis' (p. 292). In Bloom, ed, Alvin H Rosenfeld writes of Kafka's proleptic 'relationship' to the Holocaust in 'The Problematics of Holocaust Literature', pp. 32-4.

horror of the crematoria: 'Who would want to cook with an oven such as this?' The narrator's striking naïveté and childlike innocence forces the reader into a position of reading against such a question. The reader knows precisely who would use such ovens and what those ovens were being used for. Also, the way in which the insect simile recalls both the racist language of the Nazis and draws the reader into an act of comparison – bluntly, do the ovens resemble a 'tragically burly insect' – that should, ideally, cause a 'return' to images of the Auschwitz ovens.

Amis situates the narrator, who is witnessing these events 'inside' Unverdorben, directly 'outside' the gas chamber. Again, one must stress how unusual and controversial an aesthetic/ethical decision this is. A defence of any accusation of describing the 'indescribable' in Amis's novel is that the chronology is reversed and hence such terrifying and traumatic events are made more 'bearable' to read. But there remains the persistent sense of an 'excess' that cannot be spoken (or more accurately represented). For example, the narrator describes events looking through a 'viewing slit':

There was usually a long wait while the gas was invisibly introduced by the ventilation grilles. The dead look so dead. Dead bodies have their dead body language. It says nothing. I always felt a gorgeous relief at the moment of the first stirring. Then it was ugly again. Well, we cry and twist and are naked at both ends of life. We cry at both ends of life, while the doctor watches. It was I, Odilo Unverdorben, who personally removed the pellets of Zyklon B and entrusted them to the pharmacist in his white coat. (TA: p. 129)

This description of one of the central traumatic events of the Holocaust reconfigures the process of death as a process of creation. The 'gorgeous relief' that the narrator experiences when he/she witnesses the victims' 're-births' parallels similar feelings of celebration and justification articulated by Nazi guards. What was in reality an industrial process of death is interpreted as a wondrous, magical, act of life giving. This satirises Nazi testimony that sees the murder of tens of thousands of people as a necessary, even merciful act of 'cleansing'. This aspect of the narrator's awed rhetoric echoes Peter Haidu's analysis of Himmler's infamous speech at Posen that 'appeals' to a 'collectivity driven by faith and a sense of mission' that finally invokes 'the necessary sacrifice they all make to higher ideals'.³¹⁰ The narrator speaks of Auschwitz in precisely this register

³¹⁰ Peter Haidu, 'The Dialectics of Unspeakability: Language, Silence, and the Narratives of Desubjectification' (pp. 277-99) in Friedlander (1992), p. 285.

of quasi-religious rhetoric and self-sacrifice. Furthermore the introduction of Zyklon B³¹¹ into the gas chambers subsequently becomes a benign, charitable act. Turned back round to real time the reader understands that Unverdorben is intimately involved in the killing process. Also the tone of the narrator parodies Nazi testimony: Haidu argues that, for example, Himmler's speech is in itself a parody of Enlightenment 'rationality', 'morality' and 'universalizing assumptions'.³¹²

To return to Hartman's suggestion that there is always 'something' that remains outside of Holocaust representation, one can ask of Amis's description of the gassing process what it cannot contain in its literary style and rhetoric. Amis's use of intertextuality, figurative language, simile, irony and reversed chronology undoubtedly de-familiarises and makes 'alien' the representation of real events. But one might argue that the process of death in Auschwitz is already 'alien' to most, and hence is de-familiarised in the collective consciousness. This may well be linked to a sense that what actually happened in the gas chambers is unimaginable in the context that many, if not most people, 'know' what happened in Auschwitz but would prefer not to confront the details of death. Amis's rendering of the gassing process can be seen as both a 'looking away', it uses many literary devices that 'depart' from strict notions of reality, and an unflinching 'witnessing' of what remains a largely un-fictionalised set of events. Amis's postmodern literary strategies of what is represented and what is not represented suggest further ethical and epistemological questions.

Saul Friedlander raises the issue of postmodernism's relationship to the Holocaust, a crucial factor in an analysis of *Time's Arrow*. Friedlander sees that postmodernist challenges to traditional modes of representation of the Holocaust have emphasised 'ideological ambiguity and aesthetic experimentation'.³¹³ Furthermore,

postmodern thought's rejection of the possibility of identifying some stable reality or truth beyond the constant polysemy and self-referentiality of linguistic constructs challenges the need to establish the realities and the truths of the Holocaust.³¹⁴

³¹¹ In Dear & Foot (2001): 'Zyklon-B was the trade name in Germany for prussic acid when used as a commercial pesticide. After successful experiments were carried out on Soviet prisoners-of-war in Auschwitz in August 1941 it was employed in the gas chambers of the Nazi death camps, though not in those of operation Reinhard.' (p. 1018)

³¹² Ibid, p. 293.

³¹³ Friedlander, p. 4.

³¹⁴ Ibid, pp. 4-5.

Postmodern 'openness' and its resistance to 'decisive statements' suggests that 'even the most precise historical renditions of the Shoah contain an opaqueness at the core which confronts traditional historical narrative'.³¹⁵ *Time's Arrow*, as Stephen Baker has argued, is an ambivalent example of postmodern fiction. On the one hand it self-consciously displays both 'ideological ambiguity and aesthetic experimentation'. Amis's formal experimentation articulates the novel's ideological ambiguity – for example its reversed chronology exemplifying a postmodern suspicion of the linear or conventions of the teleological structure. But one can sense, on the other hand, a tension in Amis's novel regarding the postmodern orthodoxy of destabilising notions of a historical 'truth' or 'reality' that reside beneath or even beyond representation. This tension can, in part, be understood as being informed by the author's choice of subject matter.

To put these initial interpretations in a slightly different context: *Time's Arrow's* status as a paradigmatic postmodern novel can be compared with Linda Hutcheon's highly influential writing on what she calls the 'postmodern ironic rethinking of history'.³¹⁶ In her definition of 'historiographic metafiction', Hutcheon argues that novels such as Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, E.L. Doctorow's *Ragtime* and John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* incorporate 'theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs', and hence provide 'the grounds for its [the genre's] rethinking and reworking of the forms and contents of the past'.³¹⁷ *Time's Arrow* belongs to this genre of recent and contemporary historical writing. Amis's novel relies upon a bleak, negative irony to achieve its dramatic effect, and in many ways, *Time's Arrow* does rethink and rework the forms and contents of history. But one might argue that recent discourses surrounding the representation of the Holocaust radically alter and even challenge these postmodern theories that have achieved cultural orthodoxy. In other words, for all the 'fiction' of the temporal schema, nothing is changed when the novel arrives at Auschwitz. Amis inverts conventional theories of apprehending the historical whilst at the same time implicitly demanding that the reality of the murder of the Jews remains at the centre of his narrative. The novel's irony is used to reveal the facts beneath the fabulatory, non-realist surface. In this regard, *Time's Arrow* is an unusual example of

³¹⁵ Ibid, p. 5.

³¹⁶ Hutcheon, (1988), p. 5.

³¹⁷ Ibid, p. 303.

Hutcheon's formulation of postmodern historical fiction: it adheres to and subverts the genre.

Friedlander goes on to argue that it is the Holocaust that 'allows postmodernist thinking to question the validity of any totalizing view of history, or any reference to a definable metadiscourse, thus opening the way for a multiplicity of equally valid approaches'.³¹⁸ One can see immediately the perilous position this view of history might conceivably suggest: namely, a relativist position that might lead towards a distorting of the historical facts of the Holocaust and, even further, a denial of them. This is because of the proliferation of victim, perpetrator and bystander voices that are 'fundamentally heterogeneous and mutually exclusive'. In addition to this mass of contradictory and competing points-of-view, Friedlander raises Lyotard's metaphor of an earthquake so immense that all instruments capable of measuring it are destroyed. Something would be felt – tremors, for want of a better phrase – that could not be articulated or even represented. Friedlander sees this as being the 'something which should be able to be put into phrases [but] cannot be phrased in the acceptable idioms'. He summarises this position:

Thus on the one hand, our traditional categories of conceptualization and representation may well be insufficient, our language itself problematic. On the other hand, in the face of these events we feel the need of some stable narration; a boundless field of possible discourses raises the issue of limits with particular stringency.³¹⁹

Like many other contemporary historical novels, and by definition all historiographic metafiction, *Time's Arrow* does suggest an anti-totalising view of the past. The sense of the narrator being minute and passive, a helpless observer of the 'flow' of history, suggests the marginalised and powerless 'ordinary' individual observing history from the margins (whilst never fully comprehending it). This poignant position is problematised by the narrator's growing faith in the 'logic' of Auschwitz and the concomitant feeling of complicity and collusion. This implies an ethical ambivalence in Amis's text: poignancy arises because of the narrator's helplessness, but this is undermined by the recognition that Unverdorben finally finds himself 'at home' and useful in the camp environment. The narrator witnesses the world and Unverdorben's various roles in it from inside and is powerless to change the direction of time's arrow.

³¹⁸ Ibid, p. 5.

But Amis emphasises the fact that the narrator is only too willing to suspend his/her doubts – the world ‘makes sense’ in Auschwitz, and despite some minor reservations the narrator accepts the ‘good’ of the death camp in similar ways to, say, Galewski in *Pictures at an Exhibition*.

Amis undermines preconceptions about history and historical metadiscourses. Teleological notions of history’s ‘progression’ are parodied through the reversed chronology, but Amis further engages with a particular, partial and highly controversial view of history – that of the perpetrator testimony. The irony that the text inevitably creates, a distance between what is said and the reader’s prior knowledge of historical events, calls to attention the ways in which real perpetrators (and bystanders) construct excuses and denials. More pertinent still is that such individuals seek to ‘turn around’ – or even to ‘reverse’ – what actually happened, fictionalising and fabricating events to placate contemporary (sometimes judicial) judgement. Furthermore, testimony – and by extension first-person narration – is potentially unreliable, distorted and necessarily incomplete.³²⁰ Amis’s split narrator suggests the fragmented view of the past that such individuals often express out of a necessity to protect themselves from censure and even prosecution. This ‘splitting’ recalls Lifton’s influential theory of two separate ‘selves’ that he proposes was a coping strategy for doctors working in Auschwitz.

Lifton’s theory influenced Amis’s view of the novels’ protagonist(s). He speaks of his discovery of Lifton’s *The Nazi Doctors* in an interview quoted in Sue Vice’s *Holocaust Fiction*. He sees that the Auschwitz doctor was ‘the absolute example of the inverted world’ and that they ‘went, almost overnight, from healing to killing’.³²¹ Given Amis’s interest in split selves, doubles and twins in his previous fiction, it is unsurprising that Lifton’s major theorising surrounding the Nazi doctors was particularly resonant.³²² As Vice points out, in the Auschwitz chapter in particular, Amis is heavily reliant upon

³¹⁹ Ibid, p. 5.

³²⁰ A major aspect of Amis’s fiction has been his use of first-person narration and also competing and contradictory first-person narration. For example, Amis’s most lauded novel, *Money* (1984), is written from the point-of-view, and in the distinctive voice of a character called John Self. Much of the energy and satirical humour can be found in Self’s heavily Americanised cadences. In *Night Train* (1997), the narrative is told from the point-of-view and in the hard-boiled style of an American female police officer. *Success* (1978) is told between two competing voices that give two different versions of events, neither of which can, for the most part, be trusted. In this context of Amis’s oeuvre, *Time’s Arrow* is part of this concern to have the novels, in a sense, spoken to the reader. In one reading of the text, there is indeed a split between the confiding and intimate voice of the narrator and the ‘voice’ of Unverdorben, which can be read as a split between the interior voice and the exterior voice.

³²¹ Vice, p. 11.

Lifton's work. But more than a source of information, Lifton's work provides Amis with powerful theories of 'psychic numbing' and 'doubling'.³²³ The presence of doctors in the camps emphasises the 'malign logic of the healing-killing paradox'.³²⁴ There existed a 'moral reversal of healing and killing' that was intimately linked with 'the internal splitting of the subject'.³²⁵ Vice sees Amis's reliance upon Lifton's text, and its persuasive 'explanations' of the paradoxical figure of the Nazi doctor, as expressing a 'symmetry of literary form and historical content'.³²⁶ Certainly, no other British Holocaust fiction relies so heavily upon an historical intertext, with the possible exception of *Pictures at an Exhibition* and its relationship with Edvard Munch's paintings. Jonathan Culler writes that intertextuality is 'a foregrounding of aspects of language use and questions about representation'.³²⁷ Amis's intertextuality is a 'foregrounding' of historical and psychological research into the Nazi doctor's mind that finds an 'alternative' expression in the fictional recreations of the novel.

Amis's description of the gassing process and other aspects of the Nazi regime are transformed by the reversing of time. The stealing of gold from Jewish prisoners is turned into another act of benevolence: 'I *knew* my gold had a sacred efficacy. All those years I amassed it, and polished it with my mind: for the Jews' teeth'. (TA: p. 130) The pillaging of Jewish belongings is similarly 'turned' into acts of kindness and courtesy by the Reich Youth Leadership and private German companies. It is in these descriptions that Amis's novel most fully resembles a Nazi testimony. The cruel and mocking irony, for example, of the infamous sign '*Arbeit Macht Frei*' in the 'upside down' logic of *Time's Arrow* is made to appear to come true. Additionally, the narrator, in a quasi-religious rapture, interprets the image of prisoners bending their necks back to look up at the sky. In the real time of Auschwitz, one imagines the prisoners looking up at the sky in a gesture of existential and spiritual questioning – to put it informally, *Where is God?* Or, the prisoners are looking up to the sky where smoke is coming out of crematorium chimneys. In the 'Nazified' perceptions of the narrator this tragic image's logic is again turned around:

³²² Lawrence L Langer in 'Remembering Survival' in Hartman, (1994) writes that Lifton's analysis is an example of 'our need to reduce chaos to at least an intellectual order', and that this compulsion 'sometimes drives us to find explanations that are more convenient than accurate'. (p. 79)

³²³ Vice, p. 26.

³²⁴ Ibid, pp. 30-1.

³²⁵ Ibid, p. 34.

³²⁶ Ibid, p. 34.

There they go, to the day's work, with their heads bent back. I was puzzled at first but now I know why they do it, why they stretch their throats like that. They are looking for the souls of their mothers and their fathers, their women and their children, gathering in the heavens – awaiting human form, and union. (TA: p. 131)

This disturbing sense of harmony and union that the narrator discerns in Auschwitz is emphasised when the selection process is seen as a place where people are organised into marriages³²⁸ and reunions, and the narrator's tone of pride in these 'arrangements' is palpable:

When the families coalesced, how their hands and eyes would plead for one another, under our indulgent gaze. We toasted them far into the night. One guard, his knees bent and swaying, played an accordion. Actually we all drank like fiends. The stag party on the ramp, and the *Kapos*, like the groom's best friends, shoving the man into the waiting cart – freshly sprayed with trash and shit – for the journey home. (TA: p. 132)

Amis's ironic language pushes such a metaphor to the limits of Friedlander's suggestion of a need for 'some stable narration' and stretches the 'particular stringency' of limits he reads in Holocaust representation. The distance between the narrator's view of events and the reader's historical knowledge creates negative irony. Rather than being dragged from the trains, the prisoners 'return' from the camp and 'coalesce' as opposed to being torn away from each other. The 'indulgent gaze' that the narrator interprets as kindly and protective is in fact one of callousness. Such indifference is partly fuelled by alcohol – the narrator interprets this as being part of a 'stag party', but it was a factor in 'numbing' the guards and officials from confronting their crimes. A 'waiting cart' is there to take the prisoners away rather than bring them to Auschwitz. The 'trash and shit' is seen as inverted confetti. The evocation of a series of wedding ceremonies – with connotations of celebration, romantic fulfilment and social ceremony – is set against what might be seen as its precise polar opposite: the selection process on the ramps of Auschwitz. The 'stable narration' that one might desire in a Holocaust fiction is thus provided by the historical

³²⁷ Culler, *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 35.

³²⁸ Amis's evocation of weddings in the death camps echoes the opening pages of Charlotte Delbo's memoirs of Auschwitz collected in *Auschwitz and After* (1995). Delbo describes the many different types of people who have arrived from all over Europe at the camps. She writes, '[T]here are married couples who stepped out of the synagogue the bride all in white wrapped in her veil wrinkled from having slept on the floor of the cattle car/the bridegroom in black wearing a top hat his gloves soiled/parents and guests, women holding pearl-embroidered handbags/all of them regretting they could not have stopped home to change into something less dainty'. (p. 6)

knowledge that Amis assumes a reader will bring to such descriptions. It is the 'exalted' nature of a wedding that provides the scene, in the world of Auschwitz, with a grotesque irony.

Given Amis's adherence to the historical facts of the gassing process, of the stealing of prisoners' belongings and of the selections, Friedlander's argument for the 'particular stringency' of limits inherent in Holocaust representation appears to be upheld by Amis's literary strategies. In fact, one might argue for a binary quality to Amis's writing on Auschwitz, binary meant in the sense that the intertextual research that represents the historical facts of the camps is set in opposition to the flamboyance of Amis's language and prose style. As the Auschwitz chapter goes on, Amis's narrator begins to describe the illogic of the camp in increasingly 'high' language. This is also an aspect of what Ann Parry sees as Unverdorben's attempt to 'go beyond the limits of the human and assume a divine power'.³²⁹ Amis utilises a familiar satirical strategy of creating an opposition between 'low' and 'high', seen most clearly and most forcefully when the narrator describes the Nazi 'creative' powers:

The Auschwitz universe, it had to be allowed, was fiercely coprocentric. It was *made* of shit. In the early months I still had my natural aversion to overcome, before I understood the fundamental strangeness of the process of fruition. Enlightenment was urged on me the day I saw the old Jew float to the surface of the deep latrine, how he splashed and struggled into life, and was hoisted out by the jubilant guards, his clothes cleansed by the mire. Then they put his beard back on. (TA: p. 132)

The narrator has become all but synonymous with Unverdorben by this stage. Amis pointedly uses a number of troubling facts about Auschwitz and describes them in the quasi-spiritual language of the Nazis. Excrement is interpreted as being the very force that 'gives' life, the 'process of fruition'. An ironic allusion to the Enlightenment leads the reader into returning images of intense humiliation and abuse to 'normal' time. The 'old Jew' is thus 'cleansed' in the eyes of the now completely 'Nazified' narrator.

Similarly, when Mengele's³³⁰ experiments are described they are written about in terms of being 'efficient and humane'; (TA: p. 136) Auschwitz is a 'human enterprise'

³²⁹ Ann Parry, 'The caesura of the Holocaust in Martin Amis's *Time's Arrow* and Bernhard Schlink's *The Reader*' (p. 256) in *Journal of European Studies*, 29(3), 1999, pp. 249-67.

³³⁰ Robert S. Wistrich in *Hitler and the Holocaust* (2002) writes of Josef Mengele: '[He] used Auschwitz inmates as guinea pigs for what he believed was pioneering scientific research into presumed racial differences and physical abnormalities. People afflicted with any sort of deformity would be killed for him, on his orders, upon their arrival in the camp, to provide new material for his studies ... He personally killed

(TA: p. 139); and as time goes backward the narrator senses a 'general burgeoning of confidence and well-being'. (TA: p. 141) Scientific 'progress' – a discourse that was used as a justification for the experiments carried out on prisoners in Auschwitz – is dramatised in the reversed trajectory of the narrative. Mengele is rendered in this context in a manner that echoes many Nazi interpretations of medical experiments done in the camp:

As to the so-called 'experimental' operations of 'Uncle Pepi': *he* had a success rate that approached – and quite possibly attained – 100 per cent. A shockingly inflamed eyeball at once rectified by a single injection. Innumerable ovaries and testes seamlessly grafted into place. Women went out of that lab looking twenty years younger. (TA: p. 143)

The monstrosity of Mengele's experiments and his overturning of the Hippocratic oath are seen as examples of medical genius and generosity of spirit. Indeed, the narrator senses that such efforts are going largely unrecognised: 'But *not once* did I receive what might be described as sober and reasoned thanks. Oh, I'm not complaining. But it would have been nice'. (TA: p. 144) In the reversed logic of Auschwitz the narrator 'becomes' Unverdorben and interprets his and others' actions as selfless and brilliant. The industrial process of death that was Auschwitz is inverted as rather a magical creative process of life giving, conversion and invention: 'Human beings want to be alive. They are dying to be alive'. (TA: p. 145)

Mengele is seen as a 'frankly glamorous figure', (TA: p. 136) and is also described as being 'omnipresent', 'clean', 'feline' and 'collegial' (TA: p. 136). With Mengele, the narrator sees that experiments have become 'absolutely routine', (TA: p. 137) as have the 'cartfuls of corpses'. (TA: p. 139) Amis also uncovers further double meanings in the language of the camps. The text highlights the euphemistic 'argot' of the Nazi bureaucratic system. The gas chambers are called '*Heavenblock*' and the 'Sprinkelroom' is known as '*the central hospital*'. The narrator also notes that the most physically weak patients are known as '*Musselmänner*'. This is not, to the narrator's surprise, an ironic reference to 'musclemen', but a reference to the 'angularity of hip and shoulder' that suggests 'muslims [sic] at prayer'. (TA: p. 133) The narrator, striving to

many prisoners by injecting them with phenol, petrol, chloroform or air; he participated in countless 'selections' at the Auschwitz railway junction, sending all those 'unfit for work' to the gas chambers with a flick of the hand or the wave of a stick ... Yet even Dr Mengele, a music-lover and a scientific mind, also had his "compassionate" moments when he could give individual patients the best of care, between "selections" for the gas chambers'. (pp. 233-4)

learn German, sees that language is central to understanding the camps. German is described as a language defined by 'literalism' and a 'tinkertoy accumulation'. (TA: p. 134) The narrator offers an example of the inherent irony and opposition in the language, and this linguistic split recalls the doubles, contradictions and inversions elsewhere:

Another Kat-Zet usage, widely current, used in many forms: it sounds like *smistig*, but it would appear to be a conflation of two German substantives, *Schmutzstück* and *Schmuckstück*, 'garbage' and 'jewel'. Ironically, again, *smistig* means 'come to an end', 'concluded', 'finished'. (TA: pp. 134-5)

In conclusion, Amis's *Time's Arrow* represents a literary 'test case' for issues surrounding Holocaust representation.³³¹ The Auschwitz chapter is reliant upon historical and critical texts for its accuracy and its reversals and the narrator's 'wrong' interpretation confront the reader with the atrocity anew through a 'turning round' of the healing-killing paradox at the heart of the Nazi doctor's role in the camps. Despite this, Ann Parry offers an analysis of a central lacuna in Amis's text. She argues that Amis's choice to write from the point-of-view of the perpetrators 'inevitably produces a failure to represent the suffering of the Jews'.³³² Unverdorben's 'callous objectification', helplessly echoed by the naïve narrator, is mirrored in the text because the Jews themselves are not represented except as being a 'collectivity, a race of people'.³³³ Parry, through a discussion of Lacouthe-Labarthe's theories surrounding the difficulties of reading the Holocaust as a tragedy in accepted ways, writes that,

the portrayal of the slaughter in *Time's Arrow* through a series of grotesque images that have a generalized resonance in relation to all of the Jews at Auschwitz certainly evokes the dreadful enormity of the project, but not the pity that is inspired by individual histories.³³⁴

The Jews remain 'off stage' and 'outside' the tragedy in similar ways to the way they do in Harris's *Fatherland* and Roberts's *Daughters of the House*. Parry goes on to argue that this fundamental aspect of *Time's Arrow* represents the caesura of the Holocaust – the

³³¹ For an intriguing comparison with Amis's decision to describe the killing process see Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (2003), in particular Chapter 2, 'Auschwitz (Time Flies)' (pp. 199-234), and especially the 'eyewitness' account on pp. 230-32. For critical analysis see, amongst many others, Schwarz, (2000) 'The Comic Grotesque in Spiegelman's *Maus*' (pp. 287-302), and LaCapra (1998) "'Twas the Night before Christmas: Art Spiegelman's *Maus*' (pp. 139-79).

³³² Parry, p. 257.

³³³ Ibid, p. 257.

‘unrepresentable suffering of the Jews’.³³⁵ The victims of the Holocaust are still ‘stranded outside of European history’, forever exiled.³³⁶ Novels such as *Time’s Arrow* and *Fatherland* risk replaying this Nazi view of the marginality of Jews and can in effect further condemn Jews to silence and absence. The aporia of victim and survivor experiences in both novels can be read in this twofold manner. The texts ‘show’ how Jews were excluded and eventually destroyed and this reflects an historical reality. But the novels can also be read as simulacrum of the Nazi reading of history and of the Jew’s banishment from history.

In Parry’s view the absence of pity from Amis’s text articulates the ways in which the Jews were treated and how Nazi ideology reduced victims to the status of ‘vermin’. Whilst this is convincing in terms of how the novel utilises brutal irony to expose the deceptions and elisions of Nazi testimony (and therefore memory), a question remains as to how successfully the killing process is rendered on the page, given the intrinsic problems of describing such intense suffering. A further ethical dilemma in Amis’s provocative descriptions of the experience of Auschwitz is whether to represent the suffering at all. The reversed chronology effectively forces the reader into returning to historical knowledge of the slaughter. Vice argues that this form ‘generates regret and disbelief’,³³⁷ but one can still feel uneasy when the killing process is described in such explicit, if reversed, terms. Amis’s text ‘goes through the gates’ and portrays scenes and events that most other fiction turns away from. The reader’s residual unease in being faced with the ‘logic’ of Auschwitz may stem from how successfully Amis has enacted (and parodied) the fragmented identity of the Nazi psyche. And hence the killing process itself is represented through that lens of mercilessness and justification that the ‘innocent’ narrator effects.

³³⁴ Ibid, p. 258.

³³⁵ Ibid, p. 258.

³³⁶ Ibid, p. 258.

³³⁷ Vice, p. 36.

Chapter Seven

‘Like a Recurrent Nightmare’: Psychoanalysing the Holocaust in D.M. Thomas’s *Pictures at an Exhibition*

In his study of D.M. Thomas, Bran Nicol writes of the critical reception of *Pictures at an Exhibition*³³⁸ that, like *The White Hotel*, was accused of ‘pornographic’ violence and ‘lurid and sensational depictions of history’.³³⁹ Furthermore, in an investigation into the author’s personality and motivation familiar from the other Holocaust controversies,³⁴⁰ some critics castigated Thomas for his appropriation of such a highly charged subject. Nicol writes: ‘His use of Holocaust material has been seen as a calculated way of securing financial gain or as pandering to his own sado-masochistic fantasies’.³⁴¹ There have been few novels in recent years that have attracted as much controversy, discussion and opprobrium as *The White Hotel*. In many ways *Pictures at an Exhibition* continues that novel’s conflation of Freudian analysis and the Holocaust, extreme ‘perverse’ eroticism and explicit violence, historical reality and postmodern literary experimentation. The ethical demands of Holocaust fiction are perhaps more problematically questioned and challenged by Thomas’s work than any other writer under analysis in the present thesis. The opening section of the novel, for example, ‘breaks’ many of these previously discussed issues, set as it is inside Auschwitz in 1944 and including scenes of sexual abuse, violence, selections, gassing and medical experiments. Thomas’s use of psychoanalytical discourses, historical documentation, fantasy, parody and satire, interchangeable character identities, and a polyphonic narrative contribute to a highly ambiguous and disturbing Holocaust novel.

Pictures at an Exhibition is constructed around nine separate but interwoven sections, seven of which share their titles with paintings by Edvard Munch. As will be seen, intertextuality is a central strategy in the novel. Given Thomas’s deliberately problematic and often dense structure, a résumé of the novel’s main narrative will help in the subsequent analysis of its representation of the Holocaust. The first section, ‘Death

³³⁸ DM Thomas, *Pictures at an Exhibition* (London: Bloomsbury, 1993; repr. Sceptre, 1994).

³³⁹ Nicol, *DM Thomas* (Tavistoke: Northcote House, 2004), p. 4.

³⁴⁰ See the introduction (pp. 10-12) of the present thesis for more on these controversies.

and the Maiden', takes place in Auschwitz in 1944. It is constructed around the 'therapy' sessions between a Jewish communist prisoner, Chaim Galewski, and Bertold Lorenz,³⁴² an SS doctor. This section is all but unique in British Holocaust fiction in that it offers a largely realist and matter-of-fact perspective on the death camp and the present chapter will return later to a more detailed analysis. Suffice to suggest now that its descriptions of medical experiments, selections, sexual torture, the killing process, and the work of the *Sonderkommando* place it in direct opposition to most of the other novels under discussion. Galewski, for example, is a highly ambivalent character who appears to have more empathy with Lorenz than with his fellow camp inmates. His numbed voice articulates in morally neutral tones the 'work' he has to do:

Outside, the evening sky was fading, that part of it which was not filled with a smoky red glow. I walked towards the flames. I was in the Sonderkommando again, and it was those minutes when the people packed into the gas-chamber waited, not knowing what was going to happen. There was always a wait, so that body-heat could raise the temperature, which made the gas more efficient. I had an instinct which told me the wait was now, for those Hungarians. And you knew your turn would come soon, but you were grateful that this time it wasn't; you munched the bread and sausage you found in their clothing. (PE: p. 69)

The second chapter is entitled 'Jealousy' and moves the narrative to London in 1990. The section is divided into four parts, each part consisting of a correspondence between two characters. These characters, it is gradually revealed, are linked together in often complex and sometimes confusing ways. It emerges that some of them are related to and, in specific cases, actually are characters that appear in the earlier Auschwitz section. This is a fundamental strategy in the novel and one that emphasises its persistent problematising of identity. In effect the reader is presented with a large number of clues, and possible clues, as to who, in the present-day, was 'someone else' back in the war. It is this effect of the blurring of identities that suggests the theme of mixed, ambiguous individual motivation and the difficulties inherent in speaking or narrating the past. For example, the ageing Oscar Jacobson, a famous therapist living in London may or may not be Lorenz from Auschwitz. Equally plausibly, he could be Galewski, there being enough clues to support either supposition. What is not in question is the lasting importance of

³⁴¹ Nicol, p. 4.

the Holocaust for these characters, and Thomas explores this trauma of the event being reawakened in the present through a series of, to paraphrase Nicol, 'contiguous' perspectives.³⁴³ A brief introduction to the first collection of these contiguous voices will illuminate the narrative structure, and also how the reader is asked to accumulate information and connect up the novel's 'clues'.

Part one of 'Jealousy' is made up of three voices. The first is that of Lilian Rhodes. She is in analysis with Chris James, a trainee therapist. Her section is written in a first person monologue that evokes Lilian speaking to Chris James who interrupts occasionally but these questions and comments are not included on the page. This sets up the novel's use of what amounts to a series of monologues. Characters speak, write and leave messages for others, but their interlocutor's responses are not included, or rather, their responses often come later in their own section. Hence the effect is of a curious introspection and solipsism, perhaps especially in the analysand-analyst sessions. Following Lilian's session with Chris James, the second section is Chris's appointment with Oscar Jacobson, in which he tells Oscar about his meeting with Lilian. Oscar then writes to Lilian, suggesting circularity in their interconnected relationships. These sections also begin to reveal aspects of the three characters' personalities. Lilian, middle-aged and overweight, is married to a rising QC, Steven, and has a 14-year-old son, Phil. She admits to an eating disorder, speaks of her left-wing feminist politics, and shares a dream she has had:

Well, I do have a sort of recurrent nightmare. I guess I've had it two or three times in the last couple of years. I'm in a room where there's a sort of porthole, and it's shut. Then it's opened, and I press my nose against the glass, expecting some lovely view, and I see these horrifying faces. They're distorted, and like squashed against the glass, their eyes bulging, staring at me. Really evil, wicked faces. Their noses all flattened sideways, and their lips. (PE: p. 76)

Later in the narrative, the reader discovers that in Auschwitz the young daughter of the wife of an SS guard was taken into the 'bath-house' and held up 'to peer in at the corpses: telling her she must remember this and be proud'. (PE: p. 248) It appears that Lilian Rhodes was once, in 'reality', Renate Tillich. She has buried her experiences and

³⁴² Lorenz shares his name with the individual behind Freud's well-known case study of 'Rat Man'. See Gay, P, ed, *The Freud Reader* (New York [US]: WW Norton & Co, 1989; repr. Vintage, 1995), p. 309. 'Lorenz' is a fictional name given by Freud to protect his patient's anonymity.

³⁴³ Nicol, p. 71.

memories of the death camp and these have subsequently manifested themselves in mental and physical neuroses. Thomas's novel articulates the sense that the Holocaust is a 'recurrent' nightmare that has haunted those individuals 'before' the event (in particular Munch, but also Freud and Kafka) and those who have lived in the post-war years.

The rest of 'Jealousy' is made up of three more sections each divided into individual voices. The title refers to the strains of jealousy that the various characters experience – from professional to sexual jealousy. Other significant characters are introduced in these sections: Oscar's wife, Myra, who is the only individual to acknowledge her Auschwitz 'self' (she may have been known as Judith Korczak³⁴⁴); Rachel Brandt, another trainee analyst; Sharon James, Chris's wife, who is having an affair with Steven Rhodes. Apart from the one-sided voice of the analysand and the letter, Thomas includes an answer-machine message from Steven Rhodes to another woman, Jenny Townsend, with whom he is also having an affair. The Holocaust is alluded to in this 'present-day' section. Lilian, referring to the Poll Tax demonstrations in London, says that the country 'might just as well be living under Hitler'. (PE: p. 75) Rachel Brandt, who appears to be unhealthily fixated on the subject, refers to her hope of a museum being built in the Ukraine where a wartime atrocity occurred. (PE: p. 95) And Myra Jacobson is attempting to represent her memories of Auschwitz through drawings and paintings. (PE: pp. 117-18)

The third section of the novel is titled 'Six Studies for Compassion' and is constructed around six verbatim extracts taken from *Those Were the Days: The Holocaust through the Eyes of the Perpetrators and Bystanders* published in 1988. This reference is fully cited at the front of the novel, and thus Thomas cannot be charged with plagiarism, or even bad faith, in his use of exterior texts. Also, Thomas has not altered a single word unlike his highly controversial re-writing of the Kuznetsov text in *The White Hotel*. This section continues the epistolary structure of 'Jealousy' and follows reports made by military chaplains and members of the Wermacht and the SS concerning a large group of dispossessed orphaned children who are locked up in terrible conditions in a house in Byelaya Tserkov. Its title suggests a bleak irony, given the lack of 'compassion' in these official voices. The final document, voiced by SS August Häfner, describes the children's fate:

³⁴⁴ In a similar way to the correlation of Dr Lorenz with the 'Lorenz' in Freud's case study of 'Rat Man' Judith also shares her name (and initials) with Janusz Korczak, a doctor and teacher who worked in the Warsaw orphanage. For more, see Laqueur, (2001), pp. 383-4; Gilbert, (1986), pp. 392-3.

The children were taken down from the tractor. They were lined up along the top of the grave and shot so that they fell into it. The Ukrainians did not aim at any particular part of the body. They fell into the grave. The wailing was indescribable. I shall never forget that scene throughout my life. I find it very hard to bear. I particularly remember a small fair-haired girl who took me by the hand. She too was shot later ... (PE: p. 143).

The fourth section, entitled 'The Lonely One', focuses on Rachel Brandt. Written in the third-person, the chapter follows Rachel as she visits an exhibition of Munch's paintings in Brighton in 1990. Myra Jacobson is the curator of the exhibition. The narrative focuses on Rachel's increasingly fractured and anxious mood as she is introduced to and observes a number of the characters the reader is already familiar with and a number of new characters. These include Anton Becker, a doctor from Damascus, who may or may not be Galewski. In a conceit that underlines the novel's interest in artistic representation, Rachel Brandt begins to increasingly identify with Munch's paintings. In disorienting 'interruptions', these paintings 'come to life' in her mind. She re-imagines the characters, and these alternative narratives punctuate the contemporary setting, acting as neurotic 'eruptions' in the reality of the exhibition. The present chapter will return to these tropes and references in more detail. Suffice to point out here some of the ways in which the Holocaust manifests itself, especially in the context of the novel's previous section's use of real documents.

The novel's intentional blurring of identities can be read in the scene when Becker is introduced to Rachel Brandt. In the following exchange, this confusion is ironically played out. An 'eruption' from Rachel's responses to Munch's painting 'The Lonely One' appears in bold type to emphasise how these descriptions interrupt the narrative:

'How did you meet each other?' Rachel asked, her eyes straying beyond him.
The young woman on the grey shore took a small step forward.

'I was an officer in the Wehrmacht. After the war, there were vast medical problems among the refugees. I met Major Jacobson at one of the camps; we worked together. And, of course, that's where we both met Myra.'

'Enem – friends,' Oscar mumbled.

'Please?'

'We weren't enemies but friends,' Myra explained. She took Dr Becker's hands in hers, gazing into his eyes with warm affection.

'Enemies became friends,' Rachel said almost at the same moment. (PE: pp. 149-50)

Oscar Jacobson's parataxis evokes the friendship in the novel's Auschwitz chapter. It also suggests the ethical 'grey area' that the narrative's blurring of identities dramatises. Galewski and Lorenz are 'enemies' who 'became friends'. This confusion surrounding the instability of character is seen most centrally in the Galewski/Lorenz/Becker indeterminacy, but it can also be read in the characters of Lilian Rhodes and Myra Jacobson. Other characters are introduced and alluded to throughout the exhibition party – including Rachel Brandt's sister, Sarah – until claustrophobia and growing anxiety force Rachel to leave the party early and go back to the Jacobsons' apartment. She discovers Myra's drawings and overhears Chris James' father and Sharon, Chris's ex-wife discuss their affair.

The next section of the novel is entitled 'Scream' and returns to the format familiar from 'Jealousy'. There are letters from Lilian Rhodes to Chris James, from Chris to Oscar Jacobson, from Oscar to Sharon James. Also, Lilian speaks to Chris and Chris speaks to Oscar in similar dramatic monologues. Lilian's father dies, and the reader discovers that Rachel Brandt attacked Oscar Jacobson in what appears to be a hysterical 'vampiric' assault at the party. Oscar tells Lilian that he knew her father in the war and informs her of her birth and early years after being adopted. Lilian leaves her husband and Sharon goes to live with Stephen only to subsequently leave him. Chris reveals that he has transsexual urges and Lilian attempts suicide. At a Christmas Eve party, burglars break into Oscar's house and kill Lilian and Steven. Oscar refers to his 'cousin', Chaim Galewski, who has been accused of being a 'collaborator'. As can be seen from these plots, sub-plots and counter-plots, Thomas not only problematises the concept of identity but also makes the process of accumulating information about the changing relationships and possible histories of these characters highly challenging. There are also elements of satire in these scenes and events from 1990-91. The melodramatic circularity of the inter-relationships recalls farce where Thomas mocks the London intelligentsia, perhaps even implicitly comparing it with the harsh lives of suffering and endurance described in the Holocaust sections.

'Madonna', returns to Auschwitz and is again written from the first-person perspective of Galewski. The narrative involves a last conversation between Galewski and Lorenz that ranges across a number of subjects and themes. Lorenz speaks of Alma Rosé, a niece of Mahler, who was the leader of a camp orchestra. Galewski reports that Lorenz gave a starving Renate (Lillian) to Judith Korczak (Myra) to look after in Belsen

some time after the war. They speak of the fake station at Treblinka, about the 'Madagascar'³⁴⁵ plan, and the overall 'design' of the 'final solution'.³⁴⁶ Lorenz asks Galewski to ask Judith if she can sketch Lorenz's wife in erotic poses so he will not have to 'go to other women'. (PE: p. 257) The friendship between the two men is strong and Lorenz tells Galewski: 'You're a good fellow, Chaim. I feel closer to you than almost anybody'. (PE: p. 255) The last pages of this section are some of the most disturbing explicit representations of the camp experience. Galewski meets Judith and they speak of the influx of Hungarians coming to Auschwitz.³⁴⁷ Later they find time for a lover's tryst:

When dusk fell, and the sky was filled with the red glow, I came back to Canada. Another train had arrived; I saw Mengele's elegant form, silhouetted against the fire. Judith stole out to me. She pulled off her dress and was naked underneath. Her cold lips clove to mine; and this time, despite the continuous screams of the dying, she made love with a devouring intensity that previously I had only observed. But afterwards she screamed too, without a sound. I cradled her and stroked her skull, the hair downy as a baby's.

The tall flames leapt and spat; burnt flakes rained unnoticed on us, as if from the faint but serene stars.

'Canst thou bind the sweet influences of Pleiades, or loose the bands of Orion?'³⁴⁸

*Ewig ... Ewig*³⁴⁹ ... (PE: p. 259)

The present chapter will return to a further analysis of this sequence, but suffice to suggest now how Thomas provocatively places the erotic against a backdrop of extreme violence and suffering. This scene is also an apotheosis in context of the novel's trope of art, in figurative ways, 'foreshadowing' history. The scene recalls Munch's 'Death and the Maiden' and 'Scream' paintings and in its mixture of lyricism, biblical quotation and allusions to the burning of corpses emphasises the hybrid nature of Thomas's prose.

³⁴⁵ Robert S. Wistrich (2002) writes, 'In 1937 the Polish government had approached the French and British about sending a million Polish Jews either there [Madagascar] or to southern Africa. Now, following the defeat of France [1940], Franz Rademacher (the official responsible for Jewish affairs at the German Foreign Office) had drawn up a memorandum envisaging the mass deportation of 4 million Jews from Europe and their resettlement in Madagascar, once the island was transferred from French to German control. The funds for this population transfer would naturally be provided by the despoiled Jews.' (p. 97)

³⁴⁶ Wistrich (2002) writes, 'In Hitler's genocidal racist ideology, the redemption (*Erlösung*) of the Germans and of 'Aryan' humanity depended upon the 'final solution' (*Endlösung*) of the 'Jewish Question'. (p. 2)

³⁴⁷ For more see Spielberg, S. & Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation, *The Last Days* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1999; repr. Seven Dials, 2000).

³⁴⁸ This is a quotation from Job 38.31

³⁴⁹ Galewski translates 'Ewig' as 'for ever'. This information is given in the context of Galewski's translation of lyrics from Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* which ends 'Ewig ... Ewig ...'. (pp. 249-50)

The novel's following section is entitled 'Patterns of an Observed Disturbance'. This is a publisher's 'blurb' for a novel written by Chris James, one that sets out the central plot and characters and themes of *Patterns of an Observed Disturbance*. It becomes evident that Chris James's novel is a *roman à clef*. It centres on two characters, David and Sara Epstein, who are 'versions' of Oscar and Myra. The novel dramatises the 'massacre' and asks a similar question to Thomas's novel: 'Specifically, are David Epstein and his Polish cousin one and the same person?' (PE: p. 263) It also becomes clear that the novel is a personal catharsis for Chris James. The 'blurb' alludes to a fictional narrator called Charles Vane who is drawn to 'an obsession with the mysterious Karl, in Berlin, his wife's love'. (PE: p. 264) The reader is already aware, through Chris James's sessions with Oscar, that he is indeed fascinated, repelled and aroused by the possibility of Sharon's infidelity. This 'thriller' casts further light upon what has already taken place in the main text, and also suggests another layer of representation and another discourse of interpretation. In effect the 'blurb' is a précis of a simulation (the novel) of 'real' life. There is irony in reading how Chris James has used and altered the 'real' in the name of fiction, perhaps in a similar, if less literary, way to Thomas himself.

The penultimate section is entitled 'The Kiss', and is written again as an analysand's therapy session, this time with Dr Becker. The identity of the narrator, though, is far from certain. She refers to herself as Alma Koch, a character who has hitherto not appeared in the text, although her first name alludes to two Almas who have. Alma is the name given to Elli, Galewski's daughter, after she has been 'adopted' by the Stolbs; Alma is also Mahler's niece who died in Auschwitz. Given the novel's sense of the mutability of identity, it is not unreasonable to assume that the narrator may have adopted another name, another life, and even perhaps another gender. There are also intimations that this is, in fact, an entirely new character, suggesting the circularity and perpetuity of neuroses and the Holocaust. It is also possible that this is the voice of an amalgam of many of the personalities and lives the reader has become aware of throughout the narrative. If one takes 'Alma Koch' as who she says she is, there are more intriguing 'clues' in this section. Alma Koch raises the issue of whether Becker is in fact Dr Lorenz. She has met Rachel Brandt, attests to a failed marriage, and talks of her upbringing in a 'small nondescript town near Minsk'. (PE: p. 272) She refers to the allegation that 'I.G. Farben, the Auschwitz factory, had provided Saddam Hussein with his chemicals'. (PE: p. 268) Later, she alludes to the atrocities in the former

Yugoslavia³⁵⁰: ‘God in Heaven, it’s like the last eighty years haven’t happened! *It’s like a recurrent nightmare*. But, you see here in the midst of Europe – death-trains and death-camps. It shows what war does’. (PE: p. 271) (My Italics)

The final section, ‘Consolation’, is sufficiently brief to quote in its entirety:

‘The cries of the children,’ said the aged German bishop, in the crowded museum, ‘will be heard no more. For those of us here who were involved, innocently, and who fought with all our strength to save them, there is but one consoling thought ...’ (PE: p. 277)

This mysterious climax to the novel appears to be a ‘soundbite’ spoken by one of the German chaplains who filed reports of the starving children in Byelaya Tserkov, as used in the section ‘*Six Studies for Compassion*’. The reader is compelled to recall those real historical documents and, arguably, see the bishop’s words with a degree of cynicism. The fact that he is commemorating the opening of a museum – one that Rachel Brandt is a keen supporter of – suggests that the children have not been forgotten. Yet the disparity between the bishop’s words and those of his earlier ‘self’ give the perspective of an individual attempting to re-write history to fit more comfortably the present-day mores. Thomas hints at this gap between real history, signified by the documents, and misremembered history that is subject to re-evaluation at best, and at worst is prone to being falsely represented. The ‘one consoling thought’ is therefore left to the ‘silence’ of ellipses, suggesting that if there is one consoling thought, it cannot be included within the body of the text.

Nicol, writing about the ‘Death and the Maiden’ section, identifies one of the novel’s central themes:

Disturbingly, the novel demonstrates how in the midst of an apparent breakdown in civilization, the niceties of social convention – serving coffee and cake, listening to Mozart, quoting from the Bible – continue rather than cease. Their work is discussed by the two men [Galewski and Lorenz] as if they are in a quiet university science laboratory rather than a death camp.³⁵¹

Thomas makes the reader aware of the ways in which the ‘cultured’ – Lorenz is intelligent, erudite and often sensitive – co-existed with and often collaborated in

³⁵⁰ See the conclusion of the present thesis (pp. 212-13).

³⁵¹ Nicol, p. 69.

atrocities. Throughout the novel, there are references to 'high' culture, and these intertextual allusions are an important aspect of how Thomas situates the Holocaust. An image that is returned to in the narrative is that of 'Goethe's tree'. This is a reference to the oak tree that Goethe was alleged to have sat beneath as he wrote in Buchenwald. Lorenz speaks admiringly of how they built the concentration camp around it: 'It showed the Germanic respect for culture'. (PE: p. 22) In 'Madonna', Lorenz returns to this incongruous reality when he tells Galewski that Mahler's 'Symphony of a Thousand' ends with lines from Goethe's play, *Faust*, that were written at the very spot in Buchenwald. An example of 'high' German culture is shown to be right in the 'middle' of a concentration camp where approximately 43,000 inmates died of disease, malnutrition and physical abuse.³⁵²

Nicol uses a deliberately weighted word to capture how *Pictures at an Exhibition* achieves this sense of two worlds or identities or ethics existing side-by-side, even 'within' each other. He uses the word 'collaborates' to suggest the ways in which characters, concepts and images are paired, doubled, and shown to be two sides to the same whole.³⁵³ The connotative power of Nicol's 'collaboration' between these sets of couples, doubles and opposites suggests not only collaboration with the Nazis in the war but also the manner in which many were forced to comply with orders that went directly against their ethical perspective. There is an often highly enigmatic non-linear collaboration between the chapters. But the collaborations also suggest how Thomas portrays the experiences of the historical event. Characters' origins, names, histories and memories are shown to be aleatory and unstable. In this context of postmodern 'playfulness', narrative contiguity and radical uncertainty, the representation of the Holocaust, fictional and non-fictional is deeply problematic.

The rest of the present chapter will analyse the novel utilising Nicol's theory of collaboration to see how *Pictures at an Exhibition* 'tests' the limits of representation of the Holocaust. The first example of collaboration in the text is at the level of characterisation. The collaboration between Lorenz and Galewski suggests the difficulties in writing history. Their real identities remain ambiguous throughout the novel, and in effect, their 'crimes' are hard to clarify and even harder to indict. The 'modern' sections of the novel – as in Hope's *Serenity House* – are set in the months when the War Crimes Bill in Britain was debated, rejected, and finally passed by the

³⁵² *The Holocaust Encyclopaedia*, p. 97.

³⁵³ Nicol, p. 71.

Lords in 1991. Hence, the issue of identity in relation to who is and who isn't Lorenz is more important given the imminent passing of a law that would threaten his anonymity. In the two Auschwitz sections, Galewski is portrayed in a decidedly ambiguous light. The friendship that develops between the two men emphasises the similarities between them more than the differences. In this respect, Thomas deliberately confuses the terms 'victim' and 'perpetrator'. This moral 'grey area' that is described in the Auschwitz sections is shared by Amis's *Time's Arrow* where an identity is split in two 'collaborating' halves and everyday ethical behaviour is inverted in the camps.

Pictures at an Exhibition also shares with *Time's Arrow* a Nazi doctor at the centre of its narrative. As was seen in that novel, the concept of the 'split' self was central to how Amis, through the work of Lifton, portrayed the Nazi doctor. Lorenz, as described by Galewski, is a man who listens to Mahler and Wagner, reads Schiller, Dickens and Goethe, and considers his brother-in-law's 'total and indiscriminating' (*PE*: p. 25) anti-Semitism to be vulgar. Galewski refers to Lorenz and his wife as a 'decent, civilised couple' (*PE*: p. 27) who live in a 'pleasant avenue of bourgeois houses' (*PE*: p. 45) that is situated close to the death camps. Lorenz endures headaches, depression and nightmares, but does not equate these symptoms with his 'job'. He admits that he might have wished for 'nicer surroundings', (*PE*: p. 5) but only wants to 'cope and do a decent job'. (*PE*: p. 5) This involves the infamous 'selections':

Dr Lorenz, a white coat over his uniform, stood on a wooden box; then gestured with his stick. The naked men had to run past him. It was as always an absurd, grotesque sight. Running skeletons, pumping their arms, trying to stick out their chests as if they were Olympic sprinters. Many of them had swollen swinging testicles which bounced as they tried to run. (*PE*: p. 35)

The 'absurd, grotesque sight' is not seen by Galewski as the image of a doctor in a white coat 'selecting' those who lived and those who died, but the sick and the ill who are forced to parade in front of Lorenz. The Nazi doctor deplores the sexual abuse of Judith Korczak and her family as being 'barbaric', (*PE*: p. 44) but sees no apparent contradiction in returning to 'outdoor burning' (*PE*: p. 33) to cope with the growing numbers of people arriving at the camp.

Lorenz's collaboration with the killing process is characterised by a 'romantic' nationalistic pride in what has been achieved and also what will be lost after the war:

And yet, something heroic will be lost in consequence. Even this place, with all its grimness and suffering, has a kind of tragic grandeur about it, don't you think? A very Germanic grandeur and pity. Those of you who survive won't find anything to match it. (PE: p. 67)

Later, in the 'Madonna' section of the novel, as it appears that the end of the war is nearing and preparations will have to be made to escape, Lorenz further contemplates the 'final solution'. He considers Franz Stangl, the commander of Sobibor and Treblinka extermination camps,³⁵⁴ for example, a 'very decent fellow' (PE: p. 251), feels sentimental about the death of Alma Mahler, and anticipates future misunderstanding as to Nazi intentions:

'What we have done,' he murmured, 'was necessary; even enlightened. Truly constructed around Goethe's tree. Yet we shall be misunderstood. People will call us doctors who killed instead of healing. They won't realise we've been healing too, in a larger sense, by killing Europe's plague bacillus'. (PE: p. 256)

Rather than see a contradiction in the 'enlightened' genocide of millions, Lorenz explicitly identifies a lineage between Goethe and the Holocaust. The justification, ethical obfuscation and split collaborating selves evinced by Lorenz's character underline Thomas's efforts to show how Auschwitz turned the normal everyday world 'upside down', creating figures such as Lorenz.

Pictures at an Exhibition expands upon this trope by mirroring Lorenz with Galewski. The collaboration between healing and killing, and the dualities in Lorenz's personality, are doubled³⁵⁵ in the figure of Galewski. This is further compounded in the subsequent confusion about their respective identities. Galewski is the narrator of the two Auschwitz sections, and yet it is obvious from his voice that he is not the kind of character that has become familiar from Holocaust writing. He is no 'hero' in the conventional sense of the word and his behaviour and attitudes invariably align him

³⁵⁴ Laqueur (2001), p. 613.

³⁵⁵ This 'doubling' is also found in the fact that many of the characters share their surnames with real-life figures: Alma Koch, Lorenz, Galewski and Judith Korczak. See n. 5 in the present chapter for Lorenz's and Korczak's historical counterparts. Galewski shares his name with Alfred Galewski, an engineer, and one of a group of prisoners in Treblinka who attempted resistance: see Gilbert, (1986), pp. 455-6 & p. 596. See also Arad, Y, (1999), p. 98, pp. 286-98. Galewski was a 'camp elder' who was heavily involved in the uprising in Treblinka in August 1943. Intriguingly, Galewski is further 'doubled' as Gilbert refers to him as 'Alfred' and Arad calls him 'Marceli'. Alma Koch shares her name with Erich Koch, the *Gauleiter* of the Bialystok General District in Poland. See Arad, (1999), p. 134. Perhaps a more tangential 'double' is that of Tillich who shares his name with a German Protestant theologian. See Mautner, T, ed, *The Penguin Dictionary of Philosophy* (2000), pp. 565-6.

much closer with Lorenz than with his fellow prisoners. His motivation in helping Lorenz in therapy sessions initially appears to be enjoying having food prepared by Lorenz's wife and savouring a respite from the degradations of the camp. He listens to music, eats well, and drinks alcohol all in return for listening to Lorenz's problems and offering interpretations of his dreams and anxieties. Perhaps the most pressing correlation between the two men is at the level of their respective 'occupations' in Auschwitz. Lorenz is a doctor whose healing collaborates with killing, while Galewski is an inmate, a member of the *Sonderkommando* whose task it is to facilitate the 'creation and destruction of corpses'.³⁵⁶ He has been forced to collaborate with the killing process. The existence of the *Sonderkommando*, Primo Levi argued, was 'National Socialism's most demonic crime'.³⁵⁷

Galewski 'understands' that the 'Jews were no better than the criminals' and that people like Lorenz were largely justified in finding 'most of my race unspeakable'. (PE: p. 27) He admits that he admires, 'in a way, the SS hardness' (PE: p. 36), and later reassures Lorenz not to 'blame yourself too much' (PE: p. 255) for his indiscreet behaviour towards women. Towards the end of the summer of 1944, as the deportations to Auschwitz increase, Galewski speaks with respect for Lorenz's 'unfailingly courteous' (PE: p. 247) manner on the selection ramp. Galewski continues:

Indeed, it was with yet more frenetic energy and sense of purpose that he did these things: cramming more and more bodies into the bath-house, until – when the moment came to pull back the bolts – the corpses were erect, unable to fall; blue, and with excreta and menstrual blood trickling down their legs. Supervised the flinging of more and more corpses into crematoria or into burning pits. And I understood him; understood his sense of mission, his conviction that this was for the greater good of humanity. We were on opposing sides, but I guessed I might do the same, if it would lead to the triumph of communism. (PE: pp. 247-8)

In essence, Thomas argues, by way of the collaboration of Lorenz and Galewski, that the Holocaust was a complete inversion of ethical categories. Previous notions of morality and what constitutes ethical behaviour are reversed in Auschwitz.

Galewski's complex character, though, is also shown to have endured trauma when he arrived at Auschwitz. He is arrested as a communist and taken to

³⁵⁶ Clendinnen, (2002), p. 70.

³⁵⁷ Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved* (1989), p. 37.

Theresienstadt³⁵⁸ before being transported to Auschwitz. He describes these first encounters as 'Dantesque'. (PE: p. 51) He goes on to chart his reaction to the news that those being 'selected' to go to the left were destined for death, to being shaved, deloused and tattooed. Galewski is chosen to be a member of the *Sonderkommando*:

Our task was to dispose of the gassed bodies. We also, as the summer wore on, had to dig up the burial pits at Birkenau, the village of *Brzezinka*, the place of birch trees. We had to drag the corpses, who had breathed their last poisonous fumes in an old converted peasant farmhouse, to the new crematoria. Auschwitz was still quite virginal. The work was terrible, but we could steal food from the clothes of the victims. Not many of us committed suicide. (PE: p. 52)

Similarly, the 'work' of the *Sonderkommando* has rarely been described in fiction. There are many possible reasons for this absence. It may simply be a question of taste or decorum, a 'turning away' from such distressing reality. It may also have to do with a sense that members of the *Sonderkommando* were forced to survive in ways that further problematise and complicate the archetype of the 'victim'. Given Thomas's interest in testing the limits of what can and cannot be represented in fiction, the marginal and disturbing status of the *Sonderkommando* would seem to be a 'natural' area to be addressed. The radically inverted role of these men is dramatised further when Galewski is confronted with the corpses of his family:

Corpses tumbled out of the doors and the *Sonderkommando* began the process of dragging the naked bodies out. Among a small group of old, grey-bearded men I found my mother; after her, my wife, and she held our baby Elli to her breast; and I saw that our baby was still alive, eyes closed, sucking at the nipple. Her little plump hand, creased at the wrist, was moving. (PE: p. 52)

This scene is one of the most crucial and significant scenes in the novel and its implications are many and varied. The image of an infant surviving the gas chambers reflects Thomas's trope of life and death co-existing or collaborating in similar symbolic ways to Munch's paintings, especially 'Madonna' and 'Death and the Maiden'. Ellis's miraculous survival – Lorenz refers to it triumphantly as the 'miracle of Hell!' (PE: p. 53) – is a patent contradiction, and it is precisely this aspect that makes it such a resonant trope in the novel. The mother's breast is a life force that sustains the infant. Evidently,

³⁵⁸ For more on Theresienstadt see chapter three in the present thesis.

this is a highly controversial conceit and one that tests the ethical limits of 'acceptability'. Thomas's verbatim use of real documents to replace the potentially distorting perspective of fiction might be seen as being undermined by this moment, which exists more for the novel's texture than for historical accuracy.³⁵⁹ In other words, Thomas's unflinching description of the work of the *Sonderkommando*, and his use of a highly charged image of unlikely survival in the gas chambers, risks accusations of sensationalism.

The potential of writing about the event through a 'pornographic' – defined as being as much about power and violence as sex - perspective is worth exploring in more detail. It is a question that critics have dealt with in relation to *The White Hotel* but can be set against the equally disturbing descriptions of violence, death and suffering of *Pictures at an Exhibition*. Susanne Kappeler has written about what she sees as the pornographic elements in *The White Hotel*. Her comments have resonance for the later novel because they go directly to the 'collaboration' between the genres of the literary and the pornographic. Despite Thomas's use of real historical documents to represent the Holocaust, there are a number of scenes of torture and suffering, sometimes eroticised. In this context, Kappeler's accusation that Thomas 'became the snuff artist of the cultural establishment' is provocative and potentially revealing.³⁶⁰ Kappeler argues in her analysis of *The White Hotel* that Thomas, like writers such as Norman Mailer and Henry Miller, has 'dared' to 'push the boundary'. This 'boundary' is where the 'points at which the category of the literary is invoked in order to salvage the pornographic, where the literary is said to neutralize or redeem the pornographic'.³⁶¹ The evidence of the novel's literary qualities vindicates the pornographic elements of *The White Hotel*. An undoubted aspect of the 'literary-ness' of the work is the way in which Thomas merges together a fictional account of Freudian psychoanalysis with the real historical event of the Holocaust, and more specifically the massacre at Babi Yar.

Kappeler identifies other criteria of the literary that include 'audacity', 'ambition', 'power' and 'originality'.³⁶² Uniting these elements of the literary is the

³⁵⁹ In Kitty Hart-Moxon's survivor account, *Return to Auschwitz* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1981; repr. House of Stratus, 2000), there is a brief reference to this phenomenon: 'It often happened that when the doors were opened too early some people were still alive. Once, to the horror of the men in the *Sonderkommando*, a tiny baby was found still sucking at its mother's breast. It had probably been sucking all the time and so had not inhaled the deadly fumes. SS man Wagner was furious. He snatched the baby away and threw it into a blazing oven'. (p. 158)

³⁶⁰ Kappeler, (1986), p. 98.

³⁶¹ Ibid, p. 85.

³⁶² Ibid, p. 93.

prevailing sense that something has to have been seen to have been 'done' to the material, thus the pornographic elements of the novel are redeemed in the broader ambitions of the narrative. As has been noted in the introduction to the present thesis, Thomas's use of Kuznetsov's documentary fiction *Babi Yar* caused more controversy than any reading of the novel's pornography. In *The White Hotel*, Thomas's self-conscious mingling of the fictional and the imaginative with the real of history, or in other words, his mingling of sexual neuroses with the Holocaust, threatens to radically unsettle any remaining distinctions between the fabricated and the real. In *Pictures at an Exhibition*, on this level of the distinction between fictionalising the Holocaust and respecting the real, Thomas has readily clarified which is which. But this is less clear a separation because Thomas does 'go through the gates'.

As Kappeler points out, 'Nazi sadism is a stock in trade of pornography'.³⁶³ Thomas risks negating the power of the real – the real of the concentration camp experience – by threading pornographic images into dramatic scenes that are 'real' in that they are inspired by facts testifying that scenes 'like' these occurred.³⁶⁴ But because of the jarring juxtaposition of sexuality and violence, Thomas replays phallogentric pornographic fantasies 'in the symbiosis of Thanatos and Eros'.³⁶⁵ This further example of 'collaboration' sums up the disturbing literary conceits evident in both *The White Hotel* and *Pictures at an Exhibition*. Thomas's interests in Freudian psychoanalytical theories and extreme, even perverse, sexuality test the 'problem' of Holocaust representation.³⁶⁶ But this 'test' can be read as a virtual re-enactment of Nazi sexual torture, situating the reader in a profoundly troubling position of spectator and even accomplice in what is being described. The blurring of distinctions between sadist and victim is one result of Thomas's most explicit descriptions. Furthermore, his

³⁶³ Ibid, p. 92.

³⁶⁴ A significant Holocaust title that has attracted opprobrium because of its 'pornographic' content is *The Night Porter (Il Portiere di Notte)* directed by Liliana Cavani in 1973. In this film, an ex-SS officer Max played by Dirk Bogarde is living anonymously as a porter in a hotel in Vienna. One of his former victims of torture Lucia, played by Charlotte Rampling, arrives at the hotel with her husband. Gradually Bogarde and Rampling begin to engage in re-enactments of their previous sado-masochistic relationship. These re-enactments are inter-cut with scenes from the concentration camp in which the audience is shown the burgeoning relationship between Max and Lucia. Omer Bartov (1996) describes the response of Primo Levi to the film, particularly in relation to Levi's concept of the 'gray zone': 'He [Levi] rebels against the allegedly intellectually stimulating zone of crime and sexual perversion, attraction and repulsion, subjugation and submission, so often exploited by filmmakers, and achieving such intellectual (and not so intellectual) popularity precisely due to its "dangerous" subject. This, to him, is abuse of the experience'. (p. 129) For more on *The Night Porter* and *The White Hotel*, see Rebecca Scherr, 'The Uses of Memory and the Abuses of Fiction: Sexuality in Holocaust Fiction and Memoir' at <http://www.othervoices.org/2.1>.

³⁶⁵ Kappeler, p. 98.

foregrounding of neurotic sexuality and confused sexual identities risks reducing the Holocaust to exterior manifestations of interior neurotic states. Thomas's use of real historical documents may not alter the fact that his writing of sexualised torture in Auschwitz, indeed of focusing on sex and sexuality at all in such a context, is a fundamental misreading of the Holocaust. Rebecca Scherr suggests that the danger is to 'misread the Holocaust by abstracting the event into works that center on the erotic female body, works that sensationalize the Holocaust because of their reliance on representing perverse and paranoid sex as symbolic of Holocaust memory'.³⁶⁷ So, Thomas might therefore be accused of having not only 'tested' the limits of Holocaust representation but of having transgressed those limits. But it can be argued that Thomas, precisely because of this perceived transgression, has sought to express something about the Holocaust and its relation to the unconscious that has hitherto been either under-developed or ignored.

To return to Nicol's theory of 'collaboration', further confirmed by these thoughts on the novel's mixture of the pornographic and the literary, the dualities of character seen in Galewski and Lorenz can be found in others in the novel. These split selves include Judith, who it appears 'becomes' Myra, and Renate who 'becomes' Lillian. Other less obvious collaborations between characters include shared names: Lorenz's sister and a friend of Lillian Rhodes is called Hannah; Elli, Galewski's daughter, is called Alma by the Nazi Tillichs, as is Mahler's niece and the mysterious 'Alma Koch' who narrates the penultimate section. Through these parallels and coincidences, Thomas builds up in the narrative a sense of the past and the present coexisting on the same temporal plane. Another way of seeing this is to situate the Holocaust in the 'middle' of the novel's trajectory. Thus, the references to Munch in Rachel Brandt's imaginative dreams (in which, for example, Munch meets Freud on a train journey) can be seen as premonitory and the 1990/91 scenes can be seen as reflective. In other words, Thomas does not merely establish 'collaboration' between characters in the past and the present, but describes a past that also contains, in eerie presentiments, the future. This is captured in the scene when Dr Becker tells Rachel Brandt that Munch's painting 'The Scream' is like 'a prediction of the twentieth century'. He suggests that the agonised figure of

³⁶⁶ See also D.M. Thomas, *Memories and Hallucinations* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1988). In particular pp. 39-41, 46-49, 72-74.

³⁶⁷ Scherr at www.othervoices.org

indeterminate gender foreshadows the 'stick-people, no longer human' (PE: p. 155) of the concentration camps.³⁶⁸

This foreshadowing – where the past before the Holocaust uncannily predicts the event – is another example of 'collaboration' in the novel, and one can see how such a theory is also tied in with the role of art in the narrative. In the example of Munch's 'The Scream', Thomas suggests a collaboration between art and the Holocaust, but this theme is played out, and is a defining trope in, how the very question of representation is handled in the text. The novel's title takes itself from an 1874 piano suite by Mussorgsky that was written to commemorate a series of paintings by Victor Hartmann.³⁶⁹ This echoes or pre-empts the Munch exhibition where many of the characters meet. Munch's work provides Thomas with an 'exhibition' of images that find their counterpart in the 'real' of the narrative, the paintings are visual correlatives to Rachel's state of mind in the section titled 'The Lonely One'. The connections between the artist's work and the Holocaust are also hinted at, for example, in a letter from Oscar to Rachel. She has loaned him Klee's book, *Those Were the Days*. Oscar himself makes the connection:

I enclose photocopies of those deeply affecting extracts from *Schöne Zeiten*. My mind flashed to those documents when my wife, who has been busy helping with the exhibition, etc., showed me six studies for Munch's painting called *Compassion*. In their own way, I suppose, five of the six protagonists in Byelaya Tserkov were being 'compassionate'. (PE: p. 127)

The 'collaboration' between 'high' art and the Holocaust manifests itself in a number of ways. Oscar Jacobson, like Rachel Brandt, sees a correlation between Munch's work, suffused with death, suffering and mourning, and the Holocaust. The image of Goethe's tree living in amongst the Buchenwald camp is another signifier of how 'high' culture is paradoxically proximate with Nazi ideology. But perhaps it is in the Auschwitz sections, and in particular the figure of the 'cultivated Nazi', Lorenz, that Thomas locates this disturbing paradox. As Nicol points out, the fact that Mengele loved opera underlines 'the fact that the people who perpetuated the atrocities, were, on the face of it, capable of great cultural discernment'.³⁷⁰ Lorenz, when Galweski first encounters him in Lorenz's

³⁶⁸ For more on the concepts of backshadowing and foreshadowing, see Michael Andre Bernstein, (1994).

³⁶⁹ Kennedy, M, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 493.

³⁷⁰ Nicol, p. 72.

home, is 'sprawled in an arm chair' listening to Furtwängler's³⁷¹ recording of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*. (PE: p. 3) Lorenz also listens to Mozart, Schubert and Handel, and quotes from a Mahler song and his 'Symphony of a Thousand'. Galewski and Lorenz share a passion for music and art, and their friendship develops through this mutual appreciation. The character of Alma Mahler further embodies this proximity of classical music (signifying Enlightenment principles) and Auschwitz.

It is possible to draw this trope out further in an analysis of the character of Judith/Myra who is an artist and whose drawings are pivotal to the narrative. It is Judith Korczak's artistic ability which first suggests that she subsequently becomes Myra Jacobson. The centrality of art can be seen in the section, 'Jealousy', particularly in a letter from Myra to Lilian Rhodes. Myra reminisces about seeing a painting with Oscar years earlier in Florence by Artemisia Gentileschi. Myra describes the painting as 'wonderful, ferocious' (PE: p. 116). She goes on:

It struck me afresh with its genius – and its savagery – even on a postcard. That wonderful fixity of the two women's gaze on the point of interest – Holofernes' neck! I'm sure Gentileschi was influenced by the rape she'd suffered; she was avenging herself on Tassi. And then one looks at the victim. Eyes and mouth in panic; the blood already spurting; he knows it's inevitable. His legs are wide apart, and his scarlet cloak is like a woman's skirt. A man, for once, is in the helpless female position. (PE: pp. 116-17)

Myra is drawn to the painting because of its portrayal of violence and suffering and its intimations of revenge. The picture also, in a familiar proleptic trope, predicts the vampiric attack of Rachel Brandt on Oscar Jacobson in 'The Lonely One'. There are also intimations of altered gender archetypes. This motif of swapped roles for men and women can most clearly be seen in Chris James's possible transsexual urges.

The painting inspires Myra to consider her own artistic aspirations: 'Why shouldn't I try to portray Auschwitz? It's easily the deepest experience of my life, yet I've never dared to touch it. Much too horrifyingly painful'. (PE: p. 117) This leads her on to substantiate the violence of Gentileschi's painting with a memory of her own:

³⁷¹ Furtwängler was himself alleged to have colluded with the Nazis. The investigation into the conductor's war-time activities has been dramatised in *Taking Sides*. Dir. István Szabó. Ger/Fr/UK/Aus. 2001. (*Sight & Sound*, Dec 2003, v13, n12), pp. 52-3.

I saw two skeletal women sawing away, with their last remaining strength, at the neck of a Belsen guard who'd got himself trapped in barbed-wire. A tommy had given them his bayonet. They'd been with me on the death-march from Auschwitz in the winter of 1944.

I confess when I saw that painting in the Uffizi my knees buckled. I remembered the guard's screams. I think at the end he thrust at the blade, because he knew, like the Assyrian general, there was no hope, and he wanted to end his agony quickly. (*PE*: p. 118)

Thomas collates painting with, if not a mimetic power, then at least a symbolic, proleptic, psychologically revealing significance. The Gentileschi painting evokes a traumatic memory that Myra experienced when she was Judith Korczak, suggesting an emotional affinity with the representation that triggers the memory. This is further examined when Rachel Brandt discovers Myra's drawings after Rachel has left the exhibition early and returned to the Jacobsons' apartment:

She opened the portfolio. Skeletal, bald female figures, wearing what looked like striped pyjamas. She turned over a page. The same figures, suspended from a gallows. On the next page one of the figures was depicted in close-up: the rope, the broken neck.

Auschwitz, she thought, as her own nape prickled.

She shut the portfolio. (*PE*: p. 179)

These are Myra/Judith's efforts at artistically representing her own traumatic memories of Auschwitz. Also, Rachel Brandt finds what appear to be the erotic sketches Judith Korczak made of Lorenz's wife. Rachel Brandt's discovery leads to her vampiric attack on Oscar Jacobson. There is a connection between art and life or more specifically, painting and traumatic repressed memory. The painting seems to, as it were, 'unlock' Rachel's unconscious urges.

Thomas situates artistic representation at the centre of the novel and its relationship to violent and traumatic experience. Munch's work is a proleptic representation of future horror, and Rachel Brandt's identification with his paintings emphasises how an individual's neuroses can be contained in and even 'released' by the painting, but Thomas's appreciation of the inherent problematics of representation goes further to include all artistic efforts to 'contain' traumatic experience. Rachel Brandt's intense identification with Munch's paintings is contrasted with Lorenz's appreciation of Mahler and Wagner. Lorenz's 'split self' (not only the split between Lorenz/Oscar and

Galewski/Becker, but also between doctor/murderer and SS/husband/father) cannot reconcile the art he appreciates and the violence he administers in the name of the Nazi ideal. Thomas examines this distance between representation and the real when he includes the 'blurb' of Chris James's novel, *Patterns of an Observed Disturbance*. James's novel fictionalises the 'real' events that the reader has pieced together over the previous chapters. But now the 'real' has become a 'thriller' in which 'rape, mutilation and murder' (PE: p. 263) figure prominently. Chris's novel complicates identities by, for example, turning Oscar and Myra into David and Sara Epstein and asks whether David and his 'Polish cousin Moshe' (PE: p. 263) are the same person.

Thomas's self-reflexivity playfully mocks the linguistic register of a commercial publisher's blurb. Chris James's novel is described as a 'gripping novel, blending Le Carré and Kafka'. Thomas appears to be referring back to *The White Hotel* and anticipating critics' responses to *Pictures at an Exhibition* when he writes that James's novel 'is sure to arouse fierce controversy'. (PE: p. 264) But this section also contains a brief but pertinent précis of the novel's central theme that can be used as a summation of *Pictures at an Exhibition*:

But in a sense, James suggests, the camps are a common home to everyone who lives under their evil and enormous shadow. The mentality that shaped them, in the cause of a perverted 'reason', is still with us. In the words of the surviving prisoner-doctor: 'Whom the gods wish to destroy, they first make rational'. (PE: p. 264)

Thomas's polyphonic text suggests that the 'evil and enormous shadow' of the Holocaust is cast over all of his characters, many of whom are engaged, belatedly, in the difficulties of representing – through art, therapy, praxis – their memories, feelings and neuroses. Myra's real experience of Auschwitz is translated into drawings and sketches. But also, Rachel Brandt identifies with the atrocities in Byelaya Tserkov so strongly that she dreams of helping to build a museum there. The enigmatic final section of the novel that appears to provide the reader with a highly tentative, even imaginary, 'consolation', may validate this wish.

To conclude, Thomas's novel 'tests' the limits of Holocaust representation in ways that other novels under discussion in the present thesis do not. The use of 'collaboration' captures the essence of Thomas's perspective on the meanings and importance of the Holocaust. Thomas argues for the centrality of the Holocaust in the

modern consciousness. Despite reservations surrounding his alleged pornographic, or misogynist, imagination, he stresses the continued significance of the Holocaust. *Pictures at an Exhibition*, with its fragmentary and non-linear apprehension of time, is an attempt to represent the rupture that Auschwitz embodies. Nevertheless, his explicit depiction of sexual torture and sexual relations within the camp remains highly controversial. Equally, as in *The White Hotel*, the theories of Freudian psychoanalysis threaten to reduce Holocaust memory and experience to textual, theoretical games. Thomas's efforts to historicise the 'real' by his use of historical documents may be unsuccessful because of his 'excessive' interest in the most violent events of the camps and also because of his deliberate blurring of victim and victimiser. However, in many respects, precisely because of these problematic areas, Thomas's novel sets out to push the boundaries of artistic and ethical representation in ways that more conventional Holocaust fiction 'look away' from.

Chapter Eight

‘Reaching across the Years’: The Holocaust and European History in Caryl Phillips’ *The Nature of Blood*

Caryl Phillips’ *The Nature of Blood*³⁷² attempts to situate the Holocaust within the context of five hundred years of European history. Phillips’ explicit theme is how the anti-Semitism of Europe contributed to the planning and execution of the Holocaust.³⁷³ He stresses that it can be traced back through history to earlier examples of racism, xenophobia and fear of the ‘other’. Phillips’ novel is thus centrally concerned with the ‘nature’ of blood. In other words, the text analyses precisely what ‘blood’ has meant in Europe in terms of identity, racial lineage, social belonging (and exile), and the ways in which it has been spilled in wars, pogroms and punishments. The Holocaust is represented as being part of a particular set of historical discourses. To reflect this theoretical position, his text includes a plurality of voices and points-of-view that criss-cross through history with little or no apparent logic or prevailing structure. A brief overview of the characters, epochs and locations in *The Nature of Blood* will help to establish Phillips’ view of history, and will also initiate questions as to how the Holocaust is represented within this narrative.

The novel opens (and ends) in Cyprus where Dr Stephan Stern, along with many others, wait to travel to Israel in the aftermath of the Second World War. Stern is an idealistic Zionist who has abandoned his wife and family for what he refers to as ‘this imaginary country’. (NB: p. 7) His brother Ernst, Ernst’s wife and their two daughters, Margot and Eva, populate the second interrelated narrative, narrated by Eva. They are middle-class Jews (although Phillips never specifies precisely where they live), who after struggling to survive are taken off to a concentration camp (again Phillips avoids using a specific name). Eva’s story, heavily influenced by the diaries of Ann Frank, follows the family (Margot is ‘missing’) through the degradation of the train journey, the selections, and the day-to-day survival of the camp’s prisoners. Eva’s parents die but Eva survives, and after internment in another camp travels to London to meet an English soldier, Gerry,

³⁷² Phillips, C, *The Nature of Blood* (London: Faber & Faber, 1997).

³⁷³ For more on this subject see Rubenstein, Roth, (1987), in particular Chapter 1 and Chapter 2, pp. 23-89. Also, Walser Smith, (2002), pp. 3-12.

who had befriended her after the liberation of the camps. In London, Eva endures a slow and painful emotional breakdown, her personality splitting and fragmenting, her dreams filled with images from what she has escaped:

That morning, walking to the train station, with our suitcases. A human river of shattered lives. Passing houses that had become our prisons and our tombs, the train door opening with a grating sound, one pail into which we must all relieve ourselves, stopping for hours for no apparent reason, the morning mist rising from the fields, the smoke. (NB: p. 199)

The novel ends with Eva's uncle, Stephan, some years later, living in Israel. He has an affair with a recently emigrated African woman, Malka, and remembers his two nieces playing in a garden years before: 'Uncle Stephan watched as they skipped away and left him alone on the bench, his arms outstretched, reaching across the years'. (NB: p. 213) Thus, Stephan's story bookends Eva's.

Eva's narrative is told in various forms. A first-person, diary-like voice that most recalls the writing of Ann Frank dominates the telling of the story. There is also the voice of a doctor analysing Eva's survivor guilt and her mental demise, and an authorial third-person narrator who describes Margot's fate and the precise instructions for the killing process in the gas chambers. There is also a brief interlude told from Gerry's perspective as Eva arrives to discover that he is already married. Phillips would appear to be 'filling in' an alternative history of Anne Frank, one in which she survives rather than dies in Bergen-Belsen.³⁷⁴ But Phillips is also attempting to situate the experience of the Holocaust in a specific historical context: Eva's life is seen in light of her uncle's growing Zionism and in response to European anti-Semitism. *The Nature of Blood* argues that anti-Semitism has been part of Europe for centuries and, interspersed with Eva's story, Phillips fictionalises two narratives from 15th-century Venice. The first, told in an apparently dispassionate chronicler's voice, follows the arrest, trial and eventual execution of a group of Jewish men accused of murdering a young Christian boy in order that they might use his blood to knead into the unleavened bread they make for Passover. The second story is inspired by Shakespeare's play *Othello*. Phillips 'fills in' some of 'Othello's' life before the play opens, charting his arrival in Venice and his rise up the social scale despite the difficulties he encounters due to his racial 'otherness.' He eventually marries 'Desdemona' and leaves to fight the Turks. Phillips' novel is an

example of what Steven Connor refers to as the 'eternal return' of post-war fiction.³⁷⁵ *The Nature of Blood* joins other novels such as Marianne Wiggins's 'revisioning' of *Lord of the Flies*, *John Dollar* (1989) and Jean Rhys's 'prequel' to *Jane Eyre*, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966). Connor stresses that 'departures' from and 'dependence' on the original text define such novels equally.³⁷⁶ In other words, these novels rely on their prior intertexts but at the same time the 'new' narratives argue back, subvert and critique the ideologies inherent in the 'establishing' texts.

Phillips further intersperses other voices and other perspectives. There are dictionary/encyclopædia definitions of 'Venice', 'Ghetto', 'Othello' and 'Suicide' that offer extra information or provide commentary on the dramatic narrative. An example of this is the 'Suicide' entry (NB: p. 186) that is included in between two passages describing Eva's increasingly fragile psychological state, where Phillips forces the reader into making a connection between the apparently unconnected passages. There is also a sense that the 'Suicide' definition represents an 'official' version of an event, and that Eva's 'story' is 'unofficial' because of its personal, intimate and complex nature. The paragraph that appears before the 'Suicide' entry details a dream in which Eva relives the 'Death March' she endured after leaving one camp for another: 'I find it difficult to control my mind. How will they cleanse the earth after this?' (NB: p. 186) After the dictionary definition, Eva continues to dream of the new camp: 'Life leaving without a real struggle, collapsing and tumbling in upon itself. No killing. No last words. No cruelty. Just death'. (NB: p. 187) This is followed by the voice of a doctor who ponders Eva's suicide attempt. The 'clustering' of voices is further enhanced when, in the middle of the doctor's 'report', Gerry interrupts and confirms that Eva's visions of the Holocaust are accurate:

To start with, they were dying at the rate of a couple of hundred a day. We had to get bulldozers in to move them. They were just too far gone to be brought back to life, just crawling out into the sunlight to die. Feeble it was. Bloody feeble. I saw a woman choke to death on a spoonful of water. I saw it with my own eyes. I can't ever forget that, ever. It'll be with me till the day I die, it will. (NB: p. 187)

³⁷⁴ For more on Anne Frank see Laqueur, (2001), pp. 222-25; Schwarz, (2000), pp. 101-15; in Bloom, ed (2004), Barbera Chiarello, 'The Utopian Space of a Nightmare: *The Diary of Anne Frank*, pp. 153-69.

³⁷⁵ Connor, (1996), p. 166.

³⁷⁶ Ibid, p. 167.

The novel is 'shared' between a number of voices from across the years, a trope common in much British 1990s historical fiction. This signifies history's discontinuity and suggests a circular, non-linear sense of time. Any faith in time's 'progress', and, by extension, a moral or even epistemological progress, is subverted by Phillips's narrative that identifies many of the same problems in the middle of the twentieth century as in the fifteenth. This theme of the interconnectedness of history, its repetitions and echoes, is matched by the many journeys that criss-cross the European continent. These are a series of migrations that are variously enforced and voluntary. Eva's arrest and transport to a concentration camp is therefore contrasted with Stephan's voluntary travelling to Israel, which in turn is compared with Malka's journey, for very different reasons, to the same country. Phillips connects many of the characters to stress the trope of people being joined through history and their experiences of actually being or apprehending the 'Other'. For example, Malka and her sister match the sisters Eva and Margot, while Stephan's idealism can be compared with that of Othello's, whose military status recalls Gerry's. These connections are underlined when one considers how their relations define all the characters, in part, with their respective families. The last lines of the novel, from the perspective of an older Stephan lost in a reverie of memory where his nieces skip happily and he can feel that he is 'reaching across the years' (NB: p. 213) to be with them, is emblematic of Phillips's intentions. The novel, for all its fragmented stories and multiple voices, ends on an enigmatic but sincere gesture towards inclusion.

In comparison with many of the other novels under discussion, Phillips's text is unusual in this attempt to place the Holocaust in a lineage of other racism, torture and slavery in European history. In a sense, *The Nature of Blood* would not appear to qualify as a 'Holocaust novel': the Holocaust is not the central subject of the text. But, the event, with its intrinsic 'limits' of representation, poses the greatest dilemma in the narrative. The novel places Eva's experiences of the Holocaust firmly within the context of history. Philip Tew refers to this as the text's focus on 'the outsider who enters and is mediated by another culture'.³⁷⁷ Despite the narrative encompassing hundreds of years of European history, Tew argues that Phillips avoids any sense of a 'grand narrative' defining the novel's view of history:

Overall the novel charts traumatic and sweeping forces exploring their effects upon human relationships and individuals. No *grand narrative* emerges, no

³⁷⁷ Philip Tew, *The Contemporary British Novel* (London: Continuum, 2004), p. 28.

sense of overcoming on a larger scale. A key characteristic is a feeling of numbness and bafflement as determining the subject's ability not only to comprehend, but in any kind of engagement with the universe.³⁷⁸ (My Italics)

Tew sees this aspect of Phillips's novel as being emblematic of much British fiction since the 1970s: namely, a radical re-evaluating of identity and the possible ways in which identities are formed in response to previous but still prevailing concepts of explanatory 'grand narratives'. Tew's comments on the text's problematising of the concept of the 'grand narrative' and the concomitant challenge to the fixity of identity suggest ways in which *The Nature of Blood* is a post-colonial novel concerned with questions of race. Whilst many of the 'burdens' of history that the Holocaust embodies, are to be found in Eva's section, there is a sense that Phillips is making something of a different point about the event than most other Holocaust novels. Phillips's representing of the Holocaust adheres to many of the conventions, tropes and archetypes of other Holocaust fiction. It also, particularly in the camp sections of Eva's narrative, pays careful attention to historical accuracy. Nonetheless, partly because the novel's focus is not exclusively on the Holocaust, and partly because of the historical implications of Phillips's decision to place the event within history, the novel's representation of the Holocaust is qualitatively different from other novels dealing with the 'Final Solution'.

The first difference is simply that Phillips historicises the Holocaust. Many of the British Holocaust novels deal with how the Holocaust distorts and unsettles temporal conventions, but few attempt to place the Holocaust in a wider historical context. Another way of seeing this aspect of the novel is to state that Phillips 'compares' the Holocaust with other historical examples of racial oppression, he stresses the historical lineage between the fifteenth and the twentieth centuries. The Holocaust is thus situated in a historical continuum. The matching of characters across the years and of social parallels between fifteenth-century anti-Semitism and the twentieth century version of it, emphasises the circularity of history rather than its linearity. This is not to imply, however, that *The Nature of Blood* in some way underestimates the historical and ethical significance of the Holocaust. Like other writers of the Holocaust, Phillips understands the event to be unprecedented, and therefore represents the nadir of twentieth-century European history. The seeds of such a massive destruction, the novel argues, can be found in social and religious discourses in the past. The main difference that

³⁷⁸ Ibid, p. 28.

characterises Phillips's novel, and to some degree separates it from the other 'Holocaust fiction' under discussion, can be summarised as follows: it attempts to situate the event in a 'grand narrative' of history, whilst, through its dialogic structure and polyphonic narrative, also challenging conventional notions of the 'grand narrative'. The Holocaust is thus confirmed as an unprecedented event of genocide but also contextualised as an event 'in' the 'flow' of history.

Tew's reading of the novel emphasises particular aspects of *The Nature of Blood* that suggest its markedly different relationship to the Holocaust than other fictions. For instance, in a discussion of questions surrounding national and subjective identities, Tew argues that it would be misleading to read Phillips's text merely in terms of its treatment of 'the Holocaust as a major event that defined a new aesthetic sensibility and incapacity for expression'; furthermore, in combination with the parallels made between the Holocaust and the slave trade, are examples of the novel 'thereby simply historicizing its motifs'.³⁷⁹ Again, one must underline that Tew engages with the novel on other issues of national and racial identities – the representation of the Holocaust is not his primary concern. His comments suggest again the difference between Phillips's novel and other Holocaust fictions. Tew argues that Phillips's text is an exemplary post-1970s British novel in that it is focused on 'seeing society as intersubjective, as combining changing, often transitional identities and subjectivities'.³⁸⁰ If the Holocaust, in Phillips's text, is historicised and used to speak of wider issues of racial identity, exile and national belonging, how is the event represented, given that many other Holocaust fictions see it as the central and defining theme in their respective narratives?

Benedicte Ledent argues that the author's decision to write from the point-of-view of a white Jewish woman involved in the Holocaust was considered to be, in some quarters, a controversial one. Ledent argues that Phillips is challenging a pervasive literary tribalism, and yet alludes to an article written by Hilary Mantel in 1997 in which she accused Phillips of appropriating Jewish experience and that this is redolent of a colonial impulse. Ledent deals with this by suggesting that such an accusation might have a racial bias but Mantel's critique raises issues that have resonance in relation to the studying of the Holocaust. One way of discussing these issues is to see how Ledent answers back to Mantel's accusations of cultural appropriation. She initially sees the

³⁷⁹ Tew, p. 30.

³⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 30.

novel as a 'network of correspondences',³⁸¹ and that these are used to build bridges between contrasting worlds and racial experiences. Phillips stresses similarities and connections, seeking to 'interlock' the Black and Jewish Diaspora.³⁸² Despite the novel's ambivalence and problematical nature Ledent writes that the narratives suggest an 'ethical affinity' between Black and Jewish experience in Europe.³⁸³ *The Nature of Blood* is concerned with the marginalised identity of the racial 'other' and how this subjective experience negotiates the deeply entrenched racism of the continent. Ledent confirms this reading, interpreting the novel's efforts to re-evaluate important narratives from European history – Othello and Anne Frank – and submits them to a 'revisionary scrutiny'.³⁸⁴ The novel can be seen as an example of the 'writing back' to Empire and Colonialism that many critics have identified as a fundamental aspect of British fiction since the 1970s. But, Ledent writes, rather than this merely being a re-telling of two iconographic figures, Phillips is highlighting the plight of the 'stranger' in European society and their subsequent and shared victimisation.

Given the symbolic weight of Anne Frank's diaries, this re-writing or writing back to, by implication, the colonialist hegemony of particular ways of seeing the 'other', is a potentially fraught one. Ledent responds to the charge that Phillips has appropriated Jewish experience by pointing out that 'by fictionalising what may have happened to Anne Frank in Bergen-Belsen and what she could have gone through if she had survived, Phillips rescues the young diarist from the sanitised interpretation of her writing'.³⁸⁵ Phillips's writing about Eva Stern's traumatic journey to the camps, her subsequent endurance and survival, and her escape from them, 'fills in' a possible history for Eva/Anne Frank that did not exist in reality. Ledent defends *The Nature of Blood* against accusations of cultural appropriation in terms of the novel's status as a post-colonial text. The Holocaust is seen as a terrible and defining event in the history of Europe but also one that has its origins in the racism and anti-Semitism that has informed societies for centuries. Whilst this is an uncontroversial view in terms of historicising the Holocaust, and hence Phillips avoids 'sacralising' his representation of the event, one still senses a problematic in how the text 'accommodates' such horror within its fragmented and enigmatic structure.

³⁸¹ Ledent, B, *Caryl Phillips* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), p. 136.

³⁸² Ibid, p. 153.

³⁸³ Ibid, p. 154.

³⁸⁴ Ibid, p. 154.

³⁸⁵ Ibid, pp. 156-7.

Ledent characterises Phillips's dislocated temporal structure as understanding 'evil' in history as having 'cyclical resurgence'.³⁸⁶ The dramatic consequence of such a structure suggests that the Holocaust is one, perhaps the most shocking, of many historical 'ruptures'. Precisely how Phillips situates and describes Eva's experiences will illuminate some of Ledent's post-colonial readings of the novel but will also underline the difficulties that Phillips raises in any inclusion of Holocaust representations. In this reading of the novel, with its different emphasis than Ledent's, J.E. Young's evocation of a 'testimonial authority'³⁸⁷ that Holocaust fiction aspires to provides one way of seeing how Phillips writes of the event. Given the novel's imaginative re-working of a life Anne Frank 'might' have led had she survived, and the text's fragmented structure, in other words its 'literary' qualities, one can question how Phillips utilises this 'authority'. As has been seen in the present thesis, discourses of 'authority' and 'fact' have significance when the history of the event is set within a fictional narrative. The Holocaust fictional text can be interrogated in relation to its authority and its 'truth-telling'. But also that the Holocaust fictional text grapples with questions of textual representation and how, if at all, genocide can be described, or even 'contained', within an otherwise fictional narrative. Tied in with such concerns are other tropes of Holocaust writing such as the importance of 'looking away', of the tensions between silence and description, and of point-of-view. Phillips's narrative of Eva Stern raises these and other questions.

Eva's first narration begins at the moment when the liberation of the camps occurs. Phillips utilises a familiar trope of Holocaust fiction in that the event, the killing, has already happened. One effect of this is to evoke belatedness, of arriving at the knowledge of the event after it has happened. As the Allied soldiers arrive at the camp, Eva observes 'skeletons facing men' and 'bodies twisted in bony gestures of supplication'. (NB: p. 12) This opening section covers Eva's memories of her parents, her fears concerning her 'missing' sister, Margot, and increasingly the piecing together of her recent experiences: 'Community formed the basis of our lives, but then came the long march, and yet another train, and then this place, which offered no community, no planning, no hope for survival'. (NB: p. 17) Eva's physical convalescence in the camps parallels her Uncle's 'spiritual' convalescence in a refugee camp before leaving for the new state of Israel. Phillips begins to suggest something of Eva's fractured, dissociated self. She sees apparitions of her sister and endures the traumatic aftermath common to

³⁸⁶ Ibid, p. 148.

³⁸⁷ Young, (1988), p. 51.

many survivors: 'I still dream, one memory swirling into the other. Every night I endure an uncomfortable journey to a place of distorted and unnecessary recollection. And, come morning, I am grateful to be uncoupled from the night'. (NB: p. 27)

Through this ordeal, Eva befriends a British soldier, Gerry, who she asks to search for her sister. Gerry eventually acts as a catalyst for Eva to leave for England. Eva speaks of the 'violence of memory' (NB: p. 33) and the fact that she is surrounded by 'the ghosts of strangers'. (NB: p. 33) She expresses feelings of guilt and shame and Phillips highlights the beginnings of her breakdown with the interruptions of what appears to be at first another voice inside Eva:

Again I had the same dream. (... *dragging her child behind her like a secret crime* ...) This time I knew one of the people looking at me. Gerry. He was in America with all the other faces. This time they were trying hard not to laugh, for they wanted to hear more of my story. (... *the other woman was holding a tiny baby that was wrinkled like a foot* ...) (NB: p. 35)

Eva sees, greets, and subsequently 'looks after' the ghost of her mother. 'They' dream of leaving the camp and emigrating to America which 'they' believe Margot has reached and is safe. It is interesting to note that also during this introduction to Eva Phillips utilises what have elsewhere in the present thesis been referred to as 'trigger phrases'. These are words, images, symbols and motifs that are loaded with a 'negative weight' because of their mythical association with the Holocaust. This has been discussed in relation to *Time's Arrow*, *Masai Dreaming* and also in relation to Hope's *Serenity House*, in the introduction. For example, when Eva is on her way to the D.P. ('Displaced Persons') camp she finds herself sitting at the back of the truck. She regrets this because 'the *fumes rise and curl their poisonous way* into the vehicle at precisely the point where I am sitting'. (NB: p. 44) (My Italics) Phillips stresses that Eva's consciousness is now infected by the atrocities she has endured. To put it another way, the text underlines the perpetual presence of the past 'in' the present.

Eva's narration returns to the time before she was captured, and it is here that Phillips's text most resembles the diaries of Anne Frank. Eva speaks of her 'voluntary captivity' (NB: p. 60) and waits at home whilst her parents search the town for food and provisions. A young woman, Rosa, whose husband is working for the underground resistance, comes to stay in the next room and Eva befriends her. Just at the moment that

Rosa is apparently about to leave for safety she commits suicide.³⁸⁸ Following this incident Eva recounts the day when she and her parents leave to catch a train they hope will take them away from impending trouble. They join a 'human river of shattered lives' (NB: p. 70), and then Eva looks up at the church clock:

It read five o'clock. It was the same clock that I could see from the kitchen window. For almost two years, it had read five o'clock. Here, among these houses which had become our prisons and our tombs, there was no midnight, there were no bells, there was no time. (NB: p. 71)

This image of the stopped clock echoes similar scenes in *Time's Arrow* and *Serenity House*. It also reflects the fake railway station at Treblinka where a façade of a working station was built, including a clock that always told the same time.³⁸⁹ It provides Phillips with a metaphor of the temporal rupture that the Holocaust has come to represent. Eva sees that 'there was no time': this comes to mean that there is no time left for them to escape and that 'time' itself has been negated. The 'future', in this metaphor, and hence any semblance of optimism, has been eradicated.

Phillips's complex temporal structure can be seen clearly at this point. Just as Eva is describing this train journey and the beginning of her direct experience of the Holocaust, she returns to a memory of Uncle Stephan. The effect of this sudden looking back to a time 'before' is to suggest an avoidance or delaying tactic – as if Eva cannot quite face describing the journey. It is also here that Eva recalls Stephan sitting in the garden, a memory that directly links her to him, who, in Israel years later, shares the same recollection of his two nieces. Eva recalls how her sister went to stay with another family for her own protection. She also ponders upon the situation she and many others are in: 'How is it possible to be so angry with people who have done you no wrong?' (NB: p. 93) Phillips's temporal structure crosses back and forth even within the self-

³⁸⁸ Suicide is a significant reality in the history of the Holocaust. Survivor/writers such as Jean Améry, Tadeusz Borowski, Paul Celan and Primo Levi all killed themselves. As James E. Young (1988) writes, there is a 'disturbing mortality rate' amongst those 'possessed by the Holocaust'. (p. 127) There are also the suicides of the perpetrators: Odilo Globocnik, Goebbels, Göring, Himmler and Hitler took their own lives. There is also Adam Czerniakow, the head of the Warsaw *Judenrat*, who committed suicide rather than work with the Nazis, along with the countless suicides of people in the ghettos and the camps. There are significant suicides in *Fatherland*, *Masai Dreaming* and *The Reader*.

³⁸⁹ Martin Gilbert writes (1997): 'At the end of 1942 special signboards were put up at Treblinka station. Each of the station buildings was given a spurious name: 'Restaurant', 'Ticket Office', 'Telegraph' and 'Telephone' ... "When persons descended from the trains," a survivor of Treblinka, Samuel Rajzman later recalled, "they really had the impression that they were at a very good station ..." Rajzman also recalled "huge signposts" with the inscription "To Bialystok and Baranowicze", a station clock and an "enormous arrow" on which was printed: "Change for Eastbound Trains"'. (pp. 336-7)

contained narrative of Eva. This in part evokes the quality of Eva's personal testimony, its non-linearity and discursiveness. This can be summarised in Ledent's phrase suggesting that *The Nature of Blood* dramatises a 'version' of time 'not as a succession of ruptures, but as a series of passages'.³⁹⁰ But for Eva her experiences represent a place in the past that cannot be either mastered or forgotten. The novel argues for the importance of memory as a key site of identity, whilst always recognising its inherent painfulness and difficulty. The trauma is relived as it is remembered.

Eva's story is returned to after the two interrelated narratives detailing Othello's experiences in Venice and the capture and trial of a group of Jews accused of murdering a Christian child. Othello's narration in this part of the novel details his gradual rise in Venetian society and the beginnings of his relationship with 'Desdemona'. The other parallel narrative reflects back upon Eva's story as the usurer, Servadio, realises the true nature of his plight:

But here on earth, in the eyes of Christians, he knew it was easy for a Jew to sin. One could sin even without knowing it. As he looked around himself, Servadio wondered if these people realized that, so far, no one had even accused him of a crime. (NB: p. 98)

Phillips reports these events in what appears to be an impersonal, disinterested 'historical' register. The various decrees and bills that the 'Grand Council' write and disseminate testify to an increasingly mendacious political 'double-speak' that whilst composed in the 'official' language of the state, reveals the actual attitudes towards the Jews. Phillips exposes the endemic anti-Semitism of the Venetian society. Servadio's servant boy, after a swift conversion, tells the court a hyperbolic story of his master's crimes:

Therefore, it was laid down that every year they [the Jews] must sacrifice a Christian to the Most High God in contempt of Christ, for it was owing to Christ's death that they had been shut out of their own country and were in exile in a foreign place. (NB: p.104)

Eva's Holocaust experiences that are characterised by digressions, elisions and silences are thus historically contextualised by the description of a much earlier example of racist irrationality. The meaning 'made' by the reader in connecting the different

³⁹⁰ Ledent, p. 147.

strands of narrative together compares the missives and statements (and the trial) of the 'Grand Council' with the massive and efficient Nazi bureaucratic 'machine'. One can read the 'Venice' section with its identifying of the community's latent racism, and the ways in which the hierarchy reflects such prejudices as an historical microcosm of the rise of the Nazis and their systematic attack on European Jews. These acts, obviously minor in comparison with the Holocaust, are metaphorical precursors to Eva's twentieth-century experiences of state-sponsored oppression and exile.³⁹¹ This aspect of the novel's 'network of correspondences' finds its most significant expression in the trial and execution of the Venetian Jews. Phillips stresses that the trial itself is about 'blood': not only the blood 'spilled' by the young boy but also Jewish blood that is considered fundamentally impure. The public execution, after the men have been sentenced to death by burning, is described as a sign of macabre prescience. Servadio and his colleagues pray to Israel but the fire drowns them out:

And then the flames enveloped everything, and one could see only fire. As the blaze consumed flesh and blood, the spectators, on both land and water, were deeply moved by the power of the Christian faith and its official Venetian guardians. (NB: p. 155) (My Italics)

These Venetian episodes 'speak' of the processes that lead towards the executions that remain 'off-stage' in Eva's narration. Phillips's narrative structure emphasises that these events in the fifteenth century have direct parallels with events in the twentieth. This aspect recalls Ledent's phrase 'cyclical resurgence' - that historical events recur, in markedly different ways over time. To put it another way, the Holocaust is seen as having its underpinning roots of racism in a very different society four hundred years before. Phillips's historical contextualisation risks potentially trivialising the Holocaust, or at least a particular interpretation of it. Discourses such as the event's 'incommensurable' nature and the often prevailing sense that, because of certain intrinsic qualities, it cannot be compared to any other genocide, or even, as in *The Nature of Blood*, other historical examples of racism, oppression and violence, have dominated

³⁹¹ This sense of the novel's Venetian sections acting as precursors to the Holocaust sections is underlined by Othello's visit to a ghetto: 'Intimacy between Jewish men and Christian women was punishable by a heavy fine and up to twelve months' imprisonment, depending upon whether the woman was a public prostitute. In addition, Jews were forbidden to run schools or teach Christians in any subject, and any Jew found outside the ghetto at night was likely to be heavily fined and imprisoned. Some frightened Jews argued that the ghetto, far from affording them protection, made it easier for popular outbursts against them to achieve some focus, for the Jews were herded *en masse* and enclosed in one defenceless pen'. (NB: p. 130)

Holocaust studies. These concerns are inevitably linked with the representation of the Holocaust not only in fiction but also in the visual arts, cinema, theatre and television.

Yehuda Bauer, for example, offers a helpful introduction to such broad questions surrounding the 'explicability' of the Holocaust:

Absolute uniqueness thus leads to its opposite, total trivialization: if the Holocaust is a one time, inexplicable occurrence, then it is a waste of time to deal with it. Some authors take good care to state that when they talk about its inexplicability, they do not mean the processes that led to the establishment of the Nazi state, or the irrational rationale of establishing ghettos or concentration camps, but some inner quality, expressed by the senseless brutality of the perpetrators, the silence of the bystanders, the stunned reaction of the unsuspecting victims, the vastness of the crime, and the allegedly inexplicable involvement of very larger numbers of civilized people.³⁹²

The 'inner quality' that Bauer suggests might be at the heart of some critics' descriptions of the Holocaust as a fundamentally 'inexplicable' event is, of course, an ambiguous term. As Bauer's list of the various particular aspects of the Holocaust shows, any 'inner quality' that might or might not reside in the event can be interpreted in many different ways. Also, as other writers such as Novick and Finkelstein argue, the 'Holocaust' over the years, and particularly since the 1960s, has changed according to political, social and cultural determinants. If some 'inner quality' resides in its historical reality, then arguably that 'quality' itself is as contingent a 'property' as any other. Bauer argues for the use of 'unprecedentedness' in relation to the Holocaust.³⁹³ How Phillips's novel can be seen in light of this claim is instructive. Bauer writes that however 'explicable' the Holocaust might be, there still remain crucial aspects of it that are 'unexplainable'. *The Nature of Blood* structures its sections dealing with the event in terms of the 'explicable' and the 'inexplicable'. It discusses the Holocaust in terms of the spoken (the able to be spoken) and the unspoken (the inability to communicate certain events). The present chapter will turn to Phillips's specific rendering of Eva's experiences shortly, but one further analysis of Bauer's thoughts on the 'comparability' of the Holocaust with other historical events has resonance for *The Nature of Blood*.

Bauer writes that the Nazi threat, whilst certainly rooted in centuries of Christian anti-Semitism, was a 'new type of threat'. He continues:

³⁹² Bauer, (2002), p. 14.

³⁹³ Ibid, p. 20.

Christian antisemitism [sic], with all its anti-Jewish ideology and bloody persecutions, never produced a genocidal policy ... so there is a vast difference between persecutions of Jews in Christendom ... and the genocidal program of the Nazis. Those religious commentators who wish to reduce the frightening dimensions of the Holocaust into the familiar context of persecutions of Jews through the ages are in error – their aim is not achievable; the Holocaust refuses to merge into that background. The explicability of the Holocaust does not mean that it lends itself to easy exercises of this kind.³⁹⁴

To an extent, these criticisms might have been aimed directly at Phillips's novel. *The Nature of Blood* attempts to situate the Holocaust – through Eva's experience – within the history of Christian anti-Semitism. As has been noted, Eva's 'testimony' is placed within the novel's 'network of correspondences'. But Bauer argues that this is an untenable position because the Holocaust is 'unprecedented' in terms of scale, planning, execution, brutality, irrationality and global consequence. Hence it cannot, in Bauer's terms, be conveniently compared and contrasted with earlier examples of persecution. Its historical contextualising of the Holocaust might appear, given Bauer's reservations, to ignore or lessen the event's epochal impact. In terms of literary representation, given Phillips's efforts to describe many acts of oppression and violence, how does the author finally write about Eva's camp experiences? Also, how do these representations of the Holocaust 'sit' with the other self-consciously interrelated historical events?

Eva's story is returned to immediately after the execution of Servadio and the other Jewish defendants. The last three sentences of this section give a sense of how Phillips attempts to link together the disparate narratives: 'Later, when the flames had abated, an executioner approached with a long-handled shovel. He put it between the smoking coals and when he pulled it out it was full of white ash. He threw the ash into the air and dispersed it immediately'. (NB: pp. 155-6) From this scene, the novel cuts to Eva on a train being transported to the camp. Phillips makes explicit the connections between one form of historical anti-Semitic execution and another. It is important to point out that at this stage the various strands of narrative become more fragmented than before. The opening sections, including the narratives of Eva, Othello and the trial of Servadio (and that of Uncle Stephan), are, in comparison, evenly structured. It is at this point, when Eva is approaching the camp, that the sections become much shorter and

³⁹⁴ Ibid, p. 28.

Phillips begins to break up the flow of the stories. There are the dictionary definitions, Gerry's own narrative back in London, the voice of a doctor monitoring Eva's traumatic recovery after her camp experiences, and the experiences of Malka, who meets Uncle Stephan in the new Israel.

The effect of this narrative fragmentation is a feeling of increasing disorientation. Unattributed voices interrupt the more familiar Othello and Eva sections and the reader is further encouraged to 'make' meaning of them. For example, immediately following the first description of Eva and her parents on the train, a voice that it transpires is the doctor's who is observing Eva's recovery offers thoughts upon the trauma of the survivor:

They are often incapable of successful mourning, fearing that this act of self-expression involves a letting go, and therefore a forgetting of the dead, ultimately committing the deceased, often loved ones, to oblivion. Their condition serves a commemorative function, suggesting a loyalty to the dearly departed. Naturally, their suffering is deeply connected to memory. To move on is to forget. To forget is a crime. How can they both remember and move on? (NB: p. 157)

In many ways, this contemplation of trauma and memory serves as an epigraph for the novel as a whole, and in particular the final third of the narrative that deals with Eva's breakdown. The 'closer' the novel gets to the camps themselves, the more broken, disorientating and fractured the various narratives become. Eva's voice appears to be splitting between separating selves. But one might also interpret such a textual fragmenting as expressing the inherent difficulties of trying to include the Holocaust within a broader narrative scope. In other words, Phillips's text, rather than simply placing the Holocaust within a history of Christian anti-Semitism and European suspicions of the 'other' more generally, appears to problematise its own proposition to contextualise the Holocaust.

One can identify this aspect of Phillips's novel in many of the other British Holocaust fictions. *Masai Dreaming* interrogates its own efforts to represent the event, or more precisely, those efforts of the screenwriter Curtiz. Similarly, in *The Dark Room*, Seiffert utilises the trope of photography to explore the disjunction between representation and real event. *Pictures at an Exhibition* also problematises this tense and complex relationship with its fragmented and associative narrative and its references to artistic representations. *The Nature of Blood* shares with these novels a self-referential

questioning of the ways in which literary texts intersect with the representation of history. John Brannigan sees this 'complex process of negotiation and exchange' in the post-war British novel as an example of how 'History' has been challenged.³⁹⁵ Rather than novels 'passively' reflecting 'actual social and historical conditions',³⁹⁶ Brannigan argues for a literature that articulates and embodies in formal experimentation the 'dislocated, shifting modes of [historical] presence in contemporary culture'.³⁹⁷ In this context, the writing of history, as seen in many recent British novels, is also writing on the 'writing' of history. Or, to put it another way, these novels represent historical reality whilst at the same time analysing that very representation.

When Eva and her parents arrive at the camp the prose changes markedly. Sentences are truncated and the 'voice' of the narration moves seamlessly between the third and first-person. The 'selection' process, for example is described in a familiarly flat, 'numbed' prose:

Destiny is a movement of his hand. Perhaps a quick question to make sure. Looks can deceive. How old? Healthy or ill? The old, pregnant, young, short, infirm. This way, please. Walk quickly. Roll up. Roll up. Already, a loudspeaker is blasting instructions to remove all clothing. Remove artificial limbs and eyeglasses. Tie your shoes together. Surrender any undeclared valuables and claim a receipt. Children go with the women. Where are we? The thin and the handicapped, this way, please. All gold rings, fountain pens, and chains. Roll up. (NB: p. 163)

A recognisable narrating self is lost amongst the deadening brutality and the free indirect discourse suggests the loss of Eva's subjective agency. The telegrammatic prose connotes urgency and fear, whilst the unattributed voices suggest the confusion of the crowd. After Eva's hair has been shaved off and she has been forced to shower, she states: 'I try to forget my name. I decide to put Eva away in some place for safe-keeping until all of this is over. But already Eva refuses to be hidden. There is no new name in my throat. Eva refuses to disappear'. (NB: p. 165) Phillips attempts to enact this schizophrenic response to the camp experience by evoking the repressed 'real' self resurfacing against Eva's will as she endures terrible hardships:

³⁹⁵ Brannigan, (2003), p. 54.

³⁹⁶ Ibid, p. 54.

³⁹⁷ Ibid, p. 71.

A sleeping partner has given off enough warmth to enable her to sleep for a moment, and dream. Human life is cheap. (I sometimes think that I would even kiss one if it meant that I could live.) Young bodies rusted like old taps. (Squeeze it, turn it on, drip, drip, rust coating my fingers if it meant I could live.) Valueless. (Perhaps there is to be no continuity to my story?) (NB: p. 168)

Phillips pursues this rhetorical gesture over an entire paragraph that lasts nearly seven pages. In this respect, it recalls the 'Thereseinstadt' continuous sentence from *Austerlitz*.³⁹⁸ It was argued in chapter three of the present thesis that Sebald's strikingly long sentence suggested something of the digressive, discursive voice of Austerlitz, while another aspect of it was to suggest the relentlessness of the historical experience. Phillips's descriptions of the daily grind of the camps achieve something of the same effect, exacerbated by the parenthetical interruptions of Eva's real self. Eva speaks of hunger and cold; she describes a woman ordered to dig her own grave, lie down in it and then is shot in the head; Eva sees 'dead faces' and 'damaged bodies'; (NB: p. 172) and her voice becomes more and more dissociated. Phillips informs the reader of how Eva's sister, Margot died, and then describes the gassing process. It has been seen that, in the cases of *Pictures at an Exhibition* and *Time's Arrow* in particular, that writing which directly and explicitly engages with the details and specifics of the Nazi killing process inevitably provokes controversy.

The authorial, historian-like prose style that Phillips utilises to describe the gassing process is an example of this turn to documentation:

Once everybody is inside, the heavy doors are slammed shut, and sealed and bolted from the outside. There is no escape. After a short interval, which allows the room temperature to rise to a desired level, men wearing gas masks and bearing canisters of the required preparation clamber up on to the roof of the building. They open trap doors, then shake the contents of the cans (which are marked *Zyklon B – for use against vermin*) – a product of a Hamburg-based company – into the traps and then quickly retire. This product is a cyanide mixture which is known to turn, at a predetermined temperature, into a noxious and highly effective poisonous gas. (NB: p.177)

The neutrality of the description aspires to the rhetoric of an historian's detailed and objective viewpoint. Interestingly, Phillips does not include, either at the beginning or the end of the text, a list of titles that he has used as historical reference for these sections or

³⁹⁸ See chapter on *Austerlitz* (pp. 112-14) in the present thesis.

an explanatory note underlining the historical veracity of what he has written. He does refer to 'many works which space does not allow me to acknowledge' (NB: p. vii) at the beginning of the text, but the only two titles he directly references are books concerned with fifteenth-century Venice. Given the above quotation's historical accuracy, it can be assumed that Phillips did extensive research into the Holocaust. There remains, for whatever reasons, an 'inner quality' to the process described that, at the very least, alters the way in which one might write about it. To some degree, the neutral objective tone of Phillips's writing seems to evoke the 'workmanlike' approach that many SS guards and perpetrators have confirmed was their response to such violence. In other words, the accuracy of the description of the killing reflects the truth of individual reports testifying to the workings of the gas chambers.

Although Phillips does attempt to situate the Holocaust in a wider historical context of centuries-old racism, these descriptions confirm the event's unprecedented nature. It is interesting that *The Nature of Blood* strives to present history as fragmented, and in Ledent's words, 'submits it to a revisionary scrutiny', yet when describing the working of the gas chambers returns to an authoritative historiographical tone that objectively states the facts of the process. So the 'revisionary' aspects of Phillips's text that would appear to potentially 'relativise' the Holocaust are still tied up with the 'facts' of history. In some ways, Phillips's fictional imagining of what might have happened to Anne Frank restores the Holocaust to a text that, by definition, ended just at the moment the young diarist is taken away. And although the structure of interlocking narratives does force the reader into making connections between these disparate events, one can argue that the gas chamber sequence is qualitatively different from, say, the burning of Servadio and his contemporaries in Venice. Phillips does risk accommodating the Holocaust within a broader history of European racism and hence demeaning its profound brutality. But one can see that his fractured narrative – with its competing and sometimes overlapping voices from 'across the years' – acknowledges the 'impossibility' of including such atrocities in a fictionalised text even as it attempts to do so.

In other words, *The Nature of Blood* represents the Holocaust as a profoundly important moment in the 'human river of shattered lives' (NB: p. 199) that is European history. But, when the narrative reaches the death camp, Phillips confronts what Sue Vice calls the 'disruption and unease that the subject demands'.³⁹⁹ The 'disrupted' narrative

³⁹⁹ Vice, (2000), p. 161.

and the 'unease' redolent in Eva's testimony express something of the problems inherent in writing about the camps and the gas chambers. Mantel's reservations surrounding the novel's 'appropriation' of the Holocaust are, to some degree, countered by Phillips's presentation of its centrality to European history. This is not to argue that the author suggests, in a reductive manner, the Holocaust was a 'logical' conclusion to centuries of European anti-Semitism. With its temporal switching back and forth and its increasingly fragmented sections, *The Nature of Blood* embodies a highly disorganised and non-linear view of history. Linked to this aspect of the polyphonic narrative is the growing sense that, despite anyone's best efforts, history cannot be 'fixed' or 'closed' to one single interpretation. But Phillips also stresses the truth of historical events, in particular the Holocaust, by presenting the killing process in objective detail. Eva's eventual breakdown signifies her inability to assimilate her traumatic memories into the 'real' post-war world. The 'breakdown' of Phillips's narrative connotes something of this dilemma.

Conclusion

The Holocaust and Mythology

In a chapter entitled 'What Can – and Cannot – Be Said?' in their study *Approaches to Auschwitz: The Legacy of the Holocaust*, Richard L. Rubenstein and John K. Roth write about the 'profound ambivalence' they see as being common to the majority of writing about the Holocaust. They continue:

It is impossible to write adequately about the Holocaust; yet that task must be attempted. They [writers] regard themselves as unequipped to do such work; yet they are compelled to try. The corresponding tension for a reader, at least for one who was not "there," is between an effort to understand and an awareness that the Holocaust eludes full comprehension. These dilemmas have multiple dimensions. The Holocaust, for example, outstrips imagination. It is one thing to be creative when the possibilities open to imagination exceed what has become real. It is quite another to find that reality has already given birth to persons, places, and events that defy imagining.⁴⁰⁰

Rubenstein and Roth's description of a paradoxical and ambivalent 'split' between representing the Holocaust and acknowledging that such a representation is inherently 'impossible' defines the subject's central dilemma. Throughout the present thesis novelists have negotiated this dichotomy. Furthermore, the sense that the Holocaust 'outstrips imagination' and therefore defies representation is a crucial aspect to writing about the event. In context of such theories it becomes clearer why British writers in the 1990s 'returned' to the event as subject matter. In the later years of the twentieth century, the Holocaust became a 'test case' for many discourses and British novelists turned to it to explore the related issues of representation, history, memory and trauma. The 'belatedness' of this 'return' to the history of the Holocaust is part of a broader cultural, social and political tendency in Britain, Europe, the United States and Israel to 'approach' Auschwitz as a metaphor for aspects of a 'negative knowledge'.

The 1990s saw a rise in artistic representations of the event and the British fiction of the decade is a contribution to this persistent 'looking back'. But as the earlier quotation emphasises, this 'looking back' is a highly problematical exercise. The

⁴⁰⁰ Rubenstein, Roth, (1987), p. 256.

prevailing sense that the ‘unimaginable’ – in terms of barbarity, suffering and trauma – had taken place in the realm of the ‘real’ suggests a radically altered consciousness in the post-war years. If one accepts the idea that the ‘belatedness’ of many Holocaust representations embodies a simulacrum of the ‘belatedness’ of the traumatised mind reluctantly returning to the scene of the ‘repressed’, then the fiction of the 1990s can be understood as an example of a ‘delayed’ response to the genocide. Dominick LaCapra describes this as being redolent of ‘the deferred recognition of the significance of traumatic series of events in recent history, events one might well prefer to forget’.⁴⁰¹ The sense that British novels joined the ‘belated’ (‘traumatised’) response to the Holocaust is persuasive. This echoes John Brannigan’s description of a ‘literature of farewell’⁴⁰² characterised by an ‘elegaic prose’⁴⁰³ and a ‘mournful, backward stare’.⁴⁰⁴ It provides a starting point for concluding thoughts concerned with the ways in which the novels have negotiated the intrinsic and troubling problems in ‘fictionalising’ the event.

In her chapter on Keneally’s *Schindler’s Ark* in *Holocaust Fiction*, Sue Vice refers to Peter Quartermaine’s suggestion that ‘the Holocaust is the writer’s “big subject” in our secular age, as the relation of God to man was in Milton’s time’.⁴⁰⁵ The 1990s can be understood as a nostalgic, ‘belated’ decade in that there was a pervasive cultural impulse to examine the past. But a concomitant emotional distance from the event has not been apparent. If anything, the trauma associated with the Holocaust has grown stronger the ‘further away’ writers have become from the actual event. This may have much to do with Quartermaine’s assertion that the Holocaust has been ‘mythologised’ in the post-war years. The use of the word ‘mythology’ in context of the Holocaust, with its connotations of fabrication and fiction, is controversial. But an understanding of what precisely is understood as a mythology or more accurately the ‘mythologies’ of the Holocaust can shed light upon British writers’ relationship to the fictionalising of history. Before looking at the subject in more detail a clear distinction must be made between ‘myth’ and ‘mythology’. Deborah Lipstadt’s *Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory* (1993) describes the efforts of a small group of individuals, many academics, to deny the Holocaust.⁴⁰⁶ In this context of denial the use

⁴⁰¹ LaCapra, (1998), p. 8.

⁴⁰² Brannigan, p. 74.

⁴⁰³ Ibid, p. 75.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid, p. 74.

⁴⁰⁵ Vice, p. 94.

⁴⁰⁶ See also D.D. Guttenplan, *The Holocaust on Trial: History, Justice and the David Irving Libel Case* (London: Granta, 2001; repr. 2002).

of the word ‘myth’ has an accusatory meaning that Lipstadt explores in relation to attempts to undermine historical reality (inspired largely by pro-Nazi sympathies and anti-Semitism). This includes attempts to disprove specific areas of the Holocaust – the existence of gas chambers, in particular – and more broadly the reported number of dead. Lipstadt writes of a book published in 1969 entitled ‘*The Myth of the Six Million*’ [My Emphasis] that includes articles disputing historical records and generally challenging the accepted facts as ascertained by historians and voiced by witnesses and survivors.⁴⁰⁷ Lipstadt also writes of the ‘myths’ they accuse Jews of having propagated in the intervening years in order to further ‘sacralise’ the event⁴⁰⁸. These apparently unrelated instances of ‘myth’ are evoked simply to underline the crucial differences between ‘myth’ and the present chapter’s understanding of ‘mythology’. As Lipstadt writes, these ‘myths’ are products of an ‘irrational phenomenon that is rooted in one of the oldest hatreds, antisemitism [sic]’.⁴⁰⁹

In contrast to these ‘myths’ one can begin to construct a ‘mythology’ of the Holocaust, or more accurately, a number of Holocaust ‘mythologies’ that British fiction of the 1990s has responded and contributed to. Chris Baldick’s definition of ‘myth’ and ‘mythology’ is a helpful starting point. Baldick writes that two ways of defining ‘myth’ is to see that aside from the connotations of falsehood and unreliability there is a ‘romantic’ notion of ‘myth’ that is ‘a superior intuitive mode of cosmic understanding’.⁴¹⁰ This involves a more literary reading of the word that suggests ‘fictional stories containing deeper truths, expressing collective attitudes to fundamental matters of life, death, divinity, and existence’.⁴¹¹ Furthermore, ‘mythology’ can be understood as a ‘body of related myths shared by members of a given people or religion’.⁴¹² In this regard, the Holocaust can be represented, and has been represented, through the filter of those ‘fictional stories containing deeper truths’. This is not to confuse the event with a ‘myth’ or an event that is ‘unreliable’ or even ‘false’. The historical reality of the Holocaust has often been understood in terms of the many ‘mythologies’ that have been constructed around it so that it might be narrativised. This view of a set of Holocaust mythologies is akin to Hayden White’s theory of a ‘mode of

⁴⁰⁷ Lipstadt, (New York [US]: The Free Press, 1993; repr. Plume, 1994), p. 105.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid, p. 201.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid, p. xvii.

⁴¹⁰ Baldick, (2001), p. 163.

⁴¹¹ Ibid, p. 163.

⁴¹² Ibid, p. 164.

emplotment', of the ways in which meaning is produced through stories in order to make sense of inchoate history.⁴¹³

The recognition of a plurality of Holocaust mythologies is crucial in appreciating the event's incremental significance in the post-war years. The mass of voices that have articulated many conflicting and complex experiences from the event points to the scale and multiplicity of the Holocaust's mythologies. The 'belated' return of these novels means also that British authors have been writing 'back' to mythologies that have emerged in testimony, survivor fiction and poetry, cinema, art and documentary. This recognition of the 'textuality' of history and memory is also reflected in the novels' adherence to historical fact as found in documents and historiographical works. Thus, certain characters, situations, symbols, motifs and narrative 'emplotments' are constituent parts of mythologies that have been utilised to narrativise the history of the Holocaust. Intimately linked with these aspects of narrative or fictional history is the commitment to the facts of historical record that always underpins the fiction. Holocaust fiction offers an epistemological challenge, or series of challenges, to some tenets of postmodern thinking, in particular the debate concerning the 'retrieval' and representation of reality.

James E. Young explores the importance of Barthes' conception of mythology for the representation of the Holocaust. He writes that Barthes, and later Derrida, identified the 'false consciousness' through which events are represented. The 'mythological outlines' that structure and define how events are apprehended in the public domain 'interpret the world for us, shaping reality even as they lead us to our philosophical and historical conclusions about reality'.⁴¹⁴ As Young points out, Barthes and Derrida seek to isolate and expose these 'hidden formulae of mind' and in doing so they 'warn those engaged in the labours of philosophical and historical discourse not to mistake their own creations for independent external realities'.⁴¹⁵ As has been discussed throughout the present thesis, the fiction of the Holocaust often reveals a tense but usually reverential attitude towards the event's 'independent external realities'. At the same time, these novels respond to the mythologies of representation that informs the Holocaust. Thus, one can ask how the novels under analysis have either contributed to or even argued back against the mythologies of the Holocaust.

⁴¹³ White, (1987), p. 44.

⁴¹⁴ Young, (1988), p. 66.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid, p. 66.

It is the apparent 'invisibility', 'transparency' and 'natural-ness' of these mythologies that engaged Barthes and Derrida. As was discussed in the introduction, the Holocaust has been refracted through ideological prisms in the intervening years. This phenomenon increased in the 1980s and the 1990s and it is through such readings of the event that the writers of the British Holocaust novel have constructed their narratives. Initially, as Young describes, these mythologies were products of hegemonic bourgeois ideology. But along with the writing of Frederic Jameson, mythologies were shown to be perhaps 'intrinsic to language itself'.⁴¹⁶ In other words, language, the means of representation, dictates how an event can be discussed, understood and re-presented. It is important to stress that Young is writing ostensibly about Holocaust documentary literature, a genre that is often interpreted as being 'above' these cultural mythologies. However, as Young argues, this genre (aligned with social realism) can also be understood along the same lines as other apparently less transparent genres in that it too 'naturalises' reality. Young's description of a 'rhetoric of fact' has great resonance for fiction dealing with the Holocaust.⁴¹⁷ As has been discussed throughout the thesis, the 'rhetoric of fact' evident in Holocaust fiction defines the limits of representation.

In the introduction Novick is quoted as arguing that the Holocaust is framed – or 'mythologised' – to suit a particular 'mood' of a generation. It is reductive to think of British culture as a homogenous entity defined by fixed and shared beliefs and values. The writers under discussion in the present thesis are, in many ways, redolent of cultural, social and racial heterogeneity. Justin Cartwright, for example, is a British writer born in South Africa who has written novels, including *Masai Dreaming*, set in Africa. W.G. Sebald was born in the Bavarian Alps and yet was resident in Britain for the last thirty years of his life. Michèle Roberts and Rachel Seiffert come from parents of split nationalities. Each writer has turned to the mythologies of the Holocaust, and as the chapters have argued, each novel treats these mythologies in markedly different ways whilst sharing some of the ideological assumptions and cultural tropes that have developed since the war. Novick's evocation of a particular cultural 'mood' is useful in that it situates these writers at a specific historical juncture. Thus, the 'prism' through which the Holocaust has been refracted is through two psychological 'bookends': namely the end of the Cold War and the year 2000.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid, p. 67.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid, p. 68.

A specific example of the political realities of the 1990s impinging on the mythologies of the Holocaust is in the war and genocide in Bosnia. Margaret Vandiver writes:

Nearly fifty years after the defeat of the Third Reich, Europe was once again confronted with images of sealed railway cars full of civilians, skeletal men desperately gazing from behind the barbed wire of camps, and horrific accounts of the rape, forced expulsion, and slaughter of civilians. The promise “Never again” was met by the reality of “Again – here and now.”⁴¹⁸

These atrocities that took place in Bosnia (and subsequently, Kosovo), were represented, particularly in the British press, as having ‘echoes’ of the Nazi Holocaust. In the cases of ‘Ethnic Cleansing’ and the massacre at Srebrenica,⁴¹⁹ images reminiscent of the Holocaust were at the forefront of the popular imagination and, as Vandiver points out, dictated how people saw the conflict. This, combined with the Rwandan genocide in 1994, contributed to further ethical reflections amongst writers, politicians and philosophers, about the Holocaust and its continuing legacy in the years leading up towards the millennium. The slogans ‘never again’ and ‘never forget’ have been, especially in the 1990s, severely challenged by current events. To frame these historical events in terms of psychoanalysis, as D.M. Thomas does in his *Pictures at an Exhibition*, it is tempting to interpret the post-Holocaust years as having ‘acted out’ trauma rather than ‘working through’ it. In this respect the Holocaust fictions of the 1990s are an example of a potential imaginative ‘working through’ of events as current atrocities in Bosnia, Kosovo and Rwanda took place.

Omer Bartov, considering the relation of popular media representation and genocide, questions whether it is,

perhaps possible to argue that precisely this massive exposure to images of past violence [the Holocaust] (in which by definition we can no longer intervene) has accustomed us to view images of present violence *as if* they too were happening in the past, or on a different planet altogether, well beyond our control, though very much subject to our impotent sympathy and empathy? Moreover, could it be that we have grown used to confusing not only between past and present far and near, but also between real and

⁴¹⁸ Walser Smith, (2004), p. 179.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid, p. 198. ‘Site of the worst massacre in Europe since the Holocaust. Srebrenica is a Bosnian village that had been declared a “safe area” by the United Nations. But when Western allies refused to defend it from attacking Serb forces, Srebrenica was overrun by Serbian troops and at least five thousand Muslim men were murdered and their bodies dumped into mass graves.’

fictitious, authentic and false, so that staged violence appears to us just as horrifying, or leaves us just as indifferent, as electronic records of real violence?⁴²⁰

These two questions point to the reasons behind the writing about the Holocaust in British 1990s fiction. First, Bartov's evocation of a collective helplessness or ethical paralysis suggests the way in which the Holocaust has been mythologised. In other words, the exposure to the Holocaust might have inured individuals to, say, images of Bosnian Muslims held in concentration camps or news of Hutu atrocities in Rwanda. The British Holocaust novels have, arguably, dramatised a counterpoint to this accusation of moral torpor by placing the extreme suffering of the Holocaust at the centre of examination. For example, Phillips's *The Nature of Blood*, is concerned with European racism and the text makes explicit connections between past and present oppression. Thus, the novel endorses the slogan 'Never forget' whilst arguing, with reluctance, against the concomitant 'Never again'. Genocidal violence is identified as being part of a precise social, political and cultural history. The novels engage in various acts of 'remembering' this event, whilst, at the same time, emphasising the 'sinister echo' of its traumatic violence. The 1990s, through news from Bosnia, Kosovo and Rwanda, appeared to be the decade in which the 'belated' truths from the Holocaust returned to the collective consciousness. The British Holocaust novels contribute to this 'cautionary' linkage of the mythologies of the Holocaust with contemporary events.

Secondly, Bartov's question of the postmodern 'blurring' of past and present, fact and fiction and real and staged violence, evokes a reductive relativism that attenuates the historical and ethical power of the Holocaust to merely one more event in a 'flow' of images and information. Again, the British Holocaust novel, whilst cognisant of this potential dilemma, articulates a very different point-of-view. In novels such as *Masai Dreaming* and *Time's Arrow*, for instance, the Holocaust is presented as a 'real' that profoundly troubles the postmodern relativism of the contemporary world. These, and the other novels under discussion, whilst often utilising postmodern genres and forms, argue for the predominance of the real and make a 'special' argument for the Holocaust due to its extremity and size. This aspect of the novels' relationship with the real can be defined as the 'speaking' of the 'unspeakable' and the ways in which the texts rely upon historical fact and historical documents to describe the 'unspeakable' underlines the

⁴²⁰ Bartov, (1996), p. 10.

authors' commitment to the unequivocal real. In other words, the mythologies of the Holocaust severely test the 'limits' of representation. This means that writers are confronted with an 'excess' of the real – the 'horror' of the camps, for example – that is always challenging, and potentially unsettling, the rhetoric of fiction. Thus, far from being relativist and arguing for the 'textuality' of history, the Holocaust novels of the 1990s place the remembrance of the event as a fundamental epistemological riposte to the postmodern deconstruction of history.

It is important to re-state that the British Holocaust novels of the 1990s are also part of a broader literary move back towards the past and in this respect they share many tropes, motifs and narrative structures with other novels of the decade. There is the proliferation of the multi-voiced narrative, the concern with trauma and traumatised memory and a focus on the fragmentation of Europe and of war in general. Also one can read in the historical novels of the 1990s, a keen sense of the apocalyptic and a commitment to voicing the 'victim' in history. But the Holocaust novel is generally less 'playful' and less iconoclastic than many of the British historical novels by novelists such as Jeanette Winterson, Andrew Miller, Giles Foden, Adam Thorpe and Jonathan Coe. This has much to do with the mythologising of the Holocaust and the sense that it represents the 'darkest' moment of twentieth-century history. Paradoxically, temporal distance from the event has not noticeably dulled this social, cultural and political sensitivity. Indeed, as has been discussed in relation to the 'belatedness' of the 1990s Holocaust novel, the trauma of the event has only relatively recently come to the attention of the wider world, due to the growing faith in the testimonial voice and the wealth of information on the subject.

James E. Young's description of a 'society's governing mythoi'⁴²¹ is useful in understanding the ways in which the novels approach the subject. Young characterises these as 'explaining myths'⁴²², ways in which a culture constructs meaning. For example, the 'explaining myth' of the detective/researcher figure in the present 'returning' to the past to more fully understand events is evident in *Austerlitz*, *The Dark Room*, *Fatherland*, *Masai Dreaming* and *Daughters of the House*. There is the 'explaining myth' of the child witnessing confusing and terrible events as seen in *Daughters of the House*, *The Dark Room* and *The Nature of Blood*. There is also a marked concern with the 'locating' of the Holocaust, an 'explaining myth' that is redolent of a postmodern search for origins and

⁴²¹ Young, p. 68.

⁴²² Ibid, p. 68.

truths. In, say, *The Dark Room*, Micha actively travels to Belarus to speak to those who remember what happened. Similarly, Austerlitz returns to Terezin in Sebald's text to more fully 'inhabit' the past. And at the end of *Fatherland*, March returns to the ruins of the Auschwitz camp and by doing so finds physical evidence of the deaths that occurred there. These, and other, 'explaining myths' show how novelists contribute to the narratives, or emplotments, of history that are used to illuminate the real of the past. Even in the most postmodern of the novels, *Time's Arrow*, there is a strong sense that the text, for all of its formal experimentation, argues for the pre-eminence of historical fact informing and defining the fictional.

The ways in which these novels negotiate the limits of representation that the Holocaust embodies suggest that the 'speaking' of the 'unspeakable' – that which is 'indescribably repulsive' – is a continually evolving process. Tropes of silence and of 'looking away' co-exist with tropes of looking, witnessing and receiving traumatic information. A cultural pessimism in the 1990s, an apocalyptic anxiety that largely looked back rather than forward at the violence of the century (and the ways in which a modern, 'civilised' democracy perpetuated such violence) informs these novels that generally do not offer redemption for their characters. The 'grand narrative' of a future apocalypse has been transformed into many various and disparate micro-narratives expressing a highly vulnerable and perilous position for the individual in relation to world events. The British Holocaust novels of the 1990s interpret the event in just such a manner, mixing historical research with an empathetic identification with the individual helpless in the face of broader political changes. In other words, the texts stress that some people did indeed survive and they go on to remember and/or forget their experiences. But largely people were murdered and had little or no chance at surviving, so omnipresent and powerful was the Nazi system of deportation, incarceration and large-scale murder.

Finally, the British Holocaust novels of the 1990s express complex relations between individuals and time. For example, *The Nature of Blood* cuts back and forth between epochs to make its point about the cyclical nature of history and time. Similarly, *Pictures at an Exhibition* portrays characters whose interchangeability and whose immersion in the traumatic past, dictate that they will never escape the legacy of the Holocaust. Thus, the past is not simply 'there', awaiting a pristine and untroubled resurrection. It is, so to speak, both 'there' and 'not there', both present and absent. It can be located in many places: in official documents, beneath the earth, in photographs,

shared memories, mementoes and in other fictional texts distilling experience and history. The cultural compulsion to 'look backwards' and in particular to the Holocaust suggests an urgency to understand and comprehend what often appears to be incomprehensible and 'beyond' the limits of representation. This 'return of the repressed', of the traumatic history of the Holocaust, is summed up in the quotation from Sebald's *Austerlitz* that provides the present thesis with its title:

And might it not be, continued Austerlitz, that we also have *appointments to keep in the past*, in what has gone before and is for the most part extinguished, and must go there in search of places and people who have some connection with us on the far side of time, so to speak? (AU: p. 360)
[My italics]

The 1990s British Holocaust novels scrutinised in the present thesis dramatise these 'appointments' in the past and in doing so the texts make 'connections' with those who survived and those who died in what has become the defining trauma of the twentieth-century.

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