



**HITLER ON LYGON STREET:
LILY BRETTE AND SECOND GENERATION
JEWISH SUFFERING.**

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**I have walked through Melbourne
as though it were Warsaw**

**on guard for the Gestapo
in fear of informers**

(Brett, Poland 133)

ABSTRACT

In the last decades of the twentieth century the Holocaust became a significant source of identification for Jewish people throughout the diaspora, including in Australia. The collective memory of the Holocaust has become so significant that contemporary critics have coined the term “Holocaust industry” to explain the production of, and ready market for, multiple forms of Holocaust representation. Within this context, an author such as Lily Brett, a child of Polish Jewish Holocaust survivors, finds a ready market for her representation of the Holocaust and its effects in contemporary societies. This thesis discusses this author’s work, both in terms of the themes explored in her writing, as well as the political and historical contexts that have assured a growing international readership. It is argued that Brett’s representation of the affects of the Holocaust on children of survivors, herself included, provides a space for remembering that is particularly intimate and affective. Brett’s writing is also part of an expanding Holocaust market for narratives from the “next” generation. The thesis explores the interrelationship between history, memory, identity and literature to explain both the themes of Brett’s writing, and how this writing is shaped by, and shapes, contemporary discourses on Jewish identity and the Holocaust.

DECLARATION

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being available for loan and photocopying.

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INTRODUCTION: MEMORY, HISTORY, IDENTITY AND LITERATURE.

Over the last thirty years the Holocaust has come to represent one of the most significant events of the twentieth century, if not, more broadly, a defining moment - of rupture - in Western history, culture and philosophy. More particularly, the Shoah (the Jewish name for the Holocaust) has come to represent a pivotal moment in Jewish history. As Sander Gilman explains:

If there is a postmodern reading of the center/periphery model which dominates the writing of "Diaspora" Jewish history in the 1990s it is the translation of the center from that of "Jerusalem" to that of the "Holocaust." Such a reading of the "Shoah," "Holocaust," "Churban" as the new center of Jewish history and historiography makes all of the rest of Jewish history into a new periphery (3).

Thus, as Gilman contends, it becomes increasingly necessary to re-think Jewish history metaphorically or teleologically in terms of this new understanding of the centre: "Readings of Jewish history from the Middle Ages to the 1920s become preparatory for the Holocaust. Studies of anti-Semitism as a European phenomenon come to make sense only in terms of its relationship to the new center, the Holocaust" (Gilman 3-4).

Just as the Shoah has become central to, and centred in, Jewish history, so too, and consequently, has it become central to Jewish identity. Jewish identity, which has always been invested in a history of persecution, suffering and survival, has been re-centred on this story of suffering and survival through a contemporary focus on the Shoah. Not only, however, has the Shoah affected the identity of those who survived, and those from the surviving generation, but the Shoah has also greatly influenced how the children of that surviving generation, and those who have come after the Holocaust, understand and live their "Jewishness."¹

However, this contemporary focus on the Holocaust as a new centre for Jewish identity is a relatively recent phenomena. Historical events, such as the Holocaust, come into prominence at particular times, in particular ways, for a number of reasons. At other times,

¹ I use inverted commas here to acknowledge that the signifier Jewishness contains multiple signifieds that are diverse, changing and contested.

events are forgotten, or at least not legitimised and given the space for public memorialisation. In the twenty years or so after the end of World War II, the plight of the Jews was *not* publicly recognised as an event unique from the general suffering of the war. Then from the mid 1960s onward, there was a growing recognition of the particular fate of the European Jews and the need to remember the Holocaust not only as a Jewish catastrophe (Shoah), but as a catastrophe for the Western “civilised” world. Why this changed and why we have now reached a situation of so called Holocaust “saturation”² is a question that will be addressed in the first half of this thesis. Today throughout the diaspora, the Holocaust as a collective memory is supported and maintained by what has become known as the “Holocaust industry.” Institutions as various as Jewish organisations, academic institutions, art institutions, museums and the media continue to represent the Holocaust as an event that cannot be forgotten, and as an event with unique lessons to be learnt.³ Before discussing Holocaust remembrance though, it is important to discuss the understanding of “memory” and “history” that I will be applying in this thesis.

History and Memory

One of the most influential commentaries on memory and history in the field of cultural studies is Pierre Nora’s “Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Memoire*” published in Representations in 1989. In this, now famous article, Nora writes: “We speak so much of memory because there is so little of it left” (7). Nora posits an opposition between “memory” and “history” arguing that “memory” is being lost to “history.” Explaining the difference between his conception of “memory” and “history,” Nora argues that memory and history are not synonymous, but rather in opposition. Memory, Nora argues, “is life,” it is in “permanent evolution,” “open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting,” unconscious of its transformations and vulnerable to “manipulation and appropriation” (8). History, on the other hand, is the reconstruction “of what is no longer.” While memory is a “perpetually actual phenomenon,” history is a mere representation of the past (Nora 8). History calls for analysis and criticism, while memory “installs remembrance within the sacred” (Nora 9).

² This is a term adopted by Tim Cole in Selling the Holocaust: From Auschwitz to Schindler - How History is Bought, Packaged, and Sold. New York: Routledge, 1999.

³ See for example the controversial study of American Holocaust consciousness by Peter Novick The Holocaust and Collective Memory: the American Experience. 2001. I draw on Novick’s text in Chapter Three in particular.

This drive toward “history” - that which is a “cold” representation of the past - is an acceleration of forgetfulness. Nora argues that history brings complacency, and an “artificial” as opposed to an organic form of remembering. This new form of remembering, official history, has borne the need for “sites of memory:” “There are *lieux de memoire*, sites of memory, because there are no longer *milieux de memoire*, real environments of memory (Nora 7). Remembering once done in an organic way within the everyday practice of societies, is now posited in sites that must do the memory work for us. Thus, we have witnessed the rise of museums, archives, monuments, cemeteries, anniversaries, commemorations and so on, all of which mark, Nora says, “the rituals of a society without ritual” (12).

Lilian Weissberg also recognises this rise in public memorialisation, although she does not use the term “history” to describe this process. Weissberg instead, describes the political and public forms of memory that were borne through the needs of the nation state. She argues that since the latter part of the eighteenth century, the political need for memory has been particularly important. The birth of nation states not only called for a common future, but also a common past (Weissberg 12). Weissberg writes:

Monuments urged the individual to remember, but to remember and define each individual as a member of a larger group. Museums were constructed as national museums and opened to the public as institutions representative of a shared past. A person was to be defined not only as an individual, but within the bounds of a national identity as well, one that was constructed by symbolic acts like festivals or commemorations. For this process of socialization, memory became an increasingly important tool (12-13).

Weissberg’s understanding of memory then, is similar to Nora’s understanding of “history”, it is the public and political uses of memory that mark our age. This “modern” memory, according to Nora, relies “entirely on the materiality of the trace, the immediacy of the recording, the visibility of the image” (13). The less we experience memory from what Nora calls “the inside,” the more it exists through its “exterior scaffolding and outward signs” (13). Thus, we now live in an age that is obsessed with recording, where remembering is relegated to the archive: “Memory has been wholly absorbed by its meticulous reconstitution” (Nora 13). One only has to think of the establishment of the Spielberg Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation (established in 1994 after the release of

Schindler's List), whose archives are dedicated to the recording of Holocaust survivors' testimonies. While approximately fifty thousand eyewitness testimonies in fifty seven countries (including Australia) and thirty two languages have been recorded, what purpose, beyond the archiving, these testimonies will serve is still questionable.⁴

The fact that we are, in Western societies, so dedicated to recording the archive, and especially in regard to the Holocaust, is evidence of what Nora terms a "veneration of the trace" (13). With the appearance of the trace we are no longer in the realm of "true memory" writes Nora, but in the realm of "history" (8).⁵ This shift from "memory" to "history" has not only seen the rising importance of the official historian, but has more broadly affected all individuals and groups. As Nora writes:

The passage from memory to history has required every social group to redefine its identity through the revitalization of its own history. The task of remembering makes everyone his (sic) own historian. The demand for history has thus largely overflowed the circle of professional historians. Those who have long been marginalized in traditional history are not the only ones haunted by the need to recover their buried pasts. Following the example of ethnic groups and social minorities, every established group, intellectual or not, learned or not, has felt the need to go in search of its own origins and identity (15).

This search for origins, for group identity through "history," has elevated the importance of even the most humble objects as trace (Nora 17). In Chapter Six, I discuss some of these humble objects that do "memory work" for Lily Brett's protagonist in Too Many Men. I will also discuss how the trace of lost places has become a basis for an identity uniquely tied to the loss borne of the Holocaust.

While Nora's understanding of the loss of "true" memory and the rise of "history" have influenced critics working in the fields of history and cultural studies, his concepts of

⁴ On the official Shoah Foundation website (www.vhf.org) the mission statement includes: "To overcome prejudice, intolerance, and bigotry - and the suffering they cause - through the educational use of the Foundation's visual history testimonies." The site also says that the Foundation: "is committed to ensuring the broad and effective educational use of its archive worldwide." However, how the use of this archive will overcome prejudice and bigotry is not explained, except through the hope that by educating about past atrocities and suffering, further suffering can be avoided. Given the continuing state of affairs, and the many acts of genocide still occurring, this is yet to be achieved.

⁵ Nora argues that before this age of the archive, memory was embodied in communities' rituals and oral narrative traditions (Nora 8).

“memory” and “history” have also, quite rightly, been problematised. Dominick LaCapra, for example, writes: “Nora feels that something essential has been lost, and - whether or not the loss is itself imaginary - the very opposition between history and memory serves to commemorate and assuage it” (LaCapra 19). However, LaCapra argues that the obvious interjection to Nora is that while memory and history are not identical, memory is certainly not opposite to history. The problem of the interaction between memory and history, LaCapra argues, is oversimplified by a categorical opposition (19). Instead, LaCapra maintains that history and memory have an “open dialectical exchange” that never attains full closure (20). Memory is more and less than history, and history is more and less than memory. LaCapra states:

History may never capture certain elements of memory: the feel of an experience, the intensity of joy or suffering, the quality of an occurrence. Yet history also includes elements that are not exhausted by memory, such as demographic, ecological, and economic factors. More important, perhaps, it tests memory and ideally leads to the emergence of both a more accurate memory and a clearer appraisal of what is or is not factual in remembrance (20).

Like LaCapra, Paula Hamilton also contests Pierre Nora’s thesis on history and memory when she writes: “I want to argue for an integral relationship, an essential interdependence between memory and history, despite claims of great tension and conflict” (Hamilton 12). Like Hamilton and LaCapra, I work from the premise that memory and history are interdependent and cannot be understood as opposed but as existing in a “questioning interaction” (LaCapra 20). However, this is not to take a position of opposition to Nora. Nora’s contention that history is surpassing memory is valid inasmuch as his terms of reference “history” and “memory” are understood. What has been, or is being, lost is a particular kind of “memory” with the rise of a contemporary understanding of “history.” The veneration of the trace that marks this rise of “history” finds its full expression, I argue, in the rise of the “Holocaust industry” in this age of the archive.

The other important field of inquiry in regard to memory and history relevant to this thesis comes from the sociologist and predecessor to Nora, Maurice Halbwachs. Halbwachs’

sociological perspective on memory and its collective nature,⁶ has also had increasing influence in the field of cultural studies. Halbwachs, like Nora, argues that we cannot think of memory as only an individual phenomenon, but must acknowledge that all memory is structured by, and a product of, the societies in which we live. No person is an isolated being, and a purely psychological understanding of individual memory fails to understand how that memory is formed within society. In On Collective Memory, Halbwachs writes: “One cannot in fact think about the events of one’s past without discoursing upon them. But to discourse upon something means to connect within a single system of ideas our opinions as well as those of our circle” (53).

The relationship therefore, between the individual and the collective, or the group, is dialectic: “One may say that the individual remembers by placing himself (sic) in the perspective of the group, but one may also affirm that the memory of the group realizes and manifests itself in individual memories” (Halbwachs 40). One of the most important collective frameworks that structures these individual memories, is of course, language. Halbwachs argues that there are no recollections outside of language and it is language that allows the reconstruction of the past. As Liliane Weissberg, also commenting on the role of language, writes:

Memory seems to answer expectations and is already framed by the answers it seeks. Language is an important factor in this equation. Words that are formed by social life, and that appear intelligible, offer themselves as both recollections and the language in which we recall. Language itself is already a system of social conventions that makes the reconstruction of “our own” past impossible (14).

Thus, we are never outside the language system in which we live, think, and remember, and in this way never outside of intelligible collective structures of meaning. An analysis of the evolution of the term “Holocaust” as a descriptor for the Jewish catastrophe under the Third Reich will reveal that until the word “Holocaust” was devised to describe this event there was little public recognition of the event being unique in itself. With the naming of the event came the revision of the history. Similarly, before the term genocide was coined to describe the systematic and deliberate attempt to exterminate the Jews, the destruction of the

⁶ Hamilton explains that ‘Collective Memory’ was a term first used by sociologist Maurice Halbwachs in 1925 in The Social Framework of Memory, then extended upon in On Collective Memory published posthumously in 1950. Halbwachs, she argues, was the first theorist of memory as a social phenomenon (Hamilton 19).

Jews was *understood differently* given the available terminology at hand. Thus, how this history was remembered changed with changing terminology. Recent, and very heated, debates in Australia over the use of the word genocide to describe the history of Australia's Indigenous peoples, is a very good example of the politics of naming, and remembering.⁷ However, throughout this thesis I discuss the changing understanding of the Jewish catastrophe, and how this has been indicated through, and influenced by, changing terminology.

This example of language demonstrates well how memories change according to contemporary conditions of remembering. This relationship between past events, memories, current conditions and the collective, is most eloquently explained by Halbwachs:

We preserve memories of each epoch in our lives, and these are continually reproduced; through them, as by a continual relationship, a sense of our identity is perpetuated. But precisely because these memories are repetitions, because they are successively engaged in very different systems of notions, at different periods of our lives, they have lost the form and the appearance they once had (47).

Therefore, our social beliefs are both collective recollections, but are also ideas that result from knowledge of our present (Halbwachs 188). Collective memory serves a contemporary function, or desire, and can only be a collective memory if it can be subsumed within our contemporary frameworks. Thus, the "Holocaust" as a collective memory is possible now, and was not possible in the 1950s, because it can now be subsumed into contemporary frameworks that make it meaningful.

Collective memory is, of course, also very important in our understanding of "nation." As Weissberg explained, memory became particularly important in the initial building of nation states. Kate Darian-Smith and Paula Hamilton in Memory & History in Twentieth-Century Australia (1994) also discuss this relationship and argue that memories link us to time, place and nation and enable us to give value to our individual experiences as well as to "inhabit our own country" (1). Kate Darian-Smith continues a discussion of this relationship in a later chapter of this book, where she writes:

⁷ See Raimond Gaita's formidable study of understanding genocide in Australia in: A Common Humanity: Thinking about Love & Truth & Justice. 1999.

It is through memory that we frame our sense of individual, group and national identities, give meaning to our own life history, and understand our social past. Our individual memories, however, are constantly supplemented, altered and mediated by the circulation of representations and articulations of the past that constitutes collective memory. This collective remembering enables us to travel, emotionally and imaginatively, back and across time, to a past that precedes and extends our own lived experiences (Darian-Smith 137).⁸

Thus, memories are negotiated between the individual and the collective but also, as Darian-Smith writes, between “recovery and burial” (156). Paula Hamilton also recognises the role of the “burial” of memory when she writes: “Many have noted that forgetting is one of the most powerful forces that shape national remembering” (Hamilton 23). As I will discuss throughout this thesis the “forgetting” of the genocide of the Jews was publicly regarded as an important strategy for European post-war recovery and nation building. Australia - a country geographically removed from this European catastrophe - was also involved in active forgetting. The many Jewish survivors that found their way into this country after the war were encouraged to forget their pasts and participate in Australia’s post war nation building. This nation building needed migrants, but discouraged these migrants’ stories of persecution and suffering. It has only been more recently that remembering a country’s “buried” past has factored as important for nationalism and not as a threat to nationalism.⁹

Discussing further the link between memory and identity in his introduction to

⁸ Hartman, in “Darkness Visible” (1995) also extends on Halbwachs’ conception of collective memory to explain this relationship between memory and history. By looking at the way collective memory serves the needs of individual memories, Hartman brings a more positive turn to his analyses. He writes:

The collective memory, in the process of making sense of history, shapes a gradually formalized agreement to transmit the meaning of intensely shared events in a way that does not have to be individually struggled for. Canonical interpretation takes over, ceremonies develop, monuments are built. An event is given a memory-place . . . in the form of statue, museum or concentration camp site, and annually repeated day. The repetition involves public rituals that merge individual sorrow or joy with communally prescribed forms of observance (Hartman 16).

⁹ This is evident in countries such as Germany where the current government is giving much attention to the public recognition of Germany’s “past wrongs.” It was also evident in America under a Clinton government when President Clinton publicly apologised to the “black” American and native American peoples for “past wrongs.” Remembering and reconciliation with Indigenous peoples in Australia was also given political importance under the Keating Labour Government. On the other hand, Turkey is being denied entry into the European Union because of their human rights record. The Turkish government still publicly denies their genocidal acts to the Armenian people in 1915, which cannot but mar their standing with a European Union intent on recognising the rights of Europe’s minorities.

Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity (1994) John R. Gillis, in a similar vein to Halbwach, argues that the meaning of any individual or group identity is sustained by remembering and what is remembered is defined by the assumed identity - thus the dialectic relationship between memory and identity. However, Gillis takes it one step further and argues that it is important to understand these terms “identity” and “memory” as social constructs, not as objects or facts outside of language. He writes:

That identities and memories change over time tends to be obscured by the fact that we too often refer to both as if they had the status of material objects - memory as something to be retrieved; identity as something that can be lost as well as found. We need to be reminded that memories and identities are not fixed things, but representations or constructions of reality, subjective rather than objective phenomena (Gillis 3).

Because memories and identities are not things “we think *about*, but things we think *with*” they “have no existence beyond our politics, our social relations, and our histories” (Gillis 5).

Thus, group identity is a constantly changing and variable construct. As Richard Handler in “Is ‘Identity’ A Useful Cross-Cultural Concept?” (1994) writes:

Groups do not have essential identities; indeed, they ought not to be defined as things at all. For any imaginable social group - defined in terms of nationality, class, locality, or gender - there is no definitive way to specify “who we are,” for “who we are” is a communicative process that includes many voices and varying degrees of understanding and, importantly, misunderstanding. Moreover, there is an infinite regress or a reflexivity built into human communication: the uttering of every statement about “who we are” changes, if only slightly, our relationship to who we are. Thus to talk about identity is to change or construct it, despite the dominant epistemology of identity, which specifies immutability (30).

Therefore in discussing Jewish identity in this thesis, not only is my understanding informed by my own social position and within a particular intellectual tradition, but I also construct the very idea “Jewish identity” I seek to write about. My thesis is a story on identity that constructs its own subject of analysis. This is a situation that is unavoidable, but needs to be recognised none the less. The story of Jewish identity I tell here is only one story among many, informed by other stories, but not all. Thus, this thesis also participates in

illuminating certain memories and pushing others “into the dark.” To pretend otherwise is to invest in the modernist assumption that there is a complete and true story to be told, waiting to be recovered.

Coinciding with the rise of interest in “memory” in cultural studies, came the rising interest in “trauma”. In the introduction to their 2001 collection Disturbing Remains: Memory, History, and Crisis in the Twentieth Century Roth and Salas explain that until the 1980s it was extremely uncommon to find the word “trauma” outside of medical discourse. However in recent years the humanities and social sciences have also begun to discuss trauma, and extend on its medical meaning.¹⁰ For Roth and Salas trauma is a painful occurrence that is so intense it exceeds the subject’s capacities to experience it in the usual ways. “A trauma breaks through the categories we use to take in the world, and thus it seems to be registered in our memories in ways that are unlike those used to register conventional experience” (Roth and Salas 1). Trauma then, demands that we reassess our ways of understanding memory, as it necessarily falls outside of the usual ways of remembering the past.

One of the key forces that has encouraged and shaped the non-medical interest in trauma studies has been the growing interest on the affects of the Holocaust on survivors and their children. The difficulty of integrating the Holocaust into general European history is said to be similar to the individual’s difficulty with integrating a traumatic experience into their own life story. However, it has also been the rise of feminism and identity politics that has spurred this recent non-medical interest in trauma studies (Roth and Salas 2). As Roth and Salas write:

The modern conception of the self has memory at its core: you are what you remember (and forget). Building on this perception, feminist scholars have brought to light how the identities of women have been crucially marked by traumatic events: memories that can be neither fully recollected nor successfully forgotten. Other groups have embraced this paradigm, stressing how their identities have retained the traces of past injuries in subtle but important ways. You are what you’ve been marked by (2).¹¹

¹⁰ Roth and Salas argue that the concept of trauma has gained academic currency within postmodernism and anti-foundationalism, which is suspicious of “truth” and which celebrates ambiguity (Roth and Salas 3).

¹¹ Roth and Salas propose that another important force contributing to the contemporary interest in trauma “is the recent move in the humanities from epistemology to ethics - that is, from a critique of knowledge to a concern with doing (and being) good” (Roth and Salas 2).

As I argue in this thesis, this is particularly the case for contemporary Jewish identities that continue to be marked by the Nazi genocide. The rise in recognition and validation of this trauma for “second generation” Jewish “survivors” has coincided historically with the rise in identity politics in the West.

The marking of identity through trauma is now understood to not only be a marking on the victim of trauma, but on others, including perpetrators and the next generation(s). As Dominick LaCapra writes: “The traumatic event has its greatest and most clearly unjustifiable effect on the victim, but in different ways it also affects everyone who comes into contact with it: perpetrator, collaborator, bystander, resister, those born later” (9). Like Roth and Salas, LaCapra gives credence to the idea of a period of latency before a traumatic event, such as the Holocaust, can be more fully realised. LaCapra writes: “The traumatic event is repressed or denied and registers only belatedly (*nachtraglich*) after the passage of a period of latency” (9). As I explain in Chapter Two, there certainly was a period of “silence” in regard to the collective memory of the Holocaust in Australia. However, I argue that this “silence” needs to be explained not only as a period of latency necessary before the realisation of a traumatic event, but also needs to be understood by taking into account the political and other social forces in the 1950s and 1960s. The interrelationship between individual and collective memory explained by Nora and Halbwach, which I draw upon, ensures that one must examine the historical and political forces that also act upon remembering and forgetting.

In Living With the Aftermath: Trauma, nostalgia and grief in post-war Australia (2001) Joy Damousi also recognises this important interaction between memory and historical forces. Discussing the findings of her interviews with Australian war widows, Damousi writes: “These interviews suggest a significant shift from a mid-twentieth-century sense that grieving was not spoken of in the community and was restrained by obligation and duty, to a late twentieth-century consensus that we can articulate grief, that it is desirable and necessary to do so and that we *need* to grieve” (3). However, Damousi argues that while there has been a shift away from the denial of grief that shaped attitudes toward death during the mid twentieth century, toward a fuller expression of grief now, she argues that this has not meant a revival of the ritualised practices which characterised public mourning in the nineteenth century (Damousi 4). Instead she argues that in recent years, “the collapse of the distinction

between the public and the private in the expression of loss and grief - most notably reflected in public testimonies - has characterised contemporary expressions of grief” (Damousi 4).

While Australian studies have focused on the experiences of returned soldiers, Damousi argues that the trauma that others, particularly civilians, have faced remains largely unexamined. Damousi also argues that: “Accounts of the home-front have concentrated on protesters or domestic responses to particular wars, and on women’s participation in protest movements or home-front activities, such as munitions industries. ‘Public’ rather than ‘private’ events continue to dominate in the narratives of war” (Damousi 4-5). This thesis seeks to contribute to our understanding of war and grief in Australia, following Damousi’s lead, by focusing on the continuing grief for Holocaust survivors and their children. By looking at the literary representations of grief and mourning experienced by children of Holocaust survivors, this thesis adds to this field of inquiry by not only turning attention to the underrepresented voices of women, but to the next generation who continue a remembrance of war through their own trauma and mourning. These personal reflections, made public through literary representation, have shaped, and been shaped by, a growing collective consciousness of the inter-generational transference of trauma.

Vital to our understanding of the effects of the war on subsequent generations has been the representation of these effects in writing. This is especially so in regard to the impact of the Holocaust on the children of survivors. Before I discuss this at length, it is necessary to extend the analysis of memory, history and identity by asking, what is the role of art?

And Literature . . .

Art also has a vital role to play in transmitting memory, both for the individual and the community. While art often draws on historical texts, it also offers an alternative to the transmission of memory through historical discourses. Importantly art, and more specifically literary art, offers a space for a different form of remembering. As Geoffrey Hartman writes:

When art remains accessible it provides a counterforce to manufactured and monolithic memory. Despite its imaginative license, art is often more effective in “embodying” historically specific ideas than the history-writing on which it may draw. Scientific historical research, however essential it is for its negative virtues of

rectifying error and denouncing falsification, has no positive resource to lessen grief, endow calamity with meaning, foster a vision of the world, or legitimate new groups. But art remains in touch with or revives traditional materials that satisfy our need for community without repressing individualist performance (The Longest Shadow 104). Art then, allows for both individual and communal expression and has a vital role to play in communal identity, mourning and remembrance. Adorno's famous, albeit often misunderstood statement that poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric, does not adequately reflect this important role literature has within society.

Thus, while literature is a personal form of expression and interpretation, it is also produced and read within communal interpretive grids. In Is There A Text In The Class (1980) Stanley Fish argues that we need to see the relationship between the reader, author and text as not a hierarchical one, but as an egalitarian simultaneity. Fish argues, "meanings are the property neither of fixed and stable texts nor of free and independent readers but of interpretive communities that are responsible both for the shape of the reader's activities and for the texts those activities produce" (322). Fish's concept of "interpretive communities" is less about a group of individuals, and instead focuses on the collection of strategies and norms of interpretation that are held in common and which regulate the way we think. Categories of perception, far from individual and unique, are according to Fish, communal and conventional, encoded in language and already in place; they exist prior to the act of reading. The reader then, is always situated inside a system of language, in a discursive system with its own values, interests and attitudes. As Fish states: "communication occurs within situations and that to be in a situation is already to be in possession of (or to be possessed by) a structure of assumptions, of practices understood to be relevant in relation to purposes and goals that are already in place" (318). Context is fundamental to Fish's analysis and we are always already in a context.

Fish's focus on the communal nature of perception is compatible with Halbwachs' focus on the communal nature of memory. Both recognise that the individual is embedded within communal grids of interpretation that affect individual perception of the past (memory) and of texts (literature) and their meaning. These communal grids of interpretation are subject to change and challenge and are produced and reproduced by the communities and individuals in their every day practices. To trace these communal categories of perception and

interpretation then, is to understand how literature is produced, read, marketed - how writing becomes meaningful.

So, literary texts are embedded in communal reading practices (communal categories of perception) as Fish suggests, and literary texts add to our understanding of our “past,” and gives us something more than the historical document, as Hartman contends. But how does an understanding of “history” add to our knowledge of literature? The literary theories that best grapple with this question are new historicism and cultural materialism.

In his study dedicated to explicating new historicism and cultural materialism (New Historicism and Cultural Materialism) John Brannigan explains that cultural materialism and new historicism share a common concern with the relationship between literature and history, and also understand that texts (of all types) are products and functional components of political and social formations. Both new historicism and cultural materialism emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s, new historicism in the United States and cultural materialism in Britain, and while there are significant differences between the two theories, practitioners in both are concerned with “the role of historical context in interpreting literary texts and the role of literary rhetoric in interpreting history” (Brannigan 4). Brannigan argues that while previous approaches to literature assumed texts to have universal significance and ahistorical truths to impart, these two approaches read literature as “material products of specific historical conditions” (3). Brannigan writes: “In the eyes of new historicist and cultural materialist critics, texts of all kinds are the vehicles of politics in so far as texts mediate the fabric of social, political and cultural formations” (Brannigan 3).¹²

However, it is important to realise from the outset that these theories contest the simple distinction between literature and history and attempt to open up a dialogue between them. To a new historicist or cultural materialist critic, “history is not objective knowledge which can be made to explain a literary text” (Brannigan 3). Literature is not then, merely a medium for the expression of historical knowledge, but rather, an active part of a particular historical moment (Brannigan 3). Brannigan explains: “the object of study is not the text and

¹² H. Aram Veeseer writes of New Historicism:

“New Historicism has given scholars new opportunities to cross the boundaries separating history, anthropology, art, politics, literature, and economics. It has struck down the doctrine of noninterference that forbade humanists to intrude on questions of politics, power, indeed on all matters that deeply affect people’s practical lives . . .” (Veeseer ix).

its context, not literature and its history, but rather literature *in* history. This is to see literature as a constitutive and inseparable part of history in the making, and therefore rife with the creative forces, disruptions and contradictions of history” (3-4).

Also commenting on the relationship between history and literature, or text and context, Louis A. Montrose argues that the poststructuralist orientation to history in the field of literary studies is characterised by a concern with the historicity of texts and the textuality of history. Montrose explains that the “the historicity of texts” recognises the cultural specificity and the social embedment of all forms of writing, “not only the texts that critics study but also the texts in which we study them” (20). The “textuality of history” recognises that there is no access to a complete and authentic past, a “lived material existence” that is not mediated by the remaining “textual traces of the society in question” - “traces whose survival we cannot assume to be merely contingent but must rather presume to be at least partially consequent upon complex and subtle social processes of preservation and effacement” (Montrose 20).

Arguing in a similar vein, Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub in Testimony: Crisis of Writing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History (1992) state that the critical demand “*for contextualization of the text* itself needs to be complemented, simultaneously, by the less familiar and yet necessary work of *textualization of the context* (xv). Thus, the contextualisation of the text and the textualisation of the context need to be given the same critical weight. In this thesis I explore this dialectic by reading the literary texts within their historical contexts (while being aware of the need to contest the categories) and also textualizing the context, discussing how this historical context has come to be formed through multiple texts. Thus, drawing on these theorists discussed above I discuss the historicity of texts and the textuality of history, in my focus on Holocaust representations and on Lily Brett’s writing in particular. Lily Brett’s work needs to be discussed as both writing that has been produced within an historical context by an historical “author,” and also as writing which then helps to produce a context for other texts (to be read within).

In understanding Lily Brett as an “author” I both recognise the historical figure, the person, Lily Brett, but also recognise the “author” as Michel Foucault does, as a particular construct, as that which upholds the unity of the texts under the one name, and as the perceived origin

of the texts' meanings (Foucault 58-59).¹³ Thus, just as this person Lily Brett produces texts for the reader to make meaningful, the reader produces the "author" Lily Brett through the reading of these texts. I now turn to this "author" who shapes this thesis.

Lily Brett

Lily Brett was born in 1946 in a Displaced Persons (DP) camp in Germany. Brett migrated to Australia with her Polish Jewish parents, both survivors of Nazi concentration camps, in 1948 when she was two years old. Lily Brett grew up in Melbourne, and began her literary career in 1961 as a rock journalist for the Australian rock magazine Go Set. After publishing her own poetry in journals and newspapers in the early 1980s, Brett published her first collection of poetry The Auschwitz Poems in 1986. Lily Brett has since published five collections of poetry, Poland: and other poems (1987), After the War (1990), Unintended Consequences (1992), In her Strapless Dresses (1994) and Mud In My Tears (1997). Brett has also published two collections of short stories Things Could Be Worse (1990) and What God Wants (1991) (republished as one collection in 1999) and two novels Just Like That (1994) and the Commonwealth literary award winning Too Many Men (1999). Brett has also published New York (2001) a collection of short journalistic pieces originally commissioned and published as a series of newspaper columns for the German newspaper Die Zeit. Finally, to this date, Brett has two books of autobiographical essays In Full View (1997) and her latest book Between Mexico and Poland (2002).

Lily Brett is now an author of world renown and has built up a readership and reputation that ensures a continuing and expanding market for her work. Many of these books have received awards and are now being published in a number of countries and translated into a

¹³ Foucault makes the distinction between person who wrote a text and the author function. Foucault writes: "The author is asked to account for the unity of the texts which are placed under his name. He is asked to reveal or at least carry authentication of the hidden meaning which traverses them. He is asked to connect them to his lived experiences, to the real history which saw their birth. The author is what gives the disturbing language of fiction its unities, its nodes of coherence, its insertion in the real" (Foucault 58). Foucault continues: "It would of course, be absurd to deny the existence of the individual who writes and invents. But I believe that - at least since a certain epoch - the individual who sets out to write a text on the horizon of which a possible oeuvre is prowling, takes upon himself the function of the author: what he writes and what he does not write, what he sketches out, even by way of provisional drafts, as an outline of the oeuvre, and what he lets fall by way of commonplace remarks - this whole play of differences is prescribed by the author-function . . ." (Foucault 59).

number of languages.¹⁴ Yet, there is still little critical work on Lily Brett in Australian academic publications. Except for an article in Westerly in 1996 called “Things Could Be Forgotten: Women’s Remembrances in Lily Brett’s Poetry and Fiction”¹⁵ by Roberta Buffi, critiques of Brett’s work have predominantly been confined to short book reviews. There are no extensive publications dedicated to an analysis of Brett’s work, beyond the few articles in journals and book reviews. Most of the critique of Brett’s work comes from journalistic reviews in newspapers. My research then, is the first PhD thesis and major study of Lily Brett, and stands as a contribution to, what I anticipate will be, an emerging field of inquiry into “second generation” Jewish writing in Australia, and Lily Brett’s writing in particular.

While there have been recent anthologies on Jewish writing in Australia that have focused in part on the effects of the Holocaust on children of survivors, most notably Enough Already (1999) by Alan Jacobs, it has only been the very recent publication of Children of the Shadows: Voices of the Second Generation, edited by Kathy Grinblat (2002) that has seen a entire collection dedicated to the writing of the “second generation” experience in Australia.¹⁶ While individual Jewish writers have been representing their experiences of being a child of survivors for some time, it has only been in the last ten years that these have gained popular attention and become marketable.

Lily Brett is one of these children of survivors who writes about a Jewish identity that is fundamentally tied up with the Holocaust experiences of her parents, and her (absent) extended family. In both her autobiographical writing and interviews, as well as in her fiction and poetry, Brett describes what it is like to live in the aftermath of such a significant event in Western history. Brett’s writing challenges the notion that the suffering borne of the Holocaust is over, and her writing is fundamentally concerned with the continuing effects of an event that is so profound in its influence, that the horror of the past event continues to be lived in the present. Brett’s work, by detailing the experiences of living with the horror of

¹⁴ For example, in 1992 Brett won the Steele Rudd Award for What God Wants (1991) and the 1995 New South Wales Premier’s Christina Stead Prize for fiction for Just Like That (1994). Just Like That was translated into German by Anne Losch in 1998 and published as Einfach So by Deuticke Verlag. Too Many Men has also been published in Germany and Austria, with 30,000 hardback copies sold in two months.

¹⁵ In this article Buffi explores Brett’s representations of mother daughter relationships and the legacy of being a child of survivors, among other issues.

¹⁶ While Lily Brett’s work appeared in Jacob’s anthology, she was conspicuously absent from Grinblat’s more recent collection.

the Holocaust by those who came after the event itself, asks fundamental questions of our understanding of history and identity.

Readers of Lily Brett's writing are confronted with an intimacy not often met with in other "readerly" experiences. In her autobiographical writing, Brett draws her reader into a textual association of intimacy and immediacy. As I have often heard remarked, reading Lily Brett is like "talking to your best friend." It is the nature of this textual relationship of intimacy experienced by the reader, that makes the relaying of Holocaust detail most affective in Brett's work. If Brett becomes a reader's "friend," she is certainly a most tortured one. She is a friend who has a difficult history to tell and experiences of pain (associated with this history) to share. It is this relationship of textual intimacy that allows for a reading of the Holocaust that is quite unusually, experientially, confronting. Thus, the relationship between reader and text (and author) in Brett's work is one that allows for a far more empathetic experience of the Holocaust that is not often met in many "scientific" historical accounts of this event. So, while Lily Brett does not write a "new" history of the Holocaust, her work is effective, as I quoted from Hartman earlier, in "*embodying* historically specific ideas" (Hartman, The Longest Shadow 104).

The intimacy of reading Brett's writing on the affects of the Holocaust on her and her characters', is not however, unlike other contemporary writing. While Brett's style is quite distinctly her own, she is part of a larger market for "second generation" Jewish writing in particular, and personal histories in general. The increasing popularity of the biography and life narrative is evidence of what Kerweil Klein calls a crisis in "official history" (145). There is no question that the market for personal narratives and testimonies is ever increasing in what has come to be termed the age of "little histories." Writing, such as Brett's, that describes the personal trauma borne of being a child of Holocaust survivors, is one example of the turn to personal storytelling to represent our past, our present and hopes for the future.

Chapter Outline

However, this thesis has ground to cover before exploring Lily Brett's work in greater detail. Prior to Brett's writing is a long history of Jewish writing in Australia, and in Chapter One I ask: can we define an Australian Jewish writing tradition? In answering this question there

are questions that need to be asked prior to this first question. Firstly, by drawing on the work of some of Australia's prominent Jewish historians, I look at the complex history of Jewish settlement in Australia, and the conflicts that have been borne from a very diverse ethnic group that have been both antagonistic and favourable to the idea of Jewish community. This discussion of the history of Jewish community in Australia necessarily finds itself dealing with the question of just who is "Jewish"? By looking at several documented histories of Jewish settlement in Australia, this question gains a local resonance I believe important for avoiding universalising tendencies. The question also remains unanswered, and open for continual dialogue and contestation. Following this, I then turn to the concept of a Jewish literary "tradition" and again complicate an easy (homogenising) attempt at pinning down a tradition, by showing that in this nation, at least, there is little to recommend a clear and progressive idea of a Jewish Australian literary tradition. Having noted this, there is evidence to suggest that there were important dialogues between Jewish writers in Australia, but these were founded less on a religious alliance, and more often on political and linguistic grounds.

In Chapter Two I begin my specific concentration on Jewish identity, writing and the Holocaust. This chapter discusses the politics of the late 1940s through to the 1960s in Australia to try and better understand why there was no identifiable market place for writing that represented the Holocaust. This chapter attempts to fit this discussion of Australia within a global context and discusses the "great silence" about the Holocaust that prevailed for approximately twenty years after the war. While there was little published by Jewish writers on the subject of the Holocaust in Australia in this period, there are two particular texts by Jewish writers that I discuss that do tackle the subject of the Holocaust, and its effects, at length. While these two literary texts are quite an exception in Australia in this early post-war period, I also discuss them in order to problematise the idea of a "great silence." Finally, I end this chapter with a discussion of two books by Jewish writers published in the 1960s, and compare these authors' approach to the topic of the Holocaust to the earlier texts published in the 1940s. I also show how these two books reflect a changing awareness and understanding of the Holocaust in Australia in the 1960s, and reflect an emerging interest in issues of identity and difference previously stifled by the Cold War and Anglo-conformity.

Chapter Three picks up historically where Chapter Two ends and discusses the importance of the Holocaust both nationally and globally from the 1970s onward. This chapter is concerned with the rise of Holocaust awareness, and I question the impact of this “awareness” on the contemporary understanding and image of “Jewishness,” both in Australia and internationally. I draw upon arguments made by American critics in particular, to think through the historical and political contingencies that have helped to create this situation of “Holocaust saturation.” In doing this, it is at our peril that we leave out the importance of artistic representation in accounting for this rise of Holocaust consciousness. I discuss some of the pivotal artistic representations of the Holocaust that have helped shape our collective memories. Chapter Three also discusses a number of controversies related to Holocaust remembrance including Holocaust revisionism, war crimes trials and literary controversies, including the “Demidenko” debate. I argue throughout, that all acts of denial or revisionism serve to further enhance the marketplace for Holocaust representation, and the Demidenko debate is one local example of this process.

Chapters Four, Five and Six, turn specifically to the work of Lily Brett. All three chapters read Lily Brett’s texts alongside other related texts that address the Holocaust, including literary texts, memoirs and more conventional historical texts. All three chapters are concerned with the period of representation, the Holocaust 1939-1945, and the period of contemporary reception, the present. In this way, I follow from the premises of new historicism, that any analysis of the “past” must be aware of the dialogic relationship with the “present.” Also, by reading “literary” texts alongside “historical” texts, I follow from the critics outlined earlier, particularly the new historicists, in establishing a dialogue between “literature” and “history,” and recognising literature as part of any given historical moment.

Chapter Four begins my discussion of Brett’s work with her first published book - The Auschwitz Poems in 1987. In this chapter I read Brett’s collection of poetry alongside other texts that represent Auschwitz, including memoirs from survivors. In this chapter I discuss Auschwitz as both a historical “reality,” and “Auschwitz” as a signifier of multiple meanings. In recent times, with the rise of Holocaust awareness, “Auschwitz” has become the most common signifier of the Holocaust, and in many cases has replaced the sign “Holocaust” altogether. I discuss the rising importance of Auschwitz as a signifier of the Holocaust and think through the historical and political implications of this phenomenon. I also show how Brett’s collection of poems, while titled The Auschwitz Poems, avoids the

trap of replacing a historical moment and place with a sign that signifies all and nothing at the same time. I finish this chapter with a discussion of the representation of Auschwitz as presented by the “Auschwitz museum” in Poland, and challenged in Brett’s novel Too Many Men.

Chapter Five moves away from a close reading of one main text to look more broadly at Brett’s collective work. I examine Brett’s poetry, short stories, autobiographical essays and novels to discuss one of Brett’s over-riding concerns - the effects of the Holocaust on the children of survivors. Being a child of survivors herself, Brett is intimately connected to her representations, and we follow the concern with legacies through all of Brett’s writing. In this chapter I read Brett’s writings alongside each other, and discuss the value of reading an author’s *oeuvre*. In doing this, I am interested in how a reader of Brett’s works can use their accumulative reading to give meaning to individual texts, and indeed individual poems. The value of being a “committed reader,” of participating most fully in the “author function,” will be discussed in this chapter. I also discuss how the concerns of Brett’s second generation characters reflects concerns of other second generation children more widely, and again this is done by reading Brett’s texts alongside other textual representations.

However, while Lily Brett’s representations of the impact of the Holocaust on children of survivors do resonate with stories told by other children of survivors, her representations do not go uncontested. The experiences of children of survivors are vast and varied and Lily Brett’s representations cannot be thought in any way to exhaust the possible range of experiences. The need to recognise differences in memory and experience is vital and this will be addressed in Chapter Five by discussing a controversy with Lily Brett’s sister, Doris Brett, also a writer and poet. In reading what Doris Brett writes about her sister’s representation of their family life, I will explore the issue of truth in autobiography, which extends to important questions about truth and memory more generally.

In Chapter Six I turn again to a particular text and discuss the novel Too Many Men. In a close reading of this text I discuss the contemporary concern with *returning* to the past for a sense of contemporary “self.” For many children of survivors (but not all) a return to the past not only involves remembering, researching and imagining, but may also involve a literal return to the parents’ country of origin and to the places of incarceration and imprisonment. Too Many Men sees the protagonist Ruth, returning to Poland with her

father, visiting the sites of his former life and the places of his family's death and historical destruction. In discussing this return, I analyse the different meanings of "place" for a survivor and a survivor's child. Sites of memory, and the "trace" are key ideas I adopt in this final chapter.

Finally, I must acknowledge that my interest in this topic of Jewish identity and the Holocaust is as an "outsider." I have no family history related to the Holocaust and I am not Jewish. I come to this thesis as an Australian woman responding to a Jewish writer's call for recognition. I agree with Dominick LaCapra's comments regarding one's position in regard to Holocaust research, when he writes: "Of course those with direct experience of traumatic events may bring that experience to bear in what they write, and often such writing or discourse is itself crucial in the attempt to come to terms with the past. But it is also the case that one's implication in a set of problems can exist and be explored by virtue of the fact that one is indissociably a scholar, an ethical agent, and a citizen or political being" (LaCapra 210).¹⁷

¹⁷ Dominick LaCapra also writes, as a footnote: "It is, however, also important to note that the study of the Holocaust has now passed beyond the confines of Jewish studies or a sector of German studies and has become a problem of general concern. One need provide no autobiographical or other particular motivation to account for one's interest in it, and the important consideration is what results from that interest" (LaCapra footnote 14 pg 22).

CHAPTER ONE: AN AUSTRALIAN JEWISH LITERARY TRADITION?

The linkage between questions of identity/identification and history/historiography rests on the construction of organizational categories by the authors and readers of texts. We inscribe who we believe ourselves to be and where we believe ourselves to have come from in these texts we call “history.” Identity is what you imagine yourself and the Other to be; history/historiography is the writing of the narratives of that difference (Gilman 2).

This linkage between identity - as that which we imagine ourselves and others to be - and history - our textual inscriptions of how this identity has formed - will be explored in this first chapter by discussing “Jewish identity” in “Australian history.”¹ The inscription of identity is not only achieved through “historical” texts, but also through the circulation of “literary” texts, and thus this chapter will discuss the possibility of tracing a literary tradition of Jewish writing in Australia. I argue that there are many problems associated with constructing this Jewish literary tradition, and that, in Australia at least, there is much to suggest against a Jewish writing tradition. Lily Brett’s writing cannot, therefore, be considered an outcome of a long and progressive Jewish writing tradition in Australia, although of course, there are similarities to be made between Brett’s writing and other texts by Jewish writers in Australia. However, having stated that Brett is not part of an obvious tradition, she has (as an “author”) been anthologised as such. Therefore, it is important to explore Brett’s placement within this category “Australian Jewish writer” by thinking through these concepts.

One of the resounding concerns in the attempt to trace a Jewish “tradition” of writing in Australia, is the complex question of just who is Jewish? How is Jewish identity defined in contemporary Australia? Coupled with this concern over the identity category, and its boundaries, is a concern with the concept of “tradition.” Has there been a common thematic thread, or threads, in writings by Jews (however defined) in Australia that warrants a “tradition”? In addressing these questions I will take an historical approach, to begin with,

¹I recognise both of these categories as phantasmatic constructions, and that in order to avoid homogeneity, need to be contested. At the same time, the fact that these categories are contested and contentious, does not necessitate an avoidance of adopting the categories.

to discuss the changing nature of Jewish community in Australia. If we look closely at the history of Jewish settlement and culture in Australia, we see that it has undergone many changes, both in its ethnic make-up and in its levels of assimilation. In fact, I will argue, as others have, that Jewish community and visibility is now at its peak in Australian history. The need to assimilate and/or “hide” a Jewish identity has been important in different periods in Australian history, for different reasons. Equally, the desire to be “visibly” Jewish has also changed throughout Australian history. What is most clear is that there is no linear or progressive history to write regarding Jewish identity in this country.

From Assimilation to Identification: Jews in Australian History

In the first collection of Jewish writing in Australia, Shalom: A Collection of Australian Jewish Stories (1978), Nancy Keesing, a well published and highly regarded (Jewish) writer, introduces the collection by placing it within its historical “context,” thus establishing the “credentials” of Australian Jewish writing:

It is appropriate that this book will appear during the Jubilee year of the Sydney Great Synagogue. Among the convicts who arrived by the First Fleet were nine Jews - arguably the oldest 'ethnic' group in this country . . .

It is also appropriate for this book to appear during an historic year for another reason: John George Lang (1816-64), who was Australia's first native-born writer of fiction, was descended from one of those First Fleet Jewish convicts . . . (Keesing 9).

From the outset, Keesing links Jews to the earliest white settlers, the convicts on the First Fleet, and she is not alone in arguing that Jews might represent the oldest “ethnic” group.² Renowned historian of Australian Jewry, W. D. Rubinstein concurs and writes; “for many decades [Jews] were probably the most visible and best organised non-British minority in this country” (Rubinstein, The Jews in Australia 22). Rubinstein's (and Keesing's) claim, is however, quite problematic, and Rubinstein's explanation is no less controversial. While people from many different national groups settled in the Australian colonies from the

² When arguing that the Jews may represent the oldest “ethnic” group in this country, it is significant that Keesing places the word ethnic in inverted commas. In this way, Keesing both puts this story of origin as a proposition, but also destabilises this narrative at the same time. The implication, of course, is that Keesing is fully aware of the politics of the term “ethnic,” especially in regard to the invisibility of the Anglo-Celtic as an “ethnic” category itself. This understanding of the importance of naming Anglo-Celts as also ethnic, has been made by several critics of “migrant” and “multicultural” writing and will be discussed in Chapter Three.

earliest days, Rubinstein claims that, “in general these were individual migrants who did not establish an organised community” (The Jews in Australia 22). The only real exceptions to this were the German Lutherans, particularly in South Australia, and the Chinese. However, the Jews were more visible than either of these groups, Rubinstein claims, as they lived mainly in cities and were in frequent contact with the British majority. This contact with the British majority assured that Jews participated, to a great extent, in all areas of colonial life. Many Jews were involved in the colonial legislature and made “a distinguished mark on the development of Australian society” (Rubinstein, The Jews in Australia 22).

However, with this said, it must be noted, that these colonial Jews were overwhelmingly British, not only in terms of place of birth, but also in outlook. As Rubinstein explains: “Nearly all Australian Jews of the early days were born in England or had close connections with it, and the older synagogues had (and have) very close connections with the Orthodox Anglo-Jewish community, and looked to England and to British Jews for leadership” (The Jews in Australia 30). Little wonder that these early Jews were able to assimilate. What is interesting about Rubenstein's argument is that while he claims that in this early history Jews were assimilationist, he also maintains that they were a “visible” ethnicity or “minority.” This early history of Jewish settlement in Australia then, is rather ambivalent. Rubinstein is aware of this ambivalence, and indeed writes of this period 1788 - 1830: “Despite its spectacular record of success in organising and maintaining a continuing Jewish presence in so remote a country, and in producing Australian leaders its character was ambivalent in many respects . . . its success was often at the expense of compromising its Jewishness through excessive assimilation” (The Jews in Australia 55).

Indeed, these colonial founders of organised Australian Jewry, Hilary Rubinstein argues, were motivated by an attitude of Jewish “non-distinctiveness,” in everything except religion. While they pursued Jewish rights and countered manifestations of anti-Semitism, the colonial Jews also “identified with and conformed to Australia's prevalent mores” (H. Rubinstein, From Jewish Non-Distinctiveness 23). The British free migrants and freed convicts who built the foundation of Jewish communal life in Australia were, therefore, “people who confidently expected to play a full part in the life of the emerging colony while retaining their Jewish identity and affirming their Jewish heritage” (H. Rubinstein, From Jewish Non-Distinctiveness 23).

The desire to assimilate, whilst also maintain a distinct cultural heritage involved compromise and negotiation, as all migrant identity necessarily does. This is, in many ways, an atypical situation born of the diasporic Jewish experience. Because Jews were scattered over so many countries, and have been without a homeland for a great part of their history, the countries in which they settled, through the generations, became their “home.” However, within these diasporic countries the Jews were often segregated and living as a separate group within the country. For many Jews then, there was ambivalence surrounding a sense of place, as they may be part of the nation-state, but a-part from the imagined community. For other Jews, home has always been the Holy Lands, despite their country of residence, and they have considered themselves as dis-placed. Quite the contrary, for other Jewish people who have had the chance and circumstances allowing for greater assimilation, an identity was established within, and as part of, their country of residence. In the early colonial settlements, later to be called Australia, British identity was the norm, and the colonies were imagined as outposts of Britain. Thus, early British Jews who settled in these colonies, had their “Britishness” affirmed, not negated.

However, the arrival of Eastern European Jews in the final years of the nineteenth century disrupted the Anglo image and cohesive appearance of Australian Jewry. Paul Bartrop explains that with the emergence of the few Russian and Polish Jews, came a Yiddish speaking, differently dressed, visible minority far less attuned to British customs. The appearance of these Jews was enough to upset the Anglicised culture of the existing Jewish community and provide the larger society with a new image of Jewishness (Bartrop, Good Jews 171). This threat of difference led the existing Jewish community - who promoted Judaism as a religious denomination - to encourage the small number of Eastern European Jewish migrants to cease speaking Yiddish.³ Clothing which suggested the shtetl was also discouraged, as was the tendency by the “foreign” Jews to settle in “ghettoes” (H. Rubinstein, From Jewish Non-Distinctiveness 30). However, while cracks did begin to appear in the image of acceptable Jewishness, there were too few “foreign” Jews coming to Australia in the nineteenth century for this to become a serious issue or cause major disruption. However, these “foreign” Jews did serve to affirm the respectable image of the (middle class) British Jews through their position as the negation of this image, in other words, through their status as the “other” to British Jewish respectability.

³ This “encouragement” by the established Jewish community must also be understood within the context of class, as Yiddish carries with it working class connotations. This will be discussed again shortly.

After the turn of the century and Federation, it was the first Great War in Australia that “consolidated the awareness of Australian nationhood” and “intensified the search for a national identity” (H. Rubinstein, From Jewish Non-Distinctiveness 27). This Australian nationalism, in what Hilary Rubinstein calls its “ratbag” elements, fostered anti-Semitism, a fact Rubinstein argues, that became increasingly apparent in the early twentieth century not only in the Bulletin school and the like, but also in influential sections of the Labour movement. With the increasing anti-Jewish stereotyping (as both Bolsheviks and capitalists!) Australian Jews adopted a defensive gesture of “group invisibility” (H. Rubinstein, From Jewish Non-Distinctiveness 27). Better to not be identified as distinctly Jewish, than face the humiliation of anti-Semitism. However, at the same time, prominent Jews of this period were being accepted and allowed to move to positions of great influence in general society. So while anti-Semitic propaganda was apparent in Australia, and fed the desire for non-distinctiveness, its influence was also limited.

What was more apparent perhaps than evidence of anti-Semitism in the early 1900s, was the overwhelming suspicion, on the part of most Australians, of “foreignness.” After World War I there was a desire to retain the British character of life which pre-dated the war. In order to do this and to take control after the trauma of war, the elimination of diversity within society was sought (Bartrop, Good Jews 174) and reflected in Australia’s restrictive immigration policies of the period. The fear of Jewishness was particularly reserved then, for those foreign Jews, “not because they were Jewish, but because of their foreign-ness” (Bartrop, Good Jews 174). The same was true of the wider community. While Australia had always been a racist society, it was the Great War that saw this racism broaden to include xenophobia, a fear of foreign-ness not necessarily based on race. Paul Bartrop writes:

This xenophobia formed the main foundation of the status Australians gave to foreigners and was also the factor which transformed them into objects of prejudice. Translated to the area of immigration, it was the native Australian who defined who would be a stranger or who would be welcomed into the private universe of the Australian in-group. Only he could grant this, and no attempts on the part of the alien could prematurely alter his 'stranger' status. Rejecting some European immigrants as undesirable intruders, therefore, provided the Australian people with the psychological disposition to reject other immigrant groups during the 1920s. The familiar was preferred; the alien was spurned (Good Jews 174).

Within the Australian Jewish community itself there were also mixed reactions to “foreigners.” In the late 1920s this ambivalence on the part of the existing Jewish community was focused on the Polish Jews who migrated to Australia. While welcome societies and employment agencies were set up for these newcomers (often by the new arrivals themselves) their immigration threatened the “cult of group invisibility” that had been established during the war (H. Rubinstein, From Jewish Non-Distinctiveness 31). The fear of difference had been realised and the new Jewish immigrants created “ghettoes” and continued to use Yiddish as their primary language of communication (H. Rubinstein, From Jewish Non-Distinctiveness 31). Carlton, in Melbourne, was a primary example of this clustering of Polish Yiddish speaking Jews, and this was also the place where the Brett family later settled when they arrived as migrants after World War II.

It was these “odd” and foreign newcomers that represented to the wider community, in this period between the wars, what Bartrop refers to as “Bad Jews.” These “Bad Jews” exhibited different customs, rarely spoke English without an accent “and their business principles derived from the Eastern European village or market town rather than the local shop in high street” (Bartrop, Good Jews 177). In opposition, the “Good Jews” were those who were “Australian or British, conformed with the norms of the anglicised Australian community, spoke English without an accent, engaged in “respectable” business practices and in no way stood out from the great anonymous mass of other Australians” (Bartrop, Good Jews 177). However, it is important to remember that the intolerance shown toward foreign (or “Bad”) Jews by both the established Jewish community and the wider Australian population, was also extended to other non-Jewish immigrant groups such as Italians and other southern Europeans. The further away you were perceived to be from the British norm, the greater the antagonism and intolerance the migrant faced.

The period 1788 - 1930s then, is a time historians of Jewish settlement in Australia refer to as the period of assimilation. The period during and after the 1940s, in contrast, is marked by an increasing assertion of Jewishness (Rubinstein, The Jews in Australia 11). As previously discussed, prior to this period of the assertion of identity as “difference,” the Jewish community was very concerned with the maintenance of Anglo culture. In the 1930s, “loyalty” (to the Crown) was deemed an important defence against the fear of the unknown and an uncertain future. Nationalism represented a form of closure where there was little

place for dissenting opinions and cultural change. Mark Peel commenting on this nationalism and insularity in the 1930s says: “It was a grim celebration, a way of holding the line against anybody who questioned what all Australians were supposed to share” (Peel 55). Despite this environment, movements for change were making ground, and different voices of dissent were challenging this Anglo masculine hegemony.⁴ However, charges of “disloyalty” were made against those who did dare to dissent. The predominantly Anglo-Jewish community responded to this era then, as many did, by diminishing difference and dissent and showing an eager front of loyalty and conformity.

While the rise of Hitler in Germany in the 1930s, made Jewish emigration more urgent, Australia's record for taking Jews in this period is, as Rubinstein writes, “miserable beyond description” (Rubinstein, The Jews in Australia 63). This absence of humanity is due, some argue, to underlying anti-Semitic prejudices, especially against central and eastern European Jews who were popularly associated with Bolshevism. The Great Depression was also a contributing force to this lack of generosity, as were the leaders of the Australian Jewish community, “whose lack of sympathy for large scale rescue efforts was as shocking as it was falsely self-interested” (Rubinstein, The Jews in Australia 63).⁵ Rigid restrictions were put in place to ensure that any influx of refugees during the 1930s was avoided. Konrad Kwiet explains that not only did the Jewish leaders accept this policy, but they also favoured an even more rigorous hand picking of migrants than before (204). However, with the intensification of Nazi persecution toward the end of the 1930s, both the Australian government and the Jewish leaders became more flexible when the pressure increased to help solve the European refugee crisis. Approximately 7,000 refugees were able to reach Australia before the outbreak of war, nearly all of them coming from Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia and Hungary.⁶ However, these refugees were met, in many ways, by an existing Jewish establishment that “took pains not to be identified with the “reffos”” (Kwiet,

⁴ For example, feminist groups were challenging the Australian masculine culture, socialist and communist organisations were active in challenging poverty, and the 1930s also saw a greater movement to recognise the plight of Australia's indigenous minorities.

⁵ Hilary Rubinstein also writes: “it cannot be denied that the pursuit of group invisibility, and the striving for a quiet life, led to a singular insensitivity and unreceptiveness towards the needs of potential and actual refugees on Australian soil” (H. Rubinstein, From Jewish Non-Distinctiveness 32).

⁶ Thousands of Jewish refugees were interned in Australia during World War II as they were regarded as Germans, and hence enemy aliens. They were considered enemies despite the fact that nearly all would have been murdered by the Nazis, where they were considered the worst enemies of all. The most famous of these internees were the 2542, mainly Jewish, Germans and Austrians, who were sent from England to Australia on the ship Dunera in August 1940.

204). It was also expected that these new migrants “abandon all foreign features” very quickly (Kwiet 204).

Besides the support for rescue proposals by some politicians, trade unionists and church leaders for example, in terms of public opinion, the majority of Australians showed no interest in the fate of European Jewry (Kwiet 210).⁷ After the outbreak of war, only a handful of Jews were granted landing permits and “the gates remained closed” (Kwiet 212). This xenophobia was displayed by many within the existing Jewish communities and prompted A. Masel, president of the Victorian Jewish Advisory Board, to write in 1944: “It must be admitted that many Australian Jews have maintained an aloof, patronizing, even hostile attitude towards newer arrivals . . . I am convinced that many Australian Jews still look upon the new arrivals as aliens, not as fellow Jews” (qtd. in Stratton 325). Jon Stratton in response writes: “This shows well the other side of the problem, Australian Jews who were so assimilated that they had assumed the homogenizing values of assimilatory Australian national culture and thought of European Jews as different” (325).

It was only after the extinction of the centres of Jewish life in Europe, that Australia was prepared to give refuge to the survivors of the Holocaust. However, these refugees fit well with Australia's need for demographic and economic expansion. In 1947 a wave of Jewish survivors and displaced people did begin to enter Australia. Most of these Jewish migrants were Yiddish-speaking and from Poland, Rumania and other parts of Eastern Europe, although there were also Hungarian Jews who had led a more assimilated life in Europe before the war. The Holocaust profoundly affected Australia's Jewish community, with Melbourne in particular, having a higher percentage of survivors per population than any other Jewish community in the world, outside of Israel. Approximately 20,000 - 35,000 European Jews (excluding British Jews) entered Australia between 1945 and 1960 (Rubinstein, *The Jews in Australia* 65).⁸ Most of these post war Jewish migrants settled in either Sydney or Melbourne, with Melbourne having more Polish Jews and Sydney more Hungarian and German Jews.

⁷ Kwiet argues that indifference and ignorance were widespread, “the only interest that was expressed centred around the Jewish refugees, and this continuing discussion provided some with the opportunity to give increased vent to their xenophobic and anti-Semitic sentiments . . .” (Kwiet 210).

⁸ The recorded figures, from the Australian census, excluded many of these Jews as they did not declare themselves to be Jewish in the optional religious question, often out of a fear of anti-Semitism.

The influx of Eastern European Jews after World War II not only increased the number of Jews in Australia quite markedly, but these newcomers dramatically affected the Jewish community. The newcomers differed quite markedly from the older Jews already established in Australia. Firstly, the post World War II Jews were more Orthodox in religion; they were much more Zionist and pro-Israel; they often spoke Yiddish; and they were more vigorous in perpetuating the Jewish community by creating Jewish institutions (Rubinstein, The Jews in Australia 68). The older Jewish community also contained many small town and rural pioneering Jews, while the newcomers lived almost entirely in the capital cities (Rubinstein, The Jews in Australia 68).

One of the responses of these newcomers to their new country and Jewish community was to place secular communal institutions on the same level as synagogues in Jewish life. The assumption that the rabbis and ministers were the natural spokesmen diminished with the rise of other authority figures, such as the elected secular communal leaders⁹. It was these new migrants that set up the secular Executive Council of Australian Jewry and the State Board of Deputies (H. Rubinstein, Chosen 44). The newcomers broadened the concept of Jewish identity and democratised organised communal life. In fact, Hilary Rubinstein declares that these new migrants “were the salvation of Australian Jewry” (Chosen 44). While secular organisations were established, the number of synagogues also increased dramatically with the influx of more observant Jewish migrants, and in the post World War II period Jewish day schools were also established and have since flourished.¹⁰ The establishment of these institutions can be regarded as important in preserving a distinctly Jewish life against assimilationist (homogenising) pressure.

While other ethnic groups may be experiencing a decline in participation in communal institutions and experiencing greater assimilation with the second and third generations in

⁹For example, on the 29th of December 1942 the United Emergency Committee for European Jewry was established in Australia. The chairman of this committee, Dr Machover, was a Zionist who came to Australia from Europe in 1940 where he had previously been as an executive member of the Federation of Jewish relief organisations in Europe. The composition of the United Emergency Committee for European Jewry in Australia, including Dr Machover as chairman, was a clear indication that “monopoly on leadership traditionally held by the establishment had finally been broken” (Kwiet 209). The existing secular and spiritual leaders no longer went unchallenged, and representatives from both the Zionist camp and the refugee community began to make their presence felt in the decision-making organisations. This new influence paved the way for the eventual establishment of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry (Kwiet 209).

¹⁰ In the 1980s there were eighteen Jewish day schools in Australia, and Mount Scopus (which was the first day school, opened in 1947) had become, by the 1960s, the largest Jewish day school in the world outside Israel (Rubinstein, Chosen 71).

Australia, Jews are increasingly being involved in specifically Jewish institutions (Rubinstein, The Jews in Australia 11). The reasons for this increase in participation and assertion of Jewish identity are complex. However, Rubinstein posits the multi-dimensionality of Jewish identity as being one reason that Jewish identity can be maintained in a society that legitimates multiculturalism (I will discuss this multi-dimensionality shortly). Also, the two major events of recent Jewish history, the Holocaust and the establishment of Israel, have left their mark on nearly all Jews in a way that has made the desire to assimilate less likely (Rubinstein, The Jews in Australia 11). The impact of the Holocaust on Jewish identity and community will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Two and Chapter Three, and the role of Israel will be discussed in detail in Chapter Two.

Further waves of Jewish immigration have occurred since the post war influx. During the 1950s several thousand Sephardic Jews, mostly from Egypt, arrived in Australia. Many of these had been expelled from their countries by the Arabs in the wake of the Israeli-Arab conflict, and many of these settled in Adelaide (Rubinstein, The Jews in Australia 66). There are also now Jews from Asia settling in Australia, including Jews from India and Iraq. Many Jews also came to Australia from South Africa, and many of these have settled in Sydney. Today the Australian Jewish community is extremely diverse, and in itself represents a multiculturalism that is reflected in the wider community. While these Jewish migrants have settled in all Australian States, they have still tended to settle in urban centres.

As previously mentioned, the two great centres of Jewish settlement in Australia have always been Sydney and Melbourne. But it is the experience of Jews in Melbourne that is most relevant for this thesis, as this is where Lily Brett's family came to settle. As in New South Wales, Jews settled in Victoria from the earliest colonial days. Victoria was founded by free settlers rather than convicts, and Jews were involved in building Victoria from the outset, forming lasting Jewish institutions much earlier than in New South Wales (Rubinstein, The Jews in Australia 38). The first synagogue was founded in Melbourne in 1848 and a Jewish burial ground existed from 1843. Like in New South Wales, most Victorian Jews were of English background, although there were a minority of German Jews. The wealthy Jews lived predominantly to the south of the Yarra in the St Kilda area, while the majority of poorer Jews lived in working class areas around the city central, like Carlton. In 1901 Melbourne overtook Sydney as the largest Jewish city in Australia (Rubinstein, The Jews in Australia 39).

From the 1920s the nature of Jewish life changed in Melbourne as Eastern European Jews of Yiddish background began to settle here. These European Jews were much more Orthodox, Zionist and less Anglo-focussed than their predecessors (Rubinstein, The Jews in Australia 39). Many of these migrants settled in Carlton, where a synagogue was founded in 1927. Carlton was a thriving centre for Jewish life in the inter-war period. However, after World War II, most of these Jews from Carlton, who had the financial means, moved south of the Yarra, predominantly to St Kilda, Caulfield and Elsternwick, which then became the new centres of Melbourne Jewish life (Rubinstein, The Jews in Australia 39).¹¹

Lily Brett, and her Yiddish speaking, non-Orthodox parents, migrated to Australia in 1948, and settled in the working class suburb of Carlton. In many ways, Brett's parents are typical of those Jews who arrived here after the war, and after surviving terrible genocide, eager to start a new life in a foreign country far from Europe. Much of Brett's early writing represents the experiences of these Polish Jews who settled in Melbourne, especially those who survived, or whose parents survived, the Holocaust. Brett's writing also describes what it was like for her growing up in Australia in the wake of post war migration in a cosmopolitan suburb like Carlton.¹²

Like many Jewish migrants who initially settled in Carlton, when financially able, the Brett family moved to St Kilda and became a part of the dynamic community there. Jewish communities such as those in Carlton and St Kilda, were conducive to the maintenance of Jewish cultural and religious life, and also foundational in the maintenance of the collective memories of "homelands." However, Jewish identity was not only maintained, but reinvented, in a country that both, at different times, embraced diversity and rewarded assimilation. Brett's writing, which takes this Melbourne Jewish life as its subject matter, is important in the production of collective memory of Jewish life in Melbourne post-Holocaust.

¹¹ Elsternwick is also the site for the Melbourne Holocaust Museum, which I will discuss in Chapter Three.

¹² In a poem from In Her Strapless Dresses (1994) titled "In Carlton," Brett writes: "In Carlton/where I grew/up - the streets/were full/of Italians - and Germans/and Jews/and Maltese - who'd/come here/for a new beginning - we lived/on/Nicholson Street - and/across/from us - were/dimly lit/cafes - dark/opaque/caves - where men/smoked/and played cards - and/billiards/and shouted . . .each Saturday/we went/to the Victoria Market . . . my father/bargained/with the Chinese sellers - and swapped/greetings/in Yiddish - with/the Italian/florists" (Brett, In her Strapless Dresses 43-45).

Jewish Identity - A Mosaic of Meaning

Tracing this history of changing attitudes to Jewish identity in Australia is a complex project, and one I have only touched on in the section above. While this brief overview does show that there has been a history of tension between Jews of different backgrounds, and political persuasions in this country, there have also been times of unity where boundaries have been crossed and inter-ethnic relationships confirmed and institutionalised. However, if this brief history does highlight one thing in particular, it is that the question of ethnicity and cultural difference is always important. So, while tracing any history is difficult and always incomplete and partial, tracing a Jewish history in Australia is particularly difficult when the identity category itself is so contentious. Prior to tracing a history, or as a consequence of attempting to do so, the category under review must itself be thought through. What then does it mean to be Jewish? And who is a Jew?

In his study of Jews in Australia (1986) Rubinstein identifies three categories of Jewishness, or three ways of defining people as Jews. Firstly, and obviously, Jews are members of the Judaic religion, the faith founded by Abraham and Moses and based, in Christian terms, on the old testament, the Bible. Judaism is itself quite complex and has, over the ages, been a divided religion. However, in Western countries like Australia there are different streams of Judaism that co-exist harmoniously. In Australia, the largest of these streams is the Orthodox Jewish tradition, boasting the most synagogues and practitioners. The Orthodox Jews remain faithful to the halaka - classical Jewish law derived from the written Torah - and the enactments of the rabbinic sages - the Oral Torah.¹³ Orthodoxy subscribes to the belief that God exiled the Jews from the land of Israel, because they did not obey the commandments of the Torah. Orthodox Jews believe that when the Jews as a whole repent, and do live truly according to the Torah, the Messiah will appear, the exile will end, and God's people will return to their true home in Israel (Rosenberg 146).

To one side of the Orthodox Jews are the Progressive (also named Reform and Liberal) Jews. As the alternative names suggest, this is a more recent form of Judaism which has

¹³ Rabbi Rosenberg explains: "Orthodox Judaism remains committed to the idea that the written Torah was dictated by God verbatim to Moses and that the Oral Torah is divinely inspired, all its teachings being implicit in the Torah of Moses and unfolding from generation to generation in the enactments and interpretations of the authentic teachers of Torah" (Rosenberg 146).

attempted to “modernise” traditional Judaism (Rubinstein, The Jews in Australia 2). The Progressive tradition began in Germany in the early nineteenth century and spread to America during the migration of the mid-nineteenth century. The first Australian synagogue was established in Melbourne in 1830. Reform Judaism impacted very much on the daily practice of Jewish religious life - services were shortened; Hebrew was replaced by vernacular languages; the equality of women was promoted in the religious sphere; the specifically Jewish mode of dress was eliminated; and dietary restrictions were modified. In contrast to the Orthodox Jews, Reform Judaism denied the expectation of a messianic ruler who would restore the kingdom of Israel and lead the Jews from all over the world to Jerusalem. Reformers believe that Jews should not consider themselves a separate nation, but be equal within the lands in which they lived (Rosenberg 8).

To the other side of the Orthodox tradition are the ultra-Orthodox Chassidic Jews. In Australia, the Chassidic Jews are in the minority, and generally reside in Caulfield and Elsternwick in Melbourne and Bondi in Sydney (Rubinstein, The Jews in Australia 3). Chassidic Jews remain fairly separate from other Jews and their numbers are declining worldwide. As well as synagogues, each of these Jewish traditions has its own institutions, clubs, organisations and independent day schools. However, while different streams of Judaism have always existed, most Jewish people define themselves simply as Jews. Rabbi Rosenberg explains that while the Orthodox Jews regard their practices and teachings as the “true” Jewish principles, they do “not deny the Jewish identity of people who participate in other groups” (Rosenberg 144).¹⁴ Most Jews, indeed, are able to consider Jews as “one people.”

Apart from Jewishness being a religious identity, Rubinstein explains that it is also an ethnic identity. He claims that because most Jews are born Jews they are probably, at least distantly, related. Rubinstein argues, therefore, that Jews form an ethnic or national group similar to other national or ethnic groups:

This is the first and most important ambiguity in Jewish identity which is often difficult for outsiders to understand. In addition to religious identity and

¹⁴ However, there is one exception to this principle. Rabbi Rosenberg explains: “Many Orthodox do not accept the Jewish identity of converts who have been received into Judaism by non-Orthodox rabbis. They also deny the Jewish identity of the direct descendants of female converts who were received into Judaism by non-Orthodox rabbis. In order for such people to be accepted as Jews by Orthodoxy, they must undergo the conversion procedure under Orthodox auspices” (Rosenberg 144).

membership, Jewish persons may identify as Jews or be commonly identified by others as Jews as a result of distinctive ethnic, national or racial characteristics such as particular names, 'Jewish appearance' and common ancestry. For Jews, Jewish identity may be entirely secular in nature (Rubinstein, The Jews in Australia 4-5).

As mentioned here by Rubinstein, many non-Jews identify people as Jews through ethnic characteristics rather than by religion. This identification of Jewishness beyond, and apart from religion, was also a Nazi practice. However, the Nazi categorisation of Jews was through bloodlines and thus seen as a racial distinction. During the Holocaust ethnic and cultural characteristics were also, in the end, unimportant when a genocidal practice based on a concept of race was undertaken. The most assimilated Jews were killed, for even though they may not have identified as Jews, or with Jews, and even if they had converted to Christianity, if they had a Jewish grandparent for example, they had "Jewish blood." The categorisation of Jews as a racial group is a spurious one that has been a result of, and further perpetuated, anti-Semitism.

The third way of understanding Jewishness, according to Rubinstein, is as a socio-cultural group. While it is not easy to separate the socio-cultural from the ethnic component of Jewish identity, many of "the forms which the Jewish sense of community takes are not religious or really ethnic-national in nature" (Rubinstein, The Jews in Australia 5). Instead, Rubinstein argues that these forms represent a cultural, linguistic or political dimension that has united Jews from different backgrounds. For example, Yiddish culture is one manifestation of Jewish socio-cultural identity, as is a political group like the Jewish Bund (a socialist and secular but non-Zionist group).

Thus, Jewish identity can be manifested in a variety of ways, something that separates Jews apart from other ethnic or religious groups. However, it is two particular aspects of Jewish experience that distinguish the Jews from others - the historical lack of a homeland and anti-Semitism. Commenting on this historical lack of a homeland and its effects in terms of Jewish identity, Rubinstein writes:

Because Jews had no national home for many centuries, and lived in countries where other peoples were in a majority, they sometimes acquired a dual identity as both Jews and natives of their country of residence - as German Jews, Polish Jews or Czech Jews, for example.

Occasionally a group of Jews assimilated sufficiently to be generally identified as Germans, Poles or Czechs rather than specifically as Jews, and in many cases an ambiguity existed in the minds of others as to their precise national identity (The Jews in Australia 11-12).

As mentioned previously, this is the experience of the diaspora. The concept of an essential and complete identity, while itself phantasmatic, is an ideal that has never applied to those without a homeland. Trying to negotiate an ethnic and religious identity as Jewish and a national identity as, for example Hungarian, is always political. At different times, in different nation-states, assimilation has been more or less desirable and more or less possible. In contemporary Australia, the assertion of a “particularist” Jewish identity, and concurrent assertion of “Australian-ness,” while not without its complications, is now publicly acknowledged.

In Australian history, as explained above, colonial Jews were generally regarded as those who practiced the Judaic religion. The mainly Anglo Jews of this early period of Australian history even encouraged an understanding of Jewishness as a denomination of Christianity (of course, not all Jews agreed with this, and considered themselves in this way). However, at the same time, Jews were also, from the middle of the nineteenth century, racialized in popular and sometimes government discourse (Stratton 312). Yet the Australian census has consistently classified Jews by religion. A consequence of this classification is, of course, that estimates of the population of Jews in Australia are dependent on those who classify themselves as Jewish through a religious affiliation with Judaism (Stratton 312).

In terms of a Jewish racial identity, Jon Stratton argues that in Australia (as in other English-speaking countries) the racialization of the Jews has always been marked by an ambiguity about their colour-status (Stratton 314). The reason for this ambiguity, he argues, is the lack of the need to distinguish so firmly the Aryan/Semite divide. Stratton writes:

One reason for the lack of usage of the Aryan/Semite racial distinction in Australia may be that, being a settler-state, the Jewish presence was never allowed to reach a point where such a clearly discriminatory distinction against a "European" people would have been useful. At the same time, unlike in Europe, distinction in terms of color - that is, the classification of "non-European" peoples - was of much greater

importance in excluding those not considered appropriate to the Australian national project (314)

It was the Aboriginal peoples and the Chinese that represented the Other to the European unconscious in early Australian history.

The racialization of the Jews took place in Australia then, in the context of the nationalism which led to the establishment of a Federated Australia and the White Australia policy. Racial anti-Semitism was imbricated in an Australian nationalist desire for a homogeneous white nation. Australia's assimilated Jewry, who were ambivalently white/non-white, feared any increased visibility for the Jews, any signs of racial or cultural difference that would mark them as a threat to the homogeneity of the Australian nation (Stratton 321).

As previously mentioned, with the rise of Nazism in Europe the need to give refuge to Jews of different nationalities arose. While Western European Jews were deemed more desirable, as they were more assimilated, Eastern European Jews were also accepted, but with greater hesitation, into this country. Stratton argues that:

In Australian racial discourse European Jews were thought of as white and Eastern European Jews were also, if more ambivalently, white. As a consequence, while the Jews were strategically racialized they seem to have not been colorized, suggesting once again, in the context of Australian racial discourse, that Jews were both "white" and "nonwhite" (327).

However, this situation changed with later immigration from Asia and the Middle East, and colour became a marker within Jewish communities.

In Australia then, Jews cannot be identified in terms of a single ethnic-cultural background as there are Anglo Jews descended from Sephardis, there are those from Germany, Russia and Poland with an Ashkenazi heritage and there are more recent Jewish migrants who are Indian-Sephardi, Iraqi-Sephardi and Egyptian-Sephardi, among others. While Jews may share many traditions in contemporary Australia, I argue it is not useful to understand Jewishness as an ethnicity. Given the diversity of ethnic background then, it is also contentious to understand Jewishness as a socio-cultural group. While many Jews are pro-Zionist, not all Jews are, and while some are Bundist, others are not. While some Jews still speak Yiddish, the numbers are rapidly declining. If not practicing Judaism, some Jews at least hold onto a tradition of Judaism, while other Jews have little connection with the

Jewish religion at all, and still call themselves Jews. It would be a difficult task, albeit an understandable desire, to find a shared common culture among all Australian Jews.

If Jewish identity is not simply a religious identity, nor simply an ethnic or socio-cultural identity, is it, as Rubinstein suggests, a combination of all three? A multi-faceted identity with different elements being important at different times, historically and for the individual? My task is not to provide an answer, but rather to highlight the gaps, complications and idiosyncrasies of contemporary identity. Complications and idiosyncrasies that Jewish writers themselves discuss.

In Amirah: An un-Australian Childhood (1983) Australian author Amirah Inglis, does indeed represent Jewish identity beyond Judaic religious practice. Writing of her parents' Jewishness, Inglis says:

Though my parents were both Jews, they had no religion. Born and brought up in Poland and formed by differing degrees of Jewish upbringing, they had become convinced atheists by the time I got to know them and by none of the ordinary signs were they Jewish. We did not obey the dietary laws: we mixed meat and milk, ate bacon and pork. We never attended synagogue to pray, not even on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. We did not observe the Sabbath. My mother never cooked, nor did my father preside over, the Seder, the solemn Passover meal and celebration which I had never even heard of (63).

Similarly, Australian poet Andrea Goldsmith in "Only Connect: Musings of an Australian Jew" (Goldsmith 1999) also describes a secular Jewish identity. Goldsmith writes:

Orthodox Judaism holds no attraction for me; the traditional observance of Judaism is not where I locate my Jewishness. Yet I feel none the less a Jew, am none the less a Jew. I have chosen my own texts, untutored choices and deliberately contemptuous of order. It is not that they keep me Jewish, rather they build the Jew and support the Jew where religious observance is not an option and secular culture turns a suspicious eye (9).

For Goldsmith, a fifth generation Australian Jew, it is literature that is vital to Jewish identity. As she writes: "We Jews stand buried in paper . . . Home for the Jew is where the books are . . ." (Goldsmith 9). However, Goldsmith is also aware of the limitations of any

category of identity and writes: "Only much later did it occur to me that the search for identity is the search for certainty. A common enough human desire, but pure illusion" (7).

As these two writers' extracts exemplify, there is no easy way to define Jewish identity. Any understanding of Jewish identity that proposes to be the complete knowledge will certainly deny the possibility of a multi-faceted and dynamic identity experienced by the individual (in society). However, having said this, Jewish identity, or Jewishness, like other identificatory groups, does rely on collective remembering and memory. For Jewish people, and Goldsmith exemplifies this, remembering is institutionalised through books - the written word. Jewishness is also, in many ways, a remembrance of a past of persecution and wandering, a restlessness borne from the lack of a homeland. The connection between a contemporary sense of Jewishness and an awareness of Jewish history and memory, is obvious. Jewish identity, as other collective identities, is formed through multiple acts of remembering.

Thus, Jewish identity is dynamic and shifting, and while it cannot be easily defined it is also vital to acknowledge that a "lack" of coherence does not mean a diminishing of importance for individual and collective identity - quite the contrary. In the search for identity, and in the ambiguity, lies the constant making of the identity that assures attention and maintains the integrity of the lived experience.

Identity and a Literary Tradition?

The difficulty of maintaining a shared definition of Jewish identity impacts on the analysis of a Jewish literary tradition in Australia. Not only is the identity category itself so diverse, but the hesitancy or refusal to identify with certain categorisations also complicates a project of "discovering" (producing) a "tradition." Many writers of Jewish extract do not identify themselves as "Jewish writers," nor wish to be defined this way.¹⁵ Many writers who have a Jewish background find few points of identification with other writers who have a Jewish background. Similarly, the concerns of one writer's work can be so different to another's

¹⁵ This situation is of course, not confined to writers who are Jewish. Many writers who are lesbians, gay, migrants, and so on, argue that they do not want to be categorised in this way, and/or have their writing limited to these audiences.

that placing them within a shared tradition can be deemed too great a leap, especially if they refuse the category to begin with.

However, with this said, insight can be gained from reading writers in particular contexts involving other writers. In Australia, one of these contexts we might want to consider when thinking about the history of Jewish writing is Yiddish writing. Yiddish, as previously mentioned, was also the mother tongue of Brett's parents and the streets of both Carlton and St. Kilda were filled with Yiddish conversation. Yiddish culture thrived in Melbourne during Brett's childhood and must have impacted significantly on her understanding of Jewishness.

Yiddish is the language of the Eastern European Jews, a derivation of German, it has existed as the defining language of the diaspora Jews. However, Yiddish, as a spoken language is declining fast, as English has now replaced Yiddish as the new language of the diaspora. This decline in spoken Yiddish has also been encouraged from, and within Israel, where Hebrew is the official language. In Israel, Yiddish was regarded as the language of the persecuted, whereas Hebrew "was looked upon as a legitimate expression of Jewish nationalism and, hence, of self-respect" (Rubinstein, The Jews in Australia 16).

However, there have been several Jewish writers of Yiddish in Australia, and this shared language of the "exiled" gave the Yiddish writer a sense of a continuing tradition in which to place him/her self. The three most well known Yiddish writers in Australia, that shared a close association, were Pinchas Goldhar, Herz Bergner and Judah Waten. Pinchas Goldhar and Herz Bergner both lived in Melbourne and wrote in Yiddish in the 1940s and 1950s, during Lily Brett's childhood. Pinchas Goldhar was born in Lodz in Poland in 1901 and migrated to Australia in 1926. Between 1931 and 1933 Golhar edited the first Yiddish paper in Australia and in 1939 he published his collection Stories About Australia, which was the second Yiddish book to be published in Australia. Goldhar also translated English into Yiddish, and translated stories by well known Australian writers such as Henry Lawson and Katherine Susannah Pritchard, which were then published overseas. Thus, Goldhar contributed to Australian literature by writing of the Australian context in Yiddish, and then by giving Australian writing in English an international audience through his Yiddish translations.

Herz Bergner, Goldhar's contemporary, was also born in Poland, in Radinmo in 1907. Bergner published several stories in Yiddish before arriving in Australia in 1937. In 1946 Bergner's Between Sky and Sea, a novel about migration, won the Australian Literature Society gold medal (I will discuss this book in the next chapter). All of Bergner's stories were written in Yiddish, and included five collections of short stories and three novels. Bergner and Goldhar are Australia's most highly considered Yiddish writers and also most decidedly left wing Jewish intellectuals. Neither Bergner nor Goldhar practiced Judaism, they were culturally Jewish, but not religiously Jewish.

The third important writer to associate with Yiddish writing is Judah Waten. Judah Waten was born in Russia in 1911 and migrated to Australia with his parents as a child. Waten has published many novels, short stories, essays and articles and has become one of Australia's most acclaimed "migrant" writers. Waten's first book of short stories entitled Alien Son was published as a collection in 1952 and is hailed as the first "significant work to take as its subject 'foreign' or non-English-speaking migrants in Australia" (Carter 53). Waten was involved with the Communist Party for much of his life, and moved within left wing nationalist artistic circles. While Waten is not known for writing in Yiddish, he translated both Bergner and Goldhar into English, and promoted their work. However, while Waten supported these Yiddish writers he was also a firm believer in the evolution of Yiddish writing into an "Australian writing tradition."

In the late 1940s, Judah Waten published several articles on the subject of Yiddish writing in Australia. Yiddish has always been contentious in regard to debates around assimilation, as Yiddish is a clear marker of Jewish difference. Historically, Yiddish has also had class connotations, and has traditionally been associated with the poor, immigrant, working class Jews. In Australia, Yiddish divided the Jewish community into Anglo and immigrant factions (Carter 192). Judah Waten, when considering Goldhar and Bergner, built an argument both for Yiddish literature, while at the same time arguing that this literature is in transition and moving toward "Australian literature." Waten argued that while Yiddish literature in Australia represents an important continuation of the cultures of Poland and Russia, literature must not remain static and must adapt to its new environments to survive (Carter 192). As Yiddish writers, Waten recognised that both Bergner and Goldhar were not only marginal to the Anglo-Celtic Australians but also to the Anglo-Australian Jews. Waten argued most strongly for the acceptance of Goldhar's and Bergner's Yiddish writing into the

category of Australian literature. However, Yiddish writing that did not comment on life in Australia, but just happened to be written in Australia, was not, Waten maintained, Australian literature. Indeed, Waten was more intent on promoting Australian literature, which included migrant literature, than arguing a case for a Yiddish tradition (from abroad) which could be continued in Australia. Thus, while Goldhar and Bergner were writing in a language with its own long tradition, their work was also being promoted as Australian literature, because it dealt with the Australian context.

Judah Waten's own writing career, and political and cultural alliances show the complexity of defining a Jewish writing tradition. While Waten advocated Yiddish writing, he did not believe that this was where the future of Jewish writing in Australia lay. While Waten had firm alliances with Bergner and Goldhar, he was not part of a general Jewish writing community - this community never existed. While Waten wrote of the experiences of being a migrant, he did not limit this writing to the Jewish migrant experience, but to other migrant experiences, including the Irish Catholics. Waten, as one of our best known Jewish writers, was not comfortable at all with this title "Jewish writer." For example, in "My Two Literary Careers" (1971) Waten wrote: "I do not regard myself as a Jewish writer but as very much an Australian writer who happens to be of Jewish extraction" (qtd. in Carter 184). This claim not only stemmed from Waten's firm belief in the need for an Australian writing tradition, which was inclusive of migrant writing, but also in his understanding of Jewishness. As an avid anti-Zionist, non religious, communist Jew, Waten resisted the idea of Jews as being a monolithic ethnic group. He wrote:

I do not believe Catholics or Protestants are ethnic groups nor are the Jews. Jews are many things, national, religious, secular and cultural . . . The Jews in the Communist Party of Israel are Jews . . . and not even the most pious rabbi in Israel would doubt it. (qtd. in Carter 198)

I will return to Waten in the next chapter to discuss the suppression of communist writing in Australia in the 1950s. However, why I have briefly drawn on Waten here is to give an example of a writer who, while Jewish in background, did not desire to be, or define himself as, a "Jewish" writer. That Waten is one of the best known "Jewish" writers in this country shows not only the desire for categorisation in the critical literary community, but also the complexity in attempting to define a "tradition," when the writers themselves are resistant to the categorisation.

Lily Brett, while certainly not a Yiddish writer, does adopt Yiddish terms in her writing, especially in her early Melbourne publications Things Could Be Worse (1990) and What God Wants (1991). Many of Brett's Jewish characters in these stories use Yiddish terms, and through the use of this vernacular, Brett manages to capture this Melbourne Polish Yiddish culture, post World War II. In this way then, there are important similarities between Brett's writing and these early Jewish writers, in as much as they represent Melbourne *Yiddishkeit* (Yiddish culture) in the twentieth century.

However, while Judah Waten was not interested in promoting a particular Jewish literary tradition, or even a Yiddish one (that was not evolving into an Australian tradition) other Jewish writers have been. The attempt to trace a writing tradition is most obviously undertaken in the form of the anthology. The anthology has become one of the main sites for categorising authors and their texts, and Jewish writing has been no exception. Several anthologies of Jewish writing have been published in Australia, which I will discuss to show how different editors approach the concept of a Jewish tradition and Jewish identity - terms resisted by Waten.

Shalom: A Collection of Australian Jewish Stories, the first collection of Australian Jewish writing, was compiled by Nancy Keesing and published by Collins in 1978. While the mere fact of this anthology's publication alone, in 1978, might suggest a distinct Jewish writing tradition, given that it pre-dated the many anthologies of "migrant" writing, Keesing is quick to dispel this.¹⁶ Keesing writes: "There is not, and never has been, an identifiable school or group of Jewish writers of fiction in Australia. For that matter there are not, and never have been, many Australian Jewish writers of fiction" (9). Keesing explains that while there have always been Jewish immigrants from the earliest colonial history, there has never been a mass migration of Jews. Unlike in America, where virtually whole villages of Jews from Europe re-settled, there has been no mass migration of Jews from Europe to Australia. In Australia, also unlike in America, the Jewish community has always contained a high proportion of first and second generation migrants, due to the different waves of migration.

¹⁶ After Two Ways Meet. Stories of Migrants in Australia, edited by Louise E. Rorabacher and published in 1963, it wasn't until the 1980s that we saw other collections of migrant writing emerge. The first of these were Ethnic Australia, edited by Manfred Jurgensen and published in 1981. Shalom did, therefore, pre-date the influx of anthologies of "ethnic" and "migrant" writing.

Reflecting on this demographic history and its impact on literature, Keesing argues that “good writers” are rare before a third migrant generation (11).

Similarly, Gael Hammer in her collection of Jewish writing, Pomegranates, published ten years later in 1988, writes: “The Americans have shown us that it is the third generation that begins to produce a home-grown product of lasting literary value. It seems to take at least three generations of experience for writers to be able to contain the memory and speak of it with substance and maturity” (Hammer 14). Again, the importance of shared memory over time for a sense of communal identity is evident. Which is not to suggest, I believe, that third generation writing in general has greater “literary” value than second generation writing. There are many successful first and second generation Jewish writers in Australia, including Lily Brett. However, by the time a settler nation has established a third and fourth generation of writers, a tradition (of sorts) can begin to be formed. This “tradition” does, of course, need a collective memory of its predecessors, and this collective memory is partly reliant on the inscription of identity in writing (or an oral tradition). One of the roles of anthologies then, is to become a site for collective memory.

While Keesing denies there is a particular Australian Jewish literary tradition, the nature of the anthology itself, as a framing device, suggests otherwise. Keesing does grapple with questions of identity and who might be included in her anthology, even when she maintains she is not trying to produce a sense of “tradition.” Keesing writes of the inclusion of the writer Len Fox:

Some strict traditionalists may dispute Fox's inclusion since his Jewish descent is on his father's side . . . Len Fox says that increasingly he thinks back to his family and their background and his fine recent story, 'Bailey's Pine' justifies his inclusion (11-12).

The implication that an exploration of Jewishness within one’s own writing serves to aid in the justification of a writer’s inclusion within a Jewish anthology, is also made within the latest collection of Jewish writing Enough Already (to be discussed shortly).

Similar to Keesing in her introduction to Shalom, Gael Hammer uses her introduction to Pomegranates (1988) to discuss the historical presence of Jews in Australia. Also like Keesing, Hammer refers to the Jewish convicts on the First Fleet and then discusses the first Jewish free settlers and the migratory patterns of Jews throughout periods of Australian

history. Hammer proceeds through the rest of her introduction by discussing the history of Jewish writing in Australia and explaining how this history has structured her book, which is subtitled “A Century of Australian Jewish Writing.” Again, the sub-title suggests the framing device of the anthology in producing a “tradition.”

In Part One of Hammer’s anthology, which covers the 1890s to the 1930s, Hammer explains:

The mannered and clichéd writing characteristic of this period was hard to avoid and any Jewish content was in subject rather than feeling . . . I, therefore, preferred memoirs, diaries and letters which allow the reader to become more involved with the passions and concerns of the writers (12-13).

Given the lack of published writing by Australian Jews of this early period, the inclusion of diaries and letters is somewhat understandable. However, the category “Australian Jewish writing” certainly needs to be questioned when these unpublished personal memoirs and letters are published in an anthology dedicated to forming a “literary” tradition. Also, much of what is included in this early section lacks any indicators of “Jewish writing” (bar the presence in this book). Some of the written pieces do not mention Jews or Jewish identity at all. This is not, of course, a necessary component of Jewish writing. Many contemporary “Jewish writers” do not feel the need to explore “Jewishness,” and may none the less be comfortable with the categorisation “Jewish writer.” However, when an unpublished personal letter that includes nothing on the subject of “Jewishness” or Jews is published, one might suggest that the one hundred year tradition of Jewish writing is rather tenuous. And one is more likely to agree with Keesing's earlier argument in 1978, that there is no Jewish writing tradition in Australia.

In the third and most recent anthology of Australian Jewish writing entitled Enough Already: An Anthology of Australian Jewish Writing (1999) the editor, Alan Jacobs, situates his anthology in relation to both Shalom and Pomegranates, and then differentiates his purpose by focusing the anthology only on writers born after World War II. Jacobs argues that such a collection is timely as there has been a proliferation of contemporary Jewish writers.

Jacobs writes:

In 1978, Nancy Keesing lamented, in the introduction of Shalom, that 'there are not, and never have been, many Australian-Jewish writers of fiction'. This is certainly not the case today as this anthology attests. Furthermore, many of the writers born post-

war concentrate on a variety of issues and themes far different from those which concerned earlier generations of Jewish writers in Australia (vi).

One of the themes that Jacobs highlights is that of the Holocaust, with a particular emphasis on the experiences of descendants of Holocaust survivors, such as Lily Brett, Mark Baker and Ramona Koval.

Neither of the previous anthologies, Jacobs argues, explored what he calls, “the edges” of Jewish writing in this country.¹⁷ In his 1999 collection Jacobs includes writers who identify as Jews and who concentrate on Jewish themes, as well as those who are Jewish “but for whom Judaism acts as a minor or negligible force in their lives” (Jacobs vi). So how then does Jacobs define Jewish identity? Explaining his working definition of Jewish identity, Jacobs writes:

I have borrowed the Nazi definition, for want of a better term, of Jewish identity. Thus, I have included writers who are only partly Jewish and those who may not be Jewish Halachic-ly (according to the Jewish religion), but who are willing to admit that they have an element of Jewish blood in their background. And are willing to write about it (vii).

While it could be argued that the key element in this definition is the last element mentioned above: that the writers write about their Jewish background, it is of course not that simple. If the Demidenko controversy¹⁸ reveals nothing else in Australia, it does demonstrate that within literary institutions, and other public institutions more broadly, simply describing oneself as of a particular background (and writing from this position), is not enough to gain public legitimacy. Thus, Jacob's working definition would seem to rely most significantly on the element of “Jewish blood.” One cannot simply write about being Jewish if there is no bloodline. The resounding resemblance to the situation with locating Indigenous writers in Australia is deafening. Jacob's emphasis on “Jewish blood” is certainly not uncontentious. Perhaps more contentious though, is his open admittance and his choice of terminology, rather than the actual categorisation itself. The other Jewish anthologies also, in the end, relied on a category based on Jewish ancestry, or “Jewish blood,” even though they gave

¹⁷ Writers exploring the “edges” in this anthology include, Andrea Goldsmith, Bernard Cohen, Alan Jacobs, Dorothy Porter, Mark Baker, Rosa Safransky and Tobsha Learner.

¹⁸I will discuss the Demidenko controversy in Chapter Three.

other indicators of what “Jewishness” meant. Nobody without Jewish ancestry has appeared in a Jewish collection so far, and nor would we expect them to.

What is particularly interesting is that it is Jacobs, a younger Jewish writer, and the editor of the most recent collection of Jewish writing, who openly resorts to a racial categorisation of “Jew.” Instead of differentiating his definition of “Jew” from the Nazi definition that saw the destruction of approximately six million Jewish people, Jacobs openly “borrows” this definition. It could be argued that Jacobs is making a political statement by using a categorisation of denigration and reclaiming it as positive. Much like the reclaiming of the word “black” by African Americans, the term “queer” by gay, lesbian, and transsexual people, and the many terms of denigration to describe women that feminists have reclaimed. However, unlike these other cases, Jacobs is not reclaiming a word, but a definition, rather than redefining a word, which is the more common political strategy by minority groups. Not surprisingly, Jacobs’ definition does meet with opposition.

In a review of Enough Already (Australian Book Review May 2000) Serge Liberman, a well known and well published Jewish writer and commentator, questions Jacobs' justification of his selection of writers for this anthology. Liberman question the inclusion of writers such as Brian Castro, Dorothy Porter and Judy Horacek, who while having “Jewish blood” - a term he finds problematic in itself - do not carry the necessary matrilineal line that still defines Jewishness (however, Liberman also agrees that the patrilineal line should be recognised). Besides the inclusion of certain writers though, Liberman contests Jacob’s chosen definition of Jewishness:

What grates too is Jacobs' definition of Jewishness that has determined his choice of inclusions. As he writes, 'I have borrowed the Nazi definition, for want of a better term, of Jewish identity.' A better less-in-your-face term might have been 'the 1935 Nuremberg Laws' (Liberman 11).

Liberman continues with this critique:

And more - even though this reviewer too can, in the light of wartime events, argue what he believes is a just case for a definition of Jewishness actually based on the Nuremberg Laws, he sought vainly for an informed and cogently argued editorial explanation for these writers' inclusion beyond the glib one that their literary references to their Jewish background ipso facto validated their presence (11-12).

So, while Jacobs has attempted to create an anthology different from the previous two and more inclusive of newer Jewish writers, his attempt has not been met favourably by all in the Jewish community. Liberman's critique of Jacobs once again highlights the politics of anthologising "difference." Definitions are always controversial, inclusions are questioned and exclusions are highlighted. Would we expect anything less? I argue that it is the controversy, the debates and disagreements that indeed need to be valued and that these debates, rather than overwhelming agreement, suggest that the field of "Jewish writing" in Australia is flourishing. As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, a scan of Australian Jewish history itself exemplifies the problems of categorisation. The fact that "Jewishness" is difficult to define, the fact that it is controversial, the admittance that it is idiosyncratic and that there are gaps and limitations to any definition of Jewish identity, can give one a sense of pleasure in its unsettling nature. The alternative is a sense of certainty and closure, which is really no alternative at all.

While many writers, like Waten, would argue that they are not aware of, or believe that they are writing as part of a "tradition," they may be classified in this way within an anthology. An anthology's purpose, is most often, to create a sense of tradition, whether it be "migrant writing", "gay and lesbian writing", "women's writing." It is the intention of the editors that is of great importance here. While Keesing in her introduction to her anthology denied a tradition of Jewish writing, the framing of the book as an anthology of Jewish writing suggests the contrary. Similarly, while a writer of Jewish background may not wish to be identified as a "Jewish writer," once they appear in an anthology of Jewish writing, they are read in this way, and carry this label.

While Lily Brett has been anthologised in two of these Jewish collections, she has also been marked as a "migrant writer" in anthologies of migrant writing. The issue of migrant writing, ethnic writing and minority writing will be taken up in Chapter Three to discuss the importance of these identificatory categories on the production and reception of Lily Brett's work. However, before doing this, I turn to the category of "Jewish identity" again, this time looking at the influence of the Holocaust on Jewish identity in Australia, and internationally. For, while Lily Brett's work has little in common with the writing of Judah Waten, bar the representation of Melbourne Yiddish culture, for example, she does share concerns with Jewish writers who represent the importance of the Holocaust on Jewish identity. The context in which this writing has emerged is the subject of the next chapter.

Thus, while a limited understanding of Brett's work is gained by attempting to place, and confine, her to a (phantasmic) "Australian Jewish writing tradition," given the complexity and diversity of both the category and the writers, I will argue that we should look at Brett's predecessors as those Jewish writers who have written on the Holocaust. It is the relationship between the Holocaust and "Jewishness" that is most fundamental to any understanding of Brett's writing. Thus, in the proceeding chapters I will explore the rise of Holocaust consciousness, and how this has come to affect a sense of "Jewishness." Tracing this history is to provide the context for understanding the popular reception of Brett's writing.

CHAPTER TWO: FROM SILENCE TO SATURATION. THE HOLOCAUST AND COLLECTIVE MEMORY: THE EARLY YEARS.

The Holocaust is the defining experience of the twentieth century for Jews everywhere. But in Australia, it is doubly so. It has determined the composition of the Jewish community, coloured its thinking, and in a large measure shaped the way Jews see themselves (Epstein 68).

In Chapter One I began a discussion of the effects of post World War II migration on not only the composition of the Jewish population in Australia, but also the invigorated sense of Jewish community and a “particularist” Jewish identity. As I explained, Lily Brett and her parents were part of this influx of Jewish migrants in 1948 and they helped to shape the community of Polish Yiddish speaking Jews in Melbourne. In this chapter I explore this post World War II migration of Jews further by focusing on understandings of, and reception to, “the Holocaust”¹ - an event that many of these migrants survived. As I outlined in Chapter One, there is little that can be said to be common to all Australian Jews, something that makes Jewish identity so complex and varied. However, in the following chapters I will be arguing that the Holocaust does have a central place in contemporary understandings of Jewish identity. Now, more than ever, the Holocaust (and the Holocaust industry) provides Jews around the globe with a common trope of identity (of suffering and survival). Tied to this, is the most interesting situation whereby the generations of Jews that have come after the Holocaust, are more popularly defined as Jews through the Holocaust.² A discussion of the Holocaust as a historical phenomenon will ensue. I discuss this history of emerging Holocaust consciousness by also exploring artistic representations of the Holocaust, including those in Australia. I will show that these artistic representations are part of this broader emerging Holocaust consciousness.

¹ I use inverted commas here to recognise that this is a term that was not in common usage at this time, but is a more recent construction. I will discuss the emergence of this term “Holocaust” throughout this and the next chapter. I will not continue to use inverted commas, but adopt the term knowing its retrospective meaning.

²Of course, the Holocaust saw Jews defined in such a way that there was little choice or control over their own categorisation. I am not implying that Jews today face these infringements on their liberties, but rather, that in the post World War II decades there was little space in the larger societies for the recognition of Jewish life as defined through, and effected by, the loss, suffering and fear born from the Holocaust. Today that space has been made available, and the effects of this history on contemporary Jewish identity is recognised and validated. This will be discussed throughout the chapter.

Little has been written about the history of Holocaust consciousness in Australia. While Australian historian Paul Bartrop has produced a fine book on response to the Jewish refugee crisis between 1933-45 in Australia,³ and other historians of Jewish history in Australia have also written on this period (W. D. Rubinstein, H. Rubinstein, K. Kweit, S. Rutland) there is no seminal text on post war response to the Holocaust in Australia. However, in terms of the particular response to the Holocaust by Jewish communities in Australia, Judith Berman's book Holocaust Remembrance in Australian Jewish Communities 1945-2000 published in 2001, is an important study. In this book, Berman explores Australian Jewish response to the Holocaust (in NSW, Victoria and Western Australia) by focusing on three areas: Yom HaShoah commemorations, Holocaust education in Jewish day schools and Jewish Holocaust museums in Australia. However, Berman's study is only focused on three Jewish communities in Australia and not on response by the larger Australian population and institutions more generally.

While Australia's response to the Holocaust has differed in significant ways from the United States of America, there are important similarities that allow for comparison. Importantly, Australia receives much of its popular understandings on the Holocaust from representations emerging out of the United States. Both the United States, and to a lesser extent Germany and Israel, will be discussed to draw comparison and show how important international politics and global flows effect Holocaust consciousness in Australia. It is also important at this stage to acknowledge that the great body of Lily Brett's work is now written from the United States, and in many ways reflects the mood of that country, especially of New York.⁴ Lily Brett's audience is an international audience, or global reader, and her work cannot be confined to one country, or one country's literary history.

One of the most important and controversial recent studies of Holocaust consciousness comes from the American Jewish scholar, Peter Novick. In The Holocaust and Collective Memory (published as The Holocaust in American Life in the U.S in 1999) Peter Novick notes that while popular films and books about the Vietnam War almost all came out within

³ Bartrop, Paul R. Australia and the Holocaust 1933-45. 1994.

⁴ In fact Brett's latest book Between Mexico and Poland (2002) dedicates much of its content to the experience of living in New York, pre and post September 11. Brett's publication before this was a collection of short journalistic pieces called New York, and is wholly concerned with describing life in this city. Both of Brett's novels, Too Many Men and Just Like That contain protagonists who are women who live in New York.

five to ten years after the war had ended (as did the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington) the Holocaust has a very different post-war history. The Holocaust was rarely publicly acknowledged in America for the twenty years following the war, and then from the 1970s onward became more and more central in American public discourses. So central, to the extent that by the 1980s, the Holocaust had become a distinctive thing, marked off from other Nazi atrocities, “singular in its scope, its symbolism, and its world-historical significance” (Novick 19). Before the 1970s the Holocaust barely existed as a singular event in its own right. While the effects of the Nazi regime were all too real, ““the Holocaust”, as we speak of it today, was largely a retrospective construction, something that would not have been recognizable to most people at the time” (Novick 20). Judith Berman, focusing particularly on Australia, also posits the 1970s as the period when the Holocaust moved from “the periphery of Australian Jewish public consciousness to become a major component of Australian Jewish identity” (Berman, Holocaust Remembrance 9). This development, as Berman argues, was “part of an international process, and understanding this international context is essential to defining Australian Jewish responses” (Holocaust Remembrance 9).

While many writers discuss this post war silence preceding the 1970s in terms of repression of trauma, such as Dominick LaCapra (quoted in the Introduction) Novick largely rejects this hypothesis as an explanation for the long silence, then re-emergence of the Holocaust in popular discourses. James Young also rejects the idea of society as a whole repressing memory, and critiques a use of psychoanalytic terms to explain this phenomenon. Young argues that there is a problem with applying psychoanalytic terms to the memory of groups as the many different kinds of memory come to be interpreted through understandings of memory-conflict and strategies of denial. As Young writes:

If memory of an event is repressed by an individual who lacks the context - either emotional or epistemological - to assimilate it, that is one thing. But to suggest that a society “represses” memory because it is not in its interest to remember, or because it is ashamed of this memory, is to lose sight of the many other social and political forces underpinning national memory (The Texture of Memory xi).

Young argues, as Nora does, that societies remember because their rituals and institutions organise and shape their constituents' memories. People, however, do the remembering, and this remembering, even if it is at society's bidding, does not exist outside of the people who remember (Young, The Texture of Memory xi).

Like Young, Novick also focuses on the social and political forces when explaining remembering and forgetting. Novick draws on Maurice Halbwachs' notion of collective memory, which I discussed in the introduction, as a more plausible concept to explain this historical phenomenon. Novick argues that the meaning for American Jewry of its centring of the Holocaust is inseparable from the context in which that centring has occurred. Thus, there is a circular relationship between collective identity and collective memory. We centre certain memories because they seem to express what is central to our collective identity. Once these memories are brought to the fore, they reinforce that identity (Novick 7). Berman argues likewise in terms of Australian Jewish identity and the Holocaust when she writes: "Public institutional forms of Holocaust remembrance have been intricately connected to sustaining Jewish unity and identity" (Berman, Holocaust Remembrance 8). Thus, as discussed in the introduction, the Holocaust as memory needs to be understood in relation to its meaning for Jewish identity.

But how has this contemporary Holocaust consciousness emerged historically in Australia? What are some of the cultural and political forces at play that have promoted this new awareness? In this chapter I will explore this question by focusing on the post World War II period from 1945 to the end of the 1960s and suggest some of the forces that have acted over time to either promote, or more often suppress, Holocaust consciousness. These social and political forces alone cannot explain how each individual will come to an understanding of her/his own identity. However, when thinking about memory, especially the representation of memory on a collective level, these social and political forces can tell us much about the discourses available for the individual to understand and express his/her memories, and their impact on a sense of "self."

Post War Recovery and Rebuilding

Claudia Koonz, discussing the memorialisation of the concentration camps of Nazi Germany, explains that the denial about the concentration camps prior to May 1945 was followed by a very brief shock of confrontation, before quickly giving way to forgetting after 1946. Besides the obvious desire on the part of many German people to "forget" this knowledge, the desperate scarcities of post war Germany was foremost in occupying the German population. Directly after the war had ended for Germany, sixty six million

Germans had to face an influx of ten million German refugees from former German controlled territories and eight million displaced people and occupation soldiers had to be housed and fed. There were severe shortages of fuel, food and housing, which made living conditions worse in that first year after the war than during the last year of the war itself. Thus, peace bought the German people little initial relief, and taking this into account, Koonz argues that: “few Germans cared much about commemorating the dead or exposing Nazi crimes” (263). A nation, now divided, had to be rebuilt after the devastation of war, and there was little time for reflection on the events of the war, at least in public institutions. Besides Eugen Kogon's Der SS-Staat (1947) no indictment of Nazism gained much attention in post war West Germany. While more than fifty memoirs by survivors of concentration camps appeared in East and West Germany shortly after the war, they received little public comment (Koonz 263). Apart from Karl Jaspers' The Question of German Guilt (1946) and Friedrich Meinecke's German Catastrophe (1950) intellectuals from West Germany virtually ignored Nazism in this initial post war period.

In East Germany, politicians spoke of Nazi terror and analysed it within a Marxist-Leninist understanding that had no place for recognising genocide. Caroline Wiedmer explains:

National Socialism was interpreted through the lens of a Marxist theory of fascism which held that the ruling classes, motivated by militarism, imperialism, and monocapitalism, had made possible Hitler's rise to power and the ensuing war. Defining itself in this way as an anti-fascist state made possible not only the GDR's opposition to Hitler's Germany, but also its distinction from “the other Germany,” that was allegedly predisposed to fascism anyway because of its capitalist structure (175).

As a consequence of this economic understanding of fascism, those aspects of mass murder that could not be incorporated into this economic understanding (the genocide of the Jews and of other minorities such as the Sinti and Roma) were deemed a threat to the self-understanding and legitimisation of the new GDR (Wiedmer 175). Thus, concentration camp memorial sites in the GDR, most prominently Buchenwald, Sachsenhausen and Ravensbruck, were “blueprints of GDR official memory of the National Socialist past, produced by the government to forge a collective social identity commensurate with the needs of GDR ideology” (Wiedmer 169). In both the new East and West Germany then, a

virtual silence about genocide and racism settled in and it was not until the 1960s that war and Nazism returned “to public consciousness” (Koonz 265).⁵

In America in the early 1940s it was the overall course of the war that was the prevailing discourse. The fact that during the war, and for a period after, there was no popular word for the destruction of Europe's Jews is not that significant. What is of some importance, Novick argues, is that when the word holocaust (lower case) was used during the war, it was nearly always applied to the totality of the destruction, not the special fate of Jews (20).

Throughout the war few Americans, and few Australians, knew of the scale of the European Jewish catastrophe. As Novick explains, the murder of European Jewry was considered one among the countless ways the war was affecting the lives of tens of millions of people around the world. It was not “the Holocaust” (as now understood) but rather the (underestimated) Jewish proportion of the holocaust (of all peoples) that was publicly acknowledged (Novick 29).

Indeed, when the Americans liberated the concentration camps of Germany and encountered the prisoners incarcerated there, they did not encounter “the Holocaust.” Nazi atrocities were instead understood to have been directed at enemies of the Third Reich, of which Jews were but a part. There was nothing about the reporting of the liberation of the camps to suggest that: “the camps were emblematic of anything other than Nazi barbarism in general” (Novick 65). The fact was, when the Americans encountered the camps most of the victims were not Jews. The best estimate is that Jews counted for one fifth of those liberated from camps in Germany by American soldiers. The murder camps in the East, where the vast majority of victims were Jews, were either closed before the allies arrived or they were liberated by the Russians, as Auschwitz was. Thus, the liberation of the camps, as seen by many Americans and Australians on documentary footage,⁶ was not seen as the evidence of mass Jewish genocide as it is today. In terms of the impact the liberation of the camps did make in America, Novick writes:

⁵ The Sachsenhausen Memorial site was opened in 1961. The official opening of the Buchenwald State Museum and memorial was in 1958.

⁶ In 1945, 59 minute black and white documentary footage was released by the United States Counsel for the Prosecution of Axis Criminality entitled *Nazi Concentration Camps*. This footage was released as a motion picture (*Witness to genocide*) and was the record of the Nazi death camps as photographed by Allied forces advancing into Germany. The film shows surviving prisoners, victims of medical experiments, gas chambers and open mass graves.

Buchenwald was liberated on April 11; on April 12 President Roosevelt's sudden death plunged the nation into mourning. Dachau was liberated on April 29; the previous day Mussolini had been executed; the following day Hitler committed suicide. Mauthausen was liberated on May 6; the next day Germany surrendered unconditionally. And no sooner was the war in Europe over than the war in the Pacific - always of greater interest to Americans - heated up . . . Then came Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and V-J Day (66).

Thus, the liberation of the camps was but a part of a world in crisis, and the Jews amongst the many other people devastated by war.

1945, the year that brought to light the horrors of the death camps, also brought another horror which superseded these. It was Hiroshima, rather than Buchenwald, that had a much greater impact on the American public. The war, including the persecution of the Jews was a thing of the past, Hiroshima, on the other hand, signalled nuclear devastation in the present and future (Novick 110). Hiroshima had a similar impact on the Australian public, who were a very long way from the concentration camps of Europe. The new threat of nuclear disaster, along with war in the Pacific and Japanese bombing in Australia's north, superseded events in Europe for the vast majority of Australians.

However, the allies of World War II still had much invested in post war Germany. After the Nazi camps were liberated, the Allies were occupied with "bringing to justice" those who were deemed responsible for the outbreak of war, and the crimes of war committed by the "losing" side. In 1946 the victorious allies put the leading members of the Nazi government and military forces on trial for war crimes. To be known as the Nuremberg trials (the town where they were held in Germany) the defendants had to face the four counts: "The Common Plan," "Crimes Against Peace," "War Crimes" and "Crimes Against Humanity." From the outset, the International Military Tribunal was not set up solely to punish the leaders of the Third Reich for the Holocaust. Instead the focus was on trying those who were deemed responsible for beginning World War II, and to hold them accountable for the damage and loss of life this war had borne. However, when the shocking details of the atrocities committed against the Jewish people began to be revealed, the fourth count of "Crimes Against Humanity," came to be regarded as that which most represented the crime of Nazism (Bartrop, The Nuremberg Trials 606).

In Australia there was little political attention focused on these trials at the time. Paul Bartrop explains that an investigation of the Australian Archives accessions dealing with matters pertaining to war crimes trials shows that the main focus of Australian attention was directed towards Japanese war criminals rather than Nazis. On those few occasions where Nazis were concerned, the Australian government was only interested in relatively junior prisoner-of-war camp officers of German camps where Australian servicemen had been interned (Bartrop, The Nuremberg Trials 606). The Australian Parliament showed little interest in the Nuremberg proceedings, with only one reference having been made to the trials, and this three weeks after the trial had finished. As far as the Australian government was concerned, the International Military Tribunal which sat at Nuremberg between 20 November 1945 and 1 October 1946, was “none of its affair” (Bartrop, The Nuremberg Trials 606).

Despite the lack of parliamentary interest in the Nuremberg trials, the Australian government was interested in war crimes trials. In fact, after 1945, 275 separate trials were conducted by the Australian military authorities according with the War Crimes Act 1945, resulting in 644 convictions and 148 executions. Australia is certainly in line with larger powers in prosecuting war criminals. However, all of these convictions were of Japanese criminals of war, not of Germans (Bartrop, The Nuremberg Trials 607). It was the Japanese who bombed Australia’s North and were popularly recognised as responsible for other terrible actions against Australians, including the terrible treatment of Australian diggers at Changi and on the Burma Railway. Against these and other horrors affecting Australian servicemen and women, the crimes of the Nazis seemed distant. Bartrop writes:

What happened in Europe was terrible, but it happened to other people. The atrocities of the Japanese happened to us, and therefore commanded the greatest part of our attention, our legislation, and our spirit of vengeance (The Nuremberg Trials 607).

Thus, despite the large influx of Holocaust survivors into this country, the Australian authorities were fixated upon the experiences of the Australian POWs (prisoners of war) rather than the new migrant’s experiences in Europe.

However, while the Australian Government showed little interest in the Nuremberg trials, the Australian media did. For the media, the Nuremberg trials were a big story, one where issues of justice, responsibility and complicity could all be explored (Bartrop, The

Nuremberg Trials 607).⁷ The assumption at this time was that this would be the trial that brought to justice those who launched the war. However, shortly into the Trial, when the horrors of the Nazi treatment of the Jews began to be revealed, the Australian Press responded and these crimes against the Jews were revealed. From the 15th of December 1945 onward, the Australian Press reported the accusations of mass murder against the Jews. The activities that had taken place in the camps began to be revealed, as was the figure of 6 million Jewish murders (Bartrop, The Nuremberg Trials 610). However, over time, other items of news began to take precedence over the daily reportage of the Trials. The first year after the war saw many newsworthy items. The American atomic tests on Bikini Atoll, the nationalistic campaign against the Dutch in Indonesia, the Chinese Civil War and the continuing struggle between the Arabs, Jews and British in Palestine.

Thus, while the Australian Press was interested in the Trials' possibilities as a newsworthy item, these other events were also deemed newsworthy and took precedence. Also, while the Trials dealt with "Crimes Against Humanity" and the experiences of the Jews, this was considered only one aspect of the Trials that had a much larger agenda.⁸ It was not until the 1980s that Australia was involved in its own prosecution of Nazi war criminals. And when this occurred, there was a greater understanding of the war's events, and a growing acknowledgement of the particular suffering of the Jews. In the 1980s, war crimes trials were conducted with the Holocaust as the popular central context (I will discuss this further in the next chapter).

While Australia seemed a long way from the catastrophe of Europe, when thousands of refugees and migrants arrived in Australia after the war, the impact of the war in Europe came with them. Between 1945 and 1954 at least 17,600 Jewish survivors reached Australia and dramatically changed the nature of the Australian Jewish community, as explained in

⁷ The day the Trials opened, the 20th of November 1945, headlines in Australian newspapers read: "HISTORY'S GREATEST TRIAL OPENS" (Advertiser, Adelaide); "GREAT NAZI TRIAL TO OPEN TODAY" (Courier-Mail, Brisbane); "TRIAL OF TOP NAZIS OPENED" (Sydney Morning Herald) (Bartrop, The Nuremberg Trials 610).

⁸ Like Novick in emphasising the lack of centrality of the Jewish catastrophe in post war Western consciousness, Bartrop writes:

At no time was Nuremberg seen as an exclusively Jewish issue, nor, given the conditions prevailing at the time, could it have been. The Trials had been conducted of necessity, and for the betterment of all humanity. Removing this universalistic perspective and replacing it with a specific prosecution for crimes committed against one group of people only, would have had the effect of diverting attention from the main point of the trials, which was to punish those responsible for a global catastrophe (Bartrop, The Nuremberg Trials 616).

Chapter One. However, in general, these survivors were not encouraged to tell their stories. Migrants were encouraged to assimilate as soon as possible, and to leave their previous life experiences behind them (unless these experiences were useful to building the new post-war economy). The migrants who were part of the post-war influx came into a country whose people were quite pessimistic about the prospects of lasting peace. The early 1950s in Australia were marked by the prospect that Cold War tensions would boil over into another war. A series of international crisis appeared to suggest an outbreak of global conflict, and it was the outbreak of the Korean War in mid 1950, which saw this fear exacerbated.

When the Korean War began on the 25th of June 1950 many speculated that it would be the flashpoint for a third world war. While it was over by mid 1953, the toll, in terms of civilian deaths especially, was very large. In September 1950, when the war was intense, Prime Minister Menzies returned from a trip to Britain and the US, and warned Australians to prepare for a possible World War III (Murphy 93). Murphy explains that: “for a time in 1950 and 1951 the language of imminent war was pervasive in popular magazines and public discourse” (Murphy 94). During this time there was an emphasis on defence preparedness, and conscription was re-introduced in 1951. Also, during this period of the early 1950s there was a pervasive fear of the threat of communism, both internationally and internally within Australia.

Since the late 1940s, Liberal Party Prime Minister Menzies had promised to outlaw the Communist Party in Australia, arguing that local communists were disloyal and subversive at a time of anticipated conflict between the West and the Communist Bloc. The local communists were portrayed as a threat to national security as they were said to have international links, and to be directed from Moscow (Murphy 97). On April 27 1950, Menzies introduced the Communist Party Dissolution Bill into the House of Representatives. The Bill provided for the Communist Party to be declared an unlawful association. The Bill was passed back and forth between houses until in late September it was amended, and in late October 1950, communism became illegal in Australia. According to Alomes et al, Menzies’ “depiction of the Korean War as the beginning of World War III was typical of the attempt to nurture fear in the community” and that from this perspective, “every attempt by Communists to be active in Australian society was the work of the advance guard of the invading red or yellow armies” (9). Thus, communists were seen as

sinister conspirators undermining Australian democracy and an Australian way of life (Alomes et al 10).

In Australia, as in America (and many other nations) Jews had long been associated with communism; this association going back to the Bolshevik revolution. In the United States most of the “agitators” deported from the U.S. during the Red Scare after the First World War had indeed been Jewish. In the years between the wars, the Communist Jew was a common image of anti-Semitism, and while the Russian - American alliance in World War II muted charges of Jewish pro-Sovietism, this was only temporary. While most of the communists in America after the war were Jews, this was only a minority of the Jewish population. The fact that most Jews were not Communists did not impact on the continuing anti-Semitic equation of Jews equals communism (Novick 92). A similar situation existed in Australia.

The influx of Jewish refugees into Australia after World War II exacerbated this fear of a communist/Jewish alliance. The fear and paranoia surrounding communism touched all areas of Australian society, including literary institutions. In 1954, on June the 23rd, the Sydney Daily Mirror published an editorial entitled: “Taxpayers’ Money to help the Reds.” The context of this editorial was the publication of Judah Waten’s first novel The Unbending and the Commonwealth Literary Fund’s (CLF) financial support for the publication of this book that was deemed “communist propaganda” (Carter 73). The CLF faced charges in parliament for supporting communist writers and promoting communist propaganda. Judah Waten was obviously targeted, for despite not being in the Communist Party at this time, he did have clear communist allegiances. However, Waten was not the only target, nor the CLF, and both communist and non-communist liberals were targeted by anti-communist fear induced propaganda. As Carter writes: “There were few literary activities or literary artefacts in the fifties untouched by cold war politics. It was likely to affect both what was written and how it was read, what was published and where” (76). While the attacks on the CLF were extreme, they were not outside of the debates Menzies had engaged in on a number of occasions. A novel by a communist Russian Jewish writer, in 1954, was sure to cause scandal in this climate. The Unbending was published in the same year as the Petrov defection, and was at the peak of cold war propaganda.

Needless to say, the late 1940s and 1950s was not the “right” time for Jewish people to be speaking out against Germany, now a cold war ally, especially if they had communist alliances (and even if they didn’t!). Nor was it the “right” time for reflection on what had passed, when the world and Australia's place within it, still seemed unstable and fear still prevalent. What good was it to discuss the crimes of Nazi Germany, when the Russians and their allies (even those thought to be in Australia) were threatening, if not another war, then at least a way of life? Security was paramount in this period as an ideal, but in reality there was much insecurity and anxiety that was tied to the beginning of the Cold War and this anxiety had so quickly shifted from the “Huns” in World War II to the Communists in the 1950s.⁹ To publicly acknowledge the atrocities committed during the war by Australia’s new ally would not have made political sense at this time.

The changes in international relations in the post-war period, especially the Cold War, the decline of Britain as a world force, and the new strengthening of ties between Australia and America, added to Australia’s sense of insecurity about the Asian region (Alomes et al 12). Coupled with this was the threat of change within, in the form of large European migration. The arrival of a large non-British population to Australia was a massive cultural shock to the established Australian community. Alomes et al argue that the reaction against “foreigners” was similar to fears of invasion and communism: “Images of disease, or at least dirt and smell, of race and of evil were common in popular perceptions of migrants. Their colour, their foreign tongues and their food tastes all seemed different and therefore threatening to many Australians of Anglo or Celtic origin” (13). Thus, this was not an era in which to highlight one’s difference, even the persecution that has been enacted because of that difference. This was an era to assimilate rather than face overt and covert forms of discrimination and disdain. To talk of Jewish persecution during the war would have been to highlight this difference, which was preferred buried in this era of recovery and threatening change.

⁹ Hannah Arendt explains that this shift was possible through a new discourse of totalitarianism. See Arendt *The Origins of Totalitarianism* 1958.

Between the end of the war and the 1960s the plight of the European Jews in World War II was rarely acknowledged in Western public discourse.¹⁰ This was certainly the situation in Australia, where a need to rebuild after the war, aligned with a policy of assimilation to guard against the “strangeness” of the new migrants, made an acknowledgement of particular Jewish suffering untenable, indeed collectively unthinkable. The increasing fear of communism and the threat of a new world war (spurred through the actual Korean war) produced a situation where the actuality of the present and the fear for the future left little public space for reflecting on the past.

However, there was an acknowledgement of the plight of the European Jews within segments of the Australian Jewish community in this period. The earliest and most popular of these public acknowledgements was Yom haShoah (Holocaust Remembrance Day). The event on which Yom haShoah is based is the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising of April 1943. Commemorated through an event of revolt, this memorial day has focused on the heroism and martyrdom of certain Jews, rather than memorialising “victimhood” (following the lead from Israel, which I will discuss shortly). In Australia, news of the Warsaw uprising did not really filter through to the Jewish press until the latter part of 1943. However, in April 1944, on the first anniversary of the uprising, the event was recorded in editorials and articles in the Australian Jewish press, which praised the heroism of the fighters, as well as expressing grave concern at the continuing destruction of European Jews (Berman, Yom haShoah 82). Memorials and commemorations were held in various Jewish community institutions and organisations, as well as the event being remembered in sermons and prayers in synagogue services (Berman, Yom haShoah 82).¹¹

From 1945 the Jewish Board of Deputies organised Warsaw Ghetto Uprising commemorations for the Jewish communities throughout Australia. The commemorations were originally called the “Warsaw Ghetto Revolt Commemoration,” but have also been

¹⁰ In regard to America, Novick explains: “No monuments or memorials were constructed, except for a few commemorative plaques on synagogue walls. By any standard - certainly compared with the omnipresence of the Holocaust in the 1980s and 1990s - nobody in these years seemed to have much to say on the subject, at least in public” (Novick 104).

¹¹ Judith Berman explains that Yom haShoah commemorations have not been under the control of a central remembrance authority, but rather is organised in each state by that state’s Jewish Board of Deputies. This decentralisation has resulted in each Jewish community particular character affecting the commemoration, as well as there being many parallels between the different states. Inevitably, however, there have been conflicts and often intense debate about the appropriate form a collective act of remembering should take. (Berman, Yom haShoah 80).

named, “Martyrs’ Memorial Day,” “Holocaust Remembrance Day” and “Holocaust Memorial.” Yom haShoah, the Hebrew name, did not come into usage in Australia until the 1980s (Berman, Yom haShoah 82). While the scope of the commemoration has broadened, and in some years has included speeches by non-Jewish dignitaries, Berman explains that the main Yom haShoah commemorations (in Sydney, Perth and Melbourne) have never been advertised to the general public (Yom haShoah 85).¹² Public remembrance of the destruction of European Jews during the war was largely confined in Australia then, to Jewish communities.

Remembrance of the European Jewish catastrophe was not, however, confined to this memorial day in this early period. Artistic representation of what would come to be known as, “the Holocaust,” was also being produced and circulated. That there was not a large audience for this literature did not mean the few artistic endeavours were left unpublished. It is true to say however, that little was written about the Jewish catastrophe in Australia in this period. Therefore the two books I will discuss below are arguably exceptions to the general rule of silence and of “forgetting.”

A Sinking Boat and a Wandering Jew

In 1946, Herz Bergner’s Between Sky and Sea (translated by Judah Waten) was published by Dolphin Press. As discussed in Chapter One, Herz Bergner arrived in Australia shortly before the outbreak of World War II. Bergner was already a published author,¹³ but it was his masterpiece Between Sky and Sea that won him broad acclaim, and the gold medal for “The Best Book of the Year” in Australia in 1946 (Kahan 286). Between Sky and Sea is set on a decrepit Greek ship sailing in foreign waters - a transient vessel for a group of Jews who have escaped Europe in the midst of the Nazi persecutions. All of these Jews heading for Australia are in fundamental ways “survivors.” Lost children, husbands, wives and parents, they all live with the burden of death. M. J. Haddock, an early commentator of the book, writes that this ship becomes “a microcosm of all human life, for his passengers are a

¹² There have been those rare occasions however, where non-Jewish people have addressed the commemoration audience. In 1982 Thomas Keneally read from his book Schindler’s Ark at the Sydney commemoration, and in 1992 Melbourne invited Robert Greenwood QC, head of the Special Investigations Unit into Nazi war criminals in Australia, to give the English language Memorial Address.

¹³ Bergner had a book of short stories published in Warsaw. His first Australian book, The New House, was published in 1941.

cross-section of society, who have little in common apart from their religion, their losses and their shared plight” (Haddock 500).

One of the characters on this boat is a Warsaw doctor who has escaped Poland with his wife. Describing his elderly character, Bergner writes:

The doctor was half senile and wore long hair, and a thick, grey, aristocratic moustache. He had been reminded of his Jewish ancestry by Nazi soldiers who had called him “hund kerl!” and “Sau-jude!” and had hanged his only son in his own home and before his father’s eyes. Ever since then the doctor had refused to wash himself or to comb his long hair. He wandered around unkept and dishevelled, his trousers unbuttoned and a half senile smile on his face. His wife followed him with a wet towel, as a mother follows her child, to wash its face and hands (16).

Then there are Nathan and Ida who are “absorbed in each other and nursed the great sorrow that had overtaken them so suddenly.” Nathan married Ida’s sister and had a child with her. Ida was also married with a baby girl. Both lost their spouses and children in a bombing raid outside Warsaw. Neither ever saw their loved one’s bodies, but had to leave the devastation behind them in order to escape with their own lives. Aboard the ship, over time, they battle with the confusion of loving each other, and the desire to take refuge in each other, with the guilt of leaving their previous lives behind. A fellow passenger of Nathan and Ida’s is Fabyash, the bleakly comical figure of doom. Fabyash believes that the ship’s captain is a Jew hater, and that they are all going to be abandoned or killed. Fabyash is scorned and ridiculed by the other Jewish passengers until he faces further devastation of a more personal kind. Both Fabyash’s children die of typhus when there is an epidemic on the ship. Shocked and in grief, Fabyash’s wife can no longer speak to her husband, and Fabyash, in desperation, throws himself over the ship and drowns.

How the remaining characters will fare in their new land we never know, as the ship sinks. However, as Vance Palmer says in his introduction to this book, the characters had already “virtually died.” There is no happy ending, not even the pretence of one - Bergner is not giving his readers a positive narrative closure. By having the ship sink and these characters die, after having already escaped the clutches of death, Bergner suggests that some things

cannot be reconciled. Between Sky and Sea is a beautifully written¹⁴ and sensitive, albeit quite haunting, early portrayal of Jewish suffering borne of the war. However, this suffering never makes it to Australian shores, and despite the ship's destination, Australia remains the promised land.

Another early portrayal of a Jewish identity effected by the Holocaust, but one very different in content and tone to Bergner's narrative, is B. N. Jubal's The Smile of Herschale Handle, published in 1947. Jubal was the first Jewish writer in Australia writing in English to address the Holocaust and the moral-philosophical issues that emerge from it (Lieberman, An Overview 177).¹⁵ While The Smile of Herschale Handle does not have the same level of cultivated prose as does Between Sky and Sea, it is far more confrontational in telling of recent history and, apart from a dream sequence, it is set entirely in Australia. The Smile of Herschale Handle is narrated by Herschale Handle, a hawker of clothes and a sixty year old Jew who has wandered the world, thus representing the metaphorical "Wandering Jew." The book consists of short vignettes all related to the narrator's past life and current life (and finally death) experiences. While Jubal presents Handle as a humble and comic Jewish stereotype, who is self-deprecating, this merely cushions his forthright acknowledgement of anti-Semitism and bigotry. An early extract, where Handle is introducing himself to his readers, is just one example:

A hawker must be meek and modest. It is only as a matter of principle that I mention this injustice; I don't like unfairness . . . On the other hand, I must admit that there are people, fine people, first-class people who do us the honour of noticing us. Have you ever come across such signs as these: "Beware of the dog!" or, "No hawkers or canvassers allowed!" Ha! Ha! That goes against us! So I console myself: if fine, first-class people spare neither trouble nor cost in having such notices put up, then there must be something about us. I think it is perhaps, a certain twinkle in our eyes which makes them uncomfortable. We move about too much. We see too much. We remind them of too much (Jubal 9).

¹⁴ Serge Lieberman describes this book as "artistically excellent" (Lieberman 179).

¹⁵ Gale Hammer mentions a poem, not published in her collection, called "And You My Jewish Brother" by Emil Michael Offner which was published in the Australian Jewish Forum in September 1942. This poem talks about the Nazi death camps, where Offner's mother was murdered, and accuses the world for ignoring these atrocities. It was this poem, Hammer argues, that was the first Australian example of Holocaust literature. Hammer writes: "It was the forerunner of a new generic expression not seen again here until the 1980s" (Hammer 15). Unfortunately, I was unable to locate this poem.

If we insert “Jew” where there is “hawker,” this is an obvious acknowledgement of anti-Semitism. Indeed, this is what Jubal wants us to do when shortly after this extract his protagonist says “The Handle is the modern incarnation of the eternal Wandering Jew” (Jubal 10).

Although the extract above might read with socialist overtones, Hershale is a humanist at heart with no trust in any political “isms.” In a dream where Hershale enters on a critique of what can only be the recent establishment of The United Nations, Hershale, asked to represent the dead Jews by their ghosts, makes his way as the “uninvited guest” into the theatre and says to the delegates: “Gentlemen, I am the uninvited guest. I have no passport (except the one with the red “J”), no papers at all . . . What have I to say? I have to tell you, that we don’t want you. We’ve had enough of you, of your cleverness and efficiency . . .” (Jubal 104). Just prior to this speech, in looking over these delegates, Hershale observes: “I discovered with horror that the people, who were gathered here to build a better, nobler, more beautiful (and so on) world, stank of the old and rotten one. They were the same statesmen and diplomats who had forced the world into its present lethargy, pompous representatives of sovereign states” (Jubal 102). Instead Hershale had expected: “new faces, young people, who were not guilty of the present state of the world . . . Why do not the starved labour-slaves of Europe sit here; they who worked not by the sweat, but by the blood of their brow? Where are the inmates of the concentration camps?” (Jubal 103).

Jubal’s anti-hero, or comic hero, Hershale, presents us with a most scathing attack on current world politics. However, as mentioned previously, not only are world politics more generally addressed, but also anti-Semitism, and more particularly, what we now term “the Holocaust.” Telling stories of his family and members of his village, who eventually all shared the same fate at the hands of the Nazis, Hershale often begins to comment upon the larger crises of these local events. In writing about the fate of a particular woman from his former village, Hershale says:

What happened? Not much. A few million Jews had been “liquidated” by various ways and means. One doesn’t only liquidate unprofitable business, one can “liquidate” innocent people too. I find the word “liquidate” is a devilishly clever choice. If a person dies a natural death, one mourns, but the “liquidation” of millions of people does not impress anybody. Well, one day Noemi’s family was “liquidated” (Jubal 41).

However, The Smile of Herschale Handle is not only about the suffering of Jews and the world's apathy. It is also a book about hope, and a plea for tolerance in the present. It is a book about a man's recognition of what is beautiful in life, and what nature has to offer us if we take the time to see. Certainly a book that has been overlooked, The Smile of Herschale Handle is an important work of fiction that takes the inhumanity of man and the suffering of Jews as its main theme. M. J. Haddock describes the book thus:

Jubal then has replaced the detached air of the lurid penny paperbacks concerning the atrocities of the Third Reich with an emotional involvement which is understandable in human terms, but which is ultimately inimical to artistic expression. Despite the overstatement of his cause, and this is above all a didactic work, he brings to it a sureness of characterization, an ironic penetration and a simplicity of style which makes The Smile of Herschale Handle moving, if flawed literature (Haddock 499).

Serge Liberman agrees with Haddock that the book is didactic but argues, quite rightly, that we must remember the book was published only two years after the war that had seen the destruction of millions of Jews, including the author's own family: "if there is bitterness under the guise of good temper, one would have to be obtuse indeed to condemn him out of hand for that" (Liberman, An Overview 177).

In 1947, the destruction of the Jews during the war was still largely unknown and its impact, beyond the personal memoir, was largely unrepresented in artistic or historical writing.¹⁶ In Australian fiction, Herz Bergner's Jews have to die, and Jubal's Jew has to be a comic figure of no offence. Both these books, however, at least address the suffering of Jews in the war and attempt to portray the effects of the war on Jewish identity. It was a long time before we saw this kind of portrayal again in Australian literature. After the publication of these two books there was little artistic representation of Jewish wartime suffering throughout the 1950s, despite the fact that there were so many Jewish survivors in Australia. The historical and political climate discussed above certainly accounts for this representational void. "The Holocaust" as we now know it, was not popularly understood or recognised, and thus there was no substantial market for literary depiction of events "best forgotten." This period, of

¹⁶ Tim Cole explains that there was a shared silence after the trauma of the Holocaust which resulted in a lack of both popular and academic interest. Raul Hilberg's ground breaking scholarly work The Destruction of the European Jews (which he began in 1948) was rejected by publisher after publisher, and was only published in 1961 (with subsidy from a survivor family) (Cole 2).

course, was very different to the 1980s and 1990s when Lily Brett's work gained large audiences. In the 1950s, in an environment of Anglo-conformism, the Jews in Australia, like other post-war migrants, were encouraged to hide their differences and forget their pasts.

Next Year in Jerusalem: Eichmann, Zionism, and the State of Israel in Australia

1961 marked a turning point in Holocaust consciousness world wide. In 1961 the former Nazi Adolf Eichmann was put on trial in Israel for war crimes committed between 1939-1945. The Eichmann trial gained international attention and was the catalyst for further investigation into the former Third Reich, its leaders and its victims. In Israel, the trial was broadcast live on national radio, and, according to Idith Zertal, it "changed the face of Israel, psychologically binding the pastless young Israelis with their recent history and revolutionizing Israelis' self-perception" (Zertal 99-100). Outside of Israel, the trial also had an enormous impact on the Western world. Peter Novick argues that "the most important thing about the Eichmann trial was that it was the first time that what we now call the Holocaust was presented to the American public as an entity in its own right, distinct from Nazi barbarism in general" (Novick 133). From the outset, this was a trial that was not simply about Eichmann, but was concerned with raising awareness of the massacre of six million Jews, to both native born Israeli youth and to the wider world (Cole 7).

The Eichmann trial, along with controversies over Hannah Arendt's book based on the trial Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil (1963) and Rolf Hochhuch's play The Deputy,¹⁷ served to break "fifteen years of near silence on the Holocaust in American public discourse" (Novick 144). However, Judith Berman argues that while the Eichmann trial temporarily produced widespread awareness of the Holocaust, most scholars point to the period which preceded the 1967 Six-Day war, "in which neighbouring Arab nations threatened to throw the Jews of Israel into the sea," and the very real threat of annihilation which accompanied the first days of the 1973 Yom Kippur War, as the main catalysts of Holocaust consciousness in Australia. (Berman, Holocaust Education 76).

¹⁷ The Deputy, which was an indictment of Pope Pius XII's silence during the Holocaust, played in Europe and America in the 1960s, and was translated and published in English in 1964.

However, Israel, or more precisely the Holy Lands that now form part of the state of Israel, has always been a focal point for Jewish identity. Traditional Jewish law stipulates that, if at all possible, a Jew should settle in the land of Israel. Over the centuries many Jews have done this, for the most part acting in accordance to the *halaka*. However, in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, a new type of movement centring on the resettlement of Jews in the land of Israel took place in Eastern Europe that is of enormous significance to Jewish identity both in Israel and the diaspora today. During the 1890s Theodor Herzl, a Viennese journalist, was sent to Paris to cover the “Dreyfus Affair,” the trial and conviction of a Jewish military officer accused of spying. The verdict was obtained on the basis of forged evidence, and Dreyfus was eventually exonerated. However, for years in France there was debate over Dreyfus’ innocence or guilt. Herzl, a non-religious Jew, was struck by the ardent anti-Semitism of many anti-Dreyfusards. He became convinced that no liberty or equality could exist for Jews, except in their own land. Thus, Herzl began the Zionist movement, an organisation devoted to pleading the cause for a Jewish state in Palestine. Herzl died in 1904, but by then the movement was already taking effect (Rosenberg 174).

While there had been support for Palestinian Jews in Australia since colonial times, and there was Zionist activity in the early decades of the twentieth century, it was the Balfour Declaration of 1917 (which committed the British to the establishment of a Jewish National Home in Palestine) that saw support for Zionism increase significantly in Australia. This support was further increased in 1922 with the awarding to Britain of the Palestine Mandate by the League of Nations. During the 1920s and 1930s, Australian Jews gave generous financial support to the development of the Jewish homeland (this fundraising was stimulated by visits from Zionist emissaries). In 1927 the Zionist Federation of Australia was founded and headed by Sir John Monash, to coordinate Zionist activity throughout Australia.¹⁸ Zionism had become respectable for Jews in Australia in this inter-war period (H. Rubinstein, *Chosen* 203).

However, Anglo-Jewish support for Zionism in Australia faltered in 1929 following the disturbances in connection with the question of Jewish rights at the Western (Wailing) Wall.

¹⁸ See Geoffrey Serle’s *John Monash: A Biography*. 1982

The Passfield White Paper of 1930, issued by the British, denied the centrality of the Mandate of the concept of the Jewish national home, and was seen by Jews as a departure from the Balfour Declaration. While the Zionist Federation publicly criticised this White paper, the Anglo-Jewish community in Australia were quick to separate themselves from this criticism as they did not want to be seen as disloyal to the British Crown.¹⁹ By the time the Second World War was declared, the Zionist movement in Australia was supported almost exclusively by Eastern European Jews (H. Rubinstein, *Chosen* 204). As explained in Chapter One, Anglo-Jews were, at this time, most interested in a non-distinctive identity, and in the community's perception of their loyalty to the Crown. Zionism that criticised Britain was a threat to this "non-distinctiveness."

However, the Zionist movement in Australia was not only involved in matters pertaining to Jewish Palestinians and later the state of Israel, but Zionists were also actively involved during the war in rescue efforts for Europe's Jews, and in the establishment of Jewish day schools in Australia.²⁰ Australian Zionism was strengthened by the establishment of different institutional member groups. One of the most important Zionist groups being the Women's International Zionist Organisation (WIZO). WIZO had functioned with branches throughout Australia from the mid 1930s (officially becoming WIZO in 1939). The other extremely important Zionist movement in Australia is the youth sector. During the 1940s there developed an Australian Zionist Youth Council and various Zionist youth groups belonging to Australian representatives of the political movements and parties in Israel. Rubinstein notes that most of today's Australian-born Jewish leaders were active in a Zionist youth movement (*The Jews in Australia* 507). These organisations and others played a vital role in raising funds for Israel, and maintaining a homeland for the Jews. Although many Jews in Australia (and America) had no desire to settle in Israel, they were generous and enthusiastic in their support of the nation. This support toward Israel, is one important way of confirming a Jewish identity in the diaspora.

While Zionism has always been important in all Australian states, Melbourne has always been the heart of Australian Zionism. This is not only due to the high population of Jews in Melbourne, but also a consequence of Melbourne being the major settlement for Yiddish

¹⁹ The most notable, virulent and vocal Jewish opponent to 'political Zionism' at this time was Sir Isaac Isaacs.

²⁰ A specifically Jewish education in the diaspora was seen by Zionists as a vehicle for Jewish self-affirmation and a way to avoid assimilation (W. D. Rubinstein, *The Jews in Australia* 502).

speaking Eastern European Jews. When Lily Brett and her parents came to Australia in 1948 and settled in Melbourne, they entered into the heartland of support for Zionism in Australia. This support for Zionism steadily increased with changing relations in Palestine. The year of the arrival of the Brett family in Australia was also the year the Zionist nation was borne.

In 1947, Great Britain surrendered its mandate over Palestine, and the United Nations voted to partition Palestine into separate Jewish and Arab states. Despite fierce opposition, the State of Israel was declared on May 14, 1948. Israeli forces defeated Arab armies and gained even more land than was originally allotted to them by the UN. Jews from all over the world came to Israel in its war of independence, and helped establish their Zionist state. Over a four year period starting in 1947, more than 680,000 Jews arrived in Israel, doubling the population. Of these 680,000, 120,000 were Holocaust “survivors,” including thousands of orphans whose parents perished in the Holocaust.

Although there had been opposition to Zionism within Jewish communities, once the State of Israel was born, nearly all this opposition disappeared within the Jewish communities in the diaspora, including in Australia (Rosenberg, H. Rubinstein). W. D. Rubinstein explains that after 1948, Zionist vision dominated the whole of the Jewish mainstream in Australia. This domination of Zionism occurred in Australia earlier than in Britain or America, because of the greater number of recent Eastern European migrants and refugees in Australia, and also because of the isolation of Australian Jewry, which looked to Israel as the spiritual centre of Jewish life (Rubinstein, The Jews in Australia 523). Rubinstein states that it was at this time that “Israel had entered the Australian Jewish psyche as utterly central to Jewish identity in a way which only a few dreamers could foresee before 1948” (The Jews in Australia 527).

However, it was not only Australian Jews who were supporters of this new state in Palestine. Non-Jewish opinion in Australia was firmly in support of Israel, and perhaps for the first time in this country’s history, a specifically Jewish cause was popular among gentiles (H. Rubinstein, Chosen 207). The Australian government, headed by the foreign minister Dr H.V. Evatt (head of the United Nations General Assembly in 1947-48) was also firmly committed to the state of Israel, and had been instrumental in its establishment. Indeed, the Australian government was the first to give full recognition to Israel in 1949, while Britain,

New Zealand and France only granted “de facto” recognition (Rubinstein, The Jews in Australia 520). Since 1948 all Australian Prime Ministers and governments, to varying degrees, have been supporters of Israel.

Despite the influx to Israel of almost three hundred thousand Holocaust survivors between 1945-55, there was little public recognition of the devastation of the Holocaust. Idith Zertal argues that collective mourning for the Holocaust could not co-exist with a new nation’s need to fight for a homeland. In the battle to become Israel, the death and devastation of the Holocaust needed to be “forgotten.” As Zertal argues: “The State of Israel, the crowning fruit of this revolution, was, in its first, formative decade, a monument of selective amnesia and erasure of certain chapters in Jewish history that would have hindered its constituting effort and contradicted the state’s narrative of power and revival” (101). When the Holocaust was “remembered,” it was presented as the unavoidable outcome of the diaspora, and presented as a counter image to the *halutz* (pioneer and land labourer), the *sabra* (literally, cactus; that is, Israeli born), and the Israeli soldier (Zertal 102). Thus, the Holocaust could be utilised politically as an argument for the importance of the State of Israel. The events of the Holocaust, and the plight of its victims, were remembered only as a metaphor, as a lesson to the Israeli youth, and the world, that Jews would not be defenceless again.

In 1952, Germany offered 865 million dollars to Israel as war reparation. While the new state was in urgent need of money for infrastructure development, there was great opposition to accepting this money from Germany. The issues of reparation drew public protest throughout Israel and threatened to divide the nation. For many survivors of the Holocaust, whose family members were murdered by the Nazis, a monetary compensation was seen as an insult, and no price could be put on the destruction of the Jews in Europe. However, after a ten hour debate in the new Israeli parliament, the principles of reparation were approved, and this money from Germany helped in the building of the new Zionist state. While this event did bring the Holocaust into focus for a time in Israel, it was the Eichmann trial in 1961 that had a much greater impact in terms of Holocaust consciousness.

When Eichmann was put on trial in Israel he was described by Ben-Gurion as “the Architect of the Final Solution.”²¹ After four months of deliberation in December 1961, Eichmann was found guilty on all counts of crimes against humanity and the Jewish people, and was sentenced to death. On May 31 1962, Eichmann went to the gallows. This was the first and last time the death penalty was used in the Jewish state. The trial put the events of the Holocaust to the fore and this renewal of Holocaust memory served well the political ambitions of a young nation seeking to establish itself in a land surrounded by “enemies.” The Eichmann trial was utilised by Israel’s leaders to warn that anti-Semitism was still rife and the enemies were still at the gate, this time the enemy being the “Nazi-like Arabs” (Zertal 114). Commenting on the historical fate of Eichmann, Cole writes:

It is ironic to think that in some ways Eichmann, who was a central player in perpetrating the Holocaust, also played a part in the emergence of the myth of the ‘Holocaust’. He did the former from his desk in section IV of the Reich Security Head Office, and the latter from his bulletproof-glass encased dock in a Jerusalem courthouse. In both cases he was a pawn of more major players - Hitler and Himmler on the one hand, and Israeli Prime Minister Ben-Gurion on the other (8).

From the day his arrest was announced, the story of Eichmann and his subsequent trial, became newsworthy throughout the world. When a bibliography of the trial was published in 1969, some thousand works had been written on Eichmann’s arrest and trial. By 1969 Hannah Arendt’s book alone, had received over 250 reviews (Cole 8). However, as Cole explains, writing about Eichmann did not necessarily mean writing about the Holocaust. Eichmann became not only, or simply, a symbol of the Holocaust in the Western world, but a “universal object lesson” (9). While the Eichmann trial did much to bring the “Holocaust” as a specifically Jewish tragedy to public consciousness in Israel, there was a greater time lag in the West (Cole 9). As discussed previously, it was events in 1967 and 1973 in Israel that were to have a great effect on Jewish and non-Jewish relationships in the diaspora.

After the Eichmann trial, in 1963, America (under the Kennedy administration) shipped its first cargo of arms to Israel. At the same time, the Soviet Union further strengthened its relations with the anti-Israel Arab alliance, which included Egypt, Syria and Iraq (which had been formed in 1963).

²¹ The trial began almost a year after Eichmann’s capture in Argentina.

These Cold War dynamics continued to be played out until they came to a head in 1967. However, these Cold War tensions had already resulted in the Sinai campaign in 1956, which became Israel's first war since independence. When America advised Israel to pull out of this war after less than a week, a short period of peace ensued in Israel. While this period after the war for the Suez Canal was a time that allowed for massive advances in Israel's infrastructure, it was relatively short lived.

In 1967 Syria launched an attack on Israel and demanded support from Egypt. Egypt refused to become involved unless an attack by Israel was made. Syria continued to escalate tensions and eventually Egypt moved troops into the Sinai. On the 22nd of May 1967, Egypt imposed a blockade on the straits of Terain, to block Israeli shipping. Seeing this as an act of outward aggression, Israel launched a pre-emptive strike against Egyptian airbases on June 5th and war began. Israeli forces were able to occupy the Sinai Peninsula and also get the West Bank and the Old City of Jerusalem from Jordan, which had supported Egypt against the Jews. The conflict ended in six days time, hence the "six day war." Jerusalem was rejoined to that portion of the city that Israel already possessed, and it was annexed to Israel as the eternal capital of the state (Rosenberg 177). For the first time in two thousand years the old city of Jerusalem was in Jewish hands, and in the days after the war's end hundreds of thousands of Israelis converged upon the old city to view the Western Wall. The reclaiming of the old city was a defining event in Jewish history, and the winning of the war, which made Israel three times larger, was a momentous event for the State of Israel.

This "six day war" in Israel reverberated throughout the diaspora, as Jewish people everywhere followed this Zionist victory. In Australia, as in other countries, young Jewish people put themselves forward as volunteers to go to Israel and fight, but the war was over before this participation could be achieved. However, it was not only Jews who wanted to help in this war for Israel. In Australia, non-Jews also attempted to sign up, and this was a reflection of the overall Australian support for Israel during the war. When victory came, it gave Jews throughout the diaspora a new sense of pride and a positive trope of identity. While not all Jews agreed with the aggression of the Israeli army, the effect of this on Jewish identity was quite profound. After the devastation of the genocide of the Jews during World War II, this victory served to establish an image of Jews as "victors," rather than "victims."

The celebrations throughout the diaspora, including in Australia, were but one example of the importance of Israel for Jewish identity. The Jewish people now had a recognised homeland and the Zionist dream had been achieved. The creation of Israel began a revival of Jewish consciousness and identity throughout the world. As W. D. Rubinstein states: “The creation of the State of Israel, symbolising life for the Jewish people, their phoenix-like rebirth after the gas chambers of the Holocaust, would, indeed, be widely perceived to be virtually Biblical occurrences, among the few assuredly transcendental events of modern history” (*The Jews in Australia* 501-502).

However, the victory was relatively short lived. In 1973, Egypt moved against Israeli forces in the Sinai, and this time the outcome was less conclusive. While the United States negotiated a disengagement of forces between the two sides, Arab honour had been vindicated, as Egypt had been able to repel an Israeli advance into its territory. The United States helped to broker the Camp David agreements and a peace treaty between Egypt and Israel was established. The Arab states were supported by the Soviet Union in their refusals to negotiate with Israel, and the conflict between Israel and the Arab States continued to be a field for cold war manoeuvres between the Soviet Union and America and its allies, including Australia.

While 1967 saw the Six Day War in the Middle East, 1968 was the year of the student revolt in West Germany. This rebellion by the children of the wartime generation, paved the way for the questioning of West Germany’s past, especially fascism, which would mark Germany throughout the 1970s. 1968 also saw the Dachau concentration camp memorial re-opened, and the Bergen-Belsen and Neuengamme memorials were established in Germany. It was at this time, Claudia Koonz argues, that genocide entered official memory in Germany (Koonz 268).²²

²² While it was the Nazi crimes that put genocide on the United Nations agenda, Raphael Lemkin, the man who coined the term “genocide” and a Polish Jew by origin, initially defined the Nazi program ecumenically. Lemkin wrote: “The Nazi leaders had stated very bluntly their intent to wipe out the Poles, the Russians; to destroy demographically and culturally the French element in Alsace-Lorraine, the Slavenians in Carniola and Carinthia. They almost achieved their goal in exterminating the Jews and gypsies in Europe” (qtd. in Novick 100). In lobbying for American ratification of the Genocide Convention, Lemkin (except when talking to Jewish groups) used cold war arguments exclusively, hardly mentioning the Holocaust. Novick explains that: “Discussions of genocide and the Genocide Convention, which petered out in the course of the 1950s, hardly ever referred to the Holocaust; they focused almost exclusively on the crimes - often real, sometimes imagined - of the Soviet bloc” (Novick 101). However by the 1960s this began to change and genocide and the Holocaust were terms which began to be solely associated with the Jewish experience.

The first memorial to the Holocaust in Australia was erected in New South Wales at Rookwood cemetery, on Sunday the third of May 1970. The opening of this monument is recorded in the Australian Jewish Historical Society Journal (“Memorial To martyrs, Consecration” vol. VII Part I) where it is described as a “Martyr's Memorial Monument” (62). The monument, designed by architect Mr Harry Seidler reads: “IN MEMORY OF SIX MILLION JEWS KILLED BY THE NAZIS DURING THE WAR 1939-1945. MAY THE WORLD NEVER AGAIN WITNESS SUCH INHUMANITY OF MAN AGAINST MAN” (62). It is not surprising, at this time, that “Holocaust” is not used to describe this event, but rather “the war 1939-1945.” “Holocaust” was still not a term in popular usage in Australia. Also interesting, and perhaps unlike what would happen today, the words “victim” and “survivor” are also absent. The word “martyr” is the chosen descriptor, and this reflects the discourse of memorialisation in Israel.

In Israel, memory plays a primary function in both Jewish faith and nationalism. As James Young writes: “Having defined themselves as a people through commemorative recitations of their past, the Jews now depend on memory for their very existence as a nation” (The Texture of Memory 211). Whereas diasporic Jews have identified as part of a minority (and often an oppressed minority) within nations, the Israeli's experience of being a Jew consists in building a state, fighting wars, and living in Hebrew. When the Holocaust is remembered then, Jews are not remembered as “victims,” but instead as heroes and martyrs. The memorialisation of Yom haShoah is one such example. Based on the mythologised event filled with heroes and martyrs, the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising best fits the commemoration culture of Israel. However, not only Yom ha Shoah, but the physical memorials in Israel centre around this image of martyrdom. The Shoah is subsumed into the story of the founding of the state of Israel, with the Jews in Europe interpreted as heroic martyrs that have paved the way for the young Israelis today. As Young states: “Holocaust remembrance fosters a unity of identity between martyrs and a new generation of Israelis. The martyrs are not forgotten but are recollected heroically as the first to fall in defence of the state” (The Texture of Memory 214).

Unlike many memorials in Europe that focus solely on the destruction of the Jews in the Holocaust, in Israel memorials locate the Holocaust as an event within a continuum that includes Jewish life, before and after the Shoah (Young, The Texture of Memory 215). Also, unlike the remembering of the Holocaust in the diaspora, memorials to the Shoah are

scattered everywhere throughout Israel, and are part of the daily life of this nation. While this would never occur in a country like Australia where Jews are a minority, the memorialisation of the Shoah in Israel serves not only the Jews in that country, but aids in the formation of Jewish identity and community abroad. As has always been the situation, Israel is vital to Jewish identity and this country's representation of the Holocaust reverberates throughout the diaspora, particularly in Australia.

Lily Brett's early work written in Melbourne, most particularly her collection of short stories, What God Wants (1991) does present us with Melbourne Jewish characters who have a strong affinity to Israel. One of Brett's characters in What God Wants, Ella Tennenbaum, even decides to move to Israel, where she rediscovers her sense of Jewishness. After moving from Melbourne to Israel, Ella writes to her friend Rosa: "I certainly feel a Jew now . . . I'm surrounded by Jews. The chemist, the podiatrist, the hairdresser . . . Everyone is Jewish . . . And, in the middle of all these Jews, I can see myself. I see myself in so many of them. I see my mother and father. I see so many Jewish faces of my childhood. And I see that I fit in." (Brett, What God Wants 186). However, in Brett's later work, written from New York, Israel rarely rates a mention, except as a place her characters avoid. In Brett's writing from New York, Just Like That onwards, we witness a fundamental shift to the United States as a centre for defining Holocaust consciousness. As I explain in the next chapter, this shift in Brett's writing is a reflection of the larger shift from the 1970s onward away from Israel, and to America as the centre of Holocaust memorialisation and consciousness.

A Girl's Story

While events in Israel, including the Eichmann trial, had significant influence in the way the Jewish community in Australia represented the Holocaust, and attached meaning to Jewish identity, it was an earlier representation of the Holocaust from outside of Israel that impacted significantly on the non-Jewish Western world. In 1947 a diary entitled Het Achterbuis was published in Holland. This diary of a young German Jewish girl in hiding in Holland during the war, became the biggest selling Holocaust text of all time. The English translation of this diary, The Diary of Anne Frank was published in the United States in 1952 by Doubleday, and sold more than 45,000 copies in a few days. 100,000 copies were sold in America in the first year of publication, a figure matched in Japan (Cole 29). Since that

time, The Diary of Anne Frank has been translated into more than 55 languages, has sold over 24 million copies worldwide and has become “the canonical ‘Holocaust’ text” (Cole 23).

While the Diary of Anne Frank was only one of the Holocaust diaries to survive the war, it is this diary of an adolescent girl that became an overwhelming success. What is so significant about this diary is that there is very little discussion of the Holocaust at all within the text. The Holocaust is somewhat peripheral, or as Cole argues is “the context within which the diary is written, rather than the central focus” (Cole 23). Daniel Schwarz agrees and explains: “Notwithstanding the passages about deportation, Anne Frank’s diary confines the Holocaust mostly to family life in the Annex. Within the confined world in which she writes, Jews may be deprived of the privileges of citizenship, but they are not gassed” (Schwarz 107). While Anne Frank and her fellow Annex members are eventually caught and Anne and her sister are transported to Auschwitz and then Bergen Belsen, because Anne does not survive, her experiences in these concentration camps are never recorded.

Anne Frank’s father, Otto Frank, the only survivor of the Frank family, deleted several passages from the initial published diary, including passages where Anne discusses her Jewish identity. The Broadway play which opened in 1955, and the Hollywood film in 1959, continued the down-playing of Anne’s Jewishness in their representations. While Anne Frank was already a very assimilated Jew, the representations of her diary (including the play and film) made her character even more assimilated. In the 1950s it was this removal of Jewish specificity from the Diary that made it such a success.²³ As an American representation the Diary took on universal values and messages, and the character “Anne” was used as a figure of liberalism in the 1950s and 1960s. Not only was “Jewishness” omitted from the play and movie, but references to the Holocaust were also omitted from the Diary (Cole 33).²⁴ Cole writes:

²³ The play was acclaimed by critics and won a number of prestigious theatre awards. The Twentieth -Century Fox film version went on to win three Academy Awards.

²⁴ Daniel Schwarz argues: “Anne Frank’s diary has in some curricula become an annex to the horrors of the Shoah. The omission of the more uncomfortable scenes and images of the Holocaust may have helped it find a place in curricula for public schools, where it has become an appropriate tale for school children whose young sensibilities supposedly must be protected from the terrors of the Holocaust. Anne at times speaks with a sanitized diction that keeps the Holocaust at bay and, that, for naive readers (and school boards in the 1950s and 1960s) provided a comfortable way of dealing with horrific events. Thus, if one disregards or minimizes the historical passages and the contextual knowledge we bring to the text, one can think one is experiencing the Holocaust without engaging in its unpleasantness” (Schwarz 107-108).

The 'Anne Frank' made in America in the 1950s is not allowed a hint of the pessimism . . . but only speaks optimistically of an enduring belief in human goodness in spite of everything. The Broadway and Hollywood 'Anne Frank' is not even the Anne in the 'secret annexe', let alone the Anne in Bergen-Belsen. Rather, she is a creation who comes and offers reassurance that the central tenet of liberalism - that humans are essentially good - is still valid (35).

The stage play, based on the revised Diary, was performed in Europe from 1956, including an extensive tour through Germany where it was a huge success. After the play toured Germany, the Diary was reprinted eighteen times, selling over 700,000 copies in the next five years. In the Netherlands a similar story of success for the play was achieved. However, for Anne Frank to become famous in the Netherlands "she had to be taken to America in 1952, and then taken back to the Netherlands in 1956" (Cole 25-26). This Anne Frank that was taken back to the Netherlands in the mid fifties was, Cole argues, "Americanised" (Cole 26). On the back of the play's success and the rising success of the Diary itself, the hiding place of Anne, Prinsengracht 263, Amsterdam, was rescued from demolition and opened to the public in May 1960. The Annex is now one of the most visited "Holocaust" sites in the world.²⁵

From the late 1960s onward a shift occurs and the character Anne, an assimilated Jew who rarely mentions the Holocaust, comes to be "cast as the Holocaust victim and her diary as the Holocaust text" (Cole 39). The universal "Anne Frank" created (and Americanized) in the 1950s, was given back her Jewishness in the late 1960s. What is particularly significant, though, is that while other memoirs of survival, such as those by Elie Wiesel and Primo Levi, were circulating at this time, it is The Diary of Anne Frank, the story of a young girl, that became the symbol of Jewish suffering in the West. This symbolic suffering, represented by the Diary, was readily assimilated into Western notions of liberalism and progress in this period. As Schwarz says: "Her voice is what the survivors of the Western humanistic enlightenment perspective want to hear. According to this ethos, dominant in the 1950s, notwithstanding the threat of atomic warfare, mankind is evolving upward . . ." (109). It was this diluted and all-too-comfortable representation of the Holocaust, where the Holocaust hardly figures, that could evoke response over other representations.

²⁵ In the first year alone, 9,000 people visited the site. By 1970 the annual number of visitors was about 182,000, rising to about 330,000 by 1980 and approximately 600,000 by 1990 (Cole 38).

While there was little fictional representation of the Holocaust in Australia in the 1950s, two works of fiction were published in the 1960s that did attempt to address the Holocaust in a specifically Australian setting. Stan Marks' God Gave You One Face was published in Australia in 1964 and is an Australian response to issues of justice raised by the Eichmann trial. Two years later, Harry Marks' The Heart Is Where The Hurt Is (1966) was published, and like God Gave You One Face, explores the effects of the Holocaust for survivors in Australia, and the wider community. These two early representations of the effects of the Holocaust on survivors in Australia, have been largely overlooked within literary institutions, and thus are in need of exploration here. While neither of these books were to have anywhere near the success of The Diary of Anne Frank, they do share important similarities with the Diary. Both God Gave You One Face and The Heart Is Where The Hurt Is have young women as their protagonists, and both espouse the message of humanist liberalism and the need for forgiveness and reconciliation.

God Gave You One Face is the story of Hanna Kent, a Holocaust survivor living in Melbourne in the 1960s. The story is centred around a trial in which Hanna is charged with the manslaughter of Henry Fredericks, a former guard in the concentration camp in which Hanna was imprisoned during the war. The novel begins in the courthouse in Melbourne, and ends in that same place with the jury's verdict. Throughout the novel we are reminded that this is no ordinary case of manslaughter, but a story about a tortured past, its contemporary effects, justice and retribution. Confronted with the tormentor of her past some twenty years later, Hanna Kent, now a happily married and successful interior decorator, finds herself in a verbal, then physical, confrontation. Assured of the camp guard's identity, even after the lapse of so many years, Hanna is transported back to the horrors of the war, and the grief of her losses incurred. While the reader knows that Hanna is innocent, and that Henry Fredricks fell to his death during the struggle with Hanna, the all male members of the jury have to sit in judgement of this young woman, all the while being encouraged to forgo judgements of the dead man's past actions. By the end of the novel, justice is served and Hanna is found not guilty, to loud applause in the courtroom. But the larger question of justice and guilt are left for the reader to ponder.

Just as the Eichmann trial became a catalyst for thinking through larger issues not directly related to the trial of Eichmann itself,²⁶ Hanna Kent's trial was a fictional catalyst for exploring Australia's role in providing a safe haven for survivors and for demanding justice for the perpetrators of war crimes. Just as the Eichmann trial was considered a good story for newspapers, Hanna Kent's story is also a newsworthy one. Marks writes: "Hanna's case has attracted world-wide attention. Newspapers in every corner of the globe are featuring her trial" (9). However, like the Eichmann trial, Hanna's trial is quickly forgotten by an Australian Press that can only sustain stories for a very limited time, before a new story takes precedence. Marks uses the Press as a metonym for the wider Australian public's apathy toward Holocaust survivors and their experiences, as well as a disregard for Australia's harbouring of war criminals. It is not until the 1980s that Nazi war criminals were put on trial in Australia, and when they were Australia's screening of migrants after World War II came into sharp focus. Marks' book is a comment on the general apathy Australians had for the experiences of survivors in the 1960s, and through the device of a fictional court case, Marks puts this indifference itself on trial.

Hanna Kent, Marks' protagonist, is characterised as a beautiful woman who has assimilated successfully into Australian society, leaving her tortured past behind to become happily married, optimistic, and by all accounts a "good citizen." Hanna has fulfilled her role as a migrant to this country, and beside the one understandable incident deemed worthy of sympathy, she has not let her past experiences taint her ability to be a "worthy" "new Australian". But, Marks asks, have the citizens and institutions of the host country paid their dues to the migrant? Where is the justice for those who now populate our "lucky" country?²⁷

Presenting questions in the same vein, is Harry Marks' The Heart Is Where The Hurt Is. This book also centres on a Jewish female character who has migrated to Australia, leaving a tortured past, and dead relatives, behind. The Heart Is Where The Hurt Is begins with a prologue called "Crystal Night" and describes this night of terror for Liesl Schneider and her family in Germany. On this night Liesl's father is taken away by SS men, and Liesl is never

²⁶ See Hannah Arendt Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the banality of evil.

²⁷ While this book is set for exploring these issues, it does not really succeed in doing so. As Serge Liberman writes: "The potential for strong drama . . . is again there; also the possibility to explore issues of moral versus legal justice, forgiveness versus retribution, individual versus collective guilt, but regrettably these do not emerge, or, where they are alluded to, are treated with too-bland journalistic pallor and mutedness. The frustration of the reader is that of the deep-sea diver being compelled to stick to the shallows" (Liberman, An Overview 183).

to see him again. This night also sets in motion events that lead to Liesl's transportation to Australia, an escape made without her mother and brother who are left behind in Europe to face terror at the hands of the Nazis, and their eventual death. However, after the prologue, the book is set completely within Australia, and we follow Liesl's progress with her relatives in Australia, and her adaptation to a new language and culture. The first half of the book is set during the war, and part two is set post war. This structure allows the reader to follow Liesl's fear for her family left behind, and her grief when she finally learns of their death. We also see how Liesl, initially resistant to her new home and family, comes to establish strong relationships in the new country.

The Heart Is Where The Hurt Is ends with Liesl falling in love with a German boy (a non-Jew) and Liesl must deal with her own prejudice and that of her Aunt and Uncle in order to avoid the events of the war, and the racial divisions established there, ruining her future happiness. The book ends then with a reconciliation between two young people who desire a better future. Like God Gave You One Face, this book ends on a positive note - tortured pasts can be reconciled and the migrant can assimilate to a new life in a country far away from the pain of the past. However, both books show that the past is never really forgotten, not even in a new country, and old fears and pain re-emerge with new faces. Unlike Between Sky and Sea, published just after the end of World War II, the Jewish characters in these two books are allowed to land in their new country and form a new life. Unlike The Smile of Herschale Handle, the Jews in these two books are not outsiders and loners in a foreign country, but assimilated migrants who no longer need to wander. These two books published in the late sixties deal with what could not be dealt with before - what it means to adapt to a new country, and make a home, whilst always remembering what has been left behind.

In discussing these two novels - published when Lily Brett was a teenager in Australia - I recognise these two texts as both quite exceptional for their time and also typical in their espousal of liberal discourses. Both of these books tell the story of fictional Holocaust survivors. In contrast, Lily Brett's work focuses on the experiences of children of survivors, an experience rarely acknowledged until the 1980s. Brett's work is also different in terms of the discourses in which her writing is embedded. In Brett's writing there can never be a "happy ending." While God Gave You One Face and The Heart Is Where The Hurt Is represent "damaged" Jewish migrants with a tortured past, both books ultimately espouse the

benefits of assimilation. Brett's writing, beginning some twenty years later, reflects a shift to a "particularist" Jewish identity, where tortured pasts are not only remembered, but are vital in the formation of Jewish identity. While the fictional Holocaust survivors in the earlier writing are successful in putting their pasts "behind them," the children of survivors that Brett represents, in the main, still live with the legacy of their parents' suffering.

The publication of these two books in the 1960s pre-empt the beginning of a new era in Holocaust consciousness in the diaspora. While the literature I have discussed in this chapter was rather exceptional in its representation, the literature that follows becomes part of the ever-expanding canon of Holocaust writing. In discussing the rise of Holocaust consciousness in the 1970s and 1980s in the West, it is important not to forget these initial representations. This chapter has been an attempt to revisit some of these events in the 1950s and 1960s that paved the way for the political and cultural climate to come. Thus, in remembering an era where remembering was not publicly validated, it is important that recognition is given to the complexities of "silencing," and that the exceptions are always made visible. In the next chapter I begin a discussion of the new era of rising Holocaust consciousness that shapes Brett's writing and readership. This new era sees a shift from Israel as the major influence in Holocaust memorialisation, to America as the new centre of remembrance, and within this shift we see the martyr and hero become the Holocaust survivor and victim.

CHAPTER THREE: FROM SILENCE TO SATURATION. THE HOLOCAUST AND COLLECTIVE MEMORY: THE LATTER YEARS.

One of the important elements that led to the emergence of Holocaust consciousness in the West, including in Australia, has been the decline of an integrationist ethos (which focused on commonality and unity) and its replacement by a particularist ethos (which highlights difference) (Novick 6-7).¹ I highlighted this move in Chapter One, when I discussed the move from sameness and assimilation to “difference” in relation particularly to Jewish identity in Australia. As I explained in Chapter One, “Jewishness” is a complex and multi-varied identity without a straightforward consensual identificatory core. Peter Novick, discussing the American Jewish situation argues similarly, and explains that American Jews today cannot define their Jewishness on the basis of distinctly Jewish religious beliefs, distinctly Jewish cultural traits, nor a united view on Zionism (7). Instead, Novick argues that what American Jews do now have in common is “the knowledge that but for their parents' or (more often) grandparents' or great-grandparents' immigration, they would have shared the fate of European Jewry” (7). This process of centring the Holocaust as a marker of identity for contemporary Jewish people throughout the diaspora (not just the U.S) begins in earnest in the 1970s.

In his analysis of this rise of Holocaust consciousness, Tim Cole in *Selling the Holocaust* (1999) makes a distinction between the Holocaust as an historical event, and the “Holocaust” as a mythic representation of that event. He argues that while the “myth of the ‘Holocaust’ may have drawn on the historical Holocaust . . . it now exists apart from that historical event” (Cole 4). In this chapter I will adopt Cole’s understanding of the Holocaust as “myth” in recognition of the interaction between an historical event and the representation of that event. I do not use the term “myth” lightly, and understand that, in common language usage, “myth” can suggest that which is not “real.” While aware of this usage, I do believe that adoption of the term here, in this context, usefully highlights the process of remembering an event, in a public form. The use of the word “myth” also highlights the political and contested nature of collective memory.

¹ Novick’s analysis focuses particularly on the U.S.A, however, I believe this shift is also evident in Australia, and the Western world more generally.

All historical events that have a place within collective memory are “mythical” in the sense that the event itself can never be recaptured, and all remembering elevates certain moments, “forgets” others, and is imbued with contemporary ways of knowing. It is this rise of the “myth” of the Holocaust that has allowed a space for the publishing and popular reception of Lily Brett’s artistic work. The “myth” of the Holocaust provides the context for the reading of Brett’s texts in a meaningful way, and dialectically, Brett’s writing further contributes to collective “Holocaust” consciousness.

Identity Politics

An important factor in the growth in Holocaust consciousness in the diaspora in the late 1960s and 1970s was the growth in identity politics in Western countries, including in Australia. Group identity and collective consciousness movements were enacted by Jewish people as well as “black” Americans, Indigenous minorities (and in Australia, Aboriginal people), women, ethnic minorities, and gay men and lesbians. The late 1960s and 1970s was the period of protest against the Vietnam war, women’s oppression and the growth of the second wave feminist movement, gay liberation, “black” power, land rights for Indigenous peoples, and a more general protest against existing “oppressive” institutions. These group mobilisations were based on the experience of collective disadvantage and/or individual experiences of discrimination. Importantly, these individual experiences were explained through the collective oppression. For example, the feminist catchcry “the personal is political,” was recognition of the structural disadvantages that affect women on a very personal level, but that needs to be addressed not just personally, but also structurally (politically). These liberation movements by “minority” groups challenged the “dominant” society (whether that be patriarchal, racist or homophobic, or seen as all of these) that denied “others” full participation, recognition and rights. Often these shared identities were read in terms of being “victims” of the dominant culture, and some critics now argue the identity politics of the late 1960s and early 1970s was largely based on a “victim identity” (Novick, Cole, Young). As Novick states: “the assertion of a group’s historical victimization - on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation - is always central to the group’s assertion of its distinctive identity” (8).

This elevation of “victimhood” has been important in the centring of the Holocaust as a marker of Jewish identity. In the 1940s and 1950s, American Jews shunned the victim identity, which resulted in a down-playing of the Holocaust. As I discussed previously, in both Israel and Australia, “victimhood” was also regarded as detrimental for Jewish identity and community. However by the 1970s many Jews began to assert that they were also members of a “victim community.” The shift to the “Holocaust” as a marker of identification for Jews, fit in then with the larger turn to a history of “victimhood” for ethnic distinctiveness (Cole 12). These “victims” of the Holocaust were not only those who died during, or survived the Holocaust, but also those Jewish people who “came after” the Holocaust.

However, this assertion of “victim” status for Jewish people competed with other assertions of “victimhood.” Discussing the newfound ethnic pride among African Americans, Jewish Americans, and Native Americans, James Young writes:

But even as the memory of mass suffering was binding together the members of these communities, it also set the stage for an implicit competition between the various cults of victimization. Two-dimensional identities constructed solely around the memory of past suffering began to clash as groups asserted the primacy of their tragic past over that of others. America was becoming a culture of competing catastrophes (America’s Holocaust 81).

One of the results of this competition “has been a narrowing of each group’s experience” and a “dividing of these groups’ histories from one another” (Young, America’s Holocaust 81). Therefore, Young argues instead of learning about the Holocaust within a larger study of Jewish history, many Americans now learn the whole of Jewish history through the lens of the Holocaust. Similarly, all many Americans know about African Americans is their degraded history of slavery, or about Native American history, its violent encounters. “In each case, entire centuries of rich life and culture are reduced to the detritus of destroyed civilizations” (Young, America’s Holocaust 81). As mentioned, an outcome of this competition for victim status in the competition for primacy. One of the forms this takes for many Jewish people is the

insistence on the “uniqueness” of the Holocaust.²

The other term that gained popularity in the 1970s as a descriptor for identity groups that have faced oppression, was “survivor.” Henry Greenspan discussing America in particular, argues that many factors contributed to the upsurge of interest in survivors, and in the Holocaust more generally, in the 1970s. Amongst these factors were, the passage of time itself, the evolving self-confidence of the American Jewish community, the changing political climate in Israel (which I discussed in Chapter Two), and the American self-questioning after the Vietnam War (Greenspan 57). However, Greenspan also argues that there was a more general and wider “preoccupation with public and private disaster, destruction and victimization, surviving and survivalism” (Greenspan 57) in which the Holocaust could be made meaningful in the West.³

While these two discourses of identity - that of “victim” and “survivor” - were popular in the 1970s, the use of the term survivor has taken precedence as a descriptor of those who did not perish during the Holocaust. Indeed, it is difficult to now think outside of this term when wanting to describe those Jews who were not killed. The weight of this term is further evidenced by the contemporary discourses of “second generation survivors.” “Survivor” is used here to describe Jewish people who were not even present at the historical moment of the Holocaust. This will be discussed further at the end of this chapter and in the following

² The insistence on uniqueness, or arguments to the contrary, are ill founded, according to Novick, as the concept of uniqueness is dubious in itself. Every historical event, in some ways shares similarities with other events to which it might be compared, and also differs in some ways to these other events. These differences and resemblances should be discussed, Novick insists. To single out aspects of the Holocaust that are distinctive, and to ignore aspects that are shared with other atrocities, to try to claim the Holocaust as unique, is intellectually dubious (Novick 9). Novick states most adamantly: “The assertion that the Holocaust is unique - like the claim that it is singularly incomprehensible or unrepresentable - is, in practice, deeply offensive” (9).

³ Greenspan argues that two quite distinct ways of imaging survivors have developed since the 1970s: “a ceremonial rhetoric in which we honor survivors as celebrants and heroes, together with a psychiatric rhetoric in which the same survivors are ghosts and wrecks” (Greenspan 59). Greenspan writes:

There should be no misunderstanding: survivors should be honored and their testimony cherished. Likewise, whatever the struggles of survivors or their children in the aftermath, these ought to be understood in the most serious way. The problem with the celebratory and psychiatric discourses . . . is that testimony and the realities of survivors' and their children's lives are not seriously engaged. Rather . . . in place of entering into actual testimony, celebratory discourse fixes on the idea of “bearing witness.” As typically invoked, the psychiatric discourse functions similarly: charting “emotional problems” substitutes for entering into the impact of the destruction for anyone in particular (62).

chapters. It is important to note however, that discourses of “victimhood” are less popular amongst many groups today, and concepts of surviving take precedence.⁴

In the 1970s, Lily Brett was in her early adulthood, and this period, in many ways, set the tone for her career in writing. As mentioned in the Introduction, Lily Brett began her writing career as a pop journalist, before she published her first poetry and short stories in the early 1980s in Australia. Thus, Brett’s understanding of her “self” and her “Jewishness” cannot help but be formed through these dominant discourses in the 1970s, and much of her work focuses on the concept of surviving, and “second generation survivors,” a term not popularly used in this period. Indeed, “second generation survivor” is a very recent term, and while drawing on these earlier understandings of survival and “victimhood,” this term also works to challenge popular understandings of the “survivor.” I discuss the representation of “second generation survivors” in Brett’s writing in Chapter Five.

However, when Lily Brett was first published in Australia in the 1980s, she was published not under the auspice of a “second generation survivor,” but rather as a “migrant writer.” Much of Brett’s work, both poems and short stories, appeared in anthologies and journals committed to the publication of “migrant” writing.⁵ In tracing the reception of Brett’s writing then, it is important to understand the emergence of “migrant” writing within the Australian literary canon.

⁴ For example discourses of domestic violence have changed from regarding these women (and it is overwhelmingly women) as “victims,” which suggests passive recipients, to “survivor,” suggesting active agency. A similar shift has occurred within Indigenous rights movements, and queer politics. It could be argued that this change in terminology suggests a “working through” these particular histories. The change in terminology also reflects a shift in focus from the perpetrator and the crime, to the person who has been victimised and survived the event.

⁵ Amongst others, Lily Brett was published in the journals *Overland* (1985, 1986, 1987) *Westerly* (1981, 1985) *Island Magazine* (1989) *Meanjin* (1989). In anthologies, amongst others, Brett was published in *Properties of the Poet and Other Poems* Ed. Paul Kavanagh (Newcastle, NSW: University of Newcastle, 1987), *Up from Below: Poems of the 1980s* Eds. Irene Coates, Nancy J. Corbett and Barbara Petrie (Broadway, NSW: Women’s Redress Press, 1987), *Beyond the Echo: Multicultural Women’s Writing* Eds. Sneja Gunew and Jan Mahyuddin (St. Lucia: Queensland University Press, 1988), *An Inflection of Silence and Other Poems* Ed. Chris Pollnitz (Newcastle, NSW: University of Newcastle, 1986), *Displacements: migrant story-tellers*. Ed. Sneja Gunew (Victoria: Deakin University, 1982).

“Migrant Writing”

The 1980s in Australia saw a number of developments in the expansion of the literary canon to include works by writers from non-English speaking backgrounds, Aboriginal narratives and writing by women. Not only, or simply was the canon expanded, but also challenged by the focus of these “other” writers, and “other” writing. To understand reception to Brett’s early work then it is important to understand some of the shifts in focus on the “literary” at this time. Debates over the role of writers from non-English backgrounds, or more generally non-British migrants, is endemic of the broader understandings of identity and identity politics.

Tracing the meaning of the word “ethnic,” Werner Sollors argues: “it is a widespread practice to define ethnicity as otherness” (219). Regarding its origins, etymologically speaking, an ethnic is a goy. The Greek word *ethnikos*, from which “ethnic” has derived, meant “gentile” and “heathen.” Sollors explains that while the noun *ethnos* was used to refer to people in general, it was also used to refer to “others.” The usage of the word in English shifted, he explains, from “non-Israelite” to “non-Christian” (Sollors 220). Thus, Sollors says:

The word retained its quality of defining another people contrastively, and often negatively. In the Christianized context the word “ethnic” . . . recurred, from the fourteenth to the nineteenth century, in the sense of “heathen.” Only in the mid-nineteenth century did the more familiar meaning of “ethnic” as peculiar to a race or nation re-emerge. However, the English language has retained the pagan memory of “ethnic,” often secularized in the sense of ethnic as other, as nonstandard . . . (220).

In an Australian context, ethnic is not only a term used to refer to those who have migrated to this country (and their children), but a more standard referent to those of non Anglo-Saxon/Celtic origin; those “other” to the dominant Anglo norm. Thus, “ethnic” writing has also historically been a writing that has been marginalised to the Anglo canon of Australian literature. Indeed, Annette Robyn Corkhill in *Australian Writing: Ethnic Writers 1945-1991* (1994) argues that: “Immigrant literature has been an eclipsed literature within our national literature, part of our Australian heritage, but somehow placed outside the accepted boundaries or constraining norms of culture” (5). Corkhill argues that this marginalisation occurs because

the Anglophone culture has remained the dominant culture and has continued to push other cultures to the periphery (5). Similarly, Sneja Gunew, explaining how ethnic minority writing in Australia has been labelled as firstly “migrant writing” then “ethnic writing” and later “multicultural writing,” says: “Each of these terms has signalled the alterity of various writings produced in Australia but perceived as “other” (alter) than the Anglo-Celtic norm” (Framing Marginalities 3). To be labelled a migrant or ethnic writer then, is to be relegated to the periphery, either as a threat to the mainstream, or as a kitsch, quaint cultural “other.”

Only one anthology of Australian migrant/multicultural writing was published before the 1980s, and that was Two Ways Meet. Stories of Migrants in Australia edited by Louise E. Rorabacher and published in 1963. After Two Ways Meet, the first of the spate of the anthologies in the 1980s was Ethnic Australia edited by Manfred Jurgensen and published in 1981. This was followed by Sneja Gunew's compilation Displacements: migrant story-tellers published in 1982, R. F. Holt's The Strength of Tradition: Stories of the immigrant Presence in Australia published in 1983, and Peter Skrzynecki's Joseph's Coat: An Anthology of Multicultural Writing published in 1985.

In her compilation Displacements: migrant story-tellers in 1982 - which included early writing by Lily Brett - Sneja Gunew made the parameters of her collection clear by defining migrant, in this context, as people from non-English-speaking backgrounds. Gunew did not advocate an integration of migrant writing into the mainstream, but instead recognised the discursive politics of othering that had defined receptions to the migrant within the literary canon, and advocated an overhaul of the Australian mainstream. Gunew's response was to make migrant writing visible, hence the collection, and to continue to challenge the mainstream through this visibility. This politics of making visible demonstrated in the editors' construction of this collection was shaped by the identity politics of the late 1960s and 1970s. However, while the need for visibility was a political platform, and the unsettling of the mainstream was a desired outcome, discourses of “victimhood” were not fundamental in shaping these early anthologies. Rather, discourses of “difference” replaced discourses of the “oppressed” and a more active, positive politic was favoured. However, the social movements in the 1970s that did focus on oppression and disadvantage helped pave the way for discourses of “difference” in the 1980s.

Of course, not all Australian literary critics argued as Gunew (and others) did. Robert Ross in his Annotated Bibliography of Australian Literary Criticism 1945-1988 published in 1989, took quite a different approach. In a chapter on “Multicultural Writing” Ross wrote:

Immediately after World War II thousands of immigrants from all over Europe came to Australia. Immigration continues, including many Asians now as well as Europeans. Their experience had not figured large in Australian writing until recently when the sons and daughters of the original immigrants began to speak through what has been named “multicultural” or “migrant” writing. Perhaps such terms will soon disappear as this work *blends* into the mainstream of Australian literature, which need not be predominantly Anglo-Saxon in authorship . . . The future of this lively development will depend on how quickly the writing and criticism is *absorbed* into the common literature (89 [my italics]).

The use of the terms blend(s) and absorb(ed) by Ross are telling. The future of “multicultural” writing, a term he clearly wished to question given it is in inverted commas, depends in Ross’ evaluation made above, on its incorporation into the “mainstream.” While Ross articulated that this mainstream will undergo change in this process, the idea of a “common literature” is the ideal. A common literature, that which can incorporate all forms of writing, will then do away with the necessity of other marginal canons of literature that may be seen to challenge the mainstream. Incorporation becomes the marker of success, and “difference” becomes largely irrelevant.

Another commentator on multicultural writing, and editor of Neighbours: Multicultural Writing of the 1980s (1991), R. F. Holt, expressed a similar politics of integration. This collection of multicultural writing was a follow-up from Holt's earlier collection The Strength of Tradition (1983), which was a collection of Australian stories about the immigrant experience published in the 1970s. Both of Holt’s anthologies included writing from first generation immigrants from non-English speaking backgrounds, their children or grandchildren, and descendants of English speaking or Anglo-Celtic immigrants (Holt, The Strength ix). In the later anthology, Holt explained that while the concerns were similar across the two collections, by the late 1980s

multicultural writing had become accepted as a “natural, valid part of mainstream Australian literature” - inasmuch as it being “increasingly and routinely published, reviewed and read” (The Strength x). Holt concluded his Preface to Neighbours by stating that: “the writing in this collection is offered in a spirit of optimism; it may be taken as a kind of sonar or social depth-sounding whose configurations, it is contended, underline a considerable, continuing achievement in *social integration*” (Holt, The Strength x [my italics]). For Holt then, in 1991, the main achievement of bringing visibility and legitimacy to multicultural writing has been achieved. Like Ross’ comments mentioned earlier, according to Holt the acceptance of ethnic literature as a part of the mainstream is a sign of “success.”

However, many critics did not regard acceptance and integration as a sign of success, and instead argued for the need to keep difference(s) visible. In another collection of multicultural writing published in 1988, Sneja Gunew teamed up with Jan Mahyuddin to edit a collection of multicultural women's writing called Beyond the Echo: Multicultural Women's Writing, which again included writing by Lily Brett.⁶ Sneja Gunew and Jan Mahyuddin began their introduction by stating that their collection was an act of “positive discrimination”(xiv):

As a declared political strategy, positive discrimination creates a rhetorical position from which the previously absent refuse to be spoken about, and instead write experiences, needs and desires directly. The strategy does more than encourage points of equal access to a mainstream society - it re-presents (re-positions) in such a way as to irrevocably challenge a view of any society as whole, unified, indivisible, and consistently equitable and a view of any text as “good,” “better,” or, universally “best” (Gunew and Mahyuddin xix).

These acts of “positive discrimination” and the challenging of the “mainstream” that occurred with the publication of these anthologies, were fundamental in providing a space for the publication of Lily Brett’s early work. While Lily Brett has now become a popular author of international repute, this has been a long process of gaining a space in which this writing can be received. Early anthologies, such as Gunew’s have been vital in shaping a ready market for writing such as Brett’s.

⁶Lily Brett had three poems included in this collection.

While the 1980s saw a “progression” from anthologising difference according to ethnic origins, to a questioning of the language used to promote this difference and the problems in doing this, there was little published critique of the concept of anthologising difference as a strategy in itself. However, one critic did argue quite strongly against the concept of anthologies (that helped to establish writers such as Lily Brett).⁷ In an article called “Against Anthologies” published in *Outrider* in June 1992, Manfred Jurgensen wrote:

The flood of self-righteous, self-generating anthologies may be a reflection of the general publishing situation in this country. . . .The didactic (or ideological) ordering of voices may be an educational requirement, it does not make for an open-minded, sensitive and intelligent reading of an individual author. If the writer is worthy of publication, (s)he is very much more than migrant, woman, gay or whatever. Once the author is classified it is extremely difficult to change the public's (and the publishers') perception of his or her 'category' (198).

This concern, articulated by Jurgensen, over the limiting nature of categorisation was a concern also expressed by Judah Waten, as discussed in Chapter One. Reflecting on this quote above, it seems obvious that Jurgensen founds his arguments on a liberal view that promotes individual achievement. However, this concept of achievement is not always within the particular individuals' cultural milieu. The standards under which the individual writer is to be judged are often not, to use a well-known feminist line, “of her own making.” Positive discrimination, as espoused by Gunew and Mahyuddin, at least recognises this cultural hegemony, and challenges it by making other forms of writing visible. Jurgensen, on the other hand, has no time for this sort of discrimination in the promotion of ethnic writers. Or does he? While Jurgensen was scathing in his critique of anthologies of ethnic writing (among others) he was also the editor of one of the first Australian journals which promoted migrant writing.

Outrider, subtitled *A Journal of Multicultural Literature in Australia* was a literary magazine that was established in 1984 with assistance from the Australia Council Literary Board. *Outrider* was published by Phoenix Publications (Brisbane) and was edited by Manfred Jurgensen.

⁷ For a later critique of “multicultural literature” see Robert Dessaix’s “Nice work if you can get it” in *Australian Book Review*, 1991.

Outrider was the first Australian journal to be dedicated to multicultural writing, and published hundreds of new and established Australian migrant and “ethnic” writers in its twelve year history. From the outset, the inclusion of Jewish content in Outrider was numerous.⁸ This Jewish content continued throughout the history of this journal, but very much under the auspices of “multicultural” writing, rather than as specifically “Jewish writing.”

However, “multicultural” was used in the broader sense in this journal, so that while Outrider's major aim was to promote the creative output of migrant artists, the editorial team was also interested in work by Australian born writers. Work that “reflects upon Australia as a continent of migrants or that depicts the migrant, in any of his dimensions, through Australian eyes, in other words, the migrant in the eyes of the beholder” (Jurgensen, 1984 v) was welcomed in this journal. Again, this was a position Judah Waten articulated regarding Australian migrant writing (as I discussed in Chapter One). It is the migrant experience that Outrider sought to represent. However, these representations need to be “artistically effective” (Jurgensen, 1984 v), in other words, need to conform to concepts of the “literary” and “literariness.” The Outrider editorial team were quite determined not to be regarded as a benevolent organisation, but rather, a contributor to and “integral part of Australian literature” (Jurgensen, 1984 v).⁹ And, indeed, Outrider along with other journals such as Overland, were vital in giving space for creative writing from authors from a range of ethnic backgrounds.¹⁰

⁸ The first edition of Outrider featured an interview with Australian Jewish Polish writer Maria Lewitt, whose autobiographical novel Come Spring (1980) tells the story of Lewitt's experience of German occupation in Poland in WWII. Also included in this first edition were reviews of Serge Liberman's writing and a review by Liberman of another Jewish writer, David Martin's, collection of stories Foreigners (1981). There was also poetry by David Martin and Alex Skovron, and prose by Serge Liberman and Judah Waten.

⁹ This view is further promoted in an article by Serge Liberman in the December 1984 edition of Outrider. In “The Place of Ethnic Minority Writing in the Mainstream of Australian Literature,” Liberman writes: “My concern here centres on the relationship of ethnic writing to the Australian literary mainstream. And here, I have immediately a confession to make. I am not wholly sure what the true mainstream is” (Liberman 83). With this, understandable confession, Liberman continues by arguing that ethnic writing should not be set distinctly apart from Australian literature. Liberman writes that ethnic writing “is but one tributary - about this I have no illusions. That it will probably remain a small tributary, this, too, I accept with total equanimity.” What is important, Liberman argues, “is that this stream, like the so-called mainstream, be kept flowing.” The flowing of this stream, to borrow Liberman's metaphor, is reliant on grants and fellowships as well as subsidised outlets such as journals, anthologies and single-author books. He argues that the ethnic contribution needs to be “recorded, studied, analysed and integrated in the same way as, and as an indispensable part of, Australian and world literature in general” (Liberman 84).

¹⁰ In fact, it was Barrett Reid the editor of Overland (a journal that also promoted “migrant” and Aboriginal writing) who encouraged Lily Brett to publish her poetry in a single collection, which became in time, The Auschwitz Poems.

In June 1987, three years after its launch, the subtitle of Outrider - A Journal of Multicultural Literature in Australia - was dropped. Explaining this change, the editor Jurgensen wrote:

As the title-page of this issue indicates, OTRIDER sees itself as a journal of contemporary Australian literature. In its adoption of this description it does not wish to imply or to endorse any further academic concepts of, or distinction between, so-called 'mainstream' and 'fringe' or 'minority' Australian literature. Nor is the adoption of this new sub-title anything other than the realisation of OTRIDER's editorial philosophy stated in its very first issue in 1984: ". . . to enlarge (and in that sense redefine) the very concept of Australian literature" (June 1987, 3).

So, while the loss of the word "multicultural" could be regarded as representing a shift in the concept of this journal, Jurgensen and his editorial team were quick to defend the continuation of the journal's original purpose. However, despite the defence, the dropping of the subtitle is significant historically and politically. While the word multicultural in the subtitle of the journal may be a catalyst for discussion of the journal's place as a "minority" or "fringe" element in literary culture, the subsequent dropping of this word represented, at least symbolically, a deliberate move away from the politics of visibility. The new Outrider, at least at first glance, could not be considered as significantly "different" to other journals in Australia (albeit having a different history). This move from "fringe" to "mainstream," although admittedly these are terms the editorial board were uncomfortable with,¹¹ is not the consequence of simply changing the subtitle, but the further inclusion of Anglo-Celtic writers into the journal and the inclusion of writers from abroad. The inclusion of Anglo-Celtic writers shifts the journal's minority politics, even though it argues that Anglo-Celts are migrants too (which is a valid argument of course). The subsequent inclusion of foreign writers shifts the journal as uniquely Australian, and opens it up to interpretation as a world literature journal. Both of these moves, away from (minority) identity politics and the growing acceptance of global or world literature, are shifts that begin to occur in the late 1980s and into the 1990s more generally in Australia.

One year after this change to the journal's title, Outrider presented a special edition for the

¹¹ Jurgensen states that: "Certainly OTRIDER does not see itself as "the fringe" or as representing "the fringe"" (Jurgensen, June 1987 2)

Bicentenary: "Australian Writing 1988." Jurgensen wrote in the introduction that in the Bicentenary, Australian literature "ought to reflect the diversity and complexity of the real Australians of 1988," arguing that if migrants, Aboriginal peoples and critics of Australian society are excluded, "a national literature of distortion must eventuate" (1988, ix). More broadly, 1988 marked an important moment in Australian race relations. During this time it became obvious to a great many people that there were different and conflicting narratives of this country's history. This awareness began to impact quite fundamentally within academic literary institutions, and among individual academics. As Wenche Ommundsen explains: "In 1988 the question of how Australia had treated the country's original inhabitants had become a collective bad conscience plaguing white Australia . . . The story of Aboriginal Australia had not only become tellable, it was a story that had to be told in order for both black and white Australians to start to come to terms with the burden of their past" (Ommundsen 252). Not only was there a need for new stories, but many critics, Jurgensen included, realised that the reception of these stories also needed to be questioned: "It is presumptuous to judge the quality of Aboriginal or 'ethnic' writing on the basis of literary aesthetics and criteria derived from English literature taught at Australian Universities" (Jurgensen, 1988 xv-xvi).

This recognition of the limitations of English standards of literary judgement, led many critics to seek out new forms of literary criticism that would recognise cultural (and other) differences. Post modern critiques of Western modernist concepts such as the Western liberal "self" formed a basis for much of this critique. However, Jurgensen instead, drew on the liberal humanist rhetoric of the rights of the individual in his own critical understanding:

The aim of our endeavours, including writing, must be to serve the people, not a nineteenth-century concept of nationhood. In this most over-governed country, it is the politics of respect for the individual and his/her right to his/her own unique cultural heritage which is in need of protection (Jurgensen, 1988 xvi).

However, rhetoric of the individual does not always fit well with the recognition of the importance of cultural location, and what this cultural location means. This preference to be identified as artists only, that Jurgensen himself highlights, is a very different desire to the one that enables the creation of particular named anthologies (for example, "Jewish writing,"

“Greek-Australian writing,” “Lesbian and Gay writing”). This shift away from naming is a shift away from a particular politics of visibility. This rhetoric of the individual and critique of notions of nationhood are also convenient justifications for the change to a world literature focus. Thus, in 1994, *Outrider* changed its name again, as well as its whole format. In some respects 1994 marked the end of *Outrider* (not only in name) but in its conception as a journal. *Outrider* became *Riding Out. New Writing from Around the World* and was published annually as a book. This new publication was to be theme based and would feature writing from all over the world, with, Jurgensen explains, a continuing and “heavy bias towards Australian authors” (1994 ix). *Outrider* then, became a series of paperbacks “presenting topical issues in creative dialogue” (Jurgensen, 1994 ix). By 1995, we witnessed the demise of an Australian journal dedicated to the migrant experience, to be replaced by a more generic form of publishing dedicated to “world literature.” This reflects a greater understanding, as I mentioned previously, of what we would describe now as globalisation.¹²

While the adoption of the category “multicultural” and “migrant” writer was strategically important in the 1970s and 1980s in Australia as a form of resistance to assimilation, in the 1990s it was understood that the continuing separatism of this constituency may have a more marginalising effect (Brewster 99). Not only might the continuing adoption of this term cause further marginalisation, but the term was also regarded as homogenising. As Sneja Gunew asked, what are the similarities between an Italo-Australian and a Vietnamese-Australian text? And at what cost do we conflate them under the banner multicultural? Gunew also questioned this conflation in terms of genres of writing:

The thematic concerns most favoured by editors, publishers, and reviewers tend to be those which deal overtly with the migrant experience, and preferably in the generic form of confessional oral history. This results in a couple of related problems: reductive homogenisation, and 'representation' by tokenism
(*Framing Marginalities* 23).

¹² However, less enthusiastic responses to this shift were also apparent. About these changes to *Outrider*, Sneja Gunew wrote that it indicated “a different perception of multicultural literature by linking it with bourgeois culture by way of Weltliteratur.” Gunew writes: “Within the ambit of the 'best' of 'world literature', the journal now publishes overseas writers and Anglo-Celtic as well as non-Anglo-Celtic Australian writers. This represents another tactic for integrating multicultural concerns into Australian literature, but it does not fundamentally alter the premises upon which Australia's national culture is founded” (Gunew, *Framing Marginalities* 9).

Thus, writing from migrants that did not address the “migrant experience” was often given little recognition as “migrant” writing, and writing that was more experimental in form was also often overlooked in favour of realist representations. That Lily Brett’s writing is both highly autobiographical and realist did aid in her recognition as a “migrant” writer in this period. While Brett’s writing did challenge the “mainstream” inasmuch as it represented migrant experiences and she was a “migrant woman writer,” it did not challenge what was generally expected under the auspices of “migrant writing.”

While the term multicultural continued to be adopted within Australia in the 1990s, the rhetoric of multiculturalism, as it was understood in the early 1970s had been thoroughly critiqued, especially through the adoption of post modern understandings of identity as dynamic, shifting and performative.¹³ Within the field(s) of literary studies in Australia, the term “multicultural” has lost much of its currency. While the terms “ethnic,” “migrant” and “multicultural” have thus been critiqued and even abandoned (by some critics, but no means by all) it seems for many the race is still on for adopting new literary taxonomies.

The emphasis on the need to recognise the text’s context (in terms of ethnic writing in particular) has also led to the recognition of the importance of the hermeneutic process of textual “meaning making.” So, while we witnessed a move toward recognising specificities of ethnic writing, we have also seen a move toward understanding our positions as critics and our location(s) as a fundamental influence in how we understand these local literatures. While the early 1980s saw a rise in recognition of ethnic, migrant and multicultural writing and writers, the 1990s we could fairly say, not only continued this focus but also began to question, with theoretical sophistication, the silences and gaps that existed as part of this focus. More specifically, as the “ethnic” writer was being discussed and their ethnicity explored, the concept of “ethnic” itself was being deconstructed. In this process of questioning ethnic diversity and

¹³ In *Literary Formations: Post-colonialism, nationalism, globalism* (1995) Anne Brewster argues that constructions of ethnicity by nationalist discourses are founded on the idea of the separateness of different cultures, each of which is unchanging and bounded (Brewster 13). Brewster argues that instead, “the culture of any group is dynamic, and changes as it is redefined by each generation” (13). Instead of the “culturalism of multiculturalism,” Brewster argues for a postmodern and performative ethnicity, one that “comes into being through the enactment of strategies and positions” (13). Thus, the need to recognise the dynamics of identity, rather than further investing in taxonomies of identity.

difference, the silence around Anglo ethnicity was being challenged. If it is important to recognise Jewish or Italian identities for example, it is as important to recognise Englishness as an identity itself and as an identity from which other identities are formed and “known.” This concentration on the silenced ethnic identities has led to a new branch of knowledge most aptly called “whiteness” studies.

One of the first, and most influential discussions of whiteness was a book published in the U.S. in 1993 by Ruth Frankenberg called White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness. In her study Frankenberg argued that “whiteness” has a set of linked dimensions:

First, whiteness is a location of structural advantage, of race privilege. Second, it is a 'standpoint,' a place from which white people look at ourselves, at others, and at society. Third, 'whiteness' refers to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed (1).

Frankenberg argues that in naming “whiteness” we can displace it from the unnamed and unmarked status that is the effect of its dominance. The argument is that the effect of race privilege and white dominance for white people is a seeming normativity and a structural invisibility (6). Or to put it another way, as Aida Hurtado and Abigail Stewart argue in “Through the Looking Glass: Implications of Studying Whiteness for Feminist Methods” (1997), “privilege,” such as whiteness, “has the semblance of naturalness that in itself defends it from scrutiny” (300). As they explain, when whiteness, because of its “natural” order and elusive nature, remains unquestioned we have, what they call, “racial realism,” which leaves no room for questioning privilege (304). As Frankenberg writes: “To speak of whiteness is, I think, to assign everyone a place in the relations of racism” (6). Within literary criticism this means the critic needs to not only explore her/his own ethnic background, and how that forms her/his relationship to the text, but more significantly, explore how the Western traditions of criticism and Western notions of the “literary” and “art” effect how we read and evaluate all forms of “art.”

This questioning of our own critical position, is of course, not new. Critics such as Gunew were undertaking and suggesting this as a strategy as early as the 1980s. However, in the 1980s the focus was more clearly on providing a space for the “ethnic” (non-Anglo) writer to speak, and

through this the mainstream would be challenged. Toward the end of the 1990s and into this new century, the focus has turned to the “white” critic him/herself as an object of investigation. This is an important historical movement and reflects the broader shift in much current thinking from providing visibility to “others,” to exploring the invisibility of the “self” of dominant Western epistemologies.

Lily Brett’s writing, published in several of these anthologies of “migrant,” “ethnic” and “multicultural” writing in the 1980s, continued to be published, and indeed became more marketable throughout the 1990s. The rising popularity and marketability of Brett’s writing occurred when this “author” (as understood in a Foucauldian sense) was constructed not as a “migrant” writer, but as a “Jewish,” and more recently, as a “second generation Jewish writer.” To trace this change from a “migrant” writer of Jewish background, to a “second generation Jewish survivor,” we need to examine the rise of Holocaust consciousness.

At the same time as “migrant” and “multicultural” writing was being published (and then being questioned) in Australia, the particular plight of European Jews in World War II was also gaining attention throughout the Western world. Thus, not only was there a politics of visibility in the 1970s and 1980s regarding ethnic/racial differences, but tied to this was the strategy of necessarily making the history of these “others” visible. Thus, the Holocaust came into sharp focus as an event in history that had been largely neglected, and that could now be explored (and exploited).

The Rise and Rise of Holocaust Consciousness

Over the period of the last forty or so years, the Holocaust has moved from an event remembered by few to one of the greatest “myths” of the twentieth century. The myth making of the Holocaust has also shifted from Israel and Europe to the United States of America. The Americanisation of the Holocaust is also the commercialisation of the Holocaust myth. As Tim Cole writes, at “the end of the twentieth century, the ‘Holocaust’ is being bought and sold” (1) and “[I]n short, ‘Shoah’ business is big business” (Cole 1). This business is also tourist business, with millions of people from all walks of life visiting a number of tourist Holocaust

sites, including the Auschwitz museum in Poland, Anne Frank house in Belgium, Yad Vashem in Israel and the Washington D.C, Dallas, Houston and other American Holocaust museums. At these places people can purchase postcards to send home to family and friends, along with other forms of memorabilia. “At the end of the twentieth century the ‘Holocaust’ is being consumed” (Cole 17). While this consumption of the Holocaust is more prevalent in the U.S. and Germany than it is in Australia, we too have been a part of, and influenced, the growing Western myth making of the Holocaust. In tracing this rise of Holocaust representation in the last three decades of the twentieth century, 1978 marks a turning point.

In April 1978 the four-part, nine and a half hour mini-series Holocaust was watched by almost one hundred million Americans. Critics agree that the viewing of this series was a defining moment in the entry of the Holocaust into, not only American consciousness, but the collective memory of Western nations more generally (Novick, Koonz, Langer, Berman).¹⁴ However, it was not just the viewing of the miniseries alone, but the promotion of the series, study guides produced for viewers, and other educational guides, that made this series have such a large impact.

In 1979 the series was shown in West Germany and attracted fourteen million viewers (Cole 13). Despite receiving very mixed reviews in West Germany, Claudia Koonz argues that Holocaust aroused a “national furore:” “While critics assailed it as kitsch, German audiences were riveted. Call-in shows, public debates, and newspaper specials mobilized an unprecedented airing of memories about genocide” (Koonz 268). In West Germany, the mini-series aided in the establishment of local and regional archives, church and schools sponsored exhibits, lectures, and public debates about the Third Reich (Koonz 268). Thus, this mini-series and its effects prompted a “turning point in German history” (Cole 13) and “shattered thirty

¹⁴ Novick argues that “more information about the Holocaust was imparted to more Americans over those four nights than over all the preceding thirty years” (Novick 209). Tim Cole agrees that it was this mini-series, “which turned the term [Holocaust] into a ‘household’ name in the United States” (Cole 13).

years of German silence on their wartime crimes” (Novick 213).¹⁵

However, despite its impact, Lawrence Langer argues that viewers around the world were generally grateful for the manageable version of the Holocaust the series presented to them. He writes: “the sheer brutality of the event was shielded, and the technicolor horror that audiences saw, though mildly disturbing, did not threaten to displace their mental comfort with nightmares” (Langer 9). Yet, despite this, it was through the medium of television that world wide interest was renewed in a subject that had been publicly “forgotten.” The impact of this series was also felt in Australia, as just under half the population viewed the series in 1978. As in America and Germany, Gerald Green’s Holocaust “propelled the holocaust into Australian public consciousness” (Berman, Holocaust Education 76). While other American filmic representations of the Holocaust followed - Playing for Time (1980), Escape from Sobibor (1987), Triumph of the Spirit (1989), War and Remembrance (1988) - none of them ever achieved the popularity that Holocaust did in 1978. Holocaust remained unmatched as a popular media representation of the Holocaust until Steven Spielberg’s Schindler’s List in 1993.¹⁶ While it took some fifteen years before another representation would match the popularity of Holocaust, the impact of this soap opera paved the way for other forms of memorialisation of the Holocaust throughout the 1980s.

In Australia, memories of the Holocaust, within Jewish communities in particular, have been expressed in a number of institutional forms. Since the 1980s, Australian Jewish communities have established: Holocaust Awareness Week; set up an association of Jewish Holocaust Survivors, which hosted an international gathering of Jewish Holocaust survivors in 1985; established Holocaust monuments, museums and exhibitions; established survivor testimony

¹⁵ However, six years after Holocaust was shown in West Germany, a fifteen hour television special called Heimat “assuaged the national conscience” (Koonz 274). Koonz explains that this series set in a backwater village depicted a nostalgic view of Nazism without Jews, anti-semitism, racial laws, camps and so on. Other popular films like Lili Marlene, Veronika Voss, Deutschland Bleiche Mutter and others, depicted a Third Reich quite sanitized of racial hatred and war crimes (Koonz 274). These were followed by other films in the 1990s (after unification) that similarly sanitized the Third Reich.

¹⁶ Spielberg’s adaptation of Thomas Kenneally’s Schindler’s Ark, appeared the same year that the Washington Holocaust Memorial opened. Again, like Holocaust, Schindler’s List was heavily promoted by Jewish organisations and public officials from the American President down.

projects; and aided Holocaust publications.¹⁷ While some organisations have been established solely to transmit Holocaust knowledge, others have included the Holocaust as one area of interest among many others. While these various organisations and activities have all aided in the transmission of Holocaust awareness (Berman, Holocaust Education 77) perhaps among the most significant and accessible of these institutional forms of Holocaust remembrance are Holocaust museums.

The two largest permanent Holocaust displays in Australia are in Melbourne and Sydney, the two cities that are home to the largest Jewish populations. The Jewish Holocaust Museum and Research Centre in Melbourne was established in 1984 by two Melbourne Jewish organisations - the Kadimah and the Federation of Polish Jews - and was the first museum of its type in Australia. Since its inception the Museum has featured both a permanent display as well as changing exhibitions. The staff at the museum also co-ordinate public lectures and seminars on differing aspects of the Holocaust by local and visiting experts. The museum was established, and continues to be run by, Jewish survivors of the Holocaust and other members of the Melbourne Jewish community. This community focus is very apparent when visiting this museum at Elsternwick in Melbourne.¹⁸ The involvement of ageing survivors in the museum has been encouraged by the knowledge that eye-witness testimony is one of the best weapons to counter Holocaust denial, and the survivors have become more willing from the 1980s onward to speak publicly about their experiences (Berman, Holocaust Education 76). The Melbourne museum also has a large role to play in Holocaust education throughout Victoria, and as Berman explains has contributed “more than any other local Jewish organisation to the provision of

¹⁷ Different Jewish organisations have also combined to finance and organise visits by Holocaust specialists from overseas. These visits often include lecture tours, addressing a number of Jewish community organisations, especially in Sydney and Melbourne.

¹⁸ When I visited the Museum with my partner in 2001 we were guided through the Museum by an elderly male survivor (of Auschwitz), now residing in Melbourne. The generosity of this man in sharing his story and knowledge was greatly appreciated and made for a very personal encounter, unmatched in other forms of remembrance.

specialist holocaust teachers for Melbourne schools” (Holocaust Education 78).¹⁹

The Sydney Jewish Museum was established some time after the Melbourne museum in 1992, and also has an important role to play in education about the Holocaust to Jewish and non-Jewish Australians. Unlike its Melbourne counterpart, the Sydney Museum is both a museum on the Holocaust and a museum of Australian Jewish History. The ground floor of the Sydney Jewish Museum depicts Jewish life in Australia from European settlement, while the remaining mezzanine levels are dedicated to the events of the Holocaust.²⁰ While the Sydney Jewish Museum has a much larger space to dedicate to the Holocaust, both museums retain a sense of community by involving survivors from their communities. Both of these museums are part of a culture of Holocaust commemoration that began developing more publicly in the 1980s in Australia.

On a much larger scale, a commemoration culture also developed in the 1980s in West Germany, which inspired hundreds of towns and cities to commission memorials to Jews, to revive synagogues as museums, and restore Jewish cemeteries (Koonz 268). Claudia Koonz explains that in this period: “Inscriptions like “To the memory of our Jewish fellow citizens” replaced vague phrases like “No more war” or “To all victims”” (268). However, the remembering of the Holocaust in Germany has always been a site of contention and ambivalence. Noting this ambivalence, Caroline Wiedmer writes:

On the local level the excavation of the past had become something of a cult, with hundreds of plaques to the deportation of Jewish citizens, the restoration of Jewish cemeteries, the marking of sites of Synagogues, and, whenever possible, their

¹⁹ Although the Holocaust was taught “sporadically and unsystematically through the 1960s and 1970s” in both Israel and Australia, it wasn’t until 1979, that the Israeli Ministry of Education ruled that the study of the Holocaust was to be taught as a compulsory subject in the history curriculum of government high schools. It was not until 1976 that Australian Jewish day schools added compulsory teaching of the Holocaust (Berman, Holocaust Education 66). By the 1980s, when the Holocaust had become a central component of Jewish identity, specialist Holocaust teachers began to emerge. These teachers helped establish formal Holocaust education as a permanent feature of the Jewish Studies curriculum (Berman, Holocaust Education 66). Berman explains that the Holocaust has not been a mandatory part of the curricula of Australian state schools, but has been taught as an optional component within English literature, religious studies and history (Berman, Holocaust Education 67).

²⁰ Melbourne also has a museum for Jewish history in Australia, and it is the Jewish Museum of Australia, located in St Kilda in Melbourne. This museum was established in 1982 and for the first thirteen years was located in the synagogue of the Melbourne Hebrew Congregation of South Yarra. In 1995 it was re-opened in St Kilda opposite the St Kilda Hebrew Congregation Synagogue and close to Temple Beth Israel.

reconstruction. The intensification of interest at the local level was meanwhile met by more official efforts to recast the genocide in a normalising light. Bitburg and the tendencies of the Historians' debate perhaps best illustrate this (88).

The contestation over how to remember the Nazi past and the destruction of the Jews gained public recognition, as Wiedmer noted above, in 1986 in what has become known as the *Historikerstreit* (Historians' debate). This debate in the newspapers Die Zeit and Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung between German intellectuals and journalists, followed the controversial visit to Germany by American President Ronald Reagan in 1985. President Reagan, and Chancellor Kohl, visited both the former Bergen Belsen camp and a small military settlement in Bitburg. At Bitburg, President Reagan declared that the German soldiers were as much "victims" of Nazism as the victims in the concentration camp, and caused international furore. The Historians' debate came at the heels of this controversy.

The Historians' debate was catapulted into public controversy by two articles in Die Zeit by Jurgen Habermas, written in response to an article in the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung by Ernst Nolte. However, as the debate raged, contributions were made by a long list of German scholars. The crux of the debate, on a popular level, was the extent to which comparing the Nazi crimes with other genocidal phenomena resulted in a relativising and normalising of the Holocaust. It would, LaCapra explains, fixate attention on the way Germans were also victims, as Reagan stated at Bitburg. In this way, a positive identity could be gained without confronting how the German people were differentially implicated in the Holocaust (LaCapra, History and Memory 50). Controversy regarding how to remember the Holocaust in Germany occurred in a very public domain again in 1996 with the Goldhagen tour (I discuss this shortly). However, debates over how to remember the Holocaust have been continuous in Germany since the *Historikerstreit*, but certain events bring these debates in sharper public focus.

When the Berlin wall came down dividing East and West Germany in 1989 it brought with it a number of problems, including the rise of neo-Nazi movements and the spread of racist violence throughout Germany (Wiedmer 146). However, by this time, collective memory of the Holocaust, while debated, was taking on a number of forms, including memorials, testimonies,

fictional representations, local histories and films.²¹ While official memory of the Holocaust in Germany tended to place the events of Nazism in a normalising light, and make correlations between the murder of the Jews under Nazism with genocidal acts elsewhere (the Russian Gulags), as exemplified in the Historians' debate, in America the official memory of the Holocaust was focusing increasingly on its "unique" nature and its special "lessons."

On April 24 1979, President Carter, in his address to the first Days of Remembrance commemoration in the Capitol Rotunda, outlined three reasons why the Holocaust was significant to Americans. Firstly, Americans liberated many of the death camps and helped to expose them to the world. Secondly, Carter argued, Americans share the responsibility for not being willing to acknowledge what was happening to the Jews during the war. Finally, because Americans are humane people, concerned with humanity and protecting the rights of all peoples, they are naturally interested in remembering the Jewish catastrophe (Young, America's Holocaust 72). Thus, for the National Holocaust Museum that was being proposed by Carter to be justified, explicitly American reasons had to be expounded. As James Young writes: "In being defined as the ultimate violation of America's Bill of Rights and as the persecution of plural groups, the Holocaust encompasses all the reasons immigrants -past, present, and future - have for seeking refuge in America" (Young, America's Holocaust 73). Thus, while the American Holocaust Memorial Museum always sought to recognise "America's guilt" in not "acting" during the war, the museum is part of the discourse of American "freedom" and "liberty," defined in stark opposition to former German (and Soviet) totalitarianism.

Since the 1980s, hundreds of millions of dollars have been contributed by American Jews to Holocaust-related projects and large numbers of people, both Jewish and non-Jewish, turn out to Holocaust events. The Washington museum, and the many other Holocaust museums and memorials scattered throughout America, are enormous tourist attractions, with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington attracting over two million visitors each year alone (Cole 6). One hundred and sixty eight million dollars was donated to pay for the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, and millions more dollars have

²¹ For example, more than fifty feature films dealing with National Socialism were made in West Germany between 1975 and 1985 (Wiedmer 88).

been allocated to memorial projects throughout the United States (Cole 14). The money initially spent on constructing the Washington museum, ensured, Novick argues, that it would become “the principal symbol and “address” of American Jewry” (202). When the museum was finally opened by President Clinton in 1993 it became, according to Cole, “the official face of the myth of the ‘Holocaust’ within contemporary America” (5).

One of the functions of the Washington museum and other Holocaust museums in the United States of America, is to teach the “lessons” of the Holocaust. However, what these “lessons” are, have changed historically. As Novick explains:

In early writings about the Holocaust - particularly in Israel but also in the United States - Jewish resistance was inflated for inspirational purposes. In much cold war writing in America responsibility for the Holocaust was transferred from Nazi Germany to “totalitarianism,” so that the appropriate anti-Soviet lessons could be learned. More recently, the possibilities for rescue available to the Allies and to gentiles in Hitler's Europe have been exaggerated so as to teach lessons about indifference (262).

These contemporary lessons about the dangers of indifference, posited in the United States, are claimed to be universal lessons. This positioning of the Holocaust - a European event - as an historical event with universal moral and political lessons for all, and as a unique and unprecedented phenomenon, has become the most legitimised discourse on the Holocaust in the West since the 1980s. So powerful is this discourse that those that challenge the “uniqueness” of the Holocaust for example, face a number of accusations from Holocaust denial to anti-Semitism. (I discuss an example of this in relation to a literary debate in Australia, shortly).

This legitimising discourse of the Holocaust as a unique event, but with universal lessons, has been described, as mentioned previously, as the “Americanisation of the Holocaust.” This “Americanisation of the Holocaust” functions as a form of “national self-congratulation: the “Americanization” of the Holocaust has involved using it to demonstrate the difference between the Old World and the New, and to celebrate, by showing its negation, the American way of life” (Novick 13). Part of this Americanisation of the Holocaust - where the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum is the prime metonym - has seen the elevation of the Jewish

“victim,” at the expense of other “victims” of National Socialism.²² This focus on the Jewish catastrophe at the expense of an even-handed focus on all victims of Nazism, is what separates the Holocaust as a historical event, from the “Holocaust” as a myth. The myth of the Holocaust is the myth of the uniqueness of the Jewish tragedy, that does not read this tragedy as part of, and related to, other aspects of Nazism and World War II.²³ This elevation of the Jewish catastrophe is not solely confined within Jewish communities, but has become the dominant representation in the United States more generally.

However, unlike many Holocaust memorials in America where the Jewish catastrophe is the subject of memorialisation, and unlike in Israel where the sole subject of memorialisation are the Jewish heroes and martyrs of World War II, in Germany memorials have a different purpose. As Caroline Wiedmer explains:

In Germany, however, the situation is the opposite on every count . . . By officially mourning the victims it produced, Germany would acknowledge the guilt and shame, not celebrate the glory, of its past. Moreover, the crimes committed under National Socialism were directed not only against the Jews, but also against 500,000 Sinti and Roma and 3.2 million Soviet prisoners of war, in addition to homosexuals and members of various political and religious groups whose numbers can only be estimated. To dedicate the memorial exclusively to the Jewish victims of the Holocaust makes sense in Israel, but hardly in Germany (142-143).

Thus, how the Holocaust is remembered, what the Holocaust means, is of course different in different locations. While in Germany remembrance needs to be more encompassing of the many different victims, in the United States there is less pressure to represent all who suffered under National Socialism. Also, as Wiedmer points out, how these victims are remembered in Germany, the country responsible for the atrocities, carries a different burden than in a country

²² Richard J. Evans when visiting the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum explains that he was struck by the marginalisation of other victims apart from the Jews. Evans argues that this focus on Jewish victims is often at the cost of historical accuracy. For example, the museum presented “photographs of dead bodies in camps such as Buchenwald or Dachau as dead Jewish bodies, when in fact relatively few Jewish prisoners were held there” (Evans 261).

²³ Which is not to deny the particular treatment of the Jews, and Hitler’s particular anti-Semitism and anti-Semitism more generally, but rather to understand these events as a part of events that effected many other groups of people over the period of the Third Reich.

seemingly divorced from the catastrophic events, both politically and geographically. The communist “victims” of the Holocaust have been virtually ignored in the United States and other Western countries more generally. Compare this to commemoration of the war in the former East Germany, as I discussed in Chapter Two, and the politics of memory is obvious. As James Young writes: “For national memory of what I might call the Shoah varies from land to land, political regime to regime” (Young, The Texture of Memory viii).

However, the Americanisation of the Holocaust has, in more recent times, impacted on the way the Holocaust *is* remembered in Germany, and other European countries. Indeed, the term “Americanisation” describes this process of American dominance over the field of possible meanings of this event. This, of course, reflects the growing dominance of the United States as the only world power and the allied cultural hegemony of the United States globally. It is really no coincidence that Lily Brett’s popularity as a writer has increased markedly since she moved to New York. Brett’s representations of the Holocaust are readily absorbed into the new American mainstream of Holocaust representation. Her success as a writer then has, in many senses, been possible through her relocation to the centre of the Holocaust “marketplace.”

This centring of the Holocaust as an American “memory” came to fruition in 1993, which was named the “year of the Holocaust” in the United States. As previously discussed, it was in this year that the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum was opened, as well as being the year of the first screening of Steven Spielberg’s Schindler’s List.²⁴ This Spielberg film has undoubtedly caused another resurgence in Holocaust consciousness, much like the mini-series Holocaust did in 1978. However, unlike in 1978, by 1993 the Holocaust was already well established as one of the most important events of the twentieth century. Schindler’s List was based on the book Schindler’s Ark by Thomas Keneally, which was published in 1982 and won the prestigious Booker prize. Keneally’s book has special relevance to Australia, not simply because Keneally is a popular Australian author, but because many of Oscar Schindler’s survivors settled in Australia. What is quite important in terms of Holocaust representation in

²⁴ Schindler’s List was an enormous success for Spielberg, netting over \$221 million at foreign box offices and winning seven Academy Awards (Cole 1).

Australia though, and what is exemplified by this book's history, is that an Australian work of art has been re-worked and sold back to Australia (admittedly as a different work of art itself) by Hollywood. This is similar to the Americanisation of The Diary of Anne Frank, which I discussed in Chapter Two. For many Americans, and even younger Australians, the Australian connections of this film may be completely unknown. At the same time, it is hard to imagine that anyone anywhere would read Schindler's Ark today without knowing of the film Schindler's List. Such is the power and influence of Hollywood as opposed to the reputation of Australian authors abroad (and even in Australia). This is in no way to discount the deserved popularity and reputation of Thomas Keneally himself, and his achievement in publishing this book.²⁵

While Schindler's List has encouraged an enormous amount of critical response world wide, profits from this film have been used in a number of ways to continue to promote Holocaust "consciousness." One of these important projects that has been funded is the Shoah Oral Narratives project. The Shoah foundation has been recording an oral archive of survivor stories from all over the world, including in Australia. As I discussed in the Introduction, while the purpose of this archive beyond the archive itself, is unclear, one of the effects of this project in Australia has been an increase in the publication of survivors' stories. Thus, the success and popularity of this film, has enabled a space for further representation of the Holocaust globally.

After the international success of Schindler's List in 1993, another representation of the Holocaust, this time a scholarly book, again caused an international debate on the Holocaust. Daniel Goldhagen, an American scholar, published a study of German anti-Semitism in 1996 entitled Hitler's Willing Executioners. The main thesis of Goldhagen's book was that many more Germans than had traditionally been thought were involved in the killing of Jews in World War II. These Germans were, Goldhagen argued, average Germans, who had killed, not because of orders or blind obedience, but had killed because they enjoyed it. They were driven by what Goldhagen calls "eliminationist anti-Semitism," a strain of racism unique to Germany.

²⁵ Schindler's Ark is based on interviews with fifty Schindler survivors from seven countries - Australia, Israel, West Germany, Austria, the United States, Argentina and Brazil. Keneally also visited, with Schindler survivor Leopold Pfefferberg, places that figure prominently in the book, including Cracow, Plaszow, Zablocie and Auschwitz. Added to this Keneally says that the book also relies on documentary and other information supplied by wartime associates of the Schindlers, as well as postwar friends (Keneally 14).

The news of this book was made public in Germany in Die Zeit, in April 1996, when Volker Ullrich announced that the book marked the beginning of “a new, even sharper Historians’ debate” (Wiedmer 203). Hitler’s Willing Executioners was the topic of heated debate in Germany in the summer of 1996, with the comments being overwhelmingly critical of Goldhagen’s thesis.

In the fall of 1997, Goldhagen’s book was published in Germany as Hitlers Willige Vollstrecker, and shot to first place on the German best-seller list. When Goldhagen visited Germany in September on his speaking tour of five German cities (Hamburg, Berlin, Frankfurt, Aschaffenburg and Munich) he was met by thousands of Germans, not protesting, but cheering (Wiedmer 205). Wiedmer argues that Goldhagen offered the German people in late 1990 the same opportunity “grasped by the 1968 generation in mercilessly accusing their Nazi parents” (206). One of the keys to his success was that Goldhagen made a clear distinction between Germany then and the Germany of today. So successful was Goldhagen in capturing the sentiment of contemporary Germans that in 1997 he was awarded the Journal for German and International Politics’ Democracy Prize.

The space that the Holocaust now occupies has undoubtedly been influenced by popular representations such as Holocaust and Schindler’s List. These representations effect the reception of other Holocaust texts, enabling the legitimising of some texts while pushing others to the periphery. The success of Goldhagen’s Hitler’s Willing Executioners in particular, is due to the way it relates to Schindler’s List,²⁶ which now occupies the centre of the broad field of Holocaust representations. The popularity of Goldhagen’s visit to Germany in 1997, and previously Schindler’s List, also begins to explain the success of Lily Brett’s books in Germany. When Lily Brett has travelled to Germany in the last few years on book tours, her audiences have crowded venues. Most of Brett’s greatest fans are young German people eager to confront the “sins” of their parents and grandparents (much like Goldhagen’s audience). It is within this context of “confronting” the Holocaust that Brett’s writing is received in Germany. Brett’s publications not only offer her readers, German and others, the stories of

²⁶ As Wiedmer writes: “It is hardly surprising then that Goldhagen’s rendering of scenes of utter horror in precise and vivid detail has had a sensational effect not so very different from that of Schindler’s List” (Wiedmer 207).

Jewish Holocaust survivors, but more importantly, the impact of the Holocaust on the survivors' children and grandchildren. In this way Brett as an "author," and her texts, represent the continuing effects of the Holocaust on the next generation(s), and thus the need to continue "confronting" this history.

Revising Memory: Holocaust Deniers, War Crimes Trials, and a Phoney "Ethnic" in a Peasant Blouse

However, when assessing the popularity of Brett's writing, and explaining the expanding market for her work, it is important to recognise the role of Holocaust revisionism and Holocaust denial. Collective memory of the Holocaust has also been served, albeit in unintended ways, by a long history of denial of the Holocaust. Holocaust denial then, I argue, has played an important role in creating a space for response (to denial) which in turn creates an expanding market for Holocaust texts.

While there is an increasing memorialisation of the Holocaust in Australia, particularly among Jewish communities, among selected non-Jewish communities there has been a more insidious history of Holocaust denial. With the airing of the documentary Auschwitz: The Final Solution and the mini-series Holocaust on Australian television in 1978, came a number of angry responses in regional newspapers. Included in these responses were proclamations by John Bennett about so-called propaganda from Israel. While Holocaust revisionism, or denial, is historically traced to Maurice Bardeche's Nuremberg ou la Terre Promise published in Paris in 1948, it is Arthur Butz's The Hoax of the Twentieth Century published in 1977, that has been the major catalyst for Holocaust denial in Australia. In 1979, a Melbourne solicitor named John Bennett, denied that there had ever been gassings at Auschwitz and elsewhere, and refuted the figure of six millions Jewish deaths. Bennett, drawing on Associate Professor Arthur Butz's so-called "research," said on public radio, amidst a blaze of publicity and controversy: "I'm satisfied that there was no attempt by the Germans to exterminate the Jews, and I'm also quite convinced that there were no gassings at Auschwitz or indeed at any of the other camps" (Hilary Rubinstein, Early Manifestations 93).

Bennett's revisionist line, given much media attention, naturally caused anguish for members of the Australian Jewish community. The former president of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, Isi Leibler wrote: "It is a bitter irony that in 1979 I am obliged to take umbrage at the obscene claim that the Nazi death camps, and in particular Auschwitz, where my grandparents, together with millions of others, were exterminated, was nothing more than a Jewish hoax" (qtd. in Hilary Rubinstein, Early Manifestations 95). While the anger unleashed over Bennett's espousal of Butz, and his own subsequent position as one of the most high profile Holocaust deniers in Australia have led to an assumption that Holocaust denial was not organised here until 1979, Hilary Rubinstein argues this is certainly not the case (Early Manifestations 95). After World War II, the paper the New Times (established in 1934) became a principal place for anti-Semitic organisations to air their views and theories.

The New Times was a periodical produced by the Australian League of Rights (whose leader was a lay Anglican, Eric Butler) who also published a vicious anti-Semitic diatribe called The International Jew (Hilary Rubinstein, Early Manifestations 96). With the arrest of Adolf Eichmann in 1960, the League's Holocaust denial increased, expressed in both the New Times and its other periodical, Intelligence Survey. For example, in 1961 in the New Times the following appeared: "No objective assessment of Jewish casualties has yet been published, primarily because those in Germany best qualified to do so are silenced by fear of being sent to prison" and "the claim that six million Jews were gassed is beyond doubt one of the biggest lies in the whole of human history" (qtd. in Hilary Rubinstein, Early Manifestations 97). The League of Rights was also involved in the publication and promotion of the 1970 edition of Communism Unmasked by Father Patrick Gearson, who went under the pseudonym Jean Patrice. This booklet, which had already been published in a similar form as early as 1943, made the spurious link between communism and Jews, a link that has, of course, pre-dated the Holocaust, as I explained in Chapter Two.

Much Holocaust denial has appeared in Australia since 1979, but what Hilary Rubinstein is interested in showing through her analysis of these lesser known early denials and deniers, is that there has always been an undercurrent of denial in Australia. Not just Australia, of course, Holocaust denial is international in scope. As Richard Evans writes:

There is a thin but seemingly continuous line of writing since the Second World War that has sought to deny the existence of the gas chambers at Auschwitz and other extermination camps, to minimize the number of Jews killed by the Nazis until it becomes equivalent to that of the Germans killed by the Allies, to explain away the killings as incidental by-products of a vicious war rather than the result of central planning in Berlin, and to claim that the evidence for the extermination, the gas chambers, and all the rest of it had mostly been concocted after the war (1-2).

Obviously then, published writing works not only to serve collective remembering but to counter collective memory. Literature written on behalf of memorialising the Holocaust has always been met by literature denying the Holocaust, even if less evident and “underground,” Holocaust denial too has effects. One of the effects of Holocaust denial is the production of literature to counter the effects of denial and damaging revisionism. Thus, much of the writing on the Holocaust by historians, survivors, survivors’ children, and so on, have been encouraged by a knowledge of the damaging effects of denial. Also, as mentioned previously, survivors in Australia have also countered this denial by offering their experiences to others as guides at Holocaust museums and also by visiting schools and universities. Many of these survivors quite openly state that they felt compelled to speak of their experiences because of Holocaust denial and revisionist writings. Thus, there are positive unintended effects that stem from denial that need to be acknowledged and accounted for.

One of the most well known Holocaust revisionists in recent times, who has contributed to Holocaust memory, is David Irving. In the spring of 2000, David Irving brought a libel case, against Penguin Books and Deborah Lipstadt, before the High Court in London (Irving had sued for libel in 1996). In her book Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory (1993) Lipstadt had portrayed Irving as a key player in a movement dedicated to denying the Holocaust - a movement with far right connections, and an anti-Jewish political agenda. The libel case was specifically about the “falsification and manipulation of the historical record that Lipstadt alleged Irving had committed” (Evans xi). David Irving however, was no easy opponent. Irving is the author of some thirty books on historical subjects, the

majority of them about World War II, and in particular about Nazi Germany and its leaders. Irving had his first book published, The Destruction of Dresden in 1963, at the age of twenty five, and by the end of the 1960s, he was already an extremely controversial writer of World War II. In 1977 he published Hitler's War, perhaps the most controversial interpretation of Hitler ever written. Irving has continued to publish books about Nazi figures, spending years in German archives researching the "German side" of the war. However, Irving has never completed a university degree, yet espouses to be a historian with impeccable methods for extracting the "truth." Lipstadt's claim in her study that Irving not only bends historical evidence to fit his ideological leanings, but that he also has neo-fascist connections and is an admirer of Hitler, earned her this libel case. However, this issue of historical falsification was generally overlooked by the international news media which were more interested in using the occasion to discuss Irving's anti-Semitism (Evans xii).²⁷

The eventual outcome of this trial was a rejection of the libel action against Lipstadt and Penguin, and while Irving later appealed to the Court of Appeal, this too was rejected. The defence had proven its case that Irving had misrepresented evidence, that he was a Holocaust denier, that he was racist and anti-Semitic, and that his manipulation of evidence was deliberate. On April 29, two and a half weeks after the trial, Channel 4 in Britain broadcast a documentary, at prime time, juxtaposing extracts from the trial transcripts with historical analyses and archive footage. Penguin also reprinted Denying the Holocaust in a paperback edition and published the judgement of the case in a cheap book format (Evans 236). Clearly, after a flurry of media interest in Irving after the trial, the trial had further eroded his reputation, and given greater legitimacy to those whom Irving criticised. As Evans writes:

Had Irving not brought the case, the few paragraphs which Lipstadt had devoted to him in her far from best-selling book . . . would probably have languished in academic obscurity and gone unnoticed . . . The publicity generated by the trial catapulted Lipstadt to international fame, alerted people to Irving as a Holocaust denier . . . and utterly destroyed his reputation as a genuine historian (265-66).

²⁷ Irving had been involved in many legal matters prior to this. In 1983 he was arrested and deported from Austria. In 1991 he was convicted in Germany of insulting the memory of the dead and was banned from entry into Germany, Canada, and Australia in 1992-93. His reputation as a historian of World War II had always been controversial, but by the 1990s his reputation as a serious historian had plummeted and been superseded by his more popular reputation as one of the most dangerous Holocaust deniers.

Evans quotes from the British newspaper the Daily Telegraph, which stated: “The Irving case has done for the new century what the Nuremberg tribunals or the Eichmann trial did for earlier generations” (qtd. in Evans 266). Unlike the two aforementioned trials however, this was a trial that involved no victims or perpetrators, but was a trial in which historical accuracy itself was put on trial.

However, in the 1990s a resurgence of interest in the Holocaust in Australia was an outcome of *actual* war crimes trials of former Nazi collaborators. The 1990s in Australia saw the committal proceedings in Adelaide of three men charged with war crimes against Jews in Eastern Europe (Bevan 243).²⁸ Australia’s first European war crimes prosecution was in 1990 and was the trial of Adelaide based Ivan Polyukhovich, who was accused of massacring nearly nine hundred people in Nazi occupied Ukraine. After approximately three and a half years, Polyukhovich was found not guilty on two counts, one of being knowingly involved in the murder of 850 people, and another of murdering a woman and two children (Bevan 253). Witnesses came from the Ukraine, Israel and North America to give evidence in this trial that received international press, and was certainly a newsworthy event in Australia. However, this trial, and other cases that did not make it to trial,²⁹ received mixed response, many questioning the purpose of putting old men on trial after the lapse of so many years.³⁰

While war crimes prosecutions featured in the Australian media after Polyukhovich’s acquittal (for example the case in Adelaide of Heinrich Wagner which was stopped due to the defendants ill-health) the importance of these trials and the millions of (“taxpayers”) dollars that were being spent of them, was being seriously questioned. In 1994, the Federal Government introduced an International War Crimes Bill designed to meet its obligations to the United Nations. This Bill

²⁸ On the twentieth of December 1988, Australia’s Federal Parliament passed the War Crimes Amendment Bill, which allowed prosecutions against suspected European war criminals in ordinary Australian civilian courts. This was achieved under a Hawke Labour government. Prior to this, in 1986, an official inquiry headed by Andrew Menzies confirmed that war criminals had almost certainly entered Australia after World War II (Bevan 19). The Hawke government investigated a number of suspects, and in February 1987 Queen’s Counsel Bob Greenwood was given the job of setting up a Special Investigation Unit. Several hundred cases were subsequently lodged with the SIU and by late 1988 the field had been narrowed to approximately two dozen active files (Bevan 21). The passing of the Bill in December made headline news and war crimes trials were being publicly and passionately debated in parliament and in the press.

²⁹ In Adelaide the case against Mikolay Berezowsky had been dismissed before the Polyukhovich trial, and the case against Heinrich Wagner was stopped due to the defendant’s ill health (Bevan 257).

³⁰ Polyukhovich was 77 years of age when the verdict was given.

allowed Australia to hand over accused people for trial by the tribunal and to co-operate with investigations and prosecutions of alleged offenders. The Bill also allowed the tribunal to sit in Australia (Bevan 258). Subsequently, in 1994 Australian authorities allowed eighty year old Konrad Kalejs - who was accused of war crimes committed in Latvia - into the country, after being deported from the United States. The controversy over Australia's acceptance of Kalejs once again put the Holocaust, and our responsibility to survivors, on the public agenda.

It was within this context that one of Australia's most vehement literary debates was borne. Indeed, it was the imminent prosecution of Polyukhovich, discussed above, that dismayed a budding young author and led her to produce one of the most controversial works of fiction ever published in this country. The Hand that Signed the Paper was published by Allen and Unwin in 1994 under the authorship of "Helen Demidenko." The manuscript of The Hand won the Australian Vogel Award for first fiction, part of the award being the publication of the manuscript. After publication, the book won the coveted Miles Franklin Award and finally won the Australian Literature Society's Gold Medal. All three of these awards were given to the author "Helen Demidenko."

The Hand that Signed the Paper moves between two historical periods and geographical locations, Queensland in the 1990s and the Ukraine in the 1930s and 1940s. The narrator that bridges these two periods, and the first voice we hear is Fiona, a Queensland university student of Irish-Ukrainian parents (much like the author "Helen Demidenko"). Fiona's Ukrainian father Evheny was involved in the massacre of Jews at Babi Yar, and her father's brother Vitaly served at Treblinka as a camp guard. Uncle Vitaly, now an old man, is under investigation in Australia for war crimes. The novel's main focus is on the story of these two men, and their lives in the Ukraine during, and prior to, World War II. As well as the two brothers, we read about a sister, Kateryna, who was married to a German SS captain who commanded a unit of the Einsatzgruppen, and had been in command of the Babi Yar operation. Fiona uncovers this dark history of her family, and each one's individual involvement in the Holocaust. The narration of the story is split between multiple voices, that of Fiona, Magda (Vitaly's first wife), Kateryna, and the omniscient authorial voice. What Fiona discovers through her research into her family's past, is the suffering her family experienced during the Stalin-engineered Famine of 1923-33

(Manne 27). Fiona learns that the Jews dominated the Communist Party at the time, and that they were responsible for the persecution her Ukrainian family faced. Fiona then tells of the “inevitable” need for revenge, which led her father and uncle to commit heinous crimes against the Jews when the Nazis enter the country. The story ends back in contemporary Queensland, and with the death of her Uncle Vitaly, no war crimes trial has to be faced.

Since the awarding of the Vogel prize to this manuscript, The Hand was a topic of heated controversy in Australian literary circles, and in the Australian media more generally. Controversy mainly centred on the depiction of Ukrainian history in this book, and the problematic depiction of Jewish Bolsheviks as being responsible for the Ukrainian famine, and the subsequent pay back to the Jews by the Ukrainian peasants when the Nazis brought their genocidal policies into the country. Debate also focused around the question of the book’s alleged anti-Semitism and the limits of poetic licence. As Andrew Riemer explains, in the months between the book being published and the announcement of it winning the Miles Franklin, “the few public complaints were focussed on its potentially harmful anti-Semitism and its disrespect towards those who had perished at Babi Yar, Treblinka and in the Warsaw ghetto” (Riemer 121).

However, the debate became somewhat of a national scandal when the author’s “real” identity was exposed. On 19 August 1995, “Helen Demidenko,” the daughter of a Ukrainian father and Irish mother, was exposed as Helen Darville, the daughter of English migrants. The Ukrainian ethnicity that had undoubtedly influenced reception to this book, was now shown to be bogus, and many in the literary community who had been receptive to the book because it was seen as partly family history (which helped some in justifying its historical/political bias) were left in an unsettling position. While this was not the first instance of bogus authorship in Australia, it has proven to be one of the most complicated and controversial. Andrew Riemer says it was “the strangest literary and cultural phenomenon of our time” (177).

Within Australian literary journals there was much debate over this book and its author.³¹ The fact that both the literary journals Southerly and Westerly dedicated significant space to debating the “Demidenko”/Darville book, contradicts somewhat Andrew Riemer argument that the debate was predominantly confined to Melbourne.³² Explaining why this controversy was such a “Melbourne affair,” Riemer points to the particular Melbourne Jewish intellectual and communal life, as exerting great influence in producing the phenomenon. Riemer writes: “The Jewish community in Melbourne is more closely-knit and more committed to its identity than the other comparably-sized Australian Jewish community in Sydney” (Riemer 233). As I explained in Chapter One, there certainly are significant differences between the Sydney and Melbourne Jewish communities, with Melbourne being a far more Orthodox community consisting of more Polish Jews. Riemer, himself from Sydney, argues that Judaism is a far less cohesive force in Sydney than in Melbourne, and that in Sydney “there may be more people there, myself among them, who would be classified as Jews and yet feel no particular kinship with Jewish cultural traditions” (Riemer 234). Thus, concluding from this demographic explanation Riemer writes:

The controversy over The Hand that Signed the Paper must be seen, at least in part, as an attempt by the more conservative elements of Australian Jewry to regain some of the ground lost in the process of secularisation which has occurred (or seems to have occurred) at the time of the great atrocities against Jews of all social, national and cultural persuasions receded. The Holocaust, because its evil cut across nationalities, classes and intellectual inclinations, furnished the cohesion of martyrdom (234).

Thus, if we follow Riemer’s argument, in opposing this novel the Jewish community (in Melbourne in particular) has found, again, a point of connection and identification.

³¹ While Australian Literary Studies only published one article on this book, and that was not until 1997, other journals dedicated much more space to analysis. From 1994-1997, Meanjin, published a total of eight articles concerned with issues arising from the Demidenko controversy. Like Meanjin, Southerly (a Sydney journal) published eight articles related to the debate, but this time all appearing in 1995 and 1996. The journal Overland also took part in providing a space for debate publishing three articles in 1995 and one in 1997. The Western Australian literary journal Westerly also published two articles and a book review in 1996 and 1997 relating to the debate.

³² Riemer points out that the major part of the debate was conducted in Melbourne based journals, such as Meanjin, Quadrant, Australian Book Review and Eureka Street. He also notes that the debate occupied more space, and for a longer period, in the newspaper The Age than in comparable dailies like the Sydney Morning Herald and The Australian (Riemer 232).

As I discussed previously in regard to Holocaust denial and revisionism, countering these “attacks” on “history” and “memory,” countering anti-Semitism, can be extremely productive in the continuing process of Jewish identification.

Like the Wilkomirski controversy,³³ once the fraudulent “Demidenko” identity was exposed, this book became even more marketable, because of the scandal. Attempts to publicly expose or discredit a book often do more for the publisher’s profit margin, than not. This of course resonates with the Irving/Lipstadt case discussed earlier, where Lipstadt’s book, and expose of Irving, was greatly aided by the attempt to discredit her. If the Holocaust is a popular topic (and it now is), a Holocaust scandal is truly exciting. Thus, “Demidenko” not only became a name printed in all of the major Australian newspapers, but the controversy was also broadcast over radio and on television. The unfinished story of “Demidenko”/Darville captured the imagination of the Australian public, and social/political commentators were quick to take up the opportunity the debate raised.³⁴

While Andrew Riemer believed the publication of The Hand in Australia suggested that we were a more liberal, tolerant and resilient country - compared to Germany where it most likely would have never been published (Riemer 11) - Robert Manne disagreed wholeheartedly. In The Culture of Forgetting, Robert Manne, a (Melbourne based) political commentator and public intellectual, wrote with great sincerity that the controversy had exposed to him, something lacking in Australia - both a historical knowledge of the Holocaust, and an understanding of the

³³ Benjamin Wilkomirski’s Fragments is a bogus memoir of his childhood in Auschwitz and Majdanek. When it was released it was “decorated with endorsements by famous academics” (Guttenplan 70) and won the National Jewish Book Award for biography/memoir, winning over works by Elie Weisel and Alfred Kazin. Even when Wilkomirski was exposed as Bruno Dossekker, a Swiss musician whose account was entirely fictional, the book still attracted a large readership (Guttenplan 70). Dossekker, who wasn’t even Jewish, had fabricated the whole story, Evans suggests, “from a mass of survivor literature which he had some how internalized and digested until he had become convinced that the experiences these books recounted were his own” (Evans 261).

³⁴ A total of five books were published in 1996, all dedicated to analysing and ‘explaining’ the Demidenko phenomena. The Demidenko File published by Penguin and edited by John Jost, Gianna Totaro and Christine Tyshing traces the media response to The Hand, while the Demidenko Diary by Natalie Jane Prior is a more personal account of Helen Darville. Melbourne University’s history department published Genocide, history and fictions: historians respond to Helen Demidenko/Darville’s The hand that signed the paper. Then, also in 1996, perhaps the two most influential commentaries on the whole debate, The Culture of Forgetting: Helen Demidenko and the Holocaust by Robert Manne, and The Demidenko Debate by Andrew Riemer.

importance of careful and sensitive representation.

Manne's argument with this book and its author, and its general positive reception, centred on the text's ambiguity. Manne did not disregard the book because it had anti-Semitic characters, but rather because of a lack of moral presence on behalf of the author. Unsurprisingly, Andrew Riemer disagreed with Manne, arguing quite the contrary: "One strand runs nevertheless, consistently through its modest compass: an appalled incomprehension at humanity's capacity to perpetrate unspeakable outrages" (Riemer 80). Defending the novel in this regard, Riemer continues: "Even if it possesses few other virtues, Darville's novel is a necessary reminder that terrible atrocities may be committed by otherwise ordinary people, that the danger of converting those responsible for sadistic cruelty - whether as guards in a death-camp or as serial murderers - into demonic creatures represents the fantasy that barbarism and inhumanity cannot arise in the familiar and the everyday" (84-85). For Riemer then, the book's value lays in its ability to explore how atrocities can be committed by "ordinary" people, or in Hannah Arendt's terms, to explore the "banality of evil."

Directly contrasting to Riemer's reading of The Hand, Manne's reading is concerned with what he regards as the authorial voice's indifference to these atrocities. Manne argues that the authorial voice in the novel never gives us reason to challenge the novel's "distorted account of the historical relations between Ukrainians and Jews" and never undermines the Nazi ideological vision of Bolshevism as a Jewish conspiracy (126). Rather, this novel, Manne argues, revives this vision. Manne is, therefore, worried about the current generations' lack of understanding of the moral significance of the Holocaust, a significance denied in this book.

Manne writes:

It is clear that if there is a revisionist purpose at work in *The Hand* it is not the kind associated with the Holocaust-denying school of Arthur Butz and David Irving, of what has come to be called historical revisionism. The Hand does not deny the historical reality of the Holocaust - the death camps and the policy of the Final Solution. What it denies, more radically, is their significance, their meaning. *The Hand that Signed the Paper* is a work not of historical but of cultural or moral revisionism (133).

The other question that Manne addressed in his study is the question of whether it is fair to subject a work of fiction to historical criticism - a question that dominated much of the debate around this book. In this regard, Manne answered most firmly in the affirmative.³⁵ Manne reveals that Darville's book is full of historical errors and misunderstandings, and her narrative premise that violence (committed against the Ukrainians by the Jews) bred violence (toward the Jews by the Ukrainians) is misguided. As Manne states: "to explain the Holocaust within a framework of inter-ethnic conflict and to portray it without an unprovoked ideological anti-Semitism at its heart, amounts in its own way to a form of Holocaust denial" (163). However, Andrew Riemer does not agree with Manne's argument in regard to this so-called denial. Countering Manne, Riemer argues that the only "denial" in The Hand, is the denial that the Holocaust is a unique act of genocide, incomparable to other instances of genocide and ethnic cleansing. Because Darville did not accept this ideological perspective, Riemer argues that she became "the object of a virulent campaign dominated by the rhetoric of self-righteous fundamentalism (105).

The question of the uniqueness of the Holocaust has been a topic of debate ever since the Holocaust became a word popularly used to describe the genocidal destruction of European Jews by the Third Reich. Riemer is certainly not alone in criticising this elevation of the Holocaust in this way. As discussed previously, one of the fundamental premises that upholds the "myth" of the Holocaust is the idea of its uniqueness. However, I don't believe a questioning of the idea of the Holocaust's uniqueness discounts Manne's argument regarding The Hand and denial. Manne's criticism of the casual link that the book suggests between the Ukrainian famine and the Holocaust, is indeed a form of denial of a more complicated history of anti-Semitism.

However, in the end it is not my purpose to evaluate the merit of this book, nor discuss whether it was worthy of the awards it received, or should have indeed ever been published. What interests me, and what I have tried to maintain, is that for every act of denial - and I agree with

³⁵ Manne writes:

For a novel which deals so dogmatically with two of the most catastrophic events in human history, in so recent a past that some survivors are still with us, and which purports to demonstrate nothing less than a causal link between the grievous suffering of the Ukrainian nation in the Famine, and the attempted genocide of the Jews, rigorous historical criticism is more than appropriate. It is obligatory (Manne 141).

Manne here that this novel is a type of moral denial - there are counter-acts of the sort Manne himself provides. In this sense then, those texts that are deemed “dangerous” for their denial, are also productive, adding to the memory of the Holocaust, albeit in unintended ways, through the response they elicit. Therefore, Darville’s “denial” has been a catalyst for a further marketability of writing on the Holocaust. One of the other effects of the “Demidenko” fiasco has been to give greater legitimacy to those voices which do speak from a position of experiential and familial “authority.” In other words, the fact that “Demidenko” was actually Darville, and this served to discredit her book on a popular level, has meant that writers such as Lily Brett, whose parents we *know* were Holocaust survivors, are given greater legitimacy. Hand in hand with the expose of a “fake” identity comes the further legitimising of the “authentic” voice. The Demidenko controversy - much like the controversy surrounding David Irving, Raegan’s speech at Bitburg, and Daniel Goldhagen’s thesis - produces further response, and as such assures continuing collective memory; albeit contested, albeit mutable.

It is at this historical point that I will now explore Lily Brett’s writing in greater detail. From humble beginnings in anthologies of migrant writing and Australian Jewish writing, Lily Brett has now become an almost iconic “second generation survivor” writer, of international repute. In Chapter Five I will explore this term “second generation survivor,” but before this, I will begin at the “beginning” and discuss Brett’s first book The Auschwitz Poems, and the place Auschwitz occupies in our collective memory of the Holocaust.

CHAPTER FOUR: IMAGINING “AUSCHWITZ”

More than any other place, Auschwitz has over time, in multiple, shifting and often contradictory ways, come to represent the “Holocaust.” With the emergence of the “Holocaust” as a particular event of not only World War II, but of the twentieth century more generally, and of Jewish history more specifically, has come the emergence of Auschwitz as the symbolic representation of this event. As Tim Cole writes in Selling the Holocaust (1999): “More than any other place, ‘Auschwitz’ has come to symbolise everything about the ‘Holocaust’ (97-98). Thus, Auschwitz has become the metonym of the Holocaust myth.

However, while “Auschwitz” is such a loaded signifier and an iconic sign of the Holocaust, this was not always the case. Prior to the 1960s little was known of this place “Auschwitz” in the Western world. Prior to the emergence of the “Holocaust” as a distinct and meaningful signifier of the Jewish tragedy, Bergen-Belsen and Buchenwald were the places that best represented Nazi atrocity. It was Bergen-Belsen that was the first concentration camp liberated by British troops, and it was footage of piles of corpses from this camp that screened in Britain shortly after its liberation, that ensured Belsen became synonymous with Nazi brutality. On the other hand, it was Buchenwald that was liberated by American troops, and it was this camp that gained significance in the U.S., along with Belsen (Cole 98). Auschwitz, on the other hand, was liberated by the Red Army, and remained virtually unknown in the West. Thus, in a divided post war Europe, Nazi atrocity was remembered through predominantly Belsen in the West and Auschwitz in the East. The Auschwitz that was remembered in the East was not about the “Holocaust” as we now understand this mythic sign, but was a symbol of fascist aggression in the past, and a warning of the potential danger still posed by West Germany (Cole 99). Likewise in the West, as I explained in Chapter Two, in the 1940s and 1950s the liberated concentration camps were not connected to a specifically Jewish disaster, but a larger picture of Western ally war history.

Auschwitz came into prominence in the West, with the emergence of the “Holocaust.” As Cole explains: “‘Auschwitz’ came to replace ‘Belsen’ in Western consciousness, as the ‘Holocaust’ came to replace more vague notions of Nazi atrocity and the imaginary geography of the ‘Holocaust’ shifted eastwards” (100). With the Eichmann trial in 1961 and the pioneering writing of Raul Hilberg, the “Holocaust” came to be seen as the systematic

murder of Jews by gas, rather than isolated atrocities. Unlike the camps in the West, Auschwitz had been the site of mass killings by gas, and “its gas chambers became the centre of the ‘Holocaust’ world” (Cole 101). Cole argues:

Of all the death camps within Poland, it was ‘Auschwitz’ which had already been constructed as the Nazi concentration camp, and thus it was ‘Auschwitz’ which became the ‘Holocaust’ death camp. From the 1960s onwards, the original meaning given to ‘Auschwitz’ became overlaid with a new set of ‘meanings’. From being a site of Warsaw bloc memory of fascist atrocity, ‘Auschwitz’ became recognised not simply as a site of the mass gassing of Jews, but the site of Jewish memory of the ‘Holocaust’ (101).

Clearly, in current times, Auschwitz has become a signifier of multiple meanings. As a signifier - of the Jewish tragedy, the evils of fascism, the epitome of racism, or more broadly “evil” - “Auschwitz” as a sign has meanings far beyond its historical context. In becoming such a loaded signifier, the historical Auschwitz has often been misrepresented, displaced, and in many ways “forgotten” in its historical complexity. As explained in previous chapters, collective consciousness relies more on memory, than on historical accuracy. Thus the Holocaust as a collective memory has little to do with a society having a sound knowledge of a complex history. As with the Holocaust, so too with Auschwitz. Auschwitz as a complex of concentration camps established by the Nazis during World War II, is often forgotten in its historical context, when it is represented in its more vague role as a signifier of any of its multiple and shifting meanings.

In this chapter I explore Auschwitz as both a historical event and as collective consciousness by focusing on the representations of Auschwitz in the writings of Lily Brett, and particularly in her collection The Auschwitz Poems. By reading Brett’s poems alongside survivors’ memoirs and rigorous historical research, I highlight the very thorough historical research that went into the formation of this collection. At the same time, I wish to emphasise the value of poetry as an important, and indeed vital, conduit for collective memory and collective and individual mourning. I posit that there is a place for poetry after Auschwitz, and that indeed, the reading of Brett’s collection of poetry can play some part in preserving Auschwitz as a historical event currently obscured by its over burdened signification. I end this chapter by looking at Brett’s representation of Auschwitz in her novel Too Many Men, where Brett addresses some of the contemporary concerns with the

Auschwitz “museum” in Poland. However, before I focus on Brett’s representations, I will give a brief and limited overview of the camp’s existence, as background.

The Historical Auschwitz

Oswiecim is a Polish district town located 50 kilometres southwest of Krakow and 286 kilometres from Warsaw. From the partition of Poland in 1772 until the establishment of the independent Polish republic in 1918, Oswiecim was in the territory of the Hapsburg Empire. After the occupation of Poland in September 1939 by the Third Reich, Oswiecim was incorporated with Upper Silesia into Germany and renamed Auschwitz. On the eve of war the population of this town was approximately 12,000 residents (approximately half of whom were Jewish).

The site selected to become the core of the Auschwitz concentration camp lay outside the town of Oswiecim and was an abandoned Austrian artillery barracks, a collection of about twenty single-story brick buildings (Friedrich 1). In the first year of the subjugation of Poland the need for new detention camps to establish German law and order in the east was overwhelming. The first German dispatch to this site reported that the site was unsuitable, the barracks were useless and the water supply was polluted. However in April 1940 another dispatch, headed by SS-Hauptsturmführer Rudolf Hoss, was sent to the site and differing in opinion from the other dispatch, Hoss suggested to Reichsführer SS Himmler that the site could indeed be used as a camp (Friedrich 2).

At the outbreak of the war there had been six major concentration camps in Germany containing approximately 25,000 prisoners (they were Dachau, Buchenwald, Sachsenhausen, Mauthausen, Flossenburg and Ravensbruck). At Auschwitz, Himmler told Hoss to build a camp for 10,000 prisoners, a number that might increase to 50,000. These numbers were entirely new in the history of concentration camps. During the war concentration camps changed from places of supposed self-protection, to sites to aid in the war effort, the munitions production (Friedrich 6). When Himmler ordered the establishment of the Auschwitz camp he made Rudolf Hoss its commander and thereafter approximately 1,200 people were evicted from the vicinity. Following this approximately 300 of the Jewish residents of Oswiecim were made to work for six weeks establishing the foundations. In May 1940, 30 German criminal prisoners were transported from the Sachsenhausen camp. These prisoners received the first camp serial numbers and became part of the network of

functionary prisoners holding official posts. On June 14 1940, the first transports carrying 728 Polish inmates from Tarnow in Galicia arrived in the camp. The administration and management was then set up with SS-Obersturmfuhrer Josef Kramer as Hoss's deputy (formerly of Mathausen) and Karl Fritsch of Dachau was made chief of the prisoner camp. A political department (a branch of the Gestapo) was also established (Gutman 10-16).

Auschwitz started out as the main concentration camp for the Polish territories, the Polish underground, and the Polish intelligentsia, but later grew to accommodate other types of prisoners. To facilitate the camp, more residents were evicted from the town's districts, and by uprooting the local population, the Germans created an empty area measuring 40 sq km. By the time Himmler visited the camp in March 1941, 10,900 prisoners, mostly Poles, were incarcerated. Himmler and his entourage, including the officials of the industrial conglomerate IG Farbenindustrie, who wanted to establish a subsidiary on the camp's grounds, laid down plans for expansion. This expansion included construction work in the camp area with a view to accommodating 30,000 prisoners and the establishment at Birkenau, about 3km away, of a camp for 100,000 prisoners of war. Expansion plans also called for supplying 10,000 prisoners to IG Farben for the construction of an industrial enterprise and for agricultural development with prisoner manpower, the establishment of workshops, and war effort enterprises in the camp (Gutman 16).

After Himmler's visit, construction increased and in 1942 an average of 8,000 prisoners worked in construction. The main camp, Auschwitz I, expanded so greatly that by the end of 1941 it could accommodate 18,000 prisoners and by 1943 held 30,000. SS living quarters were built, along with SS guard barracks, headquarters for the complex, a workshop, and depot centre. The entire main camp occupied an area 1,000 metres long and 400 metres wide (Gutman 16). In October 1941 constructions began on Birkenau, Auschwitz II. The first stages of Birkenau were finished in 1942, and it was designed to hold various categories of prisoners as well as function as a death camp. In March 1942 a women's sector was established in the main camp and in August it moved to Birkenau. In January 1944, the Birkenau women's sector held 27,053 prisoners. Birkenau camp held both men and women's sectors and while it held prisoners of many nationalities, most of these were Jews. In February 1943, a separate family camp for gypsies was created and a similar camp for Jews from the Theresienstadt ghetto in Czechoslovakia was opened in September. In January 1944, the prisoner population of the Auschwitz camp totalled 80,839 (Gutman 17).

In addition to these main camps some forty camps were established over a wide area around Auschwitz. These camps, some of them tens of kilometres away from the main camp, were established near mines, foundries, and other industrial enterprises. The largest satellite camp was Monowitz where IG Farben erected a huge synthetic rubber plant - "Buna." In the fall of 1943 dramatic organisational changes were made in the camp complex, Hoss was removed as camp commandant and replaced by SS Obersturmbannführer Liebehenschel. During this time the camp complex was broken into three parts - Auschwitz I the main camp, Auschwitz II was Birkenau and Auschwitz III, called Monowitz was the industrial camp comprising Buna and the other satellite camps (Gutman 18-19).

The horror that pervades Western collective memory of "Auschwitz" is usually associated with camp II, Birkenau. Auschwitz-Birkenau was the killing centre of Auschwitz, the largest of its type in the Third Reich. The first gassings of prisoners in Auschwitz (main camp) were carried out in September 1941 when 1,000 Soviet prisoners of war became the guinea pigs for future mass destruction. By March 1943 four gas chambers and crematoria were in operation at Birkenau, and at top capacity over 4,000 victims could be "processed" in 24 hours. In these gas chambers and crematoria hundreds of thousands of Jews transported from all over Europe were systematically murdered. The exact number of those murdered at Auschwitz is unknown, and estimates range from one to four million. One of the problems in ascertaining a figure is due to the fact that the Nazis, such fastidious recorders, attempted to destroy all the documents of Auschwitz in its last days. Otto Friedrich suggests however, that the current consensus of death at Auschwitz is approximately 1.5 million (ix).

The last gassings occurred in Auschwitz on October 28 1944, although this by no means meant the killings ceased. The Russian army launched a surprise offensive on January 12, 1945, and on January 18 the Nazis ordered the general evacuation of the camp. For those left behind, the sick and infirm, many died of starvation and disease. For those evacuated from the camp, the cruellest, most gruelling death marches awaited them. Few prisoners survived these death marches and the subsequent incarcerations in camps in the west.

Fewer Jews were killed at Auschwitz-Birkenau than at the other four death camps combined (Belzec, Chelmno, Treblinka, Sobibor). Far more Jews survived Auschwitz-Birkenau, having been chosen for selection, than survived these four other camps. In Belzec there were no more than two survivors, from Chelmno only three, Treblinka less than forty, and from

Sobibor, sixty four people survived (Gilbert, The Holocaust 287). In Auschwitz-Birkenau several thousand Jews survived, and a few of these, fortunately, wrote of their experiences.

“Auschwitz” the Signifier

The historical details I have outlined tell little of the story of the Auschwitz complex and its five year history. While these details serve to place Auschwitz within a historical timeline, they do little justice to the many stories that emanate from this location. These stories are too numerous and diverse to ever be satisfactorily represented, and so many of these stories remain untold and can never be heard. Experiences of those incarcerated vary greatly, written testimonies attest to this. Yet, in my reading of just some of these testimonies, all agree that Auschwitz was something quite beyond human comprehension. Hugo Gryn, a survivor of Auschwitz says: “It was a denial of God. It was a denial of man. It was the destruction of the world in miniature form” (qtd. in Gilbert, The Holocaust 826).

Philosopher Jean Amery, himself a survivor of Auschwitz, famously maintains that in Auschwitz the mind came up against its limits.¹

While we can never know all that occurred at Auschwitz, let alone understand, we continue, through varying representations, to try to tell something of this momentous event in Western civilisation. Raul Hilberg maintains that there are three main reasons why Auschwitz has become the symbol for the Jewish catastrophe in Europe. The first reason is numerical - more Jews died here than in any other single locality. The second reason is geographic - Auschwitz drew its victims from a very wide variety of countries and regions. And finally, Auschwitz was the longest standing camp, after all the other death camps had shut down, Auschwitz Birkenau remained in operation - “a solitary killing center signifying the will of Nazi Germany to annihilate the Jews in the last hours of a losing war” (Hilberg 81).

The numerical significance of the killing of Jews at Auschwitz, is also discussed by Otto Friedrich in his history The Kingdom of Auschwitz. Friedrich argues that sheer numbers do count when we are trying to measure atrocity. He writes:

Some philosophical souls like to argue that quantity makes no difference in questions of good and evil. One life is just as sacred as a hundred, and therefore one killing is just as iniquitous as a massacre. This is not true. If it were just a question of cruelty and suffering, concentration camps like Ohrdruf, Wöbbelin, Nordhausen, Gusen, or

¹ Amery, Jean. At the Mind's Limits: Contemplations by a Survivor on Auschwitz and its Realities.

Thekla might be just as infamous as Auschwitz, and yet they are all but forgotten. The Holocaust still horrifies us not because some Jews were murdered - that happens almost every week in New York City - but because the incredible total of six million murders represents the attempt to kill all Jews: genocide. And Auschwitz represents the Holocaust, more than such sinister installations as Majdanek or Sobibor, largely because more people died here than anywhere else. Here death not only became a way of life but expressed that way of life by all the methods of mass production (Friedrich viii).

Similarly, Michael Berenbaum writes: "Long regarded as a symbol of the Holocaust and of the Nazi period, Auschwitz illuminates the totality of the Nazi killing machine" (vi). Yisrael Gutman agrees, and also argues that Auschwitz has become "synonymous with the unrestrained tyranny, the power of terror, and the systematic murder of millions of human beings during German Nazi rule" (5). Auschwitz, however, is also discussed in ways that are less about figures and functions, and more symbolic. For example, in Schindler's Ark, Thomas Keneally writes of Auschwitz: "By 1943, when Rudolf Hoss left Auschwitz to do a stint as Deputy Chief of Section D in Oranienburg, the place was already something more than a camp. It was even more than a wonder of organisation. It was a phenomenon. The moral universe had not so much decayed here. It had been inverted, like some black hole, under the pressure of all the earth's malice - a place where tribes and histories were sucked in and vaporised, and language flew inside out" (344). Otto Friedrich in The Kingdom of Auschwitz (1996) writes: "The images of Auschwitz, the encircling networks of barbed wire, the squat grey guard towers, the railroad tracks to nowhere, all evoke the modern sense of hell" (vii).

In this quote by Friedrich, he mentions the visual images of Auschwitz that have formed the collective consciousness of Auschwitz as signifier of "Holocaust," and more broadly "evil" or "hell." Thus, Auschwitz, as I suggested at the beginning of this chapter, exists on two levels - Auschwitz as the historical network of camps, and Auschwitz as the symbol of the Holocaust. As previously explained, the historically complex Auschwitz existed as a network of approximately forty satellite camps and three main camps, which differed in size and function. The symbolic, or the mythical "Auschwitz," is a single entity drawing from all three main camps, particularly from Auschwitz I and Auschwitz II (Birkenau). The mythical Auschwitz we see in popular representations such as the films Sophie's Choice and Schindler's List, and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Sophie's Choice

presents a single Auschwitz, which is an amalgam of the different places within this complex, as well as an amalgam of different periods. Similarly, at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, the visitor is presented with a mix of Auschwitz I and Auschwitz II. The main features being the *Arbeit macht frei* gateway of Auschwitz I and the gas chambers of Auschwitz II (Birkenau). These two symbols of the mythical Auschwitz are often recalled and have become the signifiers of Auschwitz. However, they are symbols that are rarely understood and represented in their complex history and geography (Cole 106).

One of the results of this blurring between the separate camps, and the creation of a single Auschwitz, is the homogenising of the Auschwitz prisoner. While Auschwitz II (Birkenau) was predominantly the killing centre for the Jews, Auschwitz I largely functioned to intern Polish prisoners. Then, of course, there are the particular histories and geographies of the Soviet POWs, Gypsies, and other categories of prisoners, including communists, homosexuals and “deviants.” Thus, in these and other representations the many camps and different histories that make up the Auschwitz complex are conflated into one mythic “Auschwitz.” This mythic “Auschwitz” excludes the history of these various camps, their inmates and their function. Instead we have an emphasis on the crematoria, the gas chambers and the Jewish victims.

Later in the chapter I explore the mythic representation of Auschwitz by looking at Auschwitz as a memorial museum and the conflicts over memory that have been associated with this museum in Poland. Now, I turn to explore, in detail, Lily Brett’s The Auschwitz Poems.

The Auschwitz Poems

The Auschwitz Poems was first published in 1986, although several of the poems had been published previously in literary journals or heard on ABC radio. As a collection The Auschwitz Poems won the Victoria Premier's Literary Awards in 1987, and is dedicated to Rose and Max Brett, Lily Brett’s mother and father, both survivors of Auschwitz. The Auschwitz Poems is also illustrated with drawings by Australian artist David Rankin, Lily Brett’s husband. This combination of Lily Brett’s poems and David Rankin’s drawings has featured in all of Brett’s poetic collections. In The Auschwitz Poems, this combination of Brett’s sparse poetry and Rankin’s similarly economical black and white sketches work together to produce a very haunting aesthetic.

As a collection, The Auschwitz Poems begins in the camp and ends in Australia. This collection not only deals with camp life, but also the continuing effects of Auschwitz on its survivors and the next generation. However, in this chapter I am restricting myself to a discussion of the poems specifically focused on camp life, and death. This focuses my discussion then, on about two thirds of the poems in this collection. In the next chapter I will focus more specifically on the effects of the Holocaust on the children of survivors, and will draw, therefore, on some of these later poems in this collection.

For a reader already familiar with Holocaust, and more specifically Auschwitz, testimonies and histories, many of the titles of the poems in this collection are familiar - "Muselmanner," "Arbeit Macht Frei," "Canada," "Selection," "The Sonderkommando," "Buna," "Soup." Eli Pfefferkorn and David H. Hirsch suggest that much of the morphology of Auschwitz has become common knowledge, "even among those who do not take a special interest in Nazi atrocities" (175). Some of the common features of camp life they suggest are most well known are: the transportation on cattle cars, roll call, dysentery, selections, lice, "organising," "Kanada" and the soup (175). Readers of Lily Brett's The Auschwitz Poems are presented with these familiar (yet completely strange) aspects of camp life. These are the images and words of the popular imagination of Auschwitz - the mythic "Auschwitz." On first glance at this collection then, not only its title, but the title of many of its poems in the contents pages, the reader, familiar with these images and words, may respond initially with recognition. For the reader unfamiliar with these images and words however, all may seem foreign. Yet I would suggest, only a minority of readers would be completely unfamiliar with the book's title. Auschwitz as a word, originally of the German language, but now a word with global significance, and recognised in many languages, occupies a particular place in twentieth century history and memory. By placing Auschwitz in this collection's title, the publishing house and marketers, as well as the poet herself, locate this collection within the reading public's popular understanding of the mythic "Holocaust." Given the place of Auschwitz in this Americanisation of the Holocaust, from the outset, this collection is by its title, both familiar and strange. This relationship of the familiar and strange continues once the collection is opened.

Brett's poetry is thin and economical. Like the bodies of Holocaust victims, the poetry is hauntingly lean - there is no excess. Brett's poetry also utilises simple words and "everyday" language with an uncomplicated syntax. However, in many ways the language is far from

simple. Images of decaying bodies, rodents, lice and sagging breasts, make reading Brett's poetry extremely difficult. The poetic style coupled with the thematic content renders Brett's poetry both accessible and difficult, both easy to understand and utterly unbelievable. The need to convey difficult information in as an accessible form as possible is a political and personal imperative for Brett.² This politic of informing her readers about the Holocaust is also coupled with a knowledge that it cannot be conveyed in a sanitised, distanced way. Brett reaches out for an emotional response to an event steeped in what some call extremist rationality. David H. Hirsh writes: "The death camp itself is the ultimate example of Rationalism gone mad, and madness rationalised. Any talk of rationalism and madness that does not attempt to encompass the Nazi years can only be idle chatter" (12).

To write about the way concentration camp victims were affected by dysentery and lice is to represent a history of the Holocaust so often silenced and unknown. To write about sagging breasts and protruding ribs, infected sores and rotting limbs is to bring the corporeal back into history, to return the repressed, to write the abject, to challenge Rationalism. This is the great achievement of Brett's writing, and especially of her poetic verse. Some of the finest examples of this come from Brett's The Auschwitz Poems.

In reading The Auschwitz Poems I have chosen to read them inter-textually, placing them beside other representations of Auschwitz, with particular reference to writing by survivors. I do this with the intent of showing how historically informed Brett's poetry is, and to reveal how poetry can also play a vital role in conveying historical information. This information, as stated above, is information often neglected in "scientific" historical documents. It is the detail that concerns Brett, and that I am also concerned with in reading her poetry - details that are often neglected when these Auschwitz camps are made to serve as signifier for "Holocaust." At the same time, it is also important that these details are explored in the poetic form. In this case, poetry does not obscure the details in favour of metaphoric and metonymic device, but it is the poetic form that allows for these details, and for a response from the reader that would be quite different if the textual device with different.

The first poem in Brett's collection is called "To The Left":

You knew
as soon

² See the Brett interview by Shannon Dowling published in the journal Scarp 33 (October 1998).

as you
stepped
from the train

that
the world
had gone
vanished
moved on

all
that remained
was
a giant
grey stain

striped
with ghouls
and ghosts
who'd missed
the boat

they clubbed you
to the left
to the left
was life
mother

they chopped
those large wild curls
that used to whirl
around your face
mother

shaved

your sweet head
under your arms
between your legs

...

they left you naked
in a line
for two days
and two nights
under a dead sky

to the left
to the left
was life
mother.

(1-2)

“To the Left” is just one of Brett's poems on “selections” in Auschwitz. Because Auschwitz was also a labour camp as well as a death camp, selections were an every day part of camp life. Selections varied within the camp, and were used less or more often depending on labour needs. Sometimes selections occurred on the ramp, to prisoners first arriving in Auschwitz. The selections made here separated the men from the women and children, and from those groups the sick and elderly, the very young and unfit, from those able to be temporarily exploited as a work force. Abraham Biderman, a survivor of Auschwitz explains: “Selections took place unexpectedly, sometimes twice or three times a day. We had to strip to the waist with our hands high above our heads. We then had to stand to attention as an SS officer inspected our bodies; at other times, we had to run past the selecting officer. The selections were for the gas chambers; sometimes they were for slave labour. It was hard to know what the selections were for. One had to use one's instincts to avoid being selected for the gas chambers, but chiefly it was a game of luck” (225).

Avoiding selection was of the highest priority for camp inmates who still had a will to live. Elie Wiesel describes surviving one of the selections within his barracks by mustering all his strength to run past the infamous Dr Mengele, proving himself fit and able bodied enough

for work. Wiesel writes: "Someone pushed me. It was my turn. I ran without looking back. My head was spinning: you're too thin, you're weak, you're too thin, you're good for the furnace . . . The race seemed interminable. I thought I had been running for years . . . You're too thin, you're too weak . . . At last I had arrived exhausted" (76-77). Lily Brett's poem called "Selection" represents this type of determination to pass a selection process and survive:

Selection

He leapt through
the line
like

a
sharp angled
soloist

a
mad
dancer

a
principal
in a private ballet

before
he'd pinched
and pinched
his cheeks

so
they sat
like red moons
in a grey sky

armed
against
accidents

he'd
emptied
himself

of
the typhoid
that dripped
from his bowels

he hurtled himself
so high
his bones

looked
like
they might

burst through
and
puncture
the performance

right
said
Mengele

and
he knew
he was
allright.
(33-34)

The chaos that was associated with these selections (as Wiesel describes) is captured here in Brett's verse. The metaphor of the dancer further highlights this chaos, by associating a most horrible and degrading event with a 'classic' artistic form. It is through this device of juxta-positioning in this poem that a sense of absurdity is achieved. This absurdity further highlights the non-sense of the concentration camp system.

Passing selections meant a reprieve from death - albeit temporary. Brett writes:

Another Selection

Mengele looked
while the Kommandant
lightly whipped
the thin nipples
shrivelled around
their empty bags of breast

rows and rows
of wrinkled pink tips
sitting on bowed ribs

the night sky
a romantic red
blazed with arms legs and heads

the thick air
sweet
with your mother's bones burning

the snow
clothed in
black ash
was mourning

and you stood
 pushing out
 what remained
 of the flesh on your chest

it passed the test.

(29)

Brett's imagery in this poem is horrifying - the sky red with burning bodies, the air thick with ash, the snow black. Brett heightens the effectiveness of these images by using words that are out of place in this imagery. Words like "romantic" and "sweet" contrast with the images of death, and invest these words with new meanings. "Sweet" now becomes the smell of death, "romantic" is the red sky of burning flesh. The world of Brett's death camp is horrifyingly "other" and predictable signification is made strange. This rupturing of the sign, the process of making strange, reflects the general consensus of survivors that Auschwitz was a world where the "known," the taken for granted moral codes and rules, were brutally displaced. Yisrael Gutman explains that Bettelheim and others argue that the concentration camp system bore a reality in which all the beliefs, values and norms of behaviour applicable in the outside world, were abandoned (Gutman 22). Australian writer and Auschwitz survivor, Abraham Biderman says: "In the German hell of Auschwitz, every form of civilisation disintegrated. In the jungle of Birkenau, savagery reigned" (228) and Sara Nomberg-Przytyk, another survivor states:

For some people, Auschwitz was an ordinary term, but now the word has taken on a completely new set of meanings. An unusually interesting psychological study might result if someone could demonstrate the way in which meanings passed beyond the accepted boundaries of conventional significance. Why a psychological study? Because the new set of meanings provided the best evidence of the devastation that Auschwitz created in the psyche of every human being. No one was able to resist totally the criminal, amoral logic of everyday life in the concentration camp. To some extent all of us were drawn into a bizarre transformation of reality. We knew what those innocent words meant, such words as 'gas,' 'selection,' but we uttered them, nevertheless, as though there was nothing hidden behind them (72).

Surviving selections were not the only, or sometimes most immediate, priorities on inmates' minds. The constant reality of starvation and disease meant avoiding selection was only one

of the ever-present hazards. Tiredness and hunger were pervasive in the camp. Although not everyone went equally hungry, food was uppermost on every prisoner's mind (Gutman 24). As Elie Wiesel explains: "Bread, soup - these were my whole life. I was a body. Perhaps less than that even: a starved stomach. The stomach alone was aware of the passage of time" (59). Soup, quite literally, became a matter of life and death, like all things in this camp. Because the assigned ration of food at the best of times, was never enough to avoid starvation, great risks were taken to procure a little extra soup. This soup, often no more than water and a few rotting potatoes and thistles, took on an elevated importance for inmates. Discussing this elevated importance of soup, Filip Muller, a long term inmate of Auschwitz writes:

The smell of the thin and far from appetizing soup in its steaming cauldron pervaded the yard. Hungrily we watched and sniffed, revived by the thought of food; harassment, torture and violent death were forgotten. All our senses were concentrated on the muck in the cauldrons, a mess of mangel-wurzel and overcooked rotting potatoes which always tasted the same and yet helped us to survive a little longer. Soup was our elixir of life: and any prisoner considered himself very lucky if now and then he managed to wangle a second helping (Muller 7).

Lily Brett writes:

Soup

It could have
been called
surprise soup

soupe
a la surprise
haute cuisine

served
twice
daily

it often

contained

a key

pieces of tin

tufts of hair

lengths of string

a

dismembered

mouse

mainly

made

from thistles

it

gripped and pinched

your bowels

before

rushing through

to greet your feet.

(13)

Once again a sense of the ‘other-ness’ of Auschwitz is achieved through the poetic juxtaposition of ‘haute cuisine’ with what passed as ‘soup’ in Auschwitz. And once again, the bodily effects of the camp, this time bowel movements, are highlighted. Indeed in this poem the bowel movements act as the dramatic, darkly comic, conclusion to the poem:

“before/rushing through/to greet your feet.”

Not only was food sacred in Auschwitz, but so was a bowl, a spoon, and a pair of shoes. Items taken-for-granted before incarceration now made strange through their heightened importance. Lily Brett represents this peculiar reality of Auschwitz camp life in “Possessions”:

Possessions

A bowl
was a life-saving
piece of equipment

any bit of bent metal
rusted tin
worn enamel

without
a
bowl

you
couldn't
eat soup

had
to
make do

with
sawdust-soaked
mud board

that
passed
for bread

a spoon
meant
good fortune

dignity

and
humanity.
(15)

These possessions, simple possessions, made valuable because they could mean the difference between death by starvation or life, also became the signs of “dignity” and “humanity.” Once again Brett ruptures the sign – a “spoon” signifies “humanity” in the world of Auschwitz, a world where such a notion of humanity was necessarily dis-placed. Spoons, and other possession such as a bowl, became possessions of the “rich.” Brett writes:

Possessions of the Rich

The
rich

walked
everywhere

with
their
possessions

never
left
them

for
one
second

for
one
second

was

enough

for

someone

to steal them

paper

to

pad your chest

was

at

a premium

and

string

to secure

your

spoon

and bowl

underwear

was

millionaire's square

almost

unheard

of

like

matching

shoes

or

shoes
at all

and
a
coat

could
make
you

feel
like
a king

a
stump
of lipstick

priceless
for
pinking your cheeks

flushed
life
into you

saved
you
in selections

showed
them

how

well

you

were.

(45)

Shoes, as Brett describes, were extremely valuable property in the camp, even though they rarely matched or were rarely the right size. However because shoes could save your life against the cold and back-breaking work they were guarded fiercely by prisoners. Abraham Biderman describes the routine he went through at night of guarding his shoes: “I bound them together with my belt, wrapped the belt around my neck, kept the end of the belt between my teeth all night and clutched the shoes under my arm” (226). Brett’s poem represents the importance of these once simple and humble possessions, by associating them with signs such as “millionaire” and “king.”

One of the other everyday realities of camp life at Auschwitz was disease. Typhoid reached plague proportions in Auschwitz and lice could not be avoided. Brett writes:

Body Count

They were dressed
all of them
in finely tailored
made to measure
layers

of
sleek
shiny
white
lice

a silent ensemble
of moving magicians
sucking life

from
the lifeless

their
movements
moved
the
dead

eyelids flickered
toes twitched
sometimes a whole leg shifted
chests swayed
in a soft rhythm of fraudulent breath.
(39)

The avoidance of disease, starvation and selections were matched with a constant tiredness and need for sleep. Sleeping conditions were terrible in Auschwitz and after roll call (if it didn't last all night) prisoners were confined to cold, dark and overcrowded blocks. In many blocks prisoners slept amongst each other's faeces and urination, without blankets, and quite often next to the dying and dead. Every morning before roll call the dead from the night before were dragged out of the blocks and piled out the front of each barrack. Brett writes:

Sleep

Jammed
on the
planks

they
could only
sleep on their sides

forced
to move

in unison

like

synchronised

swimmers

a

corps de ballet

with corpses

occupied

hell's

private hotel.

(11)

Again in this poem above, Brett ruptures the signifier and signified - ballet, hotel - to represent the rupture of Western ideas of "civilisation." Again, the making strange of the sign, represents the larger strangeness of this camp.

Brett not only produces poetry that describes camp conditions, she also writes of particular sections of the Auschwitz complex. So, we read a poem called "Buna (Auschwitz III)" and a poem entitled "Canada." Canada was the name given by Polish prisoners to the section in the camp where the belongings of deported Jews were sorted and stored. Filip Muller, another Auschwitz survivor, explains that: "obviously the Poles imagined Canada to be a country of unlimited wealth" (179). Sara Nomberg-Przytyk explains that the wealth within Canada was procured from Jews who came into the camp thinking they were to start a new life. She writes: "People took all of their best things with them. The Germans allowed them to take only one valise and one knapsack. People packed gold and jewellery, furs and their best clothes" (Nomberg-Przytyk 75). This wealth, procured from the deportees, was sorted and stored before being sent to the Reich by the trainload. Lily Brett writes:

Canada

Canada

was

thirty barracks

far removed
from
maple leaves and moose

or
Nova
Scotia
salmon

this
new
frontier

in the foothills
of
the
Carpathian Mountains

just
bulged
with wealth

it
swallowed
its loot

from
queues
of human cargo

that
stretched
for
miles

they'd
bought
gold and silver

and
diamonds
and silks

tapestries
carpets
and
leather bound books

and
toys
and
food

and
monogrammed
porcelain

with
the
finest
linen

to
start
their
new
lives.
(53-54)

The beauty of “Nova Scotia” is juxtaposed with the “new frontier” in the “Carpathian Mountains.” This new frontier “swallowed/its loot” from “human cargo” who packed their finest treasures to start their “new lives.” This juxtaposition of the Canadian frontier with the frontier of horror that was “Auschwitz”, effects a sense of insidiousness in this poem. An aesthetic of sadness is also achieved by representing a misguided hope held by the victims of this Nazi plunder.

Camp inmates were “fortunate” in Auschwitz if they could join a kommando that worked in Canada. Here these workers sorted this wealth ready for transportation. While working in Canada had its advantages in that it was a good place for “organising” (stealing and dealing in property) it was also extremely stressful. Sara Nomberg-Przytyk tells a story of her friend Fela's experience in Canada. Fela tells Sara:

Imagine. I unpack a valise, and I find a dead girl in it. She must have been about two years old when she died. I was terribly disturbed. The girls told me that they often find dead children in the valises. The mothers hid the children in the hope that once they got them into the camp they and the children would remain together. Later the valises were taken from them and brought to us, but by that time the children were no longer alive. I can't forget about it (Nomberg-Przytyk 76).

Jewish children deported to Auschwitz constituted the overwhelming majority of the young people who were murdered by the Nazi regime (Kubica 412). As a rule, children deemed unfit for work were killed immediately on arrival, those few who were registered and put to work did not live long. The total number of children deported and murdered in Auschwitz is impossible to determine. While the chances of survival for children were extremely low, for Jewish children it was even lower. There was no structural or systematic mercy shown to Jewish children by the Nazi regime. Children were carriers of Jewish culture and had to be eliminated. Approximately one and a half million Jewish children were murdered during the Holocaust. This elimination of children was brutal and horrifying, both within the death camps and elsewhere.³ Of children in Auschwitz, Lily Brett writes:

Children II

There
were

³ See Kubica, Helena. “Children.” Anatomy of the Auschwitz Death Camp.

thin children

fat children

brown-eyed

children

blue-eyed

green-eyed

wide-eyed children

you'd

think

it was harder

to

kill

the children

it

was

easy

they

were

flung in the air

for

target

practice

had

their heads

broken

against

the nearest
wall

they
bent others
across their knees

like
twigs
snapping their backs

the lucky ones
walked with their mothers
to the gas.

(5)

The sense of “horror” that is achieved in this poem, and others, is achieved through the simplicity of the language, and the lack of excess in the description. It is this lack of description, of ‘wordiness,’ which invites an imaginative engagement on the part of the reader, and it is this engagement that produces the affects of the poem. The poem ends, as many of the poems do, through an ironic rupture of the sign, in this instance “lucky.”

Jewish women and children probably constituted more than half of all the people murdered in the gas chambers in Auschwitz. Together with other non-Jewish women, women made up thirty percent of all registered prisoners in the camp (Strzelecka 393). During the existence of the women's camp in Auschwitz, a total of approximately 131,000 women were registered. Jewish women constituted the overwhelming majority of women registered in the camp (Strzelecka 398). Jewish women who had small children or were visibly pregnant were usually sent straight to the gas chambers. Motherhood had a particular meaning in Auschwitz, and while no one was safe from selection in this camp, Jewish mothers had little chance of survival. Abortions were practised readily within the camp hospitals and often performed by fellow inmates as a means of saving women's lives. While women, infants and young children were temporarily allowed to live in the family camp section or the gypsy camp, for most other women, especially Jewish women, there was no place for motherhood. To be a prisoner in Auschwitz was a precarious existence, to be a mother, however, was fatal. Lily Brett writes:

Children I

You
mother
would have

like
all
the other
mothers

gone
with
the
children

held
their
hands

hushed
their
cries

smoothed
their
hair

pulled
a pullover
into place

jammed
in

they
held
their children
high

to
breathe
the last air

the
gas
burst
from the ceiling

hitting
them
first.
(3)

Abraham Biderman describes seeing a group of women in Auschwitz: “They were naked except for a few whose shoulders were covered with rags. They looked like parading skeletons, their breasts empty sacks of skin hanging down over their rib cages. Their pelvises protruded as they moved forward on their stilt-like legs” (222). Lily Brett writes:

Breasts

It was strange
the way
the breasts
changed

first
the flesh
fell

as though
dropped
from shock

breasts
old and young
hung
facing the floor

till
they
disappeared
existed no more

loose pleats
of skin
covered
the vacated spaces

lying
limp
and
lifeless

and then
in rage
the skin shrank

stretched itself taut
across the chests
with no breasts.

(31).

These representations of the physical impact of the camp “world” on women’s bodies in Auschwitz returns the repressed female body back into “history,” and elevates the abject to

the status of the poetic. This poetic “elevation” of the abject must surely be one of the important contributions of this poetry to re-membering the Holocaust.

While adjustment to camp life was difficult for all prisoners, it was most often harder for those accustomed to comfort and social order. Gutman writes that these prisoners either would not, or could not, become part of camp life. Prisoners however, that had experienced the harsh conditions of prisons and/or ghettos were better prepared. Those who could not adapt and “sunk into apathy and dejection” were known, Gutman explains, as *Muselmanner*. This camp slang most likely derived from the alleged resemblance of those prisoners, unable to stand on their feet, to Muslims in prayer:

Moribund, their senses dulled, such prisoners hovered in the twilight zone between life and death. Before long, their bodies lost their shape, becoming little more than skeletons covered with dry yellow skin. Gazing aimlessly with their lifeless eyes, they moved slowly, unperturbed by savage cries in German urging them to move on, even after truncheon blows rained hard on their bodies (Gutman 20).

Gutman suggests that these “musselmen” were feared by other inmates because they represented their own fate. Jean Amery, an inmate of Auschwitz agrees, saying that, “mussulman” was a term a prisoner was given when he/she had given up, and had been given up by his comrades. He says a “mussulman” “no longer had room in his consciousness for the contrasts good or bad, noble or base, intellectual or unintellectual. He was a staggering corpse, a bundle of physical functions in its last convulsions” (Amery 9). Also describing “musselmans,” Filip Muller writes:

That was the name given to prisoners who had spiritually and, above all, physically, completely deteriorated. They had become nothing but skin and bones. Often their bones had rubbed through their thin parchment-like skin, resulting in inflamed and festering wounds. They had either died of exhaustion or they had been killed by a phenol injection. Sometimes there were also victims of pseudo-medical experiments (45).

Lily Brett writes:

Muselmanner (Moslems)

Death
was

loosely
wound around them

leaving
them
room
to breathe

they
walked
blindly

spoke
with
a slur

were
avoided
by

those
who
wanted
to stay alive

as
though
hopelessness
was infectious

these
Moslems
these
Muselmanner

named
after
beggars
starving in India

could
no longer
understand
orders

and
were
often

beaten
to
death.
(23-24)

The “musselmen” were, therefore, almost literally walking corpses. Death was inevitable for these wretched inmates. Discussing the concept of death in Auschwitz, Jean Amery says that the camp inmate was less concerned with death than with *dying*, less concerned with whether one would die than with *how* it would happen. Amery writes:

Inmates carried on conversations about how long it probably takes for the gas in the gas chamber to do its job. One speculated on the painfulness of death by phenol injections. Were you to wish yourself a blow to the skull or a slow death through exhaustion in the infirmary? . . . Dying was omnipresent, death vanished from sight (17).

Continuing this discussion of death, Amery argues that the meaning of death is different for the free person than it is for the prisoner. “Death in freedom, at least in principle, can be intellectually detached from dying: socially, by infusing it with thoughts of the family that remains behind, of the profession one leaves, and mentally, through the effort, while still being, to feel a whiff of Nothingness . . . the free person can assume a certain spiritual posture towards death, because for him death is not totally absorbed into the torment of

dying” (17-18). However, for the prisoner death had no sting, there was an agonising fear of dying, “but scarcely an actual fear of death” (18). Amery exemplifies this by telling us:

I clearly recall how comrades in whose blocks selections for the gas chambers were expected did not talk about it, while with every sign of fear and hope they did talk about the consistency of the soup that was to be dispensed. The reality of the camp triumphed effortlessly over death and over the entire complex of the so-called ultimate questions (18).

The metaphysical became meaningless when confronted with camp reality. Discussing the reality that pervaded camp life, and rendered all beyond this reality meaningless, Amery writes:

You could be hungry, be tired, be sick. To say that one purely and simply is, made no sense. And existence as such, to top it off, became definitively a totally abstract and thus empty concept. To reach out beyond concrete reality with words became before our eyes a game that was not only worthless and an impermissible luxury but also mocking and evil. Hourly, the physical world delivered proof that its insufferableness could be coped with only through means inherent in that world. In other words: nowhere less in the world did reality have as much effective power as in the camp, nowhere else was reality so real . . . (Amery 19).

In the same vein, but with a sparsity of language most appropriate for poetic reflection on this “other world,” Lily Brett writes:

After a Year

After a year

you

thought

you

must

have been

struck

from

the list

of

the

living

left

in

no

place

suspended

in

no

time

moving

in

no

space

taking

in

nothing.

(17)

Philosophical reflection on the “meaning” of “death” in Auschwitz is represented in this poem by the negative sign “no” – “no/space,” “no/time,” “no/place,” and finally “nothing.”

The apparatus of death in this camp required “agents” of death. At Auschwitz, as at Chelmo, Belzec and Sobibor, the Germans established what Gilbert calls “one of the most hellish aspects of the death camp system, the Sonderkommando” (Gilbert, *The Holocaust* 340). The first Sonderkommando team at Birkenau consisted of 200 young, Slovak Jews who had been deported from Slovakia at the end of March 1942. Sonderkommando literally means special squad, and Jews and other inmates were forced by the SS to work in the crematoria. Kielar, an inmate, explains:

The SS carried out “clean” work only. It merely did the killing. The rest, the “dirty” work, was attended to by the Sonderkommando, which consisted of a few hundred young and strong Jews who, at the price of cremating their daughters, wives and parents, were allowed to stay alive. They were witnesses, but that was not all. Under duress they took an active part in the cruellest possible crimes humanity had ever invented. In the room where the new arrivals undressed, members of the Sonderkommando handed them soap and towels, telling them that they were going to have a bath. Then they led them into the gas chambers from where, after a while, all that could be heard were the terror-stricken moans and cries of the dying. The members of the Sonderkommando had ceased to be human beings. All human feelings had been taken away from them . . .(Kielar 175-176).

Lily Brett writes:

The Sonderkommando

The Sonderkommando
those prisoners
known as
the Death Squad

merely
shuffled
death around

re-arranging
and
re-packaging
the components

they
herded
crowds
into the showers

pulled
them
out
gassed

hosed
them
to get rid of
the crap

hooked
the slippery bodies
with
thongs around the wrists

and
piled
them

into
the
elevators

for
the
ovens.

(65)

The brutality of this “job” described by many who survived Auschwitz, is captured here by Brett, where the “slippery” bodies are “hooked” like fish. While this juxta-position of human bodies with fish is less overt (fish is not mentioned), the power of the juxta-position is still apparent in this poem.

Describing the fate of the Sonderkommando in Auschwitz, Sara Nomberg-Przytyk writes:

“The komando that worked in the crematorium lived only a few months. After a few months

the Germans would liquidate the entire komando and choose a whole new set of people from the transports that were arriving in Auschwitz daily. They thought that in this way they would be able to bury the evidence of the atrocities they were committing here” (Nomborg-Przytyk 60).⁴ Gutman concludes: “There is no doubt that the Sonderkommando workers were the most wretched of all the Auschwitz prisoners. Not only was their work the incarnation of a nightmare, but also they knew, as witnesses and participants in the labor of death, that their fate was sealed” (31).

Filip Muller, who came to Auschwitz with one of the earliest transports from Slovakia in April 1942, began working in the crematoria kommando in May of that year. Amazingly, Muller managed to survive this terrible sentence until the gassings ceased in November 1944. Muller's testimony of his experience is harrowing in its detailed descriptions of the operations of the Auschwitz death apparatus. Discussing his determination to live despite the horror he was subject to, Muller says:

The heap of dead bodies which I have seen and which I was made to help remove only served to strengthen my determination to do everything possible not to perish in the same way; not to have to lie under a heap of dead bodies; not to be pushed into the oven, prodded with an iron fork and, ultimately, changed into smoke and ashes. Anything but that! I only wanted one thing: to go on living. Sometime, somehow, there might be a chance to get out of here. But if I wanted to survive there was only one thing: I must submit and carry out every single order. It was only by adopting this attitude that a man was able to carry on his ghastly trade in the crematorium of Auschwitz (17).

However, Muller was an exception. The fate of all others in the Sonderkommandos was already sealed when they were first assigned the job, as Gutman explained previously. Lily Brett also represents this reality:

The First Job

The
first
job

⁴ Kielar also explains of the Sonderkommando: “With foresight, the Germans would, at intervals, liquidate them secretly. Suddenly, in moments when their vigilance had been lulled by good treatment, they would disappear. New ones took their place, and the sequence was repeated” (176-177).

of
every
Sonderkommando
unit

was
to
kill

the
unit

they
were

replacing

the
unit

they
were

replacing

mostly
went

willingly.
(67)

Once again the sparsity of Brett's verse, the lack of explanation and description in this particular instance, does not detract from the horror it seeks to represent, but rather intensifies the effect. The impact that poetry has is often due to its ability to leave the details

and the gaps to the reader's contemplation. Brett's poetry does leave a lot to the imagination, which ensures a very active reading process. The imaginative "filling in" on the part of the reader is vital in the process of empathetic connection that poetry is best able to serve.

In precise detail Muller describes the burning practices in the crematoria. Once gassed, the bodies were laid in heaps in the changing room and were sorted into piles according to their combustibility: "for the corpses of the well-nourished were to help burn the emaciated" (98). Muller explains that four stacks were made, one consisting of strong men, one of women, one of children, and finally a stack of emaciated "musselmans." "This technique was called 'express work', a designation thought up by the Kommandofuehrers and originating from experiments carried out in crematorium 5 in the autumn of 1943" (98). Muller says that the purpose of the experiments was to save coke. Corpses were selected according to different criteria and cremated to see the results. These experiments resulted in more efficient cremating practices in Birkenau. Brett writes:

Overload

When
the
numbers

overloaded
even
the
ovens

they
dug
big pits

that
could
fit

two
thousand
at a time

the Sonderkommando
learnt
to lay
the fires

with
a
minimum
of fuss and fuel

the
best
burning
arrangement

they
found
criss-crossed

a
fat
man

a
thin
man

and
a
child

they
slanted
the pits

so
they
could
tip

fat
from
the
bottom

over
the
hissing
spitting

glistening
black
bodies

...
(71)

As this poem, and the others discussed demonstrate, in The Auschwitz Poems we have a representation of Auschwitz where Auschwitz is not used as a metaphorical device - a signifier of horror. Yet what we read is indeed horrible, and this is because Brett's poetry instigates a "remembrance" that horror is the everyday of Auschwitz; horror is the detail. What Auschwitz comes to signify can never be more horrible than the reality of what it was. There is no need to elevate Auschwitz beyond these details. When we read Brett's poetry we experience shock and horror, repulsion and sadness, and we experience these sensations through artistic representation. However, we are also simultaneously, taking in details about Auschwitz, its morphology, facts and figures. While Brett's poetry cannot give us the details

and information a personal testimony or a thoroughly researched “history” text can, her poetry leaves the reader with something “else,” something “other than.”

In his book Admitting the Holocaust, Lawrence Langer argues that much of our language about the Holocaust is designed to console instead of confront (5). Langer writes:

When we speak of the survivor instead of the victim and of martyrdom instead of murder, regard being gassed as a pattern for dying with dignity, or evoke the redemptive rather than the grievous power of memory, we draw on an arsenal of words that urges us to build verbal fences between the atrocities of the camps and ghettos and what we are mentally willing - or able - to face (6).

Lily Brett's poetry does not build verbal fences between the atrocities and the reader. The words of Brett's poetry are brutal - there is no disguise, there is no softening. Brett's poetry is bleak because Auschwitz was bleak. The form and the content of the poetry is like the chimney stacks of Auschwitz - thin, horrifying and hauntingly “real.”

Brett's interest in Auschwitz does not end with this collection of poetry however. Auschwitz figures many times throughout Brett's later poetry, short stories and novels. Yet, this first representation of Auschwitz is, I believe, unsurpassed in Brett's later writing. The great affect of this poetry is that it exists as a collection, and in that way presents a “world” of Auschwitz, rather than an isolated, shocking detail (as we see in her later work). It is not until Brett's award winning novel Too Many Men, published some thirteen years after The Auschwitz Poems, that Auschwitz once again figures so prominently (although it always figures as background, at least, in Brett's work). In this novel, Brett does not focus on the “world of Auschwitz” and its history, as much as she comments on the contemporary memorialisation and exploitation of Auschwitz. Thirteen years after creating the “world” of Auschwitz in The Auschwitz Poems, Brett is ready to tackle Auschwitz as a contemporary historical phenomena. In Chapter Six, I discuss the novel Too Many Men in detail, for now though, I discuss only the section where the protagonist and her father encounter Auschwitz in its present form. Once again, I endeavour to read this section in the context of the history surrounding it.

The Auschwitz Museum

In late November 1944, when the Red Army were approaching, the Germans evacuated Auschwitz, dynamiting gas chambers and crematoria and setting many barracks alight.

When the Soviets entered Auschwitz, the ruins were still smouldering, and the dead and dying awaited them. In order to prevent the spread of disease, the Soviet soldiers burnt a number of barracks in Birkenau, and later others were dismantled by Poles in search of building material and firewood (Young, The Texture of Memory 128). In 1947 the Polish parliament declared that what remained of the camp would be “forever preserved as a memorial to the martyrdom of the Polish nation and other peoples” (Young, The Texture of Memory 130). Five years later, a group of survivors and relatives of victims organised the International Committee of Auschwitz, which would oversee the project of memorialisation. Though most of the committee members were Jews, “their identity as survivors was defined largely by their experiences as resistance fighters and Socialists” (Young, The Texture of Memory 130). Therefore from the very beginning, the memorial at Auschwitz “assumed a decidedly internationalist cast” (Young, The Texture of Memory 130).

In 1957, the International Committee of Auschwitz launched a competition for a monument, at Birkenau, to provide a locus for official ceremonies and commemorations. The competition was open to all, and 426 designs were submitted by artists and architects from 36 countries. The process of selecting the eventual design was long and arduous, and was not unveiled until 1967, some ten years after the initial launch of the competition.⁵ The length of time for the creation of a monument at Birkenau, reflects the great weight of memory this site has to carry. Memorialisation at Auschwitz has always been fraught with tension over who is to be remembered, who has a greater right to the site of memory, and how can memorialisation best represent the many varied experiences of the site and its role in educating future generations. The controversies over memorialisation, and ownership of the sites of memory, are exemplified in the conflict over the Carmelite convent in the 1980s.

In 1984, Carmelite nuns moved into a vacant building outside the perimeter fence of Auschwitz I. The building they moved into was an abandoned barracks that at one stage held Zyklon B canisters. Initially the nuns’ location aroused little interest, as they “moved in unobtrusively and conducted their business quietly” (Dwork and van Pelt 369). However, in an appeal to raise money for the nuns the Catholic charity *Aide a l’Anglaise en Detresse* described the convent as a “spiritual fortress and a guarantee of the conversion of strayed brothers from our countries as well as proof of our desire to erase the outrages so often done to the Vicar of Christ” (Dwork and van Pelt 370). Of course, this language was offensive to Jews and a long battle over what Deborah Dwork and Robert Jan van Pelt call the “spiritual

⁵ For details and pictures of the winning designs see Young, James E. The Texture of Memory.

ownership of the camp” ensued (359). The location of the convent began to be discussed at a series of meetings, which culminated in the joint agreement by Jewish and Catholic representatives at Geneva in 1987. At this meeting the Polish victims of Auschwitz I were acknowledged, while the Jewish specificity of Auschwitz was also spelled out.

Under the agreement reached at Geneva, the convent was to be relocated to a centre outside the symbolic area of Auschwitz within two years. However, it was not until the Pope himself intervened in 1989, after much Jewish protest, that the convent was eventually relocated in 1993. During this period tensions were strained between the Catholic and Jewish religions, and it became a controversy of global proportions. Cole argues that what was being contested during this controversy “was less ownership and use of the physical fabric of the camp, and more ownership and use of the ‘brandname’ ‘Auschwitz’” (105). During the tumult that occurred at this site in 1989,⁶ Polish Prime Minister Mazowiecki set in motion a complete restructure of the memorial at Auschwitz. Under his direction, the Ministry of Culture appointed the Auschwitz Council, consisting of Jews from Poland, Israel, and other Western countries, as well as Polish Catholic intellectuals and government ministers. Young states that this council has begun “to redefine, literally to reshape, both memory of the Holocaust in Poland and its contested historical significance” (The Texture of Memory 150).

Of the many satellite camps that made up the historical Auschwitz, only Auschwitz I and Auschwitz II (Birkenau) remain as memorial sites. However, these two camps are not presented to the visitor in their historical reality, but rather exist as reconstructions. The infamous gate *Arbeit Macht Frei* holds a significant place in Holocaust collective memory, and therefore is at the beginning of the official tour through the camp. However, as Dwork and van Pelt explain, this gate played no role in the Judeocide that took place, and very few Jews deported to Auschwitz ever saw the gate. Jewish deportees were instead taken to Birkenau, either marching there or by truck, in the early years of the camp, or by direct rail line in the camps later years (Dwork and van Pelt 361). Yet, it is the *Arbeit Macht Frei* sign that has taken on iconic status in the “Auschwitz,” and larger “Holocaust,” myth.

⁶ In July 1989, American rabbi Avi Weiss and seven Jewish supporters climbed the convent walls and entered to read from the Torah and chant prayers. Polish workmen, yelling anti-Semitic abuse, dumped buckets of water and paint on their heads, beat them, and then dragged them out. This gained much attention with exaggerations occurring on both ‘sides’, and general furore and insinuation.

Another misconception produced by the Auschwitz museum surrounds the crematoria and gas chambers. While visitors to the Auschwitz museum will view a crematoria at the end of their tour, this crematoria is largely a post war construction of the crematoria at Birkenau. While a chimney has been re-created, furnaces added and holes put in the roof (for pouring Zyklon B into the gas chambers) none of these reconstructions are marked or discussed as part of the tour. What the visitor sees then is a re-constructed Auschwitz that takes the symbolic aspects of both camps and rolls them into one site for the tourist. The Auschwitz museum presents only this one, re-constituted camp to the visitor. If the visitor wants to visit the historical site of camp II, Birkenau, they do this alone.

In Too Many Men, Lily Brett's protagonist Ruth Rothwax, visits the Auschwitz 'museum' and Birkenau with her father, Edek. Ruth's father is a survivor of Birkenau, and her deceased mother, Rooshka, had been in both Birkenau, and later Auschwitz I. The trip back to the Auschwitz camps is a very emotive one for Ruth and Edek. On first arriving at the 'Auschwitz Museum' (a title Ruth takes offence to) Ruth is immediately dismayed at the tourism:

All Ruth could see from the car was car park. A large, already-crowded car park. There were coaches and vans and cars and taxis parked in the car park. It was not what Ruth had expected to arrive at. It looked more like a car park for Disneyland or another theme park (Brett, Too Many Men 527).

Indeed, Auschwitz has become a major tourist destination, almost kitsch in its tourist attraction. As Cole comments: "'Auschwitz' is to the 'Holocaust' what 'Graceland' is to 'Elvis'" (98). Ruth is appalled by this contemporary use of Auschwitz as a site for tourism, and thus a site of commodification.

Ruth's father's first reaction on arriving at Auschwitz is somewhat different, and testimony to the multiple meanings one site can have. Edek's reaction is that of a survivor, a person intimately linked to a site through personal experience. Brett writes: "They got out of the car. Edek straightened up and looked around him. 'It does not smell,' he said. He sniffed the cold air. 'The smell is gone,' he said. 'We did say the smell would never go away'" (Brett, Too Many Men 527). The first thing that Edek and Ruth see as they walk towards the sign "Museum Entrance" is the entrance gates to Auschwitz - Arbeit Macht Frei. Ruth, again experiencing the site not against previous experience (like her father) but against her own imaginative reconstruction, is taken aback:

She gasped. The wrought iron sign woven across the top of the gates looked so small. In photographs it always loomed so large. An image which had presided over so much horror. An image so blatant in its mockery. These gates, this sign, had seemed monumental to Ruth. They had signified so much. A symbol of so much that was impossible to comprehend. Ruth was shocked at how small the gates were. Almost domestic in scale. Average industrial-sized gates. They were too small, she thought. They should have been bigger, for all the damage they had wrought. She had expected them to almost touch the sky (Brett, Too Many Men 528).

This shock that Ruth experiences, is the shock of being faced with a historical reality that does not fit the cultural myth. However, as Dwork and van Pelt explained, this sign, regardless of its size is still, in its positioning, out of its historical context.

On entering the “Museum’s” first building, Ruth and Edek find themselves at a cafeteria, where Ruth muses: “Of course, museums needed cafeterias, Ruth thought. . . The whole room smelled of food. There seemed to be something wrong about a cafeteria in a place of starvation” (Brett, Too Many Men 530). Again, the disjunction is evident between what actually occurred in the camp, what the camp has come to represent, and how the camp is now commodified for tourists. Continuing her walk through the camp, Ruth observes that: “Everything in the former death camp looked so clean and neat. Almost nondescript. Non-threatening. As harmless as the average, standard housing development that it resembled” (Brett, Too Many Men 530). And a little later on: “The cleanliness and neatness was disorienting. Auschwitz, cleaned up and turned into a tourist venue, looked like an ordinary, English working-class estate. Ruth was disturbed by the absence. The absence of dirt, filth, stench, stink. The absence of cruelty. The absence of suffering. She’d expected to see the suffering in the air, on the ground, in the walls and on every fence” (Brett, Too Many Men 531). Ruth’s distress at the sanitised, “artificial” nature of this former place of horror (for her father and mother) continues when she and Edek are shown inside Block 4:

Inside Block 4, the walls were painted two tones of grey. The stairs had had a marble and concrete composite added to their surface. In the different rooms the floor was painted with enamel paint. There were heating units along the walls. There was an odd primness about the decor. Totally at odds with the brutalities and obscenities that had taken place within the walls (Brett, Too Many Men 532).

These concerns of Ruth’s are concerns that continue to affect visitors to, and commentators on, this site. Part of the problem lies in the different functions, or purposes of this memorial

site. As Dwork and van Pelt explain, Auschwitz is a destination of mass tourism, a Polish museum whose function is to preserve the remains of the Germans' crimes and to educate future generations, as well as being a place of pilgrimage, a cemetery for mourners (373). These functions are contradictory, yet inseparable and entangled within the site. It is the clash between Ruth's and her father's pilgrimage, the reality of the mass tourism, and the Polish nationalism of the guides who seek to "educate," that Brett represents in this text.

However, once Ruth and Edek leave the "Auschwitz Museum" and enter the site of the former death camp Birkenau, much of the previous concern shifts. It is Birkenau more specifically, where the genocide enacted against the Jews took place in this Auschwitz complex. Yet this site is given a lesser significance in a museum that was established to commemorate "the martyrdom of the Polish nation and other nations in Oswiecim" (Dwork and van Pelt 364). Otto Friedrich explains that Birkenau is falling into a "state of dilapidation":

Of the three hundred-odd wooden barracks in Auschwitz-Birkenau . . . only eighteen remain standing in a row, and some of those are falling in ruins, their doors knocked off their hinges, their floorboards rotting away. The surrounding grass and weeds grow waist-high. To many survivors, Polish officials, and well-wishers, something should be done about this, some restoration that would preserve the dignity of the site (Friedrich ix).

However, it is the bleakness and lack of interference at the site of Birkenau that, Dwork and van Pelt argue, "fits the Jewish memory of the genocide as Shoah: total devastation and ruin" (367). This site has not been appropriated or made into a tourist attraction as Auschwitz I has, and for many people this is a more appropriate form of memorialisation.

Our protagonist in Too Many Men, Ruth Rothwax, describes Birkenau:

There were very few people in Birkenau. There were no exhibitions, no shops, no central heating. Just the bleak fields dotted with run-down barracks . . .
A mournful mist hung low in the sky. Above the mist were dismal, grim clouds . . .
Everything was as deserted and abandoned as it must have been when the Nazis fled.
. . . It was so still. So quiet (541).

It is at Birkenau that Edek shifts from being a survivor tourist to becoming the survivor guide. Edek vividly remembers the camp and is eager to show his daughter the actual sites - the barracks where he slept, where he got off the train, where he went to the latrines. When Edek finds the wooden barracks where he slept, he shows Ruth inside:

Ruth stepped in. Edek walked in behind her. As soon he (sic) was inside the door, he let out a loud gasp. Ruth was startled. She turned around. 'It is everything exactly the same,' Edek said. 'Exactly the same.' Ruth looked around her. She couldn't believe she was standing, in Auschwitz-Birkenau, in the very barracks her father had been in (Brett, Too Many Men 545).

And then a little later on, while still in "Edek's barracks," and in contrast to the museum at Auschwitz I, Ruth can almost feel the horror:

The rain leaked through the wooden roof. Everything was as grey as it must have been then. These barracks still held the horror. She could hear the horror, in the silence. It was palpable. It hadn't vanished. A four-or five-inch gap was at the top of the doors at the back and front of the barracks. Edek was standing at the back door. 'It was just like this,' he said. 'I remember it like it was yesterday. I did sleep in the middle not to be so close to the door. I was lucky' (Brett, Too Many Men 546).

"Lucky" is certainly not a word that most would associate with Auschwitz-Birkenau, but as explained previously, in the Auschwitz complex words took on different meanings, and for the survivor "lucky" is a word associated with those experiences that delayed death. The reader of Too Many Men experiences the contemporary "Auschwitz" through the eyes of a survivor and his daughter. It is a return to a place of horror, and a pilgrimage of mourning. And, in many ways, it can be regarded as a fitting end to one author's long personal investment in this site. Read in the context of Brett's earlier work, especially The Auschwitz Poems, the return to Auschwitz in Too Many Men, acts within this particular author's oeuvre, as a coda. However, Brett's fascination with this site does not end with her second novel. In her latest collection of essays Between Mexico and Poland (2002) Brett writes again, this time as a personal narrative, of the experience of travelling to Auschwitz. In both Between Mexico and Poland and Too Many Men, Brett explores how within twentieth century history, an event of such pain and suffering, has become a site to be exploited for the tourist dollar. Thus, while "memory" for those who experience events is difficult and traumatic, and while sites of memory for survivors may be cathartic for themselves and their families, for others "memory" is something to be exploited for economic, and political gain. And in between these two understandings/uses of memory, are a myriad of other purposes, reasons, desires.

Auschwitz holds a fascination for Lily Brett not because it represents an abstract notion of horror, nor is her literary focus due to its status as an icon of the Holocaust myth. Auschwitz continues to penetrate Brett's art because both her parents lived in and survived Auschwitz and Birkenau. Brett's concern is a personal one, a need to represent her parents' past, and an anger at the status of Auschwitz now - the "Auschwitz museum" - as she expresses in both her novel Too Many Men and her latest collection of essays Between Mexico and Poland. Brett's representations of Auschwitz are always mindful of the need to keep the sign grounded in its historical reality - hence the curt exchanges with taxi drivers (and other Poles) in Too Many Men: "'You are going to the Auschwitz museum?' the driver said. 'No,' Ruth said. The driver turned around. 'We are going to the Auschwitz death camp,' . . ." (Brett, Too Many Men 524). Representing this Auschwitz camp, the subject of Brett's first published work, is no easy task, but as Brett demonstrates, perhaps one best reserved for the poetic form. In Brett's poetry on Auschwitz the "everydayness" of this camp - the typhoid, the starvation, the strange camp language, the brutality - is shocking. But the horror that the reader feels is experienced within a poetic style that is sparse in its language and historically accurate in its depiction. The need to remember this camp complex is vital for Brett, but as important is the need to remember in a way that does justice to the lived experiences of survivors, like Lily Brett's parents.

In the final chapter of this thesis I examine the novel Too Many Men in greater detail and continue this discussion of memory and the Polish landscape. In the following chapter however, I continue this focus on the theme of memory in Brett's writing, by concentrating specifically on how the memory of the Holocaust affects the contemporary identity of the survivors' children.

CHAPTER FIVE: TIL' DEATH DO US PART. THE LIVING HORROR OF THE HOLOCAUST

With the passing of Holocaust survivors, the burden of memory shifts to the next generation. While the generation that have “come after the Holocaust” have been actively involved in preserving memory for some time, the weight of this responsibility increases as the last remaining survivors begin to leave us. However, the responsibility of bearing witness in Jewish history has never been confined to those who were present at the historical moment of witness, but also those who have come “after.” As Alan Berger explains, the “distinction between a witnessing generation and those who come after but are commanded to witness is firmly rooted in Jewish history and liturgy” (252). Berger quotes the theologian and novelist Arthur A. Cohen, who writes:

The Passover Haggadah commands that every Jew consider himself as though he has gone forth in exodus from Egypt. The grammatical authority of the Haggadah makes clear that this is no metaphor, whatever our wish to make apodictic language metaphoric. The authority is clear: I was really, even if not literally, present at Sinai. God contemplated my virtual presence then, thirty-odd centuries ago. The fact that history could not prevision and entail my presence is irrelevant. No less is it the case that the death camps account my presence really, even if not literally: hence my obligation to hear the witnesses as though I were a witness (qtd. in Berger 253).

Bearing witness is, therefore, a normative element of Jewish existence. Berger explains that scriptural sanction “emphasizes the centrality of witness-bearing to living the covenant of Judaism” (253-254). For the generation born after the Holocaust, bearing witness is a moral and theological obligation (Berger 253-254). However, for the many Jewish people estranged from Judaism, including Lily Brett, remembering the Holocaust is less about a religious obligation, and instead tied up with other political, moral and familial obligations.

Whatever the motive for remembering the Holocaust by the “second generation” (and the third), that it is remembered is imperative. Efraim Sicher argues, as I have throughout the preceding chapters, that while one may have expected the passing of years to have eroded Holocaust memory, the opposite has occurred. The second generation that “bears the scar without the wound” is more impelled than the Holocaust generation to seek meaning and understanding (Sicher 26-27). While Jewish historians and critics may argue over what is remembered and how, and be critical of the elevation of the Holocaust at the expense of

other historical events involving other groups, I am yet to encounter a writer proclaiming we should “forget.”

Any study of the memories of the post-Holocaust generation, Ellen Fine argues, must consider Emmanuel Levinas’ reflections on memory. Levinas writes:

It is not memory itself which is essential but the reading, the interpretation of the facts of memory. The work of memory consists not at all of plunging into the past, but of renewing the past through new experiences, new circumstances, new wonders or horrors of real life. And from this point of view, it is the future that is important and not purely the past . . . The essential is to always find the actuality of the lessons of the Holocaust (qtd. in Fine 186).

For Levinas then, the facts of memory must be interpreted and renewed both personally and collectively by each generation in view of their contemporary relevance, and their lessons for contemporary situations (Fine 186). As I have shown in previous chapters, the meaning of “Holocaust” has indeed changed over time as the Holocaust comes to be interpreted through current concerns and changing moral and political paradigms. One of the most popular contemporary concerns is how the adult children of Holocaust survivors deal with the memory of an event they did not participate in, or as Sicher writes above, how they “bear the scar without the wound.”

Ellen Fine calls this generation “the post-Holocaust generation,” to describe those people born during and after the war who “have come to endure the psychic imprint of the trauma” (Fine 186).¹ Describing this generation Fine writes:

No matter how diverse their backgrounds may be, the members of this generation have been marked by images of an experience that reverberate throughout their lives. They continue to “remember” an event not lived through. Haunted by history, they feel obliged to accept the burden of collective memory that has been passed onto them and to assume the task of sustaining it (186-187).

However, Fine argues that in contrast to the presence of transmitted memory, a different form of memory manifests itself - absent memory (as identified by the writer Henri Raczymow). Fine argues that this lack of memory, or non-memory, is born from a feeling of exclusion both from the experience and from knowledge about the experience. “Absent

¹ Aaron Hass, a Professor of Psychology and a child of Holocaust survivors writes: “The agony of our parents did not end with their liberation at the close of World War II. Their legacy of pain and changed personalities dramatically affected a generation that never saw an SS storm trooper” (Hass 6).

memory” Fine writes, is filled with silences, “a sense of void, and a sense of regret for not having been there” (187). Fine explains:

Whether indirectly or directly, whether through a curtain of silence or an avalanche of words, the Holocaust seeped into the collective consciousness of those born in its aftermath. If stories were related, they were frequently fragmentary in nature, with wide gaps in the chronology of events. . . The memory transmitted was often a selective memory, a veiled memory, a dispersed memory, or an absent memory. Members of the second generation invented fantasies and myths to fill in the blanks of the stories. In effect, they had to fashion their own version of the memory bequeathed to them (191).

This “fashioning of memory” by the second generation has often taken form through artistic representation. Whether through writing, sculpture, dance or drawing, artistic representation has provided a space for the exploration of Jewish identity, post Holocaust. As Stephen Feinstein argues, for second generation survivors, written expression provides a means of coping with the parents’ trauma, and through focusing on the question of “absence” is a “vehicle for the discovery of self, whether as a child of survivors or as Jew” (202). Alan Berger agrees, and also argues that because the second generation lack direct access to the Holocaust, their writing often combines their parents’ memories with their own imaginings (252). Similarly, Sara Horowitz explains that these representations of the Holocaust by the second generation also often rely on historical research for bearing witness. Horowitz writes: “Second generation writers anchor their aesthetic representations in research rather than in memory, as they trace a trauma both remembered and not remembered, transmitted and not transmitted” (278).

In Australia, as in other Jewish settlements in the diaspora, these Holocaust representations by children of survivors are ever increasing. In Australia, over the last decade specifically, these artistic representations have found a ready market. Representations of the Holocaust, from the children of survivors, bring their own set of moral dilemmas: how do we record and represent stories for/of another? How do we bear witness for the witness? What of the discrepancy between memory and historical accuracy, and is there a place for fictional device? These type of questions and problems asked by children of survivors recording their parents’ stories are explored in books such as Mark Baker’s The Fiftieth Gate: a journey through memory (1997), Anna Rosner Blay’s Sister Sister (1998), Ramona Koval’s Samovar

(1996), *Heddy and Me* by Susan Varga published in 1994 and Rose Zwi's journey of discovery through Lithuania's Jewish past in *Last Walk in Naryshkin Park* (1997).

Lily Brett however, is amongst the most prolific of second generation Holocaust writers in the world, and while her books share this market place in Australia, she has a much wider international readership and has written much more than any of these other adult children of survivors in Australia. But this (re)turn to the Holocaust in writing by children of survivors is not a uniquely Australian phenomenon. The market for second generation reflections on the Holocaust is quite extraordinary with more and more anthologies of poetry, short stories and personal narratives by children of survivors published every year. Andrew Furman argues that such literature must be considered Holocaust fiction, and must be considered as an example of the "Americanization" of the Holocaust as these children of survivors show how the Holocaust continues to haunt their identities as Jewish Americans (Furman 89). And of course, as Australian Jews, British Jews, and so on.

This move to recognise the effects of the Holocaust on the generation who came after has also been a matter of great concern in Germany, particularly since 1968, and more recently in Israel. This recognition of the inter-generational affects of atrocity is not confined to the Holocaust, but is also part of wider discourses of catastrophe and suffering in the "West." However, the studies on the children of Holocaust survivors has, in some ways, set a precedent in the last twenty or so years. The publication of literature regarding the "second generation survivor" also assures, at least in the near future, an expanding Holocaust marketplace. Discussing this shift to the next generation Greenspan writes:

In recent years the rhetoric of intergenerational transmission - of "true legacies" passed on "to children and to children's children" - has become particularly salient in discourse about survivors. Indeed, references to survivors having, leaving, or bestowing legacies have become iconic. Whether speaking of a legacy of trauma, of testimony, of Hitler, of Schindler, of night, or of dawn, there is probably no word used more often in connection with survivors than legacy (Greenspan 63).

Lily Brett and Legacy

"Mum" he said "do you think you are still affected from being in Bergen-Belsen?"
"Charlie are you stupid?" she said. "Of course I am. Not one day goes by when I don't think about what happened to me. Not one day goes by when I don't think

about what happened to my mother and father and my sister. Of course I know that they died, but how did they die? I didn't bury them . . . Charlie, I thought you were clever enough to know that something like this never leaves you . . ."

"Do you think I was affected by you having been there?" asked Charlie.

"Of course not" said his mother (Brett, What God Wants 80).

"It's all such a muddle, this business of our parent's suffering. I feel scared to think about it too much. But I feel scared of so many things. My parents are scared but at least they have got a reason for being scared. You know, Charlie, I feel angry with my dad for always having such a good reason for what's gone wrong with his life, when I haven't got a good excuse for what's gone wrong with mine" (Brett, What God Wants 76).

The above extracts appear in a short story by Lily Brett entitled "Half There" from the collection What God Wants. Charlie, the child of a camp survivor, engages in the above conversation with his mother shortly after his wife Golda's confessional speech on the dilemma of the economy of suffering. Unlike the opinion expressed by Charlie's mother above, one of the overriding concerns in Lily Brett's writing is to explore the multiple, sometimes obvious, other times insidious, ways the Holocaust continues to impact on the lives of those who were never present at that particular historical time and place. To avoid unnecessary wordiness, for the purpose of this chapter, I call these children of Holocaust survivors that Brett represents, "second generation survivors." However, in doing this I realise I already situate myself in a space of controversy. Are these characters entitled to the status of "survivor"? And if so, what are they "survivors" of? Does calling these children of Holocaust victims, "survivors," diminish the experience of those actually present at this historical event? Does this process of naming these characters "survivors" lessen the enormity of their parents' experiences? These questions, and the debates that surround them, debated in very public as well as in very personal ways, are complex and emotive. These debates cannot be satisfactorily represented here. However, I choose to use this term "second generation survivor" because I believe this is what Brett represents in her work. In short stories, novels and poetry Brett represents what I will call the "living horror of the Holocaust." This living horror of the Holocaust, experienced by Brett's second generation survivors, is manifest in several different but intimately connected ways.

One of the manifestations of the Holocaust on children of survivors that Brett represents is a powerful and imminent sense of one's own fragility, and indeed, one's own death. In "locker 1012" from What God Wants:

Esther Schenkler was sure that she was dying. She walked around her house slowly. She was in mourning for herself.

She felt fragile. She sat down each time she had a cup of tea. She had naps in the afternoon. She didn't carry anything too heavy. She didn't strain too hard on the lavatory. She tried not to precipitate the disaster that she knew was on its way.

No-one had told her that she was dying, but she knew it. She could feel the death inside her. She could feel it in her bones, and she could feel it in the air around her (84).

Later in this story it is revealed that "(w)hen Esther was seventeen, she had had her mother's Auschwitz number tattooed on her right forearm . . . Esther had had a strange sense of relief after she'd been tattooed. As though some missing link had been dislocated" (88). Finally and tragically, as a middle aged woman, Esther returns to her high school, and with a shaved head and thermos of tea, she swallows 65 Serepax tablets, while sitting in her old school locker. "The locker was cosy and comfortable. She snuggled into the corner and closed her eyes" (94).

This story, culminating in the tragic death of Esther Schenkler, presents another manifestation of the "living horror of the Holocaust," common to Brett's characters. When Esther, at seventeen, tattoos her mother's Auschwitz number on her arm she is trying to link, through a literal writing on the body, her self and her mother, her history and her mother's history, her pain to her mother's pain. But in this act, Esther not only tries to come closer to her mother, she begins to lose a sense of division between her self and her mother. This inability to separate one's own experiences from another's, or this act of experiencing the history or experiences of another is presented in another short story from What God Wants. In "The Alpha Jerk Field," Rosa Cohen says:

"Well, I'm not interested in independence as a theory. I just want to live a better life. I want to stop shackling myself. I want to stop paying a price for whatever freedom I have. Whatever I mean by that. All that shit I struggled with in my analysis about

separating from my parents. Knowing that it was they who had been in Auschwitz, not me. Knowing that I hadn't suffered that damage. All I'd had were damaged parents. Well, I think I left the analysis too early. I think I haven't really separated their experiences from mine. I think that may be why I can still get so scared out in the world. I do know that I was never in Auschwitz. And I can go to the theatre now, and sit in the middle of a crowd without imagining that Nazis are going to appear and round me up. But when I think of walking down the street by myself, I feel I might be swept away. I might just float off, and blend into the air. I might disappear" (140).

This description of Rosa's - "I might just float away" - is a sensation many of Brett's characters, and Brett herself, describes. As discussed previously, in regards to the character Esther Schenkler, this is a description of a sense of one's own fragility taken to an extreme where it becomes a sense of loss of self.

It was at the end of the 1960s and beginning of the 1970s that analysts such as Henry Krystal and Judith Kestenberg pointed to a connection between the experience of Holocaust survivors and emotional disturbances in their children. Traumatic symptoms were found in the second generation that were characteristic of the parents' own Holocaust experience, suggesting Sicher argues, a transgenerational transference of the survivors' syndrome (Sicher 27). More recently, Aaron Hass, in his study of children of Holocaust survivors, writes: "The psychological after effects of the survivors' trauma are often mirrored in the attitudes, perceptions, and fears of their offspring. Many children of survivors await a repetition of the persecution their parents experienced. Their homes were shaded by ominous clouds and peopled with ghosts and demons" (7).

Which brings us to the third way the Holocaust continues to manifest itself in the lives of these second generation characters. In the short story "All Kinds of Things," Rosa Cohen, in a letter to her friend Ella, writes:

Sometimes I feel so tired of carrying all this baggage. Suitcases of dead relatives and Nazis. Remember when I had that dress made with eighty dolls' faces sewn into it? I stitched little flowers and glass beads next to each face. One way or another, I carried my own entourage, my own family, on me. And do you remember when I hung those yellow plastic skeletons on a black lurex dress. We were oblivious to the significance of it all, weren't we? . . . (What God Wants 182).

The image of the faces on the dress is haunting, a physical manifestation of the mental baggage – Rosa’s own entourage. Rosa’s baggage “of dead relatives and Nazis” is a burden that most of Brett’s characters live with on a daily basis. The sense of being burdened with the death of others is both conscious and unconscious, as Rosa says: “We were oblivious to the significance of it all.”

These three manifestations of the legacy of the Holocaust in Brett's writing - an overwhelming sense of being burdened with the death of others; a powerful and imminent sense of one's own fragility; an inability to separate the experiences of others with one's own - come to form their own set of questions. Not questions centered around who has the right to be named a “survivor,” but rather questions around key epistemological divisions between absence and presence, end and beginning, self and other, life and death. Are relatives dead if they are still in the memory and in the imaginings of surviving family? Is the horror of the Holocaust over when so many still live it out in their everyday lives? Where does the “self” end and the “other” begin?

Living Horror

In his essay “There is: Existence without Existents” Emmanuel Levinas says that “the rustling of the there is . . . is horror” (32). To be conscious, Levinas argues, is to be:

torn away from the there is, since the existence of a consciousness constitutes a subjectivity, a subject to existence, that is, to some extent a master of being, already a name in the anonymity of the night. Horror is somehow a movement which will strip consciousness of its very “subjectivity”(32).

The “there is” that Levinas is describing is an anonymous and impersonal being in general, like “it is raining” or “it is cold.” It exists prior to consciousness, prior even to nothingness. “There is” is not a thought or a perception, it cannot be grasped or intentionally constituted. “As such, one cannot avoid the experience of the “there is,” since one is steeped in it” (Hand 29). Levinas says that horror is not an anxiety about death, as Heidegger understands it. Rather in horror the subject is stripped of subjectivity, is depersonalised. Horror turns the “subjectivity of the subject, his particularity qua entity, inside out. It is a participation in the there is, in the there is which returns in the heart of every negation, in the there is that has “no exits”” (33). For Levinas then, horror is the impossibility of death:

The horror of the night, as an experience of the there is, does not then reveal to us a danger of death, nor even a danger of pain. That is what is essential in this analysis.

The pure nothingness revealed by anxiety in Heidegger's analysis does not constitute the there is. There is horror of being and not anxiety over nothingness, fear of being and not fear for being; there is being prey to, delivered over to something that is not a 'something.' When night is dissipated with the first rays of sun, the horror of the night is no longer defineable. The 'something' appears to be 'nothing.'

Horror carries out the condemnation to perpetual reality, to existence with 'no exits' (34).

Levinas explains that the horror of the night "with no exits" is an irremissible existence. "Tomorrow alas! one will still have to live . . . There is a horror of immortality, perpetuity of the drama of existence, necessity of forever taking on his burden" (34).

In Lily Brett's poetry we are confronted with anxiety, but not anxiety over the nothingness of death. The anxiety presented in Brett's poetry is the anxiety of being. Brett presents a world in which consciousness is stripped of subjectivity. This "loss" of subjectivity, this depersonalisation that is horror, is exemplified well in two particular poems, one from Brett's third collection of poetry published in 1990 (After the War), the other from her fifth collection published in 1994 (In her Strapless Dresses). From the poem entitled "I Was Living":

I was living
an ordinary
life

I was
a young wife
and mother

I had
grown into
a good daughter

and
a passable
daughter-in-law

I changed
nappies
and drove children

to school

...

there was
an order
to my days

when
the disorder
hit me.

II

In the middle
of a sentence
my head

would
disconnect
and move

several
feet
away from me.

III

Some days
my ears
would stretch

while
I was hanging
out the washing

deaf
I would
sweat

and
crawl
inside.

IV

The affliction
was
unpredictable

I never knew
when
to expect

the
queasiness
the feverishness

the vertigo

• • •

V

The specialists
were

baffled

some

of their

pronouncements

baffled

other

specialists

they were

investigating

rare diseases

and

extinct

ailments

I was thirty

and thought

I was dying.

(In her Strapless Dresses 60-63)

In this poem Brett begins to describe the onset of her “anxiety.” The poem is titled “I was living” and begins with the description of every day life. This picture of normality then gives way to “the disorder” and the poet thinks she is dying. Death becomes imminent, even as it is unlikely. The “disorder” that Brett presents, a disorder with unlikely bodily manifestations - “my head / would disconnect and move / several feet away from me” - comes as an irruption into an “ordinary” existence. This disruption, all the more frightening for its unpredictability, could be explained as an irruption of nothingness. Levinas explains that one starts with being “which is a content limited by nothingness. Nothingness is still envisaged as the end and limit of being, as an ocean which beats up against it on all sides.” But, Levinas says, we must ask if “nothingness” “unthinkable as a limit or negation of being, is not possible as interval and interruption; we must ask whether consciousness, with its

aptitude for sleep, for suspension, for epoche, is not the locus of this nothingness-interval”
(35).

Brett writes in the poem “When I Began”:

I remember
when
I began

I couldn't hear
my watch
tick

my nerves
were
impaired

my sight
was
blurred

I was
listening
for danger

I was
watching
for enemies

I was
expecting
death

I couldn't
wait
at traffic lights

I thought
I was constantly
followed

I saw
Gestapo
everywhere

I thought
every policeman
would arrest me

I couldn't
laugh
in case I exploded

I couldn't
cry
in case I couldn't stop.

(After the War 88)

“When I Began” also describes the onset of an anxiety beginning with an inability to “hear my watch tick,” ending with anxiety over the possibility of boundlessness - “I couldn't / cry / in case I couldn't stop.” This anxiety over boundlessness, or this irruption into nothingness, takes on disembodied proportions in Brett's verse. Again and again we are presented with bodies that float, slip away, disconnect, become fractured:

Falling

For days I have been
falling out of
myself

I sit in cafes

gripping
my shoulders

to stop
myself
dropping

I
feel
unplugged

pulled
from my
socket.

(Poland and other poems 59)

Angry

I
am
angry

I
dizzy
myself

fly
from
my skin

float
in
fright.

(Poland and other poems 60)

In Time

I have rarely felt
in time
with myself

at ease

or

in key

there have always been
disjointed parts
out of kilter

odd

lodgers

restless tenants

permanent residents

in this

part-time dwelling.

(After the War 78)

In these poems Brett describes a condition of feeling out of place, out of time, out of proportion. The descriptions of this psychic state are made through the body - it is the body that flies and tears apart. These representations of self-disembodiment could also be read as metaphors for a sense of historical displacement, a sense of being out-of-time with history. These descriptions of bodily fracture stem from a sense of historical and geographical fracture, as the following poem demonstrates:

In the Guggenheim

Obergruppenfuhrer I will sing

Obersturmbannfuhrer

Kapo Kommandant Kommando Lager

and what about
 Oberscharfuhrer Unterscharfuhrer Rottenfuhrer
 Oberfuhrer
 I will warble

these are the words of my childhood
 these serrated syllables
 and coarse consonants
 crossed continents with us

they moved
 wherever we moved
 they lived
 wherever we lived.

(After the War 129-130)

The language of the poet's childhood is the language of another place; another time. It was language that came before; and then came back. The "words of my childhood" are words connecting the "present" with the "past," yet at the same time fracturing this epistemological division - making "past" "present." This troubling of historical time and geographic place results, and is also a consequence of, the troubling of the division between the body as a single entity distinct from the "external" world surrounding it, described in the poems above. While "In the Guggenheim" we are presented with a world in which the language of the war and death camps continues to be present for the child of survivors, Brett also explores silences. This exploration of silences, of things not said, is perhaps best exemplified in a poem called "Secrets." Brett writes:

Secrets

Secrets were stored in all the drawers
 the ceilings and floors held more
 though hints leaked from the seats
 and jumped from the cupboards

there were secrets about your mother and father
secrets about before the war
secrets about last week

secrets about your sisters and brothers
secrets about your still-born son
secrets about your dark-voiced lover

and other secrets

the ingredients of your ten-egg sponge
the reason for your orange-peel mask
and why you rinsed your hair in beer

and other secrets

secrets about a life in Auschwitz
secrets about Stuthof on the Baltic Sea
secrets about a jewel in the ghetto

there were secrets balanced in cryptic circles
secrets sequestered beneath the feather bed
secrets hunched over a silent lunch

and other secrets.

(After the War 51)

This poem about secrets in families is both common and particular. There are the secrets many will relate to, the every day harmless secrets about recipes and beauty therapies. But next to this, are secrets of another kind - secrets of a painful and violent past, traumatic secrets too hard to be told. Brett cleverly places these types of secrets side by side to show that while we all have secrets in our families, some are far more serious and damaging. The absence of talk, becomes an overwhelming recognition of the presence of these absences. The secrets are known to be there, the content of the information is lacking. We could

describe this situation, as I discussed previously, referring to Sicher, as “absent memory.” Once again Brett plays with the concept of presence and absence. Secrets can fill a room, be in the furniture, hiding in the drawers. This is a description of a world where the knowledge of absence is an all-pervading presence.

Remembering and forgetting, coping with histories of horror and the presence of so many secrets and silences, these are the constant themes in Brett's work. These themes are combined with a desire in Brett's writing to inform the reader of historical facts about the Holocaust. The following poem exemplifies this well:

I Keep Forgetting

I keep forgetting
the facts and statistics
and each time
I need to know them

I look up books
these books line
twelve shelves
in my room

I know where to go
to confirm the fact
that in the Warsaw Ghetto
there were 7.2 people per room

and in Lodz
they allocated
5.8 people
to each room

I forget
over and over again
that one third of Warsaw

was Jewish

and in the ghetto
they crammed 500,000 Jews
into 2.4 per cent
of the area of the city

and how many
bodies were they burning
in Auschwitz
at the peak of their production

twelve thousand a day
I have to check
and re-check

and did I dream
that at 4pm on the 19th January
58,000 emaciated inmates
were marched out of Auschwitz

was I right
to remember that in Bergen Belsen
from the 4th-13th of April 1945
28,000 Jews arrived from other camps

I can remember
hundreds and hundreds
of phone numbers

phone numbers
I haven't phoned
for twenty years
are readily accessible

and I can remember
people's conversations
and what someone's wife
said to someone else's husband

what a good memory
you have
people tell me
(After the War 93-94).

As this poem exemplifies, Brett's art is also used as a medium to inform her readers about historical details so often silenced - a medium to represent what many call the "unrepresentable." Brett includes this historical detail within her art by representing its effects in the present. As discussed previously, this is done by showing the present "living horror of the Holocaust" in the lives of second generation survivors. The horror of the Holocaust comes as irruptions of evil into the lives of contemporary characters. These irruptions of evil are as much a matter of stylistics as of content in Brett's writing. This is especially evident in Brett's first novel where the style of writing is a direct reflection of the narrator's psychic state.

In Just Like That (1994) Brett moves her characters and her readers from an everyday event in the present backward to an associated event in the past. Through the method of association Brett writes the Holocaust into her contemporary narrative and thus represents its contemporary relevance. It is a stylistic that is both functional in that it allows for past events not associated with the action of the main plot to come into the present of the narrative, but it also cleverly allows the reader to not only witness but to also share in the protagonist's psychic state, her thought processes. These "irruptions of evil" in the text run as an undercurrent of the story, waiting to erupt onto the page. These irruptions often come at very unexpected times, often the reader finds herself laughing at a funny moment before being unexpectedly and shockingly transported to a moment of horror. This technique can leave the reader almost breathless with the swift movement out of the present moment of the narrative and into the horrible past of the Holocaust. And, of course, this is the whole point. This sensation that the reader may experience of shock, and possibly even breathlessness, is a clever technique that temporarily brings us into Esther's world, and Esther's ever present horror. Two extracts from the narrative exemplify this.

Approximately a third of the way through the novel, Esther, the protagonist, is talking to her friend Sonia about Sonia's pregnancy and worries over parenthood:

Esther thought that Sonia had no need to question her ability to love her babies. If she was already mad enough to be investigating wrist sensors and reading statistics on stolen babies, there was a good chance that she was going to be a ferociously dedicated mother (*Just Like That* 131).

This amusing reflection on Sonia's rather erratic preparation for motherhood, directly precedes the following:

The biological pull of parenthood was fierce. At his war crimes trial in Lyon in 1987, Klaus Barbie's voice broke as he said, "Mein gestorbener junge", my dead boy. Barbie, SS Obersturmführer Klaus Barbie's son, Klaus - Georg, had fallen to his death, in front of his father, while hang-gliding in the Andes in 1980.

On 6 April, 1944, Klaus Barbie rounded up forty-four Jewish children hidden in Thein, France. He telexed the German commander of the French security police, "This morning the Jewish children's home was cleaned out." On the fifteenth of April, 1944, the children arrived in Auschwitz. That night they were killed. They were thrown alive into a pit of burning corpses (131).

Another example of this stylistic of association occurs just five pages on from the extract above. This time Esther is with her husband at a chic New York down town cafe:

The Cupping Room Cafe's special for the day was fried potato peels. Fried potato peels. At \$8.50 a plate. This was a dish for the austere nineties. The rich dressed like the poor, in layered, carefully unmatched designer ensembles. And now they ate like the poor. Turnips, parsnips, carrots, swedes and sweet potatoes were appearing on the menus of hip downtown restaurants, and benefits and galas all over Manhattan.

Once again this rather amusing, gently sarcastic observation is followed by a Holocaust story. This time a more personal story of the narrator's father and mother.

In the Lodz ghetto, you had to know people in high places to procure potato peels. Edek Zepler had, one night, arrived home with a five pound bag of potato peels. It was Rooshka's twentieth birthday. Rooshka had kneeled at the pump in the courtyard, in the snow, and painstakingly washed the grit and dirt off the peels. Cleaned, the peels weighed two pounds. She had ground them and made dumplings,

which she cooked in what was left over of their workshop soup. By the time they sat down to their feast, it was past midnight. 'Happy Birthday, darling,' Edek Zepler had said. 'May this be the worst birthday you will ever have' (Just Like That 135).

Potato peels and children - both everyday phenomena made more strangely meaningful through the narrator's association of them with a past traumatic history.

In an interview I recorded with Lily Brett in 1997, she talks about this technique in her writing:

. . . I'm actually consciously aware of trying to slip in as much information while people aren't looking. While they're enjoying something else about the writing, I want to slip it in so that they have to take it on board, so they can't turn away, and so they can't just skip through those bits in the book. So that, that's been my one conscious motive, to really tell people what happened, and how awful it was, and how crucial it is that it doesn't ever happen again to anybody.

(Brett, "In Conversation" 21)²

These irruptions of evil into Brett's writing are not only narrative devices but also clearly, as the extract above shows, political strategy. Brett has a conscious desire to inform her readers about a history that cannot be forgotten. These irruptions of evil, or "nothingness," can also be considered as techniques of remembering. Whilst I divert significantly from the phenomenological approach of Emmanuel Levinas' I have used to structure this section thus far, I do this to suggest that in Brett's writing, the Holocaust, and those relatives murdered in it, are remembered in a difficult and traumatic way. Unlike a "remembering" which is a conscious act on the part of the subject, these irruptions of evil are not actively undertaken by the subject, but occur through unexpected moments of horror. These irruptions of evil are lived, they occur to the subject, and are enacted in an embodied way. This "re-remembering" is a "remembering" as much to do with imagination as with recollection. As explained at the beginning of this chapter, for children of survivors "remembering" is a complex of parents' memories, research, imagination and the recognition of absence.

² Brett also said in this interview:

"Lily: At the moment I'm reading about what German doctors did during the war, and it's really gruesome reading. It actually makes me feel bilious a lot of the time because I'm reading in intricate detail what happened. Now, I know that in my new novel I am slipping that in bit by bit by bit [Lily laughs] in very funny moments, in odd tender moments, I'm *slipping* it in there so that every single person who reads my books is more well informed . . ." (22)

To return again to the bodily manifestation of this “living horror of the Holocaust” on the subject, I will quote at length another extract from Brett's novel Just Like That to exemplify this corporeality of memory:

Sonia's need to have spotless haemorrhoids had made Esther think about her mother. Her mother cleaned so much, cleaned the house and cleaned herself, that she developed a permanent fungal infection in her finger nails. The doctor told her that the infection would go away if she kept her hands out of water. She couldn't.

Esther often thought of her mother's hands. She thought of them peeling apples. Apple after apple. Her mother could take the whole peel off in one piece. She thought of her mother's hands suntanned and strong. She thought of them polished and painted, ready for an evening out. She thought of them, folded, on the kitchen table, where her mother sat, thinking about something else.

Lately, Esther had been wringing her hands in her analysis sessions. She clenched and gripped her wrists. She kneaded her fingers. She twisted her hands. Sometimes her wrists ached at the end of the session.

Her hands were very much like her mother's hands. She was bringing her mother to the sessions. The feverish, anguished motion of her fingers and wrists were another language. Another voice. Her fingers conducted a dialogue, a subtext, a parallel story . . .

A few weeks after she'd begun this analysis, she'd had an urgent and inexplicable need to have her nails done. She'd gone to a nail salon. She'd had the works. A hand massage. Silk wraps to strengthen her nails, and a manicure. She'd left with dark red shiny fingernails. Now her hands really looked like her mother's. Esther had gone to the nail salon, once a week, for the first three months of her analysis (Just Like That 269-270).

This passage begins by describing how Sonia's need for clean haemorrhoids reminds Esther of her mother. This memory of Esther's mother is invoked by a contemporary situation, it is the association of cleanliness that allows for this memory at that particular time. This is followed by a description of how Esther then consciously thinks about her mother, for example, “Esther often thought of her mother's hands.” However, it is at the beginning of

the third paragraph that a change occurs. Up until now, Esther's mother is brought into the narrative by a conscious act of remembrance. In the third paragraph this changes when we discover that Esther's mother's memory is embodied in Esther's own actions: "Esther had been wringing her hands in her analysis sessions. She clenched and gripped her wrists." We are then told by the omniscient narrator, that in fact Esther was "bringing her mother to the sessions." It is the omniscient narrator who analyses this event and informs the reader that there is a real connection between the protagonist's physical actions, Esther's hand wringing, and her psychic connection with the memory of her mother.

Finally, in the last paragraph the reader is told that Esther made her hands like her mother's by having manicures and all sorts of other treatments at the nail salon; "Now her hands really looked like her mother's." In this way Esther begins to take on the characteristics of her mother. This phenomena of taking on the characteristics of another person should be considered, not just as a physic complication or "loss" of "self," but as an act of remembering. In fact, it could be argued, that it is a performance of the self. In this particular case the self is performed in a way which is connected very profoundly with another self - a remembered and imagined other/self. Esther remembers her mother by performing her mother through her own body.

Memories are written on the body, inscribed through the body. Those "other" people thought to be absent through death become present again in the thoughts, actions, and embodiment of those that re-member. Instead of calling this phenomena a loss of subjectivity I want to argue that it is, instead, a performance of the self which embodies the remembrance of an other, and lives out this other "self." In this way both the epistemological distinctions between absence and presence, as well as self and other, are troubled. This phenomena is also exemplified in the short story "locker 1012" discussed previously. When the narrator from this short story tattoos her mother's Auschwitz number on her arm, she attempts to embody an "other" and write it on her "self." This act, while tragic and traumatic, is an act of remembering. And when read, by others (readers), this serves our collective memory. The reader is vital in this process of connecting the narrative time spans, and thus actively connects the significance of the "past," to the "present" of suffering.

My Mother, My Self

This interest in exploring the relationship between one person's trauma and its effects on another is most commonly represented in Brett's poetry through her relationship with her mother. "I Wear Your Face" from The Auschwitz Poems explores this traumatic relationship:

I Wear Your Face

You never recovered
and I
and others mother
wear your burden

hugging it to me
like a collapsed cloak
a tattered coat

I wear your wariness
can't hug another
mother

I wear the glare
you froze me
with

I wear your desperation
and carry
warring strangers within myself

I wear your fear
with practiced ease
pleasing you

I wear your face

and mother
 the green witch howls behind it
 (137).

In this poem the daughter/poet describes how she is affected by her mother's traumatic past by again referring to the physical bodily manifestations. The poem begins by acknowledging that the mother never recovered and her pain affected the daughter and others as a burden, a burden worn like a tattered cloak. The poem then describes the daughter wearing this burden on her own face - the pain, the fear, the desperation, the wariness, all are worn on the daughter's face. The description of wearing a burden of someone else's past is both an image and metaphor - "a collapsed cloak" - as well as an acknowledgement of the way emotional and psychic suffering is physically manifested. The poem itself blurs the distinction between the boundaries "mother" and "daughter," and overlays the mother onto the daughter - "I wear your face." This connection between mother and daughter again emerges in Brett's collection of poems Poland and other poems, published one year after The Auschwitz Poems. In a poem entitled "I Have Never Known" Brett writes:

Mother I have never known
 where you ended

I have worn us blended
 for forty years

I have walked through Melbourne
 as though it were Warsaw

on guard for the Gestapo
 in fear of informers

...

(Poland and other poems 133)

Again, like the poem "In the Guggenheim," the daughter of the survivor brings the war back into the present through her own anxiety. Melbourne becomes Warsaw, peace (of mind) is constantly in peril. Another poem "Mud in my tears," from Brett's collection of poetry by the same title (1997) is again concerned with the question of division between the mother

and the daughter. "Mud in my Tears" also, once again, represents the trauma of being a second generation survivor of the Holocaust. The poem, haunting in its subject, is typical of Brett in its form and metre - thin and economical.

Mud In My Tears

For two thousand sessions
and three analysts
and so many tears

I've gnawed over
the division of roles
for twenty years

what happened
what happened to her
and what happened to me

I've sorted and sieved
and dissected
I've strained

through this corset
and shamed myself
I've repeated and remembered

and divided
the borders
she was the mother

I am the daughter
I am the daughter
born after the war

after the hunger

after the torture
after the typhoid

after the disfigurement
after the disinfection
after the dead

and well after
the rape
and the German Shepherd

I am the daughter
born after the war
but I've stalled

I am stuck
like a pig in mud
mud from the barracks

mud from the huts
mud from the banks
mud from my eyes and lungs

mud in my liver
mud in my mouth
mud ringing in my ears

mud in my fingers
mud in my screams
mud in my tears.

(Mud in my Tears 10-12)

This poem, through the use of repetition and metre, adopts a rather stilted rhythm. The metre, at pivotal moments in the poem, reads heavy - like mud. The poem questions the division between the mother, who lived through the Holocaust, and the daughter, “born after

the war.” The use of the first person pronoun affects an immediate intimacy for the reader. The intimacy is heightened, especially in the seventh stanza, by the sensation that the poet is trying to convince herself of her own separate identity “I am the daughter/ I am the daughter/ born after the war.” For the reader it is as though the poet is writing her thoughts directly onto the page. This intimacy established in the poem allows for a more affective response from the reader, and as mentioned previously, this is indeed the poet’s intention.

The use of mud as a connection in the poem is both “real” and metaphorical. The “real” mud that was in the “barracks,” the metaphorical “mud in my tears.” Again, Brett highlights the corporeal, but this time in a metaphorical way - mud in lungs, liver, mouth. The knowledge of the atrocities committed on the mother are lodged in the daughter's own being, in her anatomy, like mud. The metaphorical mud represents the overwhelmingly burdened nature of the daughter’s knowledge, memories heavy like mud. This knowledge, traumatic and horrifying, is not only “known,” but physically “felt.” And while in this poem the body is used metaphorically, at other times, as explained before, Brett represents the physical manifestations of this knowledge of the “other” on the “self.”

Another poem from Brett's collection After the War, a title that is complicated by the subject matter of the poetry within, again explores the problem of division between mother and daughter:

Leaving You

It has taken me
a long time to know
that it was your war
not mine

that I wasn't
in Auschwitz
myself

that I have never
seen
the Lodz Ghetto

or Stuthof
or a cattle wagon
or a selection queue

I thought
I knew
Nazis

I thought
I had lived
with fear

with
ration cards
with work' permits

I thought I knew
what bodies gnawed by rats
looked like

and how
the mattresses
smelt

and what
it felt like
to fill your lungs

with
smoke
from flesh

to
live

with death

I have had

trouble

mother

leaving you

(After the War 92).

This poem, gruelling in its historical actuality - “smoke from flesh” at Auschwitz- is also haunting in its representation of the contemporary implications for those that came “after the war.” The trauma and pain represented in this poem, and others, forces the reader to question the very concept of “after the war.” If war ends when a peace agreement is reached, then who exactly is at peace? If imprisonment at Auschwitz ended when it was liberated by the allies, who were liberated and what were they liberated from? From imprisonment? From terror? Trauma? Or just given a life sentence for continuing suffering of a different kind? These philosophical questions are in many ways beyond the scope of this chapter. However, they are questions that Lily Brett’s writing invokes.

To return again to this dilemma of attachment to an-other’s trauma, a dilemma obviously connected to these difficult philosophical questions, Brett consistently continues to represent this suffering. These representations of pain and suffering, despair and anguish are one of the most valuable aspects, both politically and aesthetically, of Brett’s poetry. We could call this poetry of Brett’s, an aesthetic of suffering. The appeal for most readers must be this poetic insight into an-other’s pain; pain and anguish that reads so honest and immediate in Brett’s verse. An extract of another poem from the After the War collection exemplifies this aesthetic of suffering.

I Talk To You

I talk to you

every day mother

I talk to you while I write

I talk to you at night

I continue our conversations

I triumph in our arguments
I don't buckle in our battles

and every time

a snatch of anguish
a shard of sorrow
a shiver of misery

almost touches me

...

(After the War 97).

The appeal of this poem is its seemingly simple honesty. Yet, there is nothing simple about this poem, and the other poems in this collection. It is the artistic ability of the poet that allows the reader to enter into the complex suffering of another in such an immediate and affecting way. This relationship between reader and poet, established through the poetry, is considered fundamentally important to the poet herself. As Brett says in the interview I conducted with her:

"I'm always so thrilled when someone starts crying when they're reading something .

..

. . . I'm very pleased because it means I've moved people. You see both my parents grew up with a universe that was unmoved by them, nobody tried to help them, nobody wanted them. Jews were barred, you know, all the quotas for Jews were left unfilled while all the Jews were being murdered. The world was unmoved, and all my life I've wanted to move people, I think that I've been proving to myself that they can be moved . . .

(Brett, "In Conversation" 27)

This is the very personal and very political imperative in Brett's writing.

Another poem on this theme of suffering and sadness, is actually entitled "This Sadness:"

Sometimes
a terrible sadness

settles on me

it is weighty

this sadness

and blankets graves

and cemeteries

it is as heavy

as quicksilver

and nimble

it sticks

to my skin

and fills

my intestines

it is dense

this sadness

as though

all the

disconsolate silvers

and

disheartened particles

in

the air

have connected

I sit in the middle

of this sadness

and miss you

(Unintended Consequences 60).

Again like the poem "I Talk to You" discussed above, this poem's strength is its seeming simplicity and heartfelt honesty. So, while Brett represents her relationship with her mother as the cause of much suffering, she also writes of the suffering of loss of the mother. The sadness, that sticks like quicksilver and weighs on the poet, is a sadness that is formed through an inextricable bind - this bind between mother and daughter. At times in Brett's writing the distinction between the two cannot even be made, or imagined. And in some poems this connection, as traumatic as it is, is desired nonetheless, as the poem below exemplifies:

I Slip

I slip into
sheer black stockings
and a straight skirt

smooth myself down
and assume
your incandescent expression

I hitch my lips
over
your thin smile

I have caught
you raw
mother

and now that I've consumed you
now that I've become you
I am free

of the green envy
the red jealousy
that contorted me

I have fused us
 and no longer
 have any use for you
 (After the War 111).

This is perhaps the most extreme expression of the bond between mother and daughter in Brett's poems of this kind. Whilst in other poems Brett presents a picture of an inability to separate her and her mother's experience, and expresses how this translates on her own body and body language, in this poem she goes further to describe herself consuming her mother. She no longer has to worry about being like her mother, or worry about her mother's influences on her, because she has become her mother; "now that I've become you/I am free." This poem reads as a harsher poem than many of the others. It is almost with anger that the mother is consumed, fused by/with the daughter. After this consumption there is no "use for you," the mother becomes useless as an "other" because she is incorporated into the "self." The desperate tone of this poem represents the anguish of the poet, an anguish of wanting to separate, yet wanting to come closer, an anguish of wanting to be part of the other's suffering without being consumed by it. An anguish of wanting to remember the past, without continually "living" it.

The legacy of being a child of a Holocaust survivor is a complex Brett can never turn away from in her writing. It is a legacy handed down from parent to child, albeit unintentionally. The unintended consequences, the title of Brett's third collection of poetry, are many and diverse, conscious and unconscious. In a poem from this collection entitled "Unintended," Brett writes of this unintended inter-generational transference of suffering:

Unintended

You didn't mean
 to leave me
 this

 you didn't mean
 to bequeath
 this bequest

this
blemished
birthright

this
tarnished
settlement

this
spent
heritage

and
flawed
testament

the
damaged
dowry

and
impaired
heirlooms

were
unintended

and
didn't
buckle me

I
was already
disfigured

an
 erroneous
 heiress

a
 stumpy
 legatee

you didn't mean
 to leave me
 this

(Unintended Consequences 31-32).

The trauma that was lived through by the survivors is carried on through their children, as Brett says, as a “blemished / birthright.” This legacy that is left to the children of Holocaust survivors that Brett represents, is a legacy that comes from a history that is irreconcilable. This is particularly evident in the poems associated with the mother/daughter bond. In these poems it is the daughter that cannot reconcile her mother's absence, her mother's history of suffering, her mother's trauma. The injustice of the Holocaust, the brutality, the overwhelming anguish, these things are irreconcilable and form the basis for continuing suffering. The living horror of the Holocaust represented in this work, is a horror inextricably associated with irreconcilable histories that are still “felt.”

The Living Dead

Efraim Sicher writes that the “burden of memory is literally to carry the dead within one's soul and, in the case of children of survivors, to be “memorial candles” for dead sons, daughters, brothers, and sisters, carrying their names, living up to their unfulfilled expectations” (24). From her chapter “Death” in her collection of autobiographical essays In Full View, Lily Brett writes:

I grew up with death. The dead were all around me. They were palpable. They felt more alive to me than the living. The dead were my mother's mother and father, her four brothers and three sisters. Her nephews and nieces and uncles, aunts and cousins and brother and sisters-in-law. The dead were my father's mother and father,

his three brothers and one sister. His nephews and nieces and uncles, aunts, cousins and brother and sister-in-law (230).

This loss, this recognition of such overwhelming absence, is not only fore-fronted in much of Brett's writing, it also lurks insidiously behind all she writes. In the collection Unintended Consequences Brett represents this loss, described above, in verse:

A Family

We had a family list
which read
people dead

the dead
were
mothers and fathers

grandmothers and
grandfathers
sisters and brothers

uncles and aunts
cousins
brother-in-laws and sister-in-laws

nephews
and
nieces

the living
were
my mother and father

the dead
were

rabbis

dentists

cantors

scholars

printers

tailors

doctors

storekeepers

piano teachers

merchants

lawyers

actors

manufacturers

bookkeepers

authors

nurses

a music critic

a cashier

a tram driver

and

forty-nine

children

afterwards

there was a supplement

of two daughters

a poor codicil
 an inadequate
 addendum

we could
 hardly
 be heard.

(Unintended Consequences 33-34)

Brett's family consists almost entirely of the dead (as this poem shows), but the dead are never absent in Brett's world, they are the "living dead." As Brett herself described in the autobiographical extract above: "They were palpable. They felt more alive to me than the living." This presence of so much absence cannot but shape the lives of those living with such loss. In the extract below, again taken from the chapter "Death," Brett describes to her reader her comprehension of this absence/presence nexus as a child:

There were so many dead. They crowded the small room we lived in in Brunswick. They moved with us when we moved into our cottage in Nicholson Street, Carlton. And they stayed with us, and joined us on our upwardly mobile journey to a house my father built in St Kilda, when I was thirteen.

I remember wondering if they preferred the salt air of St Kilda, or whether they missed Carlton and the Yiddish conversations you could hear in the street. I thought the dead relatives were alive. I thought they were real. And I knew they were unreal. I thought they were present. And I knew they were gone. I thought my mother spoke to them. And I knew she was talking to herself (230-231).

This passage so succinctly exemplifies this constant troubling of epistemological boundaries I have discussed previously. The young Lily thinks the relatives are real, but also not real, present but also gone, dead but also alive, other but also self. The passage is also interesting in the way it represents space. The dead (but present) relatives come to occupy the domestic space of these different houses. This habitation of domestic "living" space, which these dead relatives occupy, is represented even more vividly in Brett's verse. "Our House" from The Auschwitz Poems reads:

In
 our

shiny
square house

with
rose bushes
and
fig trees

and
handmade
up to date

tables
and
couches

you
were
never alone

a
bedraggled
pack

of
scrappy
people

lived
with
us

they
were joined
sometimes

by
people
you hardly remembered

and
I'd
never seen

at
celebrations
they sang
and danced

when
things went wrong
they jostled
to push
their point of view

on
anniversaries
of bad memories
they wept
and wailed

nothing
passed
their
comment

they
were
delighted
by technology

hadn't
lived
to see
everywhere telephones
and television

and
the food
the food
was rivetting

it
was hard
to invite
people
home

to
such
a
crowded
house.

(The Auschwitz Poems 111-112)

This “bedraggled pack / of scrappy people” fill this domestic space and crowd it. As Brett writes in another poem “It was hard to be heard in our house / a loud chorus sang the main score / dead people with strong voices” (“A Chorus” Unintended Consequences 35-36). Not only then do these dead relatives occupy domestic space they also occupy speaking space, the space for voice - “It was hard to be heard.” This difficulty of living with the presence of absence is also a difficulty of living with the burden of other people's death. This burden infects everyday experience and adds another layer of meaning onto everyday events, as Brett describes below:

. . . I felt they shared my heart, lungs and arteries. I had to live for them. A life worthy of all of them. It was a huge, overwhelming and impossible task. I felt my failure acutely.

...

If I fell and hurt myself, I knew it wasn't worse than anything that Tadek or Felek would have experienced. If someone was mean to me, the meanness paled next to the cruelty that Riven or Abramek would have endured. If I felt lonely, my loneliness was insignificant next to the loneliness of the dead. If I felt miserable, it was miniscule next to their misery. If I felt sad, my sadness was dwarfed by their anguish. (In Full View 231-232)

The knowledge of great suffering, experienced by one's parents and extended family, has a significant effect on how the second generation makes their own pain and suffering meaningful, or less meaningful, within this history. As Brett describes above, the history of her family's suffering made her own misery, or loneliness, or sadness, feel less significant. Often there is a sensation of guilt for the second generation in knowing that their own worries are minor in comparison to the upheaval of their dead and surviving family. As is described in the following extract by another child of survivors:

I think about what they went through a lot. I'm always thinking I have such a good life, such a lucky life, and you feel a certain amount of guilt that your parents didn't have that and now if you have problems of any sort they're a bit diminished by the problems they had at your age and that's something I've had to get over, that feeling of guilt and not having suffered as they have, so if I'm feeling depressed, what am I feeling depressed about, not having to worry about survival (Reed 186).

The Ordinary and the Extra-Ordinary

This overlay of meaning described by Brett above often plays itself out in the interstice between the "ordinary" and the "extraordinary." When the "extraordinary" forms a backdrop to, and penetrates the "ordinary," the "ordinary" changes forever. As Brett says: "If I felt sad, my sadness was dwarfed by their anguish." This effect of the extraordinary on the ordinary not only changes for the characters and the self portrait Brett constructs, but it also changes the way the reader may respond to the "ordinary" in Brett's writing. Many of Brett's poems are poems about every day events and every day meanings. Take for example the following poem about a woman's handbag:

My Handbag

In my handbag

I have

a notebook

seven pens

three credit cards

and money

I have

headache tablets

and tranquilizers

Should

an emergency

occur

I have

a driver's licence

and peppermint Lifesavers

I have

photographs

of the children

and my husband

and my parents

and my friend's child

I have a sewing kit

scissors

and a street map

museum membership cards

video rental cards

health care cards

I have

lipstick and powder

and hair combs

and

some old

eyeliner sticks

I have

a list

of Yiddish words

and

common

phrases

I have

letters

letters from my father

letters

from my best friend

old letters from my children

I have

pieces

of my own poems

and

a poem

someone sent me.

(Unintended Consequences 74-75)

This poem, “feminine” in its subject matter, can be read as a simple poem about the contents of a handbag. Many women readers, I would expect, can easily relate to this poem through their own handbag contents (although perhaps not as many items within them!). And while it is interesting to contrast this poem to Brett's other poems that are focused on the Holocaust and its traumatic effects, it is also interesting to note the similarities.

Brett's poems are about everyday experiences, whether they be about contents in handbags or about her relationships with family and friends, they are about things she lives, experiences and imagines. In this way Brett elevates the everyday to the poetic. However, Brett's poems, and indeed her short stories and novels, are also concerned with extraordinary events. Her poems, considered as a collection are both ordinary and extraordinary, about the everyday and the unimaginable, life and death, pain and love, present and past. And as previously discussed, the boundaries separating these binaries are extremely blurred. Thus, poems are about the past in the present, the pain of love, the living presence of the dead. Brett's poetry leaves one with no clear demarcations, the reader enters a world that is both familiar and strange, and often at the same time. “My Handbag,” as a poem on its own, has a different meaning as a poem if read as part of a collection, and as part of Brett's *oeuvre*. As part of a collection it stands as a poem that represents the everyday, which is surrounded by the unimaginable. But the unimaginable occurs in the everyday, as many of the poems I have discussed in this chapter exemplify.

To read Brett's poetry as a collection, and to read according to the “author function,” is to achieve greater understanding of the issues and the life the poet is trying to present to us. To talk about Brett's poetry as a collection is to take a position of greater engagement with the poet and her work. And given the content and context of this work, this engagement is not only rewarding, but an ethical imperative. This importance of reading Brett's poems in relation to her other poems is exemplified in the next poem. Again, if read alone this poem seems quite insignificant, if read in the context of her other writing - read inter-textually - this poem becomes much more meaningful.

In An Emergency

In an emergency

anyone opening my handbag
would see

that I am loved
that I belong to someone
that people will be worrying about me

I won't be
an unknown quantity
a number

a foreigner
a lost tourist
a stranger

a remnant
an entity
of no importance.

(Unintended Consequences 77)

This poem's significance is much greater if we read it knowing that Brett's parents survived the Holocaust, knowing that her family were torn from people they loved and from people who knew them. Read with the knowledge that Brett is plagued by the fear of separation, a separation that defines her history, the poem takes on another layer of meaning. Given the context of this poem as part of a collection, and as part of an *oeuvre*, we can appreciate the poet's expression of her anxiety and fear at finding herself alone in the world. Another poem in this particular collection Unintended Consequences, expresses similar concerns. This next poem follows directly on from the one above. This ordering of poems is never arbitrary, and often Brett's poems are best read as episodic.³

³ This is particularly the case with The Auschwitz Poems, which begins with incarceration and selection and ends with liberation and life in Australia. In this way, this collection resembles a verse narrative.

When We Travelled

When we travelled

I used to write

identification tags

for the children

the tags read

I am ----

the child of ----

Australian citizen

on the back

of the tags

I had half-a-dozen

emergency numbers

the children

hated the tags

and told me

later

that they used

to take them off

as soon as they left

the building.

(Unintended Consequences 78)

Once again it is the knowledge of the context of this poem in terms of where it fits in the collection as a whole, that gives the poem a layer of meaning it might otherwise not have. It is the background, the context, of loss, and the anxiety of the loss of family, the loss of identity, the loss of place, that was the poet's family's history, that makes this seemingly simple poem more meaningful. It is the reader's engagement with these poems, reading them

in context with each other, reading them inter-textually, that enables these meanings to be formed. The reader's role is vital in forming this subject of anxiety, as previously mentioned, and it is the reader that gives context, makes connections, reads between the lines, turns the page.

Another poem about the enduring relationship between two women again exemplifies this relationship between the ordinary and the extraordinary in Brett's writing. This poem, tenderly written, loses nothing by being read alone. However, when read in the context of Brett's other writing another layer of meaning is achieved.

A Friend

(for Inara)

I have a friend
I went to school with
we were thirteen

when we met
and desperate
for each other

we were displaced daughters
out of place
for different reasons

and
in
different ways

we
loved
each other

we linked arms
walking home

from school

and talked
on the phone
all night

she held my son
when he was
one hour old

and
went to him
at night

we
loved
each other

through
assorted
husbands

we loved
each other's
children

we love
each other's
current husband

she
loved
my mother

when

I
didn't

and we still
love
one another.

(Unintended Consequences 86-87)

The importance of recognising the preciousness of human relationships, expressed in this poem, is made so much clearer in the context of an event like the Holocaust. Unlike Brett's mother, who lost virtually all her family and friends during the Holocaust, her daughter, living in different times, is able to develop long-term relationships. This poem is not only a celebration of love between two women, but it is also, when read beside Brett's other poems, a celebration of that abstract thing we might call "peace." The poem is a celebration of the life the poet is allowed - opportunities her mother had stolen from her.

Emmanuel Levinas writes that: "Freedom consists in knowing that freedom is in peril" (Levinas, Totality and Infinity 35). Brett's poetry that celebrates love, friendship and family, celebrates these gifts knowing that they can be lost and taken away, in an instant. Indeed, Brett's representations tell of how all that was precious for her family was destroyed during the Holocaust. Once this is understood and felt such things can never be taken for granted again.

Just as we come to know people the more time we spend with them, learning of their history, meeting their family and friends, hearing their stories, we similarly begin to learn the significance of Brett's poetic world the more we read her poetry, fiction, and essays. I have often heard readers of Brett's writing describe their relationship to this author, or her protagonists, as their "friend." It is both the intimacy of Brett's writing and the gradual layering that is associated with reading her work that allows this intimacy to develop. However, it also must be said, that this intimacy is also developed through a telling of pain and suffering, where the reader is allowed into, becomes a witness of, the suffering of another. The reader's role in constructing the meaning of the text in the process of reading, also means that the reader enables the suffering of another. It is this intimacy that cannot be so affectively attained through traditional historical writing on the Holocaust, but can be a part of aesthetic representation. Brett has achieved quite a feat inasmuch as she provides a

space, for a time, for someone else to engage emotively in what it means to live with the legacy of the Holocaust as a child of survivors.

Another one of the reasons Brett's poetry is so affective is because, as I've explained, it troubles any distinction between the ordinary and the extraordinary. Brett writes about the way the unimaginable is manifest in the everyday, the exceptional in the usual. She also shows how the unthinkable affects real people, how horror is lived through the body, how people do live in unimaginable conditions. As I discussed in the previous chapter, Brett writes the abject back into history. The body, emotions, and the everyday effects of extraordinary circumstances are given prominence in her work, and challenge the acceptable parameters of public history. Lily Brett writes history by challenging its others - imagination, private, feminine, the body. History is told through the personal, through the emotional, through the body. In the world of acceptable literary and historical representation, Brett's writing is almost monstrous. Yet at the same time much of Brett's poetry seems rather "ordinary," about everyday experiences, love and loss. And perhaps this is why Brett's writing, considered as a body of work, is challenging - because it pushes our perceived notions of what poetry should be, and because it doesn't, because it is extraordinary, and ordinary.

While I have argued that the Holocaust is represented in Brett's writing as irruptions of evil, or as horror, I have also tried to show that it is not only this. For those of the second generation, the Holocaust is also a constant backdrop to everyday life. And this backdrop not only leaves its characters with a recognition of suffering and enormous pain, but also gives an intensity to life and an appreciation of those "ordinary" things that after the Holocaust, could never be taken for granted again. As I have also tried to demonstrate, Brett's representation of the continuing effects of the Holocaust also challenges fundamental epistemological divisions. These divisions between absence and presence, life and death, self and other, are "made strange" through the experiences represented in Lily Brett's writing.

Ellen Fine writes: "For survivors as well as for those born in the shadow of the Holocaust, its memory continues to haunt us and does not heal" (Fine 185). In the poetic world of Lily Brett, the Holocaust is not an event of the past, but very much an event in the present. How is this past history and event in the present? As I have attempted to show in this chapter, through an examination of Lily Brett's writing, it is an event in the present not only because

it is a “public memory” and all history is about contemporary thought (as discussed in previous chapters) but it is also a personal legacy felt by many, especially by children of survivors. The Holocaust is a memory, but it is also a present context in the lives of many Jewish people today. It is memory, but much more than memory. As quoted early in this chapter - “I was really, even if not literally, present at Sinai”. I was really, if not literally, present in the Holocaust. For many children of survivors, for the generation that “came after,” even if estranged from Judaic practice and belief, this quote is fundamentally meaningful - in a very personal and painful way. For the reader of Brett’s writing this continuing presence of the Holocaust is obvious, albeit “strange.” And the reader’s engagement with Brett’s art ensures that this historical event is seen for what it is - a continuing trauma.

However, not all children of Holocaust survivors share Lily Brett’s experiences. Lily Brett writes of her own experiences and constructs many other second generation characters who suffer similarly with the legacy of their parent’s traumatic past. Certainly, many of the experiences that Brett represents are common for many children of survivors - but not all. Indeed, Lily Brett’s own sister describes a very different experience of their family life in her recent autobiographical text Eating the Underworld: A Memoir in Three Voices (2001). I will now explore the problematic this has caused in more detail.

A Story of Two Voices

As mentioned, there is a particular intimacy established in the reading of much of Lily Brett’s writing. This intimacy is not only born from Lily Brett writing autobiographical essays and poetry, but also from fiction that is heavily autobiographical, as well as filled with characters that reveal intimately personal characteristics to the reader. The recent publication by Doris Brett has contested Lily Brett’s autobiographical stories, and has responded to public controversies within the Brett family aired in the Australian print and broadcast media. I will discuss Doris Brett’s book, and its possible effects shortly. Before this though, I would like to turn to autobiographical theories to shed light on some of the processes at work in the reception of Lily Brett’s writing.

Post modern theorists have argued very convincingly that every story is mediated through cultural, political and historical configurations. Every story is a product of a particular cultural situation in a specific historical time, and every story draws from a history of other

stories. As Sidonie Smith says in terms of our own personal stories or autobiographies: “every life contains within it multiple discourses on discourses, stories on stories” (Smith 46). Contemporary autobiographical theorists in particular, have discussed the way our stories are structured through particular narrative techniques. How we construct our stories is always about making choices, and our stories of ourselves can never be an exact replication of what has passed; they are always our present stories of a past that cannot be recaptured. As Smith writes, describing the autobiographical process: “the autobiographer constantly tells ‘a’ story rather than ‘the’ story, and tells it ‘this’ way rather the ‘that’ way” (46). Fundamentally this process “reveals the way the autobiographer situates herself and her story in relation to cultural ideologies and figures of selfhood” (47).

These insights from contemporary autobiographical theory have been invaluable in our understandings of how we both create our personal stories and assign meaning to our lives, and also how we create our cultural stories - our national and communal stories. As many historians also now argue, history too is “a” story rather than “the” story and is mediated through present understandings by social actors positioned in specific ways. In Lily Brett’s autobiographical writing one cannot forget that what she is writing is a story, a story that can be told now, and a story that has a receptive audience. Brett’s stories, as discussed above, are shaped by the discourses surrounding her, and are made meaningful by the discourses shaping the reader. Brett’s writing about the suffering of Holocaust survivors and the effects on their children would not have found such a receptive market thirty years ago. As I explained in Chapter Three, there is an ever-increasing market for not only anything related to the Holocaust, but more broadly, an increasing market for stories of personal survival and trauma. This goes hand in hand with an increase in “little histories,” the rise of the personal story against the more “impersonal” ways of representing history popular before the 1970s. Brett’s stories can be understood against this backdrop of contemporary interest in both personal narratives of trauma, stories of diasporic experiences, and the ever-increasing “Holocaust industry.”

In recognising the fictive nature of writing a life, many autobiographical theorists turned attention to thinking about the differences, which no longer seemed so obvious, between the categories fiction and non-fiction, or fiction and autobiography. Two important factors that need to be taken into account to understand this popular differentiation are: the intention of the author, and the significance of the reader. Barrett Mandel argues that even though autobiographers use techniques of fiction, this does not make an autobiography become a

fiction. Mandel contends that it is the autobiographer's intention to convey the sense that "this happened to me" that makes the result different from fiction. Despite the autobiographer's use of fiction techniques, Mandel says the intention always speaks through, the intention to tell the "truth." He argues that critics seem to overlook the converse view that a novelist can use devices of autobiography: facts drawn from history, first person narration, and others (53). This is certainly the case in Brett's writing, which is highly autobiographical. And while Brett's fiction has too often been taken as her personal story, we do make a distinction when embarking upon her autobiographical essays that these are "more true" than her novels or short stories. This distinction has as much to do with how the books are marketed as it has to do with what is contained within the book - both shape the reader's understandings.

The other component that has to be taken into account in the categorisation of autobiography as different from fiction is, according to Mandel, the question of the reader. Talking about the problem of categorising autobiography, Mandel says:

The problem results from leaving out readers, without whom we are left with a false dichotomy: fiction/nonfiction. We find books cut adrift from the very subjectivity that gives them their reality and without which they are left embalmed forever in dry logic and academic rules, neat but unconvincing. The point is that fiction is fiction for a subject. Autobiography is autobiography for a subject. No amount of logic brought to bear to prove that because autobiography is not life it is actually fiction will convince any reader that autobiographies can or should be read as fictions. It is a total denial of the reader's experience. It is simply a fact that readers turn to autobiography for the kind of satisfaction that one derives from reading something true rather than fabular (55).

The fact that many critics and journalists conflate Lily Brett's life with her fictional writing, is evidence of their active role as readers in creating this autobiographical meaning. The reader, in this case, brings her/his knowledge of previous books, interviews and so on, and uses this prior knowledge for the reading of the new text. This is, of course, a process that occurs all the time and is, as I've discussed previously, part of what Foucault explains as the "author function." But it is a mistake to explain a text solely through a reliance on the "Author" alone. As Roland Barthes writes: "The explanation of a work is always sought in the man or woman who produced it, as if it were always in the end, through the more or less transparent allegory of the fiction, the voice of a single person, the author 'confiding' in us"

(115). To give a text an Author, Barthes argues, “is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing” (117). This has traditionally suited the critic, Barthes argues, for once the author was ‘found’ the text could be ‘explained’. Instead of focusing on the Author as the site of meaning, Barthes argues for the role of the reader. He writes: “a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not, as was hitherto said, the author” (118).⁴

The intimacy felt in the reading of Lily Brett’s writing is an intimacy derived on the part of the reader whose desire lies in a search for the truth (about the narrator/author). Of course this is not every reader’s experience, but I would suggest that it is a common experience that has helped establish a growing international market for Lily Brett’s writing. Readers seeking an understanding of the continuing effects of the Holocaust on children of survivors might well by-pass Brett for academic and psychological studies on the subject. That Lily Brett’s writing provides a much more popular option, tells us much about the popularity of the life story, the continuing popularity of the novel, and the desire for intimate connection with another “self” that can be found in both these literary forms. But what happens when one person’s memories are disputed by another’s? While this is a common enough event in everyday life, it becomes a controversy when it occurs publicly to public figures.

In *Eating the Underworld*, Doris Brett, through poetry, fairytale and memoir traces her journey through an initial diagnosis with ovarian cancer, an operation, a recurrence of cancer, chemotherapy and remission. This story is beautifully crafted, extremely moving and intelligently reflective. However, Doris Brett’s book does not only tell her story of living with cancer but also tells of her difficult relationship with her sister Lily Brett. The book in many ways is a reply to her sister and the public controversies that have surrounded her sister, herself and her father over the last few years. The controversy stems from Lily’s representation of her and Doris’ mother, and the subsequent misrepresentation of her mother

⁴ Arguments for the active role of the reader in deciding generic qualifications is, of course, indebted to theories of reader response. Wolfgang Iser, one of the chief proponents of reader theory, argued that a literary work has two poles - the artistic and the aesthetic. He explained that the artistic refers to the text produced by the author, whereas the aesthetic to the realization accomplished by the reader (125). From this polarity, Iser argued, “it follows that the literary work cannot be completely identical with the text, or with the realization of the text, but in fact must lie half-way between the two” (125). Iser continued by arguing: “The convergence of text and reader brings the literary work into existence, and this convergence can never be precisely pinpointed, but must always remain virtual, as it is not to be identified either with the reality of the text or with the individual disposition of the reader” (125). It is argued that it is this virtuality of the work that gives rise to its dynamic nature, and this then is the precondition for the effects that the work calls forth (126).

in the media. Doris Brett writes that her book is her chance to tell her story of her mother, and counter the negative portrayals she believes Lily has produced, and also been produced by critics and journalists. Eating the Underworld gives an account of Doris' difficult journey in bringing her story of her mother to print, and the consequent rift with her father.

In the prologue to Eating the Underworld, Doris Brett writes:

Cesare Pavese, the Italian poet, said, 'We do not remember days, we remember moments.' In creating the story of our days, some of us will remember different moments from the same events and others will remember the same moments differently (Doris Brett ix).

Doris Brett's understanding of the idiosyncratic nature of memory carries through her book. Her intention, as stated in the narrative, is not to offer the 'truth' and discount her sister's experiences, but to offer her own 'truth' for the public record. Doris Brett writes: "I feel an intense discomfort in writing about my family. The life of an individual is as complex as a maze of reflecting mirrors; the life of a family is even more so. Each person has their own experience, interpretations and memories of it. Each person has their own truths. The difficulties come when these truths are not allowed to co-exist" (Doris Brett 14-15). It is Doris Brett's contention that her story has been silenced, a silence that has also been self imposed, in the face of the popularity of her sister's story. Doris Brett does not offer her memories for the sake of her own representation, indeed Lily Brett does not write of a sister in any of her autobiographical writings. Instead, Doris Brett offers her memories of her childhood to counter the representation of her mother. Doris Brett writes:

Those of us who loved my mother have our own private memories of her - a person of rare grace, compassion and love. But there is also another memory of her, one she never expected to have: a public memory. This memory is taken from my sister's writing and interviews. In this memory, my mother wears a face that is unrecognisable to me. It is clearly the way Lily has chosen to interpret her experience and yet in the minds of many, it has become who my mother actually was. It is how she will be remembered by readers, critics, academics; people who never knew her, even for a second. It is her image set into the stone of words (Doris Brett 16).

But words, of course, are not "stone," and what Doris Brett does not consider in her writing is the differing responses to a representation that readers will have. Neither Doris nor Lily Brett have any control over the meanings that are made of their stories, and the fact that

critics have read Lily's work and interpreted her mother in a particular light, cannot be the fault of the author. Once a book is published it is out of the control of the writer and open to all sorts of meaning and interpretation. No-one's memories are sacred once they are shared with another, and especially so when they are shared with thousands, even millions, through publication.

Doris Brett is concerned with memory though, but more particularly the psychology of personal memory. Reflecting on the differing memories of her and her sister's childhood, Doris Brett writes:

These differences in memory are testimony to the complexity of inner life and the way it colours and shapes our perceptions of outer life. Psychologists have known for years that fantasy, unconscious needs and re-interpretation of events all affect our memories of past and even recent events. It is confusing, disorienting. And yet in this profusion of difference, our own experience is all that we have (Doris Brett 251).

Thus Lily's and Doris' differing experiences of their childhoods, do not discount each other, but rather show the complexities of remembering and its effect on, and how it is affected by, present identity.

Memories are then, both public and personal. We share common events as memories, yet remember them in a process that is both unique to the individual and surprisingly common to the person's time and place. Memories are like photographs, framed by the discourses around us, tinted through our own experiences. And this process is two way, discourses shape experience and experience shapes discourse, and is itself a discourse. That Lily Brett remembers differently to her sister, is another proof (if we even need it) that "truth" is a personal phenomenon. Memory is a snapshot, most of what surrounds it, in the time of its event, is forgotten. Autobiographical writing is much the same, what is left outside the frame of the book is enormous, and mostly unable to be recollected. The reader of autobiography does not usually have the insight into what remains outside the frame, we are left only with the snapshot, as a certain kind of truth - a truth that exists between the reader and the text. This truth most often holds, in modernist literature especially. When this truth that is the reading process is questioned, uncertainty invades. Reading Doris Brett's Eating the Underworld upsets this narrative truth between the reader and the "author" Lily Brett. But it does not present the "real" story that would prove the other false. It presents an alternate story that unsettles the first, complicates it, but also adds to it. Eating the Underworld reminds us that there are many stories, different experiences of the same or

similar events, alternate memories. It reminds us again, therefore, of what we already experience ourselves, the multiplicity of meaning that exists with any one event, and its remembering.

What is also important to remember in terms of public memory however, is that some memories, or ways of remembering are given more validation, at particular historical moments, in particular places, than others. What Doris Brett's book reminds us of is the way memory is shaped by discourses, and that the discourses surrounding identity today are particularly invested in understandings of "legacies," unreconciled "trauma," suffering and "survival." For Doris Brett to write a story of her self, a child of two Holocaust survivors, and not express the "trauma" of being a child of survivors, is far less marketable today than an alternate story of a traumatic legacy. Doris Brett writes:

They didn't talk about the Holocaust; they wanted to put it behind them. I grew up knowing little of the Holocaust and almost nothing about my parents' particular experiences. I can't speak for the years before I was born, but in my memory - and I was an alert inquisitive child - the Holocaust was rarely even alluded to in the conversations within the family. I only came to know it in more detail as an adult (242).

This is not to discount the stories of self-hood that do express the importance of traumatic legacies, but rather to acknowledge that these stories are now more able to be heard and publicly validated. What Doris Brett's book also does is warn against the all too easy generalisation about contemporary Jewish identity. *Eating the Underworld* is a reminder that Lily Brett's personal reflections on being a child of Holocaust survivors is not atypical. There are many other stories from Jewish people that are quite different from Lily Brett's and the ones she represents in her fictional writings. Many of these stories may now need to "fight" to be given the space to be publicly acknowledged. We have witnessed a significant shift since the 1950s when "trauma" (a word that was far less common) was best "forgotten," to a situation where stories of trauma and suffering can at last be heard, validated - marketed.

However, that narratives of "second generation suffering" are marketable, should not lead to an all-too-easy scepticism. The fight for recognition of the pain and suffering the Holocaust has caused, not only to survivors, but also their children, has been a fight met with much resistance. The space the Holocaust industry now occupies, cannot discount the importance of this remembering. Every survivor's narrative that is published is an achievement and a

defence against revisionism. That Lily Brett's writing (and her self as "author") is popular and marketable, cannot be simply explained as a commodification of suffering. Brett's writing is also a resistance to "forgetting," and a sharing of trauma with/and for others. Brett's work has provided a space for further acknowledgement of the suffering borne from this most terrible crime of genocide. In the final chapter of this thesis, I continue this analysis of Jewish identity and the second generation by exploring the significance of place and the importance of "return."

CHAPTER SIX: TRAVELLING “HOME” TO A STRANGE PLACE.

Too Many Men, Lily Brett’s second novel, was published in 1999, and was awarded the 2000 Commonwealth writer’s prize (South-East Asia and South Pacific Region Best Book from the Region Award). Too Many Men is a “big book” - a 700 page epic journey of self-discovery through the Polish landscape. The protagonist, the heroine of this epic, is Ruth Rothwax, an Australian born Jew, living in New York and successful business owner of Rothwax Correspondents. Ruth’s travelling companion is her father Edek, a Polish Jewish Holocaust survivor, residing in Melbourne, Australia. Ruth and Edek are on a journey, initiated by Ruth, to revisit their family history, the places of former family life and the places of incarceration and familial destruction. While Ruth and Edek share this journey together, the journey represents quite different things for these two characters, and the meanings of the journey change as the two are flung into a contemporary Poland that has little regard for their previous suffering or for the contemporary suffering born from Poland’s particular response to the Holocaust. However, overriding all the pain and disappointment, anti-Semitism and morally corrupt Polish profiteering, is the sincere and faithful love between Edek and his daughter Ruth.

In this chapter I will trace this journey back to Poland in this novel, and draw upon it to reflect on the contemporary desire to return “home,” to actively formulate an identity through a return to a sense of place and a sense of belonging. This contemporary desire, borne partly through an acknowledgment of the displacement of people through mass migration, war and the multiple effects of globalisation, is a desire for roots, a diasporic desire not for a return to the past, but an acknowledgment of the importance of remembering the past, and understanding its contemporary effects. For the adult children of Holocaust survivors, this return to the past is especially treacherous, particularly painful, and for many, extremely important. However, given the mass destruction borne from the Holocaust, returning to one’s “roots” is often complicated by the lack of remaining information, the lack of living relatives and the continuing silence and lack of acknowledgment of countries complicit in Holocaust atrocities. I will argue, that in this novel in particular, it is obvious that this return to one’s “roots” does not give the desired sense of closure, nor reconciliation.

Indeed, returning to this “past,” a past that without survivors left is more often made through the “trace,” is a return that is made, and leaves one with, a sense of ambivalence.

The theme of the return to Poland is not unique to Too Many Men in Brett’s oeuvre. In fact as early as 1987 Brett published a collection of poetry entitled Poland, which recounts her journey back to Poland to retrace her mother’s history.¹ However, it is in her second novel that this return to Poland takes on truly epic proportions. Too Many Men also brings together common themes in Brett’s work I have already discussed in the previous chapters, namely a focus on the legacies of the Holocaust; a concern with the death camp Auschwitz; and a continuing search for identity. In this sense Too Many Men represents a culmination of the themes presented in Brett’s work thus far.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Brett’s interest in exploring the effects of the Holocaust on the adult children of survivors is pervasive in her work, and Too Many Men is no exception. Like many of Brett’s other characters, Ruth Rothwax is the daughter of two Holocaust survivors, and is conscious of the legacy this birthright brings. Again, as was discussed in the previous chapter, the legacy of suffering born by the children of survivors is often explored in Brett’s writing through the relationship between the mother and daughter. In Too Many Men Ruth’s mother is dead, and while the story centres on Ruth’s relationship with her father, the impact of her mother, Rooshka, is still significant. The trip back to Poland then, even though taken with her father, is also for Ruth a continuing relationship with her mother. If not in visiting physical sites of her mother’s former life, then in trying to understand the history that formed her mother’s anguish and her own current struggles. However, as the title of the novel suggests, there are many men (too many men) that Ruth needs to encounter in her journey across Poland.

We are told in the first few pages that it took Ruth two years to convince her father, now eighty one years old, to go on this trip to Poland with her. This trip with her father is Ruth’s third trip to Poland. Brett writes:

¹ Poland won the 1986 Mattara poetry prize.

She really didn't know why she was there. And she didn't know why she wanted her father to join her. Her first trip to Poland was just to see that her mother and father came from somewhere. To see their past as more than an abstract stretch of horror. To see the bricks and the mortar. The second time was an attempt to be less overwhelmed than she was the first time. To try and not cry all day and night. And she had cried less on that second visit. Now, she was here to stand on this piece of earth with her father (Too Many Men 6).

Standing on the "piece of earth with her father" is vital to Ruth. The need to experience a place "first hand," beyond the abstract is still desired in our virtual global societies. As Jack Kugelmass in "The Rites of the Tribe: American Jewish Tourism in Poland" writes: "An underlying dilemma of modern culture is that despite the increasing prevalence of a two-dimensional universe, made possible through the growth of the electronic media, humans remain sensual beings, and they are ill at ease with information that can be experienced only via simulacra" (400). Thus, our protagonist's need to see and feel her parents' former home, as a sensory experience.

Although our heroine does not tell us explicitly, the reader knows this trip with her father back to Poland is a search for identity, a pilgrimage back to the past to understand contemporary Jewish identity for the child of survivors. However, for Ruth's father Edek, visiting Poland is a journey to the past only, and a traumatic journey at that. It is only for the sake of his daughter that Edek agrees to this trip, but he cannot see the necessity in it: "What do you want to go to Poland for?" he had said. "There is nothing there. Everyone is dead. There is nothing to see" (Too Many Men 6). Edek's memories of his family travelled with him to Australia, which became his new home and a safe-haven for his memories.

Edek's journey from Poland after the war to Australia and back to Poland again with his child is a common journey for the Jewish victim of the Holocaust. Discussing this movement of people and memories out of Poland (and back) James Young writes:

When Jewish Holocaust survivors next remembered, it was often among themselves in their new communities abroad - and among their new compatriots. It was not among the Poles, who were left alone with their own, now uncontested memory of events. This memory was not to be challenged again until the survivors returned to

Poland years later as tourists with their children in tow (The Texture of Memory 115-116).

The character Edek Rothwax then, represents this larger movement of Jewish *return* that has unsettled Polish collective memories of World War II. However, as is always the case, collective memory, and the challenging of collective memory, is made up of a collection of individual and particular memories. Edek Rothwax's own story forms the basis for not only his own contemporary journey through Poland, but also his daughter's. The itinerary for Poland, designed by Ruth, is structured by her father's former life and incarceration in his former homeland. Poland is only experienced by Ruth through her desire to trace her family's former life, and death.

Poland and the Holocaust

Relations between the larger Polish (Catholic) population and the Jewish Poles has, historically, always been strained. Which is not to suggest that there have not been harmonious times in many areas of Poland, but rather that a "difference" between Jews and Catholics in Poland has always been produced and reproduced. While Jewish communities have existed in Poland as early as the 10th century, Jews were, and have remained, the "other" in the Polish imagination. Jews are commonly represented as "intruders" or even "guests," always distinguished from the "native" population who "legitimately" claim Poland as home. As Geoffrey Hartman explains:

We underestimate how important the feeling for place is as a physical memory. It is important for love, which often fuses person and place. But as mystique becomes politique, it can also grow into a fanatical passion: a self-sanctifying, place-bound nationalism that casts a murderous suspicion on the outsider. The Jew has been its major victim in the Diaspora. He is seen as an alien, however ancient and settled his claim (The Longest Shadow 20).

Far from healing the divisions between Poles and Jews, Antony Polonsky argues that the Nazi Holocaust, enacted largely on Polish soil, "considerably strengthened those barriers of suspicion, fear and even hatred between the two communities which had already begun to grow alarmingly in the last years before the outbreak of the war" (2). Part of this antagonism between Poles and Jews lay, James Young argues, in the competing narratives of martyrdom:

Poland's identity as a nation perpetually under siege may actually compete with the Jews' traditional sense of themselves as the primary victims of history. As self-perceived "Christ among the nations," Poland has exalted its martyrdom to an extent that rivals the place of catastrophe in Jewish memory (The Texture of Memory 115). One of the consequences stemming from these competing narratives of victimhood, is the continuing debate in Poland over who suffered more during Germany's occupation.

When the Germans invaded Poland in September 1939, they immediately rounded up Polish professionals and intelligentsia, and either imprisoned them or executed them, simply for the crime of being Polish. Young explains that the treatment of the Poles was so brutal at the war's outset, that many of the desperate members of the intelligentsia actually wore the Jewish star as a means of protection from the Nazis. In this initial period, even the "special handling" of the Jews seemed preferable to deportation and execution (Young, The Texture of Memory 114-115). Thus later, when the Jews were singled out, Young argues that: "non-Jewish Poles grasped the deportation and murder of Jews in light of their own recent suffering. In Polish eyes during and immediately after the war, before the full measure of the Jews' loss became clear, both groups seemed persecuted equally" (The Texture of Memory 115).

However, the persecution of Jews did not end in Poland with the end of the war. Survivors who returned from death camps, forests, from Russia, as well as Jewish soldiers, were most commonly met with apprehension, disdain or outright hostility, and some were even murdered by Polish people. These Jews were killed individually and in groups, in public spaces and in their homes (Cooper 188). One of these group killings of Jewish survivors, was so extreme, it became a catalyst for a mass exit of Jews out of Poland. The Kielce pogrom, resulting in over forty two Jewish deaths was a frightening act of hatred toward Jews, on the part of Polish people from all positions in society. The pogrom took place in Kielce on July the fourth 1946 - a "black day in Polish history" (Cooper 193). While a trial quickly followed the pogrom on the eleventh of July, and nine Poles were sentenced to death, it was revealed that thousands of "ordinary" Polish people were involved in this most brutal hate crime. The consequences of this event were profound and as Cooper explains: "It was the last nail in the coffin, the beginning of the end of Jewish presence in Poland." Those Jews who had been hesitating and postponing the decision to leave Poland were suddenly overcome with despair. After the pogrom: "most came to the conclusion that

Poland had become a country in which there was no future for Jews” (202). After the exodus of Jews from Poland following the pogrom there were only about 80,000 Jews left in Poland. In 1949, the Ministry of Public Administration announced that Jews who wished to settle in Israel could emigrate. Consequently, nearly 30,000 Jews left Poland, leaving behind about 45,000 (Cooper 206).

When a “vigorous anti-Jewish policy” was adopted by the Polish government in 1968, the final mass exodus of Jews from Poland occurred (Cooper 223). Cooper argues that this March 1968 was “an extraordinary event in post-war Europe.” A country in the centre of Europe applied repression against its citizens based on racial criteria and over 20,000 people - remnants of the survivors of the Holocaust in Poland - were expelled. Those people who were forced to emigrate were then deprived of their Polish citizenship, forced to leave without their assets, and forbidden to return. These post-March repressions lasted twenty years, “years of blatant violation of human rights and international conventions” (Cooper 223). Today, only five to ten thousand Jews still live in Poland, compared to a population of approximately three and a half million on the eve of destruction in 1939. Today, Poland is virtually *Juden frei*, and with this catastrophic loss of a Jewish population comes a loss, now irrecoverable, of collective memory of Polish Jewish culture.

Twenty years after the onset of these repressions in 1968, Poland’s neighbouring country and former occupier Germany, was caught up in the *Historikerstreit* (Historians debate). As discussed in Chapter Three, this debate, beginning in the newspapers Die Zeit and Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung in 1986 involved a great number of German scholars, and while the *Historikerstreit* was a fundamentally important moment in German history, its effects went far wider than Germany.

In 1987, an article entitled “The Poor Poles Look at the Ghetto” by Jan Blonski was published in the Polish Catholic weekly newspaper Tygodnik Powszechny. The title of this article was based upon a poem by the Nobel Prize winning poet Czeslaw Milosz called “A Poor Christian looks at the Ghetto.” This poem, written shortly after the destruction of the Warsaw ghetto, tells of the need for the Christian world to accept responsibility for the mass murder of the Jews. In his article, Blonski adapts this title and calls for the Polish people to accept responsibility for the suffering of the Jews in Poland, a similar call that was being made in Germany to Germans during the *Historikerstreit*. Blonski writes: “We must stop

haggling, trying to defend and justify ourselves. We must stop arguing about the things which were beyond our power to do, during the occupation and beforehand. Nor must we place blame on political, social and economic conditions. We must say first of all - Yes, we are guilty” (44). What Blonski was calling for was a “moral revolution” when considering the Polish-Jewish past. Only through this revolution can Poles, he argued, “cleanse” their “desecrated soil” (Blonski 45). Blonski’s article was the instigator for a fiery debate amongst Jews and Poles in this newspaper and its effects stretched far beyond the bounds of the print media.

In what has become quite a famous reply to Blonski’s article, Ewa Berberyusz, a Polish woman who was ten years old when World War II broke out, took up Blonski’s call and wrote: “Possibly, even if more of us had turned out to be more Christian, it would have made no difference to the statistics of the extermination, but maybe it would not have been such a lonely death?” (Berberyusz, Guilt By Neglect 70). Berberyusz ended her short response: “let us stop quibbling about extenuating circumstances, let us stop arguing, and let us bow our heads” (Berberyusz, Guilt By Neglect 71). The call then, for those who agree with Blonski and Berberyusz, is for an end to the arguing over what the Poles could or should have done differently, whether they could have done more or not, or whether they have been given due recognition for what they did do to aide or resist the genocide. The call instead, was for an acceptance of responsibility on moral grounds that would relegate these other arguments to the background.

Polish-Jewish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman also wanted to shift the terms of reference of historical debates when he explained the varying Polish responses to the Holocaust in terms of “an unresolved moral problem of suppressed guilt” (qtd. in Polonsky 3). Bauman’s argument, which was similar to Blonski’s, was for an acceptance of guilt on collective moral grounds. However, while many agreed with Blonski and others who supported his position, many took issue with his call to moral responsibility. This debate raging in the paper Tygodnik Powszechny in 1987, continues to have relevance and resonance today. And while Too Many Men tends to represent Poles in quite a limiting and negative way, it is perhaps an author’s creative response to what she perceives as a lack of moral responsibility - of the kind expressed by Blonski - by the Polish society she has experienced.²

² Lily Brett has travelled to Poland many times and writes about these experiences in her autobiographical work, including in her latest collection of autobiographical essays Between Mexico and Poland (2002).

What Lily Brett herself thinks on this subject, is less relevant to this discussion than how she constructs the moral world of her characters'. Ruth Rothwax certainly is disappointed, to say the least, by the attitude of the Polish people she encounters. While Ruth is determined to confront the past, she is confronted by Polish people who are indifferent to her family's history, and the more general history of Jewish suffering, that her family comes to represent within the text. When not indifferent to the past suffering of the Jews in Poland, Ruth finds the Polish people openly antagonistic. When not antagonistic to the history of genocide on Polish soil, the Polish people in this narrative are exploiting this history for their own profit. However, it is not just antagonism toward a history of Jewish suffering in the past that Ruth confronts, but also a contemporary disdain for Jews in the form of contemporary anti-Semitic representation.

When driving in a taxi from Warsaw to Lodz, Ruth is confronted with this contemporary anti-Semitism in the form of graffiti:

They were on the outskirts of a small town. Ruth could see the town, ahead of them. They passed a large, industrial building. On the side of the building someone had drawn a penis. A Star of David was drawn across the testicles and the initials LKS were written along the length of the penis. Ruth had seen anti-Semitic graffiti, in Poland, before. It had shocked her, each time. They had removed the Jews from Poland but anti-Semitic graffiti had stayed and thrived (128).

In his book *In The Shadow Of The Polish Eagle: The Poles, the Holocaust and Beyond* Leo Cooper explains that since the last exodus of Jews from Poland in 1967-8, "anti-Semitic slogans have been appearing in political party programmes, on walls of buildings and subways, in leaflets and brochures given away free or sold, in magazines and in speeches of a more or less public nature" (225). "Jew," in Poland today, has become a word that is often used as an insult, and when applied to a non-Jew is "intended to disqualify and humiliate" (Cooper 224). What Ruth views then, simply confirms this public expression of anti-Semitism existing in Poland that Cooper describes.

However it is not simply the evidence of anti-Semitism that upsets our heroine Ruth, but even more so, the denial of this evidence. After noticing the graffiti, Ruth points it out to her father and asks him to ask the driver what it is:

Both men looked out of the window. The driver offered Edek an explanation.

'He says it is a joke,' Edek said to Ruth.

'Does he think it's funny?' Ruth said.

'Of course not,' said Edek. The driver added something else. 'He says they didn't mean anything bad by it,' Edek said.

'LKS is the local soccer team, and they're losing,' Ruth said. 'So, the locals put Jude, Jew, or a Star of David on references to the team.'

Edek didn't say anything. 'Do you understand Dad?' she said. 'They're using the Star of David to signify the weak ones, the losers.'

'I understand,' Edek said. They drove in silence for several miles (128-129).

For Ruth, the denial of this evidence of anti-Semitism by the Polish driver fits within her larger discursive understanding of the denial of Polish anti-Semitism more broadly, both in the past and present. In the protagonist's discursive regime graffiti of this sort exists on a continuum of anti-Semitism, with genocide as the logical extreme.

However, the contemporary expressions of anti-Semitism and its subsequent denials are not limited to acts of graffiti in this novel. As the novel progresses the reader encounters many expressions of anti-Semitism, ranging from anti-Semitic iconography to blatant denial of anti-Semitic profiteering. Commenting on anti-Semitism in contemporary Poland, Cooper writes:

Today in Poland, after the expulsion of the remnants of a once vibrant community, one is faced with a phenomenon of anti-Semitism without Jews. It is a sad reflection of Polish society that in Poland, where three and a half million Jews lived before the war and where only five or ten thousand remain today, anti-Semitism still exists (224).

This "anti-Semitism without Jews" is continually encountered in Too Many Men, and forms the backdrop for relations between Ruth and Edek and the Polish people they encounter. Anti-Semitic acts in Poland today are a link to the past for the contemporary Jewish traveller. Through experiencing an anti-Semitic act in contemporary Poland, the Jewish traveller (like Ruth) is linked to the anti-Semitism of their families past - linked to the suffering of the dead.

Warsaw and the Wall of Silence

Edek and Ruth's first destination in Poland is its capital city Warsaw, a city virtually reconstituted after the war. The effects of invasion on Warsaw were substantial. As Jack Kugelmass explains, Warsaw was the capital of pre-war European Jewish culture that was, during the German occupation, emptied of its Jewish and then later its non-Jewish population, so that the "city itself had almost ceased to exist" (386). When surviving Polish Jews were repatriated from the Soviet Union and the capital was rebuilt, ethnic neighbourhoods did "not figure in the social planning of the People's Republic of Poland. Jewish Warsaw was rebuilt but as a symbol only, a monument" (Kugelmass 386).

When Ruth and Edek visit this new Warsaw, devoid of the Jewish culture Edek remembers, they visit one of its most significant monuments for Jewish travellers, the ghetto wall. The ghetto wall commemorates the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in April 1943 (and as explained in Chapter Two the anniversary of this uprising is now the date that Jews commemorate the Holocaust - Yom haShoah). Standing in front of this famous monument to the ghetto and the 1943 uprising, Ruth is overcome with emotion:

Ruth wanted to cry. She looked at the bricks. They looked like such ordinary bricks. Held together with ordinary mortar. These bricks had done a good job. Very few Jews had escaped the grip of these bricks (122).

A little further on the reader is told of Edek's reaction:

Ruth wept. 'It is just a wall,' Edek said. 'It is just a wall,' he repeated. But the expression on his face was at odds with his language and his tone. He looked as if he was crying. His face was fixed in an expression of grief. His eyes and mouth and nose were depressed and bereft. He didn't know he was crying, Ruth decided (123).

The above extracts exemplify the differences between Ruth and Edek that become even more apparent as the narrative progresses. While Ruth becomes very emotional, both angry and saddened, when the two visit Jewish monuments or places of former Jewish life, Edek's reaction is quite different. Edek's comment above "it is only a wall" dismisses the need for monuments. For Edek, remembrance occurs with his living memory of events, for Ruth there is no living memory, and thus memorialisation of a more public nature is a more significant part of her identification with Poland. The difference apparent here is repeated and extended upon as the two travellers move to Lodz, the city of Edek's family's home. On

the way to Lodz, after the encounter with anti-Semitic graffiti described previously, Edek tells Ruth of his feelings regarding their visit to the ghetto wall that morning. This exchange is another example of Edek's reticence that his daughter Ruth finds so difficult:

'Do you know what they called the path to the gas chambers? Himmel Weg. The road to heaven.'

'What made you think of that?' Ruth said.

'What, are you stupid or something?' he said. 'What else am I thinking of? You think I am not thinking about things. This morning it was a big trauma for me.'

'What was?' said Ruth.

'What do you think I am talking about?' Edek said, exasperatedly.

'The ghetto wall, of course.'

'Why didn't you tell me at the time?' Ruth said.

'Why should I tell you every little thing?' he said.

'That wasn't so little,' said Ruth. (130)

As this extract demonstrates, Edek is not unaffected by the monuments the two visit, rather he is less inclined to express his feelings in a way that invites Ruth's participation. Edek's reticence conflicts with Ruth's desire to talk and her need to understand her father's past and his feelings toward his home country. Again this is a difference that continues throughout the book in different locations around Poland. It is a difference that in many ways represents a generational difference between the survivors of the Holocaust and their children. While no overriding generalisation can be made, I would suggest that Edek's reaction to Poland is in many ways representative of a generation of Jews that after so much suffering, find talk difficult. The pain Edek experiences in remembering his past and his family is transformed into a desire to enjoy the present, with "gusto." For Ruth, representing an experience for a generation that has come after the war, the desire is to look back to try to understand her present life. The need for remembrance, in this case, is more vital for the generation that has come after, than the generation that lived through the period.

This tension between Ruth's desire to ask for information, and Edek's reluctance to talk, is exemplified in an exchange between the two when first in Warsaw. When Ruth asks her father if he has been in Warsaw before, and he replies "once or twice", she remarks that he had never told her that before. Edek replies with 'Why should I mention everything?' (112). Ruth retorts:

'I don't need to know everything,' Ruth shouted to Edek. . . . 'I just want to know a few things,' she said. 'Nothing too personal. Sometimes it seems to me that you don't want to tell me anything. It almost seems secretive, as though you don't want me to know' (112).

Ruth then muses on why this difficulty in extracting information exists:

She felt upset. Why couldn't he talk normally about a simple thing like being in Warsaw, before the war? The answer was there, in those two words, 'the war.' The war. The war changed everything. Made all simple things, complicated. Made all ordinariness extraordinary. Nothing was left that was not adulterated and tarnished (112).

The channel from the present to the past is blocked by the catastrophic effects of war. Family history is torn asunder, and some things become too difficult to remember and too painful to share. It is this difficulty in communication that is partly responsible for Ruth's desire to revisit Poland with her father - to try to fit the pieces of the family history puzzle, together.

Lodz and Loss

After leaving Warsaw, Edek and Ruth travel to Edek's home city, Lodz. On their first night in Lodz, Ruth and Edek go for a walk around the city centre. Edek is quite startled by the change apparent in the city of his youth. For Edek, Lodz could be a different city, as it does not fit his memory of the vibrant active city he remembers. The absence of Jews and Jewish culture has transformed the landscape of the Lodz of Edek's youth. Edek tells Ruth:

'Piotrkowska Street used to be full of people on Saturday night,' . . . 'People walking up and down. It was such an excitement in the feeling of the street. Young boys and girls walked together. Couples walked together. Everybody was talking. Everybody was happy. Look outside now. No one is there. There is nobody' (139).

For Ruth however, Lodz has never been anything but bleak, as Ruth contemplates as they enter Lodz: "Lodz looked as bleak and as grim as Ruth remembered it. They were in the centre of the city. In the streets people had pallid faces and blank expressions. Lodz, an industrial city built on the textile industry, was often called the Manchester of Poland. Lodz,

Ruth thought, made Manchester look like Monte Carlo" (131). Ruth's dry humour here when read against Edek's remembering above does highlight the difference, once again, between how these two characters experience a place. For Edek, returning to Poland is an exercise in remembering a past irrecoverably changed by the war - a past that was full of family and love, excitement and happiness. For Ruth however, returning to Poland for her third time is simply returning again to a place of destruction, hostility and mourning. There are no happy times for Ruth to associate with this landscape. Ruth can only listen to her father's reminiscing - a "second hand" experience tainted through the lens of destruction. In this way then it is not surprising that Edek, despite being the one who was victimised in this country, has a far more tolerant attitude toward the Polish people, his former neighbours.

However, while Edek remembers much of his home city, these memories are neither simple nor uncomplicated. When Edek and Ruth set out to find Edek's former family apartments in Lodz, Edek is sure he will remember everything - after all this was his "place" for over twenty years. However, much to Edek's frustration, street names have been changed, and without a map he is initially quite lost. Edek can no longer rely on his mental map of the city as the landscape has altered. As Edek says in exasperation: "The streets are not where they should be," (304). Edek's frustration is born from a sense of dislocation, from no longer being a part of the geography of one's youth. The dislocation Edek feels positions him as an outsider, and a tourist, not only because the familiar geography has changed with time, but also because Edek is now culturally "outside," as little remains to confirm Edek's previous life.

The sites that do remain to confirm Jewish existence in Lodz (and Poland more generally) are sites of contestation with ambiguous purposes. One of these sites that our travellers visit is the Jewish centre in Lodz, a centre dedicated to the rehabilitation of Jewish life in Poland. While the director of the Jewish Centre tells Ruth that: "It is very important that Jewish people have a home in Poland,' . . . 'We have to build up Jewish life in Poland, once more'" Ruth questions this aim: "Poland is not a conducive place for Jews. Why would you want Jews to live here? Poles don't like Jews (313). Given that the Jews that make up the Centre's current membership are too old to procreate, Ruth wonders where these Jews are supposed to come from and whether the director expects Jews to migrate to Poland. This idea of migration baffles our heroine: "Apart from the intrinsically unattractive prospect of living in Poland, a lot of Jews view Poland as one large gravesite" (313). While the Centre

director explains that they are looking for Jews already in Poland - Polish people who have discovered their Jewishness, who have been estranged, for one reason or another, from their Jewish heritage - Ruth questions whether it is worth encouraging a Jewish identity in Poland.

For Ruth, Poland will always be associated with anti-Semitism, and the idea of trying to rebuild a Jewish community makes little sense to our protagonist. However, what is interesting is the fact that our heroine has travelled to Poland three times, and that it is through these journeys back to Poland and her family's past, that Ruth attempts to understand and locate her "Jewishness." Jack Kugelmass, discussing American Jews more broadly, does not overlook this irony: "How ironic it is that Poland, relegated to the past by American Jews, has suddenly emerged as a stage upon which they act out their future" (Kugelmass 415). In many ways then, Poland and the Polish people become a stage for the contemporary search for Jewish identity, outside of this country. Unlike the effects of the Holocaust on children of survivors that I discussed in the previous chapter, these returns to Poland are an active attempt to remember and "work through" devastating family history.

While still at the Jewish Centre, Ruth continues to discuss the so-called restoration of Jewish life with the director. The director proudly tells Ruth of the money that is being donated to restore Jewish synagogues in Poland. However, Ruth is less enthusiastic and far more sceptical as to the purpose of these restorations:

The synagogues stood there. Alone and unattended except for a handful of mostly elderly people, in some of the larger cities. And a stray tourist or two. Some of the synagogues were in poor villages and towns. . . . In the middle of rural and urban poverty, the newly renovated synagogues stood out. It was a misrepresentation of a Jewish community. . . . A misrepresentation that played to the rich Jewish stereotype. . . . A community of twelve Jews shouldn't be associated with the most expensively renovated building in the village or town . . . Ruth felt it was almost like painting a target on each Jew (315-316).

While our protagonist makes it clear that she is quite openly opposed to the restoration of many of the synagogues, and her argument is convincing in terms of the potential divisive element, Ruth is interested in the remembrance of the synagogues. However, Ruth's desire

lay not in restoring to remember, but in remembering through the trace. It is the trace of the synagogues that interests Ruth, the absences that mark a former presence:

The map published by the Our Roots company that she had of Jewish Lodz before the war, was marked with synagogues. Underneath each synagogue were, in brackets, the words 'non existing.' So the places she wanted to walk by were sites. Former sites of synagogues. . . . She wanted to visit the 'non existing' synagogues . . . (321).

Discussing these sites of absence in Poland, James Young explains that approximately forty five years after the Holocaust, a new generation now knows a millennium of Jewish civilization by its absence and the sites of destruction (such as concentration camp ruins and dilapidated synagogues). As Young writes: "Of Jewish life and death in Poland, only the fragments remain" (*The Texture of Memory* 113-114).

However, the rather pragmatic Edek finds this obsession of his daughter's with things that are gone, quite baffling and confronts Ruth: "'You want to walk to something that is not there?' . . . 'Are you crazy?'" (321). A quite humorous, but telling, dialogue between these characters ensues:

'You do not go to a synagogue what it there,' he said. 'You do not go to the synagogues what are in New York, you do not go to the synagogues what are in Melbourne. Why do you go to a synagogue what is not there?'

Edek had a point, Ruth thought. She was never interested in synagogues. She avoided them. Why was she so drawn to these synagogues? To these absent synagogues.

'I don't know why I want to go, Dad,' she said. 'I just want to feel the air, there. To stand and listen.'

'To what?' Edek said.

'To nothing, to my thoughts,' Ruth said.

'You can listen to your thoughts in a synagogue in New York, or in Melbourne,' Edek said. 'Or you can listen to your thoughts in the hotel room, in Lodz' (322).

Ruth considers Edek's comments and realises that she is indeed not interested in the Jews in New York or Melbourne, but only the Jews in Poland - the dead Jews. The exchange ends with Edek's humorous brashness, but equally eloquent perception: "'You do not like so much the Jews what are alive,' Edek said" (322).

The ability to produce dialogue that is both poignant and sad as well as gently humorous, is Brett's trademark style. The serious, sad and introspective figure of Ruth is constantly contrasted to the forthright, "laid back" nature of her father. However, Edek's character is not produced in a way to undermine Ruth's moral universe, simply to contrast and question. After this dialogue with her father, Ruth continues to muse on her relationship to dead Jews:

Was there really something wrong with aligning herself with dead Jews? Ruth wondered. She felt most at home with the dead Jews. The dead Jews were her Jews. Her family. She understood their suffering. She mourned for them and their way of life (323).

Given this identification with "dead Jews" it is unsurprising that Ruth arranges a trip for her and Edek to the Jewish cemetery in Lodz. The Lodz cemetery is the biggest Jewish cemetery in Europe, and Ruth becomes excited at this stop in their itinerary. Prior to the visit, we are given some insight into Ruth's relationship to this particular site:

She felt as though she was planning a visit to the home of relatives. This cemetery was probably the closest she would get to feeling surrounded by relatives, she realised. She wished that the dead were not quite so dead. She also wished that the dead were not quite so alive to her. She thought that dead people should feel more dead (324).

Ruth's association with the cemetery is highly emotive. Brett's aesthetic of sadness discussed in Chapter Five, is again most present here. For all Ruth's faults and intolerances, it is hard for the reader not to be moved by the heroine's associations in this extract above. As in the previous chapter, it is the epistemological distinction between absence and presence that is challenged here. For Ruth the dead are too present to be thought of as "past," and this presence makes mourning all the more difficult. This present absence also heightens the sense of sadness that is carried by Ruth, and is such an essential part of her identity. Ruth's sense of "self" is tied to a sense of irrecoverable loss.

When walking around the Jewish cemetery, Ruth becomes very calm, the most calm she has felt since arriving in Poland. She is described as being "groggy with peacefulness"- a peacefulness she rarely experienced. Brett creates a very introspective heroine to allow the reader into the inner world of this character. While the omniscient narrator maintains control, an intimacy is built between the heroine and the reader that comes from reading

Ruth's own thoughts. Ruth, in her typical introspective behaviour then, questions this sensation of peacefulness:

What had pacified her? she wondered. Was it her proximity to people she had always felt close to? The proximity of the dead? They weren't her dead. She knew that. Her dead weren't buried like this. Her dead were burnt in outdoor ditches or baked, like roast meats, in ovens. But these dead, the dead in the Jewish cemetery, in Lodz, were the closest to her dead, her family, that she would ever get (341).

Again, the sadness of this passage cannot but move the reader. The calmness Ruth feels at being near the dead, not her family, but her people, is a defining moment in Ruth's search for identity. Ruth associates calmness with a sense of connection as a people, as "Jewish." This is an identification with Jewishness beyond her familial understandings, to a sense of belonging as part of a Polish Jewishness, even if only a Polish Jewishness of the past. It is in the Jews of Poland, of the past, that Ruth has found a sense of self, expressed as a sense of calm. Ruth feels safe in the cemetery because she is among her people. "There was a balance and harmony in the cemetery, that was palpable" (343).

However, at the same time as feeling a sense of identity through association with the dead Jews of Lodz, Ruth defines this identity as one opposed to the living Poles. The self, in this case the Jewish people, are defined by Ruth through her disassociation of them with the "other" Polish, the Aryan people. By creating a Jewish heroine traversing an unfamiliar Polish landscape, Brett reverses the self/other dichotomy that enabled the destruction of the Jews throughout Poland. Brett writes:

The beauty of the cemetery was amplified, Ruth thought, by the contrast with the squalor and decay of what remained of the formerly Jewish homes in Lodz. And the bigotry and ignorance and indifference of the Poles. The only passion Ruth had seen among the Polish, she thought, was a passion for hatred and a passion for alcohol (346).

It is the Jewish Poland of the past that calms Ruth, and the non-Jewish Poland of the present that causes her anxiety. Again, as discussed previously, Poland becomes the site for an identification with what has been lost, rather than what remains, in either Poland or New York or Melbourne. However, once again, while Brett presents Ruth's sense of Jewishness in this way, it is counter-balanced by Edek's most questioning pragmatism. After leaving the cemetery, there is the following exchange between Ruth and Edek:

'Tomorrow we're going to the Lodz ghetto, and then we leave for Krakow.'

'Is it necessary for you to go to the ghetto?' Edek said.

'I'd like to,' she said.

'There is nothing there,' Edek said.

'I know,' she said.

'We are visiting one nothing after the other,' Edek said (349).

The visiting of "one nothing after another" is not an itinerary that is uncommon to Jewish visitors to Poland. As Kugelmass argues, Jewish tourists go to Poland "as antiquarians rather than ethnographers" (396). The local culture of Poland is overlooked in the interest with the past, it is the "dead rather than the living" that brings Jewish tourists to Poland (Kugelmass 396). Our protagonist is part of this larger movement of Jewish tourists back to Poland. While Ruth feels compelled to return to Poland to understand/produce her sense of place, it is a return to the past, the dead, or as Edek comments a return to "nothing."

At the site of the former Lodz ghetto, where Edek and his family were incarcerated, Edek becomes upset by his fading memory: "I do not recognise anything,' Edek said. He sounded quite flat. Almost depressed" (403). Ruth ponders on Edek's sadness:

Ruth wasn't sure why the absence of anything recognisable from the Lodz ghetto was so upsetting to him. Maybe because so much of his past was impossible to locate.

Impossible to believe. Impossible to understand. Maybe with all of that uncertainty, you needed something to point at. Something more concrete than horror (403).

While Edek becomes upset when he cannot find the material evidence of his past existence, former street names, buildings and other material manifestations of the past, Ruth has more invested in the absences, in the trace. Ruth does not have to battle, as Edek does, with the changes in the Polish landscape that negate his memories. Ruth's battle is with memories of other people's lives. Ruth, the child of a survivor, mourns for a lost culture that was not her own, but her stolen heritage.

Krakow and Commercialism

When Edek and Ruth move onto Krakow, they are confronted by a city firmly entrenched in the tourist industry. For Edek, Krakow is a city without many familial associations, unlike

Lodz, and he can move around this place without the same burden of memory he feels in Lodz. Ruth, also finds Krakow a far easier city to spend time in. As Brett writes:

This medieval city was almost as beautiful as Paris, Ruth thought. Her spirits lifted. She found herself feeling happy to be in Krakow. It was easier to forget that it was Poles who inhabited Poland, in Krakow. There was a life force in the streets of Krakow, which she hadn't seen, in Poland (462).

However, while Krakow is a "beautiful" city to visit, the tourism that is a staple of this city is not without its trauma for our heroine. In Krakow, Ruth finds the profiteering from anti-Semitism at its extreme. At the market in the town square, Ruth and Edek stumble across some rather disturbing trinkets. Among a stall selling carved wooden figurines of Father Christmas's and kitsch wooden peasants in knee-length lederhosen carrying mugs of beer, are carvings of Jews. The carvings of Jews Ruth sees first, are representations of Orthodox Jews in long black coats and broad hats with the white *tfillin*, Jewish prayer shawls, draped over the front of their coats. All these carvings of Jews had long beards and long noses: "Noses, that in many cases continued down past the mouths. Enormous, hooked noses, that ended in a sharp point" (466). Ruth is shocked at this depiction:

She had never seen anything like this. Some of the carved Jews were pointing to their head. Was this supposed to signify Jews' cleverness? Or was that too kind an interpretation? Was it supposed to signify Jews' cunning? All of the ornamental Jews looked worried. All of their features sagged and bent in a downward spiral. Their beards hung below their waist. Their large eyes drooped with weighty lids. Their foreheads were furrowed. Were these Jews exhausted from counting their money? (466).

Apart from these Orthodox Jews, Ruth finds other "faux Jews" in the market place in Krakow. There are carved Jewish musicians in short black jackets and bowler hats who "looked as miserable as their orthodox brothers" (467). Our heroine wonders who would buy these carved Jews, and she questions whether they are supposed to be a souvenir of Krakow's past: "Poland had got rid of its Jews, and had now turned them into knick-knacks, Ruth thought. Bric-a-brac. Fodder for a tourist industry" (467). However, while outraged herself, when Ruth asks her father what he thinks of the carved wooden figures she discovers that he is not at all concerned by them. Ruth assumes that "next to the pogroms and beatings

and stone throwings of Polish life that Edek and his family had been accustomed to, these figurines seemed harmless” (467-468).

However “harmless” these figurines may be, compared to the violence Edek faced in the past, they are highly offensive none the less. The stereotype is one of the most common forms of racism and anti-Semitism, and it is violent at an epistemological level. These are ancient anti-Semitic stereotypes that are being adopted here by the Poles in Too Many Men, and while this is a fictional depiction, this is not a fiction in contemporary Poland. Jack Kugelmass found similar anti-Semitic representation during his travels in Warsaw:

Wares in the market square include groups of hand-carved klezmerim (Jewish folk musicians), generally arranged next to figures of other non-Jewish musicians and Christ figures. Some are representational, while others are caricatures or even abstract. In evidence also are paintings on Jewish themes such as ghetto rebbes, match sellers, and of course klezmerim; one stall carries a line of caricatures including a blatantly Shylockian moneylender counting his gold coins. These are all made by non-Jewish artists (392).

These representations of Jews are clearly not intended for the local market, as Kugelmass explains: “Although such figures . . . have their roots in peasant culture, at 5,000 zlotys . . . the equivalent of a week’s salary for the average Pole - the sculpture is clearly intended for the tourist market” (390). Brett’s representation then, builds on this actual trade in the Jewish stereotype in Poland. These kitsch depictions of the racial “other” come to represent a Jewish past in a country where few Jews are left to counter this depiction. These carvings stand in for the absent Jewish community and are another expression of “anti-Semitism without Jews” in contemporary Poland.

However, the tourist dollar is not only lured by a few wooden carvings, but also by trading in a fascination with death. After leaving the stalls with the carvings, Ruth and Edek see a billboard with the “Auschwitz museum” as a tourist destination. Ruth and Edek are both taken aback at these blatant abuses by the Poles of Jewish heritage and Jewish suffering:

“I can’t believe the Poles and the expedient way they’ve set up a little tourist industry out of dead Jews.”

“It is not so nice,” Edek said.

“They just hate Jews,” Ruth said. “It’s ingrained in them, this hatred. Nothing that they suffered at the hands of Germans changed how they felt about Jews.”

“This is the truth,” Edek said. (470-471).

As explained in Chapter Four, Auschwitz has become a major tourist draw-card in Poland, and the “Auschwitz museum” is a vital part of a tourist’s itinerary. However, how this site of mass death and genocide is remembered in Poland is still contested. This contestation of memory is significantly tied up with religious affiliations, as Young explains:

If the surrounding population is Polish and Christian, then so will be much of the memory here, whether we like it or not. Polish Catholics will remember as Polish Catholics, even when they remember Jewish victims. As Jews recall events in the figures of their tradition, so will Poles remember in the forms of their faith. The problem is not that Poles deliberately displace Jewish memory of the Holocaust with their own, but that in a country bereft of Jews, the memorials can do little but cultivate Polish memory (The Texture of Memory 116-117).

In fact, Young writes, “there is a renaissance of interest in Jewish life and death in Poland, a re-integration of Poland’s lost Jews into the Polish national heritage”. However, whether this interest is motivated by a genuine sense of bereavement, or more so by mere political and economic expediency, is as difficult to define as Jewish and Polish relations have always been (Young, The Texture of Memory 117).

For Brett’s heroine, this remembering by the Poles is clearly about economic expediency, as well as another manifestation of deep-seated anti-Semitism. Our protagonist does not consider at all, the difference in memory Young discusses above. Her attitude to the Polish people as a whole is one of antagonism and extreme distaste. Unlike her father Edek, Ruth cannot enjoy or appreciate Polish culture at all. However, this lack of enjoyment by Ruth is not idiosyncratic but symptomatic of a broader American Jewish experience.³

³ Kugelmass argues that: “Because of the intensity of prewar anti-Semitism in Poland, the extent of the destruction during the war . . . and officially sponsored “anti-Zionist” campaigns followed by mass departures of most of the remaining Polish Jews in the 1950s and again in the late 1960s, Poland is not well thought of by most American Jews. It is no wonder that the experiences the visitors remember are likely to be those that enhance an already existing negative opinion. Indeed, they are the experiences these visitors expect to have in Poland, and because they confirm deeply held convictions, they are almost a desired part of the trip” (Kugelmass 396).

The commodification of a Jewish past continues as Ruth and Edek move on to Kazimierz, the old Jewish quarter of Krakow. Brett explains that Kazimierz was first promoted as a tourist destination in the 1970s. “The Poles realised that with seven synagogues mostly intact, and former Jewish theatres and bathhouses and an ancient Jewish cemetery, Kazimierz had revenue potential” (478). Despite this potential, few people came and word of this centre did not spread outside of Poland. However, enter Steven Spielberg and “[O]vernight, everything changed” (478). Schindler's List (1993) brought an influx of tourists to Kazimierz, even though the sites the movie was based upon were elsewhere. As Brett writes: “Although most of Schindler's List took place nearby, in the Plaszow death camp, the Podgorze ghetto and Oscar Schindler's factory, the fact that Spielberg had filmed in Kazimierz was enough” (478-479). The “run-down and grubby” Kazimierz began to attract Polish entrepreneurs, who put a great amount of money into restoration. The filmic representation, in this case, becomes the site of memory, and financial profit can be made from exploiting these spaces for remembering. The significance of the site itself, its own history, becomes secondary to the representation of the site. Spielberg's influence, we are told in the narrative, has put “Kazimierz was on the map” (479).

Commenting on this kind of tourism, Kugelmass writes: “Tourism and the transformations it produces within the host society have a peculiar tendency to constitute the world tourism seeks to present. The tourist is increasingly presented with theme-park re-enactments of local cultures . . .” (401). These theme-park re-enactments become even more evident when Ruth and Edek are confronted with tour groups in Kazimierz. The tour guide of a particular group, constituted of mainly older Europeans, shows his group where the scenes were shot for Schindler's List. Nearby and listening to the guide, Ruth becomes angry at the guide's representation of what is more than a movie scene:

She wanted to point out that these episodes he was lecturing about were not scenes in a movie, they were events in people's lives (482).

The guide continues his description:

“The Jews went from Krakow to the ghetto over a bridge,” the guide said. “That bridge can be seen in a famous scene in which the Jews are marching to the ghetto” (482)

Ruth can no longer contain herself:

“They weren't marching,” Ruth called out. “They were walking. Soldiers march, not a whole community of people who were being forced out of their homes.”

Everyone in the group turned around to look at Ruth.

“Ruthie, what has got into you?” Edek said.

“Anger,” she said to Edek.

“I just wanted to make sure you realised you were talking about real people, real history, real suffering,” Ruth said to the guide. (482)

Ruth's anger at the tour guides reporting is an anger that the representation of the historical event has gained more import than the historical event itself. As discussed previously in earlier chapters, *Schindler's List* has taken on such importance it is, for many younger people especially, the only depiction of the “Holocaust” they will see. The importance of knowing that this is only a Hollywood depiction and not “the real” is paramount for Brett's heroine. However, for those exploiting history for profit, these distinctions are less important than what can become popular and draw in the tourist dollar. Tourism has become increasingly important in Poland over the last twenty years, and this tourist dollar is significantly drawn from Jewish visitors.⁴ Thus, we are faced with an ambivalent situation where Jewish history is being exploited for the tourist dollar, but often the consumer is himself/herself Jewish. Many Jewish people are participating, albeit unconsciously, in the commodification of their own people's suffering.

Ruth's anger at the tourist guide is not only an example of conflicting representations of history, but it is also a conflict over place. For Ruth, when travelling throughout Poland, places and spaces of former Jewish existence, and sites of Jewish destruction, are sacred. However, what is sacred for Ruth is often of little importance to the Polish population who are oblivious to these former histories, or have ambiguous relations to these former Jewish histories. As Leo Cooper, commenting on Krakow and the commercialisation of Jewish culture explains: “if one takes away the pecuniary interest in the promotion of Jewish culture, one is still left with the attitude of the average Pole toward Jews, which is either hostile or indifferent” (234).

Brett's heroine is clearly outraged at what she regards as the blatant commodification of

⁴ As Kugelmass explains: “In recent years Poland has made concerted efforts to woo Jewish visitors, in particular by giving special training to Orbis (the Polish national tourist agency) guides and setting up Jewish desks with special brochures at tourist offices. Efforts have been made to renovate historically significant buildings and to erect monuments and markers at various sites” (390).

Jewish culture. When presented with this commercialisation yet again, this time in the “Noah’s Ark Café,” where caricatures of Jews and Yiddish music greets the customers, Ruth ponders: “What were these Poles doing mimicking a Jewish life they had been so happy to see disappear? They were making money, that was what they were doing” (490).

However, Ruth’s father, once again, does not share his daughter’s outrage and instead is able to adopt the role of a tourist and enjoy the attractions designed for this role. In taking on this role, Edek is often (but not always) able to disassociate the depictions of Jews and Jewish culture from himself. Because of this ability to stand outside of the representation, Edek is able to enjoy the city and remain largely unoffended by the commercialisation of the Jewish stereotype. Ruth, on the other hand, cannot and will not make this disassociation and is personally offended by the Polish depiction of, and profiteering from, Jewish stereotypes. Ruth’s concern, is a most understandable concern for the sanctity of former Jewish culture and Jewish history in Poland. The sanctity of Jewish culture is clearly ignored in pursuit of the tourist dollar. However, it is not simply a matter of making money. In the pursuit of monetary gain, Jewish culture is not only commodified but also denigrated through the use of anti-Semitic stereotypes. For our heroine, a Jewish woman in search of a Polish Jewish familial identity, this is highly offensive. In the face of this anti-Semitic commodification of Jewish culture, Ruth’s own sense of self and belonging is questioned. In the face of a contemporary anti-Semitism in a country that has rid itself almost entirely of Jews, the last place Ruth feels she “belongs” is Poland. Poland here, for Ruth, is a stage, but a stage for an act of disassociation as much as association. In disassociating with contemporary Poland, Ruth reaffirms her identity as a New York Jew.

Silver and Cloth

Ruth and Edek’s visit to Poland also involves a return to Edek’s former family home in Lodz. Prior to the enforced move to the Lodz ghetto, we are told that Edek’s family was very wealthy and owned several apartments and industrial buildings. Edek’s family’s apartment is now occupied by Polish people who moved into the building when the Jews were forced out. While Ruth has visited this apartment, and its Polish inhabitants before, for Edek this is the first time he has visited his family’s home since he left for the ghetto.

On arriving outside of 23 Kamedulska street, the apartment block that was home for Edek and his family, Edek is hesitant to enter the building, saying “There is nothing more to see inside” (207). Yet eventually, with Ruth’s determination to look around, they enter. On entering the hallway of the building, Edek is surprised at how the building has changed since his family occupied it. Edek comments on the new apartment floor plan, which is now divided into six apartments, when it was previously three. Ruth’s memories are different, she remembers the building fifteen years ago, the time of her last visit. However, Ruth’s memories are not clear, despite them being more recent than her father’s memories. Ruth remembers the hallway as far less shabby than what she now sees and is surprised at her imaginative recollections:

Ruth looked at the crumbling plaster in the hallway. She had remembered this hallway as tiled. Tiled with smooth, cream tiles. Cream tiles with a patterned border. How could she have replaced the patchy plaster with Italian tiles? . . . She looked at the staircase she had held on to fifteen years ago. The staircase whose banister she had gripped to keep a grip on herself. She remembered it as marble. It was not marble. It was made of wood. A wooden staircase. It didn’t curve and sweep in a broad semicircle. The staircase had a gentle curve, and it was quite wide. But it was not ornate and it was not marble. How could she have turned the creaky timber stairs into marble steps? Sheer force of will, she thought. She must have needed them to be marble. She must have not wanted to see any decay, any disintegration. The marble must have represented the life, and the shine that must have been there, once. The life she was looking for (208).

Ruth is quite shocked at these distortions in her memory. When confronted with this run-down, lifeless building, that Ruth did not remember, she is reduced to tears. Once in his former home Edek also becomes distressed by the change in the apartment’s appearance and “feel”: ““This was not like it was when we did live here”” (215). The elderly Polish man now occupying the apartment (with his wife) offers Ruth and Edek tea, and asks them to make themselves comfortable on the couch. When Ruth moves a pile of clothes on the sofa to make space for herself and her father, Edek sees the sofa revealed under the clothes and he begins to cry. It is some time before he can calm himself to explain to his daughter that this sofa belonged to his mother. Edek and Ruth have tea with the man, then leave shortly after promising to return in the afternoon when the man’s wife will help them with their “inquiries.”

This first visit to the apartment involves multiple meaning for both Ruth and Edek. Ruth is confronted by the imaginative nature of her own remembering, and her unconscious desire to reconstruct the “shabbiness” of the past. Edek is confronted by the real material change he sees in his former home. The site was, for Edek, a site of belonging. Now the apartment is merely a shabby, down-trodden site where he becomes an intruder. However, remnants of Edek’s former life, remnants of this site’s past, remain in the form of objects such as the couch. It is the material belongings that remain that invest this site with meaning. It is also the change to the material site of the apartment that instigates a remembrance of loss for Edek. Thus, for our Holocaust survivor it is both the absence and the presence (of objects) that instigates grief.

When Edek and Ruth return to the apartment, these memories and meanings around objects continue. This time, we read of these meanings on the outside of the apartment building. Outside the building for the second time (later in the afternoon) Ruth again mourns the loss of a former life the building has come to represent:

The footpath outside twenty-three Kamedulska Street was strewn with old newspapers and other debris. This mess upset Ruth. She wanted to clean it up. She didn’t want litter around this building. She suddenly understood why people tended and cleaned graves. Why they tidied up around tombstones and monuments. But this wasn’t a grave. Twenty-three Kamedulska Street wasn’t a shrine. It was just a site of a former life. It wasn’t a mausoleum. . . .

Still, the mess disturbed her. She wanted to sweep the old leaves that had gathered against the wall. She wanted to get rid of the stubbles of straw and the cigarette butts, and the dust. . . . She wanted to get a bucket and a scrubbing brush and scrub the pavement clean. She wanted to get down on her hands and knees and clean the street, herself (252-253).

The building, for Ruth, is a metonym for the Jewish heritage that has been lost. The building stands in for all that is gone, it becomes a memorial site. In wanting to clean the building’s facade our heroine is, metaphorically speaking, wanting to clean the history of horror that infects present day Poland. In some sense she is wanting to purify a past that is tainted - Ruth wants to clean Poland. By preserving a site, sacred to Brett’s heroine because of its familial connections, Ruth is wanting to preserve a memory. Brett locates this desire

of Ruth's within a broader understanding of the relationship between Jews and Poland today. Ruth ponders:

She had seen other Jews, in Poland. Jews like herself. Looking for something that was no longer there. Looking for gravesites of mothers and fathers who were never buried. Looking for monuments and testaments to the existence of people. . . . Ruth had met Jews who had travelled to Poland to erect plaques in the birthplace of lost mothers and fathers. Plaques listing the family members who once lived there. . . . This way they had a site, a marker, a memorial. A place to visit and sit with their dead. A place to pay their respects (253).

A plaque or a memorial provides a site for memory and a site for mourning. Such material markers of the past do the memory work for us, they present a material trace of what is absent. Just as the trace of a former synagogue represents a lost thriving Jewish community, a plaque stands in for the absent family. However, marking an absence is often less about what has gone, what is being remembered, than the present desires of the living, as our heroine reflects:

Housing the dead seemed to Ruth to be an essential part of life. She wasn't sure why it was so important. The dead were absent. They were absent regardless of whether their memories were enshrined in a vault or tombstone. Or their names engraved on plaques and monuments. The dead were as absent as they could be. A dwelling place for the dead, was really an address for the living . . . (253).

However, when Ruth discusses the facade of the building with her father, the following exchange occurs, which once again exemplifies the differing perceptions of the past these two characters adopt:

“Why can't they keep this place clean?” Ruth said to Edek.

“What for?” he said. “For us? It could be the cleanest street and the cleanest building in all of Poland and it would not make any difference to us.”

“They should clean it out of a respect for the memory of those people whose lives they moved into,” Ruth said.

“It is too late for respect,” Edek said. (253-254).

Once again, for Edek, the damage has been done and no symbolic gesture can repair or reconcile the devastation of the destruction of his family.

When Edek and Ruth return to the inside of the apartment and speak to the old man's wife they are confronted with resistance and denial. When Ruth asks the woman if any objects were left behind when her father's family moved out, the woman flatly denies the existence of any sort of material remains. However, just as she is stating this, Edek sees a bowl that belonged to his mother. On the top of a set of drawers is an ornate silver serving dish. However, the woman is unrelenting with her denial, and Edek asks Ruth not to mention the bowl. The drama continues when the old woman serves Edek and Ruth tea. The teapot, the milk jug and sugar bowl, the cups and plates, even the teaspoons, Edek recognises as his mother's, and once again he and Ruth are shocked at the audacity of this old Polish couple. Ruth and Edek then leave the apartment. Walking back to their hotel, Ruth raises the idea of attaining the china and the silver bowl stating: "It would be very meaningful to me to have tea from the teapot and sugar from the sugar bowl that your mother used." Edek asks: "What sort of meaning does some pieces of china have?" To which Ruth replies: "A lot of meaning, for me" (270). For Edek however, the material traces of his former life and loved ones are largely insignificant. For his daughter, the trace is all she has of a family she never knew.

Back at the hotel, Ruth cannot get her grandmother's china and the silver bowl out of her thoughts. For our heroine, these objects become a fetish. Brett writes:

. . . she wanted the china and the silver bowl. She wanted them badly. She wanted to touch them. To hug them. To hold them to her. She knew they were only inert objects, but they had been held and touched by all the people that she would never be able to hold and touch (272).

The objects that have been touched by Ruth's grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins are the only substitutes Ruth has for the physical intimacy she was deprived. In the absence of skin, the object becomes the point of contact between Ruth and her grandparents. The fetishized china is Ruth's link to a familial Jewish identity. These objects are the material trace of a lost heritage. They become a vital part of memory and remembering, and in this sense are value-laden. As Liliane Weissberg explains, discussing objects as metonymns:

Human beings give testimony. Testimonies are also given by objects. Piles of shoes and hundreds of pictures of a prewar shtetl near Vilnius are able to speak, in their silence, more powerfully than any historic marker could. These objects were used, looked at, and touched by persons no longer alive. This is the Holocaust's residue, a

metonymic evidence for people about whom little more is known today (Memory Confined 62).

However, there is a history of denigrating the role of objects in Western thought. The Cartesian separation and elevation of the mind over matter affects our understanding of memory and memory's material trace. But, consciousness and memory are also reliant on the material forces of the world we occupy. As Peter Stallybrass explains:

It is only, I believe, in a Cartesian and post-Cartesian paradigm that the life of matter is relegated to the trash can of the "merely," the bad fetish that the adult will leave behind as a childish thing so as to pursue the life of the mind. As if consciousness and memory were about minds rather than things. As if the real could only reside in the purity of ideas rather than in the permeated impurity of the material (39).

Explaining this denigration of the material in Western thought further, Stallybrass critiques Marx's understanding of commodities and fetishism, arguing that the concept of fetishism has been inappropriately applied to commodities. While Stallybrass agrees with Marx's insistence that the commodity is "magical" in the sense that the labour process has been effaced, Stallybrass argues that Marx wrongly erases the "true magic" by which humans "inhabit and are inhabited by what they touch and love" (31). Stallybrass writes:

To put it another way, for us, to love things is something of an embarrassment. Things are, after all, mere things. And to accumulate things is not to give them life. It is because things are not fetishized that they remain lifeless (31).

This is not the case for Brett's protagonist though, as the objects belonging to her family's past are indeed fetishized, and once they are in her possession move from being mere things (to the old Polish couple) to objects of love. Ruth gives these objects life and allows them to do memory work by fetishizing them. So, despite her father's requests, Ruth returns to the old couple, accompanied by a Polish translator, and pays a great deal of money for these objects identified by her father as Ruth's grandmother's.

On this return visit, even Ruth, who already regards the couple as fickle, is surprised by the Poles' greed and deception. After buying the tea set and silver bowl, Ruth is led to the kitchen by the old man, where more possessions await her:

A pitted and dented kitchen table was covered in china. The same china as the plate Ruth had seen. Ruth could hardly breathe. . . . She looked at the plates and bowls

and cups and saucers in front of her. There were so many pieces. They were so beautiful. She thought she was going to pass out. She gripped the side of the table. The dinner plates and bread and butter plates and bowls and cups and saucers looked like family, to her. Each piece was in mint condition. The gold fluting unscratched, the china uncracked. She couldn't see one chip. How had all of this been preserved? All of these pieces from another life. She started to weep. Tears poured down her face (373).

Once Ruth has associated the objects with her family there is nothing she won't do to possess these objects, and metonymically re-possess her family identity. Knowing the importance of the fetishized objects, the Polish couple are assured of a financial reward, and a deal is done - a transaction in memory.

Just when it seems the audacity of the Polish couple has reached full capacity, and Ruth and Tadeusz are about to leave with the china, the old man calls them back and produces an overcoat for Ruth to view. The coat is described in detail:

Ruth could see that it was an expensive coat. It was dark grey. Probably made out of wool. The plush pale grey satin lining was still intact. And clean. All the seams were double-stitched. And the tailored shape of the collar and subtlety of the line of the body of the coat suggested it had been designed and made by a master tailor (377).

When Ruth asks to whom the coat belonged, the old man replies that it was her grandfather's and shows Ruth her grandfather's initials sewn into the lining of the coat's pocket and the name Rothwax embroidered on the back of the collar. Ruth thinks these "embroidered letters looked almost human, almost alive . . . So much more than a series of stitches" (378).

When Ruth asks how much the old man wants for the coat, the old man reveals that it comes with something else. He opens an envelope and spreads four photographs before Ruth on the table. Ruth looks at the four photographs, but is not sure they are her family. The old man suggests she looks at the photographs containing the children, more closely and recognises an uncanny resemblance between herself as a child and one of the young girls in the picture. Ruth pays another thousand dollars for these photographs and the coat and she leaves with her interpreter Tadeusz.

When Ruth arrives back to the hotel she shows Edek the china and coat and with much emotion he verifies it as his mother's and father's. When Ruth reveals the photographs to her father he is overcome with emotion. However, tears quickly turn to anger when Ruth tells her father how much she paid the Polish couple for these possessions. Edek is furious: "‘Those bestids,’ Edek said . . ." (396). When Ruth assures her father that she is not worried about the money, Edek replies: "‘It is not the four thousand dollars,’ . . . ‘It is the fact that you did give this four thousand two hundred and fifty dollars to those Polacks’" (396). Ruth considers her father's outrage and agrees:

It was not the amount of the expenditure that was the most bothering aspect of this, it was who the money was handed to. It was given to people who had already profited from the death of his mother and father and sister and brothers and nephews and nieces (396).

This outrage at the old Polish couple's further profit, after already profiting from the war, is a metonym for the larger profiteering in Poland from the destruction of the Jews. As discussed previously, one form of this profiteering from death is through turning sites of destruction (such as death camps) into tourist attractions. However, many Polish people, like our fictional Polish couple, did profit from the destruction of the Jews by acquiring their property (and many fear the return of their families who might try to claim this stolen heritage back).

After this time of great revelations with her father, Ruth returns to her hotel room exhausted and contemplates her new possessions:

It was going to be overwhelming to own the china. To live with it. To look at it, every day. Ruth couldn't imagine eating from the china. Using it for meals. Her instinct was to preserve it, behind glass, like some museum piece. That was absurd, she thought. She would have to force herself to use it. The cups and saucers and bowls and plates were meant to be used. They had been in constant use, until late 1939. Ruth hoped they hadn't been used since then. She couldn't bear the thought of the stained-toothed old man or his bewigged wife using that beautiful china (574-575).

The idea of the Poles using her family's china sickens Ruth, as if the china could be tarnished by the mere touch of these Poles. Again, the china like the apartment building needs to be "clean," devoid of the corruption associated with these Polish anti-Semites.

Once again, in another reversal of the self/other racial configuration, Brett constructs a world where the Jews are “clean” and the other(s) (Poles) are “dirty.”

While the china will be used by Ruth, it is her grandfather’s coat that will touch her most intimately:

She would use the coat, too, she thought. She would have it altered. She would take it to the tailor on 12th Street, between Fifth and Sixth Avenues. . . She was looking forward to wearing the coat. She thought she would look good in it (575).

It is the coat that retains the imprint of her grandfather, and will provide a barrier between Ruth and the cold world. Clothes, such as this coat in Brett’s narrative, also do memory work for us. However, the memory work of clothes is quite unique, as “clothes receive the human imprint” and therefore are powerfully associated with memory (Stallybrass 29). Or, as Stallybrass writes “. . . cloth is a kind of memory. When a person is absent or dies, cloth can absorb their absent presence” (30). In this way, cloth is not only associated with memory, or is a memory, but cloth is also relatedly a way of transferring identity:

. . . clothes have a life of their own; they both are material presences and they encode other material and immaterial presences. In the transfer of clothes, identities are transferred from a mother to a daughter, from an aristocrat to an actor, from a master to an apprentice (Stallybrass 38).

Or in this particular case, in Too Many Men, the Jewish identity of the grandfather is transferred through the coat to the granddaughter, Ruth. In wearing the coat Ruth will wear, on her skin, the trace of the absent family. As Stallybrass writes: “A network of cloth can trace the connections of love across the boundaries of absence, of death, because cloth is able to carry the absent body, memory, genealogy, as well as literal material value” (36-37). Ruth’s search for her familial identity becomes invested in these objects that have been touched and worn by her family. It is the coat, the silver bowl, the china and the photographs that Ruth can transfer back to New York. The absent family from Poland can now live with Ruth through the objects that will preserve their memory.

However, there is one object still left to recover in this epic narrative. The relationship with the Polish couple culminates with a dramatic return to Lodz, after Krakow. This final encounter sees Edek and Ruth assembling a ‘swat team’ (Tadeusz the interpreter, the doorman as guard, and the taxi-driver) to return to the building and dig for a hidden item in the backyard. In the dramatic unfolding drama of the dig, Edek eventually finds what he has

been looking for, and hiding from his daughter, since he left Europe for Australia after the war. While the Polish couple believe the buried treasure is gold, it is actually revealed to be a tin container containing a photo of Ruth's mother's first baby, which Rooshka and Edek adopted out to an Aryan couple before immigrating to Australia. The complete and traumatic story is told to Ruth by her father, and the book ends with the possibility of Ruth finding her long lost brother (whom we are led to believe may now be a German man and the husband of a woman Ruth befriends at the hotel in Krakow). The book ends then, with a vow that Ruth will never return to Poland, and a possibility for a new beginning in the search for the adopted brother in Germany. Once again, it is the trace, the photograph, that not only stands in for a past, but in this case, a promise for a future encounter.

Conversing with Dead Nazis

The other significant sub-plot that constitutes the structure of Too Many Men is the relationship between Ruth and Rudolf Hoss. Brett's fictional Hoss is based on the historical Hoss, SS-Hauptsturmführer of Auschwitz. While the narrative Hoss is clearly dead, he manages to communicate with Ruth on her journey through Poland. When Ruth first starts hearing an invisible man's voice, very early on in the narrative (page eleven), she puts it down to jet lag and imagination. It is not until the fourth encounter, when Ruth is jogging around Warsaw early one morning that the voice reveals itself to Ruth as Rudolf Hoss. During this encounter between Ruth and Hoss the reader is informed that Hoss is in "Zweites Himmel's Lager" - "the second camp of heaven" (85). This sub-branch of heaven, is just another expression for what is actually hell, as Hoss explains to Ruth:

"I know also it is not Zweites Himmel's Lager. It is not heaven. They refuse to call it what it is. Who do they think they fool? Most of us, up here, know that it is hell. Do not look so surprised. Hell is up here" . . . (85)

Hoss then tells Ruth of his current condition in this camp that is hell: "I am not who I used to be, however. I have arthritis in my right shoulder, something is wrong with my leg, my stomach gives me trouble and my bones hurt" (85). This encounter, and Hoss' complaints, borders on farce. The dialogue is extraordinarily ordinary given the context of an exchange between a living person and a "ghost." The dialogue, which continues in this intimate way is also darkly humorous given it is between a Jewish child of survivors and a dead Nazi. It is the "ordinariness" of the exchanges that counters the extraordinary context of the

discoursing with a dead person. Ruth and Hoss discuss a number of topics in this fourth encounter, ranging from Jewish humour, to Hoss' sensitivity-training class in Zweites Himmel's Lager (that he has not been able to pass in over fifty one years!).

The continuing dialogue throughout the narrative between Ruth and Hoss, while providing the reader with a great deal of historical information (as is Brett's novelistic style) also provides some comic relief from the content of this information. That there is able to be humour in these exchanges between Hoss and Ruth (albeit very dark humour) contrasts with the general humourless exchanges Ruth has with Polish people. While Hoss is represented as both comically pathetic and frighteningly ordinary, he is not presented as grotesque as are many of the Polish characters.

When Ruth asks Hoss why she can hear him, he replies: "Some people are more sensitive to what is around them than others," (87). Hoss explains further that: "Being able to hear people who have departed is just an ordinary aspect of sensitivity. There is nothing out of the ordinary about this ability. It is a sensitivity" (87). That Ruth is sensitive, and thus able to hear the dead, still does not explain Hoss' presence. When explaining to Ruth why he has bothered to communicate with her, Hoss says:

"I think you can be truthful with me," Hoss said. "You want to know about me. I can see it on your face. I had my reasons for choosing you. Even though I am restless, with not too much to do, in Zweites Himmel's Lager, I would not waste my time with just anybody. I chose you because I knew that you wanted to know" (91).

During a later encounter, when Hoss and Ruth discuss Himmler, Hoss tells Ruth that it is her "destiny" to be interested in the Nazis and in Hoss himself. When Ruth questions this so-called "fate", Hoss tells Ruth: "You and I have a connection and we cannot escape that,"(145). When Ruth then asks if this means Hoss is going to follow her around Poland, Hoss tells her that he does not need to follow as he is a "part of" her. Ruth is outraged at this suggestion:

"Don't give me that crap," Ruth said. "You are not part of me or part of anyone who has anything to do with me. You're not part of any Jew. Alive or dead. Which parts of you went up in smoke? It wasn't your soul. That had already disintegrated. It wasn't your heart, your heart wasn't there." She stopped for a moment. . . . "You are

not a part of me,” she shouted. “You are apart. Do you understand that? Apart” . . .
(156)

The implication however is that Hoss is indeed a part of Ruth, and metaphorically, German history and the history of Jewish suffering is inextricably connected, as are the identities of second generation (and third) Jewish “survivors” and German people more broadly.

During another encounter, when Ruth and Hoss are discussing Zweites Himmel’s Lager, Ruth asks about the other inhabitants of hell:

“There are demons and fiends and dybbuks everywhere, are there?” she said.

“Dybbuks?” said Hoss. “What is a dybbuk?”

“I’m surprised that you don’t know what a dybbuk is,” said Ruth. “After so much contact with Jews you would think you would know a few things about Jewish life. A dybbuk is the soul of a dead person that enters and takes control of a living person.”

“I did not know this,” said Hoss.

“There are probably dybbuks in the middle of the cutthroats and thugs and roughnecks in Zweites Himmel’s Lager,” Ruth said. A disturbing thought occurred to her. Did she have a dybbuk in her? Did she have Hoss’s soul living inside her? She shook her head. She was being stupid. She didn’t believe in dybbuks (235).

Whether Hoss is in fact a dybbuk, a demon, a ghost or a bad dream, is left to the reader to contemplate. Hoss is however, in contact with Ruth throughout her journey, talking with her about the Holocaust, and his part in it. He is a presence that is ‘felt’ and ‘smelt’ - he is something in the air. Much like the dead relatives and Nazis discussed in the previous chapter, Hoss occupies breathing space. It is not until the plane flight from Krakow (after visiting Auschwitz) to Lodz, that Hoss’ real purpose in communicating with Ruth is finally revealed. The final exchange between Ruth and Hoss ends dramatically:

“You are approaching your death again, aren’t you?” she said to Hoss suddenly. He didn’t reply. “You have to live through it all again, don’t you?” Ruth said. “They’re trying to make you get it right, aren’t they?” she said.

“Who?” Hoss said.

“I don’t know,” she said. “But I’m right, aren’t I? They’re going to make you relive every unpleasant moment, every unsavoury aspect of your existence, every ill, until you get it right?”

...

"I thought you could help me to avoid this," Hoss said, in a strained voice.

"Me?" she said.

"Yes," he said. "I thought you would be my salvation."

"Me, your salvation?" Ruth said. She was stunned. . . . There was a brisk sound. A snap. Ruth had thought that it would be a louder sound. The sound of a man being hanged.

...

She heard a thud. A loud thud. She knew that Hoss was gone (652-654).

Ruth is not to be Hoss' salvation after all, and Hoss must experience the agony of his death once again. Brett uses this narrative device to suggest that for the perpetrators of the Holocaust there can be no forgiveness. For the children of survivors, like our fictional heroine, these dead Nazis are still present and their relationship with them is something that needs to be reckoned with, yet is also amorphous.

Just prior to this dramatic re-death, a repeat hanging of Hoss that originally took place in Auschwitz after the war, Hoss and Ruth discuss Germany and the Jewish Holocaust:

"I see, also, now, from a perspective of time," Hoss said, "that the extermination of Jews was fundamentally wrong."

"Really?" said Ruth, sitting up.

"Of course," said Hoss. "Precisely because of these mass exterminations, Germany drew upon herself the ire and anger of the whole world." Ruth slumped back into her seat. "There was a hatred of Germany for many years," Hoss said. "It took quite a few years for the hostility towards Germany to evaporate."

"Do you think it has completely disappeared?" Ruth said.

"Of course," Hoss said. "Don't you?"

"Yes," she said (652).

Thus, the relationship between Ruth and Hoss in this narrative, reflecting the relationship between Jews and Germans more broadly, suggests that the histories must be considered as intimately interlinked.⁵ Hoss is cast as both an historical figure in his own right, as well as a representative of the Nazi past. Ruth's communication with Hoss provides an outlet for her

⁵ Indeed, in a recent interview Lily Brett discusses this relationship and says: "the children of the perpetrators and the children of the victims have suffered in remarkably parallel ways, we have an enormous bond." See Monica Attard's interview with Lily Brett on ABC Radio National's "Sunday Profile" (9 June 2002).

own angst, and finally, a type of retribution and resolution. This resolution with Hoss, is a resolution between Ruth, the second generation Jewish survivor, and Germany.⁶ Ruth is much closer to Hoss than to contemporary Polish people, and she is more able to have meaningful dialogue with a dead Nazi than with a Polish population that is still, in the main, uneasy about admitting their role in the Holocaust. As Stanislaw Krajewski states, in a conversation with Ewa Berberyusz:

The situation is much simpler with the Germans. They are responsible for the Holocaust and they do not deny it. Both parties have by now reached the stage of being able to talk about it directly. This point has not, however, been reached between Poles and Jews, even though Poles were not guilty of the genocide of Jews (qtd. in Berberyusz, *The Black Hole* 102).⁷

While Hoss is killed off again, his re-death signifies a new beginning for Ruth, one where it seems Germany will play an increasing role. Ruth must first partake in dialogue with a dead Nazi, find a certain amount of resolve (his re-death) before she can lunge into a contemporary Germany that may be home to her brother. The book ends with a suggestive beginning, and it is not Poland, but Germany where this new chapter will take place. Poland, for Ruth, is no longer a desirable (albeit ambivalent) place. Ruth has stood “on the piece of earth” with her father, and now has no need to return. The quest for identity, that has taken place in Poland, now moves beyond. It is a symbolic move, from a country unable to enter a dialogue with the second generation of Jews.

However, one cannot but have a sense of unease in the representation of Polish characters in this book. It is the Poles in the book, particularly the old Polish couple residing at Edek’s former home, that represent the abject. The Poles are presented as grotesque, sly, greedy, anti-Semitic, lecherous and violent. The Jewish past, prior to 1939, is presented, through Ruth’s family, as quite the opposite - idealic, civilised, beautiful. The abject body of the Jew in the Holocaust is now replaced in this book with the contemporary abject body of the “cunning”, “dirty” Pole. This reversal of racial stereotyping acts as a representational punishment for the Polish people unable, or unwilling, to “face up” to the genocide that

⁶ In the same interview with Monica Attard, Brett says that she finds the actions of the German government, in trying to educate its population about the past, “admirable.”

⁷ Similarly, Leo Cooper writes: “In Germany and France, for example, there has been much soul-searching about this matter over the years. Poland is the only country which refuses to come to terms with its past” (xiii).

dirtied their soil. Stanislaw Salmonowicz commenting on negative Polish stereotyping in America in particular, writes:

It is beyond doubt, for instance, that the first generation of Polish migrants to the United States, coming mainly from rural, backward places, supplied ample evidence to support the one-sided and on the whole negative image of Poland, as perceived, largely to this day, by general American 'public opinion'. This is not an image of an elegant spendthrift nobleman, or a gallant light-cavalryman, heroic yet reckless, but on the contrary - an uneducated, greedy simpleton, a brute if not a gangster - a drunkard and an anti-Semite. Stereotypes therefore do exist and getting away from them is particularly difficult (57).

This American stereotype of the "dirty" and "simple" Pole is indeed represented in Too Many Men. For example, when Ruth tells her friend Aaron, a Jewish American lawyer, that she is going to Poland, he replies: "They're a suspicious and sour people, and they seem to have a monopoly on stained, brown teeth," (Too Many Men 11). Not only are the old couple who live in Edek's family's former apartment represented as this negative stereotype, but so is the hotel doorman in Lodz, the driver, and many of the other minor characters that fill this book. The only real exception is Tadeusz, the translator and university student, who is much younger than these other Polish characters. Given his age, Tadeusz may represent the possibility of a new generation of Poles who are university educated, open-minded and not anti-Semitic. However overall, the representation of the Polish people is negative. So, while anti-Semitism is challenged in this novel by Brett, one does have to question whether the text perpetuates long standing negative stereotypes of the Polish people. And in this way, the difficult and often contradictory relationship between the Poles and Jews in history, is further perpetuated throughout this text.

Brett's heroine leaves Poland, for the third time, vowing never to return. As previously mentioned, her future now lies in Germany and New York - New York her "home" that she needed to leave in order to re-affirm it as her "home," and Germany as the place she will search for missing family to try to resolve this new chapter of her life. Poland is left behind, Ruth's journey with her father has been achieved, secrets have been revealed and family objects have been restored to the rightful heir. Ruth leaves with these objects which relieve the need for Poland - the objects now do the memory work that a country can not. The conflict between the Poles and Jews established in this novel remains unresolved by the end

of the narrative, as unresolved as this history still is in Poland today. Poland, for our heroine, and many other children of Polish survivors, has been and continues to be, a stage to act out a contemporary form of Jewish identity intimately linked to the Holocaust. For Ruth, however, the play is over, the stage is empty, the curtain is closed.

Outside of this fictional world the act continues and Jewish people keep returning to Poland. How this will affect a collective memory of the Holocaust in Poland is still yet to be seen. But what we do know is that the relationship with Poland for many Jewish people who have never lived in this country will continue. While the survivors may have left Poland behind, or at least relegated it to a private memory, for many of their adult children, and many of these are Australian, there is still a desire for public memorialisation and mourning in Poland today.

Lily Brett has travelled to Poland a number of times, including a trip back to Poland after the publication of Too Many Men. In her latest collection of autobiographical essays Between Mexico and Poland, Brett tells of the sensation of travelling in Ruth's footsteps and reveals her own continuing ambivalence toward Poland. Brett's own journey, and the journeys back to Poland in her narratives (beginning as early as Poland and other poems in 1987) are not unique but rather symptomatic, as I explained previously, of a larger journey of *return*. However, a return to Poland for the children of survivors does not assure a sense of completion nor a reconciling – Brett's writing attests to this. Instead, the return continues to create a sense of ambivalence and a further acknowledgement of loss and dislocation. Given the enormity of Lily Brett's own family's loss, which she writes about in her autobiographical essays and represents in her highly autobiographical fiction, to expect a resolution through returning to Poland is to undervalue the enormity of this dislocation. However, while no resolution can be easily attained, Poland still continues to be a site for "working through" these very personal, and political, memories, and thus continues to be a site for negotiating contemporary Jewish identities linked to the Holocaust.

CONCLUSION: BETWEEN NEW YORK AND GERMANY

I started this exploration of Jewish identity, the Holocaust and Lily Brett in Australia and have ended in Poland. And so this is how identity works, it is always a return. Any diasporic identity will always be invested, even if in a minor way, in a place before. Contemporary Jewish identities, such as portrayed in Brett's writing, are intimately bound to the Holocaust, and will return to a pre-Holocaust in Europe, as well as to the Holocaust itself for identification. Returning is the constant theme in Brett's writing. To go forward demands a return to the "before," but a "before" that still continues to make itself present. In Brett's writing the past (of the Holocaust) is still in the present (of its continual suffering).

The past (history) is alive as memory, and memory belongs not only to the one who was at the historical event, but to those who remember through a re-telling of the event. The Holocaust is present as a memory for the "second generation" (and the third and fourth) as long as people continue to be witness to the event. This witnessing can take many forms beyond a Judaic religious practice, including reading stories about the Holocaust, listening to the experiences of survivors and their children, writing about the Holocaust, traversing our own path to remembrance through the multiple forms of representation. Witnessing and remembering is also intricately tied to identity, as I have shown in this thesis. For many children of survivors (but not all) remembering the Holocaust is part of what defines them as Jewish today. Lily Brett's writing is an expression of this identity, and has also helped to shape this identity for many. Brett's writing is both a product of a particular movement of Holocaust remembrance and is a producer of this movement toward remembering and witnessing.

As I have shown in this thesis memory and memorialising takes many forms. We remember through objects such as public monuments and museums, but also through more intimate objects such as a photograph, a coat, a piece of china. Sites of memory can include burial grounds,

cemeteries, former concentration camps, as well as an abandoned building or a vacant block. While the building of a monument to the Holocaust is one way of remembering a devastating past, when memories are too painful they often surface as anxiety. Thus, as I demonstrated in Chapter Five, memories are also written on the body and expressed through the body, of both survivors and their children. Alongside a public memorial stands a personal trauma and a painful legacy.

Within this thesis I also discussed the importance of recognising the historical and political context of memory. That certain memories can be given public validation at certain times, in certain places, and not in others, reminds us of the importance of always exploring the historical factors that produce available discourses in which to express our “selves.” Conversely, the prevailing discourses shape how we remember, how we tell our history, and indeed the concept of “history” itself. Thinking through the forces that have made a market possible for Brett’s work, led me to an exploration of the rise of Holocaust consciousness in the “West,” and in Australia in particular. A ready market for Brett’s contemporary work has been the outcome of the many historical and political forces I discussed in Chapters Two and Three. At the same time, Brett’s writing also makes a space for further representation of the Holocaust, especially by and about “second generation survivors” (a term that would also hardly have been possible before the 1970s).

As is always the case in an act of remembering, some events, ideas, concepts and actors are given legitimacy, and other events, people, and ways of knowing are relegated to the periphery or silenced. What is publicly remembered about the Holocaust today in Australia, is influenced enormously by the “Americanisation of the Holocaust.” As I explored in Chapter Three, the centre of Holocaust remembrance has shifted from Israel to America, albeit an event that took place on European soil. However, it would be a mistake to only acknowledge America as influencing Holocaust consciousness in Australia today. This is why in Chapter Two and Three

in particular, I focused on important events in both Israel and Germany that have affected remembrance in Australia. However, Australia is not simply the receiver of Holocaust representation, a filter through which other countries' concerns are adopted. As I have demonstrated, events in Australia have also effected how the Holocaust is understood and remembered elsewhere. The movement is two-way, but never simple, nor without transformation. An event of such proportion as the Holocaust, which now has a multi-billion dollar industry in its remembrance, must always be considered in its context as both global and local, at the same time.

While leaving Australia to settle in New York over fifteen years ago, Lily Brett still continues to represent an Australian-Jewish experience in her writing. While she now writes from New York, it was in Australia that the foundations of Lily Brett's writing career were established. However, she has always, as a writer, represented a diasporic identity. Born in a Displaced Persons camp in Germany to Polish parents, Brett lived her childhood and her early adult life in Australia and also raised her children here, before moving to New York. However, whether residing in Australia or New York, Lily Brett has always looked over her shoulder toward Poland. Her identity as a Jewish woman has always been tied to Poland, and Poland has always haunted her writing career. At the same time, this association with Poland has also formed her writing career, it is rarely absent from anything she writes. If not on the page, Poland lurks behind every page. In her latest collection of autobiographical essay Between Mexico and Poland (2002) Lily Brett writes:

The hold Poland has on me is strong. It feels like a magnetic force. I can be in New York or Berlin or Sydney. I can be totally immersed in what I'm doing. And then suddenly I can feel the pull of Poland. . . . Warsaw and Lodz and Auschwitz and Birkenau are so palpable, so potent a presence for me. I feel as though I'm physically there when I'm only thinking about them (86).

Again, as I have explained throughout this thesis, Brett's writing disturbs modernist divisions of absence and presence in time and space.

In this collection Between Mexico and Poland (2002), published too late to be discussed in any depth in this thesis, Brett writes that she finally feels comfortable with calling herself a "New Yorker." In an essay titled "The Attack," Brett writes of the September 11 devastation as a person who calls New York home. September 11 for Brett, also reminds her of other times, and other places, and again reminds her of the danger of being Jewish, even in New York. This essay on September 11th in Brett's latest book, needs further explanation, but it is another project, one that lies beyond this thesis.

The last essay in this collection, unsurprisingly is called "Poland." This essay by Brett describes a trip back to Poland, with her husband, after the publication of Too Many Men. We again witness Brett travelling through her familiar terrain in Poland, travelling this time in the footsteps of her protagonist Ruth. The "author" follows in the footsteps of her own creation. An interesting concept, but not one that is surprising to the dedicated Lily Brett reader who knows Brett's work as highly autobiographical. The continuing relationship with Poland in Brett's writing is a continuing response to witness - a responsibility to the dead, that are always present. Thus, the themes I have discussed in Brett's work in this thesis continue in her latest book. In this final essay, Brett tells her reader:

I knew, from the time I was a child, that it was possible to inhabit a world that was not your world, but was part of you. I knew that it was possible to be inextricably linked to a world that existed before you were born. . . .

When you are, as I am, one of the first batch of children born to survivors of Nazi death camps, you are born attached to the dead. You are born beside them, as surely and as concretely as if you had been delivered into their arms. You can feel them. You can touch them. You are part of them (Between Mexico 409).

This understanding of the past in the present is Brett's gift to her reader, but it is a gift that comes with a responsibility to acknowledge the continuing trauma of the Holocaust. In this acknowledgement we too bear witness.

Brett has a global readership and her writing is as relevant today in Australia as in America, Germany or Austria. Brett's appeal is international, as her focus is international. Brett writes of the experiences of the diaspora, for the diaspora. To claim Brett as uniquely Australian has never been, and never could be, a serious critical objective of mine. That Brett did spend most of her life in Australia, began her writing in Australia, and continues to be tied to Australia in multiple ways, does not discount her new allegiance to New York, and her continuing traumatic relationship to Poland. Then there is the new found identification with Germany that Brett alludes to in both Too Many Men and Between Mexico and Poland. It is this emerging relationship with Germany, I believe, we will read more of in Brett's future writing. Perhaps the way ahead then, the next chapter of this story, is the impact Brett's writing is now having on a new generation in Germany. How have the stories of an adult child of Holocaust survivors living in New York become so popular in Germany? What does Brett offer a new generation of German people committed to "working through" and "facing up" to their past? How are German people today witnessing the Holocaust through Brett's writing?

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