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Words and witness: Narrative and aesthetic strategies in the representation of the Holocaust

Hamaoui, Lea Fridman, Ph.D.

City University of New York, 1991

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WORDS AND WITNESS: NARRATIVE AND AESTHETIC STRATEGIES IN THE REPRESENTATION OF THE HOLOCAUST

by

LEA FRIDMAN HAMAOUI

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Comparative Literature in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

1991

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...but I have a voice too
and for good or evil mine is
the speech that cannot be silenced.

Joseph Conrad

My corner of Europe, owing to the extraordinary and lethal events that have been occurring there, comparable only to violent earthquakes, affords a peculiar perspective. As a result, all of us who come from those parts appraise poetry slightly different than do the majority of my audience, for we tend to view it as a witness and participant in one of mankind's major transformations.

Czeslaw Milosz

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INTRODUCTION

It was my goal in undertaking this dissertation to explore in concrete terms, the conditions that traumatic experience imposes on literary expression. I emphasize the word "concrete." I do not share the extraordinary faith of the moment in theory. Why write, as is currently the fashion, about the impossibility of speech and ignore the fact of those very speech attempts? I simply find that I learn more about language, about experience, about the mind and about history by listening carefully to those articulations, to what they say, to what they don't say, to how they go about saying.

It was clear to me from the outset that trauma constituted a special category of difficulty with respect to speech and expression and that the difficulty of putting that which exceeds words into words is the formal precondition out of which a poetry, stories and testimony itself, is shaped. My original goal was to lay bare an underlying set of formal relations amongst a large number of works in different forms and languages, to show that they were related not merely on thematic, but more profoundly, on formal grounds. I wanted to show how a novel in Italian by Elsa Morante and in Dutch by

Harry Mulisch stood on the same writerly decisions and struggles as the Yiddish poems of Sutzkever, the Hebrew short stories of Ida Fink and Polish stories of Tadeuz Borowski. I wanted to lay bare the necessary connections between the experience of historical trauma and its expression and in so doing, to uncover a formal coherence amongst a diverse group of works I chose to call works of "historical horror." I set up my first chapter with the goal in mind of clarifying this notion of "historical horror."

Almost without thinking, I reached for Joseph Conrad's "Heart of Darkness." I hoped, in setting the literary and gothic horror of a Poe against the literary but historical horror with which Conrad is obsessed, to see each more clearly and gain a handle on the issues involved in works of historical horror. The comparison was more powerful than I had originally suspected and I came to wonder at the ease with which the word "horror" is used to refer to such distinct orders of experience and expression. Conrad's work speaks pointedly to every question raised by traumatic historical utterance--there is no paradox, no recognition Conrad fails to raise. As I studied it and other works representing historical horror, "Heart of Darkness" became more confirmed in my thinking as a paradigm of literary issues, formal devices and structures that are constitutive of representations

of historical horror.

My first chapter was intended to present "Heart of Darkness" in exactly this sense, as a paradigm of literary strategies in the representation of historical horror. I wished, in the chapters that followed, to extrapolate from features and strategies of "historical horror" as they appear in that novella to identical strategies found in literary representations of the Holocaust and I wished in my opening chapter to provide an analysis of formal issues to account for that similarity. Thus the chapter, "History, Fantasy and Horror," contrasts the treatment of silence and of the real in Poe and in Conrad and concludes that both are constitutive elements of traumatic utterance. The chapters that follow examine works of Holocaust fiction, film and poetry in terms of those elements. Chapters 2 and 3 are devoted to a consideration of silence in poetry, film and fiction dealing with the Holocaust. Chapters 4 and 5 examine the problematic of disbelief that accompanies events of horror makes their "realness" an issue in formal ways.

At least in literary terms, I emerge from my study of works by Aharon Appelfeld, of Don Pagis, of Piotr Rawicz, of Claude Lanzmann, of Charlotte Delbo and others with a deepened appreciation of "voice." Where words do not suffice, the burden of communication shifts

onto voice. Viewed in this light, it would be instructive to reread Conrad, his presentation of Kurtz as a voice, his substitution of voice for words as the means by which the unrepresentable is then communicated to Marlow and through Marlow to society. The literature of "historical horror" privileges the voiced dimension of literary expression and requires us to read, or better, to experience a flow of words with an acute and musical ear. It is my hope that the readings offered will point the reader in this direction.

At the same time I am more deeply convinced of an existential connection between the experience of historical trauma and its utterance in poetic and literary form. It appears to me more clearly today than ever that it is precisely the manner of expression, the rhetorical and other strategies that are deployed by the writer in the effort to represent such material, that we can trace the existential mark of an event. Jean Francois Lyotard writes of "the differend:"

> This state is signaled by what one ordinarily calls a feeling: "One cannot find the words," etc. A lot of searching must be done to find new rules for forming and linking phrases that are able to express the differend disclosed by the feeling.... What is at stake in a

> literature, in a philosophy, in a politics perhaps, is to bear witness to differends by finding idioms for them.

My first interest in this dissertation has been to uncover and explore those idioms.

Much literary criticism of Holocaust writing turns into writing about history and about horror in history. In my view, it is the job of the work of art to bring illumination to a particular corner of human experience; and it is the job of the critic to illuminate the illumination, to comment on art and not on life. The best literary essays on Holocaust works seem to follow this rule: they focus a trained sensibility and the skills of disciplined comment on a work of art. The critic functions, in relation to a work of art like a fine pianist who, in the performance itself, discovers a world of subtle relationships amongst different voices and elements of a piece of music, an awareness of which enters into that performance and brings the listener (or reader) a fuller experience of a musical composition. There is a kind of partnering here in the service of life and of society: a natural conspiracy of the critic and artist to cast light on the appalling, the confounding, but also on the miraculous in human experience. Perhaps there is a bit of miracle, too, in that partnering.

Horror is a shock, a time
of utter blindness.
--Milan Kundera

CHAPTER ONE

HISTORY, FANTASY AND HORROR

Horror, like tragedy, is a ubiquitous literary genre and element, but one which is less well understood. Certainly, our sense of "Holocaust literature" is incomplete until we begin to look at the different "kinds" of horror in literature, until we observe, if we can, the features and the strategies that distinguish them. Alvin Rosenfeld, Sidra Ezrahi and other critics have insisted upon a distinction between conventional tales of horror and Holocaust literature, a distinction that seems obvious enough.[1] But neither critic has managed to show us in more precise and analytical ways, what that distinction consists of. I would like in the analysis that follows to look at how the literary artist has in fact managed to represent historical trauma. Do

these works share features, strategies in common? What are they?

More recent critical discussion of Holocaust literary work has focused on the question of representation and its limits.[2] I am less interested in a poetics of unrepresentability and its accompanying critical paraphernalia than in examining how the literary artist has in fact managed to represent historical trauma. First, however, it is necessary to clarify the distinction between a work of fictional horror and one of historical horror.

When we speak of horror in literature we most often think of the grotesque, the macabre, the varieties of gothic and the conventions associated with a horror that derives from the imagination. These conventions and strategies are to be found, not only in what we have labelled as "gothic," but also in all sorts of works, from Oedipus Rex, to King Lear, to Crime and Punishment, in which the projection of horror is an important element of the aesthetic whole. If the classic example of the horror tale is the writing of Edgar Allan Poe, the connection of "horror" to dream and to the imagination is apparent. Richard Wilbur writes that Poe's narrative

> is an allegory of the mind's voyage from the waking world into the world of dreams, with

> each main step . . . symbolizing the passage of the mind from one to another--from wakefulness to reverie, from reverie to the hypnagogic state, from the hypnagogic state to the deep dream.[3]

Like the tales of Edgar Allan Poe, Joseph Conrad's "Heart of Darkness" is also a symbolic voyage into the horror and evil in the human soul. Both writers rely heavily upon the manipulation of point of view and upon the impressionistic posturings of a central narrative sensibility. And yet these are two very different renderings of horror.

As a literary realization of "horror," Joseph Conrad's "Heart of Darkness" is about a horror that is both more familiar but also, perhaps for that very reason, less well understood (at least in literary terms) than the horror we conventionally think of as "horror." It is well known that Conrad's story is based on his own trip to the Congo in 1890; Conrad, in his "Author's Note" to the book edition of his story, described "Heart of Darkness" as "experience pushed a little beyond the actual facts of the case...."[4] Ian Watt, in his book, Conrad in the Nineteenth Century shows how the novella is part of the polemic of its day, having been written at a moment in which King Leopold and

his imperialist policies on the African subcontinent, had aroused a storm of criticism.[5] Watt is meticulous in his study of the correspondences of the text with its autobiographical and historical background.[6]

My concern with "Heart of Darkness" is somewhat different. I am interested less in ferreting out historical correspondences than in examining the uses to which such details are put. As much as Conrad includes an exotic African setting, structures his narrative around as a symbolic quest and is fascinated with themes of depravity and madness, the horror he would present is fundamentally different from the invented and aesthetically dictated horror we find in Greek drama, in Shakespeare, in Poe. In the pages that follow I will examine the different strategies and assumptions at work in works by Poe and by Conrad, the one which elaborates deep intuitions of horror from within the human mind, and the other of which represents the unmasking and penetration of the horror as it exists outside the human mind, in history.

I

Edgar Allan Poe and the Horror of Fantasy

Several years ago Milan Kundera recorded his reactions to rereading Dostoevsky's The Idiot, which he was asked to adapt for a stage version. Kundera wrote

> that even if I were starving, I could not do the job. Dostoevsky's universe of overblown gestures, murky depths and aggressive sentimentality repelled me... What irritated me about Dostoevsky was the climate of his novels: a universe where everything turns into feeling; in other words, feelings are promoted to the rank and value of truth.[7]

The Dostoevskian world is a world that, for all of the its vast embrace and historical reference to place and events, is utterly circumscribed by the feeling-world of its protagonist. [8] The world of Poe, like that of Dostoevsky, is a world in which plot, description and style point to the internal world of the speaker, only more so. If Dostoevsky works his rich palette on a large canvas, Poe wields his more concentrated effects with precise brush strokes of black and white. And always, story and its elements serve subjective ends.

An early Poe story, "Metzengerstein," opens on a note of horror: "Horror and fatality have been stalking abroad in all ages."[9] The story details the relationship of a highborn reclusive protagonist and a horse which has mysteriously appeared on his property. The mysterious horse is identical to a horse pictured in the Metzengerstein castle on a family tapestry which the Prince has been studying and which terrifies him. After the real horse appears on the estate, this section of the tapestry is discovered to be missing. Poe notes that no one except the Prince ever actually touches the horse.

In other words, the horse is at once real and also supernatural, fabulous, unreal. The horse incarnates the horror of the inexplicable and unreal which overwhelms the real just as the horse overwhelms its rider in the story. The mysterious horse both repels and attracts the Prince and eventually races with him into the conflagration that has mysteriously overtaken the palace. The description of the Prince is a study of extremes:

> The agony of his countenance, the convulsive struggle of his frame, gave evidence of superhuman exertion; but no sound, save a solitary shriek, escaped from his lacerated lips, which were bitten through and through in

> the intensity of terror.... (68)

As horse and rider disappear, images of chaos and strife in nature give way to their opposite, to quiet. With the triumph of the horse in the form of a smoke apparition, the inversion of unreal over real is completed:

> The fury of the tempest immediately died away, and a dead calm succeeded. A white flame still enveloped the building like a shroud, and streaming far away into the quiet atmosphere, shot forth a glare of preternatural light; while a cloud of smoke settled heavily over the battlements in the distinct colossal figure of - a horse. (69)

The overblown rhetoric of this and other passages along with the piling up of typical gothic props and conventions in rapid and melodramatic succession are the bits and pieces of an anti-realist mode. They form an inverted world of romance and of pure invention upon which "historical reality" barely impinges.[10] Within such a mode, character is one dimensional. History is appropriated as myth, for example in "The Pit and the Pendulum" in which Inquisitorial Spain is another gothic

prop as it is in Lewis' The Monk and a host of other works of gothic imaginings. In all of these works as in Poe, pitch of emotion ranges from one extreme to another and is more important than variety and kinds of emotion.

It is of interest to observe that while Poe's stories are obsessed with the irrational and how it can overwhelm the personality, they are not concerned with individual character and psychology. "Metzengerstein" is not about a particular villain, but about fiendishness itself. Poe's stories are about mythic forces that make destiny inevitable rather than about the intricacies of individual psychology that shape the history and possibilities of the individual. Gothic props and conventions have only the thinnest connection to our sense of the real, concrete world out there, and function instead, as formulas ready at hand to elicit a response of horror from the reader. Together they are most unambiguous example of Eliot's "objective correlative,": "...a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion."[11]

Poe's description in "The Philosophy of Composition" of the composition of the famous poem, "The Raven" gives insight into the kinds of choices, priorities and concerns of Poe as a working artist.[12] He is treating the question of an appropriate setting in which to place the dialogue of lovelorn student and the Raven:

> The next point to be considered was the mode of bringing together the lover and the Raven--and the first branch of this consideration was the _locale_. For this the most natural suggestion might seem to be a forest, or the fields--but it has always appeared to me that a close _circumscription of space_ is absolutely necessary to the effect of an insulated incident:--it has the force of a frame to a picture. It has an indisputable moral power in keeping concentrated the attention, and, of course, must not be confounded with mere unity of place.

Poe rejects the suggestiveness and possibilities of a natural and open setting for the greater power and control of effect upon the reader rendered by the closed space of the student's study, "a chamber rendered sacred to him by memories of her who had frequented it"(460).

This focus upon effect is the counterpart of an anti-realist mode and is apparent in Poe's use of description in virtually all of his prose tales. At every moment in a narrative it is Poe's aim to work the sensibilities of his reader to their utmost. If in so doing, he can show us something about the workings of the mind as in _The Tell Tale Heart_, or project a powerful

experience of the irrational and of the way in which the irrational can undermine and overwhelm the mind, as in "Metzengerstein" and "The Black Cat," so much the better. And the objects, persons and events he describes are described not for any value, any interest they might possess of themselves, but for their value in producing particular effects upon the reader, including, at certain moments, the revelation of a state of mind.

Here is the narrator's description, in "The Assignation" of the protagonist of this story:

> There are some subjects upon which I take pleasure in being minute. The person of the stranger--let me call him by this title, who to all the world was still a stranger--the person of the stranger is one of these subjects. In height he might have been below rather than above the medium size: although there were moments of intense passion when his frame actually <u>expanded</u> and belied the assertion.
>
> (73)

Even in these few sentences which announce themselves as an excursus in description, there is little that corresponds to reality as we know and recognize it. In a passage pretending to describe the proportions of this

individual, we find an attempt at specificity (...he might have been below rather than above medium size: although...) which is a cover for acute linguistic nonsense. When impassioned, Poe says, the man's height significantly alters from below to above average, whatever "average" means in the first place.

The "description" is long. We are told that under dangerous conditions his strength is Herculean and his mouth and chin are those of a deity. Details accrue that give no information whatsoever about what they purport to describe (..."Yet his countenance was, nevertheless, one of those which all men have seen at some period of their lives, and have never afterwards seen again.") and which together create a web of association. When, for example, the narrator tells us he has never seen anyone with features as regular, "except, perhaps the marble ones of the Emperor Commodus," associations of marble, statue, kingly rank, an ancient past and an age of gods build upon one another in ways that bears no mimetic or photographic relationship to life and character but which draw upon a storehouse of image and reference that is literary, pictorial, and, often, period associated.

Where the utterance of horror is horror of an imagined origin, a text such as Poe's can afford to

indulge and to luxuriate in the horrors it produces. Poe explains the burden of this strategy in "The Raven:"

> The student...is impelled, as I have before explained, by the human thirst for self-torture, and in part by superstition, to pro-pound such queries to the bird as will bring him,the lover, the most of the luxury of sorrow, through the anticipated answer "Never-more." (462)

And Poe continues:

> with the indulgence, to the extreme, of this self-torture, the narration...has a natural termination.... (462)

Hence on the one hand we see in Poe an absolutely ascetic sense of purpose that he brings to his writing, which is such that all elements are subordinated to the creation of effects, while on the other hand we see an indulgence in the grotesquerie and embellishments of horror that is characteristic of the mode in which he writes.

If Poe's stories, generated by and relying upon essentially anti-realistic conventions, fall on one end

of a spectrum of literary horror, Conrad's "Heart of Darkness," points to the other end of the spectrum, where horror originates, not from within the mind, but from without. As much as Conrad shares with Poe a penchant for melodramatic gesture, at times for overheated language, an overall commitment to the subjective point of view and a deep fascination with the human mind, his strategies for the representation of literary horror are the very antithesis of those of a Poe.

This is understandably so. A work of horror that draws upon the mind as its source and only point of reference must use every device available to project the horror which is its expressive goal. In such writing the decibel level of emotion is high while, on the other hand, horror is safely tucked away in the formulas and conventions of an anti-realistic mode. Conversely, where horror is impressed upon the mind by events experienced in the historical world, the writer will seek, not to reproduce that horror, but to represent the attempt of the mind to resist and master the horror experienced. This involves the very opposite strategies: on the one hand, strategies which understate or otherwise present horror in indirect ways and, on the other hand, strategies of authentication which are profoundly involved with issues of truth and language as a result of

their concern to project the factuality of that horror.

II

Joseph Conrad and the Representation of "Historical Horror"

Like Poe, Conrad is very much concerned with the relation of real and unreal. Conrad uses the unreal, the exotic, the fabulous in "Heart of Darkness" as a tool with which to probe the real world of turn of the century imperialism. Hannah Arendt, in The Origins of Totalitarianism, describes "Heart of Darkness" as: "the most illuminating work on actual race experience in Africa."[13] Conrad captures the stirrings of hope and of greed, that fed the Belgian king, Leopold, and the entire imperialist enterprise. Thus Marlow recounts his visit to the Company offices upon receiving his command: "I had no difficulty in finding the Company offices. It was the biggest thing in town, and everybody I met was full of it. They were going to run an overseas empire, and make no end of coin by trade"(10). Conrad's analysis of the phenomenon of imperialism extends to such unassuming passages as the one in which Marlow meets the Director of the Company:

> A door opened, a white-haired secretarial head, but wearing a compassionate expression, appeared, and a skinny forefinger beckoned me into the sanctuary. Its light was dim, and a heavy writing-desk squatted in the middle. From behind that structure came out an impression of pale plumpness in a frock-coat. The great man himself. He was five feet six, I should judge, and had his grip on the handle-end of ever so many millions. He shook hands, I fancy, murmured vaguely, was satisfied with my French. Bon voyage. (10)

Marlow, who is usually so loquacious and detailed in describing the impressions the surrounding world makes on him, here notes only the height of the Director. The meeting is dramatically abbreviated, foreshortened and condensed. It is not the secretary who appears to usher Marlow into the presence of the "great man," but a "white-haired secretarial head." A "skinny forefinger" signals him to enter the room. Marlow notes the dim light, the desk in the room etc., without noting in his more usual manner, the impression these make on him.

Of course, this is the very point. The foreshortened description conveys an inhuman quality. It is not a meeting of persons, but of persons dismembered and turned

to things. Marlow, like the secretary, his head and his forefinger, is but an instrument, a cog in the wheel of bureaucracy. This description, as much as any of the more famous passages indicting imperialism, is a dramatic representation of the mode of being and of interacting in the world that made possible, in Conrad's analysis, the devastation and rape of Africa.

The point is not simply that a historical situation informs the text, but that Conrad's language, unlike that of a Poe, is about the mind interacting with a real historical world out there. However much "Heart of Darkness", with its exotic setting, its quest structure and other motifs reflects the romantic palette of the period, Conrad writes in a fundamentally realist mode in his preoccupation with, engagement in, and finally, projection of the real historical world.

Conrad shows us the effects of policies that ultimately reduced the peaceful Congo population from twenty to forty million in 1890 to 8 million in 1911. He portrays the black man's thralldom to the white man ("He ought to have been clapping his hands and stamping his feet on the bank, instead of which he was hard at work, a thrall to strange witchcraft, full of improving knowledge," 37). He describes how "strings of dusty niggers with splay feet arrived and departed," and how "a stream of manufactured goods, rubishy cottons, beads, and

brass were set into the depths of darkness, and in return came a precious trickle of ivory" (19). He describes early on and in detail the treatment of the black man:

> A slight clinking behind me made me turn my head. Six black men advanced in a file, toiling up the path.... Black rags were wound round their loins, and the short ends behind wagged to and fro like tails. I could see every rib...each had an iron collar on his neck and all were connected together with a chain whose bights swung between them, rhythmically clinking.... (16)

Conrad is concerned, in "Heart of Darkness" with the perceived realness or factuality of things. At one point Marlow marvels that the starving cannibals on his steamship do not eat him and his passengers:

> Don't you know the devilry of lingering starvation, its exasperating torment, its black thought, its sombre and brooding ferocity? Well, I do. It takes a man all his inborn strength to fight hunger properly. It's really easier to face bereavement, dishonour, and the perdition of one's soul---than this kind of

> prolonged hunger. Sad but true. And these chaps had no earthly reason for any kind of scruple. Restraint! I would just as soon have expected restraint from a hyena prowling amongst the corpses of a battlefield. But there was the fact facing me--the fact dazzling, to be seen, like the foam on the depths of the sea, like a ripple on an unfathomable enigma....
>
> (43)

The "fact" at issue is a fact of great historical importance since it is the mysterious "restraint" of the black man that helps make possible the degradation of the black masses. Conrad lingers on that fact, the fact that the starving African cannibals do not eat him or his fellow Europeans. This observed element of the historical interaction of black and white man on the African continent is what Conrad chooses to call "the fact facing me--the fact dazzling, to be seen, like the foam on the depths of the sea, like a ripple on an unfathomable enigma."

Conrad is preoccupied in "Heart of Darkness, "with fact, with the idea of fact, with the problem of how we apprehend fact. Fact, like the foam that rides atop a cresting wave, or a ripple that disturbs the surface of a body of water, calls attention to itself and disconcerts our picture of things. It "dazzles." It is

experienced in sensory, physical terms like a sliver of light that irritates the eye as it "dazzles." The light blinds, but also illuminates. Conrad's language suggests an imaginative path of grappling with historical experience that moves from initial wonder and apprehension to its integration in physical and bodily terms.

Two more weighted instances occur in which simple objects come to signify a state of ultimate integration and facticity that is morally and symbolically charged. Marlow is much preoccupied with the rivets which lie uselessly about in crates at different trading posts and which he needs to fix the tin pot steamship that is to pick up Kurtz. "What I really wanted was rivets, by Heaven! Rivets. To get on with the work--to stop the hole...." Marlow exclaims to one of the trading agents. A page later he continues: "...but what I wanted was a certain quantity of rivets--and rivets were what Mr. Kurtz wanted if he had only known it"(29). The quest for Kurtz and for the knowledge he possesses cannot get under way without the rivets to hold the steamship together. They are connectives and symbolize, by virtue of that function and of their physical properties, the absolute integration of self and world that is the foundation of knowing and the goal of Marlow's quest.

After three months delay, the voyage to the Inner Station begins. Along the way, Marlow and the pilgrims come upon an unlikely but "significant" object, a sailor's book left in an abandoned hut in the middle of the jungle. Marlow picks it up:

> It had lost its covers, and the pages had been thumbed into a state of extremely dirty softness; but the back had been lovingly stitched afresh with white cotton thread, which looked clean yet. It was an extraordinary find. Its title was An Inquiry into Some Points of Seamanship, by a man Towser, Towson--some such name--Master in His Majesty's Navy. The matter looked dreary reading enough, with illustrative diagrams and repulsive tables of figures, and the copy was sixty years old. I handled this amazing antiquity with the greatest possible tenderness, lest it should dissolve in my hands. Within, Towson or Towser was inquiring earnestly into the breaking strain of ships' chains and tackle, and other such matters. Not a very enthralling book; but at the first glance you could see there a singleness of intention, an honest concern for the right way of going to work, which make these humble

> pages, thought out so many years ago, luminous with another than a professional light. The simple old sailor, with his talk of chains and purchases, made me forget the jungle and the pilgrims in a delicious sensation of having come upon something unmistakably real.
>
> (38,39)

The book is old, dirty and filled with "repulsive tables of figures." Marlow ponders the content and purposes of the book; it is "an extraordinary find." As in the passage describing the cannibals who fail to eat him, Marlow is filled with amazement as he ponders the fact of the book, its physical aspect, dull content and singleness of purpose. The book becomes "luminous with another than a professional light," acquires the moral attributes of its author, a "simple old sailor," with "singleness of intention" and an "honest concern for the right way of going to work." Finally, having uncovered the underlying moral and human "meaning" of the book, Marlow experiences his discovery of the book as "a delicious sensation of having come upon something unmistakably real."

Once again, fact has yielded up its meaning. Once again, the formulation of meaning is experiential, and, in its literary representation, takes a sensory,

nonverbal form. To stumble upon the real is to move somewhere past the physical object to its integration within a human consciousness. The passage describes knowing as a process, as a journey of consciousness into a world of physical, historical and human fact and consciousness as something that exists as a primary awareness within the body. The book and the rivets are parts of that world of fact outside mind and consciousness, facts that, like the white man's shocking behavior in Africa, resist integration.

The interpretive process which extracts meaning from the facts at hand is most intensely dramatized in Marlow's upriver voyage to Kurtz. The story of that voyage moves from fact to its meaning and finally, to the knowledge of both fact and meaning experienced in an integrated way, and, therefore, as "real." The facts of the European presence in Africa, the horror and exploitation made possible by the bureaucratic system, the treatment of the black man and description of life at the trading stations, occur for the most part in the first section of "Heart of Darkness" as we follow Marlow from Europe to the shores of Africa and to the Central Station where he finds the vessel he is to command at the bottom of the river. These are the unintegrated facts of historical existence that Conrad lays before us.

In the passage that follows, Conrad describes Marlow's first view of Africa from on board a passenger ship carrying him to the first of several trading station. Already the historical, physical and sensory "facts" of the world around him are categorized into those which seem to be a delusion and those that are natural, have reason and meaning; those that keep Marlow away from the truth of things and those that "gave one a momentary contact with reality":

> We pounded along, stopped, landed soldiers; went on, landed custom-house clerks to levy toll in what looked like a god-forsaken wilderness, with a tin shed and a flag-pole lost in it: landed more soldiers--to take care of the custom-house clerks presumably. Some, I heard, got drowned in the surf; but whether they did or not, nobody seemed particularly to care. They were just flung out there, and on we went.... The idleness of a passenger, my isolation amongst all these men with whom I had no point of contact, the oily and languid sea, the uniform sombreness of the coast, seemed to keep me away from the truth of things, within the toil of a mournful and senseless delusion. The voice of the surf heard now and then was

> a positive pleasure, like the speech of a brother. It was something natural, that had its reason, that had a meaning. Now and then a boat from the shore gave one a momentary contact with reality. It was paddled by black fellows. You could see from afar the white of their eyeballs glistening. They shouted, sang; their bodies streamed with perspiration; they had faces like grotesque masks--these chaps; but they had bone, muscle, a wild vitality, an intense energy of movement, that was as natural and true as the surf along their coast. They wanted no excuse for being there. They were a great comfort to look at. For a time I would feel I belonged still to a world of straightforward facts; but the feeling would not last long.... (13,14)

Conrad describes the black men paddling their boats along the shore as "a great comfort" for Marlow "to look at" and he describes the black men themselves in triumphantly sensuous terms: "but they had bone, muscle, a wild vitality, an intense energy of movement, that was as natural and true as the surf along their coast."

Throughout "Heart of Darkness," the unchanging, exotic and fabulous jungle and its people are associated

with vitality, energy, nature, truth, meaning, straightforward fact, purpose and reality while the traders and the European world they represent are just as consistently described (all of the adjectives are Conrad's) as: dissembling, cruel, inhuman, sham, hollow, rapacious, ludicrous, muddled flabby, greedy, without seriousness and absurd. Marlow feels isolated among the traders whom he calls, here and elsewhere, "phantoms."

> They wandered here and there with their absurd long staves in their hands, like a lot of faithless pilgrims bewitched inside a rotten fence.... By Jove! I've never seen anything so unreal in my life. And outside, the silent wilderness surrounding this cleared speck on the earth struck me as something great and invincible like evil or truth, waiting patiently for the passing of this fantastic invasion. (23)

The final image of the silent and patient wilderness sums up the mysteries of evil and of truth that draw Marlow upriver in search of Kurtz.

As Marlow journeys upriver toward Kurtz, Conrad focuses less upon the facts of European colonialism, and increasingly upon images that project the meanings

behind those facts. The jungle becomes an active presence and organizing motif taking over from the shabby and destructive world of the trading stations. Like the rivets and like Towson's Inquiry into Some Points of Seamanship, the jungle is a symbolic and impressionistic rendering of the concrete and sensuous factuality of pure existence. However, unlike the rivets and the book, which are useful objects, the jungle is alive, it has a soul and a personality. It has moods, feelings. At moments it is benign, at other moments, less so. But always it has what the European traders lack and what Marlow seeks: truth in all of its imposing presence and facticity.

The world of the jungle forms the backdrop and goal of Marlow's voyage. It is a world of physical wholeness, relationship and integrity while the traders in all of their unreality, represent the historical puzzle of European man entering the twentieth century. Kurtz is, of course, the mystery itself, the heart of historical atrocity and darkness in Africa. Kurtz' cry is the third phase of a voyage to make real the horrific unreality of white behavior in Africa. It is the final phase of a process of knowing which moves from object, to meaning, to the object perceived and thereby, endowed with a perceived factuality." With that cry, the historical horror to which Marlow is a witness in Africa and the

truths it reflects about humanistic Western culture become real for Marlow in the way the jungle, the rivets and the book are real:

> It was as though a veil had been rent.... He cried in a whisper at some image, at some vision--he cried out twice, a cry that was no more than a breath:
>
> 'The horror! The horror!' (71)

III

Historical Horror and the Strategies of Silence

Horror, because it is the word that Kurtz uses to sum up his judgement of himself, bears the accumulated weight of all that draws Marlow onward to meet Kurtz. It is the revelation promised, deferred, sought and revealed. Narrative time slows as we draw closer and closer to Kurtz and the meanings promised, not because Conrad indulges in leisured description of a primeval landscape, its sounds, its imposing reality, but because the sounds and silences and stillness are part of an inner resistance, part of that which shrinks before a

fully experienced illumination of 'the horror!...the horror!'

Horror is the most significant word of this work and it is also the most sparingly used 'significant' word. Except for Kurtz' cry, it appears four or five times in a narrative of close to eighty pages. It appears for the first time in Marlow's description of the "gloomy circle of some Inferno" to which the sick and diseased blacks retreat to die(17). Marlow describes himself as "horror-struck" at the sight which is like "some picture of a massacre or a pestilence" (18).

This reticence with respect to the word horror takes other forms as well. Marlow reacts to the sight of human suffering in this and in every instance by turning away where possible: "I didn't want any more loitering in the shade, and I made haste towards the station," he says just as earlier he tries to let a chained gang of blacks he has described in some detail get out of sight: "You know I am not particularly tender..." he avers and stands "appalled, as though by a warning" (17,18)

Marlow talks a great deal and yet says little about himself. At one point he describes his puttering to get the tinpot steamship going and ends the paragraph "I toiled wearily in a wretched scrapheap unless I had the shakes too bad to stand" (70). This is the first hint of an illness we never hear about except one more time when

Marlow tells us: "And it is not my own extremity I remember best.... No! It is his extremity that I seem to have lived through"(72). Just as he glosses over his own brush with death, he glosses over the hardships of a two hundred mile trek for fifteen days by foot through jungle to the Central Station during which such mishaps occur as the disappearance of all of the black carriers who dump Marlow's overweight and sick white companion in the bush: "However all that is to no purpose," Marlow comments (21).

All of these incidents and passages point to horror while they maintain a reticence at the same time. At odd moments Marlow mentions that he hasn't eaten and is getting savage or he throws a new pair of shoes overboard his steamship that are splattered with the blood of his black helmsman. In each case Marlow continues his meditative and essentially detached narration, for example telling us about the stillness of the jungle or the impact of Kurtz' words on him, as though he'd never mentioned his more personal struggle with the brutalizing conditions of his journey and their effects upon him. Marlow is constantly trying to point out the significance of things; he recounts the impressions that people, events and environment make on him. He observes. He characterizes, judges what he sees. But he leaves out the

gut line, the experience going on inside Marlow out of which his speech flows.

Conrad litters his text with examples of physical brutality and of casual death, all of which are parenthetic, besides the point, glimpsed and quickly passed over. Marlow's command is the result of a strange incident in which the former captain, Fresleven, "the gentlest, quietest creature that ever walked on two legs," quarrels over some hens, publicly and mercilessly beats a screaming black chieftain whose desperate son then spears the good and gentle Danish captain. Marlow refrains from describing Fresleven's death and observes instead that the black man's spear "of course... went quite easy between the shoulder-blades"(9). Later, he describes a delivery of letters to a French ship absurdly firing shells into the "empty immensity of earth, sky, and water": "We gave her letters (I heard the men in that lonely ship were dying of fever at the rate of three a day) and went on"(14). The use of parenthesis here is certainly deliberate. On his two hundred mile foot journey through the wilderness, Marlow passes several black carriers "dead in harness, at rest in the long grass near the path"(20). Significantly, Conrad follows this example of casual death with a description of the silence of the jungle, a powerful, felt silence that seems to absorb into itself all of the unexpressed

and inarticulate human pain and outrage that casual death inflicts upon the living and which we sense in the sounds of drumming that follows the silence:

> Now and then a carrier dead in harness, at rest in the long grass near the path, with an empty water-gourd and his long staff lying by his side. A great silence around and above. Perhaps on some quiet night the tremor of far-off drums, sinking, swelling, a tremor vast, faint; a sound weird, appealing, suggestive, and wild--and perhaps with as profound a meaning as the sound of bells in a Christian country. (20)

Like the rest of the "pilgrims," Marlow feels "bewitched and cut off for ever from everything... amongst the overwhelming realities of this strange world of plants, water, and silence." (34) The silence of the jungle is here connected to Marlow's feeling of being cut off and disconnected from the world around him. A page later, Marlow describes the sense of being cut off and overwhelmed in this way:

> We were cut off from the comprehension of our surroundings; we glided past like phantoms,

> wondering and secretly appalled, as sane men would be before an enthusiastic outbreak in a madhouse. We could not understand because we were too far and could not remember.... (36)

The jungle is both an earlier, integrated and utterly human world with which Marlow and the Europeans have lost contact, and a horrifying projection of the potential for evil within themselves which Marlow and the others sense but do not yet "comprehend."

Marlow, we have seen, is loquacious and at the same time closed. He selectively understates, turns away from the sight of death and atrocity, speaks in a voice which is essentially impersonal at the same time that it is subjective, feels cut off, overwhelmed and appalled by what he sees and experiences. Finally, he displaces and projects that to which he points but does not give voice, onto the jungle "world of plants, water, and silence."

The frequency of Marlow's use of the word 'silence' is as startling as the infrequency of his use of the word horror and the two are closely related. Marlow is preoccupied with silence, with the "indeterminable miles of silence" before him "while we crept toward "Kurtz," (38) with the "high stillness of primeval forest" before his eyes,(27) with the jungle as a "rioting invasion of soundless life," (13) with the "audible soothing silence"

which follows the drum beats and cries of the natives.(65) The word is repeated in a myriad of ways, always ambiguously and suggestively: "and through the dim stir, through the faint sounds of that lamentable courtyard, the silence of the land went home to one's very heart - its mystery, its greatness, the amazing reality of its concealed life." (26)

The silence and its mystery are indeed the reality, or better, the horror, which Marlow would like to conceal and which he walks away from at every opportunity. "Heart of Darkness" is carefully orchestrated not only to reveal, but, just as important, to conceal. For all of its sympathy for the exploited, it is crucial to note that the story is narrated from the perspective of a member and employee of those that are exploiting the native population. A sentence such as "Black shapes crouched, lay,...clinging to the earth...in all the attitudes of pain, abandonment, and despair," would read very differently had it been written from the perspective of one of the dying blacks or from the eyes of his child, brother or wife(17). Marlow and Kurtz' horror is not the horror of the victim, tortured and abandoned by his fellow man, but a deep form of insight of the capacity for evil within oneself. The two are entirely different and the second, is more cerebral, more

complex, more contrived in some ways, less emotional at its core.

The revelation itself takes the form of an encounter, a cry, uttered after the fact, a metaphorical "rending of the veil." The real story is, in effect, never told. Details of horror are glimpsed at best but never revealed. The word "horror" that Kurtz utters to Marlow gives us no clue whatever as to the atrocities Kurtz sees in his mind's eye. Kurtz' cry brings knowledge to Marlow but this knowledge, deep as it is, is indirect knowledge. The story of Marlow's journey is the story of the witness and of his witnessing. It is not the story of the devastation itself.

Silence, then, in "Heart of Darkness," takes forms that are implicit as well as explicit, structural as well as tonal. While the evidence of human devastation does appear in Conrad's text, the weight, passion and focus of the narrative has been displaced: dramatically, onto the symbolic quest-journey, and linguistically, onto images and rhetoric associated with the jungle, its sounds, the cries heard, and especially, its silence. Silence as an image, in "Heart of Darkness," acquires a life and density of its own even as, within the narrative of the quest and again in the lie to the Intended, Conrad acknowledges that other more awful silence that cannot be broken.

IV

Strategies of Authentication: the Problem of Language and of Truth in "Heart of Darkness"

Unlike Poe, who uses the resources of language to create effects, Conrad views language as an instrument of seeing. After permitting one of the trading agents, a brickmaker, to think he has influence with the company offices in Europe, Marlow reflects:

> I became in an instant as much of a pretence as the rest of the bewitched pilgrims. This simply because I had a notion it somehow would be of help to that Kurtz whom at the time I did not see--you understand. He was just a word for me. I did not see the man in the name any more than you do. Do you see him? Do you see anything? It seems to me I am trying to tell you a dream--making a vain attempt, because no relation of a dream can convey the dream-sensation, that commingling of absurdity, surprise, and bewilderment in a tremor of struggling revolt, that notion of being captured by the incredible which is of the very essence of dreams...." (27,28)

If we think a bit about seeing and about "Heart of Darkness" we begin to ask ourselves how Conrad proposes to help us see? How does the narrative go about making us see?

The passage itself contains several hints. Kurtz, Marlow tells us, is not real to him. He is "just a word." And Marlow cannot "see the man in the name." In seeking out Kurtz, Marlow is seeking to bring together the man and the name. Seeing has to do with a oneness of names and things. The thing revealed, the thing exposed--truth--is a bringing together of names and things. And by the instrumentality of his language and the story he tells us, Conrad will bring these two together and help us see.

But Marlow has a difficulty. He, too, does not yet 'see.' He exists in a state in which things and their names have not yet come together. He feels himself as much of a pretence as the pilgrims. He perceives the flow of existence as unreal and dreamlike and it is this sensation that he must capture--"the dream sensation, that commingling of absurdity, surprise and bewilderment in a tremor of struggling revolt, that notion of being captured by the incredible"--if the word and the thing are to come together after all. The burden of language and of narrative in "Heart of Darkness" is exactly this,

to transform the unreal into the real, to bring together word and thing and thereby to know.

Questions of language and of truth in "Heart of Darkness" are more complicated than this would suggest. Conrad is deeply concerned, in "Heart of Darkness," with language as an instrument, both of apprehension and of power. Kurtz draws Marlow to him by virtue of Kurtz': "gift of expression, the bewildering, the illuminating, the exalted and the most contemptible, the pulsating stream of light or the deceitful flow from the heart of an impenetrable darkness"(48).

Kurtz's gift is the gift of language and the entire period of the voyage and meeting with Kurtz is imaged in a series of adjectives that describe a sound. "A voice. He was little more than a voice," Marlow says and describes the memory of his stay in Africa in the unlikely image of the sound of "a dying vibration of one immense jabber, silly, atrocious, savage, or simply mean without any kind of sense"(49).

Sound is jabber without sense before words and their combinations make their appearance, for better and for worse, creating form where once there was none, and preparing the ground for evil, chaos and violence where once there was peace, as in the Congo. Sounds, whether they be the sound of drums, or of silence, the "flying terror of the sound" of a steam whistle or the "infinite

desolation" of a human cry, repeat through the text in leitmotifs that together project a world of sound and expression that has not yet differentiated into speech, into the words and forms that represent.

Kurtz embodies both of these aspects. After his return to Europe, Marlow tears off the infamous postscriptum, "Exterminate all the Brutes," from Kurtz' Report and gives it to a journalist who once knew Kurtz. The journalist confides his view of Kurtz to Marlow:

> Heavens! how that man could talk! He electrified large meetings. He had faith--don't you see? he had the faith. He could get himself to believe anything--anything. He would have been a splendid leader of an extreme party. (74)

At the same time, Conrad describes Kurtz' deathbed cry of horror as a "supreme moment of complete knowledge" (71). It is Kurtz' testimony: "It was as though a veil had been rent." Kurtz reveals to Marlow his summing up and judgment and Marlow is witness to that revelation. Kurtz names that which has eluded Marlow and for which Marlow has undertaken his voyage into the interior of Africa. With his cry, "'the horror, the horror,'" the unreality that accompanies mass historical destruction is

rent "as though a veil had been rent." With Kurtz' cry, word and thing briefly come together.

The key event toward which the larger narrative moves, then, is not arrival at a physical location or even moral destination, but an event of vocalization. It is Kurtz' whisper: "a cry that was no more than a breath" (131) The factuality or integration that is the goal of Marlow's quest-voyage is accomplished by the action of Kurtz' cry and, more specifically, by the communication of lived knowledge from one man to another through the living and bodily medium of the voice, and in the modulations and inflections of that voice.

One of the most interesting aspects of the novella is the fact that it is structured around this very idea of personal communication, of telling and listening: of telling that claims the status of witnessed truth, of listening that establishes a line of transmission in society for that truth.[14] Conrad underlines the personal relationship of witness and listener upon which this sense of the real relies. He describes Marlow's first interchange with Kurtz: "I did say the right thing....at this very moment, when the foundations of our intimacy were being laid--to endure--to endure--even to the end--even beyond"(128).

If Marlow's journey is climaxed by an act of listening, the larger work is structured in as a series

of "tellings." Kurtz' personal revelation of witnessed truth is passed on to Marlow who tells his story to the five men aboard the Nelly. That story is told to the reader by one of Marlow's five listeners who describes their bonding and the community they constitute this way:

> Between us there was, as I have already said somewhere, the bond of the sea. Besides holding our hearts together through long periods of separation, it had the effect of making us tolerant of each other's yarns--and even convictions. (57)

"Heart of Darkness" shapes itself, then, not as the story of something that happened, but as a story about that telling. The magnitude of the devastation wreaked by the European imperialist policies is not conveyed in a rendering of the facts of that devastation, but through the medium of a personal communication by a witness. Historical horror displaces the very possibility of a represented universe, fictional or nonfictional, so that the effort to represent that horror always falls back on the action itself of representing, telling. Marlow never tells us what he actually sees when he glances into Kurtz' cabin. Instead he describes his

disbelief, his shock and the outcry he might have made:

> I think I would have raised an outcry if I had believed my eyes. But I didn't believe them at first--the thing seemed so impossible. The fact is I was completely unnerved by sheer blank fright, pure abstract terror.... What made this emotion so overpowering was--how shall I define it?--the moral shock I received, as if something altogether monstrous, intolerable to thought and odious to the soul, had been thrust upon me unexpectedly. (127)

"Heart of Darkness" only provides us with glimpses of the horrors with which it is so concerned. It is a story about the attempt to grasp the actuality of those horrors: the story of Marlow's voyage and not the story of colonized Africa. The notion of witnessing and the religious language in which Conrad describes Kurtz' revelation are only two strategies among many to confer a status of truth and factuality to events that are "intolerable to thought and odious to the soul."

The encounter with Kurtz in Africa is followed by another encounter, the encounter with Kurtz' fiance back in Europe. Marlow chooses to conceal Kurtz' final words

from Kurtz' Intended and explains only: "I could not tell her. It would have been too dark--too dark altogether...'"

The effect of Marlow's lie to the Intended is to suggest that the human truths Marlow has wrested from the heart of imperialist and historical darkness, are finally useless, demoralizing, and even dangerous for the conduct and support of life in the real world. Having finally come together, word and thing unravel in but a few brief pages. The same narrative that is structured upon a relay of witnesses presents us with the dilemma of the witness who fears the consequences of his witnessing. "Heart of Darkness" closes with Marlow's decision to bear false witness.

If the real is constituted in society by an act of witnessing, the lie to the Intended brings to naught the animating quest of the novella, or at least, turns it on its head. The lived truth of the witness defers, finally, to the necessary fictions of survival.
The unbearable knowledge is suppressed in the human arena while, in the form of art Conrad exposes the modalities, resistances and difficulties of that knowing. So accurate is Conrad i his imaginative and analytic grasp of the behaviors and situation he dramatizes that the story resonates, almost a century later, with the authority of prophecy: Western civilization did deceive itself into

catastrophic and unprecedented programs of enslavement and of state sanctioned extermination.

NOTES

[1] Rosenfeld raises this problem in A Double Dying: Reflections on Holocaust Literature (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980). In his opening chapter he discusses the ways we read Poe, Kafka and even de Sade and the difference between such a reading and the reading of a Holocaust narrative: "the point is that we lack a means of reading Holocaust literature. It has no symbolic dimensions, carries no allegorical weight, possesses no apparent or covert meaning..."(22-25).

See also Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi, By Words Alone: the Holocaust in Literature (London: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 51 and Lawrence Langer, The Holocaust and the Literary Imagination (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975) 22.

[2] The unrepresentability of the Holocaust is a key theme of all writing on the subject from the first diary entries in the ghettos to the outpouring of memoirs and of literary and historical writing that has surfaced over the past fifteen years. With the publication of Jean-Francois Lyotard's The Differend (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988) and the discussion in that work of language and the problematic of testimony, the issue has received scrutiny in detailed theoretical terms. Hayden White, Jacques Derrida, Geoffrey Hartman and Dennis Donoghue focused on this issue at a conference put together by Shaoul Friedlander to address this very question. The conference was entitled "The Limits of Representation" and took place at the L.A. campus of the University of the California, April 26-29, 1990.

[3]"Poe and the Art of Suggestion," Studies in English, 3, 1982: 1-13.

[4] See the Norton Critical edition of Heart of Darkness, ed. by Robert Kimbrough (New York: Norton, 1971) 160. All citations from this work will refer to this edition. Page numbers will be indicated parenthetically in the body of my text.

[5] Richard Davis, a well known journalist of the period wrote that

> After one has talked with men and women who have seen the atrocities, has seen in the official reports that those

> accused of the atrocities do not deny having committed them, but point out that they were merely obeying orders, and after one has seen that even at the capital of Boma all the conditions of slavery exist, one is assured that in the jungle, away from the sight of men, all things are possible....
> (Kimbrough, 92,93)

[6](Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979) 126-253.

[7]"An Introduction to a Variation," New York Times Book Review, Jan. 1985: 1,26.

[8]Kundera's unconventional view of Dostoevsky grows out of the harsh experiences of Nazism and communism. See his novel Life is Elsewhere for his moral critique of aesthetic positions based on a Dostoevskian 19th century valorization of feeling and of the self.

[9] The Annotated Tales of Edgar Allan Poe, ed Stephen Peithman (New York: Doubleday, 1981) 3-10. All citations from this work will refer to this edition. Page references will be indicated parenthetically in the body of my text.

[10] By "historical reality" I mean the impression of factuality created when authentic detail of the physical, social and psychological world enter a work of art. See Patrick Brady, "Fact and Factuality in Literature," Directions in Literary Criticism: Contemporary Approaches to Literature, ed. Stanley Weintraub and Phillip Young (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University, 1973).
By "invented world of romance" I am suggesting a continuum between pastoral, the fairy tale and the gothic in which all share an invented character and differ in the emphasis upon an ideal or monstrous version of that invented world or some fantastic mixture of the two. All three are consistent in their reliance upon a narrative principle of disengagement from the observed world.

[11] The Great Critics: An Anthology of Literary Criticism, ed. Smith and Parks, "Hamlet and His Problems" (New York: Norton and Co., 1967) 711.

[12] Selected Writings of Edgar Allan Poe, ed. David Galloway (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1974) 480-491.

[13](New York: Meridian Books, 1958), 185. See chapter seven "Race and Bureaucracy" in which Arendt cites Conrad repeatedly in her historical analysis of European imperialism on the African subcontinent.

[14]I am indebted to J.Hillis Miller for his observations pertaining to structure in "Heart of Darkness," and particularly to his noting of a "proliferating relay of witnesses" ("Heart of Darkness: Parable and Apocalypse," 12). I am grateful to Professor Miller for sharing his unpublished ms. with me.

Mystery on the border of death
Lay a finger upon your lips:
'Silence Silence Silence'-

--Nelly Sachs

CHAPTER TWO

SILENCE AS FEELING AND AS FORM IN AHARON APPELFELD'S BADENHEIM 1939

The better the work of art, the more true it is to common experience. The most common response to traumatic experience is the inability to describe the experience. The speaker asserts that he simply lacks the words to describe his experience. Or he may resort to a mode of description that is structured to leave out as much as it is to reveal that which it purports to describe. Amnesia, memory blocks, vague or partial description are all familiar after-effects of the traumatic experience. And what is described is perceived as dislocated from the ordinary flow of experience. The memory of the traumatic event is colored in a fashion that marks its peculiarity

as when Margaret Thatcher, responding to a question about a bombing attempt upon her life, instead described the sunlight and the feeling of wonder that followed the explosion. Literary strategies that give voice to traumatic experience are artistic and well analyzed formulations of exactly such everyday tactics. The pages that follow are a study of the silence that proceeds from the experience of "historical horror," as we meet it in literature. It is a study of the way in which this silence structures a work of art and it is a study of how a particular work of art orchestrates, organizes and represents that silence. I will use the Hebrew writer, Aharon Appelfeld's small masterpiece, Badenheim 1939 translated into English and first published in 1980, as the focus of my study.[2]

I

Omission: Silence as Structure

Badenheim 1939 imagines a place in Europe called Badenheim--a counterpart, perhaps, to Marienbad, a spa in western Chechoslovakia famous for its mineral springs and baths. Badenheim is a summer resort typical of so many other European spas to which an assortment of guests flock each summer to nurse soul and body with a fare of concerts, good food, long walks through the town and

adjoining forests, poetry readings, and agreeable company. But the year is not imagined. It is historically specific and that specificity is crucial to the novel.

It is 1939. Late spring. The town and the hotel are readying themselves for the guests who will descend upon the sleepy and slow moving town. This is all described to us. And we are also told, somewhat vaguely, that "It had been a strange, hard winter. Storms had swept through the town and tore the roofs off the houses. Rumors were rife."

The strangeness ascribed to the winter and the word rumor point in the direction of that historical specificity that has entered the story and yet is kept at a certain distance within it. It is, after all, nine months after the occupation of the Sudetenland in which Badenheim is presumably located, a bit over two months before the German invasion of Poland on September 1 which launches World War II. If Appelfeld leaves us, historically, at the very brink of war, he ends his story, similarly, at the brink of an extermination that takes place outside the frame of the novel. The extermination of the Jews of Badenheim is anticipated virtually from the first paragraph of the novel in which inspectors from the Sanitation department, the administrative arm of government responsible for the

effort to cleanse the world of its Jews, already make their appearance. Events, relationships and conversation in Badenheim 1939 are conditioned by an understanding among the characters of what lies ahead and by an unspoken agreement among the characters to seek out ways of denying what they cannot afford to recognize and which Appelfeld has so carefully relegated just beyond the circle of his story.

As the novel closes, the Jews of Badenheim gather at the train station. A freight train appears. The scene is not unfamiliar. The reader knows exactly what the freight car portends. The fate anticipated in the opening paragraph of the novel, is at hand--or almost. The novel closes not on a note of recognition but of denial, not with the extermination but the instant just prior to it:

> An engine, an engine coupled to four filthy freight cars, emerged from the hills and stopped at the station. Its appearance was as sudden as if it had risen from a pit in the ground. "Get in!" yelled invisible voices. And the people were sucked in. Even those who were standing with a bottle of lemonade in their hands, a bar of chocolate, the headwaiter with his dog--they were all sucked in as easily

> as grains of wheat poured into a funnel. Nevertheless, Dr. Pappenheim found time to make the following remark: "If the coaches are so dirty it must mean that we have not far to go." (175)

Pappenheim's final words give voice to the impossibility of the mind to assimilate the horror of genocide in the utter reality and immediacy of the four filthy train cars into which the Jews of Badenheim and, metaphorically, the rest of European Jewry, are "sucked in as easily as grains of wheat poured into a funnel." Collapsed into a single moment that occurs just immediately outside the "fiction," the genocide of Badenheim's Jews gains the force of a body in motion suddenly stopped short. Its impact draws precisely on the long preparation, the continuous motion toward and stopping short before an envisioned destination: the awful, unmentionable and, literally, unwritable event.

The novel plays endlessly with an imagery of sound and of silence against the backdrop of this larger silence. The exquisitely nuanced play with images of silence and of sound is the explicit mark in the narrative of that other silence, the silence of a fate beyond all words and therefore, also beyond the borders of the novel itself.

The night before the Jews of Badenheim are to meet the trains and their fate, some of the characters get together to "celebrate" the fortieth birthday of one of the group, Gertie. Dr. Pappenheim duly informs the company that "The emigration procedures have already been posted on the notice boards."

The party, understandably, lacks gaiety. People lack words to speak. They sink in their armchairs as though they are about to disappear forever into them while, contrastingly, the walls, room, and objects around them seem to come to life:

> The colored wall, adorned with reproductions seemed to come alive: it was as if dormant veins had started to throb in it. Nocturnal shadows slunk against the windows and a fat fly beat against the screens. If there were any words left, they belonged to Salo. But Salo did not speak....

We feel a hush as the lights dim and life energies on the verge of extinction drain into rooms that have until now, contained those lives:

> The lights grew dimmer, and delicate sounds invaded the room from outside. It seemed that

> the country parlor was already living a life of its own, a life without people. (150)

A kind of transubstantiation has occurred here, an exchange of vitality between the inanimate world and those who have always inhabited it. The loss of vitality includes a loss of speech: "Salo did not speak...." But the silence is itself never specified. Instead Appelfeld writes "...and delicate sounds invaded the room from outside." The silence here is neither named nor described but appears in a negative form, in the form of an absence. The sounds and words that normally fill human spaces are located somewhere "outside" the room being described, a room whose silence is literally wordless and is perceptible only by virtue of those sounds that "invaded the room from outside."

Badenheim 1939 is a novel with a double frame, one that is literal, begins with the beginning of the novel and ends with the end of the novel, and the other that stretches beyond it to include all that is excluded and denied. The point of this other, "implied" frame, is exactly that: that it is an implied, not an explicit structure. The drama of the novel derives from the necessity of implying what cannot be stated, and in this oblique but powerful way opening up that silence for which there are no words.

The juxtaposition of frames privileges the world of silence, a world of meanings that insist and press their unanswerable questionings upon us. We read, as it were, in a different space, in a special zone of hearing. And that altered relationship is reflected in the flow of terse, symbolic narrative, of charged poetic association, of images that are ambiguous like Dr. Pappenheim's final words, evasive, or deliberately unexplained, and hence, always pointing toward some other explanation, some organizing logos that refuses to be named. It imbues the reality at hand with the sense of something akimbo, jagged, disconnected and yet, in some other, deeper and terrifying way, connected.

When the schoolgirl lover of one of the older men suddenly stands up and says "Why don't you take me out of here? Can't you see that I can't stand it any longer?" her outburst is unexpected. And her question is left hanging in the air, unanswered. The effect is surreal. We sense a reality and meaning that is just beyond, our grasp, an ultimacy beyond the narrative that drains the ordinary of its vitality, its sacred center, its organization. And it is frightening. There is a sense of panic. The girl faints. Someone orders brandy. There is a poise, a balance that breaks down too easily and too quickly:

> Thus the twilight hour was shattered. Shutz knelt down and lifted her onto the sofa. The people stood around her looking chastised, as if the facts of life had suddenly given them a slap in the face. (77)

Another passage, again concerning the pregnant schoolgirl begins by peeling away the reality of words to close on a similar strange note of harshness and disappointment:

> Darkness fell and the words died away. The schoolgirl's face grew more and more transparent. There was no fear or regret in her eyes. It was as if she weren't a girl who had run away from school, but a young woman who had known both pleasure and disappointments in her life: she curled up in the blankets like an experienced woman who knew the value of inanimate objects.
>
> "What's come over the child?" The people exchanged glances. And the very same question seemed to stare from the eyes of the lover himself.
>
> For a long time they went on looking at her. But her face gave nothing away. A sickly

> light seemed to shine from it. And then this light, too, died away and her face grew cold.
>
> "Shall we go out for a walk this evening?" asked Shutz.
>
> "Where to?" she said, and the words sounded less like a question than a harsh statement of fact. (110)

The passage begins with the falling of darkness and with silence. Again silence is evoked as a lack or absence: "and the words died away." The words have died the way people might die, indeed, the way the Jews of Badenheim will die--as a final and permanent eclipse of body and of soul, of life and of the traces of that life in the world We hear the dying of those words, that is, we hear their absence in the spaces they once occupied. And in that newly emptied space, a woman is curled up in her covers like a caterpillar in its cocoon, like a swaddled child. The picture of the woman, the interchange of the characters who worry over her and then suggest taking a walk is domestic and familiar. But things are far from ordinary and the effect of the scene bears this out. The guests communicate this to us in the looks that they exchange. And the most commonplace and amiable of questions, "Shall we go out for a walk this evening?" brings another question in its wake, a question that

points to the restrictions on movement that now govern the lives of the Jews of Badenheim: "Where to?"

Appelfeld relates, not only the question that the schoolgirl tosses back to her concerned lover, but its sound: "and the words sounded less like a question than a harsh statement of fact." The receding of outer and inner light, the dying of words and expressionlessness of the child's face give way to a place in which questions have narrowed into facts. And fact is the knowledge that has so drastically transformed the schoolgirl, a knowledge that is feared, suspected, denied and shared by the Jews of Badenheim even as it remains unspoken.

On the level of the words they use and their meanings, the Jews of Badenheim are utterly naive. They never suspect that "relocation to Poland is anything other than resettlement. But Appelfeld manages to give them words that maintain a tacit silence while they are shot through with an ironic candor and even humor that relies on the informed position of the reader while leaving ambiguous just how much or how little the speaker himself suspects. As the deportation draws closer, music rehearsals are more frequent:

> The nights were now high and transparent. The hotel throbbed to the sounds of music. Even the laziest of musicians practiced. No one

> could say anymore: "Why don't you rehearse?" Never before had Badenheim heard such a concentration of sounds.
>
> "Isn't that a feast for the ear! exclaimed Dr. Pappenheim.
>
> "They're driving me crazy," grumbled Mitzi.
>
> "You wouldn't like us to appear in Poland unrehearsed, would you? What would people say?" (111)

Trude, the pharmacist's mad wife, confides to her husband: "Soon we'll go to Poland and all will be well. "Memories fill her and her words. She speaks of the Poland she remembers from childhood and of Yiddish, the language of the Jews of Poland:

> When she spoke about Poland her eyes lit up, and the sorrow was erased from her brow. A new, young skin seemed to be growing over her face. She laughed.
>
> Martin asked many questions. "Are the rivers in Poland beautiful?'
>
> And Trude spared no details. There was no country as beautiful as Poland, no air as pure as Polish air.

> "And Yiddish? You know I don't speak Yiddish."
>
> "There's nothing easier than learning Yiddish. It's a simple, beautiful language, and Polish too is a beautiful language."
>
> (118)

Poland is a word that releases all sorts of feelings and associations with family, with origins, with the Jewish identity that the assimilated Jews of Badenheim have long ago discarded, but which is also a way of speaking about the unspeakable. Descriptions of rehearsals that will go on in Poland, references to the purity of the air in Poland become elliptical references to death. The characters are thus endlessly elaborating a coded way of speaking their feelings, thoughts and ideas about their fate while respecting the taboo against its more direct articulation.

When, in a similar vein, we are told that Dr. Pappenheim has carefully chosen the words with which he describes the future to another of the guests, those words register at one and the same time as the coded speech of a knowing man and as the ironic speech of an utterly naive man:

> "In a few days' time everything will change. We are on the threshold of a radical

> change," said Pappenheim, choosing his words with great deliberation. (112)

And he continues somewhat enigmatically a couple of paragraphs later, "There are many Jews living in Poland. In the last analysis, a man has to return to his origins."(112)

The ambiguity here of such a pointed utterance that is pathetically naive and daringly knowing, that denies on one level that which, on another level, is acknowledged, even accepted, is a way of addressing the nature of genocide as the Jews of Badenheim experience it. To know somewhere deep down and yet be unable to integrate that knowing, to need to speak and yet not to speak, to speak around, to speak in coded ways that do not intrude upon the silence tells us more about the experience of historical horror than words possibly could.

The Jews of Badenheim use the word Poland in order to suggest that their deportation is merely a kind of emigration and hence, really, a form of rescue. Theirs is an informal if unconscious conspiracy of speakers, not to represent, but to misrepresent. Beyond all that is implicit in such an effort, we come to experience words, and more broadly speaking, the narrative, not in their

adequacy, but in their inadequacy; not for their ability to name their object, but in their helplessness before it.

II

Silence: Its Rhetorical and Aesthetic Articulations

Appelfeld does not name the thing that cannot be named. He never, finally, provides us with a word or image that pretends to correspond to the grievous experience he is seeking to communicate. Instead he brings us words, images, symbols that betray to us their inability to establish the kind of simple equation of word for thing that we take for granted as speakers. In this way, the silence is never broken. It is only made more palpable.

And Appelfeld is quite explicit in his sense of how the overdimensional experience interjects itself between words and their meanings:

> Words without bodies floated in the lobby. The words did not seem to belong to the present. They were words of the spring which had somehow lingered on, suspended in the void.
>
> (177)

In a strange and strangely moving metaphor, Appelfeld tells us that something has come apart. Words have been

sundered from their bodies. They are no longer rooted in the objects and world they are intended to represent. Instead they float in the hotel lobby like the lost souls of the Homeric underworld. It is as though there has been a rupture of an original and living wholeness of words, their speakers and the world they speak of. With that rupture, people lack the words they need to describe their experience of the world, to make that world coherent, if not less awful, and to situate themselves in it. Like the schoolgirl, they do not go out for walks. They retreat from the sunshine to the hotel and to the anger, fear and confusion that cripples them and at the same time, shields them from truths too terrible to acknowledge:

> ...If not for the angry people it would have been possible to take a stroll to the square and enjoy the coolness in the air. The sun was still shining, but the angry people clung stubbornly to the old words, hoarding them like antiquated gadgets that had gone out of use. Since they were unable to liberate themselves from the old words and the fear, they prowled the streets and cast their angry shadows. (115)

All of us understand this silence and we understand that it is not a metaphor, an image pulled out of a hat to stand for something else. We understand that this silence is not a picture, a symbol, a "representation," but a literal lack of words for something very actual and real. Silence is as much a part of the traumatic experience as the paralysis of a limb is a part of polio. And if polio is as severe as the paralysis that accompanies it, we might say that an experience is traumatic to the extent that it cannot be put into words.

This simple human calculation is essential to the aesthetic organization and effect of the novel. The mind intuitively assesses and translates the resistance to words and the intensity of struggle surrounding the effort to find words as it is aesthetically elaborated into what it recognizes as trauma. The portrait of the overdimensional is accomplished in the accumulation and organization of a host of detail, all of which touch upon silence: the rich portrait of human speechlessness, the way in which a poeticized and symbolic surface of the novel reinforces that speechlessness, the felt disparities of words and their meanings, the rhetorical axis of desire for speech upon which the portrait of silence and its poignance depends, the image of music which is both a symbol of that desire and ironic formulation of its disappointment.

Badenheim 1939 is organized in a very elaborate and detailed way around a convention in rhetoric that is among the oldest and which, at the same time, is a commonplace of speech at its most ordinary. Before the recounting of wonderful, terrifying or extraordinary events, Virgil, like Homer, before him and Dante after, prefaces his description with a demurral: "Words cannot describe..." the poet tells us. The unavailability of words to tell, describe, express, communicate, represent, convey a particular event, is a means of pointing or gesturing to that which is experienced as being beyond words.

Unlike his ancient and medieval predecessors, Appelfeld does not immediately follow that protest with a blow by blow description of the incredible experience he wishes to relate. Appelfeld makes this simple rhetorical gesture, not a preface to his tale, but its substance. The Festival is continually at risk because the tools of expression, be they words or music, are problematic. Shortly after Pappenheim receives an order to register all of his musicians with the Sanitation department, the festival collapses. Music, a symbol in its wordlessness of all that words cannot express, is no longer possible. Concerts cease. We are told that a child prodigy, the "yanuka,"has lost his voice and grown fat. And what does the story of a music festival have to

do anyway, with the story of the deportation of the Jews of Badenheim? The absurd counterpointing of the deportation process with the fortunes of a music festival projects the longings and the inadequacies of human speech into the fabric of the novel.

The unavailability for the Jews of Badenheim, of the words they need to describe and to protest their fate is precisely the symbolic and thematic heart of the novel. As the extermination draws closer, its nameless terror more debilitating, what flickers of hope remain cluster around the Festival itself:

> The drugs ran out and the people sank into themselves, into their sadness. Despair now stared from every wall. The kitchen was dark, the tea tables were deserted, and the two chandeliers hung askew, like the morning after a wild party. What could be done? If only the Festival could be revived! (139)

The Festival signifies the desire for expression frustrated and raised in its urgency to the desperation of the life urge itself. And its fortunes become an intimate chronicle of an inner breakdown that afflicts Dr. Pappenheim, his artists, the hotel guests and their

uninvited Jewish guests who are fated to join them in their struggle. At this point in the novel, the trains that will whisk Badenheim's Jews to their fate are seven chapters away. Food is less plentiful in the hotel. Martin's pharmacy has been looted several times over, once for its poisons, later for drugs and cosmetics. The musicians have accumulated fortunes by robbing the hotel of its silver and fine china; they consume chocolate in secret nightly feasts which bring them fear but no joy. The hotel population has increased beyond its paying guests as Jews who have been removed from their homes in different towns and villages are sent to await deportation at the hotel.

Shortly after Dr. Pappenheimn receives notice that all of his artists are to be placed at the disposal of the Sanitation Department, he announces: "The Festival is falling apart":

> Dr.Pappenheim stood at the hotel gates and held forth to the strangers. Someone asked for information about the Festival. Pappenheim apologized for the confusion in the schedule. He had done everything in his power, but what could he do if this year other matters had taken precedence?

> If only the Festival could be revived! Was there no way in which the Festival could be revived? The people now dogged Dr. Pappenheim's footsteps not with demands but with pleas. The drug they had become accustomed to over the years, it was this drug they now craved above all. Dr. Pappenheim stood by the great artist's door and begged "just one concert, just one, have mercy on us..." (134)

The image of Pappenheim standing at the gates of the hotel and then by the door of his guest artist, Mandelbaum imploring him to have mercy and perform "just one concert, just one" touches, as Appelfeld does so well throughout the novel, the raw psychic and human nerve of his trapped human beings. The passage is striking for its gentle mockery of Pappenheim's all but inarticulate plea in the face of an overwhelming fate about to overtake him, his artists and the rest of the Jews of Badenheim. Gesture and power of expression fail the good maestro who stands at the gates of the city and holds forth to the strangers in the pose of the ancient prophets of Israel whose words have the wings, power, the wrath of God which he so utterly lacks. The preoccupation with food, the stealing of china and

cutlery, and scrambling for drugs in the novel all follow from the impossibility of ordering experience and feeling, whether in words, in music or in action, in ways that address the fate hanging over the Jews of Badenheim. Like Pappenheim's misdirected cry for mercy and his worry about schedules, the breakdown of manners is another sign of the essential speechlessness that afflicts the characters of the novel.

III

Two Modes of Silence

There are two modes of silence that are portrayed in Badenheim 1939. Pappenheim's condition of speechlessness takes shape against another silence, a silence that has found its form and for which music is a symbol. Appelfeld's description of the twins who recite Rilke's death sonnets crystallizes the possibilities of expression upon which the novel turns:

> The moment they ascended the stage their emaciation took on a compelling power. Their mastery was such that the words did not seem like words at all; they were as pure and

> abstract as if they had never been touched by human mouths.
>
> For a whole hour they stood there on the stage in total concentration. And by the end of the hour the words did their work alone, flying through the air like birds on fire. (101)

The novel seeks words that fly "through the air like birds on fire," and brings us, instead, words that float "in the void like tired, dispirited birds." Rilke's poetic articulation of death and its meanings brings late romantic, lyrical and mystic notions of poesis, or word-making into the novel while the actual fabric of narration uses words in ways to remind us of how different they are from the things they are supposed to evoke.

The Rilkean paradigm presents a view of language, of art, and of the possibility of expression that falls apart in Badenheim along with one of the favorite symbolist metaphors, the metaphor of music for a desired order that is utterly beyond expression. The idea of music brings a religious vocabulary of desire and transcendence into the novel against which another silence makes itself heard, a silence in which words cannot some together, cannot sing.

In an article by Gisele Brelet included by Suzanne Langer in her Reflections on Art, Brelet analyzes the relationship of silence to music:

> Sound is an event: by its coming it breaks an original silence, and it ends in a final silence. And music,like sound, projects its form upon a background of silence which it always presupposes. Music is born, develops, and realizes itself within silence: upon silence it traces out its moving arabesques, which give form to silence, and yet do not abolish it....[3]

Brelet is interested in music as a becoming, as event, and silence as a calm "far from the world of matter and space which noises symbolize," in which "those who listen no longer hear anything but the voice of their inwardness." (103) And she identifies music with silence since silence contains the "possibility of all sounds."

> If sound seems to surge forth from silence, it is because it cannot in fact be born except from the movement by which, in silence activity was already orienting itself towards

the making of sound.[4]

Badenheim 1939 plays with the idea of that silence which is a component of music and artistic expression and with another silence which is as different from it as noise is from a melodic phrase.

When food supplies do not arrive at the hotel and the headwaiter goes to the storeroom of the hotel, his fingers tremble "as if the treasures of the world to come had suddenly been revealed to him."(103) The imagery of the passage is explicitly religious. The headwaiter first "illuminates the darkness with a flashlight." Light brings revelation. The headwaiter is struck with the perception of a plenitude, which is like a treasure from "the world to come." And Appelfeld describes the feelings aroused in the headwaiter as feelings that are religious and reverential. "From here?" asked the headwaiter reverentially."

If the religious language of the passage suggests fulfillment and seems to promise a coming together of feeling and of words that would in some way reflect that sense to us, those words do not appear. The flashlight reveals only "a big room full of antique furniture" and the passage ends with Appelfeld's description of a very different silence which is found in the storeroom: "the

kind of silence only found in sealed off places hung congealed in the air."(103)

Appelfeld thus brings into his story another silence, one that silently mourns the silence of spiritual essence and fulfillment of which Brelet writes and which is the ironic ground out of which this different and diminished silence articulates itself. We sense the disjunction of these two kinds of silence as Appelfeld continues his description of the headwaiter and his joy:

> The headwaiter was as happy as if he had been promoted. The hotel was now full of the fragrant aromas of liquors, Swiss chocolate, French wind, pecans, and fine peach preserves. The people sat at the tables and ate with quiet enjoyment.
>
> "This is a time we'll remember forever," exulted the musician Zimbelman." (103)

The sequence employs gestures and language of promise in order to move, not to a variety of levels of opening, but to a strangely restricted form of fulfillment, that of people eating at the table. The quiet of the people is part of a paralysis we recognize on a narrative level. The ticking off of a list of fine luxury foods--the liquors, Swiss chocolate, French wine, pecans, and peach

jelly--leaves us without the sense of eating as a socially connecting act, but as a concession to appetites that continue to hunger for another kind of fulfillment, one which is never even so much as whispered.

The last sentence is especially pointed in the biting, tongue in cheek manner so characteristic of Appelfeld. "This is a time we'll remember forever," Zimbelman exults, continuing the religious imagery of the passage while reminding us that for Zimbelman, there is no forever, only deportation which is now only weeks away. The passage refers to memory in the face of a future that promises only the obliteration of memory along with the individual. Finally, the image of the exulting musician completes a description of happiness that should in its sensory, emotive, and symbolic meanings point out of the sealed storeroom, but which, instead, is most striking for the fact that it does not do this, that it is a form of description which rhetorically spins out of the congealed silence of the storeroom.

Zimbelman means man of cymbals in Yiddish, an instrument which is prominent in classical Hebrew descriptions of the angels, their music and, especially, of music in its aspect of power. The meaning of the name underlines the powerlessness of the character in his historical situation, the powerlessness of his musical vocabulary and of the silence which longs for but cannot

find the essences and fulfillment that it seeks. Closing her essay, Brelet writes:

> It is in their absence that objects and beings realize in us their spiritual essences, and it is in that absence of itself which is silence that music achieves fulfillment. That is why sounds must fade away and die for the musical work to be born.... (121)

IV

Image and Symbol: the Textures of Silence

Badenheim 1939 brings a stripped prose to bear upon a symbolic fabric of longing and desire. Within that fabric, music is symbolic of the wordless, of beyondness, of silence and of realization in language that is continually disappointed. The sounds of silence are everywhere heard along with the longing for essence and fulfillment that they bring. But silence stumbles on silence of another kind, as in the beautifully articulated tones of the closing sentence in the following passage:

> And in the evening Martin gave them tea and cookies. It was like old times. Helena took the peasant shawl off her head and her high forehead transmitted a dry sorrow. She stirred her tea and the sounds died down one after another.

The articulation of this other, diminished silence depends upon the disappointing of a variety of rhetorical, stylistic and other cues in the context of a powerful evocation of the lyrical and mystical silence of which music is a symbol. And the impact of that juxtaposition is one of texture. It lies in the juxtapositioning of the stuckness of the one with the flow and connectedness of the other, the play of image against symbol.

As much as music is a symbol of expressiveness, it is symbolic of the idea of symbol itself. As such, the silence of music is part of the numinous, of a deeper reality within a system of correspondences. Its texture is flowing, mysterious and evocative. But as image, silence in Badenheim 1939 is cut from a very different fabric. Its texture is not numinous but dense, heavy, even viscous, a silence that extends out of but not past the traumatic condition. Image and symbol provide a dialogue of unsatisfactory alternatives and a tension out

of which Appelfeld makes palpable the meanings of the overdimensional experience. At one point Appelfeld describes the atmosphere in the hotel:

> The rustle of paper was no longer heard in the hotel. The silence was dense and from day to day it grew denser.

After an angry outburst by one character, the silence that follows is described in this way:

> In the end he withdrew his head and a heavy silence descended with the darkness and enfolded the people huddled in the corners of the lobby. (142)

And as the summer stretches toward fall and the deportation grows closer, the hotel guests more exhausted, Appelfeld describes the nighttime silence which the dogs pierce with their shrieking as though it were a vulnerable object among other surrounding objects in the world:

> The dogs could not understand what was happening. The angry glare in their eyes shone like polished metal.
>
> And at night they tore the silence to shreds. (139)

Silence in its opacity, its vulnerability, its lack of transparence, suggests something which is impenetrable and incomprehensible. It is a silence that reverberates on other levels as well, for example, in the comment of a waiter in the hotel about his guests: "If I could serve them Rilke's Death sonnets maybe they would eat. It seems they can't digest any other food."(36)

The trapped Jews of Badenheim cannot digest their situation. They hunger for the words that will bring comprehension to their condition, express what they cannot express and lift the awful silence around them. They hunger for Pappenheim's music festival and for the cry of Mandelbaum's violin whose "clean polished notes" are able to "cut through the silence."(87) But the clarity they seek holds terror as well:

> That very night Mandelbaum shut himself up in his room: the clean, polished notes cut through the silence. Now a new fear fell on the people: Mandelbaum. (87)

The terror, of course, could hardly be more real. To move out of a condition of silence to a silence that is formed, expressed, a silence of a beyondness named, a terror acknowledged, despair given voice is a temptation, a dilemma but not, finally, a possibility.

NOTES

[1]There is by now a large critical literature on the theme of silence in Holocaust writing. One of the most original and persuasive discussions is Alvin Rosenfeld's "The Poetics of Expiration," which first appeared in the American Poetry Review and was later incorporated into chapter 4 of Rosenfeld's A Double Dying: Reflections of Holocaust Literature (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1980).

Another study of interest, "Literary Response and Remembrance: A Bakhtinian Approach to the Holocaust Novel," was presented by David Patterson at the International Scholars Conference, "Remembering for the Future," Oxford England, 10-13 July 1988. See preprints (New York: Pergamon Press, 1988) 1513-1522. For a full length study of the subject see Andre Neher, The Exile of the Word: From the Silence of th8e Bible to the Silence of Auschwitz, trans. David Maisel (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1981).

[2]All citations from Badenheim 1939 will refer to the Dalya Bilu translation (New York: Washington Square Press, 1980). Page references to this edition will appear parenthetically in the body of my essay.

There are no full length studies of Appelfeld's work in English although his writings are translated and have been widely reviewed. For a view of Appelfeld within a spectrum of Hebrew writings, see Alan Mintz, Hurban: Responses to Catastrophe in Hebrew Literature (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984) 203-238.

A number of papers on Appelfeld were presented at the International Scholar's Conference, "Remembering For the Future," held in Oxford, England, 10-13 July 1988 including papers by Nurit Govrin, "To Express the Inexpressible: The Holocaust Literature of Aharon Appelfeld"; by Lawrence Langer, "Aharon Appelfeld and the Use of Language and Silence"; by Gila Ramas-Rauch, "Aharon Appelfeld--the Phenomenology of Time, Space in Holocaust Literature"; by Lea Hamaoui, "Aharon Appelfeld's Badenheim 1939: A Study of an Image." See preprints, Remembering for the Future (New York: Pergamon Press, 1988).

[3]Reflections on Art: A Source Book of Writings by Artists, Critics, and Philosophers, ed. Suzanne K. Langer (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958) 103-121.

[4]Brelet in Suzanne K. Langer, 105.

Now the Sirens have a still more
fatal weapon than their song, namely
their silence. --Franz Kafka

CHAPTER THREE

SILENCE IN LANGUAGE AND IN HISTORY

In his study of silence Bernard P. Dauenhauer describes the relationship of language and silence this way:

> Therefore originary and fundamental silence is not the contrary of language. Rather than being that which thwarts language, silence is that which opens the way for language's potency....for speech is born from silence and seeks its conclusion in silence. This is the case because there is in principle an exchange between experience and language. Neither is closed within itself.[1]

The pages that follow address the question of silence precisely in terms of what Dauenhauer calls the "exchange between experience and language." In particular I will

examine some of the ways that traumatic historical experience enters that "exchange" and marks the silences we hear in works of historical horror.[2] The silence of historical horror involves a breakdown of this "exchange." Film, fiction and poetry representing "historical horror" must formally recapitulate this breakdown.

The silence thus articulated is articulated inferentially.[3] We infer the overdimensional nature of an experience by virtue of the very fact of its omission in narrated detail. The power of the word "horror" in Conrad's Heart of Darkness has precisely to do with how we explain the omission of all that Kurtz has observed and experienced in the Congo. What we are given is not the narrative of that which was committed in the Congo, but the story of Marlow's journey to meet Kurtz, to hear Kurtz' famous whisper. One concern of this chapter is to suggest that writing about historical catastrophe relies on language not in its capacity to reflect or cast light upon experience (that is, in its separateness from experience) but in the most intimate domain of its relation to a speaker and to his experience: as voice. In a sense Conrad's story is about the missing story, the story whose meaning lies in the conditions of its absence: in the breakdown of narrative on the one hand and on the description of the voice on the other.

Alan Udoff has noted that "through its silence, then, through the age of silence that has settled on art..., Holocaust literature may be viewed as belonging to post-modern literature."[4] One of the goals of this study is make audible, so to speak, the tonal or experienced content of that "silence in history" with which fiction and poetry of historical horror and of the Holocaust is concerned and which is easily confused with other very different silences.

A number of theorists--I am thinking of Robert Jay Lifton's The Broken Connection in particular--have addressed themselves to the specificity of that experience for the individual, for his connectedness to the world and for the act of speaking that stands upon such a connection.[5] The silence we hear in works of historical horror is inseparable from the experience in question. The social philosopher, Jean Amery, who was interned in Aushwitz and committed suicide October 17, 1978, wrote in his discussion of his experiences, At the Mind's Limit,:

> It is not Being that oppresses me, or Nothingness, or God, or the Absence of God, only society. For it and only it caused the disturbance in my existential balance, which I am trying to oppose with an upright gait. It

> and only it robbed me of my trust in the world.[6]

To confuse metaphysical distress with silences that bear within them the metaphysical and human implications of violent social and physical assault in a shared historical and human world is to err in the listening, hearing and responding to artistic expression of this silence.

In the pages that follow I will briefly clarify my understanding of a "speech that is born from silence and seeks its conclusion in silence," as a point of reference from which to consider works of film, of poetry and of fiction that would voice the contradictory notion of a silence in history, a silence, paradoxically and by definition, outside language. I will use Claude Lanzmann's film Shoah and the poetry of the Hebrew poet, Dan Pagis, to show how the articulation of a silence outside language involves--as we have already seen in Appelfeld's Badenheim 1939--its counterpointing against a silence that can be articulated, a silence within language that then falls apart before the overdimensional experience. I will explore the relation of silence and voice in these works and in fiction by Andre Schwarz-Bart, Jerzy Kosinski and Tadeusz Borowski in which the

human dimensions of this breakdown of voice are more fully developed.

I

Silence and Language

"Man arrives at speech" wrote the Hebrew poet Haim Nahman Bialik, "out of the magnitude of his fear of remaining even one moment in the abyss, face to face with unmediated nothingness." The silence that precedes speech, here, is identified with a silence outside language, with the world of experience, history and death. Rilke, in the First Duino Elegy, uses the notion of silence in precisely this sense. He admonishes his heart to listen deeply to the silence in which we begin to hear in the fates of those who die young:

> But listen to the voice of the wind and the
> ceaseless message that forms itself
> out of silence.
> It is murmuring toward you now from those who
> die young.[7]

It is precisely the silence of the world outside words that liberates the word. In the last lines of the Elegy, Rilke refers to the absence created by death as a "startled space." The song of the poet fills the space or void that "felt for the first time/ that harmony which now enraptures and comforts and helps us."[8]

In her study of music and silence, Giselle Brelet explains the crucial relationship between absence and presence this way:

> The spiritual act only awakens in the absence of its object, and from that initial deprivation is born its movement towards its object.... Everyone knows with what intensity an object or being materially absent can be present in our imagination. It is the very nature of the mind to make of absence the instrument of presence.[9]

This understanding of the relationship of silence to speech, of experience to language is deeply embedded in language itself. It points to another meaning of silence, to a silence that is the goal of speech and which is produced by speech. "The word," Max Picard writes in World of Silence "not only brings the things

out of silence; it also produces the silence in which they can disappear again."[10]

George Steiner observes some of the connections between language, transcendence and silence. In a detailed consideration of the final cantos of Dante's Paradiso he shows how the repeated assertion of a failure of words is the mechanism by which transcendence makes itself felt:

> But it is decisively the fact that language does have its frontiers...which gives proof of a transcendent presence in the fabric of the world. It is just because we can go no further, because speech so marvelously fails us, that we experience the certitude of a divine meaning surpassing and enfolding ours. What lies beyond man's word is eloquent of God.[11]

Steiner is suggesting that a rhetoric of transcendence depends precisely upon the experience (and thereby also a rhetoric) of limit. In evoking and pressing against that limit, we move from known to unknown, from a world of time to what Broch in the Death of Virgil called "the word beyond speech":

> The word hovered over the universe, over the nothing, floating beyond the expressible as well as the inexpressible, and he, caught under and amidst the roaring, he floated on with the word..., it was the word beyond speech.[12]

The passage from Broch is especially interesting because it describes language as unfixed and floating. Man flows with the word toward the "word beyond speech." Within that process, the speaker moves from a silence in the world to a deeper silence. In the words of Max Picard:

> It is as though behind silence were the absolute word to which, through silence, human language moves. It is as though the human word were sustained by the absolute word.... Silence is like a remembrance of that word.[13]

The sensibility of the modern period articulates itself precisely around this transaction that moves from silence in the world to deeper silence, that accomplishes the leap from limit to transcendence that Steiner describes. The crucial influence is Mallarme who "came to realize that the logos--God's expression--was beyond the human, and could not be heard or apprehended, for it

was silence, the absolute, source of all things."[14] He hears the silence that is produced by speech and aims at the evocation, not of things but of the deeper silence behind those things:

> I say: flower--and out of the oblivion into which my voice consigns every contour, apart from the known calyxes, there arises musically, the idea itself, the flower absent from all bouquets.[15]

Both modern and postmodern periods privilege the question of that leap, how to accomplish it and whether it is possible in the first place. The poetic project of Wallace Stevens is devoted to the question of how to move from the "absence in reality" of "things as they are" to the "rhapsody of things as they are."[16]

As modernity wears on, the transaction of world and word becomes a project of increasing difficulty and the silence articulated, a silence of failed transcendence. "The fact is," Ionesco wrote in his diaries, "that words say nothing, if I may put is that way....There are no words for the deepest experience...."[17] And if the deepest experience cannot be reclaimed by speech, the world itself and its humblest objects reveal, for Samuel Beckett, the gap that separates consciousness from the

world, names from things. The protagonist of Beckett's Watt looks at that affable, dependable and necessary item, a pot, and thinks:

> It was not a pot, the more he looked, the more he reflected, the more he felt sure of that, that it was not a pot at all. It resembled a pot, it was almost a pot, but it was not a pot of which one could say, Pot, pot and be comforted.[18]

II

The Marking and Opening up of Historical Silence

Claude Lanzmann's film, Shoah, is profoundly engaged with a very different silence, a silence located not in language and its failure but in history.[19] In particular, Lanzmann is concerned with the fact of massive death and with denial and resistances that surround and defend against a knowledge of that fact.[20]

The passage below follows a familiar rhetorical pattern. The eyewitness and speaker repeatedly asserts that what he saw cannot be described, is beyond belief.

Except that his goal is not rhetorical, is not to help us see and feel more clearly what is beyond by delineating and making present the very limits and borders that separate us from what is beyond.[21] The speaker is describing his own existential plight of remembering as he stands on the physical location of the death camp forty years later. If the assertion in Dante brings us closer to transcendence, the assertion here brings us closer to a historical chaos that, like God, is outside language:

> There were two huge ovens. It was terrible. No one can describe it. No one can recreate what happened here. Impossible? And no one can understand it. Even I, here, now. I can't believe I'm here. No, I just can't believe it. It was always this peaceful here. Always. When they burned 2000 people-Jews-every day, it was just as peaceful. No one shouted....It was silent. Peaceful. Just as it is now... (16)

The effort begins in the first sentence with the mention of the crematoria. The speaker interrupts his description of the killing for a space of eight sentences in which he speaks of the impossibility of communicating or even himself believing the events to

which he was witness forty years before. The last four sentences divide their attention between the killing and the quiet of the landscape. The quiet of the landscape seems to involve nature in a resistance to the horror of mass extermination at the same time that is a tangible reminder of those very events: "It was silent. Peaceful. Just as it is now...."

There is a struggle around silence that comes across in the passage above and which is the subject of Lanzmann's film. As Lanzmann presses eyewitness after eyewitness for details of his experience, speech repeatedly breaks down. The absence of those killed and factuality of mass killing accumulates as those killed acquire the faces of neighbor, brother, cousin, mother, father, child, husband and wife. Lanzmann repeatedly has to step in and coax his witness to face his memory, his pain, his knowledge, his resistance.

In order to hear a silence in history, Lanzmann must present us with a resistance to that silence. As the resistance breaks down, as stories fall apart, as we witness the enactment of a literal and not merely rhetorical, failure of the word, we begin to hear that other silence in all of its historical depth, chaos and horror. To assist the breaking down of that resistance--a resistance with all language and speaking is profoundly complicit--Lanzmann, at another point in

the film, foregrounds yet another silence, a silence that is the physical mark of the killing process.

In the excerpt that follows, Lanzmann picks up the word "silence" which a witness, the Sobibor railway switchman, Jan Piwonski, uses to describe the sudden quiet that revealed the gassing of several thousand Jews the previous night, a night that initiated the exterminations at Sobibor. He questions Piwonski about that silence:

> The next morning...the station was absolutely silent, and we realized after talking with the other railway men who worked at the station here, that something utterly incomprehensible had happened. First of all, when the camp was being built there were orders shouted in German, there were screams, Jews were working at a run, there were shots, and here there was that silence, no work crews, a really total silence. Forty cars had arrived, and then... nothing. It was all very strange.
>
> **It was the silence that tipped them off?**
>
> That's right.

Can he describe that silence?

> It was a silence...a stand still in the camp. You heard and saw nothing; nothing moved. So then they began to wonder "Where have they put those Jews?" (67)

This silence which Piwonski describes is the direct consequence of the previous night's extermination as well as Piwonski's clue in sense datum experience to what had transpired. His discovery begins with hearing and seeing: "You heard and saw nothing; nothing moved," he says. The mind then begins to make its connections: "So then they began to wonder, "Where have they put those Jews?"

If the killing process has a beginning, middle and end, the end is precisely the silence that Piwonski and other workers hear in the camp for the first time. It is evidence of the unbelievable, testimony to historical horror. Lanzmann calls attention to the event of that silence and to the nature of its connection to the killing as a way of pointing to radical and inadmissible aspects of human existence. To dwell on the silence that is linked to the killing process, that is the very mark of the killing process, is to dwell precisely on the unintegratable and overdimensional fact and hence to

begin to hear a silence profoundly resisted and, therefore, profoundly silent, at the chaotic heart of history.

The artistic strategy of the film is precisely to work against all the devices in art, in language, in the human mind, that interfere with, take us away from, obscure that reality. Lanzmann stages history before our eyes. That is, he places the memory of an experience before our eyes in the persons of eyewitnesses whom he has flown to the very locations all over Europe of their remembering. We witness the impact of their experiences in their words, on their faces, in their voices. He includes shots of the camera filming his witnesses to authenticate and verify the witnessing of his witnesses. In this way, Lanzmann's film attempts to exchange the pretenses of art and its special claims to represent the real for another kind of link and of transaction with the real, a link of witnessing in which the viewer is witness to the witness.[22]

Lanzmann's technique echoes essential elements of Conrad's Heart of Darkness. The revelation of horror in Conrad as in the Lanzmann film is personal, intimate and involves a chain of witnesses: Kurtz, Marlow, Marlow's sea friends to whom he spins out his tale, the reader who overhears the tale.[23] Credibility of Kurtz' whispered communication depends on the authority of personal

experience, experience that is excluded from the narrative at the same time that it marks the voice in which it is told. Marlow undertakes his journey into the African depths for the sake, not of Kurtz' stories but to hear his voice: "The man presented himself as a voice...." Marlow tells us and at another point says of Kurtz: "A voice! A voice! It rang deep to the very last....".

In Conrad, as in Lanzmann, there is a breakdown of narrative, a lack of words and a fear of their meanings, at the historical heart of human darkness which Conrad acknowledges explicitly in Marlow's lie to Kurtz' beloved.[24] The marks of traumatic historical experience, if not lexically available, are audible in the voice that is our venue, finally, to the silence outside language.

III

Silence, Articulation and History

Thus far we have examined two sets of silences, silence within language and silence outside language. "The Tower," a poem by the late medieval scholar, poet and survivor, Dan Pagis, is about both kinds of silences.[25] We have seen how Claude Lanzmann in his film

Shoah tries to bring us closer to that contradiction in terms, a silence outside language, mind, and representation. If the eloquence of Shoah lies precisely in the breakdown of the narratives of Lanzmann's witnesses, the poem by Pagis is, conversely, a narrative of that breakdown. As in Conrad's "Heart of Darkness" it is about the before and after of an articulation that cannot take place. It is a study of kinds of silence: of the silence that "opens the way for language's potency" and of a silence that cannot be voiced because it is outside language. And it is about the conflicted relationship of these silences, the deeper problematic of language and traumatic experience that underlies that conflict.

The Tower

1 I did not want to grow, but quick-fingered memories
2 put layer upon layer, each one alone,
3 and were mixed in the tumult of strange
4 tongues and left in me unguarded entrances,
5 stairs that led nowhere,
6 perspectives that were broken.

7 Finally, I was abandoned.
8 Only sometimes in the twisted corridor
9 a small speechless whisper
10 still rises in me and runs
11 like a draft and it seems to me
12 that I am a whirlwind
13 whose head is for a moment in the sky
14 and before I wake up
15 the mess of my burnt bricks crumbles
16 and turns back
17 to clay.

The poem tells of an elusive moment in which memory and desire mingle in the self, the very moment in which "the exchange between experience and language" takes place. It follows this exchange in time. The first seven lines of the poem are written in the past tense and outline the effect of experience upon memory. In the next six lines, the poet speaks of the effort to articulate experience in a present tense that is filled with the tenuous perception of a whisper that "still rises in me," and with the tentative hope that makes it seem "to me that I am a whirlwind..."(8-13). The final four lines of the poem tell of the effect of experience on language in the crumbling of the tower, a breakdown that occurs in the present tense from a precisely

delineated point in time described as the moment before awakening(14-17). The poem, then, moves along a temporal path toward the constriction and collapse that are implicit in the crumbling of the tower.

Pagis employees traditional devices of poetic language to describe an untraditional situation in which those devices and the impulse out of which they arise, founder and fall apart. The "migdal" that is the title of the poem refers to a self that lives in the world and accumulates the memories of its experiences in that world. At the same time it is also a reference to "migdal Bavel," to the tower of Babel built by Noah's descendants in their attempt to reach heaven, an attempt for which the tower is destroyed and the human and linguistic confusion of a multiplicity of language is established on earth.

Historical memory in the poem involves a post-Babel situation: memories are "mixed in the tumult of strange tongues." The self cannot draw upon its past and experiences in the charting of a future or vision: the memories leave "stairs that led nowhere,/ perspectives that were broken"(5,6). It is here in this tower that refers to self, to memory, to transcendence and to language, that the exchange of which Dauenhauer writes between experience and language, between a remembering "I" and a poetic "I," takes place.

The silence in which "a small speechless whisper/ still rises in me"(9), is the very silence and longing which "opens the way for language's potency." For a brief moment the silence of the "speechless whisper," of an impulse that is yet "bli omer," without word, but which seeks the word, moves into the foreground.

The whisper, which itself is a flow of air out of the body, is figured in highly traditional literary terms as wind. It is referred to first as a draft and then as a whirlwind(11,12). Like the welter of experience out of which it rises, the impulse is disconnected from its deep creative and life sources: it arises in a "twisted corridor"(8) of the self and it arises "sometimes"(8), that is, fitfully, unbidden and against the better knowledge of "stairs that led nowhere"(5) and of "perspectives that were broken"(6).

In the silence and space in which the impulse arises, the self becomes aware of a direction. If the whisper is still without word, the goal of those words is sensed as an upward motion in which the speechless whisper first arises, gathers a certain amount of energy until it runs through the tower "like a draft," perceiving itself finally as fully energized in the form of a "whirlwind/whose head is for a moment in the sky"(11,12,13). The flow described takes the self from the dismembered chaos of its experience in the world to

a very different locus in the world in which the self might also touch the sky or transcend. Clearly we have a description of self and of language that is similar to the flow that Broch describes toward "the word beyond speech."

But the open space of a silence within, a silence that is fraught with desire for articulation and fueled by a silence outside the self, in the world, cannot arrive at the deeper silence that is the goal of speech. Instead there is an awakening into a world of the real, an awakening that takes place after the crumbling of the tower in which we begin to hear another silence, the silence that follows its destruction: "and before I wake up/ the mess of my burnt bricks crumbles/ and turns back/ to clay"(14).

The poem juxtaposes the awakening of the impulse to speak against the awakening into which the defeated impulse subsides. It juxtaposes, in other words, two sets of possible silences against one another: those associated with the impulse to speak, to integrate, to transcend and those associated with a silence in history. The impulse that, "is born from silence and seeks its conclusion in silence," (Dauenhauer) is overcome, as it were, by a different silence. Significantly, the second and final awakening takes place

outside the literal borders of the poem, and, by extension, of language.

The reference to clay, "chomer," in Hebrew is a Biblical allusion to the clay or dust out of which God created Adam(17). The crumbling of the tower and subsiding of the whisper, then, involves a return of man to clay, a reversal of creation, a decomposing of form. We are left with the silence of a void that is outside the range of hearing because it is outside the human and created structures of thought, perception and language, a silence of that which is, finally, not amenable to human symbolic manipulation.

This last awakening is an awakening to a knowledge that is excluded from the poem. The story of the "speechless whisper" is the story of the nature and conditions of that knowledge: its unrepresentability within language. For all of its traditional use of narrative and image, the poem does not claim a mimetic relationship to its subject. It relies instead on the fact that we listen to stories armed with basic human understandings upon which story telling is built and which, in this case, the reader uses to infer that which has been omitted from the narrative. What is involved is not a system of corresponding hierarchies, a forest of signs that are in some way analogous or tragically at odds with experience, but a crisscrossing of familiar

experience and modes of experiencing that are recognizable and familiar to the reader. It is on the basis of this familiarity--of a shared knowledge of how we experience the world and articulate that knowledge--that the reader is able to construct some sense of the conditions that lead to a breakdown of language.

IV

The Silence of the Throat

Giselle Brelet clarifies the role of the self or mind in the motion toward silence that is signified by the "migdal" or tower:

> Be it possession or expectation,--endowed with whatever affective quality, silence must invoke what goes beyond it, the transcending act of the mind. It is filled by the mind, for it is the mind's own presence to itself.[26]

The tower image implicates a silence of symbolic integration at the very same time that the play of whisper and wind in the containing structure of the tower suggest a human throat in which the voice and its

structures of articulation reside. The physiological metaphor inscribes a human physicality into the poem. That bodily presence is at its densest in the concluding images of the poem in which the tower--as the "mess of my burnt bricks"--is a figure for a desymbolized (read, without speech) state of self into which the poem resolves.

The complex and layered sensibility of the poem involves an uneasy coupling of symbol and flesh, of a silence associated with metaphysical longing and a silence that is rife with the lived experience of massive destruction in history. In another poem, "Brothers," Pagis writes:

> Cain is dumbstruck. His large hand
> gropes in the slaughtered throat in front of
> him:
> where has this silence burst from?

Silence in the lines above is a bodily silence, a silence of the throat. In the figure of the tower of the first poem and here in the concreteness of reference to a "slaughtered throat," the silence projected embodies within it the materiality of the destruction to which it is a witness. It is a silence that disturbs because it

is so freighted with bodies and with history, and because it so easily reduces that other silence, the ardent and complex will to transcendence, to irrelevance.

Aharon Appelfeld describes the tension of these two silences as they affect his own voice and his conflictedness:

> If we had been able to shut up in an inner silence, that would have been right for us, but that was just a wish. We never actually stopped trying to say something, even in moments of greatest torpor. But all we succeeded to emit was a stutter, or worse, familiar, traditional words and fabrication. Afterwards we understood that nothing would be said unless new words and a new melody were found.[27]

Appelfeld speaks here both of a desire to remain silent and an impulse to speak, of stuttering and of music, of old words and of the need for new words. "There are still songs to sing beyond mankind," the German poet Paul Celan writes.[28] The Yiddish poet and survivor of the Vilna ghetto, Abraham Sutzkever, similarly employees a familiar vocabulary of transcendence in a poetry attuned to the silence of historical destruction:

> ...slaughtering silence weeps
> I hang - a shattered chord
> and dedicate my song to you.[29]

Sutzkever, like Pagis, uses the metaphor of a broken vocal/instrumental chord to suggest the problematic of articulation that lies at the heart of "historical horror." All of these writers acknowledge a familiar motive of transcendence, the need for words that will move through time, like music, to "the word beyond speech," at the same time that they point to the dilemma of voice for the writer who would hear the "slaughtering silence" of historical destruction.

In his discussion of the poet Paul Celan, Alvin Rosenfeld touches upon differences in the kinds of silences with which we are here concerned. We cannot, in discussing Celan, write of the silence or

> speechlessness of an existential angst, for with Celan we are well beyond that, the night of Holderlin and even of Nietzche was precipitated by that radical transvaluation of values that abandoned each of them to extreme states of ontological loneliness and terror, finally trapping the poet and philosopher in madness. The night that Celan knew was darker

> and more terrible still, for this time history determined it literally, not metaphorically and swept away innocent millions including the poet's own family into empty spaces in the sky.[30]

In another poem, "Footprints," Pagis refers to the silences with which he is concerned as a new language to be studied. Its parts of speech describe a set of relations that are the deep structure, the "heavenly grammar," of the universe, not as mind would construct it but as history and silence in history would reveal it. The poet, in Stephen Mitchell's beautiful translation from the Hebrew, must learn the "ascensions and declensions of/ silence":

> Where to begin?
> I don't even know how to ask.
> Too many tongues are mixed in my mouth. But
> at the crossing of these winds,
> very diligent, I immerse myself
> in the laws of heavenly grammar: I am learning
> the declensions and ascensions of
> silence. (33)

Writing in this other language, speech takes different forms. Pagis writes, not about the impossibility of ascent to vision but of the difficulty of descent to the experience he would represent:

> Frozen and burst, clotted,
> scarred,
> charred, choked.
>
> If it has been ordained that I pull out of
> here,
> I'll try to descend rung by rung,
> I hold on to each one carefully--
> but there is no end to the ladder, and already
> no time. All I can still do is fall
> into the world. (35)

And he writes of the conflictedness of voice, that cannot forget the old impulses, the old grammar, a voice engaged in dialogue, not with the world but with itself:

> And my throat says to me:
> If you are still alive, give me an opening, I
> must praise.

V

Voice and Silence

In both the Pagis poem and in the film Shoah, voice is a key to the voicing of a silence in history. Barthes, in his essay, "The Grain of the Voice" writes, "isn't the entire space of the voice an infinite one?"[31] And he continues "the grain is the body in the voice as it sings, the hand as it writes, the limb as it performs." Barthes is speaking quite literally of the human speaking and singing voice. The point of the essay in question is to question a formal aesthetics, one that does not hear in the voice a living human body in living relationship to itself and to its experience.[32] Simone de Beauvoir also focuses the physical manifestation of voice in her discussion of Claude Lanzmann's film Shoah:

> Voices: During most of the film all the voices tell of the same things: the trains that arrived, the wagons being opened and corpses tumbling out, the thirst, the unawareness riddled with fear, the stripping and "disinfection" procedures, the gas chambers being opened. But never does it seem repetitive.

And she describes the different voices, the points at which emotion takes over the voice, the poise of the voice: that of Franz Schomet, the SS Unterscharfuhrer at Treblinka, that of a train driver who delivered Jewish children to concentration camp, of a Sobibor station master, of peasants who lived just outside the different camps, of survivors.

> And then there are the voices of the very rare Jewish survivors of the camps. Two or three have managed to master a seeming serenity. But many can hardly speak--their voices break down and they burst into tears. (iv)

De Beauvoir tells us that although the stories of the survivors are repetitive, we are not bored by them. She understands intuitively that the point is not the story told, but the voice in which it is told. She knows that an experience can be communicated only through another experience, and that as we experience the voice addressing us, the pauses and hesitations that mark that voice and flow from the experience it would recount, we first begin to be able to understand the words it would speak. The stories of the survivors in the film do not bore because the real story, as in the poem by Pagis, is the story of the voice. As the voice flows out of the

body and into the world, out of experience and toward a reconciliation with that experience, it is qualities of that flow that actively structures the silences that we hear.[33] The breakdown of voice which we witness in Shoah and the story of the voice which Pagis recounts in "The Tower" involve a specific gesture or human response to the experience of historical catastrophe.[34]

In a comment on the poetry of first world war poet Wilfred Owen, Stephen Spender discusses the delicate issue of poetic voice in relation to the experience of catastrophe. Owen's poetry, he writes,

> retains its Keatsian richness, but his subject matter mocks Keat's belief in a sensuous world of the imagination. The literal imagery of war parodies the richness of Romantic imagery.... The real agony turns on the poetic agonizing and strangles it with bare hands.[35]

At the 1989 meeting of the International Association of Literature and Philosophy, the poet Carolyn Forche addressed the problematic of voice in the representation of historical catastrophe. Her talk was about a work in progress, "Angel of History," a work which takes the Holocaust and calamities of our century as its subject.[36] Forche stated that as she began the work, her voice as a

lyric poet immediately became problematical. The romantic tower of self and of language could not sustain her subject. She began to hear the voices of others, voices of people she'd met. She described some of those encounters, especially one with a woman survivor who was briefly a hospital roommate. And she perceived the space of her voice as a space in which others might articulate themselves. She directed her efforts to listening, not to the voice within herself, but to the voices of others not herself; not to a silence within that makes possible the movement of language to the "word beyond speech" and conviction of divine presence in the world, but to a world of history, a world peopled with the bodies of those not here, to the voices of those who have been destroyed, hunted, dislocated maimed, starved, tortured and killed.

Forche's solution to the technical problem of voice posed by historical catastrophe presumes the crumbling of the tower in Pagis' poem. In another poem, Holocaust by the objectivist poet Charles Reznikoff, the poet chooses to efface his voice entirely.[37] The poem is constructed as a collage of the voices of others out of bits and pieces of testimony given at the Nuremburg trial. Charlotte Delbo writes a novel, None of Us Will Return, of her experiences in Auschwitz in the highly untraditional and highly effective first person plural

stream of consciousness.[38] The "we" that includes herself and her comrades, the "we" that is a collective and historical voice, is a "we" of testimony and witnessing. By virtue of a stream of consciousness technique, it is also a "we" that locates itself within an experience. Both Reznikoff and Delbo privilege a voice that is branded by history in the effort to voice a silence within history.

VI

Schwarz-Bart: Trauma and the Breakdown of Voice

The breakdown of voice that is described in the Pagis poem involves the breakdown of a poetic process, more fundamentall8y, a speech process. The rupture of language, of which so many writers, critics and philosophers speak in connection to the Holocaust, refers to this breakdown. The formally significant point to be made about imaginative representations of historical horror is that they characteristically place such a process at risk. Traditional images of transcendence accompany and ironically set up the implications of such a collapse: hence, the collapse of the tower in the Pagis poem, of a music festival in Badenheim 1939, the use of bird imagery in Appelfeld and in Kosinski's

Painted Bird and the imagery of song and of music we have noted in Celan and in Sutzkever. In each case, such an imagery accompanies a simple rhetorical statement about a breakdown of speech around which writing about historical catastrophe organizes itself. "...it is especially important," Susan Shapiro writes, "to consider the testimony of this negative poesis for it witnesses to the shattering of the coherence and the negation of the meaningfulness of language itself."[39]

If we move from film and poetry to fiction in Holocaust literature, we find the story told in Pagis' "Tower" of a breakdown of voice told and retold. Andre Schwarz-Bart's novel, The Last of the Just, is a beautifully written history of one family whose last descendant, Ernie Levy, dies at Auschwitz.[40] The title of the novel refers to an ancient Jewish legend according to which the continued existence of the world depends upon the existence of thirty-six hidden righteous men. Ernie is the last of these. The novel follows Ernie from childhood to adulthood. The story of his assault (chapter 5 of section 5) by teacher and classmates ends with a breakdown of voice that is remarkable for its similarities to the story of Pagis' tower at the same time that it portrays the human and psychic meaning of that breakdown in moving detail. Ernie and three other Jewish children have been humiliated in a variety of ways

in the classroom by Herr Geek, a party ideologue who has replaced Herr Kremer. Assaulted physically and sexually by classmates after school and betrayed by his sweetheart, Ilse, Ernie closes his eyes:

> His eyes closed, the little boy imagined that the sweat, the saliva, the tears and the phlegm in which he was bathing were simply one and the same substance, welling up from some spring deep within his being, splitting its envelope now and flowing in the sunlight. All those liquids emanated from his own interior substance, blue-green, shadowy, viscous, not composed normally of flesh and bone, as he had once thought...
>
> Time now seemed a bottomless sea.

Ernie fends off his attackers with his teeth. Alone, he makes his way home over a bridge and washes dried blood from a gash on his forehead. From this point forward to the end of the chapter the narrative is not one of events, but of their integration. The setting is pastoral and filled with a detailed attention to childhood, to children's ways of thinking, feeling, playing. Schwarz-Bart's portrait of a process that will

culminate in the child's loss of voice begins with a moment of silence. Imagery of earth, of silence, of sky and of details of play with insects suggest a depth of inner sifting through experience:

> The earth around him gave off its odors. All things were fixed, enveloped in the smells of the earth. The silence had that smell, and the exhalations of the sun, and the immutable blue of the sky.... With infinite gentleness, Ernie Levy set the ladybug on the end of his vertical thumb.... (269)

The silence ends as Ernie cracks the ladybug between his fingers and rolls it into a pulp. The meadow then fills with sound as Ernie seeks out one insect victim after another:

> ...setting this atom of matter in the hollow of his of his hand, he rubbed it between his palms at great length until the ladybug was annihilated, leaving only a grayish stain.
>
> Then raising is head, he realized that the silence had just died.
>
> The meadow was alive with the rustling of wings, with the movement of grass, with that

> invisible, heavy quivering of life. The earth itself was seething defiantly. (270)

Sound is associated here with wings, grass, life forces, defiance. But the insect murders that follow finally wear Ernie out. Each insect death cost him more. Each death added its cortege of soft ordure, and now they were filling his stomach-viscid liquors on his palms but dismembered insects, seething and suffering, in his own belly....

> Ernie raised his eyelids and drowned in the fallen sky. The necessary and intact world of childhood cannot put itself back together. The child views birds flying above, perceives himself in contrast to be an insect and cries out repeatedly "I was nothing," as he buries his head in the ground for half an hour. Surprisingly, his eyes are without tears:

He seemed to be hailing someone far off, a being buried deep in the earth from whom he wanted only an echo. But his cries only exaggerated the silence, and the vermin remained lively in his belly. His mouth was full of grass and dirt. Finally he knew that nothing would answer his call, for that call was born of nothing: God could

not hear it. It was precisely here that Ernie Levy, the little boy, felt burdened by his body and decided to let that burden fall. (242)

There is a cleavage that occurs inside Ernie. With the assault upon his physical integrity, something breaks inside the child and as a consequence of that break, his speech loses its substance, his call is "born of nothing"; he is nothing and God cannot hear his cry. Just as the tower crumbled in the Pagis poem, selfhood, here, shrivels to nothing in the silence so that "his cries only exaggerated the silence."[41]

Schwarz-Bart underlines the interruption of a living relationship of the self to the world from which it draws sustenance in language suggestive of an infant at the breast.

> As he thought, "I was nothing," the little boy buried his face against the earth and intoned his first cries. At the same instant he felt astonishment that his eyes should be empty of tears. For half an hour he cried out, his mouth against the earth.

Once the umbilicus joining self and world is cut, Ernie experiences the silence of stillborn speech, a silence

described as a foreclosure of relationship between the self and God: "Finally he knew that nothing would answer his call, for that call was born of nothing, God could not hear it." At the crucial level, then, of speaking, silence does not bring speech into being, but overwhelms speech. Schwarz-Bart thus portrays in the simplest possible human terms a rupture in speech that one philosopher calls "the Shoah-rupturing of God-language and of the very foundations of speech and writing."[42]

As in the Pagis poem there is a sense of rising energy that precedes collapse. The same sequence of a silence followed by a gathering of energy and its collapse plays itself out on the final pages of the novel. The scene takes place years later. Ernie is an adult. He, his beloved, Golda, and a group of children he has taken into his protection, are standing in the gas chamber. Again, Schwarz-Bart notes the silence:

> When the layers of gas had covered everything, there was silence in the dark sky of the room for perhaps a minute....

The silence does not last. It gives way to a rising energy, not of grass, of birds and earth, but of words:

> And first a stream, then a cascade, an irrepressible, majestic torrent, the poem that through the smoke of fires and above the funeral pyres of history...the old love poem that they traced in letters of blood on the earth's hard crust unfurled in the gas chamber, enveloped it, vanquished its somber, abysmal snickering: "SHEMA YISRAEL ADONAI ELOHENU ADONAOI EH'OTH.... (422)

The energy and protest of life forces within the gas chambers fills the silence with words that form: "a stream, then a cascade, an irrepressible, majestic torrent, the poem...." We are back to Broch and his sense of language as a flow toward "the word beyond speech." The words of the poem fill the gas chamber and momentarily vanquish it until:

> The voices died one by one in the course of the unfinished poem. The dying children had already dug their nails into Ernie's thighs.... (421)

Within half an hour Ernie's body is found by the Sonderkommando and burnt with millions of others in the crematory ovens. So much for life forces, for language, for transcendence. But reminders of transcendence are

not so easily laid to rest. The closing page of the novel continues to juxtapose imagery of transcendence against more chilling references to death in the disturbing manner of Pagis' tower image. The dark organic particles of smoke that soon fill the sky rise upward at the same time that they are heavy with the organic matter of destroyed life:

> For the smoke that rises from crematoriums obeys physical laws like any other: the particles come together and disperse according to the wind that propels them. (422)

Turning his words to the reader, Schwarz-Bart offers a prayer in which words of praise to the creator alternate with names of death camps. "And praised. **Auschwitz**. Be. **Maidanek**...." The language of praise, of prayer and of God provides a final affimation of human value even as it articulates the extinction of all human value. The tension generated by this striking interpolation is a tension of bald oppositions. A confrontation with the "real" does not move us, as it does in the poetry of Wallace Stevens, to a "passion for yes that had never been broken," but instead lays bare a set of mutually negating insights into the human core and into the real ("Esthetique du Mal," 320). The ritual and rhythmic

formulation of that opposition is connected to the drive for vitality, meaning and affirmation that is rudely exposed and negated in the naming of the death camps. The prayer is jarring and disturbing in ways that so much imagery in this literature disturbs; it is as though the world we knit together so arduously with each of our words is simultaneously and frantically unknit.

VII

Kosinski: The Premise of Trust in Language

In a poem entitled "Draft of a Reparations Agreement," Pagis makes ironic reference to the loss of voice with which his poetry is so centrally concerned:

> All right, gentlemen who cry blue murder as
> always,
> nagging miracle-makers,
> quiet!
> Everything will be returned to its place,
> paragraph after paragraph.
> The scream back into the throat....

Jerzy Kosinski"s The Painted Bird is about a scream that is ripped out of the throat of the child protagonist

and narrator.[43] The dramatic structure of the novel turns on the loss of voice and, finally upon its recovery. In his Introduction, Kosinski points out that a million people were killed in his native Poland as a result of direct military action during the war, while five and one half million were exterminated. And it is the physical possibility of speech that is thereby placed in jeopardy.[44]

The protagonist and child narrator of The Painted Bird spends the war years wandering from village to village exchanging his menial services for food and a roof over his head. At one point he is asked to carry the missal during a church service. The episode culminates a series of atrocities suffered, witnessed, and in one case precipitated by the child to save his life. It follows scenes of torture in which the child is repeatedly hung by straps from a ceiling by his "protector" Garbos who leaves his vicious dog to watch the child for signs of losing his hold on the straps.

Slight in build, the child slips with the missal. The peasants in fury grab him and take him outside. The child tries to beg for mercy but no sound comes out of his throat. Realizing the peasants intend to throw him into a large manure pit, he tries to shout again without success. Thrown into the pit, he miraculously climbs out

despite the undertow and first realizes what has occurred:

> Suddenly I realized that something had happened to my voice. I tried to cry out, but my tongue flapped helplessly in my mouth. I had no voice. I was terrified...
>
> I sat down. The last cry that I had uttered under the falling missal still echoed in my ears, was it the last cry I would ever utter? Was my voice escaping with it like a solitary duck call straying over a huge pond? (140)

Voice is no longer located in the child's body. Being and the power of articulating being have been physically separated. The opaqueness of history, its silence, its resistance to speech, is inscribed into the novel and into the body of the child from that moment forward until the child's recovery of speech in the very last lines. As in the Schwarz-Bart novel, the breakdown of speech is the manifestation of a larger event and loss within the self, an event that results in muteness. The child marks his dispossession of his voice by figuring the voice as something separate from himself and from his body: a bird.

> Where was it now? I could envision my voice flying alone under the highly-arched, vaulting ribs of the church roof. I saw it knocking against the cold walls, the holy pictures, against the thick panes of colored glass in the windows, which the sun's rays could scarcely penetrate. I followed its aimless wanderings through the dark aisles, where it wafted from the alter to the pulpit, from pulpit to balcony, from the balcony to the alter again, driven by the multichorded sound of the organ and the groundswell of the singing crowd. (141)

Voice is seen here as a moving bird that cannot freely ascend to the sky but is trapped in the dark spaces of the church. The bird image in this passage with its emphasis upon motion suggests language as it dwells and moves through silence and in time. The child's muteness is the physical mark by which traumatic experience interrupts that flight, drains the self of the vital connectedness that is the condition of speech.

The separation of body and voice follows a scene of torture and takes place in setting that is both

religious and communal. A breakdown of the human family that turns against its own most vulnerable members thus leads directly to a the loss of speech. Jean Amery comments on the experience of torture:

> ...with the very first blow that descends on him he loses something we will perhaps temporarily call "trust in the world.... the certainty that the other person will...respect my physical, and with it also my metaphysical, being. The boundaries of my body are also the boundaries of my self. My skin surface shields me against the external world....
>
> At the first blow, however, this trust in the world breaks down.... If no help can be expected, this physical overwhelming by the other then becomes an existential consummation of destruction altogether. (28)

The historical assault depicted in the novel and referred to by Amery, breaks down a primary relationship of trust that bonds the self to the world and makes speech possible. Voice is premised on that trust and depends upon a connection to the world that is radically undermined by historical trauma.

With the recovery of speech, self and world can move once again into meaningful relationship by virtue of their renewed dialogue. At the end of The Painted Bird the child begins to chatter, first in peasant dialect, then in a city idiom. The novel closes with the recovery of speech:

> enraptured by the sounds that were heavy with meaning, as wet snow is heavy with water, convincing myself again and again and again that speech was now mine and that it did not intend to escape through the door which opened onto the balcony. (234)

VIII

Borowski: Birthing the Word, a Process and Its Burdens

Tadeusz Borowski, a Pole who was interned in Auschwitz as a political prisoner and who took his life in Warsaw in 1951 at the age of twenty-nine, is well known for a collection of short stories entitled This Way to the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen.[45] Unlike Kosinski's The Painted Bird, the narrative does not end with repair

and recovery of voice but with the examination and analysis of damage.

The stories, which record Borowski's experiences in Auschwitz and in post-war Germany, logically progress to the final story "The World of Stone" which is an account of the struggle to articulate the writer's experience of the world. The story is about a succession of failures and of images that assault the narrator as he makes his way through a crowd to accomplish an errand until he finally arrives home and picks up his pen to write "a great, immortal epic, worthy of this unchanging, difficult world chiselled out of stone." If on one level "World of Stone" follows in chronological sequence all of the other stories, it seems at the same time to move backward to the outset of the stories, to recapitulate the burden of each narrative, the difficulty of its articulation. The assault on the individual in the camps that is the setting and action of almost all of the preceding stories is a prelude to this very story and that burden.

"World of Stone" is about the silence that overcomes voice as a result of the sustained assault described in story after story. It is a detailed examination of "the exchange between experience and language." The image, unlike the tower of Pagis' poem, does not collapse once, but four times. The repetition is a measure of

Borowski's struggle with his experience of the historical world in its overwhelming presence.

The story, we are told, in the opening lines, is about gestation, the gestation of this very knowledge. As in the Pagis poem, there is an impulse that searches for the words with which to voice the experience, and there is a silence located in the overdimensional experience that resists the articulation:

> For quite some time now, like the foetus inside a womb, a terrible knowledge had been ripening within me, and filling my soul with frightened foreboding that the Infinite Universe is inflating at incredible speed, like some ridiculous soap bubble. (177)

As this knowledge ripens, the writer goes on an errand through one of the poorest districts of the city. Repeatedly as he walks, the sights, smells, sounds and activities around him, and especially, the physical details of the people around him cluster and form an image: the image, however, falls apart. The impulse to give form does not find an inner space or silence out of which the flow of language may shape itself but stumbles upon its own umbilicus:

> Sometimes it seems to me that even my physical sensibilities have coagulated and stiffened within me like resin. In contrast to years gone by, when I observed the world with wide-open, astonished eyes, and walked along every street alert, like a young man on parapet, I can now push through the liveliest crowd with indifference and rub against hot female bodies without the slightest emotion, even through the girls may try to seduce me with the bareness of their knees and their coiled intricately coiffed hair.

The problem is precisely the breakdown of the underlying and animating erotic bonding of the narrator to the world, a bonding which is the premise of symbol-making and a condition of speech. Desire does not fail before an image or vision receding before it but is itself victim to the lethargy and inner numbness of traumatic experience. Like the muteness of the child in Kosinski's novel, this numbing becomes the condition of the self in the world:

> At this point I must confess that although since the end of the war I very rarely force myself to polish my shoes and almost never

> shake the mud off my trouser turn-ups, that although it is a great effort for me to shave my face, chin and neck twice weekly, and although I bite off my fingernails in order to save time, and never hunt after some books books or materials, thus relating the deliberate senselessness of my own fate to that of the Universe, I have recently begun to leave my house on hot summer afternoons to go for long, lonely strolls through the poorest districts of my city. (178)

The world cannot seduce him into speech. The vigor and directress of the description carries desire for what Merleau-Ponte calls "sonorous speech about the world" into the texture of the reading experience.

> I can see as distinctly as if I were looking in a mirror, the ruins, already overgrown with fresh, green grass,the peasant women, with their flour-thickened sour cream and their rancid-smelling dresses, the trolley-bus rails, the rag-ball and the children, the workers with their muscular arms and tired eyes, the street, the square and the angry babbler rising above it into the restless

> clouds blown on by a strong wind--I can see all this suddenly float into the air and then drop, all in a tangles right at my feet--like the broken reflection of trees and sky in a mountain stream rushing under a bridge. (178)

Borowski's language, in this story, creates an energy, a pulse rate of successive and graphic images that betrays the liveliness of the impulse that would seek out the word even as it speaks to us of trauma, silence and resistance.

The narrator continues to wrestle with the impulse that "opens the way for language's potency," and with that in memory which interferes with the "exchange between experience and language." The next image of failed articulation implicates a perceived chaos of experience which finally "flows along the street, down the gutter, and seeps into space with a loud gurgle, like water into a sewer." The chaos is a chaos of the sensuous, visible present, a "gust of cosmic gale" that sweeps the bodies of men, women and children on the street into an imagined whirlpool of their dismembered parts. Borowski describes the bodies with visual, sensual and sexual detail that give this surreal image a crisp and horrifying materiality:

> Through half-open eyes I see with satisfaction that once again a gust of the cosmic gale has blown the crowd into the air, all the way up to the treetops, sucked the human bodies into a huge whirlpool, twisted their lips open in terror, mingled the children's rosy cheeks with the hairy chests of the men, entwined the clenched fists with strips of women's dresses, thrown snow-white thighs on the top, like foam, with hats and fragments of heads tangled in hair-like seaweed peeping from below. (179)

Once again the image-making process breaks down as the sensuousness of language recalls a helplessness of living bodies only too graphically. The pressure of overdimensional experience, of "this gigantic stew" cannot flow into speech, but slushes its way into a sewer.

Failure of the image brings new effort. The world, grasped in sensuous terms continues to overwhelm the narrator, the image falters:

> I enter with a casual air, the modest but cozy little rooms occupied by people of importance and ask, perhaps a trifle too politely, for things that are perhaps too trivial, but to

> which nevertheless I am entitled-but which, of course, cannot keep the world from swelling and bursting like an over-ripe pomegranate, leaving behind but a handful of grey, dry ashes.

Desire to find the word that will give speech to the world tags him like a devoted pet. The world in which the death camp is one possibility and this cozy office with its marble staircase another, overwhelms the narrator with both longing and fear. The image of desired wholeness, the over-ripe pomegranate, swells and bursts into the parched ash of the real.

Finally, back in his room, with extraordinary effort, the writer takes out his utensils. Distant sounds of the street intrude upon the silence. Borowski notes those sounds one after the other as though the relation of the physical silence and noises that surround him were analogous to an inner silence and the noise of experience that must search for the words to trace into the empty page before him. In memory now he recalls once again the physical details of the people and places he passed in the course of the day. Finally, the writer embarks upon his:

> attempt to grasp the true significance of the events, things and people I have seen. For I

> intend to write a great, immortal epic, worthy
> of this unchanging, difficult world chiselled
> out of stone. (180)

IX

The Snow of That Left Unspoken

If we briefly return to the poem by Pagis, we now understand that the method of speaking about a silence outside language and mind involves speaking about the desire to articulate. Traumatic utterance takes its dramatic form in the desire for articulation, its impediments, difficulties and resistances. The silence it would articulate is never revealed except by inference in the same way that the drawing of a figure on a clean sheet of paper also gives shape to the spaces surrounding the figure, in which the figure resides and in relation to which the figure exists. Unlike the silence of a postmodern sensibility, the silence of traumatic utterance is very specific in the relation of the self to words and to silence. Celan's poem "With a Variable Key" is a description of those relations:

> With a variable key
> you unlock the house in which

drifts the snow of that left unspoken.
Always what key you choose
depends on the blood that spurts
from your eye, or your mouth or you ear.

You vary the key, you vary the word
That is free to drift with the flakes.
What snowball will form around the word
depends on the wind that rebuffs you.[46]

Here is not the silence of a world beyond language nor the birthing silence in which the formal impulse presses for articulation, or the symbolic depths of silence that follows closure. Instead Celan brings us a silence that forms protectively around the word: "What snowball will form depends on the wind that rebuffs you." And his words, words that do not spring passionately into lyrical ecstasis, those words are at the mercy of inhospitable winds. Unlike the snowman in Wallace Stevens' "Snowman," snow here is not alien but intimate.[47] It does not proceed from an otherness outside the self but is excreted, as it were, from within that very self. It is the "snow of that left unspoken."

NOTES

[1]Silence, the Phenomenon and Its Ontological Significance (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1980) 119.

[2]For a full length treatment that approaches the theme of silence in connection to Auschwitz very differently, see Andre Neher, The Exile of the Word: From the Silence of the Bible to the Silence of Auschwitz, trans. by David Maisel (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1981).

[3]This paper argues against the position of James Young and others which emphasizes the inadequacy of all Holocaust narrative (whether that narrative takes the form of fiction, of history or actual testimony) and fails to take account of non-referential domains of language that enter into and structure communication. See his Writing and the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988).

[4]"On Poetic Dwelling: Situating Celan and the Holocaust," Argumentum e Silentio, ed. Amy Colin (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1987) 335.

[5](New York: Simon and Shuster, 1979). Lifton bases this theoretical work on extensive clinical study of Hiroshima and concentration camp survivors and the "traumatic syndrome" he finds common to both.

[6]At the Mind's Limit: Contemplations by a Survivor on Auschwitz and its Realities, trans. Sidney Rosenfeld and Stella P. Rosenfeld (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980). Further page references to this edition will be given in the body of the text.

[7]The Selected Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke, ed, and trans. Stephen Mitchell (New York: Random House, 1982) 153.

[8]Mitchell, p. 155. For a discussion of the notion of death in Rilke and its relevance to world that has experienced Aushwitz, see the first chapter of Edith Wyschogrod's Spirit in Ashes: Hegel, Heidegger, and Man-made Mass Death (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985).

[9]Suzanne Langer, ed., Reflections on Art: A Source Book of Writings by Artists, Critics, and Philosophers (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1958) 120-121. Further page references to this article will be given in the body of the text.

[10]Cited in Dauenhauer, 135.

[11]Language and Silence: Essays on Language, Literature, and the Inhuman (New York: Athenium, 1967) 39.

[12]Cited by Robert Alter in his discussion of the political and spiritual context out of which Broch wrote his novel in Alter's Defenses of the Imagination: Jewish Writers and Modern Historical Crisis (Philadelpia: Jewish Publication Society, 1977) 9.

[13]Dauenhauer, 135.

[14]Joseph Chiari, Symbolisme from Poe to Mallarme: The Growth of a Myth (London: Rockliff, 1956) 142.

[15]Trans. mine from the French as cited in Chiari:

> Je dis: une fleur, et hors de l'oubli où ma voix relègue aucun contour, entant que quelque d'autre que les calices sus, musicalement se lève, idée même et sauve, l'absente de tous bouquets. (264)

[16]The Collected Poems (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971). In "The Man with the Blue Guitar," Stevens writes: "It must be this rhapsody or none,/ The rhapsody of things as they are" (183).

[17]Cited in Steiner, 52. The citation in its entirety reads:

> It is as if, through becoming involved in literature, I had used up all possible symbols without really penetrating their meaning. They no longer have any vital significance for me. Words have killed images or are concealing them. A civilization of words is a civilization distraught. Words create confusion. Words are not the word (les mots ne sont pas la parole).... The fact is that words say nothing, if I may put it that way... There are no words for the deepest experience. The more I try to explain myself, the less I

> understand myself. Of course, not everything is unsayable in words, only the living truth.

[18]The Norton Anthology, 2 (New York: Norton and Company, 1985) 1924.

[19]See the text to Claude Lanzmann's film, Shoah: An Oral History of the Holocaust (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985). Page references to this text will be given in the body of the text.

[20]In "Writing and the Holocaust," Irving Howe cites Lanzmann:

> The destruction Europe's Jews cannot be logically deduced from any ... system of presuppositions.... Between the conditions that permitted extermination and the extermination itself--the fact of the extermination--there is a break in continuity, a hiatus, an abyss.

Writing and the Holocaust, ed. Beryl Lang (London: Holms and Meier,1988) 178.

[21]This assertion of the impossibility to describe is repeated in every eyewitness account, in every diary, memoir, oral history and video testimony. At the same time, it is a central theme of the poetry and fiction of the Holocaust. It is a problem discussed by every literary critic from Adorno on, and most recently, a key issue in philosophical debate on the question of testimony and its interpretation (see, Susan Shapiro's discussion of Fackenheim, Ricoeur and Lyotard, "Towards a Post-Holocaust Hermeneutics of Testimony," presented at the University of Minnesota, at a conference entitled "The Impact of the Holocaust on the Humanities," December, 1988).

[22]An important analysis of the notion of witnessing in Shoah was presented by Tony Brinkley and Steven Joura at a panel devoted to the film at the 1988 meeting of the International Association of Literature and Philosophy, "'The Alarming Nature of Darkness': Witnessing Shoah." The paper juxtaposes Pierce's idea of the "index" with Levinas' ethics of otherness in a persuasive view of witnessing as a dimension of language.

[23]Particular thanks to J.Hillis Miller for permitting me to examine his article "Heart of Darkness: Parable and Apocalypse," prior to its publication by University of Alabama Press. In that essay Miller emphasizes the

"proliferating relay of witnesses" in Heart of Darkness (ms,12).

[24]Conrad's juxtaposition of the word "voice" and the word, "word," is fascinating. Insofar as Kurtz is a voice, he embodies a truth of experience that Marlow seeks. On the other hand, Marlow lies to the beloved after she begs to know his dying words: "His words at least, have not died.... I want to hear his very last words...." Kurtz incorporates these conflicting dimensions of language. Hence Marlow refers to Kurtz's:

> gift of expression, the bewildering, the illuminating, the most exalted and the most contemptible, the pulsating stream of light, or the deceitful flow from the heart of darkness.

[25]Points of Departure, trans. Steven Mitchell (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1981) 89. Page references to other poems by Pagis will refer to this edition and will be included in the body of the text. See Sidra Ezrahi's discussion of Pagis' poetry, "Dan Pagis: The Holocaust and the Poetics of Incoherence," presented at the International Scholars Conference, "Remembering for the Future," at Oxford, England, 10-13 July 1988; preprints, Remembering for the Future 3 (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1988) 105-116.

[26]"Music and Silence," Reflections on Art: A Source Book of Writings by Artists, Critics, and Philosophers, ed. Suzanne Langer (London: Oxford University Press, 1958) 120.

[27]Cited in Udoff, 349.

[28]Cited in Alvin Rosenfeld, A Double Dying: Reflections on Holocaust Literature (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1980) 89.

[29]See Frieda Aaron, "Poetry and Ideology in Extremis: Ghetto and Concentration Camp Poetry," Proceedings of the Xth Congress of the International Association of Comparative Literature, ed. Claudio Guillen, 364.

[30]Rosenfeld, 105.

[31]Image, Music, Text, trans. by Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977) 184.

[32]See also Herman Rapaport, "Geoffrey Hartman and the Spell of Sounds," Deconstruction at Yale, ed. Robert

Davis and Ronald Schleifer (Norman U. of Oklaoma Press, 1985) 159-177, for a very nuanced examination of the ways that voice operates in a literary text.

[33]Francois Mauriac, in his "Forword" to Elie Wiesel's Night, ponders the extraordinary impression made upon him by his wife's voice:

> I confided to my young visitor that nothing I had seen during those somber years had left so deep a mark upon me as those trainloads of Jewish children standing at Austerlitz station. Yet I did not even see them myself! My wife described them to me, her voice still filled with horror....

Night, trans. Stella Rodway (New York: Hill and Wang, 1960) 7.

[34]See Rosenfeld's important discussion of voice and silence in the poetry of Paul Celan, in Chapter 4, "Poetics of Expiration," A Double Dying (London: Indiana University Press, 1980) 82-90.

[35]"Introduction," Abba Kovner and Nelly Sachs: Selected Poems (Great Britain: Penguin Books, 1971) 15.

[36]Parts of this larger work in progress have been published in the Graham House Review, Colgate University Press, Spring 1988; also, under the title "The Recording Angel," in Antaeus, 20th Anniversary issue.

[37](Black Sparrow Press, Los Angelas, 1975). See Robert Alter's discussion of Reznikoff, "Charles Reznikoff: Between Present and Past" in Defenses of the Imagination: Jewish Writers and Historical Crisis (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1977).

[38]Trans. John Githens (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968).

[39]Shapiro, 13. See note 21.

[40]Trans. Stephen Becker (New York: Bantam, 1976). Further page references to this work will be included in parenthesis in the body of the text.

[41]For a detailed consideration of the connections between voice and physical pain, see Elaine Scarry, The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

[42]Shapiro, 14.

[43](Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1976). Further page references to this work will be included in parenthesis in the body of the text.

[44]For a consideration of the condition of muteness in Kosinski's novel, see Sarah Horowitz, "Linguistic Displacement in Fictional Responses to the Holocaust: Kosinski, Wiesel, Lind and Tournier (World War 11 Poland, Hungary, Germany, France)," diss., Brandeis University, 1985. See also, Lawrence Langer's discussion of Kosinski in The Holocaust and the Literary Imagination (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975) 166-191.

[45]Intro. by Jan Kott, selected and trans. Barbara Vedder (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1976). Further page references to this work will be included in parenthesis in the body of the text.

[46]Argumentum e Silencio, ed. Amy Colin (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1987).

[47]The Complete Poems (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971) 9.

> Because even in direct experience everyday reality is nothing but codified abstraction. Only in rare moments of life do we truly stand face to face with the event and, with it, reality.
>
> --Jean Amery

CHAPTER IV

HISTORICAL HORROR AND THE LITERARY ACT OF WITNESS: AN EXAMINATION OF ELIE WIESEL'S "NIGHT"[1]

Hannah Arendt reports in Eichmann in Jerusalem that "Repeatedly during the Eichmann trial, witnesses blunted the prosecutor's questions saying "You cannot understand. Who was not *there* cannot imagine."[2]

In Chapter 1, we saw that the attempt to represent horror whose origins are outside the mind in history brings into play a host of narrative and aesthetic strategies whose purpose is to authenticate: to make real the unreal. "Today at this very moment as I sit writing at a table, I am not convinced that these things really happened," Primo Levi writes.[3] And reviewing her

manuscript, Charlotte Delbo, whose work we will examine in some detail in the chapter that follows this one, is troubled. She does not question the reality of events, only the faithfulness of her account: "I am no longer sure," she writes that what I have written is true, but I am sure that it happened."[4]

This chapter and the one that follows examine the pressures that historical horror, and specifically the dimension of unreality that characterizes the experience of historical horror, exerts upon form. The problem of the perceived unreality of historical horror places special demands upon such a narrative. All narratives of historical horror are caught up in the issue of witnessing and in the use of narrative as a "literary act of witness." To use narrative to enact a breakdown of narrative and, further, of witnessing itself, as Piotr Rawicz does in his novel Blood From the Sky is characteristic but also symptomatic of the technical and writerly problems that face the literary artist.[5] Charlotte Delbo's decision in None of Us Shall Return to bypass a conventional structure of narration in favor of a stream of consciousness technique that locates the reader within the consciousnesses of Delbo and her fellow internees is a very different solution to the problem of representing extreme experience. In chapter five I will examine both of these works in detail.

In this chapter, I explore the narrative strategies and aesthetic textures of a central text of "literary witnessing," Elie Wiesel's Night.[6] Night addresses the issue of disbelief, not through a disavowal of narrative or by replacing narrative with an elaborate poetic voice, but within a transaction between reader and writer. Rolf Krause discusses this aspect of "literary witnessing" in some detail. The distance between reader and writer "cannot be bridged one-sidedly" he writes, "by way of confrontation with facts." He explains that

> the disturbance may... arise... in the communication process itself: if the partners do not speak the same language communication cannot be successful. It need not necessarily be because the partners do not want to understand one another but because they are not capable of doing so--their fields of experience and their present situations and needs are too divergent....[7]

Wiesel's narrative incorporates into itself the situation of the reader. The topos of the rejected witness and the Cassandra figure of Madame Schachter precede the arrival of the narrator, Eliezer, in Auschwitz, and function as ways of narrativizing the

resistances of the reader to the impact of the experience (Auschwitz) that Wiesel wishes to portray. Krause writes that

> ...a confrontation with communication partners can only have genuine informational value within the framework of a self-instruction of the communication partners about the differences that stand in the way of successful communication. This however, requires adopting an attitude in writing which does not exhaust itself in the referential function of language, in the role of a repartee as a mediator of facts--rather the author must treat the writing process as a chance to achieve mutual understanding which means that he has to incorporate both his dialogue partner and himself into the communication process.[8]

The effect of Wiesel's strategy of narration is to make possible within narrative, the reception of violent fact in its unmitigated facticity.[9]

Wiesel's method is simple, brilliant and depends upon a series of repetitions in which what is at stake is a breakdown of critical illusions. Thus the experience of the reader reading the narrative parallels Hans Robert

Jauss' striking description of the way one comes to apprehend 'the real.' "For progress... in the experience of life, the most important moment is the 'disappointment of expectations.'" He quotes Karl Popper:

> It resembles the experience of a blind person who runs into an obstacle and thereby experiences its existence. Through the falsification of our assumptions we actually make contact with 'reality.' The refutation of our errors is the positive experience we gain from reality." [10]

Eliezer's tale is the story of a series of shattered expectations, his and our own. The repetition of this "disappointment," of optimism proven hollow and warnings rejected becomes the crucial aesthetic fact or condition within which the reader then experiences Wiesel's account of Auschwitz, of Buna, of Gleiwitz and of Buchenwald. Night opens with Eliezer's search for a teacher of mystical knowledge. He finds that teacher in Moshe the Beadle.

> And Moshe the Beadle, the poor barefoot of Sighet, talked to me for long hours of the revelations and mysteries of the cabbala. It

> was with him that my initiation began. We would read together, ten times over, the same page of the Zohar. Not to learn it by heart, but to extract the divine essence from it. (17)

Only a paragraph later, Moshe is deported. He is shot but escapes from a mass grave in one of the Galician forests of Poland near Kolomaye and returns to Sighet in order to warn the Jews there. He describes children used as targets for machine guns and the fate of a neighbor, Malka, and of Tobias the tailor.

Moshe is not believed, not even by his disciple, Eliezer. The Jews of Sighet resist the news Moshe has brought them:

> I wanted to come back to Sighet to tell you the story of my death....And see how it is, no one will listen to me.... (16)

> And we, the Jews of Sighet were waiting for better days, which would not be long in coming now.

> Yes, we even doubted that he (Hitler) wanted to exterminate us.

> Was he going to wipe out a whole people? Could he exterminate a population scattered throughout so many countries? So many millions! What methods could he use? And in the middle of the twentieth century? (17)

Wiesel describes the optimism that persists with the arrival of the Germans. After Sighet is divided into a big and little ghetto, Wiesel writes, "little by little life returned to normal. The barbed wire which fenced us in did not cause us any real fear."(21)

The narrative itself is caught between the pressures of real and unreal. Real events befalling the Jews of Sighet are perceived as unreal:

> On everyone's back was a pack.... Here came the Rabbi, his back bent, his face shaved, his pack on his back. His mere presence among the deportees added a touch of unreality to the scene. It was like a page torn from some story book, from some historical novel about the captivity of Babylon or the Spanish Inquisition. (26)

The movement toward and away from the knowledge of historical horror that Moshe the Beadle brings back from the mass grave shapes the first two chapters of Night and functions as a kind of prologue to the ultimacies that will unfold with Eliezer's arrival in Auschwitz in chapter three. The intensity of the resistance peaks in the boxcar in which Eliezer and his family are taken to the death camp. Madame Shachter, distraught by the separation from her pious husband and two older sons, has visions of fire: "Jews, listen to me! I can see a fire! There are huge flames! It is a furnace!"(35) Her words prey on nerves, fan fears, dispel illusion: "...we felt that an abyss was about to open beneath our bodies." She is gagged and beaten. As her cries are silenced, the chimneys of Auschwitz come into view:

> We had forgotten the existence of Madame Shachter. Suddenly we heard terrible screams: Jews, look! Look through the window! Flames! Look!
>
> And as the train stopped, we saw this time that flames were gushing out of a tall chimney into the black sky. (38)

Eliezer's rejection of the knowledge that Moshe brings back, literally, from the grave, predicts our own

rejection of that knowledge. His failure to believe the witness prepares the reader for the reception of Eliezer's own story of his experience in Auschwitz by first examining the defenses that Eliezer, and, thereby, implicitly, the reader, would bring to descriptions of Auschwitz. It is only at this point that Wiesel brings his narrative inside the gates of Auschwitz.[11]

It is precisely this moment and its imaginative reception, this confrontation with facts that human impulses and assumptions must resist, with which Wiesel is concerned, as a writer, as a shaper of words in the service of communication of lived experience. The rejection of Moshe has stripped the reader of his defenses in advance of the arrival at Auschwitz. Once stripped of his defenses, the reader moves from a fortified, to an open undefended position vis a vis the impact of the narrative.

Wiesel's use and subversion of the traditional quest story defines the stakes of the narrative from the first page of <u>Night</u>. Moshe the Beadle is to be the vehicle of Eliezer's enlightenment.

> There are a thousand and one gates leading into the orchard of mystical truth. Every human being has his own gate....

> And throughout those evenings a conviction grew in me that Moche the Beadle would draw me with him into eternity, into that time where question and answer would become one. (14)

The search for ultimate knowledge, thematized from the outset, breaks down as Moshe is deported and returns with ultimate knowledge that is rejected. The traditional quest folds into the confrontation with historical horror, subverting that original quest in ways that are ironic and radical. Wiesel harnesses the energy of mystical search even as he presses upon us a narrative designed to foreclose reader resistances to historical horror. Knowing in the quasi-religious framework in which Wiesel has located his story, is no mere knowing. The witnessed knowledge that Wiesel would present is presented, not only in its human ultimacy, but within a traditional vocabulary of mystical ultimacy as well.

The final and most violent shattering of human expectations occurs as Eliezer, newly arrived in Auschwitz, sees a lorry filled with children who are dumped into a fiery ditch.[12] Eliezer cannot believe what he has seen:

> I pinched my face. Was I alive? Was I awake? I could not believe it. How could it be possible

> for them to burn people, children, and for the world to keep silent? No, none of this could be true. It was a nightmare....

The narrative of 'disappointed expectations' makes possible within a narrative an experience that is analogous to that of the blind man that Popper describes "who runs into an obstacle and thereby experiences its existence." The distance between words and the world collapses. The unbearable referent leaps out at the reader. The obfuscations, defenses and plethora of possible structures that inhere in language, in rhetoric and convention, give way to that referent.

The language of horrific fact is a language that steps back and contracts before the fact of horror, that registers the crumbling of a potential world of forms before certain kinds of facts, certain kinds of experiences. Eliezer's words mark that crumbling. He addresses his disbelief: "I pinched my face. Was I alive? Was I awake? I could not believe it.... No, none of this could be true." As his words move away from the sight of the babies to address his numbed disbelief, the lingering memory of that terrible sight etches its outlines even more deeply into our awareness. The resisted fact makes its presence felt as words retreat from the fact and illuminate instead that obscure and

vast terrain of human resistance, a resistance of the body ("I pinched my face. Was I alive?") as well as of the mind ("Was I awake.... It was a nightmare").[13] The sight of the children thrown into burning pits is followed by an interruption of the narrative in which the writer/narrator addresses the reader and swears never to forget that which he has witnessed.

The "literary act of witness" involves a posture and goals of witnessing, of establishing truth where truth is or might be contested, of creating the conditions for the reception of the fact of historical horror where those conditions do not obtain as a norm. It is an act of recovery. It accomplishes its ends through narrative and aesthetic strategies and not through the attempt to 'imitate' in the sense of a congruence between description and event. It is a highly contrived, very literary and exceedingly delicate attempt to make the intransigent material of historical horror available to others in the same sense that it is the goal of art to open up a truth of lived experience. In the words of the Russian formalist, Victor Shklovsky:

> Art exists that one may recover the sensation of life, it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone stony. The purpose of art is to

> impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known....[14]

In The Differend: Phrases in Dispute, Jean Francois Lyotard is concerned with exactly such intransigent material of experience and the onus it places on language. He explains what he means by a "differend:"

> The differend is the unstable state and instant of language in which something which ought to be able to be phrased cannot yet be phrased. This state involves silence which is a negative sentence, but it also appeals to sentences possible in principle. What is ordinarily called sentiment signals this fact. "you can't find the words to say it," and so on. A great deal of searching is necessary to find new rules of formation and linkage of sentences capable of expressing the differend betrayed by sentiment.... It is the stake of a literature, a philosophy, perhaps a politics, to bear witness to differend by finding idioms for them.[15]

The "literary act of witnessing," and Wiesel's Night in particular, locate themselves in precisely such an

instant.[16] The strategies that Wiesel brings to Night are themselves witness to that "unstable state and instant of language" that follows from and is a condition of any language that would seek to "express" or to "represent" experience of "historical horror." It is an instant that brings the world of language and the world outside language into the uncomfortable position of two adjacent notes on a piano keyboard which are simultaneously pressed and held. The sounds they produce jar the ear.

Night represents the collision of those two worlds in its organization of narrative and in the heard meanings that fill the words of that narrative. The motif of spiritual quest and narrative of the violent disillusion of a deeply religious young man whose only language of apprehension of the world is a God-language, the language of spiritualized, personalized and absolutized formal unity, brings the opacity and separateness of those structures---structures of mind, of desire, of language and structures of experience and world---into violent juxtaposition. The confrontation, then, with facts of utter horror does not lead to an acquiescence to 'the real,' but to an opening up and illuminating of the abyss that separates the world as we inhabit it linguistically, psychically and spiritually from the world as it is unto itself. The opening up, here, in Wiesel's Night occurs in the form of a story about words, specifically, about

the words of the "Kaddish," and in the dissonances that fill those words.

After witnessing living children thrown into flames, Eliezer and his father conclude that this is to be Eliezer's fate as well. Eliezer decides to avoid such a slow agony by running to a nearby electrified fence and electrocuting himself. Wiesel proceeds to tell us the story of that decision and of its reversal. The story of the attempted suicide is intertwined with another story, the story of the Kaddish. The narrative thus literally sets the two stories, the two worlds---a world that includes the witnessed horror of the deliberate burning alive of children and a world of words and forms, of faith and of God---reverberating against one another.

Hearing his fellow Jews murmur the Kaddish, a formula of praise of the Almighty which is the traditional prayer for the dead, Eliezer first revolts:

> For the first time, I felt revolt rise up in me. Why should I bless His name? The Eternal Lord of the Universe, the All-Powerful and Terrible, was silent. What had I to thank Him for? (43)

The Jews continue their march and Eliezer begins to count the steps before he will jump at the wire.

> Ten steps still. Eight. Seven. We marched slowly on, as though following a hearse at our own funeral.... There it was now, right in front of us, the pit and its flames. I gathered all that was left of my strength, so that I could break from the ranks and throw myself upon the barbed wire. In the depths of my heart, I bade farewell to my father, to the whole universe.... (44)

Even as Eliezer bids farewell to his father and the universe, an unanticipated event takes place:

> ...and in spite of myself the words themselves and issued in a whisper from my lips: Yitgadal veyitkadach shme raba... May His name be blessed and magnified.... My head was bursting. The moment had come. I was face to face with the Angel of Death....
>
> No. (44)

Eliezer does not run to the wire. The entire group turns left and enters a barracks.

The narrator, when he sees what he sees, revolts--but briefly. When faced with the horror of death in a fiery ditch himself, he turns away from that ultimate horror with words of sanctification and of blessing of the Eternal. The world of experience and the world of language could not, at this moment, be further apart. Experience is entirely beyond words. Words are utterly inadequate to experience.

The Kaddish is itself a form of testimony, the testimony and ritual affirmation of a congregation of believers to God's Oneness. The narrative of reversal, of Eliezer's decision not to run to the wire, turns on the appositioning of competing testimonies: the testimony of the eyes and the testimony of the words, the testimony of events and that of the entire spiritual and linguistic vocabulary to which Eliezer's life had been so committed. The scene closes with Eliezer pressing his father's hand. His father responds with a question: "Do you remember Madame Schachter, in the train?"

The words of the Kaddish are transformed by the context in which they are recited. As the Jews look at the flames they assume will soon consume them and utter the words of the Kaddish, the words do not affirm God and his existence so much as they voice the disjunctions of a world of experience and that of faith. They point directly to that which "ought to be able to be phrased"

but "cannot yet be phrased" and hence include the "silence which is a negative sentence" (Lyotard). The very revising of the meanings that are contained by the words of the Kaddish is a literary attempt "to find new rules of formation and linkage of sentences capable of expressing the differend." The oath of witnessing that directly follows the narration of extremity is particularly fascinating for the "rules of formation and linkage of sentences" with which it responds to historical horror.

The passage, the most famous in Wiesel's oeuvre, is a tour de force of contradiction and of formal dissonances which are not reconciled, but juxtaposed and held up for inspection. More specifically, Wiesel's oath, like Night itself, constructs itself out of the very language, a language of God and of faith, that it renounces. His testimony against God and faith is fashioned in a grammar, out of sentences and in the powerful grip of that faith:

> Never shall I forget that night, the first night in camp, which has turned my life into one long night, seven times cursed and seven times sealed. (44)

Eliezer's words take the form of an oath never to forget this night of his arrival. The oath, the recourse to metaphorical language ("which has turned my life into one long night"), the reference to curses and phraseology ("seven times cursed...") echo the biblical language in which Eliezer was so steeped. He continues:

> Never shall I forget that smoke. Never shall I forget the little faces of the children, whose bodies I saw turned into wreaths of smoke beneath a silent blue sky. (44)

The oath is an oath of protest, the "silent blue sky," an accusation:

> Never shall I forget those flames which consumed my faith forever.

Here and in the sentences that follow, Wiesel uses the rhythms, the verbal energy, imagery and conventions of the Bible to challenge, accuse and deny God:

> Never shall I forget that nocturnal silence which deprived me, for all eternity, of the desire to live. Never shall I forget those

> moments which murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to dust. Never shall I forget these things, even if I am condemned to live as long as God Himself. Never. (44)

The elaborate oath of remembrance recalls the stern Biblical admonitions of remembrance. The negative formulation of the oath and the incremental repetition of the word "never" register defiance and anger even as the eight repetitions circumscribing the passage give it rhythmic structure and ceremonial shape. So steeped in the linguistic structures of the Hebrew faith and its literature is Wiesel's language that the eight repetitions of "Never" seem to implicate mystical notions of God's covenant with the Jews, a covenant associated with the number eight because the ceremony of entrance into the covenant by way of circumcision takes place on the eighth day after birth.

The passage uses the poetry and language of faith to attest a shattering of faith. In a sparely written, tightly constructed narrative it is the only extended poetic moment. It is a climactic moment, and, strangely in a work that so powerfully undercuts the pinions of words and language, a rhetorical moment: a moment constructed out of words and the special effects and properties of their combinations, a moment that hovers

above the abyss of human extremity in uncertain relationship

The "differend" of historical horror thus involves an ironic linkage of two sentences one of which repudiates the possibility of faith and the other of which mitigates against the repudiation. The "idiom" or expression of historical horror consists of this setting up of oppositions which appears precisely at moments that call for resolution, replacing the satisfaction of resolution with the dissatisfaction of the refusal of such comfort. One could trace the same linkages as they appear in the poetry of Paul Celan, of Jacob Glatstein, of Abraham Sutzkever, of Dan Pagis. Critics like Alvin Rosenfeld, Sidra Ezrahi, Ruth Wisse, David Roskies, Alan Mintz and others have done just that.[17]

The point which I find particularly significant is the relationship between such a verbal juxtaposition and the experience to which it refers and attempts to address. The ironic "linkages" and other strategies that structure Wiesel's narrative are witness to the vacuum in words produced by events of historical horror. Words cannot encompass lived horror. It is precisely in its agonized technical and rhetorical play with their own muteness that words are witness to history.

Susan Shapiro, a philosopher at the University of Syracuse, writes: "We must listen, therefore, not only

to the "what" of their testimony, but to the witness of their language."[18] Lawrence Langer, James Young and a host of other writers--the list is long--have analyzed in some depth, the ways that accounts of historical horror" betray their very intention.[19] The professional readers and explicators seem often to adopt a position that strangely parallels the ultimately much more complicated rhetorical positions that lie at the heart of all testimony, poetry and fiction of historical horror. The critical project of reading such a literature is not to add to a testimony of impossibility but to describe "the rules of formation and linkage" that are the conditions of testimony, that make testimony possible. It is to assist in the effort to make that testimony heard.

NOTES

[1]Forward by Francois Mauriac, Trans. Stella Rodway (New York: Hill and Wang, 1958). All citations from this work will refer to this edition and page references will be included in the body of the article.

An earlier version of this essay appeared in Elie Wiesel: Between Memory and Hope, ed. Carol Rittner, R.S.M. (New York: New York University Press, 120-129.

[2](New York: Viking Press, 1964).

[3]Cited in Alvin Rosenfeld, A Double Dying: Reflections on Holocaust Literature (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1980), 28.

[4]Trans. John Githens (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978).

[5]Trans. Peter Wiles (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1964).

[6]Among the numerous articles and dissertations devoted to Wiesel's work, I would like to note two: a full length literary study by Ellen Fine, Legacy of Night: The Literary Universe of Elie Wiesel (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982) and a volume of essays edited by Alvin Rosenfeld and Irving Greenberg, Confronting the Holocaust: The Impact of Elie Wiesel (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1979). For a more recent book of essays, see note 1.

[7]Truth But Not Art? German Autobiographical Writings of the Survivors of Nazi Concentration Camps, Ghettos and Prisons," presented at the International Scholars' Conference, Remembering for the Future: The Impact of the Holocaust and Genocide on Jews and Christians, Oxford, England, 10-13 July 1988. Unpub. ms., 15.

[8]Krause, 15. See Lawrence Langer's "Interpreting Survivor Testimony" for an important discussion of the ways that interviewers mishear, misconstruct and misrepresent survivor testimony in the very interviewing process of those survivors. Langer's article is thus an examination of a problematics of reception based on his work in the Yale Video Archives. The article appeared in an important volume exploring this and related issues of representing "historical horror" entitled Writing and the Holocaust, ed. Beryl Lang (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1988) 26-40.

See also Geoffrey H. Hartman, "Testimony, Preserving the Personal Story: The Role of Video Documentation,"

Dimensions: A Journal of Holocaust Studies 1.1 (Spring 1985).

[9]For an excellent discussion of language and violent fact, see Frederick Hoffman, The Mortal No: The Theme of Death in Modern Literature (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964). See chapter 4, "The Moment of Violence: Ernst Juenger and the Literary Problem of Fact," 158-178.

[10]Trans. Timothy Bahti (University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 1982) 40.

[11]The most comprehensive discussion of the issue of the psychic trauma of the concentration camp from a psychoanalytic perspective is Robert J. Lifton's The Broken Connection: On Death and the Continuity of Life (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979). See especially chapter thirteen, "Survivor Experience and Traumatic Syndrome," 163-187. See also Knowing and Not Knowing the Holocaust, ed. by Dori Laub, M.D. and Nanette C. Auerhahn, Psychoanalytic Inquiry: A Topical Journal for Mental Health Professionals 5.1 (1985), which offers a series of papers devoted to the specific analysis of the problem of reception or "knowing" from a psychiatric point of view as it pertains to the Holocaust. An important address was given by Shaul Friendlander on the strange ways that resistances to "knowing" the Holocaust makes itself felt in the worlds of artistic and intellectual production at the International Scholars' Conference held in Oxford, England, 10-13 July 1988 and entitled "Remembering for the Future." The address was entitled, "On the Representation of the 'Shoah' in Present-Day Western Culture."

[12]See Alvin Rosenfeld's discussion of this scene, "The Problematic of Holocaust Literature," A Double Dying: Reflections on Holocaust Literature (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1980) 24-26.

[13]Taduesz Borowski similarly describes a splitting of the mind and body in the experience of the horrific knowledge of the crematoria in a short story entitled "The People Who Walked On":

> I stared into the night, numb, speechless, frozen with horror. My entire body trembled and rebelled, somehow even without my participation. I no longer controlled my body, although I could feel its every tremor. My mind was completely calm, only the body seemed to revolt.

The story is from a small volume of Borowski's stories selected and translated from the Polish by Barbara Vedder entitled This Way For the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1976) 85.

[14]Cited in Richard Weisberg, "Avoiding Central Realities," Human Rights Quarterly 5.2 (1983): 153.

[15]Trans. Georges Van Den Abbede (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1988) 23,24.

[16]See David Roskies' discussion of the "testimonial imperative" in "The Holocaust According to the Literary Critics," Prooftexts: A Journal of Jewish Literary History 1.2 (May 1981). Also see Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi's discussion of the same impulse in chapter two of By Words Alone: The Holocaust in Literature (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

[17]See Alvin Rosenfeld's discussion of the poetry of Paul Celan in A Double Dying. See also chapters five, six and seven in Sidra Ezrahi, By Words Alone: The Holocaust in Literature; David Roskies, Against the Apocalypse: Responses to Catastrophe in Modern Jewish Culture (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1984); and Alan Mintz, Hurban: Responses to Catastrophe in Hebrew Literature (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).

[18]"Towards a Post-Holocaust Hermeneutics of Testimony," presented at the University of Minnesota at a conference entitled "The Impact of the Holocaust on the Humanities," Dec. 1988.

[19]See Lawrence Langer's Versions of Survival: The Holocaust and the Human Spirit (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982); also James E. Young, Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988).

> ...the representational seeks continually to reshape and revitalize ways of apprehending the actual, subjecting convention to an empirical review of its validity as a means of reproducing the reality.... But the representational is tied to the means of reproduction and varies as new ways of seeing or new artistic techniques of reproducing are discovered.
>
> --Scholes and Kellog

CHAPTER FIVE

THE LITERARY ACT OF WITNESS: NARRATIVE, VOICE AND THE PROBLEMATIC OF THE REAL

Historical Horror and the Suspension of Disbelief

Wiesel and Conrad both call attention to the chasm that the "overdimensional" historical experience opens up between words and fact, symbol and history, language and experience. Marlow describes his feeling "bewitched and cut off forever from everything... amongst the

overwhelming realities of this strange world of plants, water and silence."[1] Similarly, Wiesel, describing deportation from the town of Sighet describes his numbness and sense of the unreal: "And there was I, on the pavement, unable to make a move... It was like a page torn from some story book, from some historical novel about the captivity of Babylon or the Spanish Inquisition." [2]

The difficulty is clear. How to render an experience in all of its sensations from which the mind must recoil, harden, deaden itself? Robert Lifton in his pioneering study of trauma and mass death observes that:

> In order to dissociate itself from grotesque death the mind must itself cease to live, become itself deadened. The disassociation becomes intrapsychic in the sense that feeling is severed from knowledge or awareness of what is happening....[3]

What is not really real can be safely confronted. The premise of disbelief upon which our relationship to the fictional world of a narrative depends breaks down where disbelief is already present. The pressure with which such a work must deal is precisely the pressure to counter the dissociation process, its threat to the self

and to one's grasp of the world. "What is more basic," Lifton continues in the passage cited above, is the self's being severed from its own history, from its grounding...."

To explore such experience within a fictional form threatens to perpetuate the dissociation process. To engage in a fictional procedure in coming to grips with historical catastrophe is to treat as fictional the actuality of traumatic historical experience and thereby to interfere with the goal of that telling. The writer who would write of such experiences writes out of a profound consciousness of this dissociation process, a process that undermines for the reader and for the writer alike, the convention of "suspended disbelief" that is the shared and also unwritten understanding between the reader and writer.

The work of art that would represent historical horror is in a peculiarly complicated and vulnerable position. In Primo Levi's words: "To bear witness, was an end for which to save oneself. Not to live and to tell but to live in order to tell." [4] Such a telling is no ordinary "telling." We ask that it tell us what cannot be told. We ask it to perform special communal and cultural tasks in society at large. We ask that it "bear witness" when art is founded on the very opposite notion of a "suspended disbelief" or separation between

art and life. We are back to issues concerning the nature of historical horror, the problem of disbelief and the search for a mode of writing capable of anchoring the "exploded bits of reality" that elude and break down before violent fact. In the pages that follow I will concern myself with two autobiographical novels, Blood From the Sky by Piotr Rawicz and None of Us Shall Return by Charlotte Delbo. The different technical procedures they deploy in representing extreme experience will, I think, clarify the formal difficulties that face the writer who would represent historical horror. I hope such an examination will further demonstrate the formal connections that exist between an experience and the work of art, connections that, in Lyotard's words "bear witness to differends by finding idioms for them."[5]

II

Piotr Rawicz: Blood from the Sky

"The purpose of eloquence," writes Frederick Hoffmann in The Mortal No " is to direct the reader's attention away from fact," and he continues:

> or to link fact with one or several of the systems of larger meaning which in any period circumscribe fact. Eloquence also acts to slow the rhythm of factual succession. In key

> passages of classical drama, sequences of minor facts lead to a major fact: this latter requires a pause.... The more intensely violent fact becomes, the more solicitous is eloquence to mitigate its intensity.[6]

These observations bear upon Rawicz' novel up to a point. That point is the violent heart of the novel, a key scene upon which the first section of the novel, dealing with the liquidation of Rawicz' home town in the Ukraine, closes. The rendering of the massacre involves the breaking down of the conventional character of narrated experience into separate and sequential passages of fact and eloquence, external event and subjective response, literal description and metaphor.

The breakdown of language proceeds out of a breakdown within the experiencing subject. "One comes to feel the self disintegrating at moments when one's inner forms and images become inadequate representations of the self-world relationship," Lifton writes.[7]

Words in this section, do not skirt so much as they stop short before horrific fact. Three off-duty soldiers hold Yaakov, one of a group of children accidentally discovered in hiding, while the Corporal cuts out his tongue with a bayonet that is too large for the purpose.

"Not a word was uttered by the group of children, who froze into complete immobility...."(155)

Violent detail unfolds in silence and in a factual, neutral, if ironic, tone that gives equal attention to the gouging of the eyes of another child and to the instrument used for the purpose, the "hornbacked penknife, the very one he used for opening tins of corned beef."

The paragraph that follows this factual account of the action breaks the silence amid "indefinable noises, monstrous crossbred sounds," recording the sensations, skewed perceptions, and shattered meanings of these grotesque events in a language that is metaphorical, grammatically irregular and outright metaphysical:

> They were slippery. They were trickly. Piercing screams filled the cellar.... Yawnings, indefinable noises, monstrous crossbred sound. Rendings of senses and skins. Geometric figures, geometry subsiding into madness.... The belly of the Universe, the belly of Existence was gaping open, and its filthy intestines were invading the room...and all astronomies were indulging in a masquerade or tussle, in a wedding or ride, and the stuff of dreams was sprawled on the Throne of God,

> who lay in a swoon on the concrete, surrounded by His own vomit.... (155)

The scene closes brilliantly in a coda in which fact and eloquence come together to fight in Hoffmann's words "against the isolated factuality of fact."

The protagonist, Boris, has returned to the scene of the massacred children with a nurse. She provides the dying children with injections to speed death. Images of gingerbread, cake, flowers and sunshine associate the relief of death with a rhetoric of childhood and of idyll. Rawicz compares the nurse distributing death to the children to a gardener "who fulfills the destiny of the flowers and the sunshine by picking them:

> Several mutilated children were still suffering. The nurse went around distributing death, like portions of gingerbread stuffed with darkness. For they do exist, Boris assures us, cakes stuffed with darkness. He also compares the nurse to the gardener who fulfills the destiny of the flowers and the sunshine by picking them. (156)

The final passage is musical in the sense that it plays with experienced dissonance and employs diction, imagery

and metaphor to resolve the dissonance into a very different tonality: "For they do exist, cakes stuffed with darkness."

The language of childhood belief into which the scene mutes the violence or rupture that we experience in the earlier breakdown of language. The reader may, as it were, recover his breath, look past the disturbing implications of violent fact--escape. In Hoffmann's words, the purpose of eloquence is

> to enable cultural implications to establish themselves, to distract the mind from the factual center, in short to allow the mind the chance to move away from the fact into the area of associative rhetoric.[8]

The sequence of passages discussed then captures the conflicting pressures to which language and narration are subject in the rendering of extreme violent fact. These pressures govern that rendering, its sequence and structure, no less than its texture, imagery, tonality. But the issues are more complicated still. The account of the children's massacre is presented, not as part of a larger story, but apart from that story. It is an eyewitness account taken from a diary sent to the author. The interpolated diary account thus implicates a

breakdown, not only at the level of language, but also of narration. To lay aside story is to lay aside the attempt to tell, at least, in its novelistic formula.

Clearly, what is at stake is belief. As the climactic heart of the novel uncovers the ultimacy of historical horror, the novelist lays aside the pretense and conventions of storytelling for a different narrative posture altogether: a posture of witnessing. The issue only grows more complicated, however, since the journal itself is described as "gibberish," highly edited, and finally, unreliable. The account is a bracketed account. And the point is the bracketing: the failure of a witnessed as well as a narrative mode of telling. The narration of traumatic historical events is caught endlessly on the warp of pressures both to tell and to disavow that telling, to integrate and to disintegrate, to establish factuality, to expose the fiction of that project and in so doing, recover the experience in its fragmentary nature.

The real protagonist of the novel, then, is memory and the ways that the nature of a particular experience inscribes itself upon memory. The first chapter of the novel is introductory and closes with these words:

> An average-sized town in the Ukraine.
>
> July 12, 194-,

> A boat. A floating island made of crystal. Such, then is this past solidified for all time, like men turned to stone at the sight of the Gorgons. We shall die, and so, with the blood from our brains, will our memories: they will be soaked up by the sand that the high seas lap against. But the boat, full of frightened faces, of faces lit up by hope, of dead faces, and also of bodies of every age and every degree of beauty, the boat will go silently on and cleave breathless eternity, rusty eternity.
>
> And never again will the island, with its lights, descend to these depths which go by the name of Earth. (9)

The image of a dislocated floating past, an island, that has achieved the dense and luminous qualities of crystal suggests key qualities of the traumatic experience, its totalizing and isolating aspect. It makes explicit Lifton's notion of a severing of the self from its own history that lies at the heart of the traumatic syndrome. And it formalizes the dissociative logic implicit in the structure and style of Rawicz' narration.

The displacement of the experience of the protagonist to the background of the larger narrative canvas and the continual back and forth between a past that invades the present and a present cut off from itself reflects the unintegratable heart of the experience. The dissociation extends to the constant play in Blood from the Sky with voices that address us from within and from outside the narrative and to a writing surface that moves from expository comment to story, from prose to poetry and from dramatic dialogue to purported journal entree and back to story.

Narrative sequence seems to be a function of strategies designed to accommodate the factuality of violent fact in all of the ways that Hoffman suggests. The three chapters that separate the deportation of patients and staff of the ghetto hospital from the final brutal massacre of a hidden group of children do not follow the life of the protagonist, Boris, or even provide us with information as to what is happening in the ghetto. Instead they form a kind of pause in the narration, an empty space during which the last of the Jewish population is rounded up to be sent on to their deaths, a prose surface impervious to the violent facts that are recounted in partial and incomplete ways.

Chapter 15 begins on a note of anticipation. "Your narrator gets up, impelled by an indefinable feeling: a

change of scene is about to happen." The writer describes Boris's voice which has acquired a new roughness and notes that dawn seems to hang back "in the grip of a stage fright so human...." The sense of theatricality in these lines is the mark of an unreality that lies at the center of the experience of the violence which then leaps out of the prosaic and familiar world: "A uniformed cop and your plain-clothes men keep lookout for the hesitant dawn. It fails to appear. It hangs back..." Four pages later, the chapter closes and dawn appears:

> Whereupon, with his long bony finger, Boris touches the paling sky. In one swift movement, he seemed to give a fleeting caress to the rising sun, petting it as though it were the lightest of balloons....

The poetic lingering over the transition between day and night slows the temporal flow of the narrative both literally and musically. It is not so much the sun that hangs back as it is the inscription of the dread of the new day and of its violences that enter into and dramatically slow the rhythms of the narrative:

> Oh, to drown, to annihilate this moment with the aid of words teeming like black insects. I dread Boris's fluency--certainly I do--but I dread even more what would happen if one now gave the sun free rein. (128)

Fluency, Rawicz tells us (or"eloquence" in Hoffmann's terminology) is a means of staying time, of avoiding, if only briefly, and then only within the experienced temporal progression of the narrative, the horrors to come with dawn. The effect of a chapter about hanging back is to generate tension in the opposite direction, to build anticipation, to point to the violence from which the words would provide respite.

The next two chapters extend the pause of "Boris's fluency," or avoidance at the same time that they address the anticipated moment of violence, its meanings and its experience. Chapter 16 takes up the theme of language:

> One by one, words--all the words of the human language--wilt and grow too weak to bear a meaning. And then they fall away, like dead scales. All meanings evaporate. But that is their normal condition. Man grows dumb....
> (132)

Boris begins to speak (in his journal) about writing as though to disavow in advance his description of the violences that are already anticipated. "Yet more comparisons, yet more metaphors. It's enough to make one throw up." (132) And he laments:

> Between the terror inspired in me by a blank sheet of paper and the sense of shame that the aforesaid sheet gives off as soon as there are a few hasty marks on it, will there never be a "neutral zone"...? (133)

The meditation on writing continues. Rawicz describes literature as "anti-dignity exalted to a system"(134). He attacks "literary manner" which" is an obscenity by definition" and compares the writer to an insect:

> ...haven't you noticed that man never so much resembles an insect as when he engages in the activity of writing...? Dissecting the world into tiny bits, covering paper with tiny scribbles that aspire to be unique.... And man's posture, and the movements of his brain at the time of writing--are they not those of an insect to end all insects, fleshy and podgy.... (135)

Rawicz'references to selfhood and to the sense of the real suggest what Lifton calls, a "coming apart of crucial components of the self."[9] In the same chapter, Rawicz writes that "Those actions in life which are reputedly... the most insignificant... strike me as being so much more... 'existent' than I, the supposed author of these notes."(132) A couple of pages later he comments that the 'I' who had lived through the walled-up town and all the rest, is flowing away, draining away."(134) And he describes a sense of non-being that fills him even as he writes:

> It is an especially revered deity, the deity of Nonentity, that jealously stays my hand. More and more seldom do I try to escape from it. For nonfulfillment is like soft fur. So, my brothers in Nothingness, fight Reality, crush it! There is no more degrading form of mass hypnosis.

The disavowal of the writing activity, of self and of reality ("...fight Reality, crush it! There is no more degrading form of mass hypnosis) in chapter 16 is followed, in chapter 17, by a description of Boris's journal, the journal from which author-cum-editor will

fish out the account of the massacre in chapter 18. Rawicz ruminates on Boris's "mass of gibberish," on Boris's handwriting, on the linguistic hodgepodge of French, Slavonic and other languages in which the journal is written. The voice that speaks at this point is the voice of the editor/author who complains about "a narrative in which I would have preferred... to see greater unity," and at another point that "the notes--even those I had been able to isolate after removing the pseudo-lyrical bits--were extremely muddled." The author, despite the condition of the manuscript, is tempted into salvaging a story which he describes as "the remains of a story which wasn't one, or wasn't quite...." Thus the narrative of the final death throes of the ghetto in chapter 18 is resumed not as a story taken up once again, but on a new basis, as testimony.

But the story that is put together out of Boris's confused journal entries, is itself tampered with in drastic ways by the author--cum--editor and hence, itself profoundly flawed:

> I have quoted from the manuscript wherever I was unable otherwise. I have summarized as often as seemed possible, but first and foremost: I have CUT. And if I fancy I have

> earned the right to any gratitude whatsoever from any reader whatsoever--and I am in doubt as to that--it will all be due to this wholesale amputating. (140)

The documentary status of the account only complicates and deepens our awareness of the gap between fact and account. Even before reading it, we are informed that the account to follow is untruthful. Both chapters prepare the reader for the resumption of the story of the ghetto by disavowing that account in advance. The disavowal occurs on the level of its explicit thematization in chapter 16, and more playfully and formally in chapter 17 with the device of the edited journal.

The two chapters are thus the consequence of the fact that violent fact destabilizes narrative. The pause, extending over the three chapters that precede the massacre consists precisely of the recognition of the subversive implications that are intrinsic to the expression of violent fact. Not only is a pause of "eloquence," necessitated as a means of slowing the pace of violent fact, the content of that "eloquence is equally a function of the violent facts anticipated.

The novel thus calls attention to the issues raised by traumatic fact as a means of gaining access to those

very facts. It calls attention to the violences done to the sense of the real in order to access its felt "realness," or facticity. It opens up the Pandora box of the problematical status of violent fact, a Pandora box whose roots lie in the dissociation process that is involved in the experiencing of trauma, as a rhetorical means of reconstituting the perceived status--and thereby a linguistic, symbolic and social relationship--to those very facts. Formal procedures of narrating over-dimensional historical experience, here, in Conrad, in Wiesel and other writers, take account of the nature of traumatic exper.ence in order to "recover the sensation" of that experience, "to impart the sensation... as it is perceived and not as (it is) known."[10]

By calling attention to the fictionality of the fiction and of the eyewitness account as well, the novel attempts to recoup the experienced credibility of words in the same way that Pirandello's exposure of the fictionality of the actors who play at the role of the Six Characters in Search of an Author affects the way we then experience his "characters." Pirandello plays with our belief in illusion in order to generate, within the illusion and through the manipulation of illusion, a very different kind of belief that stands on life, on experience, on history. Through the formal manipulation, he plays with our sense of the actual. For the space of

the play we watch on stage, he is able to reproduce a sensation of actuality different from the actuality of the illusions we agree to believe in. Pirandello creates the illusion of something outside the illusion of art. He helps us touch, as it were, the sense of a real outside artistic convention, outside a formal reality.

Similarly, the dismantling of fictional convention and attack on storytelling in all of its fictional and nonfictional forms in the novel at hand, redraws the terms within which we then experience the horrific massacre. The appearance of utter confrontation with the lie of the fiction lends the horrific account the authority of that very truthfulness. If traumatic experience severs the self from its groundedness in experience, the very articulation of the disjunctions that follow from that experience, is the ground upon which the reconstitution of a sense of the real must, paradoxically be built.

The forms of language and of discourse called upon to speak about historical catastrophe are profoundly connected to the negating character of the experiences they would describe. Thus, it would seem that it is impossible to speak about violent fact without acknowledging the violence done to that very articulation To write about such violence is to explore in minute and intimate detail, the effect of that violence on the words

that would describe it. The act of grasping violent fact in words must include, then, by formal definition, the action of grasping, in the most precise way possible, the exact boundaries of that description.

II
Expression and Voice: Charlotte Delbo's *None of Us Shall Return*

Charlotte Delbo is most fascinating for the technical virtuosity with which she deals with these very problems raised by her subject. *None of Us Shall Return* is written primarily as a stream of consciousness novel in the first person plural.[11] The "we" is the experiencing subject multiplied fifteen thousand times to include Delbo's historical comrades in suffering and in witnessing. Unlike Rawicz's novel, in which violent events determine the pace of the action, narrative sequence, rhythms and content, Delbo's novel focuses on experiences rather than events. She writes chapters about thirst, about roll call, about nightmares, about a peasant cottage that offers shelter during a rain, about evening, about spring. Her chapters focus less on the extraordinary character of extremity than upon the everyday aspect of extremity.

Delbo does not take her reader back to a historical account of an event or of a series of events but to the experiencing communal consciousness in all of the fragmentation and instability of that experience, in its most intimate connection to the body, to the outer world, and to others. In this way, Delbo depicts that dissolution in all of its lived and witnessed precision. If the unreal lies at the heart of the experience of extremity, it is that unreal that achieves objective status in her account. What is formidable in her writing is the precision and detail of that portrait.

And if Rawicz, in order to write a narrative, must show us all the ways that violent fact destabilizes narrative, Delbo constructs a voice that speaks and organizes a narrative from within that fragmented experience. Instead, she creates a form whose principle is phenomenological and descriptive. She records the dissonance of extreme experience and the violence it performs on notions of time, continuity, coherence, speaking, writing, signifying and meaning. She uses stream of consciousness technique in order to speak from within that dissonance as it affects the proper names of dead friends and human response to the cries of a dying woman.

Her concern is not a particular subject, but subjectivity under special conditions. Delbo's account

takes shape, not in the form of analogy, of telling, of narrative, but in a poetic unfolding of consciousnesss in particular situations, in its physical sensations and the effects of these on human interactions. She is interested in providing us with the most minute data of such experiences: of thirst, of cold, of witnessing a beating, of the sight of a tulip, of sustaining oneself through roll call, of wishing to die, of nighttime, of dreams. She positions the reader within that consciousness and the operations it must perform upon the overdimensional experience of the death camp.

To give up narration, to give up story is itself an acknowledgment of language and its limitations. Delbo thinks about story--can she render thirst, for example, in the form of a story?

> Thirst is an explorer's tale, you know, in the books we read as children. It is in the desert.

And she goes on to tell us the story as convention might have her tell it:

> People who see mirages and walk toward the unattainable oasis. They are without water for three days. The pathetic chapter in the book. At the end of the chapter, the supply caravan

> arrives, it had gone astray on the trail obliterated by the sandstorm. The explorers break open the water bags, they drink. It is thirst from the sun, from the warm wind. The desert. A palm tree in filigree against the red sands. (79)

Such is the thirst of convention, of story. But the thirst experienced by Delbo and her fifteen thousand women comrades who labor in the marshes of the death camp, is different from the thirst in the story. It has no beginning, no middle, no foreseeable end:

> But the thirst of the marsh is more burning than that of the desert. The thirst of the marsh lasts for weeks. The water bags never come. Reason wavers. Reason is laid low by thirst. Reason holds out against everything, but it gives in to thirst. In the marsh, no mirage, no hope of an oasis. Mud, mud. Mud and no water. (79)

Delbo's chapter on thirst eschews story. Instead it describes the effect of a dry mouth on the lips, the difficulty of speaking, the arrival of the tea canteen in the women's bunk before roll call:

> They are not the water bags of the caravan. Quarts and quarts of herb tea, but divided into tiny portions, one each, and everyone else is still drinking when I am finished. My mouth is not even moistened and still the words refuse to come. My cheeks stick to my teeth, my tongue is hard, stiff, my jaws are blocked and still this feeling of being dead, of being dead and knowing it. And terror grows in my eyes. I feel terror growing in my eyes to the point of madness. Everything is sinking, everything is slipping away....
>
> (80)

She describes the obsession with thirst that lasts through the day, her inability to eat without saliva in the mouth, a dangerous attempt to get a cupful of water from a stream, the thirst of morning, of afternoon and that of the night:

> I have the taste of orange in my mouth, the juice seeps under my tongue, touches my palate, my gums, trickles down my throat. It is a slightly sour orange and wonderfully cool. This taste of orange and the sensation of cold wake me up. The awakening is dreadful.

> But the second when the orange peel gives between my teeth is so delightful that I would like to summon up that dream. I chase after it....

Unlike Rawicz, Delbo does not try to tell a story since that story, as Rawicz so eloquently illustrates, can finally never be told. Delbo's technical and philosophical choice to scrap narrative or story in favor of a stream of plural consciousness in a narrative present allows Delbo to sidestep disbelief as a formal issue. Delbo can thus move, in formal terms, from the elaboration of a negative statement (the impossibility and unreliability of the story) to a "positive," or content statement. Delbo explores and brings into her work the content of that experience which Rawicz says cannot be told.

Where Rawicz pauses before the narration of the horrific massacre as though to slow down and anticipate that which is to come and uses excursus in language or "eloquence" for the extraordinary length of three chapters to screen the reader from the details of the final roundups whose description he mostly omits, Delbo pauses over the violent instant itself. The pause is not a device, not a clever form of "telling but not telling," but a lingering in narrative time upon the violent fact

itself and the conjunction of real and unreal that occurs with it.

In one passage she describes the dreams of night and the effort of consciousness to deny reality by investing dream with reality. A brick has come loose from a wall and the sleeper struggles to metamorphose the sensation of that brick into the stone sink of the home to which she returns each night in her dreams:

> We must go back, go back home to feel the sink stone with our hands and we fight against the vertigo that lures us to the bottom of the pit of night or of death, (63)

The dream state is not a state of fantasy but a deeper state of freed awareness, awareness that has been numbed during the day so that it is in dream rather than in a waking state that the mind experiences the actuality of its experiences.

The sentences run on continuously, separated only by commas to indicate this deeper level in the flow of mind and perception. Delbo continues to linger on the physical perception of the cold of the brick around which she organizes a host of nightmarish aspects of daily existence in which the brick is concretely implicated. The passage continues:

> we make one last, desperate effort and we cling to the brick, the cold brick that we hold close to our heart, the brick that we have snatched from a pile of bricks stuck together with ice, chipping the ice with our nails, quick, quick, the clubs and the straps are flying--quick, quicker, our nails are bleeding--and this cold brick against our heart we carry to another pile, in a gloomy cortege in which each woman has a brick against her heart, for this is the way we carry bricks here, one brick after another.
>
> (63,64)

The nightmare indeed consists of the concrete, precise details of the construction work at which the prisoners toil each day. Delbo's description of nighttime and, in particular of the sensation of a cold brick is the means by which she describes both the external reality of the inhuman work to which the prisoners are consigned as well as the inner reality of its overdimensional character. For all of its poetic organization, the passage is very literal, even commonsensical in its observations of how the world of the construction site invades the "rest" of night and in its evocation of yet more detail of that real concentrationary universe that is Auschwitz:

> from morning till evening and it is not enough that we must carry bricks all day long at the construction site, we carry them again at night, for at night everything pursues us at once, the mud of the marsh in which we sink, the cold bricks that we must carry against our hearts, the kapos who shout and the dogs who can move in the mud as on solid ground and bite us at a signal from the flashing eyes in the darkness and we have the hot, moist breath of the day on our faces and fear beads our temples. (64)

What we are given is not a story about the terrors of working at the construction site, but the terror, as it is freed by a brick that has come loose from the wall. The brick acts as a trigger to the consciousness of the sleeper, releasing suppressed and horrific detail of the real concentrationary world that stands outside that consciousness but that has also invaded it. The dreamer seeks in the brick, the materiality of the real that is radically undermined by historical extremity. The passage encapsulates the dilemma of that consciousness that must numb itself to the assault of daily existence and in so doing, sustains profound wounds in that vital link to the

real world that is the ground of speaking, writing, living.

The brick image is drawn out of the nightmare of the real. It is a physical sign of that concentrationary world, a sign, not analogous to, but physically drawn from the daily routine at the construction site. The passage locates the brick in that daily routine:

> The brick that we have snatched from a pile of
> bricks stuck together with ice...quick, quick,
> the clubs and the straps are flying....
> this cold brick...we carry to another pile
> for this is the way we carry bricks here, one
> brick after another, from morning till evening
> (63,64)

At the same time, the passage addresses another dimension of the brick: it is a brick "that we hold close to our heart...:"

> and we cling to the brick, the cold brick that
> we hold close to our heart
>
> and this cold brick against our heart in which
> each woman has a brick against her heart

> The cold bricks that we must carry against our hearts (63,64)

The brick as an object of consciousness is also a lifeline. Its coldness is real. The brick is part of a world out there, but also, and problematically, part of the world as it is experienced by the mind. Delbo's sentences zigzag from inner to outer bricks:

> the cold brick that we hold close to our heart, the brick that we have snatched from a pile of bricks (63)

> in which each woman has a brick against her heart, for this is the way we carry bricks here (64)

The passage allows the bricks of concentrationary reality to enter mind via the body. The word is repeated again and again as though its repetition would aid us in grasping the brick in the ultimacy of its realized and materialized form. The poetic organization of the passage is an attempt to reestablish a ground of self in the world by inserting itself at the juncture (which is the brick) at which the heart clings to, moves toward, attempts to integrate and assimilate into consciousness

the reality of brick, kapos, dogs, etc., that threaten it.

> We feel ourselves teetering over a pit of shadow, a bottomless pit--it is the pit of night or of another nightmare, or our real death, and we struggle furiously, endlessly. We must go back, go back home to feel the sink stone with our hands.... we make one last desperate effort and we cling to the brick
>
> (63)

The dreamer seeking to "go home, go back home, to feel the sink stone with our hand," makes "one last desperate effort," an effort which takes the form of clinging to the brick.

The linguistic form of the passage is a kind of clinging as well. The organization of the passage around the brick, the repetition of the brick, the zigzagging between inner and outer bricks is the means by which Delbo conveys the lived "sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known...." By means of a stream of consciousness rendering, Delbo allows the traces of that experience to mark her narrative, to reveal the altered ways that consciousness experiences itself under extreme conditions.

In <u>At the Mind's Limit</u>, Jean Amery writes of the difficulty of finding words for bodily extremity:

> It would be totally senseless to try and describe the pain that was inflicted on me. Was it "like a red-hot iron in my shoulders," and was another "like a dull wooden stake that had been driven into the back of my head"? One comparison would only stand for the other, and in the end we would be hoaxed by turn on the hopeless merry-go-round of figurative speech. The pain was what it was. Beyond that there is nothing to say. Qualities of feeling are as incomparable as they are indescribable. They mark the limit of the capacity of language to communicate. If someone wanted to impart his physical pain, he would be forced to inflict it and thereby become a torturer himself.[12]

Amery points out that "Qualities of feeling are as incomparable as they are indescribable." There are no words that can substitute for the exact qualities of feeling. In chapter 16, Rawicz similarly suggests that violent fact involves a perceived breakdown of the ability of words to stand for things, dirty cotton for

grey clouds, the story of the destruction of a town in the Ukraine for the fact of its destruction:

> With rusty scissors, I used to cut up bits of the sky. I used to compare clouds to dirty cotton, easy as preparing boiled eggs... Yet more comparisons, yet more metaphors. It's enough to make one throw up. (132)

Both Rawicz and Delbo use a metaphor of organic death to describe the effect of extreme experience on words. "One by one, words--all the words of the human language--wilt and grow too weak to bear a meaning" Rawicz writes (132) and Delbo writes: "All words have wilted long ago."(126) As strength ebbs from the women carrying the bodies of two dead comrades back to the camp at the end of the work day, Delbo describes the efforts of two women to carry the body of their dead friend back to the camp:

> At first it is Berthe and Ann-Marie that we are carrying. Soon they are nothing more than very heavy bundles that slip out of our grasps at every movement. (90)

The story of the ways that proper names are transformed into "very heavy bundles that slip out of

our grasps at every moment" is a literal description of a psycho-linguistic process, a dissolving under conditions of extremity, of the human beliefs and connections that make the connections between word and thing possible. As experience exceeds the possibility of integrating or containing it, naming it is definitionally an impossibility. To tell the story is a reminder of the trauma that remains outside the possibility of telling. Telling turns away from an unavailable content onto the problematic of telling itself. Delbo focuses, not on telling what cannot be told, but on the connections that sustain telling possible in the process of their dissolution.

At one point Delbo writes of watching trucks pass filled with other women who in a short space of time will have been gassed and burned: "The living shrink with fear. With fear and revulsion. They shriek. We hear nothing." The experiencing self wards off the words of the doomed, cannot hear or respond to those words and Delbo addresses herself to that deafness: "We hear nothing. The truck glides silently over the snow...." Delbo places before us the fragmenting nature of the experience by juxtaposing the exactness and intensified seeing of the witness with the deafness to which it is deeply allied:

> We watch with eyes that cry out, that do not believe.
>
> Each face is inscribed with such precision in the icy light, on the blue of the sky, that is marked there for eternity. (39)

What is privileged in this passage is the consciousness that is the consequence of and response to violent fact. The facts are minimal--women pass in a truck, cry out, the truck disappears. But they are also disorienting:

> The women pass near us. They cry out. They cry out and we hear nothing. This cold and dry air would be conductive if we were in an ordinary earthly environment. They cry out to us but no sound reaches us. Their mouths cry out, their outstretched arms cry out, and every bit of them cries out. Each body is a cry. So many torches that flame in cries of terror, so many cries that have assumed the bodies of women. Each woman is a materialized cry, a scream that is not heard. The truck moves silently over the snow, passes under a portico, disappears. It carries off the cries. (39)

The passage records the shared consciousness of the living who hear and who are defended from hearing the cries of the doomed. The pause of "eloquence" is poised specifically on the question of hearing, that is, on the question of effect of extremity on perception. The "eloquence" or language that fills the written spaces between the arrival and departing of the women in the truck does not focus away from violent fact so much as it suspends that violence over narrated time. Delbo and her fellow prisoners are themselves violated and are witnesses to the violation of others.

The crying out is repeated in slightly different form each time. The life energy soon to be extinguished seems to locate itself in those cries, cries that, in the course of the passage, acquire bodies. At first the cries are merely soundless, "They cry out to us but no sound reaches us." Then the passage records the cry visually, "Their mouths cry out, their outstretched arms cry out." Finally we are told that the bodies of the women have dematerialized into cries, "Each body is a cry." The next sentence involves a reversal in which the cry is transformed into a body: "...so many cries that have assumed the bodies of women." Finally, the cry that had become body dissolves back into unheard cry, "Each woman is a materialized cry, a scream that is not heard. The truck moves silently... It carries off the cries."

It is the bounded physical presence of all of those bodies marked for immediate extermination that moves the reader as the cry, in its very insubstantiality, in its fragility, in the brief history of its presence, appears only to disappear. The cry that cries out ever more urgently only to fade away into silence assumes the materiality of the body that anticipates this very fate, this fading into nothing and silence.

The relation of cry and body forms the heart of the passage. The metaphor is unstable and that seems to be its point. The women and the cries are at first disconnected from one another in the consciousness of Delbo and the other witnesses. The women then become cries. The cries also become bodies. As the passage closes the cries and bodies once again detach in the consciousness of the witnesses. At no point are they in a conventional relationship in which one stands for the other or substitutes for the other. Their connection seems to have nothing whatever to do with analogy and everything to do with the ways that the human body experiences itself, its materiality and immateriality, its crushing presence and threatened absence, under conditions of extremity. There is an exchange as it were, between body and voice, that occurs at the heart of the passage and toward which the passage moves. The

exchange involves the very identifications and hearing against which Delbo and her comrades are defended.

The repetition of the unheard cry locates the unheard in the trajectory of that cry, in the tenuousness of body and voice, the relation of real and unreal, in the organicity of the one and the insubstantiality of the other.

III

Language and Exactness

In eschewing story, Delbo eschews the presumption of a correspondence between language and experience that is the ground of formal expression. Instead she develops an extraordinary language of exactness in representing the human being in extremity.

Under conditions of extremity incoming stimuli are dulled in some ways, distorted in other ways. Here is Delbo's description of marching in bitter cold to work:

> ...but the cold is so intense that we no longer feel it. Before us sparkles the plain: the sea. We follow. The ranks cross the road, move straight toward the seas. In silence. Slowly. Where are we going? We move onward into the

> light solidified by the cold. The S.S. shout. We do not understand what they shout. The columns strike out into the sea, farther and farther into the icy light.... (36)

Delbo makes clear the way that traumatic experience, in this case intense cold, interferes with the ways we see and understand, with the ways we experience space, cold, sound and light. She records the ways that the body in extremity begins to experience itself in its parts, the way that the parts no longer seem to be part of a whole, the way that vitality gives way to numbness and the mind itself seems to shut down:

> So numb that we seem to be only a chunk of cold...
>
> Our legs move as if they were not part of us. (38)
>
> Not that we feel colder, we just become more and more inert, more and more unfeeling. (38)
>
> We watch without comprehending.
>
> ...we have lost all the senses of life. (36)

Delbo's extreme faithfulness, a clinical faithfulness, to recording the effects of extremity on the perceptual process, specifically here the effect of extreme cold on fifteen thousand women, has the poetic effect of creating the sense of a reality that is other, that is detached from the mundane, that is different, heightened. It creates the poetic effect of a literal surreal:

> We are frozen fast in a hard block of ice as transparent as a block of crystal. And this crystal is bathed in light, as though light were frozen in ice, as though the ice were light. (37)

The literal reality opens into a phenomenology of cold that takes the form of key images, images of ice, hardness, light, time, transparency and embeddedness which in turn provides the organizing images of the larger chapter.

The principle of organization has to do with Delbo's description and analysis of the perceptual process under intense assault, the ways that it detaches from experience and undergoes a kind of reorganization on a perceptual level: cold is not felt but seen (witnessed) and also associated with light. The experience of cold involves an embeddedness. The women are "frozen fast in

a hard block of ice." The ice is hard but also "as transparent as a block of crystal." Delbo remains with the image of the crystal and plays with its quality of transparency that permits light to filter through: "And this crystal is bathed in light...." The features of the imagined block of ice in which the women feel themselves to be embedded, its hardness and its transparency, merge. The density of the encasing ice collapses into the insubstantiality of the light: "as though light were frozen in the ice, as though the ice were light."

The final lines of the paragraph capture the essential experience of coldness, and through it, of extremity by extending the contrast of ice and light, of density and immateriality that is part of the coldness to the experience of the self. To exist inside such coldness, inside the block of ice, is also to cease to exist in some perceptual and existential sense:

> We do not know if we exist, only ice, light dazzling, snow, and us, in this ice, in this light, in this silence. (37)

The experiencing self has undergone a dissolution under the onslaught of stimuli. What remains and what Delbo is at great linguistic pains to describe in detail is the qualities of a coldness so cold that nothing

exists but that coldness. Surface or aesthetic play with the notion of coldness is play with that very coldness whose severity implicates the dissolution of the experiencing subject.

I am suggesting that Delbo's technical procedures produce an aesthetic surface upon which the breakdown of the experiencing subject is inscribed. A precise poetic language that describes concrete overdimensional experiences builds its associational play around textures of an experience and a psychic economy that is radically other from that which obtains in more usual circumstances. More specifically, where extreme experience renders an experience unavailable (numbing, coldness), poetic language marks the numbing, exploits the fragmenting of the perceptual process and dwells on those perceptual facts that have to do with the disintegration of the experiencing self within the particular experience. It is as though where coldness cannot be experienced via its natural route, it is experienced via an alternative route, that is visually. Metaphor, in this case the block of ice/crystal, is the record of such a process in perception, of the effort of the organism to reintegrate experience along alternative pathways. It is not analogous to experience in the sense of Amery's "hopeless merry-go-round of figurative speech" but extends and intensifies clinical exactness. Poetic

language in None of Us Shall Return is a means of describing consciousness. Delbo's poetic method is a tool of the analysis of experience. Poetic language, in other words, is a literal transcription and elaboration of perceptual processes and reality.

IV

Language and Witnessing

As much as Rawicz and Delbo approach conventions of narration differently, they are each profoundly involved with the same questions. Leo L., head of the ghetto says to Boris and Naomi before they leave the Jewish ghetto for a brief sojourn outside the ghetto walls:

> Of you who are leaving, a few may survive, I am by no means certain. But should you happen to do so remember everything, remember carefully. Your life will be no life. You are going to become strangers to yourselves and to everyone else. The only thing that matters, that WILL matter is the integrity of the witnesses. Be witnesses, and God keep you...."
>
> (27)

The notion of witness emphasizes words, not in the adequacy of their representational function, but as faithful indices of memory, inerrant markers of historical events. The notion of witness attempts to bypass the problem of word and thing by treating words, not as names for things, flawed attempts to describe things and events that cannot be described, but as testimony or evidence on their behalf. The purpose of testimony is to authenticate fact: to locate fact in history and establish its facticity. The concern with witnessing here and in works about historical catastrophe involves the need for a mode of speaking capable of anchoring the "exploded bits of reality" that elude and breakdown before violent fact.[13] Conrad's "Heart of Darkness" skirts the devastations of imperialist venture in Africa at the same time that it is structured around Marlow's journey to receive the testimony of Kurtz. The power of Kurtz' famous words, "The horror, the horror," does not have to do with the word horror, but with its witnessed, its testimonial force. "Kurtz had judged. He had summed up."

In Rawicz the witnessed account of horror represents itself as a break in the fictional narrative, and is further disqualified as unreliable to begin with. Like Conrad, Rawicz plays in complex formal and rhetorical ways with the notion of witnessing as a means of

establishing facticity. Delbo is concerned to write a witnessed account but in ways very different from Rawicz and Conrad. If in Rawicz the witnessed account finally breaks down before the facticity to which it cannot bring formal testimony, the connection between experience and language remains intact in Delbo. Delbo evolves a language of clinical precision in None of Us Shall Return in which the flow of words, of rhythmic and of associational play evolve out of and are thereby witness to, the overdimensional experience.

Delbo's treatment of time is fundamental to the ways that her writing is marked by extreme experience. Narrative time in one of Us Shall Return unfolds within the subjective logic and temporal rhythms of the wounded body. "The will to struggle and resist, life, had taken refuge in a reduced part of the body, just the immediate vicinity of the heart" she writes.(29) At another point she writes:

> What is nearer to eternity than a day? What is longer than a day. How can one know that it is passing? Clod follows clod, the furrow moves back, the carriers continue their rounds.
>
> (54)

Words like "eternity," "immobility," and "motionlessness" are repeated throughout Delbo's text to suggest the totalizing aspect of traumatic experience. Delbo writes of the terrifying screams of women being taken to the gas chambers that do not disappear with the women but are somehow caught and reverberate forever in time: "The screams remain inscribed on the blue of the sky." (39) She describes the faces of the women: "Each face is inscribed with such precision on the icy light, on the blue of the sky, that it is marked there for eternity." Describing the painful dying of a woman, Delbo notes the slowing of perceptual time as well as the stillness of the women who witness that dying:

> Suddenly a shiver runs through this heap that the yellow coat makes in the slush. The woman is trying to get to her feet. Her actions break down into unbearable slow motion. She kneels, looks at us. None of us move....
>
> (32)

Physical immobility is perceptually linked to the experience of a collapsing temporality. "And we remain standing in the snow. Motionless in the plain." (34) This aspect of motionlessness, of the experience of "a time outside of time," (37) that is explicitly referred to again and again is inscribed into the novel by virtue

of Delbo's use of a narrative present from which vantage point she traces the flowing consciousness of a communal "we."

The narrative present of extreme experience is the present of an endlessly disintegrating instant. The disintegrating instant always evokes awareness of its disintegration:

> The light is still immobile, wounding, cold. It is the light of a dead star. And the vast frozen expanse, infinitely dazzling, is that of a dead planet. (38)

Words like "star," and "infinitely dazzling," remind us of a light associated with insight, transparency, and radiance within a description of a very different sense of light. That light, experienced by fifteen thousand women prisoners while at work on a bitter cold morning is "immobile," "wounding," and "cold." Immobility is thus a physical experience of these women's bodies even as it is connected to the structure of the overdimensional experience.

Such a context severely undermines the conventions of "associated rhetoric" of which Hoffman writes, in which light, for example, is associated with transcendence. "It is the light of a dead star," Delbo

writes. Thus the immobility that is connected to the cold experienced at that moment by fifteen thousand women and perceptually linked to the experience of a collapsing temporality within that experience, takes the form here and elsewhere in Delbo of an imagery of negated transcendence ("dead planet"), of obstructed movement, of vital energy unable to engage itself, unable to find words:

> Immobile in the ice in which we are caught fast, inert, unfeeling, we have lost all the senses of life. No one says: "I am hungry. I am thirsty. I am cold." (38)

Extremity erases a tension between the life of the body and the life of the mind. Structures supplied by consciousness that mitigate against the mortality of the body disappear--or almost disappear. That disappearance is the mark of extreme experience. On the last pages of the novel, memories of spring interfere with the life of mind and body in extremity. "It is...harder to die when the sun is shining," Delbo writes,

> Spring sang in my memory--in my memory. This song surprised me so much that I was not sure that I heard it. I thought I was hearing it in

> a dream. And I tried to deny it, not to hear it and I cast a despairing glance at my companions around me.... (124)

Memory brings consciousness and language of another kind:

> ...In my memory spring was singing.... Silvery pussywillows sparkled in the sun--a poplar bends in the wind--the grass is so green that the spring flowers shimmer with surprising colors. Spring bathes everything in a light, light intoxicating air. Spring goes to one's head. Spring is a symphony bursting forth on every side, bursting, bursting.
>
> Bursting. In my bursting head. (124)

The bursting associated with spring and its physical bounty involves an expanding motion of consciousness. The final sentence reverses that consciousness in favor of another consciousness, a consciousness that is marked by an image of violent physical head pain.

The repetition of the word "bursting" modulates between these two kinds of consciousness and between two directions in language,from an imagery associated with burgeoning life forces to a bodily image of puncture,

pain and contraction. The collapse of a lyrical outward flow of awareness into an image of body is similar to the unheard cries of the women on the trucks that metamorphose into bodies and to the light that is frozen in the ice. More globally, it is part of a movement toward density and facticity of body that negates impulses toward meaning and transcendence connected in memory and language to a different form of consciousness.

"Transported to another world," Delbo writes, "we are at the same time exposed to the breath of another life, to living death. In ice, in light, in silence."(38) The poetic effect of the closing words of this passage has to do with their links to a complex of meanings that collapse under the weight of the overdimensional experience. Description continually moves in the direction of the body since human awareness, under acute physical threat, is continually forced back to the threatened and tenuous existence of that body. Words like star, eternity and light, memories of past springs are absorbed into a language of the body, one that bears within it reminders of another language, another body. At a different point the sight of stars and of a barbed-wire fence is experienced through the body rather than beheld by the eyes:

> I do not look at the stars. They stab with cold. I do not look at the barbed-wire fences lit up in the dark. They are claws of cold.
> (72)

Delbo inscribes a language of the body within that other, more metaphysical, more familiar language. To turn away from stars that "stab with cold," that "are claws of cold," is to bring witness of this other more familiar language to the witness of body.

Rawicz and Delbo evolve two different modes within which to explore the historical catastrophe. If Rawicz is finally about the breakdown of formal truth, Delbo evolves a writing style that is able to maintain an authentic experienced connection to the subject of which she writes. Her decision to scrap narrative in favor of a stream of plural consciousness in a narrative present allows Delbo to evolve structures of meaning, imagery and surface texture, all of which flow out of the overdimensional experience. Delbo's prose poetry is a poetry of witnessing in the strict sense that the connection between the experience and its rendering is never broken.

In writing about "the witness of poetry," in his collection of essays under that title, Czeslaw Milosz defines poetry as a "passionate pursuit of the Real":

> ...I have defined poetry as a "passionate pursuit of the Real".... That elementary contact, verifiable by the five senses, is more important than any mental construction. The neverfulfilled desire to achieve a mimesis, to be faithful to a detail, makes for the health of poetry.... The very act of naming things presupposes a faith in their existence and thus in a true world, whatever Nietzche might say.[14]

Delbo's technical inventiveness and exquisite writing style make possible the very exchanges between language and experience that other narratives of "historical horror" uniformly despair of.

NOTES

[1]Heart of Darkness, ed. Robert Kimbrough (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1963) 36

[2]Night, trans. Stella Rodway. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1958) 27.

[3]The Broken Connection: On Death and the Continuity of Life (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1980) 175.

[4]"Beyond Survival," Prooftexts: A Journal of Jewish Literary History, 4.1 (Jan. 1984): 12,13. The citation reads in full:

> During my imprisonment, despite the hunger, the cold, the blows, the fatigue, the gradual death of my companions, the promiscuity of all hours, I experienced an intense need to recount how much I was living. I knew that my hopes of being saved were minimal, but I also knew that if I survived, I would have to tell the story. I would not be able to do less. To tell the story, to bear witness, was an end for which to save oneself. Not to live and to tell but to live in order to tell.

[5]Rawicz, trans. Peter Wiles (New York: Harcourt Brace and World, 1964). All citations will be from this edition and will appear parenthetically in the body of my text. The same will be true for the work by Delbo, trans. John Githens (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968). Citations from this edition and translation will appear in parenthesis in the body of my text.

[6](Princeton: Princeton University Pres, 1964) 158,159.

[7]Lifton.

[8]Hoffman, 159.

[9]Lifton, 175. See Lifton's discussion of the "traumatic syndrome," 173-177.

[10]Victor Shklovsky, cited in Richard Weisberg, "Avoiding Central Realities," Human Rights Quarterly 5.2 (1983): 153.

[11]A somewhat different version of this essay was presented at the Fifteenth Annual Meeting of the International Association for Literature and Philosophy at the University of California, Irvine, April 26-28, 1990 and was entitled, "The Body as Witness: An Examination of the Prose Style of Charlotte Delbo."

Delbo has been insufficiently appreciated in this country. Rosette C. Lamont has written a number of essays on Delbo and translated a number of her writings. Most recently she has translated and contributed a Forward to a posthumous work by Delbo, Days and Memory (Vermont: Marlborough Press, 1990). Her essays on Delbo include "Charlotte Delbo's Frozen Friezes," in L'esprit Createur 19.2 (Spring 1972): 65-74; "Charlotte Delbo: a Woman/Book" which appeared in a volume of essays edited by Alice Kessler-Harris and William McBrien entitled Faith of a (Woman) Writer (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988); and "Literature, the Exile's Agent of Survival: Alexander Solzhenitsyn and Charlotte Delbo," which appeared in Mosaic 9.1 (1975): 1-17.

Her translations include "The Gypsy," for a special issue devoted to the Holocaust of Centerpoint: A Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies 4.1 (Fall 1980): 47-52; "Phantoms, My Companions," which appeared in the Massachusetts Review 12 (1971): 10-30; and "Phantoms, My Faithful Ones," which also appeared in the Massachusetts Review 14 (1973): 310-315.

See also Lawrence Langer, "Charlotte Delbo and a Heart of Ashes," The Age of Atrocity: Death in Modern Literature (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978) 201-244.

A recent dissertation by Lorraine Richards provides a lengthy discussion of Delbo's writing, "La Litterature de L'Angoisse Totale: Trois Temoins de la Deportation: wiesel, Delbo, Semprun. Diss., University of Western Australia 1990.

[12]At the Mind's Limit: Contemplations By a Survivor on Auschwitz and Its Realities, trans. Sidney Rosenfeld and Stella P. Rosenfeld (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980) 33.

[13]Hoffman.

[14]The Witness of Poetry (Cambridge, Mass. and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1983) 56,57.

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