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SURVIVOR'S GUILT AND THE ETHICS OF REMEMBERING IN ISAAC
BASHEVIS SINGER'S *THE SLAVE* AND CYNTHIA OZICK'S "THE SHAWL"

By

Ryne Menhennick

THESIS

Submitted to
Northern Michigan University
In partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS IN ENGLISH LITERATURE

Office of Graduate Education and Research

April 2020

SIGNATURE APPROVAL FORM

Survivor's Guilt and the Ethics of Remembering in Isaac
Bashevis Singer's *The Slave* and Cynthia Ozick's "The Shawl"

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ABSTRACT

SURVIVOR'S GUILT AND THE ETHICS OF REMEMBERING IN ISAAC BASHEVIS SINGER'S *THE SLAVE* AND CYNTHIA OZICK'S "THE SHAWL"

By

Ryne Menhennick

The focus of this thesis is an analysis of post-Holocaust Jewish-American literature with a specific emphasis on texts set in Europe. In particular, I examine how Jewish-American authors who lived in the United States during the Holocaust address issues of trauma and survivor's guilt through fiction. Informed especially by Theodor Adorno and Elie Wiesel, I examine the ethics of fictionalizing the Holocaust. Furthermore, this thesis considers both trauma theory and the psychology of grief to investigate the ways in which the Jewish-American community at large responded to the cultural destruction perpetrated by the Nazis during the Holocaust. Chapter One analyzes the use of allegory in Isaac Bashevis Singer's *The Slave*, a novel set in seventeenth-century Poland. In writing *The Slave*, Bashevis Singer approaches issues of guilt and the destruction of cultural and religious spaces, as well as the loss of community, in such a way as to give specific voice to the Jewish American community. In Chapter Two, I focus on Cynthia Ozick's short story "The Shawl," which is a brief but powerful fictional Holocaust narrative. Ozick's text examines the ways in which the Holocaust destroys the bonds of family and community, and it grapples with the question of responsibility and blame felt by those who were not directly affected by the Holocaust itself.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project would not have been possible without the support of many people. I would like to thank my thesis director, Dr. Caroline Krzakowski, for all of her direction and patience. I would also like to thank my reader, Dr. Lesley Larkin, and the many professors at Northern Michigan University who have challenged and encouraged me during my time in the English Department. Additionally, I extend my thanks to the Excellence in Education Committee for helping to fund my travel to Central Europe to further my research on this topic. Finally, this would not have been possible without the early encouragement of two important English instructors: Dr. Ralph Williams at the University of Michigan and Connie Heinlein, formerly of Negaunee High School.

This thesis follows the format prescribed by the MLA Citation Style and the Department of English.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION:	1
CHAPTER 1:	14
CHAPTER 2:	39
CONCLUSION.....	59
WORKS CITED	62

INTRODUCTION:

Survivor's Guilt and the Ethics of Remembering in Isaac Bashevis Singer's *The Slave*
and Cynthia Ozick's "The Shawl"

"Yet, he did beg Miriam not to heap so many horrors on him at once.

There was a limit to what the human mind could accept. It was beyond the
power of any man to contemplate all these atrocities and mourn them
adequately." *The Slave*, Isaac Bashevis Singer, 106

Much of twentieth century Jewish-American literature is characterized by place-making, or the effort to establish a sort of homeland for Jewish Americans in the United States. This trend can be clearly identified in the work of the many of the century's foremost Jewish authors and the cities central to their stories: Philip Roth's Newark, Saul Bellow's Chicago, and Chaim Potok's New York, for instance. Such a movement is not especially surprising, considering that the largest wave of Jewish immigrants to the United States arrived in the early 1900s and tended to settle in predominantly Jewish neighborhoods in large urban areas. It was often the case that these immigrants came from entirely different countries (Russia, Poland, Germany, etc.), spoke different languages, and brought entirely different cultural and social practices; yet they were united by their religion. At a time when religion played an even greater role in public life than it does today, Jewish communities were often isolated and tight-knit in the overwhelmingly Christian United States, much as they often were in overwhelmingly

Christian nations in Europe. Due in part to this social and cultural isolation, the effort to create a common cultural identity in the United States was a matter of great importance for many Jewish authors. In many ways, the Holocaust accelerated this effort because it destroyed many of the connections that individual Jewish families had with their nations of origin—entire Jewish villages and towns were destroyed, and the Jewish presence was essentially eliminated in many parts of Europe. Furthermore, the memory of a European place of origin came to be closely associated with trauma and grief for many American Jews. It is no surprise, then, that comparatively little twentieth century Jewish-American literature exists that is situated in Europe.

Although Jewish-American authors like Roth, Bellow, and Potok seek at times to understand and address the trauma of the Holocaust in their own way, their work tends to deliberately emphasize the cultural importance of American places as separate from (and often “safe” from) the events of the Holocaust. There exists a large body of scholarly work that analyzes the ways in which Jewish-American authors have addressed the Holocaust in their writingⁱ, but my investigation is not largely concerned with this American approach to the Holocaust. Rather, this thesis is focused specifically on the much smaller body of writing from this period that represents a literary return to Europe as a means of addressing the trauma of the Holocaust. Undoubtedly due in part to the relative paucity of Jewish-American texts that center on European stories, there exists very little scholarly or critical work on this subjectⁱⁱ. This investigation analyzes two major texts: first, Isaac Bashevis Singer’s 1962 novel *The Slave*, which tells of a Polish-Jewish slave’s return to his hometown following a brutal massacre that leaves his family dead and much of his community destroyed; and second, Cynthia Ozick’s 1980 short

story “The Shawl,” which details the experience of three Jewish women in a Nazi death camp. Although both stories are concerned with Jewish-Americans’ relationship to the Holocaust, the two texts are in fact quite different. Bashevis Singer heavily employs allegory to explore themes of survivor’s guilt and the importance of place and location, while Ozick employs direct, sensory-based descriptions of the Holocaust in the most realistic terms. The two texts function as opposite sides of the same coin, both grappling with similar themes but approaching them from entirely opposite directions. At the heart of both texts are questions of the ethics of portraying the Holocaust, the difficult position of Jewish-Americans who evaded victimhood by virtue of their geographic location, and the lingering effects of survivor’s guilt on an entire population of people.

At the core of this analysis is how authors use allegory to depict the Holocaust. According to its most basic definition, allegory refers to “A story, poem, or picture which can be interpreted to reveal a hidden meaning” (OED). Historically, allegory is most closely associated with literature of the Medieval and Renaissance Periods, where it was often used to represent religious or moral themesⁱⁱⁱ. Jeremy Tambling writes

‘Allegory’ derives from the Greek word *allegoreo*, formed from *allos* (other), *agoreuo* (to speak in the place of assembly, the *agora*, the marketplace). The ‘other meaning’ of allegory may conceal a secret significance, in that it may persuade readers to probe for another meaning, it may enrich the meaning that has been given, or it may draw attention to a split between the surface meaning and what is underneath (Tambling, 6).

In the case of Isaac Bashevis Singer’s *The Slave*, there is little effort to conceal a secret significance, for although the allusions to the Holocaust are not directly stated, they are

quite clear from the very beginning. Instead, Bashevis Singer relies on allegory to both prompt the reader to consider the alternative meaning *and to avoid naming that meaning*. Perhaps, in light of this specific employment of literary allegory, Tambling's definition should be expanded to include an additional definition: "an allegory may intentionally conceal meaning to allow the author to address it indirectly." Although this may seem an unusual technique, a close analysis of the ethical and emotional considerations inherent to any literary discussion about the Holocaust demonstrates that such an addendum is quite important to understanding the purpose for Bashevis Singer's careful but determined use of allegory in *The Slave*.

Bashevis Singer's usage of extended allegory in his 1962 novel followed a period of changing critical views on the appropriateness of allegories in serious literature. Displaced by the literary realism of the nineteenth century, the use of allegory in fiction had long been derided as unsophisticated and passé, as Tambling describes in his book *Allegory: The New Critical Idiom*^{iv}. Tambling writes, "the old prejudice against allegory was both that it insisted on putting one thing in place of another, saying that A meant B, and that this connection was rigidly, rather abstractly, coded" (Tambling, 1). While allegorical stories were often disregarded in the realist period, the use of allegory was "reclaimed" by elements of literary modernism and postmodernism, both of which incorporated metaphorical and metaphysical representations of reality through fiction. These twentieth century movements were characterized by the use of modes such as intertextuality, narrative distortion, and nonlinear or fragmented plots. This period is also associated with a revival of allegorical storytelling (although perhaps in ways less direct than those techniques employed during the Medieval and Renaissance Periods), and

Tambling writes that “allegory has been reclaimed as a term within recent debates in literary and cultural studies. The assumption that it is an artificial device no longer seems so problematic. . .” (2). The use of allegory was therefore reasonably well established in popular literature by the mid- to late-twentieth century, when both Bashevis Singer and Ozick were publishing.

Both Bashevis Singer and Ozick wrote and were influenced by (and influenced) the postmodern period, so it is not necessarily a surprise that their writing engages with allegory in some way. However, understanding allegory in the basic literary sense does not sufficiently explain why a turn toward allegory was particularly embraced by Bashevis Singer and seemingly rejected by Ozick in their separate efforts to write about the Holocaust. One particularly obvious explanation for the use of allegory when dealing with the Holocaust, particularly for authors with a proximal relationship to the event, is that allegory allows for a degree of separation from the incident itself. This gives authors the ability to avoid a direct confrontation with their subject. For some writers, allegory allowed them to circumvent censorship laws in countries where artistic expression was restricted^v. For Bashevis Singer and Ozick, censorship was not an official concern, although a degree of “social censorship” seemed to dictate an avoidance of direct depictions of the Holocaust during the mid-twentieth century, led in part by Holocaust survivors who felt that such representations were inappropriate.

This social censorship-mentality may have also been shared by authors themselves, including Bashevis Singer, who fled Poland just prior to the German invasion and lost family members in the death camps. For Bashevis Singer especially, exploring feelings and emotions related to the events of the Holocaust through an allegorical lens

may have allowed him not to confront the most painful aspects of his own recent history, while still providing an outlet for the intense feelings of grief that he so clearly felt. The reluctance to recreate scenes of the Holocaust on the page is not necessarily limited to those Jewish Americans with direct connections to those who died, however. While Bashevis Singer's personal losses may have played a role in making him less willing than Cynthia Ozick to write directly about the Holocaust, it is important to consider the ways in which such a massive genocide affected the entirety of the United States' (and the world's) Jewish population. Although there was undoubtedly an ethical aspect to Jewish scholars' and writers' opposition to Holocaust fiction, it is also worth noting that many Jews, whether survivors, relatives of survivors, or simply individuals who claimed a common faith and heritage with those murdered, experienced profound personal trauma as a result of the Holocaust^{vi}. It is not surprising, then, that there existed a period of at least 30 years during which very few Jews were willing to engage with the Holocaust artistically, and some, like Bashevis Singer, did so only indirectly through the use of literary allegory.

For both Bashevis Singer and Ozick, it is fair to consider whether their personal relationships to the Holocaust played some role in their approach to writing about it. As noted, Bashevis Singer grew up in Poland and lost close relatives and friends during the Holocaust, while Ozick grew up in the Bronx and lost no immediate family during the same period. However, it is also important to consider the authors' respective audiences when evaluating their stylistic choices; Bashevis Singer, who famously wrote all of his work in Yiddish, tailored his work an audience of primarily Jews in the United States. Because most of his pre-translation audience spoke Yiddish as a first language, it is likely

that the vast majority were Ashkenazi Jews. Because the Ashkenazim were the primary Jewish victims of the Holocaust, it is perhaps more likely that this group would have been uncomfortable or unwilling to read literature that dealt so directly with the events of the Holocaust when Bashevis Singer published *The Slave*, only 17 years after the last camps were liberated. Ozick, on the other hand, published “The Shawl” (in English) in a 1980 issue of *The New Yorker*, a nationally distributed magazine that does not specifically cater to a Jewish audience. Furthermore, Ozick’s story was published nearly 20 years after Bashevis Singer’s *The Slave*, when fewer readers might have had firsthand experience with the Holocaust. Since “The Shawl” was published in a magazine, Ozick was not subject to concerns about book sales and therefore likely assumed less financial risk by publishing a story that had the potential to alienate her readers. The logistical differences alone may explain in part the variant approaches that Bashevis Singer and Ozick took to exploring the Holocaust through literature, although it is quite likely that both were also keenly aware of the ethical considerations of writing about such topics in a post-Holocaust society.

These ethical concerns regarding the use of allegory go beyond the psychological trauma associated with reliving scenes from the Holocaust on the page (or the screen). Philosopher Theodor Adorno famously wrote that “to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric,” because, as he argues, using the suffering of the Holocaust as the basis for art risks reproducing the cultural conditions that enabled the Holocaust to occur in the first place^{vii} (Adorno 34). Simply put, Adorno suggests that the production of literature and other forms of art that depict the Holocaust may cause society to normalize and internalize the social and political factors that led to the Holocaust (even while society

maintains disgust for the murders themselves), or, as he explains, “when even genocide becomes cultural property in committed literature, it becomes easier to continue complying with the culture that gave rise to the murder” (252-3). From an ethical standpoint, this influential philosophical perspective asserts that to fictionalize or even dramatize the events of the Holocaust is irresponsible because it renders the Holocaust quotidian enough to be accepted and even enjoyed as art. While Ozick’s depiction of the realities of life in a death camp runs afoul of this directive (as she herself has admitted), the use of allegory to explore themes related to the Holocaust, as Bashevis Singer does in *The Slave*, seems to comply precisely with Adorno’s insistence that the truth of the Holocaust ought to remain unspeakable. Bashevis Singer’s *The Slave* is a fully developed exploration of survivor’s guilt built on a thinly veiled retelling of the Holocaust, set in the seventeenth century; the allusions to the genocide and anti-Semitic violence are quite clear, and yet the novel itself does not attempt to depict the Holocaust in any way. Although there is no indication that Bashevis Singer’s use of allegory is motivated specifically by the opinions of Theodor Adorno, it is nonetheless entirely possible that Bashevis Singer was influenced by, or at the very least, was of the same opinion as Adorno regarding the ethical responsibility associated with literary depictions of the Holocaust.

On the other hand, even Adorno himself seems to concede that “suffering . . . also demands the continued existence of the very art it forbids” (252). To clarify, Adorno suggests that forbidding art as a means of ignoring or erasing the suffering of victims of the Holocaust is a greater offense than producing art that dramatizes it. Anna Richardson writes that,

Although . . . the representation or rendering into narrative form of the Holocaust experience necessarily implies the possibility of an alternative representation or counter-narrative, the opposing limit of silence does not offer the same symmetry. In maintaining a silence there is always a chance that some other party will take the opportunity to fill that silence, and here we come across the spectre of Holocaust denial (Richardson, 5).

While Adorno declares that to write poetry after Auschwitz is “barbaric,” he makes clear that such a judgment should not be used to silence survivors or obscure the truth about the Holocaust. If suffering demands the continued reproduction of the event itself through some form of artistic representation, then there must somehow be a way in which the truth can be accessed ethically. The most obvious solution is the survivor’s narrative, which may be “artistic” in the sense that they are stylized and recorded as prose, but nonetheless present the absolute truth about the events of the Holocaust. Many survivor’s narratives were published in the years following the Holocaust, and many have become quite famous, including *The Diary of Anne Frank* (though she herself was not a survivor), Primo Levi’s *Survival in Auschwitz*, and Elie Wiesel’s *Night* (and several others). By opposing the silence that would seek to forget the trauma of the Holocaust, survivor’s narratives open up the possibility that literature (but not fiction) can successfully meet Adorno’s criteria for ethical and necessary representations of the Holocaust.

Adorno’s phrase “suffering . . . also demands the continued existence of the very art it forbids” calls forth a question about the nature of suffering itself; why must suffering persist? The simplest answer seems to be that suffering and memory (or memorialization) are intrinsically linked—that to honor the memory of both victims and

survivors, or to prevent their erasure, they must suffer to tell their stories (even if this memorialization occurs only in the mind of an individual). But what about the suffering of those who were not present? It is entirely obvious that American Jews who emigrated prior to the Holocaust did not experience anything remotely like the suffering that actual Holocaust victims experienced—and yet, it would be callous to suggest that many American Jews did not suffer, too. Many lost parents, siblings, even children in the death camps. Many others lost friends and ancestral communities. Nearly all lost connections with the spaces that their ancestors inhabited, as the vast majority of Ashkenazi Jewish homes, villages, temples, and infrastructure were destroyed by the events of the War. An event of such magnitude undoubtedly sent shockwaves of real trauma that reverberated across the world, trauma that can correctly be considered suffering. Furthermore, trauma theorists Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub suggest that trauma itself does not conclude, but rather represents an ongoing, unfinished event: “trauma survivors live not with memories of the past, but with an event that could not and did not proceed through to its completion, has no ending, attained no closure, and therefore, as far as its survivors are concerned, continues into the present and is current in every respect” (Laub & Felman, 69). Since suffering demands the continued existence of art, American Jewish artists also sought out an outlet for some type of artistic expression to counteract the silence that threatened to delegitimize their own experiences.

For Isaac Bashevis Singer, one of his outlets was the use of allegory. Most of his pre- and post-war writing centers on characters and events set either before or after the Holocaust. Some take place in Europe, but many of his most well-known works relate the lives of Jews in the United States. *The Slave* is unique in being one of only a very small

number of his literary works to deal with the Holocaust at all, albeit in a deliberately indirect way. As has already been established, the ability of Bashevis Singer to clearly express his feelings and experiences related to the Holocaust was constrained by personal and social pressures, but the ethical prohibition was two-fold; as a fiction writer, his telling of the Holocaust would run contrary to Adorno's suggestion that doing so would lead to a normalization of the Holocaust; as a non-victim (or indirect victim), he is ethically incapable of speaking on behalf of those who survived. By choosing to tell an allegorical narrative in which the subject is absent for the enacting of the physical trauma of murder and communal destruction, Bashevis Singer tells the story of his own trauma in a way that performs the necessary action of giving voice to the suffering of millions of American Jews *without* taking agency away from the individuals who actually survived the death camps.

While Bashevis Singer uses allegory to tell the story of his own trauma, Cynthia Ozick takes a very different approach to telling the story of her own suffering. Perhaps emboldened by the passage of decades, or perhaps merely in defiance of the established ethical mores, Ozick uses "The Shawl" to tell a fictionalized survivor's story. In her story, she conjures a narrative in which the protagonist is a helpless witness to the death of her daughter, whom the protagonist is unable to adequately care for because of her own suffering. The two primary themes of "The Shawl," the destruction of family ties wrought by the Holocaust and the misappropriation of blame and guilt for the deaths of innocents, are themes quite relevant to the position of Jewish Americans who did not witness the Holocaust firsthand. Ozick's story forces the reader into a head-on confrontation with the destruction and dispersal of families. She places the reader in the

position of a helpless bystander who can only watch as their loved one is violently murdered. And finally, “The Shawl” grapples with the question of who is to blame for such atrocities. Do the bystanders share some responsibility? The witnesses? Those who simply, for whatever reason, *did not die*? Although Ozick is notable for being one of the first well-known Jewish-American authors to fully fictionalize a Holocaust narrative, she nonetheless gave a voice and a perspective to many American Jews who may have struggled with such questions on their own, particularly as it relates to their role as non-victims relative to communities and family members in Central Europe. Although Ozick later stated that she regretted fictionalizing the Holocaust for many of the same reasons that Theodor Adorno suggests that doing so is unethical, “The Shawl” remains a heart-wrenching story that directly and unapologetically confronts the Holocaust from a Jewish-American perspective, and it has undoubtedly influenced many contemporary Jewish-American writers.

Although Isaac Bashevis Singer and Cynthia Ozick diverge in their approach to the usage of allegory and the proper way to tell of the Holocaust from a Jewish-American perspective, both authors are deeply concerned with the lasting impact that the Holocaust had on American Jews. Their carefully crafted approaches symbolize the fraught emotional and ethical tension at the center of any literary depiction of the Holocaust. Despite the difficulty of setting down such emotions on the page, both authors give voice to the trauma enacted on American Jews by the Holocaust, who experienced not only grief and suffering through the loss of heritage, community, and loved ones, but who were also often unable to express this trauma due to their position as bystanders across the ocean to perhaps the greatest atrocity in human history. The close textual analysis in

the following chapters further explores the specific ways that these two authors express feelings of survivor's guilt and overcome the urge to keep silent in the face of their own trauma.

ⁱ Alan Berger's *Children of Job: American Second-Generation Witnesses to the Holocaust* and Efraim Sicer's *Breaking the Crystal: Writing and Memory after Auschwitz* (collection), for example.

ⁱⁱ There are texts that indirectly reference Jewish-American authors' writing related to Europe, including *Eastern European Jewish American Narratives, 1890–1930: Struggles for Recognition* by Dana Mihăilescu and "Jewish American Literature: A Scholar's Map" (*Resources for American Literary Study*) by Gloria L. Cronin and Makayla C. Steiner, but neither of these texts focus specifically on Jewish-American fiction set in Europe.

ⁱⁱⁱ For instance, authors like Dante (*The Divine Comedy*), Edmund Spenser (*The Faerie Queene*), and John Bunyan (*Pilgrim's Progress*) are considered to have relied on allegory in their writing, particularly in their explorations of Christian theology.

^{iv} Tambling also argues, however, that allegory was also present in the fiction of many authors associated with literary realism, including Henry James and Nathaniel Hawthorne, although sometimes unintentionally (Tambling, "Language of Flowers").

^v Scholar Elena Gomel writes in "The Poetics of Censorship: Allegory as Form and Ideology in the Novels of Arkady and Boris Strugatsky" that many authors in the Soviet Block, including Arkady and Strugatsky, used science fiction as a form of allegory to criticize Communist Party policy during the twentieth century.

^{vi} It is here worth considering that the vast majority of Jewish Holocaust victims were Ashkenazim, the population of Jews who historically lived primarily in Central and Eastern Europe (Jewish Virtual Library). The Ashkenazim shared a common language (Yiddish) and religious and cultural practices. The vast majority of Jewish Americans (between 72 and 92%) are descendants of Ashkenazi Jews (Das et al.). Therefore the connection between most American Jews and those murdered during the Holocaust (of which about two thirds were Ashkenazim) is more than just religious—these two populations shared a number of common practices, traditions, and customs.

^{vii} Like Bashevis Singer, Theodor Adorno was born and raised in Europe but spent the years spanning the Holocaust in the United States. Following the end of World War II, Adorno returned to Germany to teach at Frankfurt University, where he was a founding member of the philosophical Frankfurt School (along with Herbert Marcuse and Max Horkheimer, among others).

CHAPTER 1:

Survivor's Guilt and the Significance of Geographic Location in Isaac Bashevis Singer's *The Slave*

Jewish-American novelist Isaac Bashevis Singer's 1962 novel *The Slave* explores the feelings of guilt and shame that often plague those who survive a traumatic experience. Although the novel can be considered historical fiction, it offers a remarkable opportunity to develop a comprehensive understanding of the ways in which individuals and communities respond to an unthinkable event like genocide. At the center of this narrative is a man who is not physically present for an act of extreme violence that destroys much of his family and community. It is the protagonist's absence that fundamentally alters the course of his life, leading the reader to develop a sense of the role that absence and grief play for Jewish Americans in a post-Holocaust world. Furthermore, *The Slave* explores the complex relationship between physical space and grief – Bashevis Singer demonstrates that the physical destruction of geographic locations and buildings impedes the survivors' ability to process and overcome feelings of guilt and shame, thereby interrupting the grieving process. Although *The Slave* is not widely studied or discussed by contemporary critics, it stands out among post-Holocaust Jewish American fiction as one of the most honest and emotionally brutal depictions what life is like for those who survived the Nazis' attempt at cultural and racial annihilation.

The Slave is far from Bashevis Singer's most well-known work. Generally speaking, Bashevis Singer is best known for his short stories, including "Gimpel the

Fool” and “A Crown of Feathers” (the latter was awarded a National Book Award). Nonetheless, Bashevis Singer also had a successful career as a novelist, publishing, in addition to *The Slave*, 18 novels, all originally in Yiddish. He was a key figure in the literary movement today known as the “Jewish Decades,” a period spanning roughly 1950 to 1970, during which time many Jewish-American authors rose to national prominence, including Saul Bellow, Philip Roth, Bernard Malamud, and Chaim Potok (Cronin and Steiner). The themes of Bashevis Singer’s stories, including assimilation, the tension between secularism and faith, and the importance of Jewish tradition and oral history, have profoundly influenced Jewish-American authors to the present day. It is perhaps surprising, then, that Bashevis Singer wrote almost nothing about the Holocaust. Although it does not directly deal with the events of the Holocaust itself, *The Slave* is Bashevis Singer’s only novel that broaches the subject of genocide, survivor’s guilt, and the significance of geographic location to trauma and remembrance. By using an allegorical approach, Bashevis Singer intentionally avoids any direct mention of the Holocaust while also clearly exploring issues central to processing the trauma of living through such an event. In so doing, Bashevis Singer does not attempt to speak for or silence those who actually experienced the Holocaust firsthand, but rather he gives voice to the specific trauma of being a member of a group targeted for extermination, but surviving because of one’s geographic location. As such, this text more than most provides valuable insight into the personal and philosophical issues at the heart of Bashevis Singer’s understanding of his own position as an American Jew and his responsibility to the memories of those who died during the Holocaust.

Isaac Bashevis Singer's personal life certainly informed the writing of *The Slave*. Like his protagonist, Bashevis Singer narrowly escaped almost certain death; in 1935, fearing the growing strength of Nazi Germany, Bashevis Singer emigrated from his native Poland to the United States, leaving behind a wife and son. Following the Nazi invasion of Poland, many of Bashevis Singer's family members were killed, and Bashevis Singer spent years unsure of the ultimate fate of his first wife and child^{viii}. In the United States, Bashevis Singer remarried and continued an already successful literary and journalism career. Under pseudonyms, Bashevis Singer wrote stories and articles in Yiddish for the sizeable population of first-language Yiddish speakers in the United States^{ix}. All of Bashevis Singer's work is written in Yiddish, his first language, and most of it has now been translated into English. Following the publication of his novel *The Family Moskat* in 1945, Bashevis Singer's profile as a successful writer grew rapidly. According to Irving Saposnik, Bashevis Singer "was able to transform his Yiddish stories, and his Yiddish identity, into a Jewish American – or even American – literature" (Saposnik, 45). Bashevis Singer was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1978, becoming the only author writing in Yiddish to win the prize. Bashevis Singer lived the rest of his life in the United States, dying in 1991 at the age of 88. Although *The Slave* is not directly autobiographical, the protagonist's story shares many similarities with Singer's own personal life, and the themes of survivor's guilt and the long-term damage of trauma mirror many of the struggles of Bashevis Singer and other Jewish Americans who were coming to terms with the aftermath of the Holocaust in the middle of the twentieth century.

Although *The Slave* is set in the seventeenth century, it is clearly concerned with the position of Jews in a post-Holocaust world. Bashevis Singer's story functions as an extended parable for the dispossession of both Jewish space and Jewish cultural memory, and by setting his story in the distant past, Bashevis Singer writes about the Holocaust through an impersonal and historical lens, creating an artificial *longue durée* through which he is able to explore the manifestations of survivor's guilt that he and other American Jews experienced as a result of having avoided the direct violence of the Holocaust. By situating the complex emotional and psychological issues felt by those who avoided or survived the Holocaust within a seventeenth century narrative, Bashevis Singer's approach defers most of the immediate trauma of the Holocaust itself, which ended less than two decades before he published *The Slave*. This indirect literary approach to the Holocaust both allows the author and reader to contemplate issues of survival and cultural destruction without reliving (or reimagining) the horrors of death camps and gas chambers. Bashevis Singer writes in *The Slave*, "there was a limit to what the human mind could accept. It was beyond the power of any man to contemplate all these atrocities and mourn them adequately" (106).

In addition to providing a historical lens through which to approach urgent issues of guilt, Bashevis Singer's allegorical approach also creates a "safer" narrative for readers, as it centers on a little-known and long-past massacre that lacks the emotional heft of the Holocaust itself. Although *The Slave* clearly comes across as Bashevis Singer's attempt to work through his own feelings of grief, it should also be noted that his (largely Yiddish speaking^x) intended audience may have similarly been unwilling to contemplate such issues had they been presented as a direct story of the Holocaust. This

approach differs from that of many of his Jewish-American contemporaries, including Cynthia Ozick, whose story “The Shawl” depicts the realities of the Holocaust in very direct terms, a distinction that is partly explained by Bashevis Singer’s immediate relationship to the Holocaust, including his narrow escape prior to German occupation and the loss of many of his close relatives in Nazi death camps. Many of Bashevis Singer’s Jewish-American contemporaries, including Ozick, were not themselves immigrants and therefore had less direct experience with pre-Holocaust Europe.

Scholarly analysis of *The Slave* is quite limited; while Isaac Bashevis Singer’s work has been extensively analyzed critically, *The Slave* is often mentioned only in passing – if at all^{xi}. Most scholarly work to this point has focused on Bashevis Singer’s pre-Holocaust novel *Satan in Goray*, as well as *The Magician of Lublin* and *The Family Moskat*. Additionally, much has been written on Bashevis Singer’s many short stories, including “Gimpel the Fool” and “The Letter Writer.” Among the few noteworthy examples of critical analysis of *The Slave* comes from Edward Alexander in his 1994 book *The Holocaust and the War of Ideas*. Alexander includes a scant two paragraphs to *The Slave*, but he devotes much of these lines to a critique of Bashevis Singer’s indirect approach to synthesizing the survivor’s response to the Holocaust.

While he agrees that “*The Slave* may even be said to deal more concretely with the Holocaust than Singer novels and stories that approach it frontally,” Alexander suggests that Bashevis Singer falls trap to faulty “generalizations” of the Holocaust and fails to delineate the Holocaust as “different in kind from the long series of disasters that have befallen the Jews since the seventeenth century” (Alexander, 34-35). Furthermore, he accuses Bashevis Singer of failing to confront basic questions such as “Why the

Jews?” and “Why the Germans?” (35). While it is certainly true that the scope and impact of the Chmielnicki Massacre was far smaller than the Holocaust, Alexander’s criticism fails to fully appreciate the important and perhaps necessary role that allegory plays in Bashevis Singer’s novel – Alexander himself concedes that, in *The Slave*, Bashevis Singer is “clearly writing about the Holocaust,” but he does not consider the importance of the oblique perspective afforded by setting the novel in the distant past. Tackling questions such as “Why the Jews?” and “Why the Germans?” need not be a prerequisite for any novel that successfully explores the trauma of the Holocaust. *The Slave* is clearly a book that serves as an attempt to exorcise Bashevis Singer’s own survivor’s guilt, as well as give voice to the many European and American Jews who either survived the Holocaust or directly avoided it. In this way, *The Slave* serves its own purpose without necessarily answering existential questions surrounding antisemitism and the Holocaust.

The novel begins with the protagonist, Jacob, living as a slave at the summit of a mountain in an unnamed Polish village. Before his enslavement, Jacob was an educated Jew living in the semi-fictional Polish town of Josefow^{xii} with his wife and three children. The novel describes the real-life Chmielnicki Uprising, in which bands of Russian Cossacks carried out frequent and systematic attacks on the Jewish populations of Poland. During one such massacre, Jacob flees the village before the murders begin, and a band of Polish robbers kidnap him and sell him as a slave to a man named Jan Bzik (6). Jacob’s narrow avoidance of the horrors of the Chmielnicki massacre and his removal to an isolated and remote location mirrors the position of many Jews who left Europe in the decades prior to the Holocaust. Jacob, like many 20th century Jewish emigres, “did not know whether his wife and children were still alive” (6). The sheer number of Holocaust

casualties and the difficulty of reuniting the survivors and identifying the deceased led to similar instances of confusion on the part of relatives of those who had not remained in Europe. Jacob also experiences intense survivor's guilt; for instance, "he no longer hummed and sang the old melodies, and was ashamed to think about his wife and children and all the other martyrs whom the Cossacks had slaughtered. What connection did he have with such saints? They were holy and he, unclean" (85). In this instance in particular, the manifestation of Jacob's guilt and shame is in tandem with his inability to bring himself to resume the cultural and spiritual practices of his faith, as he feels that his mere act of survival makes him undeserving of participation. The allegorical references to the guilt of those who avoided the annihilation of the Holocaust is particularly stark in Jacob's self-reflection as a slave and stranger in a Christian village.

Jacob is experiencing a clear example of what might be psychologically termed "survivor's guilt," which is commonly described as "A feeling of guilt for surviving a tragedy in which others died, often associated with a sense of having been partly responsible for what happened." (OED). Although he was kidnapped and is in no way directly or indirectly responsible for the death of his family or destruction of his village, he nevertheless feels both shame and guilt related to his own survival. In her analysis of survivor's guilt, philosopher Amber Griffioen argues that "survivor's guilt, properly understood, may represent a kind of response to feelings of shame – one which is centrally tied to the philosophical notions of autonomy and integrity" (Griffioen, 2). Because he was kidnapped and forced into slavery, Jacob was deprived of all autonomy, which Griffioen argues is central to the manifestation of survivor's guilt. Jacob feels helpless because he lacks the power to protect his family, or even to know what truly

became of them. Griffioen argues that such feelings of powerlessness “threaten one’s perception of oneself as an full-blown agent and contribute to a very basic experience of shame, given one’s perceived inability to instantiate one’s autonomy to the degree required for one to have a sense of agency (at least regarding the event(s) in question)” (Griffioen, 8). Specifically, Jacob suffers from a form of survivor’s guilt called “substitution guilt,” which describes “the feeling that someone else has paid the price for or taken the place of the survivor” (Griffioen, 5). This form of guilt is particularly common among survivors of genocide and other events in which entire communities or groups of individuals are killed, and it often manifests as shame characterized by the individual in question being “undeserving” of survival when so many others died. Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel is quoted as saying, “I live, therefore I am guilty. I am here because a friend, an acquaintance, an unknown person died in my place” (Glowacka). Similarly, when Jacob asks himself, “What connection did he have with such saints? They were holy and he, unclean,” he both elevates the dead (using the exalting but clearly non-Jewish term “saints”) and diminishes his own worth, calling himself “unclean.” In accordance with Griffioen’s definition of survivor’s guilt, Jacob’s prolonged powerlessness imbues a sense of shame that forces him to hold himself inferior and undeserving of life in comparison to those who died in the massacre.

Jacob’s position as a shepherd atop a mountain is also layered with allegory. The text itself compares Jacob’s isolated life on the mountain with Moses’ ascent up the mountain to converse with God (38). Like Moses, Jacob chisels the commandments on a stone in order to both remember and maintain his Jewish faith. However, the mountain also serves as a secondary metaphor. Atop the mountain, Jacob is both isolated from and

totally visible to those below him. His isolation is comparable to the experiences of Jewish immigrants in the United States, like Bashevis Singer himself. The villagers below tolerate Jacob, but regard him with both suspicion and ridicule. His habits and attire make him immediately identifiable as a Jew, and his refusal to participate in Christian ceremonies make him a pariah. While grappling with the grief over the loss of his family and community, Jacob must also contend with the virulent and sometimes violent anti-Semitism of the Polish villagers in the valley and the pagan cowherds who live further down the mountain. Although he remains devoted to his Jewish faith, the ridicule and ostracism that he experiences no doubt further contribute to the shame that Jacob feels as a result of his lost autonomy. For Jewish-Americans like Bashevis Singer, such feelings of restricted autonomy likely would have been familiar.

The United States has been historically referred to as a “city upon a hill,” first by Puritan John Winthrop in 1630, who said that the Massachusetts Bay Colony was “as a city upon a hill, the eyes of all people are upon us” (Winthrop). This phrase was later coopted by political leaders, including John F. Kennedy, to describe the United States’ role as the visible leader of the free world^{xiii}. The fact that Jacob lives in a strange land upon a mountaintop further connects his experience to that of the Jewish immigrant in America. Jacob’s isolation, his inability to reconnect with his religion and culture, and the conditional tolerance held by the gentile population is similar in many ways to the experiences of the Jewish immigrant in the United States, where Jewish communities were often isolated and beset with anti-Semitic suspicion, and where a dominant Christian culture often made religious observance difficult^{xiv}. Such an interpretation therefore allows the reader to understand Jacob’s position as a symbol of the Jewish-

American émigré who was able to escape prior to the Holocaust, but must nonetheless find a place in an entirely foreign and often hostile new nation.

Jacob's piety is challenged by Wanda, a widow and the daughter of Jan, Jacob's slave-master. Wanda is a gentile woman, nominally Christian but, like the other Polish villagers, largely uneducated on matters of faith. She quickly develops an intense lust for Jacob, and she repeatedly tries to convince him to have sex with her. Wanda's presence in Jacob's life further complicates both his loss of culture and his estrangement from his faith. Although Jacob feels a strong attraction to her, he forbids himself from any sexual contact, both because he is unsure whether his wife is still alive and because, as a gentile, Wanda is considered unclean by Jewish law, and it would be a serious religious transgression to have sex with her. Wanda initially plays the role of a stereotypical shiksa (שיקסע), a Yiddish word that indicates "a non-Jewish woman who is either romantically interested in a Jewish man or who is a Jewish man's object of affection" (Pelaia). According to Ariela Pelaia, "the shiksa represents an exotic 'other' to the Jewish man, someone who is theoretically forbidden and, thus, incredibly desirable." This is especially obvious in Wanda's sexual forwardness and the often crass methods that she uses to tempt Jacob to sleep with her – at one point, she initiates sexual contact while he is asleep – and in her complete ignorance of Jewish religious tradition. As a gentile and native Polish villager, Wanda initially represents the allure of sexual assimilation, which grants immediate gratification but comes at the cost of religious piety and (for Jacob) betrays the memory of his former family.

Ultimately, Jacob is unable to resist Wanda's advances; he engages in sexual contact with her, but only under the condition that she conform strictly to Jewish law and

eventually convert to Judaism. She agrees, and Jacob quickly falls in love with her, albeit not without intense shame and guilt. As the daughter of his oppressor and an individual completely indifferent to Jewish culture, Wanda represents the difficulty of assimilation in a non-native environment. Their love is genuine, but the dangers that it brings are also real and immediate. It is also worth noting that Wanda's first husband, a native Pole, was killed by a bolt of lightning (10). The Yiddish word for lightning, "בלִיץ" is pronounced "blits" and is a cognate of the German word "Blitz," the diminutive of "Blitzkrieg^{xv}." Readers experiencing *The Slave* in its original Yiddish would likely draw a connection between Wanda's husband having been killed by lightning and a more contemporary woman widowed by a soldier who died fighting World War II. This small detail further supports the allegorical interpretation of Wanda and Jacob's relationship as one between a Jewish émigré and an American gentile.

Among the most obvious and persistent themes in *The Slave* is Jacob's contention with the destruction of his culture by the Chmielnicki Massacre, which ultimately erodes his memories of both his family and his faith. By virtue of being transplanted away from the source of his cultural heritage, Jacob repeatedly struggles to remember many basic Jewish traditions. For example, "lacking as he did a calendar, he could not even observe the holy days properly" (11) and he was unable to recall the 248 commandments and 365 prohibitions of the Torah, which made him sometimes unsure whether he was committing a sin (37). This dissonance from the bedrock tenets of his faith builds in Jacob, causing him great anguish. Bashevis Singer writes that "Jacob's heart cried out. The Jews were celebrating Simchath Torah, were reciting 'Unto Thee it was shown,' and circling the lectern . . . But now all of this seemed dreamlike to him. He had been torn from his home

not four but forty years ago!” (73). When he finally sees Jewish men again, Jacob also describes this sensation as “strange and dream-like” (97). When these men pay his ransom and take him back home to Josefov, Jacob realizes that he no longer remembers how to be a Jew; he asks the men “should I rend my clothes? . . . I have forgotten the law” (100), and he loses his grasp of language, as “each time he tried to say something, Yiddish and Polish mingled in his head” (101). Although he returns to his home and the source of his cultural memory, Jacob is a changed man because of his exile, and he is unable to resume life as his former self.

Jacob’s need to mourn the loss of his children long after most of Josefov’s citizens have moved forward from the events of the Chmielnicki Massacre represents a clear example of the psychological principle of “belatedness,” which R. Clifton Spargo defines as follows: “simply put, belatedness signifies an element of noncooperation in the mourner, marking him as someone who is, if only accidentally, out of step with the rhythm of his society and its forgetful flow toward the future” (Spargo, 129). Josefov’s “forgetful flow toward the future” infuriates Jacob – he is outraged that members of his community not only no longer mourn the deceased but have also quickly reverted to their sinful and dishonest behaviors. Dr. Andrew Barnaby argues that belatedness as a psychological concept plays a particularly strong role in the exertion of trauma and manifestation of grief; he argues that being physically absent from the central event not only imparts serious psychological damage on the absent party, but that the absence itself causes the individual to become unable to move forward with their life. Barnaby writes, “it may be that the reenactment or obsessive return occurs precisely because, at the time of the original event, the subsequently traumatized subject was already left behind in the

sense of not having been present” (Barnaby, 124). Jacob clearly experiences a delayed grieving process after having been kept away from his community for four years, but as Barnaby would suggest, Jacob’s particular form of belatedness stems from the very fact that he was absent when the massacre occurred. Such an “obsessive return” to the imagined or physical site of trauma may very well have also forced many American Jews into a permanent state of belatedness, wherein their absence from the Holocaust arrested the normal process of grieving and prevented individuals from synthesizing and rationalizing overwhelming feelings of survivor’s guilt.

This loss of his personal connection to his Jewish faith and culture is more than just a social and religious transgression for Jacob; it is also a mortal one. When the Jewish elders who pay his ransom inform him that his wife and children were indeed murdered by the Cossacks,

He remembered his own children, little Isaac, Breina, the baby; he imaged them thrown into a ditch of lime and buried alive . . . Jacob wondered how it had been possible for him to forget them for an instant. Through forgetfulness, he had also been guilty of murder. “Yes, I am a murderer,” he said to himself. “I am no better than they” (102-3).

Jacob’s feelings of personal responsibility for the deaths of his family members is also a classic manifestation of survivor’s guilt. Jacob feels both helpless and devastated by their deaths. His absence and his lack of autonomy prevented him from playing the role of protector for his wife and children, and such a failure causes him to judge himself guilty (even though their deaths were no fault of his own). As Amber Griffioen argues, such a psychological approach “attributes at least partial responsibility for that event or its

consequences to the survivor herself. This allows for the recognition of the event as something objectively bad, but makes room for the subject to retain a sense of agency in light of her trauma” (Griffioen, 10). Because his perceived failure both “resulted” in the violent murder of his entire family and (in his mind) was caused by his abdication of his masculine and parental duties as protector of his family, Jacob must accept responsibility for their deaths in order to establish a degree of personal autonomy. For him, blame is more palatable than helplessness.

The need to assume responsibility that Jacob feels is not unusual for trauma survivors, even those who did not themselves experience the trauma firsthand. Marianne Hirsch poses a critical question in the introduction to her book *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust*. Hirsch asks “How are we implicated in the aftermath of crimes we did not ourselves witness?” (Hirsch, 2). In Jacob’s (and Bashevis Singer’s) case, this question is further complicated because both men share both a familial and communal relationship to the victims of such crimes. While Hirsch’s *The Generation of Postmemory* is firmly rooted in a twenty-first century, post-Holocaust critical space, it is nonetheless instructive for understanding the ways that genocide manifests as a trauma not just for victims, but also for individuals like Bashevis Singer and Jacob, who were not physically present when the violence was enacted. Hirsch writes:

that descendants of victim survivors as well as of perpetrators and of bystanders who witnessed massive traumatic events connect so deeply to the previous generation’s remembrances of the past that they identify that connection as a form of *memory*, and that, in certain extreme

circumstances, memory *can* be transferred to those who were not actually there to live an event (3).

Although Hirsch emphasizes that the prefix “post” in postmemory refers specifically to the “relationship that the ‘generation after’ bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before,” (5) the same ontological framework can be applied to the long-lasting trauma that manifests as survivor’s guilt experienced by Jacob. Jacob is haunted by images of his children being buried alive, as well as Jews digging their own graves and villages being burned to the ground. Despite Jacob not having been “actually there to live [the] event,” the reality of what happened to his family and community takes the form of an authentic memory in his mind. Although Jacob is clearly experiencing survivor’s guilt as a result of the massacre of his community, it must also be noted that he is also experiencing real trauma in the form of postmemory-like flashbacks, due to his familial and communal connection to the victims. It is no coincidence that the types of atrocities that the Jews of Josefov experienced were quite similar to those that Jews experienced at the hands of Nazis during the Holocaust. As an allegory, *The Slave* provides a theoretical conception of the intersection between ‘mere’ survivor’s guilt and the more complex transfer of memory-as-trauma that would later be outlined by Hirsch in *The Generation of Postmemory*. Bashevis Singer gives voice to a suffering that goes far beyond grief, and despite his position of relative safety as a Jew living in the United States, his writing in *The Slave* elucidates the particular form of trauma that is exerted upon individuals *who did not die*, but still witnessed the near annihilation of their families, communities, and cultures.

Jacob contends that his lack of remembrance for his family is equal to murder, but it is not necessarily true that he ever actually “forgot” his family; instead, “forget” seems to refer to an insufficient reverence for their memories. Jacob anguished over the death of his wife and children throughout his period of enslavement, but Bashevis Singer seems to indicate that the act of “forgetting” was committed when he entered a sexual relationship with Wanda. From a strictly religious perspective (ignoring the realities of human grief), the death of his wife during the Chmielnicki Massacre means that Jacob did not commit adultery by having sex with Wanda. Indeed, remarriage is quite common in Jacob’s Jewish culture, and matchmakers attempt to find him a new wife almost the moment that he returns to Josefov. Instead, his foray with Wanda seems to represent a form of cultural betrayal – his “forgetting” was not an act of literal disremembering^{xvi}, but rather a betrayal of the expectations of his family and community. In this way, it is clear that Jacob’s grief is wound tightly with both his cultural and religious beliefs. According to Deborah Dash Moore, several scholars of American-Jewish studies consider intermarriage to be “the final step” of assimilation (Moore). This is particularly true when a Jewish man marries or reproduces with a gentile woman, as Jewish identity is traditionally conferred matrilineally, meaning that any children born of such a union would not truly be considered Jews. Apart from the religious prohibition against sex with gentiles, Jacob’s actions represent a willing attempt to divorce his future offspring from a direct Jewish ancestry, thereby foreclosing them from significant cultural and religious inclusion. Whether viewed in a seventeenth- or twentieth- century context, it is not difficult to understand why Jacob considers his affair with Wanda to be an affront to his community, his faith, and his first family.

Although Jacob does ultimately return to Josefov, his expectations are quickly shattered. Jacob is unable to resume his old life, not only because his family is gone, but because he has returned a changed person. Bashevis Singer writes, “not an hour had passed, scarcely a minute, without his coming upon something new or something he had half forgotten. Was it so trivial a matter to return to Jewish books, clothes, holidays, after years of slavery among the pagans?” (104). He becomes disillusioned with the gossip and corruption of the Jewish population, he is disinterested in the matchmakers’ attempts to find him a new wife, and he finds himself unable to cope without returning to the memory of the events of the Chmielnicki Massacre. Furthermore, Jacob is unable to overcome his love for Wanda, even though he has returned to his culture and family. Of himself, Jacob thinks “the Jews had ransomed him but he remained a slave” (113). Although Jacob regains his sense of place, he has been changed by his experiences. This creates a feeling of incongruity that he cannot reconcile, and he is impatient that others do not share his perpetual grief and outrage, thinking, “what was so new for him was stale for everyone else” (107). Again, Jacob experiences a form of belatedness that does not allow him to either resume the life he previously led or seek to achieve a new life in the community that he left behind against his will. He is provided an opportunity to teach children on matters of faith, and townspeople generally respect him. He is offered the opportunity to marry a second wife (precisely in accordance with Jewish tradition), yet he finds himself unwilling to participate in the life that he left behind and over which he continues to grieve.

Jacob’s inability to move forward from the trauma that he did not personally witness is mirrored in his surprise at how quickly the community erased the physical

markers of the lives of those who were lost. Bashevis Singer writes, “houses were being built, buildings roofed; on every side men were mixing lime and carrying bricks. There were new stores in the market place and once again the peasants flocked to town on market day to deal with the Jews” (106). This evokes further anguish in Jacob, who “would have liked to run off and hide in some ruined building where he could remain in silence. But there was no such place in Josefov. . .” (106). This passage raises the question of the preservation of spaces and places that existed before and during events of cultural trauma. Human geographer Dr. Tim Cresswell defines “place” as a location that has a subjective emotional and/or historical association, while “space” is a more abstract term that refers to specific but uncharacterized geographical areas within which people and groups exist^{xvii} (Cresswell). Following the Holocaust, Jewish spaces and places destroyed during the War were rarely reconstructed, nor were their remains left as permanent markers of the community’s history to this day. For survivors and international members of the Jewish community, however, the fact that these spaces no longer exist in their pre-war or immediate post-war states leaves many in a position similar to Jacob’s, and Bashevis Singer argues that survivors lack the ability to return to the sites of their cultural memory and heritage in a way that is conducive to the grieving process.

The Great Synagogue of Warsaw, for instance, was at the time of construction the largest synagogue in the world and one of the grandest buildings in Poland. Following its destruction in 1943, the building was not reconstructed, and its place is now occupied by a skyscraper built under Soviet direction during the Communist period^{xviii}. In Krakow’s Kazimierz district, several of the community’s major synagogues survived the war

largely intact,^{xix} but most were not restored until decades later. Berlin's Scheunenviertel, similarly, was largely destroyed and the Jewish cultural presence annihilated during the Holocaust. The New Synagogue there was not rebuilt until 1993. Other, lesser-known cultural centers in cities and towns across Central Europe have largely not been rebuilt, and their spaces are now generally occupied by non-Jewish buildings^{xx}. There is no collective strategy that European communities have employed to memorialize the Jewish spaces that existed prior to the Holocaust; some, like Prague and Krakow, have marketed their Jewish quarters as heritage sites and tourist destinations. Others, like Berlin and Warsaw, have largely abandoned the spaces themselves, instead erecting major museums to commemorate the former Jewish citizens of their cities^{xxi}. These are the two primary approaches largely because the Jewish communities in these areas were decimated by the Holocaust itself, so true restoration was rarely possible.

The transformation of historical and cultural spaces is closely tied to the grieving process, as Jacob's feelings makes clear. Contemporary scholars note that ““because of their importance, mourning practices are not simply quaint customs that can be ignored at will. On the contrary, they are duties imposed by the group’ usually within established political and religious systems as those parts of society responsible for ‘collective decision making’ and ‘meaning and value articulation’” (Clark & Franzmann). Because he was physically not present for the trauma of the Chmielnicki Massacre or its aftermath, Jacob is unable to participate in the collective grieving process that was necessary for the community to move forward. Four years later, Jacob is unable to contemplate resuming a normal life because the community has already done so without him. Since grieving is a socially necessary task “imposed by the group,” Jacob seeks a

return to the ruined buildings and damaged spaces that existed immediately following the attack. Only here would he truly be able to feel the gravity of this loss and retroactively participate in the process of overcoming trauma and loss in the same way as his fellow citizens. Jewish-Americans encounter similar challenges with processing the destruction of their ancestral cultural spaces, and Bashevis Singer suggests that a mere return to these sites cannot possibly lead to catharsis, since the spaces themselves were altered both by the War and subsequent reconstruction and repurposing.

Unable to overcome his grief in Josefov, Jacob quickly leaves the town and travels to Lublin, a larger city with a significant Jewish population. Here, too, he is disillusioned by the religious impiety of his fellow Jews. Furthermore, he is haunted by his love for Wanda, whom he left behind in her village. Believing her pregnant, Jacob sneaks away to retrieve Wanda, planning to create a life with her in secret. When he finds her, she is not pregnant, but she does express her desire to convert fully to Judaism and live a religiously upright life with Jacob. They make a new home in Pilitz, a town in Eastern Poland with a significant Jewish community. Although their marriage is happy, Wanda (who takes the name Sarah) must pretend to be deaf and mute in order to prevent the villagers from realizing that she does not speak Yiddish and is actually a gentile convert^{xxii}. Jacob's inability to find acceptance in Wanda's native village is mirrored by the lengths that she must go to in order to gain tacit acceptance in Pilitz; she is literally unable to speak for fear of revealing her true background, which exemplifies the lack of acceptance afforded to interfaith marriages, both when the novel is set and during the twentieth century. Wanda and Jacob develop a bond of true love, which Jacob never felt with his first wife, yet his first marriage was officially sanctioned and celebrated by his

community, while his second marriage could have led to both partners being put to death. Here Bashevis Singer further emphasizes the pitfalls of assimilation in an unfamiliar environment, and he clearly makes the point that these risks apply to both Jews and gentiles.

Ultimately, Wanda becomes pregnant. While giving birth, she screams and curses the Jewish community, who mistreated her openly because of her non-Jewish looks and perceived deafness. This act reveals her true identity, and both she and Jacob are essentially excommunicated on the spot. Wanda dies in childbirth, however, and is buried in a grave outside the Jewish cemetery. Their son survives but is taken in by another family while Jacob is arrested by Polish authorities. Jacob escapes captivity (again) and returns to Pilitz to retrieve his child. He then leaves Poland entirely and settles in Israel, where he and his son both become respected religious authorities. Jacob returns to Pilitz 20 years later to retrieve Wanda's bones, and while there, he discovers that he and Wanda have since become revered by the community for their faith and commitment to each other, despite the consequences of their love. While in Pilitz, Jacob dies and is buried next to Wanda. Jacob's ability to find peace in Israel also serves as a clear allegory for the founding of the nation of Israel, which served as a safe-haven for many Jews who survived the Holocaust. Unable to find peace in a non-Jewish community (perhaps like the United States) or in a European community destroyed and rebuilt following a massacre, Jacob is finally able to build a life in Israel. His return to Poland after two decades and his peaceful death and burial with Wanda indicates that Jacob finally achieved a sense of peace, both for the massacre of his first family and the death of his wife and his subsequent excommunication by the Jews of Pilitz. Allegorically, Bashevis

Singer seems to suggest that overcoming the grief of both personal and cultural loss is possible, but in Jacob's case, it was only achieved through a move to Israel. Bashevis Singer himself was a Zionist but did not live in Israel, and he seems to suggest that while a physical migration to Israel is not necessary for to overcome the guilt and grief of the Holocaust, the creation of the nation of Israel was necessary to heal the international Jewish community and provide an opportunity for the reestablishment of cultural memory in a place that is specifically Jewish, which was not possible in the United States, nor in post-Holocaust Europe^{xxiii}. Furthermore, this ending also suggests an important connection between place and the process of healing and overcoming trauma. Jacob is unable to find peace in Poland, and is only truly capable of moving on with his life when he moves to Israel, the cultural and spiritual point of origin for the Jewish people. Aside from the Zionist implications of the novel's ending, it also suggests a need for communal and spiritual reconfiguration as a solution to the trauma that Jews experienced following the Holocaust.

While the novel's ending gestures toward twentieth century political issues quite clearly, the entirety of *The Slave* serves as a very clear allegorical allusion to the position that American Jews (and in some ways, all Jews) found themselves in in the aftermath of the Holocaust. Because Bashevis Singer chose to distance the narrative from the Holocaust itself, however, he completely avoids the ethical constraints of fictionalizing an event of such a magnitude without having truly experienced it firsthand. While Theodor Adorno suggests that any art that seeks to evoke pleasure or entertainment from the Holocaust is unethical, he also insists that survivors must resist the urge to remain silent in the face of the trauma that they experienced (Adorno). There is no question that

Bashevis Singer and other Jewish Americans experienced significant trauma by virtue of their cultural and religious connection to the millions of victims of the Holocaust, as well as their personal connections to the people who died and places that were destroyed. While such an obvious allegorical narrative might generally be considered clumsy or even excessively cautious, in the context of the Holocaust as experienced by a non-victim, such an approach strikes a careful balance that allows Bashevis Singer to explore feelings of grief and pain that are specific to Jewish Americans. At a time before Holocaust fiction entered the mainstream, *The Slave* provides one of the earliest and most enlightening depictions of the complexity of Jewish Americans' response to the Holocaust and the significance of their own survival.

While critics are largely correct to assert that *The Slave* does not attempt or even hint at answering the question of *why* such tragic and senseless events (real or allegorical) were committed against the Jewish people, the novel succeeds as an emotional exploration of the impact of trauma on individuals who were able to avoid the physical experience of genocide, but who nonetheless experience tremendous psychological violence as a result of the destruction of their communities and historical cultural spaces. As a Jewish immigrant in the United States, Bashevis Singer's experience might be considered lucky – he narrowly avoided the Holocaust, becoming a legendary author and winning a Nobel Prize for Literature. However, *The Slave* provides an intimate and devastating glimpse at the power that survivor's guilt holds over individuals who were absent at the time of trauma – in fact, *The Slave* demonstrates that this absence itself is indeed the root cause of this particular type of trauma. Bashevis Singer delineates clearly between those who were present but survived, and those who survived *because* they were

not present. Bashevis Singer presents a complex emotional picture of those who survived because they were not present, lifting the reader's understanding beyond a one-dimensional grasp of survivor's guilt and illuminating the absolute power that an absence at the site of cultural destruction and genocide can hold over a single individual.

^{viii} Bashevis Singer later learned that they had managed to escape Poland to Israel via Moscow, but he received this information long after marrying his second wife in 1940.

^{ix} Yiddish is the primary language of the Ashkenazi (Central and Eastern European) Jewish Community. Although it is derived from German, it is written with Hebrew script and contains elements of a variety of languages. Precise numbers are not available, but in 1915 there were at least 500,000 Yiddish speakers in New York City alone, compared to less than 180,000 in the United States today.

^x Although most of Bashevis Singer's writing was translated into English, his decision to write only in Yiddish was largely motivated for a desire to maintain Yiddish as a living language of art and literature. Importantly, a Yiddish-speaking audience in the United States would have been far more likely to have had first- or second-hand experience with the Holocaust than an English-speaking audience.

^{xi} Extensive database searches turned up zero scholarly articles dedicated only to *The Slave*. When the novel is mentioned in critical books, it is rarely afforded more than a paragraph or two, and few focus squarely on issues of Holocaust allegory or survivor's guilt.

^{xii} "Josefov" seems to refer to the town of Józefów, which is located near Zamosc and in proximity to Lublin, two details that match Bashevis Singer's description of the town. However, Józefów was founded in the 1720s, long after the Chmielnicki Uprising (1648-1657). Józefów is nonetheless a town with great historical significance for Polish Jews, as it was the location of the Józefów Massacre. On July 13, 1942, Nazi soldiers massacred 1,200 to 1,500 Jews in the village square. The similarity of this Holocaust-era event to the fictionalized depiction of the Chmielnicki massacre in *The Slave* further suggests an intentional allegory between Jacob's experiences and the events of the Holocaust.

^{xiii} The phrase was perhaps most famously used by Ronald Reagan in 1980, but *The Slave* was published in 1962.

^{xiv} Conversely, Jacob also experiences several attempts at forced assimilation, which also hints at the pressures exerted on Jews to assimilate to the dominant American culture. Some villagers "wanted to marry him to one of their daughters" (5), while others "jokingly sought to force a piece of sausage in his mouth" (9). He resists all of these temptations, but he is unable to resist a sexual relationship with Wanda, a Christian.

^{xv} "Blitzkrieg" refers to German military tactics consisting of intense air- and ground-supported offensive attacks designed to quickly disable and defeat an enemy target.

^{xvi} "Disremembering" here refers to the practice of intentionally erasing an event or individual from either personal or collective memory – effectively the rewriting of history to avoid confrontation with difficult memories or prevent dissonance between truth and what one wishes to perceive as reality. A passage from Toni Morrison's *Beloved* well illustrates the use of disremembering to warp both personal and collective histories: "Disremembered and unaccounted for, she cannot be lost because no one is looking for her, and even if they were, how can they call her if they don't know her name?" (Morrison, 323).

^{xvii} For instance, a synagogue might be considered a "place," while a street in a Jewish neighborhood might be considered a "space."

^{xviii} It is important to note that, almost immediately following the end of World War II, Poland became a Communist nation under the tight control of the Soviet Union, which largely prevented the rebuilding of Jewish buildings.

^{xix} The High Synagogue survived intact and today serves as a small museum. The Remah Synagogue was used by the Germans as a warehouse, but survived the war intact. It is in active use today. The Old

Synagogue was ransacked and also used as a warehouse, but survived the war largely intact. Today it also serves as a museum.

^{xx} In Leipzig, for instance (home to East Germany's largest pre-war Jewish population), all but one synagogue survived the War, and those destroyed were never rebuilt. Frankfurt's Judengasse, another of Germany's largest pre-war Jewish districts, was completely leveled following the War and replaced with streets and offices, leaving no trace of the former Jewish presence.

^{xxi} The Jewish Museum Berlin and the POLIN Museum, respectively.

^{xxii} Although conversion was allowed according to Jewish law, Christians converting to Judaism was forbidden during this period of Polish history. Additionally, Jewish law forbade conversion on the basis of love or marriage. Had they been found out, both Jacob and Wanda risked excommunication by the Jewish community and death under Polish law.

^{xxiii} It is worth noting that Palestine was not empty space prior to the establishment of Israel, but was rather a primarily Muslim country with a large and growing Jewish minority. I am sensitive to the dispossession of Palestinian citizens for the establishment of Israel and the subsequent oppression of Palestinians by the Israeli government.

CHAPTER 2:

Survivor's Guilt and the Destruction of the Family in Cynthia Ozick's "The Shawl"

In contrast with Isaac Bashevis Singer's *The Slave*, which has been largely overlooked by literary critics, Cynthia Ozick's 1980 short story "The Shawl" has left an indelible impression on Jewish-American literature about the Holocaust, and it has formed the basis for many critical analyses of this literary genre. The story's impact might initially seem outsized, considering that "The Shawl" is a mere six pages and was published to little initial fanfare in the *New Yorker Magazine* in 1980. It was not until 1989, when the short story was republished in book-form by Vintage International that "The Shawl" began to attract serious critical attention. The story itself, while short, delivers a palpable emotional shock to the reader; Ozick skillfully leads her reader to a feeling of impending disaster while holding them in the grip of terror before the story's final, devastating paragraph. Importantly, and also unlike Singer's novel, "The Shawl" seems to avoid allegory entirely, instead placing the reader directly in the mind of a Holocaust victim, augmenting the experience with intimate sensory and physical details. In this way, Ozick does not allow her readers to shun or circumvent the complex emotional and psychological questions at the heart of the narrative, instead forcing them into a confrontation with the ugliness and horror of life in a Nazi death camp. In this regard, "The Shawl" is undoubtedly successful. However, this assertion calls forward two important questions. First, what exactly are the emotional and psychological questions at the heart of the narrative? And second (and perhaps most importantly), what is Ozick's

role in the prompting and investigation of such questions, considering the fact that she is an American-born Jew who did not experience the Holocaust first-hand?

Like *The Slave*, Ozick's "The Shawl" is intensely concerned with the impact that an event as destructive as the Holocaust has on familial bonds. Specifically, Ozick suggests that the Holocaust profoundly disrupted the bonds between relatives, including (or especially) the bond between parent and child. Although Bashevis Singer's Jacob does not witness the murder of his children, Ozick's protagonist does in fact see her daughter murdered, but both are completely powerless to protect their children. The inability to protect a child from murder prompts an investigation of survivor's guilt – specifically, like Bashevis Singer, Ozick is also concerned with the urge by survivors to assign or assume responsibility for the deaths of others. While Bashevis Singer's approach to this question is purely allegorical, Ozick creates a realistic narrative through which she explores the breakdown of family ties and the need to ascribe blame for the death of innocent people. Her non-allegorical approach, however, raises ethical questions about the ability of non-victims to fictionalize the events of the Holocaust, and whether doing so trivializes the experiences of survivors and the deceased. Ultimately, while Ozick herself later expressed regret for having published "The Shawl," her short story has left a lasting impact on Jewish-American literature and provides a remarkable insight into the personal struggles of the generation of twentieth century American Jewish writers whose lives coincided with the Holocaust, but who survived by virtue of their geographic presence in the United States.

Cynthia Ozick is herself a second-generation American, having been born in 1928 to Russian-Jewish parents in the Bronx. According to Giles Harvey in his 2016 interview

with Ozick, her parents “fled the old country to escape the pervasive anti-Semitism that overtook the empire at the turn of the 20th century” (Harvey). As such, her parents were clearly not strangers to religious persecution. Her father owned a pharmacy, and the family was financially comfortable during her childhood. Nonetheless, having grown up in the primarily Italian-American neighborhood of Pelham Bay, Ozick has spoken of experiencing anti-Semitic abuse firsthand; she notes in Harvey’s interview that she was called “Christ-killer” by her peers and was ostracized for refusing to participate in Christmas caroling (Harvey). Ozick attended New York University and the Ohio State University, and she published her first novel in 1966, at the age of 37. Since then, she has had a largely uninterrupted and successful writing career, publishing critical and fictional texts alike, including essays, novels, plays, and short stories. “The Shawl” was published after Ozick was already a well-known author and expert on Jewish aesthetics and the role of Judaism within the wider social fabric of the United States.

It is perhaps a bit shocking, given Ozick’s reputation, that such a powerful story received so little initial attention. A compelling explanation for the limited recognition that this story received relates to the broader academic attitude toward first-person Holocaust narratives. Holocaust expert Barbara Warnock notes in an interview with Brigid Katz that scholars initially “treated the Holocaust as a chapter within the broader narrative of the Nazi regime, rather than a subject in its own right,” and Warnock notes that “it took until the late 1960s at the earliest, and perhaps even onto the 1980s, for a larger shift in the framing of the Holocaust to occur in academia” (Katz). Warnock suggests that scholars disregarded first-person accounts of the Holocaust during the first several decades following World War II in favor of a more holistic view of the war, in

which military and civilian casualties were not discretely distinguished, and the Holocaust was not necessarily considered an event separate from the War itself. Although Warnock's assertion specifically pertains to first-person accounts by survivors, a comprehensive analysis of popular culture during this period reveals a strikingly similar trend. While the military aspect of the War made for a popular cinematic and literary theme^{xxiv}, few books or films dealt directly with Holocaust survivors' experiences. With regard to American pop culture, the change in this trend, which began in the late 1970s and progressed into the 1980s, occurred over the same time period in which institutions and museums began in earnest to record oral testimony from Holocaust survivors. This effort, as well as a shift in academic and pedagogical approaches to teaching the Holocaust^{xxv}, seems to have expanded such topics as were previously regarded as taboo and led to the dissemination of a wide variety of Holocaust narratives over this period, both fictional and non-fictional. While the phenomenon can be clearly identified by the sharp uptick in film and print stories directly related to the Holocaust during the 1980s (as is described in detail later in this chapter), it does not definitively answer the question of why Ozick's story took nearly a decade to be published in book form and command the attention of critics. Nonetheless, understanding that "The Shawl" was published in the midst of this time of changing academic attitudes toward Holocaust literature is vital to understanding Ozick's authorial position as an individual who never witnessed the Holocaust firsthand, because her story was published at a time when many authors, both Jewish and non-Jewish, were grappling with the ethical questions associated with fictionalizing an event as horrific as the Holocaust.

An overview of the changing academic attitudes toward depictions of the Holocaust in media during the 1970s and 1980s is helpful for understanding the approach that Jewish-American authors of the mid-twentieth century took toward writing about (or not about) the Holocaust. Two of the most well-known authors who wrote about the Holocaust, Primo Levi and Elie Wiesel, were survivors who wrote memoirs and critical historical texts on the subject, but very few non-memoir accounts of the Holocaust were published during this period. Similarly, very few films dealing with the Holocaust directly were produced in the decades following the end of World War II. Nonetheless, the Holocaust was an important thematic influence on Jewish writers, inside and outside the United States. Menachem Kaiser writes that, “the Holocaust has influenced, if not defined, nearly every Jewish writer since, from Saul Bellow to Jonathan Safran Foer, and many non-Jews besides” (Kaiser). Written in 1962, Isaac Bashevis Singer’s *The Slave* is firmly situated in the period of time before Jewish authors generally ventured into incorporating the Holocaust directly into their fictional works^{xxvi}. With individuals such as Elie Wiesel advocating against depicting the Holocaust through art and most Jewish American authors avoiding the subject in their fiction, the late 1970s and early 1980s seem to represent a transformational period in Jewish American literary attitudes toward the Holocaust (Wiesel). At the very least, this time period gave rise to a willingness on the part of Jewish American writers (and ultimately, filmmakers) to offer a more graphic, realistic view of the Holocaust in their work. Ozick’s publication of “The Shawl” in 1980 seems a seminal moment in this larger cultural and artistic movement, particularly since the short story drew praise and criticism (and continues to do so) because of its hyper-realistic, heart-wrenching style and content.

“The Shawl” represents the Holocaust in way that might accurately be described as the opposite of an allegory. Specifically, Ozick’s minimalist writing style clearly provides the reader with a first-person perspective on the reality of a Nazi death camp. The text lacks an omniscient narrator, providing only the immediate perspective of Rosa, the primary protagonist. Rosa’s perspective is limited to the physical sensations that she feels and the immediate spatial positions of her daughter Magda and her niece Stella. Rosa’s thoughts never wander; she considers only reality as she experiences it moment to moment. Reading a story structured in such a way provides the reader with only a very narrow aperture through which to view the events of the plot. Absent a narrator’s contextualization or a protagonist’s power of retrospection and anticipation, the reader can only experience the horrors in their immediacy, without opportunity to brace oneself and certainly without the option to overlook the most terrifying and depraved aspects of Rosa’s experiences. Ozick’s narrative format immediately centers the reader in the story. “The Shawl” begins with the lines “Stella, cold, cold, the coldness of hell. How they walked on the roads together, Rosa with Magda curled up between sore breasts, Magda wound up in the shawl” (3). Ozick’s language privileges physical sensation before providing any expository details – “cold, cold” – and then provides a paradoxical metaphor, “the coldness of hell,” to convey the suffering inherent in the protagonists’ condition. By offering her reader primarily the most fundamental sensory descriptions of a death camp, Ozick’s writing takes the form of a sort of documentary realism that leads the reader closer to experiencing rather than simply encountering or understanding the most horrific realities of the Holocaust.

Despite the hyper-realistic writing style and serious subject matter, the story somewhat unexpectedly focuses on the mystical qualities of a tattered shawl that the protagonist Rosa uses to warm and nourish her infant daughter Magda. Ozick writes, “It was a magic shawl, it could nourish an infant for three days and three nights” (5). Magda sucks on a corner of the shawl, which provides her with enough nourishment to survive for months against the odds in a Nazi death camp. Furthermore, Rosa uses the shawl to hide Magda from the guards, holding her daughter to her body beneath the shawl so that Magda is simply “mistaken there for the shivering mound of Rosa’s breasts” (6). Finally, the shawl is used to placate Magda and preventing her from crying or making any other sounds that would alert the guards of her existence, which also helps her to survive in the barracks with her mother undetected. Ozick’s description of the shawl as capable of nourishing an infant “for three days and three nights” is reminiscent of the story of Hanukkah, in which a one-day supply of oil burned for eight days, enough time to consecrate the temple that had been defiled by the Hellenistic king Antiochus in 167 BCE^{xxvii} (1 Maccabees). Additionally, shawls are important garments in Judaism, as Jews are instructed by God in Deuteronomy to wear prayer shawls (tallit, טלית). Such shawls made Jews easily identifiable and were a central part of the Jewish identity, particular for the Ashkenazim (as Rosa and Magda likely were). Furthermore, both Jewish men and women were traditionally buried with a shawl covering their bodies, a point that is also quite significant to Ozick’s story, as Magda’s death is a direct result of her separation from the shawl.

Magda’s death, as with every brutality depicted in this brief story, is both shocking and horrifying. Because of the mystical powers of the shawl itself, Magda is

able to survive without nourishment and remain undetected in the death camp barracks. As long as she is wrapped in the shawl, Magda does not make a sound, which allows her to avoid discovery by the guards. One day, perhaps out of jealousy, Stella steals Magda's shawl, causing her to immediately begin screaming. Ozick presents Rosa's two options – neither of which has the power to save her daughter – either she can run to Magda without the shawl with the understanding that she will continue screaming, or she can retrieve the shawl from Stella but risk Magda attracting the guard's attention in the meantime. The open-ended manner in which Ozick writes of this choice places the reader squarely in Rosa's position, faced with a desperate and futile pair of options. Instead of providing the reader with Rosa's decision, Ozick writes, "Rosa entered the dark" (8). Ultimately, she seeks to retrieve the shawl first, but as expected, Magda's wailing attracts the guards' attention almost immediately. Magda is carried away by a guard, and Ozick describes the moment of her death as follows:

All at once Magda was swimming through the air. The whole of Magda traveled through the loftiness. She looked like a butterfly touching a silver vine. And the moment Magda's feathered round head and her pencil legs and balloonish belly and zigzag arms splashed against the fence, the steel voices went mad in their growling, urging Rosa to run to the spot where Magda had fallen from her flight against the electrified fence; but of course Rosa did not obey them. (9-10)

While this passage retains the brutality of the rest of the story, it is perhaps notable for its use of counterintuitive simile ("like a butterfly touching a silver vine"). In the moments in which Rosa tries to retrieve Magda's shawl, she has a fleeting thought of "another life,

of butterflies in the summer . . . On the other side of the steel fence, far away, there were green meadows speckled with dandelions and deep-colored violets; beyond them, even farther, innocent tiger lilies, tall, lifting their orange bonnets” (8). And as she watches as Magda is carried away by a guard, Rosa thinks “she was no bigger than a moth!” (9). The repetitive comparison of Magda to a butterfly and the insinuation of “another life” on the other side of the fence (the same fence upon which Magda is killed) seems to suggest that Rosa is grappling with the unstated question of whether her daughter might not be better off if death brought her to “another life^{xxviii}.” As Rosa is hurrying to save Magda, she considers what “flowers” and “rain” mean for her and her daughter: “excrement, thick turd braids, and the slow stinking maroon waterfall that slunk down from the upper bunks. . .” (9). Upon this thought, Rosa “stood for an instant on the margin of the arena” (9). She hesitates, and it is at this precise moment that Magda is picked up by a Nazi guard.

Rosa’s hesitation in this moment is critical. Although she certainly could not have saved her daughter (the situation was futile from the start), it is her hesitation and ultimate inaction that allow her to appropriate the blame for her daughter’s death. “The Shawl” closes with Rosa unable to run to her daughter, unable to call out, unable to even scream, because she knows that any reaction would alert the guards that she had hidden the child and result in her death. Therefore, she is unable even to express even the most basic form of grief upon seeing her daughter thrown into an electrified fence. Instead, Rosa “took Magda’s shawl and filled her own mouth with it” (10). The story ends without revealing whether Rosa herself survived the death camp^{xxix}, and the reader is certainly not left with any concrete sense of what guilt (if any) Rosa felt regarding her

role in Magda's death. However, the story does depict a woman who is unable to perform her duties as a mother, and ultimately her daughter is killed. Witnessing the violent death of one's own child, particularly after having tried and failed to prevent it—or even hesitated—is undoubtedly one of the most traumatic experiences that an individual could experience, and any reader of “The Shawl” is forced to consider how Rosa could possibly cope with what she experienced.

By line two, Ozick makes quite clear that maternity is one of the key themes of “The Shawl.” “Sore breasts” indicate that the condition of motherhood is strained or challenged by the present reality for Rosa; later in the paragraph, Ozick writes that Rosa was a “walking cradle,” and that “there was not enough milk; sometimes Magda sucked air; then she screamed” (3). Rosa's inability to produce enough milk for her daughter is a persistent problem in the story. Rosa does not expect Magda to survive, because she has no nourishment to provide her. Ozick writes, “without complaining, Magda relinquished Rosa's teats, first the left, then the right; both were cracked, not a sniff of milk. The duct-crevice extinct, a dead volcano, blind eye, chill hole. . .” (4). Although Rosa's inability to produce milk undoubtedly stems from her own severe malnutrition, it nonetheless prevents her from ensuring her daughter's survival and inhibits the most basic of her maternal duties—keeping her daughter alive. Indeed, the role of “mother” is subsumed by the shawl itself: “so Magda took the corner of the shawl and milked it instead. She sucked and sucked, flooding the threads with wetness. The shawl's good flavor, the milk of linen” (4-5). It is the shawl, not Rosa, that keeps Magda alive, and it is the loss of the shawl that leads to her death, while Rosa is only able to observe passively. One of the most obvious themes at the heart of “The Shawl” is the way in which the Holocaust

explodes familial bonds and dismantles the maternal bond between a mother and child. One can only imagine the trauma that Rosa must experience at not only witnessing her daughter's murder, but also having to cope with the knowledge that her ability to perform her role as a mother was taken from her long before Magda's death.

An important and heretofore unaddressed figure in this short story is Stella. From the start, we know little about her, other than the fact that she is a young girl and Rosa's niece. Based on Rosa's observation that Stella is not menstruating (but ought to be), it would seem likely that Stella is in her teens. Although she is ostensibly responsible for caring for Stella, it is clear from the start that Rosa dislikes and resents her. In Rosa's eyes, Stella is always "cold," and she is described as constantly "ravenous." Rosa imagines that Stella would like to eat Magda, calling her a "young cannibal." Of course, it is ultimately Stella who takes Magda's shawl, setting in motion the chain of events that leads to Magda's death. When asked why she took the shawl, Stella responds that she took it because she was cold. Ozick writes, "and afterwards she was always cold, always. The cold went into her heart: Rosa saw that Stella's heart was cold" (6-7). Stella, unlike Magda, is not Rosa's child; the two lack a maternal connection. Apart from taking Magda's shawl, the story does not reveal what becomes of Stella except that after Magda's death, "the cold went into her heart" (7). There is no indication that Stella experienced any degree of remorse or guilt following Magda's death—on the contrary, "coldness" would seem to indicate a lack of contrition or regard for either Magda or Rosa. From a critical perspective, Stella's coldness provides the story's most promising opening for an exploration of Ozick's position relative to the narrative, and perhaps a

broader platform for analyzing Ozick's view on the relationship between American Jews and victims of the Holocaust.

The story gives no clear indication that Stella is a malevolent character per se. In fact, her only wants (or needs, more accurately) are warmth and food. Coldness and hunger are traits that are full of thematic significance, however. Coldness may be interpreted to signify callousness or indifference, while hunger might indicate selfishness and greed. Stella herself (although obviously a victim of the Holocaust at large) is not harmed by Magda's death, nor does she display any grief at the loss of her cousin. However, the reader's initial interpretation of Stella is likely to be biased by the telling of the story from Rosa's perspective. Although one may sympathize with Rosa's anger toward Stella for taking Magda's shawl, the text itself offers many opportunities for reading Stella as a sympathetic character. Beyond the obvious—that Stella is a young girl who is herself a victim of the process of genocide—Stella also clearly lacks a maternal figure. One would expect Rosa, as her aunt, to have love and compassion for Stella, yet she feels only resentment when Stella's need for warmth and nourishment threaten Magda's. Just as the conditions of the death camps inhibited Rosa's maternal abilities with regard to her daughter, they also destroy the familial bonds between Rosa and Stella. As Elie Wiesel writes in his memoir *Night*, "here there are no fathers, no brothers, no friends. Everyone lives and dies for himself alone" (Wiesel, 122). For Rosa, her infant daughter's survival is her only priority, and because Stella is a threat to Magda, Stella becomes a kind of enemy. Textually, this places Stella in a unique position—she is portrayed as a villain, yet an objective analysis clearly reveals that she is no less a victim than Magda.

Rosa's impulse to blame Stella for Magda's death provides a lens through which to view Ozick's position as a Jewish woman who did not herself experience the Holocaust firsthand. While it is obvious that the responsibility for Magda's death lies with both the guard who killed her and the Nazis at-large for perpetrating this genocide, Rosa does not express the same hatred or resentment towards her captors as she does for Stella. This misappropriation of blame can also be seen in the impulse of many American Jews to blame themselves or otherwise seek to assign responsibility for the suffering of other Jews through their own inaction or absence. Even if one assumes that Stella stole the shawl from Magda knowing that it might put her life in danger, it seems fair to suggest that Stella, a child, also had a right to some of the shawl's magical nourishing properties. Likewise, American Jews and their ancestors who fled or otherwise emigrated from Europe prior to the Holocaust did so with the intention of finding a life of greater safety and economic security. And yet, by taking such an opportunity, those emigres ensured their own survival while many of those left behind perished. Although this analogy is not perfect, as Stella herself is also a direct victim of the Holocaust, it does get to the heart of the question of what responsibility those who survived bear for the deaths of those who did not. As noted in Chapter 1, survivor's guilt often results in an individual "attribut[ing] at least partial responsibility for that event or its consequences to the survivor herself" (Griffoen). By writing a story in which Stella is attributed responsibility for Magda's death, Ozick surpasses the *irrational* assumption of guilt and actually assigns a degree of blame to one of her characters. As Singer demonstrated in writing *The Slave*, it was not uncommon for American Jewish authors to grapple with the question of their complicity in the deaths of Jews during the Holocaust simply because they survived

by virtue of living in the United States. With this historical and psychological context, it is not a stretch to read Stella as a characteristic manifestation of the survivor's guilt that Ozick and other American Jews might feel when directly confronted with the horrors of the Holocaust.

In a 1989 review of *The Shawl*, Irving Halperin writes that “In a time when the memory of the Holocaust is being trivialized by slick fiction, talk shows, and TV ‘documentaries,’ . . . Ozick’s extraordinary volume is a particularly welcome achievement of the moral imagination” (Halperin). Although Halperin does not identify what he considers “slick fiction,” the period in which Ozick published “The Shawl” roughly corresponds with the publication of William Styron’s *Sophie’s Choice* (1979) and its subsequent film adaption (1982)^{xxx}, as well as Thomas Keneally’s *Schindler’s Ark* (1982)^{xxxi}. Furthermore, Claude Lanzmann’s nine-hour documentary on the Holocaust, *Shoah*, was released in 1985^{xxxii}. Regardless of Halperin’s assessment of these and other examples of 1980s Holocaust media, it is certainly clear that “The Shawl” was published during a time when both publishers and filmmakers were becoming more comfortable with producing content related to the Holocaust. This represented a monumental shift away from the approach of novelists and directors of the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, most of whom chose to avoid the Holocaust as a subject or approach it obliquely or even allegorically^{xxxiii}, as Singer does in *The Slave*. This approach was pushed in part by Holocaust survivors themselves, who often felt that artistic license could never be applied to the events of the Holocaust. For instance, survivor Elie Wiesel famously wrote in 1989:

Auschwitz represents the negation and failure of human progress; it negates the human design and casts doubts on its validity. Then, it defeated culture; later, it defeated art, because just as no one could imagine Auschwitz before Auschwitz, no one can now retell Auschwitz after Auschwitz. The truth of Auschwitz remains hidden in its ashes. Only those who lived it in their flesh and in their minds can possibly transform their experience into knowledge. Others, despite their best intentions, can never do so (Wiesel).

Wiesel's article, titled "Art and the Holocaust: Trivializing Memory" was published as a rebuke to the many works of fiction published in the 1980s that depicted the Holocaust. He called out works by name: "'The Night Porter,' 'Seven Beauties,' the docudrama 'Holocaust,' 'Sophie's Choice,' 'War and Remembrance' (I speak of the film, not the book, which is both shattering and sensitive) 'Murderers Among Us,' the recent 'Ghetto' that played on Broadway for several weeks and previously, to great acclaim. . ." (Wiesel). For Wiesel, the Holocaust was not merely impossible to depict accurately, but also, he argues, doing so is disrespectful to the millions of people who were killed by the events.

Cynthia Ozick did not live through the Holocaust. Is it true, then, as Wiesel says, that "Only those who lived it in their flesh and in their minds can possibly transform their experience into knowledge. Others, despite their best intentions, can never do so?" Perhaps surprisingly, Ozick herself seems inclined to agree with Wiesel that she not only lacks the ability to transform such experiences into knowledge, but also that attempting to do so is unethical. In a 1993 interview, upon being asked whether she had ever "fictionalized the Holocaust," Ozick responded:

I did it in five pages in "The Shawl", and I don't admire that I did it. I did it because I couldn't help it. It wanted to be done. I didn't want to do it, and afterward I've in a way punished myself, I've accused myself for having done it. I wasn't there, and I pretended through imagination that I was. I've also on occasion been punished in angry letters from people who really were there. But I wasn't there, and the story is not a document, it's an imagining. (Canales)

Ozick's quote is revealing in a number of ways. Importantly, she expresses regret for having composed a Holocaust story from her imagination, because she "wasn't there." The other important revelation from this quote is Ozick's justification; she says that she "couldn't help it," which prompts a deeper consideration of her own process of guilt and the position that she finds herself in as a person of Jewish faith who was not harmed by the Holocaust. It is unclear whether caving to this compulsion is meant to exorcise feelings of survivor's guilt, but Ozick's statement that "it wanted to be done. I didn't want to do it" seems to indicate that the need was external of her own creative interests, but rather part of a deep-seated cultural and historical necessity.

Although Ozick claims that she was wrong to write about the Holocaust from a firsthand perspective, her critical writings provide a more complex explanation for her motives. As previously noted, William Styron's 1979 novel *Sophie's Choice* was among the first works of popular American literature to fictionalize the Holocaust. It received criticism, including from many Jewish Americans, for its portrayal of a non-Jewish protagonist and her two children as the story's primary victims. Among these critics was Cynthia Ozick, who wrote an essay titled "A Liberal's Auschwitz," in which she

criticized Styron's centering of non-Jewish characters in a story about the Holocaust. Ozick wrote, "We have no right, in the nourishing name of 'life,' in the perilously ennobling name of 'humanity,' to divest the Jews of their specifically Jewish martyrdom" (Ozick). While she expressed qualms about her own qualifications to create such a narrative, Ozick clearly believes that the trauma (or "martyrdom," to use her word) of the Holocaust is specific to Jewish people, and therefore they claim the singular ability to tell such stories. This dichotomy helps to explain why, as Jew, Ozick felt compelled to write "The Shawl" just one year after she renounced Styron's right to write a fictional Holocaust narrative as a non-Jew.

To answer the question of what exactly compelled Ozick to write such a narrative, it is vital to turn to the text for clues. It seems particularly revealing that Ozick, who felt that she "couldn't help" but write a fictionalized Holocaust narrative, chose to include a young girl whose seemingly selfish actions result in the brutal murder of a small child. As established, Stella is not an evil character – she, like Rosa and Magda, suffers unimaginable pain and misery in the death camp. And yet, she is characterized by Rosa repetitively as "cold" and "hungry," and perhaps most importantly, indifferent. Objectively, Stella is also clearly a victim; she is starving, she is freezing, and she lacks the love and comfort that she ought to expect from Rosa, her only adult relative. And yet, because "The Shawl" is told through Rosa's eyes, the reader is led to interpret Stella as selfish, greedy, and callous. The authorial decision to include such a character, and to hinge the events of the plot upon her actions, does seem to indicate a desire to ascribe blame where blame is undue – and to perhaps atone for sins uncommitted. This desire to assume or place blame reflects the psychological manifestation of survivor's guilt.

Similar to Jacob's insistence that he is to blame for the death of his family in Bashevis Singer's *The Slave*, Ozick's Stella is blamed for Magda's death simply because she, like Magda, craved warmth and nourishment. Keeping in mind the psychological manifestations of survivor's guilt and the established understanding that such a complex can develop even in individuals who were not present when the trauma occurred, it seems likely that Ozick's writing of "The Shawl" was motivated by a desire not merely to fictionalize the Holocaust for an American audience, but rather to work through her own complex feelings of associative guilt and the desire of many American Jews to assume some blame or responsibility for their lack of suffering during the Holocaust.

"The Shawl" is not anchored in any form of historical contextualization or geographic specificity. Read beginning to end, it does not include the words "Holocaust," "death camp," "Nazi," or "Jewish." Instead, it relies on the reader's knowledge of the events in question to establish the setting, while keeping the plot entirely in the moment – starting with a forced march and culminating with the death of a small child at the hands of a guard in a concentration camp. Ozick situates her readers directly in Rosa's mind at all times, describing only what she sees, feels, and hears. Although a third-person narrator, Ozick's style is not omniscient; rather, the impending sense of what *might* befall Rosa, Magda, and Stella is what propels the narrative. As a work of prose, "The Shawl" is remarkable in its power to devastate and force a direct, face-to-face confrontation with the realities of the Holocaust on a sensory level. Thematically, the story explores the ways in which trauma narrows the scope of one's life and limits one's comprehension to only what is in front of them. Furthermore, "The Shawl" conducts a brief but complex analysis of what happens to the bonds of motherhood and family when people are

stripped of their most basic human dignity. Most remarkably, this six-page short story provides a fascinating look at the workings of trauma and survivor's guilt on Ozick herself, an American Jew who never herself encountered the violence of the Holocaust face-to-face. "The Shawl" stands as a revelatory piece of fiction that presents the Holocaust with cutting devastation while simultaneously calling into question its own right to exist, providing a glimpse into the manifestations of survivor's guilt across an entire community of individuals.

^{xxiv} Norman Mailer's *The Naked and The Dead* (1948), Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* (1961), and Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five* (1969) each deal primarily or entirely with the military aspects of World War II. *Battleground* (1949), *Decision Before Dawn* (1950), and *The Guns of Navarone* (1961) were early films depicting the same.

^{xxv} James H. Farnham's important 1983 essay "Ethical Ambiguity and the Teaching of the Holocaust" begins with the now-famous phrase, "Having taught a college course on literature of the Holocaust four times, I will soon begin my fifth guided tour through hell" (Farnham, 1). This essay called for a more comprehensive approach toward teaching the Holocaust, including providing a more nuanced understanding of life in a death camp and the leaving of room for ethical ambiguity when teaching about subject such as kapos (prisoners assigned to oversee and sometimes punish other prisoners). The influence of Farnham's essay has been noted by other pedagogical researchers, including David H. Lindquist in his 2007 article "A Necessary Holocaust Pedagogy: Teaching the Teachers."

^{xxvi} However, Bashevis Singer's novel *Enemies, A Love Story* and several of his short stories do deal with the Holocaust more directly.

^{xxvii} Although Hanukkah is a relatively minor holiday in Judaism, it has particular significance in modern times, as it falls during the Christmas season and thus is viewed by many as a Jewish equivalent to Christmas. Historically, it was not widely celebrated, but it does emphasize the Jewish belief in the occurrence of miracles during times of struggle or oppression, as is the case in "The Shawl."

^{xxviii} The Jewish faith has a clear concept of the afterlife, although it differs somewhat from Christian theology insofar as it lacks a well-defined dichotomy between heaven and hell.

^{xxix} Although Ozick wrote another story, "Rosa," which presumes that Rosa did survive and had immigrated to the United States.

^{xxx} Styron's *Sophie's Choice* was regarded as controversial by some, largely because it focuses on a non-Jewish Polish protagonist. Alvin Rosenfeld wrote in his 1979 article "The Holocaust According to William Styron" that Styron intended to "reorient views of the Holocaust away from its being solely aimed against the Jews, toward its encompassing Slavic and other Christians" (Rosenfeld). It is not clear whether Halperin found this approach objectionable, or if he was in fact referring to *Sophie's Choice* when criticizing the "slick fiction" of 1980s Holocaust narratives. Ozick, however, did object to the subject of Styron's novel.

^{xxxi} *Schindler's Ark* was later adapted into the film *Schindler's List* by Steven Spielberg, and the book was later re-issued under the name *Schindler's List*. Although not generally controversial, *Schindler's Ark* does not center exclusively on the conditions of the Holocaust, but rather tells of Oskar Schindler's efforts to save thousands of Jews from murder by Nazis.

^{xxxii} *Shoah* was criticized by some as being anti-Polish, but it seems unlikely that this well-respected documentary is the target of Halperin's critique of "TV 'documentaries.'"

^{xxxiii} Wanda Jakubowska's 1947 film *The Last Stage (Ostatni etap)* is often considered the first film about the Holocaust. Jakubowska herself survived Auschwitz, and filming was conducted on the grounds of the camp. Extras were often themselves Auschwitz survivors. Noteworthy American films from the following decades include *The Diary of Anne Frank* (1959), *Judgement at Nuremberg* (1961), and *The Pawnbroker* (1964). These films generally concern the events leading up to the Holocaust or those following the liberation of the camps, and they tended to avoid showing graphic violence or conditions in detail. After the release of films like *Sophie's Choice* and *Schindler's List*, American and international filmmakers began to produce more realistic depictions of the horrors of the Holocaust, including *Life is Beautiful* (1997), *The Pianist* (2002), and *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* (2008).

CONCLUSION

Some 75 years after the last death camps were liberated, it is clear that Elie Wiesel's assertion that the Holocaust "defeated art, because just as no one could imagine Auschwitz before Auschwitz, no one can now retell Auschwitz after Auschwitz" has been largely ignored (Wiesel). In the last two decades, dozens of books and films have been produced that fictionalize the Holocaust—dramas, children's books, graphic novels, even comedic films. Whether Adorno is correct that turning the Holocaust into art is "barbaric" is open to interpretation, but there is no question that it is being done. In today's era, in which the Holocaust is frequently the subject of mass media, it is perhaps difficult to conceptualize a time in which publishing a short story in *The New Yorker* about a little girl who dies in a death camp was considered a risk. It stretches credulity even further to imagine that, 60 years ago, it would have been almost unheard of for an American Jew to publish a novel dealing directly with the pain and grief of the Holocaust. And yet these observations are both true—despite their vastly different approaches, Isaac Bashevis Singer and Cynthia Ozick were two of the first Jewish-American authors to tackle the subject of the emotional trauma felt by American Jews who were not present for the Holocaust, but were nonetheless profoundly and irreversibly affected by it.

If what Adorno says is true, that "suffering . . . also demands the continued existence of the very art it forbids," then it would seem only natural that, at some point, Jewish Americans would turn to the written word to give voice to their own suffering (Adorno). While there is no question that those Jews who were saved from the Holocaust

by virtue of their residency in the United States did not experience the immense terror of Nazi genocide, they nonetheless experienced a very powerful form of trauma. On an individual level, many American Jews lost relatives and friends. Others lost religious and cultural sites important to their heritage. Nearly all suffered from the horizontal transfer of trauma by virtue of their cultural and/or religious identity as Jewish. They suffered, but the ability of American Jews to break the silence of this suffering and confront this shared trauma head-on was limited by the need to respect the dead and allow space for the survivors. In time, however, Jewish-American authors found ways to speak their trauma. For Bashevis Singer, that meant using allegory to explore the complexities of survivor's guilt. For Ozick, it was as simple as a six-page story reimagining life in a death camp. Today, there exists a wide array of Jewish-American perspectives on the Holocaust, and as a result, the suffering of generations of victims, their families, and their communities are well known.

There is no doubt that Bashevis Singer and Ozick opened doors for subsequent generations of Jewish (and non-Jewish) authors who chose to write about the Holocaust. But how does their approach to the difficulty of fictionalizing mass murder apply beyond just the Holocaust? Following a traumatic event, it is not unusual for critics and philosophers to pronounce the inability of language to adequately convey the true scope of the suffering. For example, Richard Gray writes, "If there was one thing writers agreed about in response to 9/11, it was the failure of language; the terrorist attacks made the tools of their trade seem absurd" (Gray, 1). September 11, 2001 was without a doubt one of the most traumatic days in U.S. history, and the artistic response in many ways mirrors

the response to the Holocaust. For a period, little was written (and certainly no films were produced) that directly addressed the events of 9/11.

And yet, in time, authors began to find ways to express their suffering. Jonathan Safran Foer, for instance (whom Menachem Kaiser noted was “influenced, if not defined” by the literature of the Holocaust himself), published the novel *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* in 2005 in which he depicted the grief and survivor’s guilt of a young boy whose father died in the World Trade Center attacks. Foer’s approach is similar to Bashevis Singer’s; instead of writing the novel from the perspective of a victim and directly reimagining the events of the attack, Foer centers the story on a child, thereby largely avoiding the event itself and focusing instead on grief and the passage of trauma through families and generations (Foer). This approach makes the novel (and subsequent movie adaptation) more palatable for the audience, who are not expected to directly confront the violent trauma of the 9/11 attacks while still facilitating an emotional rumination on the loss of a loved one through a tragic and senseless act.

For better or worse, it seems unlikely that the ethical warnings against making art out of certain traumatic events will ever last forever. Although entirely well-reasoned, Elie Wiesel’s insistence that those who did not experience the Holocaust firsthand cannot reproduce it artistically has not succeeded in preventing generations of artists from attempting to do so. As long as trauma is passed on through and across generations and communities, it is nearly impossible to limit artistic expression to only those with firsthand experience with such traumas. As both Bashevis Singer and Ozick demonstrated, people who suffered the effects of trauma will inevitably find a way to give themselves a voice.

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