

# Imagining the Unimaginable

Holocaust Memory Transmission and the Representation of the  
Holocaust in Jewish-American Holocaust Fiction

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## **Abstract**

While studies on the representation of the Holocaust in American literature generally focus on first-, second-, and third-generation Holocaust literature, literary contributions of American authors who lack personal experience of the Holocaust but who nonetheless wrote their fiction alongside the survivor generation are rarely included. This thesis re-categorizes Jewish-American Holocaust authors based on their temporal and spatial distance to the historic Holocaust, examines how these categories of authors employ the Holocaust within their fiction through an analysis of three pivotal novels from the Jewish-American Holocaust canon, and considers what external sources have influenced these representations, paying special attention to America's cultural Holocaust memory. Such an analysis explores the reciprocity between Holocaust literature and cultural Holocaust memory, by revealing how Holocaust literature simultaneously relies on, and helps in the formation of, a society's cultural Holocaust memory.

**Keywords:** Jewish-American Holocaust literature / Jessica Lang / cultural memory / Holocaust memory transmission / Thane Rosenbaum / Richard Zimler / Leon Uris

## Introduction

During the German occupation of the Netherlands in the Second World War, my grandfather, Andreas Smits, was an active member of the underground Resistance Movement in Heerlen, while my grandmother, Wil de Bruijn, worked in a bakery which also served as a hiding place for both Jews and resistance fighters. Consequently, the stories I was told of the Second World War as a child were always laced with a touch of romance, and involved thrilling smuggling operations, evading scary Nazis, and forging lifelong friendships. To my young ears, the war sounded as an amazing adventure. However, as the years progressed and I learned more about Nazi policies, civilian casualties, and the Holocaust, I came to the understanding that the Second World War was not just a time for heroism and blossoming romance, and that my grandparents' version of the war was very different from what I read in history books. Moreover, I came to the conclusion that the image I had formed of the Second World War in the Netherlands was greatly influenced by the stories I had absorbed as a child. Having thus realized how an individual's image of a given subject depends on external sources when the individual lacks a personal connection to it, I was intrigued when I came across Jessica Lang's article '*The History of Love, The Contemporary Reader, and the Transmission of Holocaust Memory*', in which she discusses, among other things, how memory of the Holocaust is transmitted through generations.

Although I found her article both interesting and inspiring, and despite the fact that I knew virtually nothing of memory transmission at the time, I quickly noticed a gap in Lang's discussion. In her article, Lang argues that Nicole Krauss' novel *The History of Love* "represents, without the privilege of direct memory, both a Holocaust past and a postmodern present" (44). In order to demonstrate this, she poses the idea that Krauss belongs to the third generation of American Holocaust authors: American Holocaust authors who, according to Lang, were born in the 1960s or later, and who only bear an indirect relation to the Holocaust

(46). In her discussion of Krauss' literary usage of the Holocaust, Lang compares third-generation American Holocaust authors to two other, widely recognized, generations of Holocaust authors: the first-generation of Holocaust survivors, and the second generation of American Holocaust authors, which consists of children of survivors who, through close emotional and physical contact with their survivor parents, have based their image of the Holocaust on their parents' experiences and who, to some degree, have absorbed their Holocaust trauma (46). Although Lang claims to thus present her reader with a review of the "range and periodicity of American Holocaust fiction", it struck me that this classification, based on temporal distance to the Holocaust, and which I quickly found out to be widely accepted, excludes an important group of American Holocaust authors (44).

Following Lang's logical premise that American Holocaust fiction has to have been produced by American writers, and given the fact that the vast majority of Holocaust survivors were and are Europeans, I concluded that virtually no American Holocaust fiction of the first-generation exists (43). However, not all the American Holocaust authors Lang mentions in her article, for example, Cynthia Ozick, Edward Lewis Wallant, and William Styron, can be classified as belonging to either the second or third generation of Holocaust authors (45). As such, I believe that the full range of the worldwide totality of Holocaust fiction, including American Holocaust fiction, includes yet another, crucially different, category of Holocaust authors. Lang – perhaps purposefully – fails to quantify and discuss this category, casually brushing over what I believe to be America's first wave of Holocaust authors: authors whose literature has not only helped move the subject of the Holocaust to the center of American society's consciousness, but whose literature also contributed greatly to the body of Holocaust knowledge as it exists in American society today (45).

What distinguishes these authors from the first-, second- and third-generation Holocaust authors Lang discusses is that, unlike the first- and second-generation Holocaust

authors, they do not bear a direct relation to the Holocaust, nor have they grown up in close proximity to a Holocaust survivor. In that sense, this category of American authors resembles the third generation of American Holocaust authors, as introduced by Lang. However, while this third generation of Holocaust authors, according to Lang, consists of American authors who were born in the 1960s or later, indicating a significant temporal distance to the Holocaust as an event, the group of American authors she fails to discuss in her article were already alive during the Second World War (46). As such, these authors, to some extent, witnessed the Holocaust as it was taking place overseas. In other words, while Lang's third-generation Holocaust authors are historically distanced from the Holocaust, those authors who lived through the Second World War in America were merely spatially distanced from the event. As a result, these authors were the first group of American authors to publish Holocaust fiction. Some, such as John Hersey, as early as 1950. Therefore, and because the term 'first-generation Holocaust authors' refers so specifically to eyewitnesses and survivors, in this thesis, I shall refer to them as first-wave American Holocaust authors.

Upon reading Lang's article, and during my subsequent studies of both American Holocaust fiction and cultural memory theory, I found myself wondering about these first-wave American Holocaust authors, and the bodies of Holocaust knowledge on which they based their fiction. What external Holocaust sources were available to them? And how did they incorporate the Holocaust in their fiction? Moreover, does the way they represent the Holocaust in their work resemble the way second- and third-generation Holocaust authors represent it? And have the Holocaust representations of first-wave American Holocaust authors influenced the image of the Holocaust as it exists in the minds of second- and third-generation Holocaust authors, or the American community in general? Although a lot has been written about the Holocaust and the different generations of American Holocaust literature, Lang is not the only scholar to have overlooked the importance of first-wave

American Holocaust fiction.

The Holocaust and its representations in American literature is a popular subject when it comes to scholarly research. Due to the sheer size of the canon of Holocaust fiction, the majority of these studies focus on a specific area of interest. For example, a large number of studies limit themselves to Jewish-American literature in particular, such as S. Lillian Kremer's *Witness Through the Imagination: Jewish American Holocaust Literature* and Allan L. Berger's *Crisis and Covenant: the Holocaust in American Jewish Fiction*. On top of these detailed studies, there are a large number of literary analyses focusing on individual Holocaust novels, such as Irmtraub Huber's 'A Quest for Authenticity', in which she analyzes Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything Is Illuminated*. Furthermore, there are numerous studies on American Holocaust fiction in which the role of cultural memory in the author's interpretation of the Holocaust is explored. The second generation of American Holocaust fiction and the way second-generation Holocaust authors are affected by their parents' Holocaust experiences in particular has proven to be a popular area of study. Among the most noted scholars to have written on the subject are Marianne Hirsch, who coined the term 'postmemory', and Ruth Franklin, who famously criticized second-generation Holocaust authors for appropriating their parents' personal suffering. Although a review of all of these Holocaust studies is beyond the scope of this thesis, it is important to note that a lot has been written on the subject of Holocaust and memory transmission, yet few studies have given serious thought to the position of first-wave American Holocaust fiction in relation to second- and third-generation American Holocaust fiction and cultural memory.

Therefore, in this thesis, I aim to examine the temporal and spatial position of first-wave American Holocaust authors in relation to the historic Holocaust, and analyze in what specific ways this position has affected the representation of the Holocaust in their fiction. Unfortunately, an analysis of all first-wave American Holocaust fiction is beyond the scope of

this thesis, so I will base my findings on a close reading of Leon Uris' *Mila 18*, which was published in 1961. Furthermore, I compare a pivotal second- and third-generation American Holocaust novel, respectively Thane Rosenbaum's *The Golems of Gotham* and Richard Zimler's *The Seventh Gate*, to the ideas posed about these categories by Lang, after which I will relate my conclusions about the way the Holocaust is represented in these novels to their unique spatial and temporal positions to, and emotional distance from, the Holocaust. In other words, in this thesis I will use Lang's article 'The History of Love, the Contemporary Reader, and the Transmission of Holocaust Memory' to guide my research of second- and third-generation Holocaust fiction, supplementing her ideas on Holocaust memory transmission with my findings on first-wave American Holocaust fiction.

Because of the sheer number of American novels about the Holocaust, I felt a clear delineation of the literary materials under discussion in this thesis was necessary. As second-generation Holocaust authors are characterized as children of Holocaust survivors, and are therefore usually of Jewish descent, I have further limited my area of research to Jewish-American Holocaust authors. Although this limitation raises complex questions about the nature of 'Jewishness' and the difference between Jewish and gentile writers – questions I unfortunately cannot elaborate on – I have nonetheless decided to analyze three examples of Jewish-American Holocaust fiction, as this means that all of the authors under discussion somehow, in their own unique ways, feel connected to the Jewish victims of the Holocaust. In other words, by solely focusing on Jewish-American Holocaust literature, and leaving gentile American Holocaust literature out of the equation, I hope to be able to clearly analyze the literature under discussion on the basis of temporal and spatial relation to the historic Holocaust, without running the risk of possibly coming across Holocaust representations that are somehow affected by a sense of 'otherness'. I have thus not only selected the novels under discussion on the degree of Holocaust referentiality, but also on the basis of their authors'

identification with Judaism.

Furthermore, it is important to note that, in my readings of these novels, I will not pay attention to stylistic aspects. Rather, I will focus on how the authors have incorporated the Holocaust within their fiction and how they have chosen to represent the historic event. Moreover, I will analyze in what ways their representation of the Holocaust reflects their temporal and spatial distance to the Holocaust. As such, I base my readings of the pivotal novels under discussion on my understanding of cultural memory theory.

Because of this chosen angle of analysis, the first chapter of my thesis takes the form of a brief introduction of my theoretical framework. First of all, I provide a brief outline of the history of cultural memory theory. I then illustrate how an individual's personal experiences are converted into memories and, in turn, may be absorbed by a group's cultural memory. Furthermore, I explain about the differences between collective and cultural memory, and provide insight into the function of cultural memory.

The second, third, and fourth chapter of this thesis are each devoted to the discussion of one category of Jewish-American Holocaust authors I have identified and have the same basic structure. I begin each chapter with a brief introduction to the category, after which I determine the temporal and spatial position of the category under discussion compared to the Holocaust. Subsequently, I analyze in what specific ways the authors whom I've chosen to represent the three different categories of Jewish-American Holocaust fiction correspond to the general category to which they belong, and conclude each chapter with a close reading of a pivotal Holocaust novel.

In chapter two, I begin my discussion of how Holocaust memory is transmitted through cultural memory and literature with my reading of a second-generation Jewish-American Holocaust novel, Thane Rosenbaum's *The Golems of Gotham*. Chapter three is devoted to the role of the imagination in third-generation Jewish-American Holocaust fiction,

and focuses on Richard Zimler and his novel *The Seventh Gate*. Finally, chapter four revolves around the importance of first-wave American-Jewish Holocaust fiction in relation to America's cultural memory and features a reading of Leon Uris' *Mila 18*.

Although chapter two, three, and four all end with a brief conclusion about how the Holocaust is employed in the different pivotal novels, in chapter five I present my overall findings.

## **1 – Theoretical Framework: Cultural Memory**

### **1.1 – Introduction**

Before I can analyze the representation of the Holocaust in three pivotal novels of Jewish-American Holocaust fiction, written by authors differently distanced from the Holocaust, it is important to gain insight into the way memory, and particularly the memory of an historic event such as the Holocaust, is transmitted through time and space. Exactly what is cultural memory? Why is it called ‘memory’? What is its relation to culture and the collective? How is cultural memory formed and structured, and how does it affect the way individuals think?

Finding the answers to these questions not only enables us to understand how memory and knowledge are transmitted horizontally, within groups and generations, it also allows us to examine how knowledge is transmitted vertically, through time and, in effect, *through* generations.

Because cultural memory is a vast area of research, a detailed analysis of how it evolved in different directions is beyond the scope of this thesis. Therefore, in the following chapter, I briefly review the origins of contemporary cultural memory studies and provide a cursory overview of the most important notions, ideas and concepts of contemporary cultural memory theory.

### **1.2 – Before Cultural Memory: the Mind as a Storehouse of Memories**

Before the idea of a ‘cultural memory’ was first conceptualized in the 1920s, theories on the nature of memory traditionally concentrated on the idea that individual memory functioned as a storehouse. As Gerdien Jonker explains in her introduction to *The Topography of Remembrance: the Dead, Tradition and Collective Memory in Mesopotamia*, for hundreds of years generations of philosophers and theorists – ranging from Aristotle in Greek antiquity

to Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel in the nineteenth century – have regarded ‘memory’ as an individual’s personal repository of images of events that could be activated and browsed freely according to the individual’s needs and wishes (Jonker 6-17). In this ‘static’ model of memory – in which memories are seen as captured ‘scenes’ that are forever and unchangingly imprinted on the individual’s mind – the act of remembering is seen as an individual affair and the person who remembers is deemed in complete control of an organized ‘storehouse’ filled with distinct memories (Jonker 8).

These days, this idea of a ‘storehouse memory’ is perhaps best explained by equating it to a filing cabinet. As François-Xavier Lavenne, Virginie Renard and François Tollet explain in ‘Fiction, Between Inner Life and Collective Memory’, supporters of the ‘storehouse theory’ believe that the human mind is able to collect complete and truthful impressions of the world and the past, like files stored in a filing cabinet (5). Furthermore, supporters of the storehouse theory claim that these memories can be fully retrieved at will, as long as the owner “holds the key” to the memory he or she wishes to retrieve (Lavenne 5). Consequently, according to the storehouse theory, no memory is ever lost; forgetfulness is merely caused by an individual’s inability to find the right key to retrieve specific memories.

However, at the end of the nineteenth century, a crucial step towards cultural memory theory was made when French philosopher Henri Bergson published *Matière et Mémoire* in 1896. As Jeanette R. Malkin explains in *Memory Theater and Postmodern Drama*, in *Matière et Mémoire* Bergson distinguishes between two primary types of memory: ‘habit memory’ and ‘pure memory’ (51). By differentiating between two different kinds of memory – albeit co-existing within the individual – Bergson moved away from the traditional storehouse memory theory, which centered on a single individual memory.

On top of that, the nineteenth century had cultivated many attempts to develop theories on the possibility of a genetically inheritable ‘racial memory’. As Jan Assmann notes in

‘Collective Memory and Cultural Identity’, many nineteenth-century scholars investigated into the possibility of phylogenetic evolution: the idea that an individual’s distinct character and personality are genetically inherited (125). Thus, not only did nineteenth-century academics slowly move towards a different outlook on memory, they also gradually shifted their focus from the individual to the group by examining the role of genetic relations in the formation of individual identity and the transmission of behavioral patterns in social groups.

In other words, at the end of the nineteenth century, the time was ripe to move both the debate concerning the transmission of individual characteristics and the discourse about the form and function of memory out of respectively a biological and an individual framework and combine them into a cultural structure.

### **1.3 – Collective Memory**

#### **1.3.1 – The Birth of Cultural Memory**

Because the end of the nineteenth century witnessed a growing academic interest in both the nature of memory and the transmission of personality traits within a defined collective, it is not surprising that independent memory studies cropped up in several different places at the same time. As Astrid Erll notes in the introduction of *Cultural Memory Studies: an International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, “[a]round 1900, scholars from different disciplines and countries became interested in the intersections between culture and memory”, (Erll 8). This led to numerous studies on cultural memory from a wide range of different disciplinary perspectives. For example, some scholars, such as Sigmund Freud, mainly sought to adhere collective memory to individual memory, while others, such as Marc Bloch, concentrated on the function of collective ideas throughout history (Assmann, ‘Communicative and Cultural’ 109, 110; Confino 77, 78). Although these works on memory all demonstrate a new interest in the workings of collective thinking, none was as explicitly

theoretical as the writings of the French philosopher and sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (Erll 8, 9).

Today, Halbwachs famous studies of the *mémoire collective* are widely recognized as the foundational texts of modern memory studies. As Erll and Nünning observe in the preface of *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, Halbwachs was the first to systematically theorize the idea of a ‘collective’ memory (Erll and Nünning v.). In 1925, Halbwachs, influenced by the Durkheimian concepts of ‘collective consciousness’ and ‘collective psychology’, and Bergson’s concept of ‘habit memory’, published what would become his most notable work: ‘Les Cadres Sociaux de la Mémoire’ (or ‘The Social Frameworks of Memory’), in which he first discussed the concept of the ‘*mémoire collective*’, or ‘collective memory’ (Crane 149).

Because Halbwachs is widely recognized as the founding father of contemporary collective memory studies and the ideas he posed in his works are still viable and applicable today despite the fact that contemporary collective memory studies have expanded his collective memory theory with new ideas and corresponding terminology, this brief overview of cultural memory studies will focus largely on Halbwachs’ foundational ideas (Erll 8; Olick 5).

### **1.3.2 – Collective Memory and Individual Memory**

One of the most striking aspects of Halbwachs’ idea of the *mémoire collective*, or ‘collective memory’, is that it functions within any given social collective, and that it continuously interacts with the individual members of the collective. As such, the collective memory interacts with individual memory.

In ‘The Social Frameworks of Memory’, Halbwachs argues that collective memory is not a ‘memory’ in the sense that it is an assemblage of recollections. In fact, he stresses that the function of the collective memory – contrary to what the more traditional semantic

association suggest – is not the passive storage of remembrances. Instead, Halbwachs states that it is also a “concatenation of ideas and judgments” (‘The Social Frameworks’ 176). As such, Halbwachs asserts that the *mémoire collective* is both meditative and creative in nature, explaining it as: an image of the past as it exists in a group of individuals that both reflects and defines the predominant thoughts, ideas and opinions of that particular group (‘The Social Frameworks’ 40, 53, 56, 59, 176). In his posthumously published book *The Collective Memory*, Halbwachs elaborates on this idea, stating that, due to its reflective quality, collective memory represents both contemporary and past “currents of thought and experience” (64). In other words, unlike history, the collective memory of a group contains more than just factual information, such as dates and definitions (*The Collective Memory* 53). Rather, a group’s collective memory is a social framework of remembrances, values and models of teaching that not only expresses, but also, consequently, shapes “the general attitude of the group” (‘The Social Frameworks’ 59). Thus, collective memory can be regarded as a social collective’s general outlook on the world that is constantly interacting with the thoughts and ideas of the group’s individual members.

This is perhaps the reason why some scholars recognize collective memory as a form of human consciousness. As Jan Assmann points out in ‘Communicative and Cultural Memory’, collective memory, like consciousness in general, “depends [...] on socialization and communication”, and like consciousness it can be “analyzed as a function of our social life” (109). Furthermore, Halbwachs suggest that, like consciousness, collective memory enables individuals to adequately interpret everyday impressions. As Roy Baumeister observes in ‘Understanding Free Will and Consciousness on the Basis of Current Research Findings in Psychology’, the most far-reaching function of human consciousness is to “[help] the individual operate in the complex social and cultural worlds that humans create” (24, 25). Similarly, in ‘The Social Frameworks of Memory’, Halbwachs notes that by comparing the

impression of an event or scene to a ‘social framework’ of memories, morals and rules – a framework provided by the group’s collective memory – an individual can understand any given impression from the perspective of the group he or she finds himself in (53, 55). In other words, like consciousness, the collective memory of a group allows individual group members to attribute meaning to witnessed events. But where consciousness merely serves as a mediator between the individual’s mind and the outside world by providing the individual with the means to place him or herself within a larger social structure, Halbwachs claims that a group’s collective memory also aims to ensure that impressions and events are interpreted in a socially desirable manner (‘The Social Frameworks’ 53, 55). Thus, the collective memory provides the individual with the tools needed to function in, and engage with, a complex social environment and as such interacts with individual memory on a subconscious level, enabling the individual to adhere to the standard established by the group (Baumeister, ‘Understanding Free Will’ 24, 25).

As such, the collective memory of a group performs an important role in the formation of individual memory. In *The Collective Memory*, Halbwachs explains, that “remembrances are organized in two ways: either grouped about a definite individual who considers them from his own viewpoint” or “distributed within a group for which each is a partial image” (*The Collective Memory* 50). Halbwachs identifies the first kind of remembrances as ‘individual memories’, whereas he calls the latter ‘collective memories’ (*The Collective Memory* 50-53). While collective memories enable the individual to place himself within the perspective of the surrounding social group by evoking and maintaining “impersonal remembrances of interest to the group”, the individual remembrances are the individual’s own, and serve solely to construct a sense of personal identity (Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory* 50, 51). As such, collective memories are characterized as remembrances that do not exist in the mind of the individual, because the individual has never witnessed the events that

evoked them: “in recalling them, [the individual] must entirely rely upon the memory of others, a memory that comes [...] as the very source of what [the individual wishes] to repeat” (Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory* 51).

An example of collective memories can thus clearly be found in historic events, such as the Second World War and the Holocaust. As Halbwachs states, and as I will demonstrate in chapter two, three, and four, in the minds of most individuals, these memories can merely be imagined, and never remembered (*The Collective Memory* 52). While these memories need not necessarily be important to the individual, they are of interest to the group, so the individual – as a group member – helps to evoke and maintain them (Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory* 50). Individual memories, on the other hand, are based on events or scenes the individual actually witnessed and remembers (Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory* 50). As far as Holocaust memory is concerned, only Holocaust survivors and eyewitnesses, among whom authors of first-generation Holocaust literature, possess individual memories of the event. And while some Holocaust survivors managed to turn their individual memories into part of a group’s collective memory through literature, as I will explain in chapter 4.2, most individual memories – especially in larger groups, such as nations – are not of interest to the group, and are merely employed in order to define and characterize the individual (Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory* 50, 77, 78).

But whereas Halbwachs thus recognizes individual memory as a distinct form of memory, he stresses that it nonetheless relies heavily on collective memory (‘The Social Frameworks’ 53). In *The Collective Memory*, Halbwachs claims that the individual memory often “momentarily merges” with collective memory in order to either complement or confirm data or memories associated with individual memory (50, 51). However, this does not necessarily mean that individual memory is somehow subordinate to collective memory. Although Halbwachs stresses that – while both kinds of memories draw from each other “to

cover the gaps in [their] remembrances” – it is the individual memory in particular that relies upon the collective memory, he also notes that the individual memory “gradually assimilates any acquired deposits” (*The Collective Memory* 51). In other words, the individual extracts information from the collective memory and employs this information for his or her own individual purposes. Thus, the individual memory appropriates selected parts of the collective memory as its own, and, in doing so, remains individual in nature.

Furthermore, as collective memory aids the individual in interpreting his or her surroundings, the collective memory plays a role in the formation of individual memories. In ‘The Social Frameworks of Memory’, Halbwachs explains that, in order for an impression of an event to firmly settle into the memory of the individual, and thus become a remembrance, it first needs to be processed and understood (53). In other words, the individual needs to make sense of it. As Halbwachs notes, this step in the individual’s memorization process requires a specific standard of thoughts and ideas: the collective memory of the group the individual finds himself in (‘The Social Frameworks’ 53). By comparing an impression to a framework of collective thought – “a single system of ideas [and] opinions” as it exists in a social collective – an individual is able to attribute meaning to any witnessed event and to understand it within the context of his or her social surroundings (Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory* 53). As such, the group’s collective memory enables individuals to interpret impressions and, consequently, remember them in a specific manner.

In other words, Maurice Halbwachs’ idea of collective memory, as the precursor of what scholars nowadays refer to as ‘cultural memory’, should be seen as a body of knowledge as it exists within a collective, rather than an actual collective ‘memory’, or remembrance. As a body of knowledge, consisting of facts, morals, and attitudes, the collective memory of a group interacts with present concerns and beliefs, and allows individual group members to interpret past and present events from the group’s viewpoint. In relation to the Holocaust and

its representation in Jewish-American literature, it can thus be said that the way in which an author incorporates and represents the Holocaust in his or her literature is predetermined by the contents of the collective memory of the group he or she belongs to.

However, before I can discuss at length how the representation of the Holocaust in Jewish-American Holocaust literature is thus influenced by the collective memory of the social group surrounding the writer, a rudimentary knowledge of some of Halbwachs' key concepts is crucial. First of all, it is important to observe what, both in Halbwachs theory and in cultural memory studies in general, constitutes a remembrance.

### **1.3.3 – Collective Memory as a Reconstruction of the Past**

Throughout his works, Halbwachs repeatedly uses the term 'remembrance', and although the word is usually interpreted as 'something remembered from the past', or simply as a 'memory' or 'recollection', the sheer nature of Halbwachs' field of study demands a more explicit and consequential description.

According to Halbwachs, "a remembrance is [...] a reconstruction of the past achieved with data borrowed from the present" (69). In other words, Halbwachs believes that remembrances are not stored in one's memory as complete, detailed scenes. As such, he fully rejects the idea of a storehouse memory. More importantly, he claims that remembrances can change, depending on the amount and quality of the historical information available at the time of remembering. Thus, data available in the present may color remembrances in such a way to partly, or even completely, alter them.

This notion, that memory is in fact a construction of the past based on the information available to the remembering individual in the present, is particularly important in relation to first-generation Holocaust literature, as the testimonial Holocaust literature of Holocaust survivors would nevertheless come to be associated with authenticity and fact. I will explain more about first-generation Holocaust literature and the role of the imagination in their

representation of the Holocaust in chapter 4.2 of this thesis. For now, however, it is merely important to realize that memory is a construction of the past based on current ideas, beliefs, and data.

To complicate the matter, Halbwachs adds that all remembrances are assembled by other remembrances, which can be regarded as “reconstructions of earlier periods wherein past images had already been altered” (*The Collective Memory* 69). Thus, Halbwachs not only poses the idea that the past is merely a collection of reconstructed remembrances organized according to current needs and beliefs, he also claims that it is this highly subjective, reconstructed past that in turn shapes and defines new remembrances and, consequently, a new, more recent portion of the past. As Lewis Coser puts it: “[for] Halbwachs, the past is a social construction mainly, if not wholly, shaped by the concerns of the present” (25). This idea – of the past as a re-constructed interpretation – can be traced back to Friedrich Nietzsche in the nineteenth century, but it was Halbwachs who first applied it to collective memory theory (Assmann, ‘Remembering In Order’ 93; Lemm 94-96). Ever since, other collective and cultural memory theorists have readily accepted the idea that the past “must continually be re-constructed and re-presented” as a “basic insight” (Erl 7). As noted above, according to Halbwachs, collective memory can be seen as an image of the past as it exists in a group of individuals that reflects the predominant thoughts, ideas and opinions of that particular group. Thus, it cannot only be said that a group’s collective memory – or image of the past – is shaped by reconstructing and reinterpreting collective remembrances according to the predominant present concerns of the group, it is also important to understand that this image of the past, which in itself is thus affected by present ideas and beliefs, in turn affects the way current events are interpreted and remembered.

For example, to draw on the case of the Holocaust, the way the Holocaust as an historic event is thought about today not only influences the way current events, such as neo-

Nazism, the recent trial of Oskar Gröning, or even the shift towards a new form of Holocaust literature are interpreted, other current events, such as new historic research on the concentration camps, or the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, may in turn alter the way the Holocaust is remembered. Furthermore, to build on the case of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the viewpoints and present concerns of the groups involved differ greatly, and, consequently, their respective collective memories of the Holocaust differ greatly as well. In other words, according to Halbwachs, the nature of the social group and its present concerns, or the perspective from which both current and past events are perceived and interpreted, largely determines the substantive composition of the group's collective memory.

Which brings up another concept that, though often employed by Halbwachs and other cultural memory theorists, requires further investigation: 'the social group', or 'social collective'.

#### **1.3.4 – The Social Group and the Formation of Collective Memory**

As I explained in the introduction of this thesis, in this thesis I will analyze the representation of the Holocaust in three pivotal Holocaust novels written by authors belonging to three different categories of Jewish-American Holocaust authors: an author of the second generation of Jewish-American Holocaust authors, an author belonging to the third generation of Jewish-American Holocaust authors, and an author whose work is part of the first wave of Jewish-American Holocaust fiction. Clearly, each of these authors belongs to a distinct social group, and, consequently, the different Holocaust representations found in their Holocaust novels are influenced by three different collective memories.

As Jan Assmann notes in 'Communicative and Cultural Memory', "groups are formed and cohere by the dynamics of association and dissociation" (114). Thus, social groups are created when individuals choose to associate themselves with either another individual, or with a group of other individuals. According to Halbwachs, any combination of two congenial

individuals qualifies as a social group ('The Social Frameworks' 38). Consequently, there are innumerable social collectives. Not only is society in itself a particular social collective, within any given society there are also social classes, neighborhoods, religious communities, families, and numerous other social groups (Coser 22).

Or, to relate this idea to the subject of this thesis, within the large group of American authors, there is a smaller social group who, defined by their cultural or religious heritage, can be classified as Jewish-American authors. While some of these Jewish-American authors have written fiction about the Holocaust, others have not, which further divides this group. Finally, the group of Jewish-American Holocaust authors, which is significantly smaller than the different overarching groups these writers are also a part of, can be subdivided into different categories, or generations. The social groups that these authors belong to, or associate themselves with, is said to largely determine their outlook on the Holocaust. Consequently, the social groups these authors either actively chose to be a part of, or were simply born into, and these groups' corresponding collective memories of the Holocaust have shaped how these authors choose to represent the event in their literature.

As mentioned in chapter 1.3.2, each social group has a unique collective memory that is shaped and defined by the individual memories, thoughts and opinions of the individual members of the group (Coser 22). As such, the totality of the members of the social collective – thus, the group – plays a vital role in the formation of the group's distinct collective memory. As Halbwachs notes, the collective memory of a specific group reflects the predominant concerns of said group, by constantly interacting with the thoughts, memories and values of the group's individual members ('The Social Frameworks' 40, 53, 56, 59). In other words, it is the individual members of a group who constantly determine and shape the composition and structure of the group's collective memory.

However, although there are some instances in which individual group members can

greatly influence a group's collective memory – for example, when an individual's experiences and thoughts reach the minds of the majority of the group – within larger social groups this is generally an unconscious process, which the members of the collective cannot deliberately instigate (Coser 22). As such, the influence of the individual within a larger collective should not be overestimated (Coser 22). As Halbwachs argues in *The Collective Memory*, the specific collective memory of a group “evolves according to its own laws” (51). Instead of being fixed or definite, or prone to periodic change, the collective memory of a group is in “continuous development”: not only does the collective memory of a group change as the group's predominant perspectives and concerns change, as the social tissue of the group changes over time – either by the replacement of group members or changes in the size of the group – the group's collective memory also changes accordingly (Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory* 82, 85). Thus, even though the individual members of the group usually cannot deliberately influence the formation and composition of the group's collective memory, their actions, thoughts, and the formation of their individual memories are nevertheless absorbed by it.

In other words, as there are numerous social groups, there are numerous corresponding collective memories that affect the way in which members of these groups interpret witnessed events and perceive the world. But while the collective memories thus affect and influence the thoughts and beliefs of the individual group members, the group's individual members in turn shape the group's collective memory as the totality of the thoughts, beliefs, and ideas of the group's individual members are absorbed into it.

#### **1.4 – After Halbwachs and the *Mémoire Collective***

As Astrid Erll notes in ‘Cultural Memory Studies: An Introduction’, interest in Halbwachs' collective memory theory subsided with the advent of the Second World War (9). According to Erll, it was only in the 1980s when interest in Halbwachs' theory rekindled,

when “the generation that had witnessed the Shoah began to fade away” and scholars became aware of the world’s dependency on media and literature to transmit the memory of the Holocaust onto younger generations (9). With this realization came a new wave of cultural memory studies, and scholars of various disciplines began applying Halbwachs’ concepts to different fields of study (Erll 1, 8, 9). For example, Pierre Nora applied Halbwachs’ theory of collective memory to examine the relationship between France’s national memory and identity to various *lieux de mémoire*, or ‘sites of memory’, while Jan and Aleida Assmann employed Halbwachs’ ideas to analyze the relationship between “media and memory in ancient societies” (Erll 10).

Unfortunately, an extensive analysis of all areas of research related to cultural memory studies, including cultural memory studies that center around media and literature, is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, it is important to understand that Halbwachs’ theory of collective memory primarily applies to the transmission of memory and experience within the social collective, from individual to individual. As this thesis is about the transmission of Holocaust memory within social collectives, but also through literature, a brief addition to Halbwachs’ ideas is necessary.

#### **1.4.1 – Applying Halbwachs’ Theory to Culture**

As stated above, both in ‘The Social Frameworks of Memory’ and ‘The Collective Memory’ Halbwachs primarily focuses on the transmission of memory and experience within a social collective, and identifies collective memory as the driving force behind the successful transmission of memory between members of a social group (Assmann, ‘Collective Memory and Cultural’ 126). As Jan Assmann argues in ‘Collective Memory and Cultural Identity’, the problem with Halbwachs’ theory is that it stops at the juncture between everyday communication between group members and ‘objectivized’ culture (128). As such, as Assmann observes, Halbwachs’ concept of collective memory has a “limited temporal

horizon” that only extends about eighty years into the past because of the average human lifespan (‘Collective Memory and Cultural’ 127). Because of its limited temporal horizon, and the simple fact that social groups – especially larger ones, such as nations – generally also base their sense of identity on events that happened more than eighty years ago, a social group’s collective memory thus cannot be the only way through which memory is transmitted through time.

Therefore, in 1987, Jan and Aleida Assmann formulated a theory on the transmission of memory that also takes other modes of memory transmission within a social collective into account (Assmann, ‘Collective Memory and Cultural’ 126; note 5). By differentiating between two different modes of memory – communicative memory, which they suggest is similar to Halbwachs’ concept of collective memory, and cultural memory, which focuses on memory transmission through objectivized culture (such as texts, images, rites, buildings, and monuments) – the Assmanns conceptualized a “collective concept for all knowledge that directs behavior and experience in the interactive framework of a society and one that obtains through generations in repeated societal practice and initiation” (Assmann, ‘Collective Memory and Cultural’ 126). In other words, the Assmanns not only suggest to change the name of Halbwachs’ concept of ‘collective memory’ into ‘communicative memory’, as it focuses on memory transmission through everyday communications, they also pose that the communicative memory co-exists with another form of memory, cultural memory.

As Jan Assmann explains in ‘Collective Memory and Cultural Identity’, cultural memory, as opposed to communicative memory (or Halbwachs’ idea of collective memory) is characterized by the fact that it does not take place in everyday life (129). Instead, it “preserves the store of knowledge from which a group derives an awareness of its unity and peculiarity” through a cultivated medium, which can be seen as the “crystallization of communicated meaning and collectively shared knowledge” (130). In other words, the

Assmanns argue that, what Halbwachs calls the ‘collective memory’ of a group – a social framework of remembrances, values and models of teaching that expresses and shapes the perspective of the group – can also be represented and transmitted through ceremonies, monuments and other *lieux de mémoire*, as the social group works to invest these ‘places of memory’ with meaning (Assmann, ‘Communicative and Cultural’ 111; Halbwachs, ‘The Social Frameworks’ 59). As such, cultural memory should be regarded as a form of collective memory that operates through a group’s cultivated heritage, as it is shared by individuals belonging to a social collective and is both formative and normative in nature (Assmann, ‘Communicative and Cultural’ 130, 132). Furthermore, like Halbwachs’ collective memory, Jan Assmann argues that cultural memory functions by reconstructing the past based on contemporary needs and beliefs (‘Communicative and Cultural’ 130). Thus, the Assmanns’ concept of cultural memory, combined with their idea of communicative memory, explains how knowledge, memory, traditions, myths, and rules of conduct are transmitted over decades, centuries and ages.

As such, the Assmanns have made an important contribution to cultural memory theory, as they managed to eliminate the problem of Halbwachs’ collective memory’s limited temporal horizon. However, even their understanding of cultural memory is limited, as their theory focuses primarily on objectivized culture. Therefore, in this thesis, I will make use of a concept of cultural memory as posed by Astrid Erll.

#### **1.4.2 – Towards a Conclusive Definition of Cultural Memory**

In ‘Cultural Memory Studies: An Introduction’ Erll justifies the use of the term ‘cultural memory’ in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, by explaining that the term ‘cultural memory’ in general carries more appropriate connotations and associations than Halbwachs’ preferred ‘collective memory’ (4). As Erll notes, the term ‘cultural memory’ “accentuates the connection memory on the one hand and

socio-cultural context on the other” (4). As such, the term seems to adequately describe how cultural memory functions as “the interplay of present and past in socio-cultural contexts”, and includes a:

broad spectrum of phenomena as possible objects of cultural memory studies – ranging from individual acts of remembering in a social context to group memory (of family, friends, veterans, etc.) to national memory with its “invented traditions,” and finally to the host of transnational *lieux de mémoire* such as the Holocaust and 9/11. (Erll 2)

Erll further clarifies her usage of the term by stating that, in her terminology, the word ‘cultural’ refers to a “community’s specific way of life, led within its self-spun webs of meaning” (4). In other words, where Erll uses the term ‘cultural memory’ she does not solely refer to memory transmission through objectivized culture, as the Assmanns do. Instead, she employs the term to refer to memory studies in all its different aspects.

Thus, today Halbwachs’ concept of collective memory is said to refer specifically to memory transfer between individuals within a social group by means of everyday communication. As such, the term ‘collective memory’ does not include memory transmission through cultural expressions. And although the Assmanns theory of cultural memory refers to objectivized culture, such as literature, it does not involve the transmission of memory through culture in its broader anthropological sense. As this thesis revolves around both Holocaust memory transmission within smaller social groups, from individual to individual, and Holocaust memory transmission within larger communities and generations, through time and space, by means of objectivized culture, media, and sites of memory, I shall therefore primarily make use of Erll’s terminology, as it appropriately includes memory transmission in a wide range of modes. In other words, in the following chapters, where I refer to ‘cultural memory’, I make use of Erll’s terminology unless otherwise indicated.

## **2 – Second-Generation Jewish-American Holocaust Fiction: *The Golems of Gotham***

### **2.1 - Introduction**

As I explained in the introduction of this thesis, in her article ‘*The History of Love, the Contemporary Reader, and the Transmission of Holocaust Memory*’ Jessica Lang distinguishes between three generations of Holocaust authors: first generation authors, also known as the generation of survivors; second-generation authors, whom she characterizes as the children of Holocaust survivors; and third-generation authors, authors born after 1959 who only bear an indirect relation to the Holocaust (44, 45, 46). As Lang observes, while first-generation Holocaust authors draw from personal experience in writing their literature, thereby utilizing the privilege of direct memory, the literature of second-generation authors is solely based on accounts related to them by the generation of Holocaust survivors (44, 45).

Consequently, Lang notes, second-generation Holocaust literature is often more abstract, addressing complex themes as Jewish existentialism, theodicy and suicide (45). According to Lang, these topics signal the unique, yet distanced position of second-generation Holocaust authors.

In this chapter, I will examine this unique position of second-generation Holocaust authors, who, on the one hand, as children of eyewitnesses, have been deeply influenced by the Holocaust but who, on the other hand, lack individual memories of the events that affected their families so profoundly. Moreover, I will analyze how Lang’s theory on second-generation Holocaust literature themes applies to Thane Rosenbaum’s novel, *The Golems of Gotham*.

### **2.2 – The Problematic Position of the Second Generation**

According to Lang, the three different generations of Holocaust authors she distinguishes between have distinct perceptions of the Holocaust, depending both on the

emotional relationship the generation bears to the subject, and the temporal distance to the historic event (44-47). As Lang notes, the first shift in this perception, and thus in the way the Holocaust is represented in literature, appears with second-generation writers, who are faced with the challenge to represent the Holocaust at a generational remove (45).

As Marianne Hirsch, author of 'The Generation of Postmemory' notes, the literature of second-generation authors reveals a complex relation to a troubled parental past, and their works have therefore been characterized as a "syndrome of belatedness" (106). She finds proof of this in the many terms created by scholars to set the literature of the second generation apart from that of the generation of survivors. According to Hirsch, terms such as 'absent', 'belated' or 'inherited' memory' firstly suggest that both types of literature – thus both types of Holocaust representation – are rooted in memory (106). Consequently, keeping in mind that second-generation authors did *not* experience the Holocaust themselves, these terms imply a trans-generational transfer of said memory between these two generations (Hirsch 106). However, these terms simultaneously attempt to distinguish between the literatures of these two generations, emphasizing the fact that holocaust memory as it exists in the minds of members of the second generation, and as such the literature that came forth from them, is inherently different from that of the generation of eyewitnesses (Hirsch 106). After all, as Gary Weissman, author of *Fantasies of Witnessing* points out: one person's exact memories simply cannot, in all their complexity and entirety, be transferred to others (qtd. in Hirsch 109).

While agreeing with Weissman on the physical transmission of individual memories, Hirsch, speaking from her own experiences as a child of Holocaust survivors, also claims that, despite the fact that complete memories thus cannot be transmitted directly, there is an undeniable relation between the memory of trauma of the generation of survivors and the emotional connectedness of those who grew up in close proximity (106). Moreover, she

claims that the connection felt by members of the second generation is deeper and more pressingly urgent than simply an interest in the past (106). As Hirsch explains: “these [traumatic] experiences were transmitted to [the second generation] so deeply and affectively as to *seem* to constitute memories in their own right” (106-107). In other words, while members of the second generation do not possess actual memories of the Holocaust – what Halbwachs would call ‘individual memories’ that are acquired by the owner through personal experience – their close relationship to those who *do* possess these memories has profoundly and notably shaped their image of the Holocaust.

To describe the intricate relationship second-generation Holocaust authors bear to their subject of choice, Hirsch coined the term ‘postmemory’. As Hirsch explains, the term ‘postmemory’ not only inscribes a critical separateness from the traditional idea of ‘memory’, it also underlines its deep interrelation with it (106). Similar to postmodernity and postcolonialism, postmemory aims to analyze the present in connection to a troubled past (Hirsch 106). In other words, postmemory is not the same as memory as it is generally understood. As Hirsch observes, “it is “post”, but at the same time it approximates memory in its affective force” (109). Furthermore, Hirsch claims that “postmemory’s connection to the past is [not] mediated by recall”, like individual memory, but by “imaginative investment, projection and creation” (107). As such, the internal images that the members of the generation of postmemory have of the Holocaust are based on an unconscious emotional attachment to the stories and images of the Holocaust provided to them by the generation of eyewitnesses (106). In other words, postmemory can be seen as a form of collective memory, because the internal images of the members of the postmemory generation are shaped by a body of collective knowledge, provided to them by close relatives.

Hirsch, aware of postmemory’s close connection to the collective, explains this trans-generational transmission of Holocaust images by drawing on the work of Aleida Assmann.

As Hirsch notes, Assmann insists that individual memories, once verbalized, are “fused with the inter-subjective symbolic system of language” (110). In other words, these individual memories become part of a group’s collective memory. As a result, these individual memories, acquired by the individual through personal experience, are “no longer a purely exclusive and unalienable property”, but can be used, interpreted and reinterpreted by other individuals who are part of the collective (Hirsch 110). However, as Hirsch notes, while individual Holocaust memories may eventually find their way into the memory of larger collectives, such as a neighborhood or a religious community, they are most abundantly shared within the collective of the family (106, 107, 110, 111). According to Hirsch, the fact that children of Holocaust survivors are thus more intimately connected with original Holocaust memories accounts for their emotional attachment to a past they have not experienced and their deep internalization of received Holocaust images (109).

In other words, while personal experience, and consequently individual memory, is not trans-generationally transmittable, second-generation Holocaust authors – whom I will from now on refer to as the generation of postmemory – have a stronger connection to their subject than other authors who lack personal Holocaust experience, because they have grown up in close proximity to Holocaust stories and images. According to Hirsch, postmemory Holocaust authors therefore strive to reactivate their familial collective memories by creative investment, thereby seeking connection to a past that lives as memory in their minds, but which they cannot actually remember (111).

### **2.3 – Thane Rosenbaum as a Postmemory Holocaust Author**

Thane Rosenbaum was born in 1960 in New York to Norman and Betty Rosenbaum, who both survived Nazi death camps during the Second World War (Furman 1021). As such, Rosenbaum qualifies as a second-generation Holocaust survivor and, consequently, as a member of the generation of Holocaust postmemory.

As Andre Furman notes in *Holocaust Literature*, Rosenbaum is best known for his debut novel *Elijah Invisible*, which focuses on the long term effects the Holocaust has on its protagonist Adam Posner, a child of Holocaust survivors (1021). Not only did this “fragmented novel” earn Rosenbaum the 1996 Edward Lewis Wallant Award, it also inspired him to write another two novels about the aftermath of the Holocaust, *Second Hand Smoke* and *The Golems of Gotham*, resulting in a trilogy that, as Rosenbaum claims, deals with the different stages associated with the Holocaust legacy, ranging from loss and rage to repair and resurrection (Furman 1021; Royal 6). Unsurprisingly, Rosenbaum has often been characterized as a Holocaust writer.

However, Rosenbaum seems all too aware of his position as a member of the postmemory generation. In an interview with Derek Parker Royal, Rosenbaum admits to feeling “embarrassed” when characterized as a Holocaust writer, precisely because he, as a child of survivors, has “no claim to the Holocaust as an event” (3). Therefore, Rosenbaum adds, “I don’t write about the Holocaust. My novels deal with the post-Holocaust universe, so if anything I am a post-Holocaust novelist” (Royal 3). In other words, both personally and in his novels, Rosenbaum strongly identifies as a member of the postmemory generation, aiming to provide insight into the aftereffects of the Holocaust through his literary contributions.

Nonetheless, Rosenbaum, among other Jewish writers belonging to the generation of postmemory, including Marianne Hirsch, have been accused of appropriating their parents’ Holocaust experiences as their own. For example, in ‘Identity Theft’, Ruth Franklin states that some children of Holocaust survivors “cannot resist stealing their parents’ spotlight”, having constructed fictions “that serve to elevate their own childhood traumas above and beyond the sufferings of their parents” (pars. 5, 4). Apparently, the complex connection between memory and postmemory, as well as the emotional entanglement between Holocaust survivors and their children, can, for some, be hard to comprehend. In effect, second-generation Holocaust

writers such as Rosenbaum are not only burdened with the trans-generational transmission of their parents' trauma, unlike any other generation of Holocaust writers they also have to defend the authenticity of their resulting personal traumatic experiences, and the literature based on both their parents' trauma and their own (Berger, 'Bearing Witness' 256; Hirsch, 'The Generation Of' 106).

However, as Rosenbaum explains, in addressing the effects the Holocaust had on its survivors and their children, there is a striking difference between inauthentic appropriation and writing from what he calls a "privileged view" of the circumstances (Royal 5). Making a comparison to non-Holocaust authors who base their literature on other traumatic childhood experiences – experiences such as incest, abuse and alcoholism – Rosenbaum argues:

I would assume that those who wish to write fiction from that perspective, and who have lived in such homes, had a privileged view of those circumstances. Surely they can write authentically from that perspective [...] It's their emotional experience, and their fiction should probably benefit from it. [Why] wouldn't it be the case that the children of [Holocaust] survivors simply have seen something unique, lived with people who are unique, so that their experience is singular, privileged (in the worst sort of way), and, yes, exclusive? (Royal 5)

By thus comparing growing up with parents who have survived the Holocaust to other problematic childhood living situations that can leave a permanent mark on a child, Rosenbaum demonstrates that, despite the fact that the fiction of the postmemory Holocaust generation depends more on the imagination than the literature of the generation of survivors, their literature, too, originates in personal experience.

Furthermore, like many survivors, Rosenbaum writes from the understandable, yet inexplicable need to make his experiences known to the world. As Kirstin Gwyer observes in *Encrypting the Past*, first-generation Holocaust writers predominantly acted on the imperative that knowledge of the Holocaust should be passed on to later generations, so as to prevent history from repeating itself (12). Furthermore, as Grace Wermenbol explains in 'Why Must

Holocaust Survivors Tell Their Stories?', Holocaust survivors, among whom Primo Levi, were often compelled to write about their experience by a deep felt, inexplicable "necessity", while others, including Elie Wiesel, felt that writing about their experiences helped them deal with their trauma (Wermenbol pars. 21, 27; Levi 1). As it turns out, Rosenbaum wrote his Holocaust fiction for the exact same reasons. In 'Law and Legacy in the Post-Holocaust Imagination', Rosenbaum relates why, despite his initial reluctance, he eventually decided to write about the aftermath of the Holocaust.

I am not a survivor and I have a full range of choices before me. Apparently, the laws of the physical universe and the artistic liberties of a free society inform me that I have all the freedom in the world to create whatever it is that I want. And yet I am seemingly trapped by history, and historical forces, that have made imperious claims on what it is that I can and should write. (464)

Strikingly, Rosenbaum, as a member of the postmemory generation, appears to be driven, or "trapped", by the same inexplicable need to write about the Holocaust as first-generation Holocaust writers. And like some of his predecessors, Rosenbaum feels that he, through his literature, is able "to comprehend [his] own connection to Jewish history" and "begin the complex untangling of the fears that has once belonged to [his] parents" that have been passed on to him ('Law and Legacy' 242, 244). In other words, Rosenbaum may be a member of the postmemory generation, focusing on the aftermath of the Holocaust in what he calls post-Holocaust fiction, his reasons for writing his fiction are very similar to the motives of first-generation Holocaust writers.

As such, Rosenbaum's fiction not only enables us to study to what extent, and to what effect, Holocaust trauma and memory are transmitted to, and imaginatively interpreted by, the second generation, his literature also provides insight into the 'living connection' between postmemory authors, their parents' trauma, and the historic Holocaust that shaped their lives so profoundly.

## 2.4 – *The Golems of Gotham*, by Thane Rosenbaum

*The past is there for a reason. It lingers and lurches even when the rest of your life is throttling away at full speed. It follows from behind and is bound to catch up – whether you actually peer back and take notice of it or not. And whether it appears as a demon or a dream, a ghost or a nervous breakdown, eventually it will be sitting right beside you, no longer to be avoided.*

– Thane Rosenbaum, *The Golems of Gotham*.

### 2.4.1 – Synopsis and Structure

*The Golems of Gotham* tells the story of Oliver Levin, an author of mystery novels, and his fourteen-year-old daughter Ariel, who live together in a large brownstone in New York. The year is 1999, and while New York prepares itself for the new millennium, Oliver reaches an impasse: after years of writing, he suddenly finds himself suffering from a writer's block. Oliver, although severely troubled by this new development, fails to acknowledge the true nature of his problem: his traumatic past. As the reader learns, Oliver's parents were Holocaust survivors who had been interned in Auschwitz. Almost twenty years ago, when Oliver was away in college, Lothar and Rose Levin, having lost all faith in the future, simultaneously committed suicide.

While Oliver appears to remain oblivious to the cause of his writer's block, slowly spiraling into depression, Ariel comes up with a plan to fix him. Playing an old violin she found in the attic and chanting the numbers the Nazis tattooed on her grandparents' forearms, she attempts to create a golem out of clay she retrieved from the Hudson River. However, Ariel's mythical experiment does not go as planned, and instead of creating a single golem, she brings back the ghosts of her grandparents and six other Holocaust survivors who sadly took their own life: Holocaust writers Primo Levi, Jean Améry, Paul Celan, Piotr Rawicz, Jerzy

Kosinski, and Tadeusz Borowski. The ghosts, in the novel referred to as ‘golems’, explain to Oliver that, despite their efforts as Holocaust writers, the horrors of the Holocaust are slowly overshadowed by new historical events. Now, as golems, they wish to teach the world “how to live with the Holocaust as it steps into the future” by ensuring that the six million Jews who were killed are remembered and the horrible crimes are not repeated, but also by teaching the world how to move on from a traumatic past (Rosenbaum, ‘The Golems of’ 80-82).

While the golems busy themselves with bringing the metaphorical spirit of the shetl to New York, magically wiping the skin of the New Yorkers clean of tattoos, and vanishing all the different kinds of New York smoke, their mythical presence forces Oliver to share the many nightmares of his unusual guests, and submerges him in his family’s troubled past (Rosenbaum, ‘The Golems of’ 164). Confronted with Holocaust images and memories, he starts writing a Holocaust novel.

A few months after Oliver has completed his novel, and after having spend almost a year in the mortal world, the golems realize that, despite their many positive accomplishments, the Holocaust is still gradually sliding “out of sight into the upper-deck margins of cultural obscurity”, only to be replaced by “[swastikas] spray-painted on synagogue walls” (Rosenbaum, ‘The Golems of’ 293). Infuriated, the usually friendly golems plan a monstrous uprising to shock the world into a renewed sensitivity to atrocity (Rosenbaum, ‘The Golems of’ 311). While the golems bring hell to New York, Oliver, realizing that writing about the Holocaust has made him lose all hope for the future, attempts to follow in his parents’ footsteps and commit suicide (Rosenbaum, ‘The Golems of’ 340). But before Oliver pulls the trigger of the gun that killed his father, his daughter’s face reminds him that he does not share his parents’ Holocaust experiences, and that he has a future (Rosenbaum, ‘The Golems of’ 333, 345-346).

## 2.4.2 – Suicide as a Theological Response to the Holocaust

According to Lang's '*The History of Love and the Transmission of Holocaust Memory*', second-generation holocaust literature differs from first-generation holocaust literature, because it often addresses abstract topics like theodicy and suicide (45). Rosenbaum's novel, however, despite being the final novel in his post-holocaust trilogy, focusing on repair and healing, does not present its readers with a theodicy. Rather, Rosenbaum employs the theme of suicide to explore some of his character's theological and worldly responses to the Holocaust.

Rosenbaum's novel opens with the double suicide of the protagonist's parents, Lothar and Rose Levin, an act which Rosenbaum convincingly depicts as a deliberate challenge to a God who failed to save his chosen people when they needed him most (Rosenbaum, 'The Golems of' 1-3). As readers learn, Lothar and Rose both take their own life while attending a synagogue service on Shabbat. The fact that they kill themselves in a synagogue not only indicates that the Holocaust did not make them renounce their faith, it also implies that they chose not to respect the God they still, apparently, believed in. As such, their suicide comes across as a direct message, or a challenge, to said God. The way the event is narrated supports this idea:

A *Shabbos* suicide pact is not exactly what God had in mind for his day of rest. But Lothar and Rose were Holocaust survivors; God would have no say in this matter. That's the price you pay for arriving late at Auschwitz, or, in his case, not at all; you forfeit all future right to an opinion.

(Rosenbaum, 'The Golems of' 3)

Not only does the narrator confirm the direction of the characters' faith, his comment also underlines that God, usually the ultimate judge, has silenced himself by allowing millions of Jews to be murdered in the Holocaust. Not only the double suicide in the synagogue and the narrator's comments support this idea, the details of Lothar's suicide, specifically, point in

this direction: Lothar only shoots himself after he has been called to the Torah, and because he removes the gun's silencer before aiming it at his temple he ensures that his violent death, which would otherwise be muffled, is loud enough to demand the attention of everyone present in the temple, including God (Rosenbaum, 'The Golems of' 1). In other words, the suicide of Lothar and Rose can be regarded as a deliberate message to their God, who abandoned them when they needed Him most; by killing themselves in a synagogue, Lothar and Rose apparently dare Him to judge them. Of course, this final act, and their apparent unwillingness to obey Him, can thus be regarded as the Levins' theological response to the Holocaust.

As such, Lothar and Rose place themselves, as Holocaust survivors, above God's law. As Rabbi Louis Jacobs explains in 'Suicide in Jewish Tradition and Literature', suicide is traditionally seen as a grave sin in Judaism, because the act not only denies human life as a divine gift, it also defies God's plan for the individual (par. 7). Therefore, as Jacobs observes, in Jewish tradition, those who commit suicide "are not entitled to Jewish burial and mourning rites" (par. 1). However, as the narrator of Rosenbaum's novel notes:

Yes, it's true: The taking of a life is a sin in the eyes of God. But this was a God who had already blinded himself. It mattered little to the Levins whether he approved of what they had done under his watch, and that's why they showed no fear in taking the liberty of poking God's eyes out one last time. (Rosenbaum, 'The Golems of' 3)

Again, the narrator's comments on the double suicide confirm that the Levins still firmly believe in the existence of their God. However, the narrator's comments – and, of course, the Levins actions – also clearly demonstrate how God, by allowing the horrors of the Holocaust to happen, has lost the Levins' respect and esteem. In Rosenbaum's novel, it seems to be this loss of respect to abide by their God's laws that eventually coaxed the Levins to take matters into their own hands and kill themselves, having decided that they had had "enough": "The

old rules didn't apply [...] because the Third Reich had killed off all the old biblical commandments, wiped the tablets clean" (Rosenbaum, 'The Golems of' 3, 8).

The suicides of the first-generation Holocaust writers who return as golems in Rosenbaum's novel can be regarded as a similar theological response to the Holocaust. Like the Levins, the golems who were religious before the Holocaust did not renounce their faith after the Holocaust, although they, too, have come to feel entitled to place themselves above God's law by committing suicide. But where the Levins' double suicide in the synagogue appears to be a direct challenge to God, the golems, through disobeying God's will by committing suicide, mostly direct their anger towards humanity. An example of this can be found in an excerpt in *The Golems of Gotham* in which Rosenbaum narrates the final hours of Italian Holocaust writer Primo Levi. Of course, readers need to be aware that, although the circumstances surrounding Levi's death point toward suicide, Rosenbaum, in writing his novel, took the liberty of fictionalizing Levi's final moments. But, fictionalized he may be, the golem of Primo Levi nonetheless provides readers with valuable insights into living with the memory of the Holocaust. Levi does not appear to either blame God, or to defend His actions through a theodicy. Rather, he blames humanity for the atrocities of the Holocaust, and commits suicide because he no longer believes in the goodness of mankind (Rosenbaum, 'The Golems of' 59):

Maybe the [neo-Nazis] would stop marching. Maybe his years of witness would soon result in a better world [...]. But he had lived long enough, and had seen enough, to place more trust in his doubts than in his hopes. (Rosenbaum, 'The Golems of' 59)

As this example illustrates, rather than directly expressing a post-Holocaust theological standpoint, Rosenbaum's fictionalized Levi apparently holds mankind itself, not God, responsible for the Holocaust and the lives that were lost. As such, the fictionalized Levi almost appears to hold an existentialist view of the world, where it not that Rosenbaum makes

it clear that Levi is a devoutly spiritual man up until his final moments (Rosenbaum, ‘The Golems of’ 7, 8). In other words, Levi does not kill himself to necessarily disrespect God. While his suicide indicates that he, as a Holocaust survivor, places himself above God’s law, it is ultimately his mistrust for mankind that drives him to jump from a balcony.

In *The Golems of Gotham*, the suicides of Rosenbaum’s characters thus not only provide the reader with an indirect theological response, Rosenbaum also provides his readers with insight into how the Holocaust changed the way survivors viewed the world. Like Levi, the fictionalized Jean Améry is also said to have lost faith in mankind during the Holocaust: “He said that faith in humanity could never again be recaptured. But he still had to live among men, in a world so prone to human error, where the lessons go unlearned, the crimes unpunished, and the madness repeated” (Rosenbaum, ‘The Golems of’ 64). In *The Golems of Gotham* it is this bitter outlook on the world – acquired because of the Holocaust – that ultimately convinces Améry to overdose on pills (Rosenbaum, ‘The Golems of’ 64). In a chapter in which the golems reflect upon the Holocaust, and the many different factors that led up to them taking their own lives, the narrator comes to the following conclusion:

Not all trauma can end in recovery, nor perhaps should it. Atrocity has a way of fitting the eyes of the living with new lenses. The vision that ensues is not corrected, but distorted. There is now way to repair how survivors see. Their outlooks are fundamentally and tragically unalterable. (Rosenbaum, ‘The Golems of’ 180)

As this quote illustrates, the Holocaust had a way of dramatically altering the way survivors perceived the world that surrounded them. As Rosenbaum puts it: “Once you’ve seen a death factory up close, no future horror can ever again be thought of as mere fiction” (Rosenbaum, ‘The Golems of’ 32). Ultimately, in *The Golems of Gotham*, it appears that it is this changed outlook on the world that caused the Holocaust survivors to change their view of both mankind and God; while humanity was no longer to be trusted, God was deemed less

powerful, deserving of less respect.

In other words, the many suicides of Holocaust survivors narrated in *The Golems of Gotham* provide the reader with insight into living with the memory of the Holocaust. Not only did the Holocaust alter the survivors' outlook on their worldly situation, it also changed the way they regarded God.

### 2.4.3 – Voicing Trauma

Not only is *The Golems of Gotham* thus a valuable second-generation Holocaust novel as it examines the theological responses of survivors to the Holocaust through the theme of suicide, because of its troubled protagonist it also offers the reader insight into the complex post-Holocaust world of the postmemory generation. *The Golems of Gotham* is told by three different narrators: Oliver, Ariel, and the novels' omniscient narrator. Especially in the chapters narrated by Oliver – which the reader soon learns are part of the Holocaust novel *Salt and Stone* he writes once the golems have removed his writer's block – Rosenbaum explores the complex psychological world of the postmemory generation.

But while the chapters narrated by Oliver offer the most intimate insights into the mind of a member of the postmemory generation, the reader initially gets to know Rosenbaum's protagonist through brief character descriptions provided by his daughter Ariel. For example, the first chapter narrated by Ariel, chapter three, opens with the words: "All I wanted was to fix my father" (Rosenbaum, 'The Golems of' 20). From this simple sentence, the reader learns that Oliver is damaged: in need of fixing. As the omniscient narrator has already related the story of the deaths of Oliver's parents to the reader, this comes as no surprise. Ariel continues her description of Oliver by stating that he is a writer, and that he, like most writers, lives in his own "made-up, quiet [world]" (Rosenbaum, 'The Golems of' 20). According to Ariel, it is crucial for writers to leave their inner world every now and then, because they otherwise run the risk of getting "stuck in silence" (Rosenbaum, 'The Golems

of' 20). Finally, Ariel concludes her description of Oliver by claiming that he used to read stories to her, but stopped doing that years ago (Rosenbaum, 'The Golems of' 20). As such, the reader learns that Oliver lives in silence, in his own imagination, voluntarily cut off from the outside world.

In the chapters narrated by Oliver, the reader learns that Oliver has become lost in his own world, because it makes him feel safe. Firstly, it is important to note that, more than anything, the chapters narrated by Oliver reveal a cynical outlook on the world. These cynical views are most clearly expressed through his ideas of the familial 'home'. While for most people the idea of 'home' symbolizes a feeling of safety and warmth, Oliver observes that the Holocaust had taught him that "there is no point in counting on families staying together", claiming how Otto Frank had tried to keep his family together by hiding in an attic (Rosenbaum, 'The Golems of' 149). According to Oliver, "you can't hide in an attic to save your own skin, or the skins of the people you love the most. [...] Shutting the door of your home won't make it safe" (Rosenbaum, 'The Golems of' 149). In other words, it seems that his parents' Holocaust experiences have led Oliver to believe that he cannot be safe in his own home. In response, Oliver decided to "shut the door on [himself]", believing that it is the only way to keep himself from getting hurt (Rosenbaum, 'The Golems of' 149). Thus, fearing potential loss and pain, Oliver has emotionally distanced himself from the outside world.

This remote interaction with his surroundings becomes most apparent and poignant in his relationship with his daughter. Not only does Oliver show little interest in his daughter's life – for instance, he appears oblivious to his daughter's sudden ability to play the klezmer violin and is unaware of her attempts at making a golem – he also explicitly states that, because of the Holocaust, he has "resisted growing attached to anything with legs" (Rosenbaum, 'The Golems of' 150):

I have parented as if I had been preparing the entire time for an empty nest, as if Ariel were about to go off to college before she even took her first steps. I've hardened myself to early departures, developed an emotional nonstick surface. (Rosenbaum, 'The Golems of' 150)

Because of this complex fear of losing Ariel, Oliver admits that he does not want her to call him 'Daddy', as it "signals complete umbilical, parental responsibility" (Rosenbaum, 'The Golems of' 151). Rather, he has her call him by his first name, which he considers more informal, signaling at once a specific form of closeness, but at the same time indicating a casual remoteness (Rosenbaum, 'The Golems of' 151). In other words, Oliver employs emotional disconnectedness to prevent himself from experiencing emotional pain even at the cost of his relationship with his daughter.

As such, the character of Oliver offers ample insight into his bitter personal outlook on the world as a member of the postmemory generation, and reveals why he has chosen to emotionally withdraw into his inner world. However, Oliver fails to explain to the reader how exactly his parents' Holocaust trauma was transmitted to him and how his parents' trauma affected him as a child until the very last chapter of his novel. In fact, apart from briefly mentioning that he has always lived in homes that felt oddly empty despite the presence of his parents, he does not relate specific childhood experiences to the reader (Rosenbaum, 'The Golems of' 147). As such, the reader learns most about Oliver's childhood through stories and facts told by his parents, and excerpts narrated by the omniscient narrator.

In effect, it is initially these passages that allow Rosenbaum, as a postmemory author, to illustrate to the reader what it is like to grow up in a home marked by the Holocaust. For example, Oliver's remark about growing up in an empty home is clarified when the narrator notes, "Oliver's parents had been essentially strangers to him. They were a family that shared physical space but kept their inner lives in solitary confinement" (Rosenbaum, 'The Golems of' 270). Furthermore, through these objectively narrated passages Rosenbaum is able to explore why Holocaust survivors cannot help but transmit some of their trauma to their

children. For example, in explaining the reason for the Levin's emotional absence during Oliver's childhood, the narrator notes:

Parenting hadn't been possible. These were people without much confidence in the preservation and continuity of a family. For them the shelf-life of a seed was predictably short. The Nazis could come back. Or there might be new Nazis, or Nazis known by another name but with the same unoriginal, murderous agenda. No reason to get too close to a son who might eventually be taken away. (Rosenbaum, 'The Golems of' 271)

As a result of his parents' objectively understandable but subjectively incomprehensible emotional remoteness, the boy Oliver attempted to fix his parents. As the golems of his parents observe, he excelled at things "to compensate for and replace everything we had lost" (Rosenbaum, 'The Golems of' 90). In turn, Lothar admits, "we made him feel like a failure, because we were never anything other than damaged" (Rosenbaum, 'The Golems of' 91). And while the Levins never spoke about the Holocaust in their home, Oliver's parents feel that, even as a boy, Oliver realized that the Holocaust was "responsible for everything" (Rosenbaum, 'The Golems of' 92). In other words, the reader learns, through passages related by either the narrator or Oliver's parents, how the weight of the Holocaust pressed down on him as a child, and how his parents' Holocaust experiences affected his childhood. Of course, the fact that Oliver himself initially barely speaks of his childhood up until the final chapter narrated by him ties in with his own inherited emotional detachment and the fact that he prefers to be "stuck in silence" (Rosenbaum, 'The Golems of' 20).

When Oliver eventually, with the help of the golems, dares to address his troubled past and has come to the final chapter of his novel, a chapter he means to conclude by committing suicide on the George Washington Bridge, he is able to explain how living with parents who survived the Holocaust affected him as a child (Rosenbaum, 'The Golems of' 334). As such, he admits how he often felt that his life was somehow a substitute for a beloved, but lost,

relative, and how he, fearing he might turn out to be an “unsatisfying, unworthy replacement”, tried to end his parents’ grief by “filling their lives with artificially inseminated joy” (Rosenbaum, ‘The Golems of’ 334). More importantly, Oliver indulges in the idea that the transmission of Holocaust trauma somehow defies the rules of the physical world, believing that the generation of postmemory is able to “register deeper sensations and sensitivities to parental pain and silence” (Rosenbaum, ‘The Golems of’ 334):

And yes, perhaps there is some psychological validity to the idea that living in the same household as people who had survived genocide and witnessed atrocity at such close range – breathing beside them, observing their every movements – invariably exposes children of Holocaust survivors to second hand smoke, plaguing them with cattle-car complexes, and that these symptoms and pathologies are more than mere metaphors. (Rosenbaum, ‘The Golems of’ 334)

In other words, while the characters of Rose and Lothar, as well as the narrator, attempt to explain to what degree Oliver’s life has been affected by the Holocaust, it is ultimately Oliver, the only true member of the novels’ postmemory generation, who illustrates the extent to which his parents’ fate is linked to his own.

Moreover, Oliver, despite his personal sufferings and his dramatic decisions to hide from reality through stoic remoteness and to take his own life, acknowledges that he, as a child of Holocaust survivors, is *not* a survivor himself. Pondering the paradox that none of the Holocaust writers who committed suicide left a suicide note, and on his way to his own planned death, Oliver states:

children of Holocaust survivors are not survivors of the Holocaust. They may have survived something, but not that. All that is certain is that they lived with damaged parents. Yes, they were indeed witnesses to an uncompromising trauma that held the parents hostage – the penitentiaries of memory, the labyrinths of loss. But that didn’t make them survivors themselves. (Rosenbaum, ‘The Golems of’ 333)

According to Oliver, this means that he, as a member of the postmemory generation, had to find other ways to deal with his trauma. For example, he appears to understand why his parents could not find it in themselves to be adequate parents, as the Holocaust had stripped them from every feeling of security (Rosenbaum, 'The Golems of' 150). According to Oliver, "[his] parents had an excuse" (Rosenbaum, 'The Golems of' 150). However, he cannot find an excuse for his own inadequate parenting, and feels like he has let his daughter down (Rosenbaum, 'The Golems of' 150). Although this insight does not stop Oliver from trying to kill himself, it nonetheless proves that he realizes that he, as a child of survivors, has not acquired their trauma. As noted in chapter 2.3, Rosenbaum shares this particular view. As such, Rosenbaum appears to employ the character of Oliver to not only provide his reader with insight into the troubled psyche of the postmemory generation: by showing how Oliver is, on the one hand, deeply burdened with his parents' problematic past, but on the other hand completely separate from the trauma that affected his life so profoundly, Rosenbaum also uses him to demonstrate the difficulties of belonging to that generation.

In other words, *The Golems of Gotham* is a rich source for information about the postmemory generation. In his novel, Rosenbaum, writing from his 'privileged' viewpoint as a child of Holocaust survivors, not only reveals how Holocaust trauma is transmitted to later generations, he also demonstrates how it can affect the lives and minds of later generations. Through the character of Oliver, initially lost in his own inner world of silence but liberated after he eventually finds the courage to dive into his family's troubled past, he emphasizes the importance of giving a voice to trauma. As such, *The Golems of Gotham* truly is a novel of healing and repair, sending a clear message to the reader that the past, however troubled, need to be confronted before a future is possible.

#### 2.4.4 – Conclusion

In short, *The Golems of Gotham* explores how Holocaust memory is transmitted within families and through generations. As such, the novel demonstrates that the destructive power of the Holocaust, though characterized as an historic event, is still alive today, and that the after-effects of the Holocaust continue to affect the lives of many individuals of different generations.

By employing the theme of suicide in his novel, and bringing back the ghosts of Holocaust writers who all committed suicide because they could no longer bear living with the memory of the Holocaust, Rosenbaum examines the power of memory and how a witnessed event can dramatically change a person's outlook onto the world. As such, Rosenbaum also successfully explores the theological response of Holocaust survivors to the Holocaust, employing the suicides of a number of his characters as a starting point to analyze their relationship with God and the post-Holocaust world.

Finally, in *The Golems of Gotham*, Rosenbaum, as a child of Holocaust survivors, explores the possibility of moving on, both on a personal level and as a society, from such an overwhelmingly gruesome historic event. As such, despite the fact that Rosenbaum has admitted to detesting “redemptiveness” in Holocaust novels, Rosenbaum sends a clear message to his readers: “the world must learn how to live with the Holocaust as it steps into the future, otherwise there will be no future” (Royal, 4; Rosenbaum ‘The Golems of’ 81).

### 3 – Third-Generation Jewish-American Holocaust Fiction: *The Seventh Gate*

#### 3.1 – Introduction

According to Lang, the Holocaust becomes more accessible to the imagination as more time separates the historic event from the present (44). As Thane Rosenbaum's novel *The Golems of Gotham* demonstrates, second-generation Holocaust literature finds its origins in the experience of living in close proximity to the generation of Holocaust survivors, and therefore marks the first transition from the direct Holocaust experience of the eyewitness. Moreover, as Hirsch observes, second-generation Holocaust authors, finding themselves at a generational remove from a troubled past, aim to re-create this past through "imaginative investment" (65). In other words, while second-generation authors thus, to some degree, base their literature on the experience of having grown up in the shadow of the Holocaust, they also have to rely on their imagination to represent it, as they have no actual memories of the Holocaust as an event.

As Lang notes, the second remove from the direct experience is marked by third-generation Holocaust authors (46). While the second generation of Holocaust authors consists solely of children of Holocaust survivors, Lang notes that this third generation is a lot harder to quantify (45). However, in Lang's terminology, they have in common that they only possess an indirect relationship to survivors of the Holocaust (46). In effect, third-generation Holocaust authors are forced to base their literature on cultural Holocaust knowledge.

Because of this indirect relation to their subject of choice, Lang explains, these third-generation Holocaust authors incorporate within their literature a large variety of themes (45). Moreover, Lang explains that third-generation Holocaust literature strikingly resists "the kind of literal referentiality" found in the works of earlier generations, precisely because, for the third-generation Holocaust author, the Holocaust as an event does not convey the same "sense of immediacy and impact" that it strikes in the first two generations (45, 46). Thus, because

third-generation Holocaust authors lack a personal connection to the historic Holocaust and only have an indirect relationship to it, the Holocaust is given less prominence in their work (Lang 46). Instead, Lang notes, these authors incorporate the Holocaust as a narrative device, balancing it with other histories and events (46).

In this chapter, I will explore to what degree the fact that third-generation Holocaust literature thus relies on the imagination of the third-generation Holocaust author affects the representation of the Holocaust, and I will analyze the consequences of such an imaginative re-creation of trauma. Moreover, through a close reading of his novel *The Seventh Gate*, I will examine how third-generation Jewish-American Holocaust author Richard Zimler interpolates the theme of the Holocaust with other themes and storylines and how he employs the Holocaust as a narrative device.

### **3.2 – Authenticity and Imagination in Third-Generation Holocaust Literature**

In speaking of a ‘third generation’ of authors, a generation that apparently follows the generation of survivors and the generation of the survivors’ children, one can logically assume that the third generation consists of the grandchildren of Holocaust survivors. Indeed, this definition of the term has been popular among scholars, including Erin McGlothlin, author of *Second-Generation Holocaust Literature: Legacies of Survival and Perpetration* (McGlothlin 231). However, Lang appears to attribute the name ‘third generation’ to a much broader range of authors.

In ‘*The History of Love, the Contemporary Reader, and the Transmission of Holocaust Memory*’, Lang poses the idea that Nicole Krauss, author of *The History of Love*, employs the Holocaust experiences of one of the novel’s main protagonists as a narrative strategy (Lang 44). While Lang clearly notes that she considers Krauss to be a third-generation Holocaust author, she fails to explain exactly why she believes Krauss falls into this category (45). Lang merely states that, to her, a third-generation Holocaust author is someone who possesses only

an “indirect relation to the original eyewitness” (46). While Krauss has made statements regarding her parental and grandparental past, explaining that she has grandparents who survived the Holocaust, this apparently is not the reason why Lang considers Krauss a third-generation Holocaust author (Rothenberg Gritz par. 16). Instead, Lang seems to categorize third-generation Holocaust authors by, to some degree, temporal, but mostly emotional distance to, or separation from, the Holocaust (45, 46). In other words, Lang renders the familial connection in the third generation of Holocaust authors irrelevant, expanding the term to all Holocaust authors who base their literature on indirect knowledge of the event.

Consequently, in analyzing third-generation Holocaust literature, Lang focuses on the role of the author’s imagination and the importance of cultural knowledge. As Lang notes:

The struggle for third-generation Holocaust writers lies in crossing not one but two gaps, that of experience and of memory. In order to imagine the Holocaust, third-generation writers both rely on text and imagine text. In short, third-generation writers work to represent a text of the text. (49)

In effect, Lang claims that third-generation Holocaust literature generally lacks “the sense of immediacy and impact” that first- and second-generation Holocaust fiction, because of the emotional connection of these authors to the subject they choose to represent, manage to impress upon the reader (46). As Bettina von Jagow notes in ‘Representing the Holocaust, Kertész’s *Fatelessness* and Benigni’s *La Vita è Bella*’, Holocaust authors who have to rely on something other than experience and memory for their perception of the Holocaust – on, for example, texts or images – raise questions about the “ethics of memory” (79). According to Irmtraud Huber, it is the generation of survivors, with their testimonial Holocaust literature, who heavily influenced the way authenticity is evaluated in Holocaust literature (116). When it comes to Holocaust literature, Huber argues, authenticity “is increasingly associated with the demand for objectivity and truth to external facts” (116). It is important to note that ‘authenticity’ here should not be confused with ‘originality’, but instead approximates

‘authority’ (Huber 116, 117). In other words, some scholars believe that Holocaust literature should be based on objective ‘fact’, which they seek in the personal experience of the Holocaust author, because they believe objective fact holds the truth of the historic event Holocaust authors aim to represent. Consequently, these scholars claim that, since third-generation Holocaust authors have no personal experience or memory of the Holocaust, and therefore possess no claim to the truth, their literature lacks the ‘authenticity’ required to represent the horrors of the Holocaust (Huber 130). Thus, like the generation of postmemory, the literature of third-generation Holocaust authors is, by some scholars, considered to be inauthentic (Huber 130, 131).

However, as Primo Levi has pointed out, even the supposedly factual literature of the survivor generation is in fact distorted. According to Levi, Holocaust memories, like all memories, are prone to change over time as the owner comes into contact with other Holocaust information and memories (Parvikko 190). This would mean that even eyewitness accounts of the Holocaust are, to some degree, unreliable (Parvikko 193; Huber 118). This notion, that personal memories change over time due to external influences, is widely accepted (Stoffels 106). As Hans Stoffels observes in ‘False Memories’, memory is subject to complex cognitive processes such as “selection, modulation, forgetting, and conversion”, and is closely related to present concerns and beliefs (106). As such, Stoffels claims, “memory is reconstruction”, an idea also posed by Halbwachs in the early days of contemporary cultural memory theory (107). In other words, the questions raised by critics about the authenticity and historical accuracy of the literature of the third – and, of course, second – generation of Holocaust authors, could also be raised in relation to first-generation Holocaust testimonials. Yet, it were these, perhaps distorted, but certainly affected, Holocaust reconstructions of first-generation Holocaust authors that were accepted as historically accurate and authentic, and would eventually form the foundation of today’s body of cultural Holocaust knowledge

(Parvikko 193).

As third-generation Holocaust authors, lacking access to a direct source of Holocaust memory, rely on this body of cultural knowledge – or cultural memory – in writing their literature, it can thus be derived that third-generation Holocaust authors base their literature partly on the affected Holocaust representations of survivors. Or, as Lang puts it: third-generation Holocaust authors “[re-create] the re-created” (49). This idea, too, raises important questions concerning the knowability of the past, and, again, the right to depict the inhumanity of the Holocaust, which seems to “call for [...] a literature of authentic reports”, in a largely fictional manner (Huber 115). Moreover, as I explain in chapter one of this thesis, cultural Holocaust memory changes over the years. As Mieke Bal observes in *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present*, cultural Holocaust memory interacts with present concerns and events (viii). An example of this idea can be found in the fact that it was not until the Eichmann trial in 1961 that society began to show an interest in the stories of Holocaust survivors, and Holocaust survivors, in response, started to publish their stories (Parvikko 194). In other words, the cultural Holocaust memory, or Holocaust consciousness, that affected the Holocaust writing of first-generation Holocaust authors is different than the cultural Holocaust memory that shapes and influences present-day Holocaust literature. As such, the demand for so-called authentic Holocaust literature is by definition unrealistic, because the past, and what we think we know about the Holocaust, is so heavily affected by contemporary tensions and beliefs. According to Huber, this leaves us with two options: we either continue to demand ‘authentic’ Holocaust literature, which would mean that, as fewer eyewitnesses in possession of a supposedly authentic voice are left, the representation of the Holocaust is to come to an abrupt halt, and with it the means of keeping the memory of the Holocaust alive; or we accept the supposedly inauthentic, perhaps distorted, contemporary Holocaust representations that are based on cultural Holocaust knowledge and imagination as

an adequate successor (121-122).

Finding themselves thus at the beginning of a new age of Holocaust representation, an age where personal Holocaust memory and first-hand Holocaust experience are becoming scarce, third-generation Holocaust authors are forced to rely on cultural Holocaust memory and imagination to represent the Holocaust. Appropriately, their literature, and the way they utilize the Holocaust in their works, reflects this unique shift in Holocaust literature. By distancing themselves from the testimonial writing of first- and second-generation Holocaust authors, who worked to represent respectively their Holocaust experiences and their experiences of living with parents who survived the Holocaust, third-generation Holocaust authors strike out on a new course, and approach the Holocaust in an indirect way, utilizing it as a narrative contextual structure in support of the main plot.

### **3.3 – Richard Zimler as a Third-Generation Holocaust Author**

Richard Zimler was born in Roslyn Heights, New York, in 1956 as a second-generation American (Biography; Berry par. 27). As Zimler explains in a personal email to the author of this thesis, his mother's Polish parents immigrated to the United States in 1905 (par. 10). Although his grandmothers' siblings remained in Poland and were eventually killed in the Holocaust, and the fate of these great-aunts and -uncles would ultimately leave a deep impression on him, Zimler, as a second-generation American whose grandparents arrived in America long before the 1930s, thus nevertheless did not grow up in a family burdened with the memory of the Holocaust (Zimler, 'Welcome to Poland' pars. 2, 4, 5). In other words, Zimler, unlike Rosenbaum, only had indirect access to Holocaust stories, and as such qualifies as a third-generation Holocaust author.

Today, Zimler is best known for his debut novel *The Last Kabbalist of Lisbon*, which was first published in Portugal in 1996 as *O Último Cabalista de Lisboa* and which became an instant best seller (Krich pars. 14, 15). Not only was it translated in twenty-three different

languages, the novel, featuring the severe anti-Semitism of sixteenth-century Portugal, had a massive impact on Portuguese society (Krich pars. 2, 3). According to Helen Avelar, a specialist in Jewish history at the University of Lisbon, Zimler's novel contributed greatly in making the Portuguese community aware of their Jewish ancestry and as such instigated the emancipation of Judaism in the devoutly Catholic nation (qtd. in Krich par. 19-22). As in *The Last Kabbalist of Lisbon*, Judaism and Jewish history play an important role in most of Zimler's subsequent novels. Consequently, Zimler has come to be known as a spokesperson for Judaism (Krich par. 2). Especially through his 'Sephardic Cycle' – four independent yet inter-connected novels narrating the lives of different members of a fictional Portuguese Jewish family, the Zarco family, which he first introduces in *The Last Kabbalist of Lisbon* – Zimler has been able to draw attention to many historic Jewish struggles, ranging from the aforementioned anti-Semitism in sixteenth century Portugal to the persecution of Jewish 'sorcerers' in colonial Goa (Biography par. 4). In his seventh novel, *The Seventh Gate*, Zimler places a descendant of the Jewish Zarco family in Nazi Germany.

Despite the fact that no one in Zimler's American home had experienced the Holocaust, Zimler nevertheless acquired his first Holocaust impressions in the familial sphere. As Zimler explains in his email to the author, his mother "always spoke very bitterly about the Holocaust" and "anti-Semitism in Poland", and categorically refused to buy any German products (par. 10). Moreover, Zimler notes that, even as a young child, he was well aware of the fact that many of his relatives had been killed in the death camps (Email to the Author par. 10). In other words, regardless of the fact that Zimler does not bear a direct relation to a Holocaust survivor, he, like Rosenbaum – though certainly to another degree – was already exposed to Holocaust images in early childhood.

These initial Holocaust impressions were later supplemented with images from Holocaust documentary films and first-generation Holocaust literature. As Zimler notes, the

1955 French short film *Nuit et Brouillard*, which includes images of starved Jews being dumped into mass graves in concentration camps, left a particularly deep impression on him, as did *The Diary of Anne Frank* (Email to the Author pars. 11, 13). Strikingly, in his email, Zimler makes no mention of any form of institutionalized Holocaust education. As Zimler observes in ‘From Mount Olympus to Mount Sinai’, having grown up in a secular Jewish family he was only exposed to Jewish culture through the occasional bar mitzvah as a child (pars. 2, 4). Moreover, as Thomas Fallace explains in *The Emergence of Holocaust Education in American Schools*, up until the late 1970s Holocaust education in secondary schools in America was limited to an average of only twenty lines in history textbooks (97, 98). In fact, according to Fallace, it was not until the mid 1970s that the Holocaust was first introduced as a serious topic of study in American high schools (49). Having been born in 1956, and having thus received his secondary education from the late 1960s to the early 1970s, Zimler missed out on an institutionalized Holocaust education. Consequently, in his formative years, Zimler’s image of the Holocaust was mainly shaped by his family and representations of the event in Holocaust films and literature.

However, Zimler did not base *The Seventh Gate* on these previously acquired images and ideas. On the contrary, as Zimler explains in ‘Richard Zimler: “The Subversive Side Of My Personality”’, all of his historical fiction stems directly from extensive research, which, in turn, is driven by a desire to learn more about a topic he is relatively unfamiliar with, such as, in the case of *The Seventh Gate*, the Nazi sterilization and murder of disabled people from the 1930s to the 1940s (Berry pars. 16-18). Even the plot of his novels, Zimler notes, emanates from this research: “I never decide what a book is going to be before I do months of reading about the time and place I’ve chosen” (Berry par. 18). In other words, before attempting to recreate a historical setting or context, Zimler immerses himself in the world and culture of his eventual characters. Or, as Jacob Staub observes, he “begins with the best historical

scholarship and then imaginatively explores its nuances and ambiguities” (Krich par. 15). While many critics of third-generation Holocaust authors thus claim that third-generation Holocaust literature such as *The Seventh Gate* lacks authenticity because third-generation Holocaust authors do not have personal experience with the Holocaust, Zimler, through his historical research, incorporates within his novel a high level of historical accuracy.

This historical accuracy, combined with his intricate ‘imaginative explorations’ of the historical context, enables Zimler, as a contemporary author, to transport his reader back to the event, thereby conveying a similar sense of immediacy and impact that first- and second-generation Holocaust authors have managed to pass on to their readers because of the intensity of their personal experiences. As such, Zimler’s *The Seventh Gate* is an excellent example of how third-generation Holocaust literature, through appropriate use of both the author’s imagination and historical fact, can adequately and convincingly succeed first- and second-generation Holocaust literature. As Lawrence Langer observes in *The Holocaust and the Literary Imagination*, where history books about the Holocaust merely present the reader with historical knowledge of the event, Holocaust literature that manages to actually “evoke the ‘atmosphere’ of the Holocaust” while presenting the reader with these historical facts, such as *The Seventh Gate*, has greater potential to emphatically involve the reader in the represented history (qtd. in Weismann 104). Although Langer speaks of the differences between first-generation Holocaust literature and historic research, one can logically conclude that, apparently, the power to evoke an emotional reaction from the reader lies in literature’s ability to present the reader with more than just the bare facts. Indeed, according to Langer, an imaginative representation of history is far more successful in making the horrors of the Holocaust accessible to the reader’s imagination (qtd. in Weismann 104).

In other words, by imaginatively re-creating the Holocaust in *The Seventh Gate*, Zimler, as a third-generation Holocaust author, helps the contemporary reader to not only

better understand the event both historically and emotionally, but also to realize why it is so important to commemorate it.

### **3.4 – The Seventh Gate, by Richard Zimler**

*If I try to be fair, which I don't often want to be, then I have to admit that human beings are contradictory creatures. Our minds are made of darkness and light, and our hands are dexterous enough to juggle affection and resentment for sixteen years with no difficulty at all.*

– Richard Zimler, *The Seventh Gate*.

#### **3.4.1 – Synopsis and Structure**

Zimler's *The Seventh Gate* is a coming-of-age story set in Nazi Germany. It tells the story of Sophie Riedesel, a Christian girl growing up in 1930s Berlin. The novel consists of eight different sections: a preface and seven book parts, subdivided into different chapters.

Sophie is first introduced in the preface of the novel, in which her nephew, who narrates the preface, introduces the reader to his then 89-year-old aunt Sophie, who has been hospitalized after a heart attack. Sophie's nephew, who remains unnamed, explains that Sophie was born in Berlin and married his mother's brother after the war. Under the impression that she is Jewish, the narrator naturally assumes that Sophie is troubled by memories of growing up under the Nazi regime when she, through confused and misplaced comments and remarks, reveals part of her pre-war history. However, once fully recovered from her heart attack, Sophie confesses to him that not only is she not Jewish, she also has a son who lives in Istanbul, and she tried to murder her own father in the 1930s. For years, she has been hiding her true identity.

In the seven subsequent parts Sophie narrates the story of how the Nazis came to power in her beloved Germany and how she and her family succumbed to their regime. When her father, a fervent communist, is faced with persecution, he is forced to renounce his earlier

convictions and join the Nazi party. Sophie's mother, convinced that her husband's actions have put her family out of danger, and determined not to compromise their newfound safety in any way, makes Sophie join the Young German Maidens, where she is to learn how to be a good Aryan wife and mother. Sophie, however, has trouble leaving her earlier, and what she believes to be true identity, behind and secretly joins The Ring, a resistance group led by her elderly Jewish neighbor, Isaac, with whom she eventually falls in love. When her mother dies of cancer, the care of Sophie's autistic younger brother Hansi falls on Sophie's shoulders. Torn between her love for her brother, whom she can only protect from the Nazis if she continues to pretend to be one of them, and her love for Isaac and justice, Sophie ultimately has to decide between staying true to herself and everything she believes in, and losing herself to save her brother.

### 3.4.2 – Telling the Untold

As Lang notes in '*The History of Love and the Transmission of Holocaust Memory*', third-generation Holocaust literature can generally be regarded as Holocaust fiction in which the Holocaust as an historic event is incorporated, but in which it is not given the same prominence and weight that first- and second-generation Holocaust authors have granted it in their novels (46). On the contrary, where first- and second-generation Holocaust fiction often deals directly with the Holocaust, Lang notes that third-generation Holocaust authors view the Holocaust rather as an "indirect part of the narrative", and therefore balance it with "other, also important, histories" (46). This is indeed the case in Zimler's *The Seventh Gate*. In *The Seventh Gate*, Zimler presents the Holocaust as a contextual background element, paying little attention to representing its many horrors in detail, and focusing instead on representing less-documented aspects of the Nazi regime and exploring the socio-political circumstances that nurtured it.

As stated in chapter 3.4.1, *The Seventh Gate* takes the form of a coming-of-age novel,

with its first part opening in the Berlin of February 1932. As such, Zimler's novel opens three years before the Nazis implemented the Nuremberg Laws, and six years before Kristallnacht in November 1938, which marked an important transition in Nazi policy towards Jews as anti-Semitic abuse changed from "social ostracism, abrogation of legal rights and economic boycotts" to "organized physical violence including murder" ('When Did the Holocaust' par. 7). Furthermore, as Christopher Browning explains in *The Origins of the Final Solution*, the Nazis had not formulated the Final Solution until late 1941, and it was not until March 1942 that they started to systematically deport Jewish people to extermination camps (374). As Zimler's narrating protagonist flees Germany in the spring of 1940, *The Seventh Gate* thus does not (and cannot) center around the Holocaust as most readers would recognize it - the train deportations and extermination camps - but rather aims attention at the build-up to the actual Holocaust.

As noted in chapter 3.4.1, *The Seventh Gate* is narrated by Zimler's then 89-year-old protagonist Sophie, who relates the story of her adolescent years growing up in Nazi Germany. As such, Zimler's novel not only contains many details about life in Berlin in the years before the Second World War and the Holocaust, but also includes narrations of everyday adolescent experiences, such as school life, teenage sexual experimentation, and celebrity adoration. It is these everyday events that, at times, overshadow the more dramatic and serious political events happening in Germany at the time that lead up to the severe persecution and abuse of the Jewish people we associate with the Holocaust. For example, when the Nuremberg Laws are implemented, Sophie, having already fallen in love with Isaac, jokes about the stupidity of the new laws, and explains to the reader how she felt "giddy with the news" that sleeping with her lover had suddenly become an act of defiance (Zimler, *The Seventh Gate* 273). Although Zimler, by having his protagonist mention the Nuremberg Laws, thus ensures the reader knows exactly how far the Nazis have taken anti-Semitism in Berlin,

the passages following Sophie's confession of giddiness center around her relationship with her other boyfriend, a young Nazi, the novelty of her father's new girlfriend, and Isaac's mysterious past (Zimler, *The Seventh Gate* 274-280). Furthermore, on top of everyday adolescent experiences, Sophie's thoughts, and thus narration, is dominated by the mysterious death of a member of the Ring (Zimler, *The Seventh Gate* 63). In other words, Zimler counters the history of the Holocaust with not only the everyday concerns and interests of an adolescent girl, he also interweaves it with a compelling murder mystery.

By thus shifting the focus of his novel to other events that happened alongside the Holocaust, Zimler not only provides the reader with information about everyday life in Berlin during the 1930s, he also seems to answer the question of how the implementation of the strict anti-Semitic Nazi policies, the increasing violence against the Jews, and the eventual crimes committed during the Holocaust could have happened without much protest from the German public. In the first part of the novel, in October 1932, during Hitler's campaign to become Germany's new Chancellor, Isaac protests by hanging a shredded Nazi flag out of his window (Zimler, *The Seventh Gate* 75). When a photographer for the Nazi paper takes Isaac's picture, Sophie recalls how she confronted the man by saying that he was not given permission to photograph her neighbor:

He gives me a look of violent disdain and goes back to his work. My pulse races when I think of swatting the camera out of his hands, but I don't have the courage.

In such seemingly insignificant ways did I slip away from myself, I now realize. If only Rini had been with me; she'd have grabbed his damn camera and hurled it against a wall, then casually offered me a square of chocolate.

“Forget the mischief-maker,” Mr Zarco calls down, flapping his hands. “He's harmless.”

So it was that he, too, let his guard down. (Zimler, *The Seventh Gate* 78).

As this example illustrates, both Isaac and Sophie initially underestimate the power of this 'harmless mischief-maker', and consider themselves safe (Zimler, *The Seventh Gate* 78).

However, a few days after his picture is taken, two men attack Isaac on his way to work (Zimler, *The Seventh Gate* 79). In the hospital, a newspaper clipping of the latest issue of the Nazi paper with Isaac's picture on it is found in his pocket. As Sophie notes, Isaac's attackers "must have identified him from this clipping and stuffed it in his pocket to be certain he understood that they were avenging his affront" (Zimler, *The Seventh Gate* 80). This example seems to indicate that Zimler wishes to instill upon the reader to what degree many Germans underestimated the danger Hitler and the Nazi party posed to their country. As such, the idea behind Zimler's third-generation Holocaust novel does not seem to be to educate the reader about the atrocities performed against the Jews *during* the Holocaust, which he may expect the reader to already have knowledge of, but rather to provide the reader with insight into the possible *origins* of it; how *could* the Holocaust happen?

On top of exploring how the 'good Germans' underestimated the Nazis' anti-Semitic policies, Zimler also manages to bring the attention of the reader to aspects of the Nazi regime that are not as well-known, or well-documented, as the Holocaust. Besides her love affair with Isaac, the mysterious murders of several members of the Ring, and everyday teenage girl worries, Sophie's prewar experiences, and her resulting perspective on the political changes in her environment, are heavily influenced by her autistic little brother Hansi. In *The Seventh Gate*, Hansi is referred to as a "distant child", as autism as it is known today was not recognized as a medical condition until the 1940s (Zimler, *The Seventh Gate* 215; Deisinger 246). Although Sophie and her parents are aware of the fact that Hansi is not like most children of his age from the onset of the novel, it is not until Sophie is forced to attend a lecture on 'racial hygiene' at her Young German Maiden group that Sophie realizes that the Nazis may want to harm her brother (Zimler, *The Seventh Gate* 194):

The Jew is, of course, Number One on our list of *verboten* suitors, and we see a mug shot of a fat-faced specimen in profile so we can better see his monumentally hooked nose. Number Two is a

swarthy, smirking Gypsy, whom we see head-on so that we can remark his greasy halo of shoulder-length hair. Last but not least of these inferiors is a bare-chested Negro sitting on a stool while a man in a white coat uses calipers to measure his thick lips. Three and a half centimeters of proof that he is beneath our contempt. [...]

Later in the slideshow we hear about the dangers of marrying men who look normal but who are anything but – idiots, epileptics, syphilitics, the congenitally deaf and blind. And those who live in their own universe, whom Dr Linden calls schizophrenics. One of the types he describes is Hansi, which makes my legs quiver as if I need to run and never stop. (Zimler, *The Seventh Gate* 194, 195)

As this example illustrates, Sophie is thoroughly aware of the Nazi discrimination of certain ethnical and cultural groups, but her disgust for these Nazi policies pales compared to her fear for her little brother's safety.

As such, it is mainly through the character of Hansi, and Sophie's close connection to him, that Zimler is able to educate his readers about the obscure Nazi war on disabled people. Although *The Seventh Gate* is populated with many colorful characters whom the Nazis would describe as 'inferior' or 'disabled' – for example, Vera the giant, Heidi the dwarf and K-H and Marianne, who were both born deaf – it is the close bond between Sophie and Hansi in particular through which Zimler manages to evoke a strong emotional reaction from the reader to the events described in his novel. After their mother dies, Sophie becomes Hansi's main caretaker, as their father slowly distances himself from his children and becomes involved with another woman (Zimler, *The Seventh Gate* 271). Earlier in the novel, Zimler introduces the reader to the Hereditary Health Court, a Nazi government authority with the power to forcibly sterilize people deemed unfit to reproduce (Zimler, *The Seventh Gate* 230-231). After he is given the status 'unfit to reproduce', Hansi is first sterilized and eventually, when he is hospitalized for scarlet fever a few years later, murdered, although the Nazi doctors claim that he died of complications (Zimler, *The Seventh Gate* 290-292, 294, 296,

367-372). Sophie's emotional reaction to his fate evokes a strong sense of empathy in the reader:

Is it worth saying that I weep for Hansi and myself for years, even when I make no sound at all? Until the end of the war, I will spend a portion of every day trying to figure out what I should have done differently and how he could have been saved. And for decades I will wonder what he might have become. (Zimler, *The Seventh Gate* 373)

Through the extent of Sophie's grief over her brother's mysterious death, Zimler grants tremendous weight to Hansi's fate, and the fate of thousands of other handicapped children and adults who, like him, were brutally murdered in specialized killing centers under the Nazi regime (Zimler, *The Seventh Gate* 379). As mentioned in chapter 3.3, Langer argues that Holocaust literature is far more able to suggest the exact nature of the horrors associated with the Holocaust experience if it manages to make these events accessible to the reader's imagination (qtd. in Weismann 104). Through the close relationship between Sophie and her little brother, Zimler appeals to the reader's imagination and manages to emotionally engage the reader in Sophie and Hansi's situation, creating a strong emphatic response to the relatively unknown Nazi war on disabled people.

In short, *The Seventh Gate* is an excellent example of a third-generation Holocaust novel that moves away from graphic Holocaust representations and resists the kind of literal Holocaust referentiality often found in first- and second-generation Holocaust literature. Indeed, as Lang predicts in her article, Zimler, as a third-generation Holocaust author, employs the Holocaust as a contextual narrative device, interpolating cursory passages depicting its many different aspects, ranging from social exclusion of Jewish people to actual physical violence, with other, lesser known, stories and themes (46).

As such, *The Seventh Gate* sheds light on many obscure Nazi policies, such as the forced sterilization and eventual murder of the disabled and handicapped, while

simultaneously providing the reader with insight into the minds of the ‘good Germans’, who, finding it impossible to believe the extent of the evil they were facing, severely underestimated the Nazis. As a third-generation Holocaust author, perhaps working from the assumption that most of his readers are already well-informed when it comes to the Holocaust, Zimler is not only able to place the Holocaust in the background of his novel, the temporal distance separating him and his readers from the historic event also allows him to give prominence to aspects of the Nazi regime that have been, for many years, overshadowed by the more direct horrors of the Holocaust.

### **3.4.3 – Adopting a Wide Focus**

The temporal distance separating Zimler as a third-generation Holocaust author from the Holocaust, and the resulting emotional distance, thus not only allows Zimler to give prominence to other histories and events that happened alongside the Holocaust, and to explore the contextual political and social circumstances that eventually led up to its occurrence, it has also affected his perspective as an author in another way.

As Lang notes, first- and second-generation Holocaust authors base their literature on personal experiences and memory, and it is this close relation to their subject that gives the literature of these groups of authors its “sense of immediacy and impact” (46). As such, first- and second-generation Holocaust authors can benefit from their personal connection to the Holocaust, as it may be easier for them to convey a particular emotion in their writing. However, as Sara Horowitz observes in ‘Holocaust Literature’, the literature of these authors may also be highly subjective, and narrated from a specific, and to some degree limited, viewpoint that is pre-determined by the author’s personal experience (par. 7). In other words, while the literature of first- and second-generation Holocaust authors may benefit from the authors’ personal connection to the Holocaust, it may also affect their literature negatively, as it may prevent them from viewing the historic event objectively.

Third-generation Holocaust authors, on the other hand, lacking personal experience and memory of the Holocaust as an event, can benefit from the distance separating them from the Holocaust, because their historical detachedness allows them to distinguish various historical nuances often overlooked by authors who are more emotionally. As Zimler observes in ‘The Writing Life... Richard Zimler’, writing about the past makes it easier for him to see an historic event in a specific manner:

When I write a historical novel, I am able to tell a very specific and detailed story, but also to explore big themes like slavery, as I did in *Hunting Midnight*, or the effect of a repressive political system on love and friendship, as I did in *Guardian of the Dawn*. The distance from the present time helps me achieve that wide focus. (Forbes, par. 17)

Indeed, as Adam Philips notes in ‘Close-ups’, “distance from pain”, or in this case trauma, “makes redescription possible”, where proximity to an event can narrow an author’s narrative stance in relation to his or her subject (147, 148). Thus, bearing in mind that authors cannot freely choose their distance to an event, it is nevertheless important to understand that an author’s predetermined distance to a subject influences how he or she views said subject (Philips 90). In other words, third-generation Holocaust authors, as writers who have no painful personal memory of or experience with the Holocaust, are thus not restrained by these predetermined viewpoints in representing it.

Proof of this theory can be found in the fact that third-generation Holocaust authors counter the history of the Holocaust with other histories, thereby shifting the reader’s attention from the main plot – the Holocaust itself – to its many subplots, as this indicates that third-generation Holocaust authors regard the Holocaust of lesser importance than first- and second-generation Holocaust authors. Furthermore, this theory also applies to the manner in which the Holocaust as a subject is represented by these authors. Rather than providing the reader with a highly contrasted black-and-white image of the Holocaust – an image often

conveyed by first-generation Holocaust literature, for example – third-generation Holocaust authors are able to present the event from a wide variety of angles and numerous perspectives, none of which they have a predisposed preference for because of personal experiences. This, in turn, enables third-generation Holocaust authors to choose to incorporate narrative perspectives in their literature that allow them to examine morality during the Holocaust and pay close attention to the extensive grey area between right and wrong.

A striking example of this aspect of third-generation Holocaust literature can be found in *The Seventh Gate*, in Zimler's representation of the Nazis. While Zimler informs the reader about the Nazi war on disabled people through the relationship between Sophie and Hansi, he raises questions about morality in the face of persecution through their father, Friedrich Riedesel. As stated in chapter 3.4.1, at the onset of the novel, when Hitler and his Nazi party still seem more of a joke than an actual threat, Sophie's father is introduced to the reader as an ardent supporter of Marxism (Zimler, *The Seventh Gate* 45). Through several passages depicting how Friedrich interacts with his children, the reader learns that he is an affectionate father, and Sophie even seems to favor him as a parent, referring to the unfaltering "age-old magic between fathers and daughters" (Zimler, *The Seventh Gate* 47). Moreover, when Isaac hangs the shredded Nazi flag out of his window in protest of the ever-growing Nazi party, Friedrich exclaims his support, although he also warns Sophie that it is unwise for individuals to protest government policies alone when they find out that Isaac has been attacked (Zimler, *The Seventh Gate* 75, 79). In other words, the reader gets to know Friedrich as an idealistic, loving father and husband, but is also introduced to his cautious nature.

However, once Hitler has been elected Chancellor in 1933 and starts rounding up communists, Sophie's father drastically reinvents his identity. After hearing word of his impending arrest, Friedrich goes into hiding (Zimler, *The Seventh Gate* 125). Two days later, he returns home and tells his family that he went to seek help from a Nazi acquaintance, who

strongly advised him to renounce his communist beliefs and join the Nazi party (Zimler, *The Seventh Gate* 132-134). After Friedrich explains to his family how two men convinced him that Hitler represents the future of Germany, Sophie's mother accepts her husband's new political orientation without question, but Sophie wonders about her father's motives, noting:

I'm certain that my father is lying to us, and maybe for the first time in his life over something important. It's at that moment that I decide that his clownish smile must mean that he's making up a story to cover the truth. But what that story is, I have the distressing feeling I'll never find out...

(Zimler, *The Seventh Gate* 135)

As such, Sophie not only puts emphasis on her father's sudden and unexpected personality change, she also focuses the reader's attention to the possible origin of his new political beliefs. This becomes even more apparent when she adds:

I will remember my father's bent back and trembling hands all my life, and always with a sharp sense of guilt; if I'd found the courage to speak honestly then, I might have convinced Papa to keep resisting – and thereby saved many lives. (Zimler, *The Seventh Gate* 135)

As these examples indicate, Zimler apparently wants to communicate to the reader that not all Nazis were pure evil. After all, the reader has come to know Friedrich as a good person. His “bent back” and “trembling hands”, combined with Sophie's remark that he appears to be lying to his family about his encounter with the Nazis, seems to indicate that his sudden change of political direction is caused by fear rather than ideological beliefs (Zimler, *The Seventh Gate* 135). As such, Zimler clearly moves away from the typical two-dimensional image of the sadistic Nazi, and presents the reader with a well-rounded character with complex emotions.

However, this does not mean that Zimler forgives or even accepts Friedrich's Nazi orientation. On the contrary, Friedrich's change of political direction goes hand in hand with a shift towards a low moral standard. When Sophie teases her mother, Friedrich interferes,

remarking that Sophie “is not too old for a beating”, which Sophie finds troubling, since her father had never hurt her before (Zimler, *The Seventh Gate* 139). Again, Friedrich’s motive appears to be fear, as Sophie notes: “threatening me must mean he’s terrified by what I could do or say. [Hitler] has now made parents across Germany afraid of their children” (Zimler, *The Seventh Gate* 139). However, at the same time, Zimler does not hesitate to connect Friedrich’s newfound Nazism to physical violence.

But what’s even more important than Zimler’s exploration into the mind of the Nazi, is how Zimler employs it to focus the reader’s attention to the complexity and instability of human nature. As mentioned before, as soon as Friedrich tells his family about his new political beliefs, Sophie doubts his intentions. It is at this time, that she starts to refer to her father as having two distinct personalities, one being her “real father” who would never hurt her, and her new father, who does the exact opposite (Zimler, *The Seventh Gate* 140). Although she always thought of her father as the center of her family, Friedrich’s sudden identity change makes Sophie question the authenticity of his former self:

Catching my glance, Papa rolls his eyes as if Mama is a silly creature. A mistake. In a vague way, I’m beginning to understand that he’s worked hard over the last years for her to become the policeman in our family. That way, he’s been free to be sweet to me. And yet there’s always been another man inside him – one who holds a stretched belt between his hands. So who is the calculating villain in our movie, after all? (Zimler, *The Seventh Gate* 149)

As this example illustrates, after Friedrich joins the Nazi party and threatens to give Sophie a beating, she seems unsure of his ‘true’ identity. Through Sophie’s uncertain narration, and by connecting Friedrich’s identity change to Sophie’s adolescent search for her own identity, Zimler not only focuses attention to the complexity of human nature, but also raises questions about the existence of a ‘true’ identity, as Sophie states:

My fears for my own identity are a clear indication that I've failed completely to understand the ingenious simplicity of Papa's conversion – and the ease with which millions of others have been reinventing themselves since the election. My father has been assured he'll be able to go right on campaigning for a prosperous paradise of workers who sing and dance as they plow, weld, hammer, and type. Indeed, as Professor Furst has told him, the Führer expects nothing less than dreams of glory from his little helpers. My father can go on loving Hansi and me, his wife, gymnastics, chocolate, chemistry (both organic and inorganic!), and the Victory Monument. Little need change. All he really has to do is slip dear old Marx into the magician's hat of Professor Furst's political theory, whisper an incantation from *Mein Kampf*, and presto... Out will come a black dove named Hitler. (Zimler, *The Seventh Gate* 137)

As this example shows, instead of continuing to identify as a communist, Friedrich, faced with persecution and arrest, sheds his communist skin and adopts a sets of values and beliefs that is more socially accepted in the Germany of the 1930s. This example thus clearly indicates that Zimler wants to communicate to the reader that identity is ultimately a choice.

In other words, the distance separating Zimler, as a third-generation Holocaust author, from the Holocaust not only means that he is inclined to grant the Holocaust as an event less prominence in his work, and instead use it as a contextual element, it also allows him to adopt unusual narrative perspectives. Through the character of Friedrich Riedesel, Zimler explores the difference between right and wrong, and brings awareness to the complex decisions people were faced with in the face of the Holocaust. Moreover, by providing the reader with insight into the Nazi mindset, Zimler appeals to the reader's own morality while conveying the central idea that, even when Nazism is adopted as a survival "strategy" to save one's own life, such as in the case of Friedrich, the fact remains that a decision about right and wrong has been made, and, consequently, responsibility has been taken (Zimler, *The Seventh Gate* 150). As such, and tying in with the fact that Zimler also demonstrates how the 'good' Germans underestimated the danger the Nazis posed, *The Seventh Gate* appears to implicitly

communicate a warning to the reader to learn from the many moral mistakes that resulted in the Holocaust.

#### 3.4.4 – Conclusion

In short, Zimler thus employs the Holocaust in *The Seventh Gate* as a contextual element, choosing not to present the reader with an intricate representation of the Holocaust and instead exploring lesser-known aspects of the Nazi regime, such as the Nazi war on disabled people. On top of this, Zimler examines the social and political tensions of 1930s Germany that resulted in the occurrence of the Holocaust. As such, Zimler's novel demonstrates the tendency of third-generation Holocaust authors to interpolate the Holocaust with other histories in their writing, thereby granting the Holocaust as an event less prominence than preceding generations of Holocaust authors. Furthermore, Zimler thus informs the reader of Nazi crimes that, up until now, have been overshadowed by the enormity of the Holocaust, but should nevertheless be commemorated.

Also, and particularly through the character of Friedrich Riedesel, Zimler presents the reader with a three-dimensional representation of the Nazis, demonstrating that, while Nazis are usually portrayed as sadistic brutes, the reality of the Second World War may have been less straightforward. By thus drawing attention to the complexity of human nature, Zimler raises questions about morality in the face of death, and encourages the reader to think about how seemingly personal choices may affect the outcome of a war.

Finally, through a convincing combination of historic fact and compelling fiction, Zimler's story about the Nazi war on disabled people and Sophie's desperate attempt to stay true to herself despite social expectations and dictations manages to evoke a strong empathic reaction from the reader. As such, *The Seventh Gate* not only effectively educates the reader about the build-up to the Holocaust, the novel also manages to engage the contemporary

reader in Holocaust history while increasing the contemporary reader's understanding of how the Holocaust could happen, and why it should be remembered.

## 4 – First-wave American Holocaust Fiction: *Mila 18*.

### 4.1 – Introduction

As mentioned above, in her article ‘*The History of Love, the Contemporary Reader, and the Transmission of Holocaust Memory*’, Lang claims that the first remove from direct Holocaust experience is represented by second-generation Holocaust literature, while third-generation Holocaust literature marks a second remove from the experience of survivors (45, 46). Lacking personal experience of the Holocaust as an event, members of these generations have to rely on both their imagination and external sources – such as survivor parents or history books – in order to represent the Holocaust in their work (Lang 45, 46). While Lang thus begins her discussion of Holocaust memory transmission in literature, she fails to discuss at length a category of American authors who consciously experienced the Second World War in America, and who, like second- and third-generation Holocaust authors, could not rely on either experience or memory in their depiction of the Holocaust: a category which I refer to as ‘first-wave American Holocaust authors’.

However, while Lang fails to discuss first-wave American Holocaust authors at length in her article, she *does* briefly refer to some of them. As Lang observes, in the 1960s and 1970s, when the Holocaust moved towards the center of American consciousness, more and more novelists decided to incorporate the event within their literature (44). According to Lang, “Holocaust narratives written during this time are, for the most part, readily recognized”, as they usually “make explicit reference to a Holocaust setting”, or in the case of Holocaust fiction not set in Europe, “center around a survivor protagonist indelibly marked, physically and emotionally” by the horrors of the Holocaust (44). In other words, Lang claims that first-wave Holocaust literature can be recognized as such, because it represents the Holocaust and its many horrors in an exceedingly direct manner.

In the following chapter I will determine to what degree Lang’s statement about literal

Holocaust referentiality in first-wave American Holocaust fiction applies to Leon Uris' novel *Mila 18*. Moreover, I will examine the position of first-wave American Holocaust authors, who, unlike the generation of postmemory and third-generation American Holocaust authors, were merely separated from the Holocaust by spatial distance, but who also, like third-generation Holocaust authors, could not rely on either memory or experience in writing their fiction. Because an analysis of all first-wave American Holocaust fiction is beyond the scope of this thesis, I will base my conclusions of this research on a close reading of Leon Uris' *Mila 18*. Finally, I will reveal why the literature of first-wave American authors has played such an important role in the formation of America's collective Holocaust memory.

#### **4.2 – The Rise of Holocaust Literature in America**

In order to understand the position of first-wave American Holocaust authors, and to understand their social context, insight into the history of Holocaust awareness in America is crucial.

The earliest literary Holocaust testimonials, among them Primo Levi's *If This Is a Man* (*Se Questo è un Uomo*) and Anne Frank's *The Diary of a Young Girl* (*Het Achterhuis*), were first published in 1947, in the native countries of their authors, Italy and the Netherlands (Patterson et al. 53, 107-108). As Matthew Boswell observes in 'Holocaust Literature and the Taboo', Levi began writing this autobiographic work about his experiences in Auschwitz almost as soon as he arrived back in Italy in 1945, while Frank famously wrote her diary from 1942 to 1944 while in hiding from the Nazis (182; Patterson et al. 51). As Frank perished in Bergen-Belsen in early 1945, and her diary was published by her father, Otto Frank, *The Diary of a Young Girl* cannot be classified as survivor literature, and therefore I shall not treat it as such (Patterson et al. 52). Levi's testimony, on the other hand, was the first of many Holocaust testimonials by a Holocaust *survivor* that would be written after the war. However, as Boswell states, Levi was exceptionally early with his literary testimony, as most Holocaust

survivors would refrain from confronting their Holocaust experiences in literature for many decades (182). Moreover, as I've explained in the introduction of this thesis, most first-generation Holocaust literature was not written in English, and it usually took several years before these works were translated into English and published in America. Eventually, in 1952, Frank's *The Diary of a Young Girl* was translated into English and appeared on the American market as the first first-generation Holocaust testimony, closely followed by Levi's *If This Is a Man* in 1959, and Elie Wiesel's *Night* in 1960 (Patterson et al. 51, 107, 213).

The first example of first-wave American Holocaust fiction, however, was published several years earlier. In 1950, John Hersey published *The Wall*, a work of fiction that is presented as a translation of sections of a diary written by a survivor of the Warsaw ghetto, which was well received by critics and public alike (Severo par. 14). More than a decade later, in 1961, Edward Lewis Wallant and Leon Uris published *The Pawnbroker* and *Mila 18*, followed by Bellow's *Mr. Sammler's Planet* and Styron's *Sophie's Choice* in 1970 and 1979 (Goldman 156; Kremer 61, 1228; Nadel 135).

As these dates indicate, first-wave American Holocaust literature did not follow the literary testimonials of Holocaust survivors. On the contrary, Hersey's *The Wall* was published two years before the first Holocaust literature written by an eyewitness, Frank's *The Diary of a Young Girl*, became available to the American public. Moreover, since Frank's diary mostly details her life in hiding and comes to an abrupt end on the day when she and her family were discovered and deported – and, as such does not include descriptions of the appalling conditions in the deportation trains, ghettos, or concentration camps – Hersey's *The Wall* appeared almost a decade before the first literary Holocaust *survivor* testimonial, Levi's *If This is a Man*, which *does* shed light on life in the camps, was published. From the 1960s onward, more and more Holocaust literature, written by both survivors and first-wave American Holocaust authors, slowly made its appearance on the American market. In other

words, strikingly, first-wave American Holocaust authors wrote their fiction in a time when few literary Holocaust testimonies, or even historiographical research on the Holocaust, were available in America (Raphael 101).

However, this does not mean that the average American living in the 1940s and 1950s was unaware of what had happened in Europe during the war. As I've established in the introduction to this chapter, first-wave American Holocaust authors can be classified as authors who consciously experienced the Second World War in America, and who, thus, can be regarded as authors who, to some degree, and from afar, bore witness to the many crimes the Nazis committed in Europe at the time. In other words, these authors may have been compelled to write their Holocaust novels by a sense of urgency, a need to inform the American public of what had happened in Europe, perhaps provoked by their own war experiences and, possibly, by what information about the plight of the European Jews may have reached them during the Second World War. But exactly what kind of information about the Nazis' persecution of the European Jews reached America during the Second World War?

According to Peter Novick, the Holocaust as it is known today is a "retrospective construction", and for the American people "barely existed as a singular event in its own right" throughout the 1930s and 1940s (20). Rather, Novick argues, it was the totality of the war that formed the center of American consciousness (20). Nevertheless, the average American had a basic understanding of the European Jews' struggles under Nazi rule. As Novick explains:

Americans [...] were well aware of Nazi anti-Semitism from the regime's beginning in 1933, if not earlier. Prewar Nazi actions against Jews, from early discriminatory measures to the enactment of the Nuremberg Laws in 1935 and culminating in Kristallnacht on 1938, were widely reported in the American press and repeatedly denounced at all levels of American society. (20-21)

Moreover, Novick observes, word of the concentration camps – where, up until then, few Jewish prisoners had been interned because of their cultural identity – had already reached America by the 1930s (21). However, when Germany invaded Poland in 1939, thereby starting the war in Europe, awareness of the Nazi concentration camps was driven from public consciousness, as American newspapers started focusing on military actions and events instead (Novick 20, 21). When Japan attacked Pearl Harbor in 1941, America entered the Second World War, and while American sailors engaged in combat with the Japanese in the Pacific the ongoing war in Europe became of little interest to America (Novick 23-26). Even after the famous Riegner Telegram, which revealed the Nazis' plan to exterminate the entire Jewish people, reached America in 1942, it was believed to be a wild exaggeration of the actual facts (Novick 23). In effect, and because the Nazis had not persecuted Jewish people based on their cultural or religious heritage up until late 1942, when American newspapers had still been covering the situation in Europe, most Americans, both gentile and Jewish, remained ignorant of the terrible fate of the European Jews throughout, and for some time after, the Second World War (Novick 29).

In other words, while first-wave American Holocaust authors, through extensive coverage in American newspapers, had certainly been exposed to reports about the war in Europe, it is not likely that they knew much about what we now call 'the Holocaust', let alone its most gruesome details. Thus, even though these first-wave American Holocaust authors lived through the same war, and were exposed to shreds of information about the situation in Europe, they, like third-generation Holocaust authors, could not rely on either experience or memory in writing their fiction. Furthermore, as historiographical research on the subject virtually did not exist during and in the years after the war, and the Holocaust as a distinct event did not yet exist in America's cultural memory, first-wave American Holocaust authors could not rely on these sources either. Consequently, they had to base their literature on other

bodies of knowledge.

### 4.3 – Leon Uris as a First-Wave Jewish-American Holocaust Author

Leon Uris was born in 1924 in Baltimore, Maryland, to Jewish parents of Polish-Russian descent (Nadel 5). His mother was a first-generation American, while his father was born in Poland and immigrated to the United States in 1921 (Nadel 11, 13, 14). Although his father's mother and sister would eventually be murdered in Trablinka, no one in Uris' direct family thus experienced the Holocaust (Nadel 11). When the Germans entered Poland on the first of September 1939, Uris was fifteen, and a model student in Baltimore City College (Nadel 20). In other words, Uris qualifies as a first-wave American Holocaust author, as he was born an American and, when the Holocaust was taking place in Europe, was old enough to consciously absorb any relevant information that reached America.

However, according to Uris, he only became aware of the Nazi persecution of the European Jews in 1942 (Nadel 28; Silver 40). And even if Uris *had* been an expert on the events taking place in Europe at the time, the fact remains that “the places and events described [in *Mila 18*] actually happened” (Uris, N.pag.). In other words, Uris could not rely solely on his own imagination and superficial Holocaust knowledge in writing *Mila 18*. Instead, he needed to base his novel on other sources. The only problem was, as mentioned in chapter 4.2, that by the late 1950s academic research on the Holocaust was scarce in the United States. In other words, unlike Zimler, who, as an author writing about the Holocaust more than sixty years after its occurrence, had access to a vast array of historic Holocaust research, Uris could not rely on historiographic sources. However, as early as 1950 John Hersey's novel *The Wall* had been published, which tells the story of the ghetto revolt through the fictional character of Noach Levinson and a series of dated entries from his fictional journal, called the ‘Levinson archive’ (Francioci 247). As Nadel observes in *Leon Uris: Life of a Best-Seller*, Uris read *The Wall* in 1954, but “did not reread it while working on *Mila 18*”

(131). Nonetheless, it is reasonable to assume that it was Hersey's *The Wall* that first brought the story of the Warsaw Jews to Uris' attention.

Unlike Uris, John Hersey had much first-hand knowledge of the Holocaust. In 'John Hersey: War Correspondent Into Novelist', David Sanders explains that Hersey had been a war correspondent for *Time* magazine throughout the Second World War, reporting from Europe and Asia (51-54). As Robert Francioci notes in 'Designing John Hersey's *The Wall*', when the war came to an end, Hersey was based in Russia, and after Russia had liberated Poland Hersey's job as a journalist enabled him to visit the ruins of the Warsaw ghetto (268). Although Uris openly admired Hersey's work and was heavily inspired by it, Nadel claims that Uris also criticized the way Hersey's novel "[put] the Jews in a position of slavery" (5, 105). Moreover, where Hersey used the story of the Warsaw Jews to explore "the theme of human tenacity in the face of unprecedented mass murder", Uris saw an opportunity to change the image of the Jewish people (Francioci 248, Nadel 133).

In post-war America, the prevailing image of the Jews as it existed in America's cultural memory was exceedingly negative. As Warren Rosenberg explains in *Legacy of Rage: Jewish Masculinity, Violence and Culture*: "historic and prevailing discourse of Jewish masculinity [...] has emphasized since the mid-nineteenth century the feminization of the Jewish male, a process [only] exacerbated by the victimization of the Holocaust" (11). The publication of Hersey's novel in 1950 did not manage to change these ideas. According to Rosenberg, in postwar America, Jews were regarded as cowards (1). Even the American Jews themselves helped sustain this idea. According to Uris, after the Second World War, there were many Jewish American authors who were consciously berating and ridiculing the Jewish people by turning them into caricatures (Silver 163; Lovett-Graff 455). Uris rejected this image of the Jew. As Nadel explains, Uris' goal was to free the Jewish people from the stigma of cowardice by creating strong Jewish protagonists (133).

Although Uris first explored the theme of the tough, fighting Jew in *Exodus*, he probably wrote *Exodus* with another group of heroic Jews in mind: the Jews who had stood up against the Nazi's in the Warsaw ghetto in 1943. While *Exodus* largely revolves around the founding of Israel, it also narrates the events of the Warsaw ghetto uprising through the character of the young hero Dov Landau, a Polish Jew who miraculously survived the liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto (Silver 59). As Matthew Silver observes: "the forty-two days of resistance in the Warsaw uprising, recounted in *Exodus* in flashback sequences [actually] served as Uris's heroic standard" (59). Again, one can reasonably assume that knowledge of this event had first reached Uris through Hersey's novel, as other sources of information on the Warsaw ghetto revolt were not available in the United States in the late 1950s. However, this does not mean that Uris did not conduct his own research.

In fact, in researching both *Exodus* and *Mila 18*, Uris decided to completely cut out the middleman and emerge himself within the social group, and corresponding collective memory, in which the heroic story of the Warsaw Jews originated. According to Nadel, when Uris first traveled to Israel in 1957, he made a visit to the Warsaw Ghetto Fighters Kibbutz, founded by the leader of the ghetto resistance Antek-Yitzhak Zuckerman and his wife Ziviah Lubetkin, who had commanded the women's brigade of the resistance (124, 126). In writing *Mila 18*, Uris drew heavily from the information revealed to him by the kibbutz members (Nadel 130). For instance, Uris devoted three chapters of his novel to a story related to him by Lubetkin, who escaped the ghetto by crawling through Warsaw's sewers for forty-eight hours (Uris 543-561; Nadel 130). Furthermore, Uris relied on a large number of diaries and journals to make *Mila 18* as authentic as possible. Not only did he make use of the diary that survivor Lubetkin had kept, he also drew from diaries and journals created by Jews who did not make it out of the ghetto alive (Nadel 130). Among these documents was Emanuel Ringelblum's famous journal *Notes From the Warsaw Ghetto* (Nadel 130). In other words, although *Mila 18*

is usually referred to as a work of fiction, Uris directly incorporated a significant amount of survivors' memories into his novel.

Although Uris also made use of other journals, texts and testimonies in writing *Mila 18*, a detailed discussion of these documents and how they shaped Uris' image of the Warsaw ghetto uprising is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, it is important to note that the cultural memories of the social groups Uris was a part of in America could never have provided him with the information necessary to write *Mila 18*. Instead, Uris had to emerge himself within the collective memory of Jews who had actually lived in the Warsaw ghetto. Taking into account the massive impact *Mila 18* had on American society, the novel thus forms a bridge between two disparate collective memories: the collective, even cultural, memory of America, and the collective memory of the survivors of the Warsaw ghetto.

#### **4.4 – *Mila 18*, by Leon Uris**

*If the Warsaw ghetto marked the lowest point in the history of Jewish people, it also marked the point when they rose to their greatest heights.*

– Leon Uris, *Mila 18*.

##### **4.4.1 – Synopsis and Structure**

*Mila 18* is a fast paced, action packed novel detailing the creation, revolt and eventual destruction of the Warsaw ghetto in Nazi-occupied Poland in the Second World War. Although the novel was not well received by critics, it was a hit with the American public, spending thirty-one weeks on bestseller lists (Nadel 139).

The novel tells the story of the Warsaw Jews, who, faced with starvation, extreme violence, and death, eventually stand up to their oppressors in a heroic battle that would later come to be known as the 1943 Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. In *Mila 18*, Uris combines compelling fictional elements with a wealth of historic fact without disturbing the pace of the

plot or weighing the plot down. As such, Uris not only ensures that the reader gains a thorough understanding of the social and political context of the novel's Warsaw-based characters, but also a comprehensive, three-dimensional understanding of the Holocaust as a whole.

The novel is structured into four distinct parts, each focusing on a specific period before or during the Second World War. Furthermore, the story is narrated by an omniscient, though at times intrusive, third-person narrator and focalized through a number of principal characters.

*Mila 18* opens in August 1939, a few weeks before Germany would invade Poland. Through the character of Alexander Brandel, a Jewish historian and the author of a journal of which fragments are incorporated within the novel, the reader is informed of the prewar political tensions between Poland, Hitler's Germany, and Russia. When the Nazis invade Poland on the first of September, Uris narrates the brave but futile Polish war effort through the character of Andrei Androfski, a Jewish Ulan cavalry officer and the hero of Uris' story. Through Andrei's experiences, the reader learns how the Germans viciously attack Poland, butchering the Polish army, after SS troops dressed as Polish soldiers blow up a German radio station. Andrei narrowly manages to survive the attack, and, after he escapes from a German prisoner compound, quickly makes his way back to Warsaw.

Through various other principal characters of different religious and political beliefs, markedly Zionist leader Simon Eden, Christopher de Monti, a gentile journalist, Gabriela Rak, a Christian member of the Jewish underground, and Alexander's teenage son Wolf Brandel, who becomes one of the leaders of the ghetto uprising, Uris narrates how the Germans occupied Poland and slowly but surely isolated the Jews from Warsaw society, to eventually lock them away in the Warsaw ghetto. Once imprisoned, the Jews wage an emotional and desperate struggle for survival as the Nazis cut food rations and start deporting

large groups of ghetto inhabitants to work camps. Eventually, after several years of suffering, in which the Jews reluctantly begin to realize the extent of the Nazis' cruelty, the remaining imprisoned Jews form a guerrilla army and start to fight back.

Uris concludes his novel with a dramatic final battle, in which the Nazis burn the ghetto to the ground and a mere handful of Jewish fighters manage to escape to the Aryan side through sewers filled with barbed wire and poisonous gas.

#### 4.4.2 – Representing History

As mentioned in chapter 4.1, according to Lang, in American Holocaust fiction written in the 1960s – which I've termed first-wave American Holocaust fiction – the Holocaust is employed in a different way than it is in second- or third-generation American Holocaust literature (44). Not only did first-wave American Holocaust authors grant the Holocaust more prominence in their writing, their work can also be characterized by a high degree of literal Holocaust referentiality and direct Holocaust representations (Lang 44, 45). As Melissa Raphael observes in *Judaism and the Visual Image: a Jewish Theology of Art*, since historiographical research on the Holocaust was scarce in the 1960s and 1970s, it was therefore these direct Holocaust representations in literature that shaped the American public's image of the Holocaust (101). In *Mila 18*, Uris does not merely employ an explicit Holocaust setting; he also incorporates a vast amount of historical fact and background information to educate and inform his readership about the crimes inflicted upon the Jewish People in the Holocaust.

One of the most important techniques employed by Uris in order to transfer factual knowledge of the historical Holocaust onto his readers is the novel's fictional journal, kept by Alexander Brandel. In *Mila 18*, the journal initially arises out of Brandel's desire to record the changes in his social and political environment (Uris 3). However, the journal quickly evolves into an extensive archive through which the desperate Warsaw Jews try to preserve their

culture and traditions when more and more Jews are deported or executed as the war progresses (Uris 234-235). As such, the journal in *Mila 18* plays an important role in the novel's representation of the Holocaust.

In the first part of the novel, the journal primarily offers insights into the political circumstances leading up to the Second World War. Brandel, anticipating the war, employs the journal to record political tensions between Germany, Russia and the Allies. As such, the reader is introduced to the 1939 non-aggression pact between Germany and the Soviet Union, and Poland's refusal to answer Allied pleadings that it negotiates for help from Russia (Uris 5, 24). Thus, Uris provides the reader with important background information, which helps in understanding the sometimes incomprehensible and often illogical political decisions in the plot. For instance, the journal entries clarify why Poland makes the absurd decision to meet the Germans in battle and thereby "[asking] the horse to fight the tank" by explaining about the stubborn pride of the Polish people (Uris 10, 93). In other words, in the first part of the novel, the journal provides the readers with political insight into the prewar tensions.

Once the Nazis have successfully invaded Poland, from the onset of part two of Uris' novel, the journal enables Uris to disclose to his readers the historical changes the Nazis enforced onto Polish society without disrupting the pace of the plot. For example, Uris includes a large number of shocking but historically accurate directives that were implemented by the Germans, ranging from relatively innocent notices defining the term 'Jew', to directives heralding the gruesome violence that was to come: "DIRECTIVE: ALL JEWS MUST REGISTER IMMEDIATELY AT THE JEWISH CIVIL AUTHORITY AT GRZYBOWSKA 28 FOR ISSUANCE OF KENNKARTEN AND RATION BOOKS. FAILURE TO DO SO IS PUNISHABLE BY DEATH" (Uris 128). By presenting these directives directly into the journal, Uris informs the reader of the changes the Nazis made to the social environment of the novel's characters without the need for additional explanatory

passages in the plot detailing the consequences of these changes. Thus, the journal also has a summarizing function.

On top of this, the journal contains reported observations of Brandel, who paints a grim picture of Polish society under German occupation. A clear example of this can be found in a 1941 entry, in which Brandel recounts how Nazis marched 53 innocent ghetto inhabitants to a nearby Jewish cemetery to be executed: “we have had mass executions at the cemetery before. Usually a group accused of ‘criminal’ activities or intellectuals. Never have fifty-three people been indiscriminately lopped off without excuse. [We] are rather certain this mass execution was a test case” (Uris 245-246). Thus, as this example shows, Uris not only employs the journal to disclose actual Nazi directives, he also uses the journal as a means to transfer knowledge of the horrific violence inflicted upon the Jews to the reader; contextual knowledge that needs to be revealed and which, in the novel, contributes to the development of an accurate representation of the Holocaust, but which nonetheless has no actual place in the novel’s plot. In a similar fashion, the journal allows Uris to concisely relate the course of the Warsaw Uprising whenever the pace of the plot does not permit detailed digression. Because of its summarizing qualities, the journal not only provides Uris with a means to compress certain uneventful episodes of the revolt, it also offers the reader a clear and concise overview of the final battle of the Warsaw Jews.

Thus, Uris’ fictional journal has a number of functions, all of which contribute to the reader’s understanding of the historical Holocaust. Not only does it provide the reader with insight into the political and social circumstances in Poland before and during the German occupation, it also allows Uris to incorporate historical events that would have been difficult to incorporate into the plot otherwise. As such, the journal is one of Uris’ most powerful tools in providing the reader with an accurate representation of the Holocaust.

Nevertheless, the majority of the historical information provided in *Mila 18* can be

deduced from the plot itself. In fact, while many journal entries are indeed shocking reminders of the horrors inflicted on the Jewish people during the Second World War, it is the casual dialogue between Uris' characters and seemingly trivial incidents that manage to conjure the most powerful image of the Holocaust. For example, a striking illustration of the anti-Semitic attitude in prewar Poland can be found in a conversation between Andrei and Gabriela Rak, in which Andrei tries to explain to the Catholic Gabriela why the two of them could never be romantically involved. When Gabriela asks him why Andrei has rejected her, Andrei merely states that he is a Jew, dispassionately adding, "in Poland it is the general consensus [Jews] use nice tender young Catholic girls like [her] for sacrificial offerings" (Uris 42). Pressed for his reasons for becoming a Zionist, Andrei replies "because, miss Rak, the Polish people have not allowed us to own or farm land" (Uris 43). These casual statements do not merely educate Gabriela about how the Polish people regarded their Jewish countrymen before the Second World War, they also supplement and enrich the image the reader has of the historical Holocaust. Moreover, by introducing the reader to the bloody history of the Jewish people in Europe, Uris illustrates how social exclusion and prejudice can lead to extreme violence.

However, Uris not only includes subtly interwoven facts about the problematic history of the Jews in Europe prior to the Second World War in the plot of *Mila 18*, the novel also contains numerous in-plot examples of the horrors inflicted on the Jewish people during the Second World War. Markedly, these instances of anti-Semitic violence are rarely told from the perspective of one of Uris' main characters. Although *Mila 18* is narrated from an omniscient, third-person point of view, acts of anti-Semitic violence are rarely narrated by the narrator. Instead, they are usually related by one of the novel's characters. For instance, the reader learns about the Nazis' treatment of hidden Jews when Gabriela insists on joining the

Jewish underground movement and Andrei tries to talk her out of it by telling her how two female underground runners – the Farber sisters – died:

After the Gestapo finished with them they were turned over to the Reinhard Corps barracks for sport. Stutze led the parade. A hundred more of his sportsmen followed. They continued raping them for hours after they were dead. Raping their corpses. (Uris 305)

While Uris could have chosen to graphically represent the fate of the Farber sisters by incorporating the event in the plot and having it narrated by the omniscient narrator, describing in detail the helplessness of the victims and the ferocity of the perpetrators, he instead allows one of his characters to briefly inform the reader of the atrocities performed by the Nazis.

In other words, by using different narrative techniques to incorporate a vast range of historical information and fact, Uris provides the readers of *Mila 18* with an intricate representation of the Holocaust, which, consequently, aids in the readers' understanding of the historic Holocaust. Strikingly, however, Uris' novel includes almost no passages directly depicting the violence the Nazis inflicted upon the Jewish people. In fact, it appears that, in *Mila 18*, Uris made the conscious decision to exclude graphic representations of anti-Semitic violence in order to change the image of the Jewish people in 1960s America.

#### **4.4.3 – Shifting the Focus on Jewish Heroism**

As explained in chapter 4.3, the reputation of the Jews as it existed in America's cultural memory during the war was exceedingly negative. As Gregory Shealy observes in *Culture Wars: An Encyclopedia of Issues, Viewpoints and Voices*, from the early 1900s to the 1940s, "American Jews experienced many forms of discrimination" (28, 29). However, after the war ended and people became more aware of the Holocaust, the American public grew "more sympathetic to Jews at home and abroad" and began "examining examples of their own

discrimination against Jews” (Shealy 28). As a result, during the 1950s, American Jewry slowly gained more and more acceptance in American society (Shealy 28). Uris’ fiction – as well as his public persona – played an important role in the emancipation of the American Jews. Although Uris’ literature has often been criticized because of supposed aesthetic shortcomings and the fact that he, as an author, appears to favor action and graphic representation over emotional depth and reflection, a close reading of *Mila 18* shows that Uris actively employs the graphicness in his novel to change the image of ‘the Jew’ in the minds of his American readers (Nadel 2, 135).

In order to illustrate this idea, an understanding of Uris’ use of graphic details in *Mila 18* is crucial. While Ira Nadel calls *Mila 18* a “graphic account of Jewish resistance”, its representations of Jewish suffering are not very graphic in comparison to other first-wave Holocaust fiction (132). For instance, although the aforementioned passage in which Andrei informs both Gabriela and the reader of the Farber sisters’ fate contains shocking facts, it can hardly be defined as a graphic representation of the occurred event. After all, Andrei merely states, quite plainly, what happened to two Jewish runners who got caught on the wrong side of the ghetto wall. Had Uris wanted to present the reader with a graphic representation of their deaths, he could have narrated the event as it happened, shifting the focus of character onto one of the Farber sisters. However, instead of providing his readers with an undoubtedly gruesome passage, Uris ensures that the reader is informed of the event by carefully interweaving the information into his characters’ dialogue. In other words, despite his reputation of favoring “macho action”, and the effort he goes through to provide his readers with an intricate, three-dimensional image of the historical Holocaust, Uris also appears to keep certain horrific details from his readers that need not necessarily be narrated in order for the reader to understand the severity of the crimes committed by the Nazis (Nadel 8).

Even when terrible violence is inflicted upon key characters, Uris prefers to

communicate this to the reader through inter-character dialogue, rather than describing the events in a graphic way. In the case of the Farber sisters, one might argue that Uris may not have wanted to fully narrate their deaths because they were only minor characters; Uris never shifts the focus of character onto them and the reader is only familiar with their names because they were occasionally mentioned by the other characters. However, even if the character suffering abuse is a key figure, Uris seems to deliberately distance the readers from a graphical representation of the brutality. For instance, when the Gestapo arrests one of the novel's heroes, Wolf Brandel, the reader only witnesses a brief interrogation (Uris 250-256). It is only later, after Wolf has been released again, that the reader learns the horrific details of the Gestapo investigation:

Alex and Sylvia sat in their room, ghost-faces, drained of life. Neither of them had spoken a word for an hour since Wolf had left to go to Rachael.

Andrei knocked softly and entered.

“Dr. Glazer examined him. None of the dog bites are infected. He’ll be all right.” (Uris 261)

Another striking example that demonstrates how Uris seems to deliberately withhold explicit details and denies his readers a graphic representation of the violence inflicted on a Jewish protagonist can be found in the final chapter of *Mila 18*. When the Nazis discover the location of the bunker at Mila 18 and throw poison gas grenades down to kill the Jewish people hiding there, three of Uris' main characters are killed (Uris 239-545). However, instead of focusing on their gruesome final moments, Uris interrupts their struggle by shifting the narration onto events happening elsewhere. When another protagonist enters the bunker moments later to try and help his fellow Fighters, the reader learns the fate of the people in the bunker:

“Simon!”

Andrei rolled over the body of his commander. Simon Eden was dead. And then the light fell

on the lifeless face of Alexander Brandel holding his infant Moses against his chest.

He turned the corpses over one by one. Fighters who had tried to hold back the civilians.  
Children... children... children... and the light poked at the bricks removed to the sewer.

“Deborah!”

He knelt behind the body of his sister, who hung half in, half out of the room, stricken down  
while passing a child through the sewer to the safety of Mila 19. (Uris 544-545)

Again, Uris hints at the atrociousness of his characters’ degrading last moments without actually narrating the event, thus avoiding the necessity to enter into graphic details. This indicates that Uris did not want the horrors inflicted upon his people to be the ‘attraction’ of the book, but rather that he wanted to present his readers with an image of Jews fighting for their survival.

This corresponds with Uris’ wish to change the reputation of the Jews in the United States. According to Cheryl Lynn Greenberg in *Troubling the Waters: Black-Jewish Relations in the American Century*, as a Jewish child growing up in the South of the United States Uris had to endure severe discrimination and bigotry, which would eventually turn him into an activist determined to eradicate anti-Semitic prejudice in America by changing the image of the Jews through his novels (94). Although *Mila 18*, as a Holocaust novel, certainly features a large number of suffering Jews, Uris convincingly manages to shift the focus of the novel to Jews who resist oppression and abuse. And while Uris refuses to present his readers with graphic details of Jews being tortured or murdered, he provides his readers with a large number of graphically narrated passages that feature his Jewish protagonists courageously enduring hardships in their determination to survive.

For example, when Nazis raid the ghetto in search of Jews and hiding places and Andrei, Christopher, Wolf and Simon are forced to hide in a cramped space in the sub-roof of a building for thirty hours, Uris narrates the event in great graphic detail:

The four men were locked in a lightless coffin. They lay inside a triangle formed by beams, rafters and the wall. Each man lay on two three-inch boards which supported his body at his calves, thighs, back and shoulders. Beneath the beams was a rotted floor, part of which extended into the eaves, directly over the street.

The face of one man touched the feet of another end to end. Their movement was limited to a few inches. [...] The beams cut into their bodies, but no one dared change his position. The slightest sound now could give them away. [...]

An hour passed. Then two, then three. [...] Andrei sniffed. He came out of his trance slowly. Smoke! The brick chimney next to him was becoming warm. [...] Their hiding place turned into a stifling furnace. The sweat gushed from their bodies, driving them deeper into agony. Whiffs of smoke slithered into the eaves through the crumbled mortar. Andrei gagged and twisted his head to the slit in the eaves to try to suck in a whiff of pure air. (Uris 412, 416)

Although the passage goes on for a few pages, revealing how the men pass in and out of consciousness from hunger, pain and lack of oxygen, this brief example clearly illustrates how Uris ensures that even the slightest detail of his characters' heroic ordeal is depicted in an exceedingly graphic manner. In other words, it seems that, in *Mila 18*, Uris only makes use of graphic representations in order to convey to the reader the strength and courage of his Jewish characters, even if it means depicting Jews who suffer. Apparently, it is only the suffering of Jews at the mercy of the Nazis that Uris refuses to directly narrate or represent in a graphic way.

Thus, while Uris' novel features a large number of passages in which Jewish suffering is graphically presented and correspondingly narrated by the third-person narrator, these passages focus on instances where Uris' characters are suffering from self-induced hardships while defying their Nazi oppressors, rather than events where Jews are being tortured or murdered. In other words, Uris apparently refuses to depict his Jewish characters as victims, instead portraying his protagonists as strong, heroic individuals fighting for survival. This is not only consistent with Uris' desire to alter the reputation of the Jews in America, the fact

that *Mila 18* depicts Jews fighting against oppression instead of meekly accepting their annihilation, struck a nerve in many Americans, who suddenly felt they could identify with the victims of the Holocaust (Rosenberg 15; Raphael 101). As such, *Mila 18* does not merely inform the reader of the historic Holocaust, the way Uris chose to depict the Warsaw Jews also positively altered the reputation of the Jewish people in the minds of many Americans in the 1960s.

#### 4.4.4 – Conclusion

In short, *Mila 18* is not merely an action packed novel narrating the 1943 Warsaw ghetto revolt; it is a carefully constructed, detailed representation of the historical Holocaust in Poland. Throughout the novel, Uris employs different narrative techniques to incorporate a wealth of historic fact into his novel without disturbing the pace of the plot or weighing the plot down, and includes various degrees of graphic detail in order to convey to the reader not only a convincing image of the Holocaust, but also a striking image of the Warsaw Jews. Uris does not limit himself to informing his readers of the appalling conditions in the Warsaw ghetto, but also provides his readers with extensive information about the concentration camps, the train deportations and the persecution of the Jewish people throughout history. In other words, Uris ensures that the reader gains a thorough understanding of the social and political circumstances surrounding the historic Holocaust in Poland, and, consequently, enhances the overall Holocaust understanding of his American audience.

As such, *Mila 18* is an important piece of American Holocaust literature. Not only did it help move the Holocaust to the forefront of American consciousness in a time when most Americans were not comfortable confronting the subject, it also provided American readers with valuable information on the Holocaust when academic Holocaust discussion in the United States was scarce.

Although it is impossible to determine whether the fact that *Mila 18* conveys such a

broad representation of the Holocaust in Poland – thereby making the horrors of the Holocaust and the situations in Europe during Second World War comprehensible to a large American audience – has contributed to its popularity as a novel, the fact remains that the novel, due to its rich historic detail and status as a bestseller, was ideally suited to shape the image of the Holocaust in the cultural memory of the American public in the early 1960s. Furthermore, by focusing on Jews determinedly fighting for their survival in the face of their apparent destruction, *Mila 18* played a major role in the emancipation of the Jewish community in American society.

In other words, because *Mila 18* was one of the first written sources available to the American public that extensively addressed the subject of the Holocaust, and was, more importantly, devoured by the American public, it helped shape the image of both the Holocaust and the Jewish people in the cultural memory of America. Because the cultural memory of a social group in turn shapes the way group members regard a specific event, it is apparent how the way the Holocaust and European Jewry are represented in *Mila 18* could have influenced later generations of Holocaust fiction.

## Conclusions

To conclude, the way Uris, as a first-wave Jewish-American Holocaust author, employs and represents the Holocaust in *Mila 18* differs greatly from how postmemory-generation Jewish-American Holocaust author Rosenbaum and third-generation Jewish-American Holocaust author Zimler employ and represent the event in respectively *The Golems of Gotham* and *The Seventh Gate*. Where Uris writing in the 1960s apparently aimed to educate his readers about atrocities committed in a recent historic event, Rosenbaum and Zimler, as contemporary Holocaust authors, do not provide their readers with an equally intricate Holocaust representation. Rather, Rosenbaum and Zimler, writing in a cultural climate in which knowledge of the Holocaust is considered abundant and ubiquitous, focus their attention on other aspects of the Holocaust. Instead of providing their readers with an answer as to what exactly happened during the Holocaust, which Uris strives to do in *Mila 18*, Rosenbaum's *The Golems of Gotham* explores if it is possible to move on from such a traumatic historic event, while Zimler aims to understand how the Holocaust could have happened. In other words, the three analyzed novels all seem to have a highly different focal point.

The different ways in which the Holocaust is employed in the analyzed novels reflects these disparate focal points. In *Mila 18*, the reader is invited into the very center of the Holocaust; the Holocaust is everywhere. In *The Golems of Gotham*, on the other hand, the Holocaust is neither narrated nor directly represented. Rather, it takes the form of a hazy memory of the past the novel's protagonist cannot quite put his finger on, and as such mirrors how members of the postmemory-generation possibly experience the event. In *The Seventh Gate*, the Holocaust is merely a contextual element, a presence in the background, almost a warning, which in turn appears to reflect how contemporary society looks back upon the Holocaust.

These differences in focal points and perspectives on the Holocaust are likely caused by the fact that the authors of these novels all occupy different temporal and spatial positions in relation to the Holocaust, and, at the time of writing, were surrounded by highly diverse cultural Holocaust memories. Uris, writing in a time when people knew little about the Holocaust and a cultural Holocaust memory was yet to be formed in America, perhaps felt the need to tell his readers about what happened, and thus incorporated collective Holocaust memories of survivors of the Warsaw ghetto within his novel. Rosenbaum and Zimler, on the other hand, wrote their Holocaust fiction in a time in which an American cultural Holocaust memory had already been formed. Rosenbaum, influenced by his parents' personal memories and experiences of the event, naturally incorporated this close emotional relation to the Holocaust, and how having experienced the trauma of the Holocaust continues to affect the lives of Holocaust survivors and their descendants, within *The Golems of Gotham*, while Zimler, lacking a direct connection to the Holocaust, utilizes his emotional and temporal distance from the Holocaust in order to explore questions about morality in the face of death and the complexity of human nature in *The Seventh Gate*.

Although it is very difficult, if not impossible, to determine to what degree *Mila 18* has influenced America's cultural Holocaust memory, and therefore possibly Rosenbaum's and Zimler's images of the Holocaust, the fact remains that first-wave American Holocaust fiction has greatly contributed to the formation of America's cultural Holocaust memory. Of course, there are numerous other sources that have also contributed to its current shape and content, including various contemporary factors, but this thesis, especially my research on *Mila 18*, demonstrates that the role of first-wave American Holocaust literature nevertheless should not be underestimated.

Unfortunately, due to the small scope of this thesis and the vast array of literary texts available for study, my research on how first-wave Jewish-American Holocaust fiction has

influenced America's cultural Holocaust memory, and, consequently, succeeding generations of American Holocaust literature, and how Holocaust representations in first-wave, second-generation, and third-generation Jewish-American Holocaust literature rely on America's ever-changing cultural Holocaust memory, can only be considered incomplete. In order to come to concrete conclusions, my research on Holocaust transmission in Jewish-American literature in relation to America's cultural Holocaust memory would have to be applied on a much larger scale, including numerous literary works by different authors belonging to the above-described categories.

Having said that, research on the transmission of Holocaust memory can form the basis of other research concerned with the transmission of trauma memory. Researchers may want to examine the representations in literature of other culturally traumatic historic events, such as the 2001 September 11 attacks in America or the 1945 atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan, and examine pivotal moments of change in its literary representation. Furthermore, research on Holocaust memory transmission in Jewish-American literature, because of the enormity of this gruesome historic event and its many representations in literature, also provides insight into the role of the media in the formation of a society's cultural memory of a given topic, as it allows scholars to analyze the difference between past representations of a traumatic event and contemporary representations, and how past and contemporary media have influenced these representations and, consequently, the cultural memory that was available to the author.

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## **Appendix: Richard Zimler's Email to the Author**

Van: Richard Zimler [rczimler@netcabo.pt]

Verzonden: vrijdag 27 februari 2015 18:02

Aan: Klashorst, N. van de (Noë)

Onderwerp: from Richard Zimler

Dear Noe van de Klashorst,

Thank you for writing! I'm thrilled that you will include *The Seventh Gate* in your master's thesis. Thank you for letting me know.

"*The Warsaw Anagrams*" was published in Holland by Karakter, but - unfortunately - it didn't sell very well. I don't think they were able to get any publicity for it. Karakter was going to publish "*The Seventh Gate*", as well, but they changed their minds because of the mediocre sales.

I understand what you say about Sophie. "Finding her" (coming to know her) was a gradual process, but I started with the idea that she loved Berlin and loved certain aspects of German culture (Expressionist films, Goethe, Beethoven, etc...). She couldn't imagine living anywhere but Berlin, which may have been the most progressive city in the world at the time. I thought it might make for a unique novel if I wrote from the point of view of a girl who LOVES Berlin and German culture. After all, even today we have so many prejudices against the Germans. And most novels about the Holocaust are written by people who have great contempt for all things German.

Also, I believe it is important to remember that there were heroic Germans who did everything they could to stop Hitler and his friends. And so many thousands of disabled people who were sterilized and murdered! No one wants to think about them, even today!

I was briefly in Nijmegen last year. Sorry we didn't meet.

I have never read Mila 18, but since you say it is good, I will make room for it when I am reading again. I am busy right now with an historical novel I'm writing.

I have met Thane a couple of times. I didn't like his novel "Second-Hand Smoke". Between you and me, I thought the last 100 pages were very poorly written. I didn't believe the characters. But I am willing to believe that "Golems of Gotham" is much better.

I am not too busy to discuss these matters with you.

My earliest impressions of the Holocaust come mostly from my mother. Her mother and father immigrated to the USA around 1905, from Poland. They had lived and worked in a small city called Brzeziny, near Lodz. My grandfather was a tailor. When they came to the USA, my grandmother left 8 brothers and sisters back in Poland. One joined her in New York a few years later. So 7 brothers and sisters remained in Poland. When the Nazis occupied Poland, they were all there, along with their children, in-laws, cousins, etc.... All of them were put in ghettos and then sent to the death camps, mostly to Treblinka. Only one person - among many dozens - survived: a first cousin of my mother's, who was working at the time in Brussels. He and his wife were arrested but they survived. They had two children after the war. I am friends with one of them. She still lives in Brussels with her husband. Her name is Anny. I shall see her again in June.

I mention all this because my mother would NEVER buy any German products - no food, no appliances, no cars. No one in my extended family would ever visit Germany or Poland, of course (I did a book tour in Poland in 2011, so that was amazing for me). My mother always spoke about the anti-Semitism in Poland very bitterly. And she always spoke very bitterly about the Holocaust, so I grew up knowing that our family had lost many dozens of relatives in the death camps.

I also saw films of the liberation of the camps when I was very young - on television, I suppose. Films such as "Night and Fog". Obviously, the site of the skeletal bodies being dumped in ditches made a big impression on me.

When I was an adolescent and young adult, I started reading about the Holocaust. The best writer I discovered at that time was Primo Levi. I always recommend his books to anyone interested in finding out more.

I read the "Diary of Anne Frank" when I was 21 and that had a big impression on me. Going to her home in Amsterdam was a devastating experience for me, because it made what had happened to her and so many others so real. I visited her house when I was 21, on my first trip to Europe. (In 1977). I have not returned since. I suppose it left me a bit traumatized.

As an adolescent and young adult, I also saw many films that had directly or indirectly to do with Nazism and the Holocaust, including "Cabaret", "The Garden of the Finzi-Continis", "Le vieil homme et l'enfant", "The Great Escape", "Stalag 17", "The Man in the Glass Booth", "The Diary of Anne Frank", "Exodus", "The Pawnbroker", "The Odessa File", "Seven Beauties", "Sophie's Choice," "Au revoir les enfants"....

I also saw the play of "The Man in the Glass Both" on Broadway, with Donald Pleasance.

Later, when I was about 30, I started reading more about the Holocaust. One book that had a big impression on me was "The Nazi Doctors" by Robert Jay Lifton, because I had always heard about the terrible experiments done by Mengele and his colleagues, and I wanted to know more about it.

I have never visited any of the death camps. I do not want to go. I lived in the skin of Erik Cohen (The Warsaw Anagrams) and Sophie and Isaac for many years, and those were

wonderful and important experiences for me. I do not believe I will have much to gain from visiting Auschwitz or the other camps.

I did visit one small prisoner of war camp in the Alsace. That was enough.

To write *The Seventh Gate*, I read maybe 20 books about the Holocaust, everything from "The War Against the Jews" by Lucy Dawidowicz to "Outcast" by Inge Deutschkron to specific books about the treatment of disabled people ("Deaf People in Hitler's Europe" for example). I also read a great deal about other topics to write the book, such as autism, Expressionist films, Berlin, etc... And I got a great map of Berlin from the early 20th century.

Here is the link to my article about my book tour in Poland in 2011:

<http://talkingwriting.com/a-tale-of-two-polands>

Another article about my writing and Judaism came out last month in a Jewish American magazine:

<http://www.momentmag.com/richard-zimler-last-kabbalist-lisbon/>

These articles may give you some more ideas about my relationship to Judaism and other traditions. Happy to discuss all that with you.

Thanks again for writing.

All the best,

Richard

P.S. I am not sure if most Americans have any clear idea of the Holocaust - they do not even have a clear idea of slavery or the Civil War, much less European history!