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Forgetting and Remembering: Narrating Holocaust Childhoods in Hiding

A Dissertation Presented

by

Carolyn Ariella Sofia

to

The Graduate School

in Partial Fulfillment of the

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Abstract of the Dissertation

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Mention of the Holocaust brings to mind images of skeletal adults and piles of corpses. Less well-known is the experience of Jewish children who tried to survive the cataclysm in hiding, only a small fraction of whom succeeded. Roughly 90% of Europe's prewar Jewish child population perished during the war. In Poland, the central location of concentration camps, historians estimate less than 1% survived, all of them assumed to have done so in hiding.

In contrast to Anne Frank's literal life behind the woodwork, in which for a time she was able to retain her Jewish identity, children who lived in open hiding had to forget the past, to mask themselves as faux Christians and never by a glance, an accent, or a social mistake reveal their original ethnic identity. Survival in this manner involved a combination of luck, planning, and the ability to live behind a wall of psychological silence.

What is still missing from literary analysis on texts they produced is application of psychological theory developed specifically from therapeutic interaction with Jewish adults who began life as hidden children. Yvonne Tauber, a clinical psychologist at AMCHA, the National

Israeli Center for Psychosocial Support for Holocaust Survivors and the Second Generation, coined the term “compound personality” to describe the coexistence of a shattered, traumatized child self and the chronologically appropriate adult self within the child survivor's personality. By-passing her theory in favor of dominant trauma theories makes critics miss important elements in child survivors’ memoirs and fiction. Indeed, when we apply the notion of compound personality to such texts, as is done in this dissertation, we discover a “literary thumbprint,” one that identifies these texts as a distinct sub-category of Holocaust literature.

*For my dear children, Elana, Joel and Aaron, the joys of my life
and in memory of J.K.*

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Acknowledgements

Writing is best when it is a collaborative project. Especially in a university setting, scholars are supposed to be in dialogue with their subjects and in conversation with other thinkers. Nevertheless, writing a dissertation can be a long, lonely process. When I returned to the university as a graduate student after a long absence, I was determined to finish but had to find a way into the conversation.

It happened first by mail and telephone with writers and scholars across the country. I am indebted to Professor Jerome Klinkowitz of the University of Northern Iowa, to Professor Emeritus Martin Tucker of L.I. University/C.W. Post College, to the late Dr. Henry Krystal of Michigan State University, to the late Rabbi Byron Sherwin of Spertus Institute, and to Professor Emeritus Stanley Corngold of Princeton. All had known Jerzy Kosinski on a personal basis. They were willing to read early iterations of my work and to offer encouragement for me to pursue this study. So was novelist Cynthia Ozick. Heartfelt gratitude goes to all of them for taking my ideas seriously and becoming my first conversational partners.

My dissertation committee members encouraged me to include other child survivor authors besides Kosinski, a suggestion that greatly enhanced the quality and breadth of the study. Warmest thanks go to my advisor, Professor Stephen Spector, to Distinguished Professor E. Ann Kaplan, to Professor Eugene Hammond, and to my outside reader, Distinguished Professor and Chair of the Stony Brook University Political Science Department, Jeffrey Segal. They made my dissertation defense a genuine conversation and gave me a new goal of turning this dissertation into a book.

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Introduction

In the winter of 1982 while packing for a trip to Israel to visit a friend who had decided to live there, I hurriedly added a paperback novel to my suitcase in case there was time to read on the plane or at the hotel. Jerusalem that February was bitterly cold; the evenings brought a different chill. Jerzy Kosinski's *The Painted Bird* was so terrifying I ended up abandoning the book in my hotel room instead of taking it back home.

Two years later in the late fall of 1984, while browsing the shelves for a new novel at the Coliseum bookstore in Manhattan, I noticed Kosinski standing next to me. He was leaning over, his arm extended, his fingers counting off the number of his own books stored on the shelf. Too shy to speak to him, I went home and wrote a long letter describing what had happened to me in Jerusalem and asking a few questions about his novel. One evening a few months later the phone rang. Imagine my surprise when his fast-paced, Slavic voice came on the other end of the line introducing himself.

We met for dinner at a local restaurant and had several hours of ferocious argument about writers, readers and novels. He listened so attentively and made such thoughtful remarks, I don't remember ever being as spontaneous as I was that night. Our evening started a peculiar relationship in which we almost never saw each other, but somehow stayed in touch by phone or mail. Tongue in cheek in June 1986 we published connected letters to the editor in a Manhattan magazine. Later that year we met once more to continue our first discussion. When he published his last novel, *The Hermit of 69th Street*, in the spring of 1988, he sent me a copy of a short story that he had also published in a small literary journal that season. A long break followed and then

two quick contacts from him by mail in March and April 1991. The last envelope had his return address on it, but no handwriting inside. He had simply folded a copy of an essay he had written for the *Boston Globe* on the Holocaust. The article had been printed alongside a pen and ink illustration of a man with angel wings, earthbound, his face turned away from the viewer, the tips of his wings engulfed in flames. Unaware that Jerzy was going to end his life in a few weeks, I found the envelope's content puzzling and didn't respond to him. In retrospect, perhaps, he was saying good-bye, using the picture on his behalf to say that no matter what he did in life, memories of his childhood in the Holocaust always threatened to consume him.

Later in life than most students I came back to the university to complete a doctorate and to write about Kosinski's books. Not long after my research got started in 2009 I realized that almost no scholars were engaged with his work anymore. This was a major problem because the culture of academia encourages dialogue with other well-educated and serious minded individuals. Normally this connection is made through conventions and publications, but I did not see an early pathway to my own goal that way. So I decided somewhat unconventionally to start work and to share it directly with academics and friends who had been on the scene when the author's reputation was still untarnished. In essence I decided to create my own conversational group.

My first contact was with Professor Jerome Klinkowitz, once a central figure in Kosinski studies. In correspondence that lasted several months, he was willing to read early iterations of my ideas, especially an analysis about a section of his book, *Keeping Literary Company*, which described Kosinski's visit to his home in the 1970s. In the end, he agreed with me that Jerzy had behaved in the way of a person undergoing a panic attack at his house when he was being

escorted outside to view the gardens, but instead turned abruptly and raced back inside without a word after noticing a dense stand of trees far back in the yard. Two meetings with Professor Martin Tucker at C. W. Post College, who had worked with Kosinski on a newsletter at American P.E.N. and edited the small-circulation literary journal that published Kosinski's single short story, "Chantal," put the details surrounding publication of that short fiction into sharper focus for me.

Dr. Henry Krystal, a Holocaust survivor and one of the pioneer thinkers on the topic of massive psychic trauma, graciously read over fifty pages of my preliminary analysis and encouraged me to keep working on the idea that Kosinski was hiding autobiographic material in female characters and also that he seemed to have a double personality, a private, non-fiction self and a public, fictionalized persona. The late Rabbi Byron Sherwin, Kosinski's spiritual mentor toward the end of his life, welcomed me to Chicago in 2010 to visit the portion of the author's literary archives that are housed at Spertus Institute. Sherman's conversations were enlightening, particularly his description of the day Jerzy wore a traditional Jewish head covering and prayer shawl in order to act as the *sandak* or spiritual godfather to Sherman's infant son. So was the shopping bag full of letters and writings and other Kosinski memorabilia from his personal collection that he let me borrow overnight and bring to my hotel. I would also end up making several trips to Kosinski's main archives at Yale University's Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library in New Haven. Jewish-American novelist Cynthia Ozick, with whom I had also corresponded in the 1980s, welcomed a heavy envelope of writings from me and read and commented on my work, as did Professor Stanley Corngold, who had edited two of Kosinski's early novels.

As a group, all these individuals need to be warmly thanked for taking my ideas seriously and responding to me in such a generous way. Their response, along with the suggestion of my dissertation committee advisors, motivated me to study a broader array of narratives by hidden child survivors, without which I would not have been able to put Kosinski's writing into its proper context. For the sake of balance I have only been able to include a small portion of the research work I have done on Kosinski into this study, but I now have an inkling of how academics find ideas for future projects.

Thirty years have passed since my dinner with Kosinski, yet I still recall what an extraordinarily intelligent, yet vulnerable, man he was. His absence leaves me wondering what he would have accomplished had he chosen to live. It makes me wonder what all the people whom the Nazis marked as inferior would have accomplished had they been allowed to live out their lives.

So we may say that this study has its roots in ruminations on absence. Ancient Hebrew texts record a long list of nations wishing to replace the existence of the Jewish people with their absence: the Edomites, the Ishmaelites, the Moabites, the Hagarites, the Philistines, the Amalekites, the Assyrians, and so forth. When the biblical *Book of Jeremiah* describes the God of Israel mourning such attacks against the Israelites -- "Mine heritage is unto me as a speckled bird, the birds round about are against her" (12.9) -- the text reads as if it were source material for the title of *The Painted Bird*, a wartime *bildungsroman* about a six-year old boy lost among peasants in a barbaric landscape and community that seem to reference rural Poland during the Holocaust. The rhythm of violence against the Jews continued during a multi-century chain of inquisitions and pogroms. Owing to the general trend of emancipation that began in the

eighteenth century and brought fuller integration into mainstream society, Jewish communities living in Germany and the surrounding Western European countries had reason to expect life was on an upward tilt at the outset of the twentieth century.

But hindsight proves that assumption incorrect: the twentieth century instead sank into a moral abyss. The First World War's new weaponry, coupled with old-fashioned field defenses, took the lives of over nine million people. Technological advancement, which outstripped human capacity for ethical action, hit its nadir in the 1930s when Adolf Hitler realized that information itself could become a tool of war. In support of his desire to clear Europe of all its Jews, to make it *Judenrein*, the Third Reich utilized the Hollerith machine, the most advanced tabulator in the world prior to the introduction of electronic computers, as its data gathering system for a national census in Germany that would, among other identifying pieces of information gathered on punch cards, determine race and religion back to the grandparents' generation ("Locating the Victims" 1). Such sophisticated data management meant that for the first time residents could, in a routine way, be identified and located quickly by virtue of statistical information. According to investigative journalist Edwin Black, "the Hollerith card sorting system [would end up being used] at Bergen-Belsen and most of the other concentration camps" (22). For a time in 1943, its five-digit code even provided the numbers tattooed on prisoners' forearms (352). In some way Auschwitz was, as Henry Feingold writes, "a mundane extension of the modern factory system" (398.) Mundane obviously does not equate to normal because this union of German fascism and technological innovation helped pave the way for the efficient, bureaucratic torture and murder of almost six million Jews, as well as millions of other people the Nazis' racial laws considered undesirable.

According to Stephan G. Fritz's study of the Russo-German war from a German perspective, the Führer's original plan had been to expel the Jews of Germany to the island of Madagascar. This idea proved impractical when the defeat of Poland and France brought millions of additional Jews under the domination of Berlin. The cornerstone of Hitler's life thereafter became the "conquest of living space" (*Ostkrieg n.p.*), a directive that involved the eviction of those defined by the Nazis as racially inferior and the substitution of *Volksdeutsch*, ethnically pure Aryans, in order to extend German culture into those areas. With it came plans eventually for the annihilation of all Jews. When we think back to the Hollerith machine operator and picture the image of a typist's finger hitting a key that flings forward a metal die on a machine -- a single stroke to produce a small, rectangular cut-out, an absence, on a card -- we recognize the movement as an eerie metaphor for Hitler's dark fantasy of a Nazi-occupied Europe excised of its Jewish population.

Even before the Final Solution began to unfold, Hitler's intention was understood and could be represented from a child's perspective. Maciek, the young protagonist in Louis Begley's novel, *Wartime Lies*, notices after the Anschluss occurs and Austria has been occupied and annexed into Nazi Germany, that his father's behavior shows heightened concern for the fate of Poland. He therefore concludes that "[t]he fabric of his [father's] youth was unraveling" (27). Jews outside the camps in Europe felt this sense of political encroachment and diminishing territory too, particularly in ghettos as the perimeters were tightened and more and more people were squeezed in by hateful mathematical precision that divided the amount of personal space available into smaller and smaller units, as well as in hiding places too cramped to allow a person to stand up.

The youngest group of Jews to survive Hitler's onslaught includes a small percentage of children who emerged from hiding places after the war, but who kept silent about their wartime experience for decades. Not considered for a long time as actual victims, they did not speak out in large numbers until the 1990s when big group meetings of child survivors were first initiated. Nevertheless, some writers in this group spoke out earlier and gave readers a child's eye view of the terror of war and the psychological effect of being a target of the Third Reich's maniacal Jew-hating machine.

This dissertation uses an inter-disciplinary approach to focus on such children, showing the various circumstances that make up a life in hiding and mark its psychological aftermath. Though in many ways hiding situations are more individualistic than concentration camp settings, such childhoods nevertheless share commonalities, i.e., frequent and traumatic separation from parents, the necessity for a false Christian outer identity, the stress of avoiding discovery, and an enforced silence for decades after. The study argues that these similar childhoods mark testimonial accounts in fact and fiction by hidden child survivors in a distinctive way. While many readers would assume that concentration camp experiences are the central story of the Holocaust, it claims that narratives by hidden child survivors create a distinct sub-section of Holocaust literature.

Divided into five chapters, the study progresses as follows: **Chapter 1: Beyond *l'univers concentrationnaire*** connects the psychology behind concentration camp accounts to the emotional core of narratives written by hidden children. It argues that their similarities to the former also make them a genre of Holocaust literature. Though not about the concentration camp experience, they are wedded to testimonies written by camp survivors by the expression of similar dissociative coping mechanisms. **Chapter 2: The Unmaking of the World** creates a

context to understand Jewish children's lives in the years immediately preceding the war (1933-1939), especially how the Nuremberg Laws and other forms of anti-Semitic Nazi policies affected them. **Chapter 3: The Last Eyewitnesses** analyzes the psychological situation of this child survivor group. Members of this group belong to the generation sandwiched between adult Holocaust survivors and generations born after the war. They did not forget, as was first hoped, the traumatic events of their childhoods, but they also do not possess full memory, so holes, gaps, and other markers of traumatic memory are found in their texts. **Chapter 4: Narrating Hiddenness** utilizes the autobiography and fiction of Sarah Kofman, Georges Perec, and Jerzy Kosinski to illustrate how hidden child survivor narratives form a sub-group of Holocaust literature by virtue of their similar focus on a double-self type of consciousness forced on them during hiding, their consequently shared sense of ambiguous ethnic identity, and the shared sense of trauma that affected them long after the war. **Chapter 5: Hiding in Extremis** concludes the study with an as-yet-undiscovered short story from Kosinski who I contend transformed his experience into an elaborate textual framework of hiding.

Chapter 1: Beyond *l'univers concentrationnaire*

The experiences of children were different from the experiences of grownups. Children sucked the horrors, not through their minds, but through their skin. Aharon Appelfeld

1.1 A Different Kind of Survivor

Though the twelve-year event took place in a variety of venues, we traditionally call to mind places like Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen when speaking of the Holocaust. In the camps the mental degradation from a name to a number to an absence had terrible physical and psychological effects. When Henry Krystal, a pioneer in the field of trauma theory, was an adolescent in Poland he was first deported to the Starachowice labor camp and then to Auschwitz. During an interview in 1996, he spoke haltingly of this loss of self:

I remember once in Auschwitz I was looking at my hands and they were dirty. They were -- dirt was ingrained. And that was a, a blow to my, to myself. Look what's happening to me. I'm becoming part of the dirt. I'm, I'm not myself. All of these were part of the assault. And they were uh, in, in many of them were calculated that way. Certainly the assault on, on, on the people's autonomy and they emphasized this in Auschwitz and they gave us the numbers, you know. They'd say, "Now you're just a number, that's your name, that's it." They, they were destroying everyone's uh, inner resources and self-recognition as a person.

This sense of the vanishing self is a repetitive theme among camp survivors. Yehiel Finer, who after immigration to Israel took the name DeNur, Aramaic for "out of the flames," became one of the first writers to pen a sustained narrative about his two-year captivity in Auschwitz. Instead of

using his name to sign his 1946 novel, *Salamandra*, he signed instead with his prisoner identity. “Ka-tzetnik 135633” combined camp slang for prisoner (Ka-Tzet was derived from the first two letters in the German word for concentration camp, i.e., *Konzentrationslager*) with the number that the Nazis had tattooed on his arm.

Jeremy Popkin interprets this action not as a typical use of a pseudonym in which a writer attempts to hide his authorship, but as a way of emphasizing the “devastating impact that being reduced to a mere number had on this man’s sense of identity” (344). Concentration camp numbers transformed humans into factory inventory equivalents much the way data managers in modern industry use SKU numbers – unique stock-keeping unit codes – to identify products and services in their warehouses or retail outlets. As one new camp inmate is told in *Salamandra*: “Get this, whoreson, Hymie Cohen isn’t your name any longer. You’re dead. Name’s exactly what this number says on your arm. It’s what they call you when the furnace wants you.” (qtd. in Popkin 344). On the one hand, therefore, we understand DeNur’s use of Ka-Tzetnik as his pseudonym to be his admission of the complete stripping away of his identity at Auschwitz: the Nazis had effectively removed him from the human race. On the other hand, as Popkin points out, signing with the camp number allowed the author to step into the collectivity of sufferers who had died during internment and therefore were the only inmates to experience the full extent of Hitler’s Final Solution. Such identification is a mark of human empathy and, paradoxically, a form of defiance because Ka-Tzetnik’s voluntary choice to use the absence of his own name helps him resist disappearing into the dehumanized void Hitler had envisioned.

This small gesture is in fact large. This naming decision suggests that Ka-tzetnik wants to write less for himself – he would not allow even his picture to be printed on the book jacket – than for all victims of the Holocaust, especially those who had perished and could not witness for

themselves. But signing by absence also psychologically merges the not-yet-dead with the dead. If we follow the factory metaphor infused in the Nazis' imagination and transmitted to its prisoners, we realize also that DeNur's awareness is of himself positioned on a conveyor belt of death rather than as a living man counter-poised and separate from someone else's dead self. This metacognition arises from traumatic knowledge, much as Elie Wiesel's comment at the evening feeding that "the soup tasted of corpses" (71) after he had witnessed the hanging of a young boy at Auschwitz expresses his own traumatic understanding of the collapsed distinction in the camps between the living and the dead.

But what do Krystal's and DeNur's experiences have to do with Jews who spent the war in hiding, particularly those who were children at the time? On the surface the physical and psychological difference between the camp and the hiding place seems vast and much in favor of the one in hiding. Indeed, many children who survived the war in such circumstances were told they had not suffered. But Eva Fogelman, founding director of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai Brith's Jewish Foundation for Christian Rescuers, remarks that such a message "undermined the massive psychic trauma" children in hiding suffered (qtd. in Marks 38). Alternatively, they might be told they were simply too young to remember, the prevailing psychological belief at the time. After adult camp survivors, therefore, children of survivors were the next group of people rigorously studied by psychiatrists, psychologists and social workers. With a few exceptions, four decades would have to pass before the majority of children who survived the Holocaust, almost all of whom did so in hiding, found the ability to voice their experiences.

This dissertation will concentrate on the idea that for children who hid in quasi-public and public settings, survival demanded that parents and caretakers impose a different kind of

identity erosion from that which occurred in the camps, one in which they had to force their children to constrict and conceal the core Jewish identity and overlay it with a false, Christian self. Fear of abandonment, an eroded sense of self, identity confusion, a significantly diminished -- if not demolished -- sense of trust, this aftermath experienced by camp survivors was also reality for many children in hiding. When successful, hiding maintained physical life, but it came with a steep psychological price, especially for children. As Paul Valent, a child who survived the Holocaust in hiding with a foster family and who became a psychiatrist with a specialty in traumatology writes, “[i]n some ways, hiding was more stressful than being caught, as one had to cope with constant isolation in hostile circumstances, and the fear of being caught could be larger than actually being caught” (390). As the continuum of texts written by child survivors shows, from oral testimonies, to diaries, to memoirs, to fiction -- truces that signaled an end of war did not eliminate suffering for either camp inmates or hidden children.

Although most narratives by adults who survived Holocaust childhoods in hiding did not appear till the 1990s, notable exceptions do exist, including narratives by the major authors frequently mentioned in this study. The circumstances of their hiding varied: two were in convents (Saul Friedlander and Georges Perec), one on the run with partisans and Red army soldiers (Aharon Appelfeld), two with one parent (Louis Begley and Sarah Kofman), and one with both parents, the most uncommon hiding situation (Jerzy Kosinski). All of them published literary memoirs or autobiographical fiction about their wartime experiences. Writings from this group represent the view of adults re-visiting the period labeled “latency” (age 6 to 12) by Sigmund Freud or “middle childhood” (age 7 to 11) by Erik Erikson, a time when important maturation processes normally help children extend their appreciation and understanding of the outside world. The “berserk” quality of European society during the Holocaust (Kluger 109),

along with the physical and psychological trauma suffered by these youngsters, made this normally quiet span of life especially onerous, taxing to individuals who needed to call forth memories to write their narratives, regardless of whether they resulted in memoir or autobiographically inflected fiction.

A paradoxical desire to remember/not remember seems to color the texts of the child survivors, as Appelfeld, orphaned and on his own as an 8-year old, states:

Anyone who underwent the Holocaust will be as wary of memory as of fire. For many years the members of my generation were concerned with the concealment and repression, or, to use a harsher word, the suppression of memory. It was impossible to live after the Holocaust except by silencing memory. Memory became your enemy. You worked constantly to blunt it, to divert it, and to numb it as one numbs pain. This battle lasted for years. People learned how to live without memory the way one learns to live without a limb of one's body (ix).

Even without the activity of repression, however, these writers' young ages at the time of calamity placed them below a threshold of awareness so that memory work becomes difficult. Referencing Ellen Fine's term "absent memory" and similar terms proposed in recent years – Marianne Hirsch's "post memory" and James Young's "received history," child survivor Susan Rubin Suleiman points out that writers in this category "have constructed much (or at least some) of their literary work around absent memory, a void" ("Reflections on Memory" xi). Particularly thinking of the younger members of the group under discussion, Georges Perec and Sarah Kofman, who had the least time to create pre-Holocaust memories, Suleiman states that "absence is more than a trope – it refers, rather, to the physical, material destruction of the carriers of

memory: people and places” (xii). Like a black hole in space, in other words, the trauma of the lost past seems to exert a powerful gravitational pull that shapes the texts produced by these child survivors.

The hiding places and the manner of hiding were so different in each case that it is not incorrect to say each child survivor under study authored a unique text of the history of maltreatment, but we can also compare and contrast the circumstances of their hiding to show areas of shared concerns. This becomes particularly noticeable in the context of traumatic memory for, as Cathy Caruth states in *Trauma: Exploration in Memory*, “the traumatized carry an impossible history within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess” (5). The focus of the dissertation then is to analyze areas of shared trauma these writers experienced as children and how it is represented in their literature: the tension between hiding a Jewish self within an outward display of Catholicism, depersonalization/ dissociation as a coping mechanism in the face of terror, the way writing was used to help suture together a self by those Susan Rubin Suleiman calls the “1.5 generation,” children young enough to remember something of the war but whose young age also was responsible for leaving them vulnerable to absent memory, and, finally, how textual play in the work of one of the authors manifests itself as he becomes, to borrow Caruth’s language, a symptom of a history he cannot entirely possess.

Chapter 2 – The Unmaking of the World

*It will be as if a man did flee from a lion, and a bear met him; or
he went into the house, and leaned his hand on the wall, and a
serpent bit him. Amos 5:19*

2.1 The War before the War

As an 8 year old at the outset of World War II, Israeli novelist Aharon Appelfeld experienced the murder of his mother and a subsequent forced march to a concentration camp with his father. Escaping alone, he spent three years hiding in the forests of the Ukraine and eventually found support from a group of friendly Red Army soldiers. From that perspective it is not surprising that he doubts “whether there are six years as long as those in all of Jewish history” (*Beyond Despair* 45). Here he references the 1939-1945 period of World War II that overlapped the Holocaust. However, for all lives affected by the Third Reich’s policies, especially those of people marked for annihilation because they were deemed racially, physically, or mentally inferior, one may argue that the Holocaust really began in 1933 with the ascension of Adolf Hitler to the post of chancellor in Germany and of his National Socialists to the position of ruling party.

Although investigations of these dozen years have predominantly focused on perpetrator actions and the victimization of adults, this dissertation takes as its subject the plight of Jewish children and the way those who survived in hiding remember and reconstruct the event. Nechama Tec, a Holocaust scholar and hidden child survivor, points out that the Nazis had a “dual and contradictory perception of Jewish children” in which they were on one hand viewed as “useless” to help the German war effort, yet, on the other, classified as “potentially

threatening” in terms of being the future of a group deemed racially inferior (“Introduction” xxi). As future adults, they were also prospective avengers against those who had harmed them and their families. Jewish children therefore became the Nazis’ special target. According to figures published by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, roughly 90% of Europe’s prewar Jewish child population perished in the Holocaust, versus about two-thirds of all adults. In Poland, the central location of the European Jewish population and the concentration camps, the situation was so dire that historians estimate fewer than 5,000 Jewish children survived out of an original population of more than one million youngsters, less than one percent, all of them assumed to have done so in hiding (“Life in the Shadows”).

Though even under the best of circumstances the outset of life is not identical for all children, certain experiences are generally shared by all youngsters regardless of economic, social or political context. In war, as in peacetime, children enter the world with self-centered points of view, not yet capable of comprehending their existence as separate from their caretakers. Gradually, parents and teachers socialize and educate them out of this myopic, infantile perspective, a sequence that arrives as a series of graded steps. This developmental process is well described by Georges Perec, whose grandparents immigrated to France in the 1920s in response to Polish pogroms against the Jews. His father died in 1941 from wounds received while serving in the French army against the Nazis; his mother was deported from Paris during the 1942 Vélodrome d’Hiver round ups and likely perished in Auschwitz. Orphaned, Perec survived the Second World War hidden in a French Catholic boarding school. In spite of this tragic biography he captures the lyrical essence of childhood in *Espèces d’espaces* (*Species of Spaces*) while trying to express a sense of his own youth, imagining and recording in a tonal quality suitable for a fairy tale that “once upon a time” he must have written his address this way:

Georges Perec
18 Rue de l'Assomption
Staircase A
3rd floor
Right flat
Paris 16
Seine
France
Europe
The World
The Universe (qtd. and trans. in Bellos 100)

Representing the widening arc of what a child's normal physical and emotional growth is supposed to be, the string of locales included in these eleven lines instead telegraphs to readers a poignant and ironic realization of how the Nazis reversed the normal life sequence in each occupied country, unmaking the assumptive world for certain groups: gypsies, homosexuals, political prisoners, but especially Jews.

In effect, the Nazi era deconstructed Perec's entire list. Long before the frightening 1938 national pogrom of *Reichskristallnacht* (the Night of the Broken Glass), Jewish children under the domination of Berlin's government found the world growing smaller in ways that counteracted normal development. The plan of destruction began with a program of national, anti-Semitic laws that came, ironically, on the heels of the Weimar Republic (1918-1933), an historical period that had seen "unprecedented integration of Jewish citizens into German social, cultural, and economic life" (Heberer 3). By contrast, the National Socialists moved in the

opposite direction. Starting from a wide world view that drilled down to individual lives, the Nazis strove to break apart existing political regions through planned annexations and conquests, to disassemble neighborhoods by forcible relocation of Jewish families, and to split up such families further by dispersing the members at various points -- in ghettos as fathers and older boys were sent to work camps and even in concentration camp selection lines as old were separated from young, men from women, and infants from parents. Lastly, they targeted the individual on the most fundamental psychological level by tattooing a number on an arm to erase a name or by forcing a situation where a false identity in hiding -- another erasure -- held out a last hope as a desperate measure to survive. Instead of the widening arc meant to represent normalcy, therefore, Perec's list stands as an example of what happened to Jewish children all over Nazi-occupied Europe: as if from the end of the list moving backward, the Nazis reversed the ordinary course of life by attempting to erase item by item the constructs of self.

This reversal began in 1933. In her study on the daily life of Jewish women in Nazi Germany during the six-year period preceding the war, for example, historian Marion A. Kaplan writes that because of past prohibitions ruling out land ownership and certain other forms of economic activities, almost two-thirds of Germany's Jews -- compared with less than one-fifth of non-Jews -- "worked in business and commerce" during this time ("Jewish Women" 581). Beginning in 1933, she notes, "Jews were forced into an era of 'dissimilation,' a process of separation and then segregation that took about six years, gradually gathering speed and thoroughness" as a result of more than 400 pieces of anti-Jewish legislation passed in Germany (583). The surgical strike to create such a parting between the Aryan and Jewish worlds emphasized an onslaught against Jewish business interests. Though the 1933 National Socialist boycott against Jewish-owned stores met limited success in Berlin, it was more successful in

other cities (Heberer 7). Jewish children whose parents owned and operated shops could see a divide opening up between their families and the Aryan side as guards stood outside and warned former clients not to enter. By 1935 nationalist policies more directly affected their young lives when they no longer were permitted to enter public swimming pools. In the spring of 1936, all German-Jewish children were expelled from public schools. By government fiat the borders of life beyond the classroom continued to close in against the Jews: like their parents, Jewish children were forbidden to enter “cinemas, theaters, and sports facilities” after November 1938, as well as “designated ‘Aryan’ zones” (Heberer 31). By the beginning of the war, Jewish children were deprived of any outdoor space in which to play except in Jewish cemeteries (Kaplan 590). This protracted shrinkage of physical real estate is what Ruth Kluger, who was deported to a concentration camp with her mother but who survived to become a professor of German literature, meant when she wrote that her childhood under Nazi control felt as if “the soil on which you stood wanted you to disappear” (109).

What happened to Jewish children in Germany found a counterpart in other European countries in the form of broad expressions of anti-Semitism even before their occupation by the Reich. Romania’s Jews, for example, lost their citizenship by royal decree in 1938. The year Hitler came to power he signed a 10-year amity agreement with Poland (“1933 – Seven Years”) that encouraged a significant rise in anti-Semitic acts of violence. Laws passed to exclude Jews from local and national business gave way to pogroms staged by right-wing nationalists. By 1937, in hopes to “drive [them] away from the seats of learning,” Nazi-leaning Polish university students “distinguished themselves by their savage attacks” against Jewish students and “assaulted one-tenth” of the 2,200 Jewish students enrolled at the University of Lwow (Cohen). That year the Polish government declared separate “ghetto benches” for Jewish university

students, despite an international outcry and an internal protest by a handful of Polish professors, including sociologists Florian Znaniecki and Josef Chalasinski (Gogarty), the latter of whom would become the mentor of Jerzy Kosinski a decade after the war at the University of Łódź (Sloan 77) and whose intellectual work influenced the author's Holocaust-related, first novel, *The Painted Bird*.

The emotional cost to young Jews of such government-sanctioned prejudice was high. "Treated as pariahs and objects of harassment and ridicule," writes Heberer in her study *Children During the Holocaust*, "Jewish students were often subject to public humiliation and punitive measures by politically zealous teachers and experienced both scorn and neglect at the hands of their peers" (9). Jewish youngsters also often found themselves in conflict about competing demands of home and school. Kaplan describes, for instance, what must have been a common occurrence: Jewish children were forbidden at home to make the Nazi salute but at school many wanted to be like their non-Jewish peers and make the gesture if only to avoid being ostracized ("School Lives" 45). The relentless nature of anti-Semitic bullying took a significant psychological toll: 12-year old Marguerite Strasser recalls the day all Jewish students were expelled from her school and expresses confusion at her grandmother's insistence that she should nevertheless be proud to be Jewish. The idea of remaining honored with her tradition seemed "incomprehensible" to her. "I had always been terribly ashamed," she states, "that I belonged to this horrible people with their terrible Jewish grimaces, as they were pictured in *Der Stürmer*" (qtd. in Heberer 27). Referring to the vehemently anti-Semitic Nazi tabloid, Marguerite's inability to equate Jewishness with goodness is a direct result of having to cope with the ubiquity of demeaning visual propaganda and direct personal harassment.

What this division of youth exposes is that upon their rise to power the Nazis' belief in their own racial superiority sought not only to re-map the continent of Western Europe, but also to re-draw the terms of childhood for all youngsters living under their control. After Hitler took the reins of government, only two groups of children essentially could be identified, i.e., those he marked for survival as valued members of an Aryan world vision, and those who did not fit the definition and were targeted for eventual elimination. This re-mapping of childhood was therefore not limited to racially inferior groups: Aryan children were themselves cast as an integral part of Hitler's social experiment. His government included them along a continuum from pre-birth in the *Lebensborn* program, which supported the pregnancies of healthy Aryan women, to organizations like *Hitler-Jugend* (Hitler Youth), which was designed to inculcate the ideology of Nazism in the minds of German youngsters, to a eugenics program for those of any race deemed physically or mentally unfit. "No German group was more stringently affected by the changes of the dictatorship," writes Erika Mann, "than the children" (19). German adults could have the secondary identity of shopkeeper or manufacturer, but "the German child is a Nazi child, and nothing else. He attends a Nazi school; he belongs to a Nazi youth organization; the movies he is allowed to see are Nazi films. His whole life, without any reservation, belongs to the Nazi State" (19). In a memoir of his own years spent in the *Jungvolk*, the ten-to-fourteen-year-old group of the Hitler Youth movement, German cultural critic and historian Jost Hermand describes his understanding of the organization's charter: "It was not the goal of the National Socialists to raise highly educated boys," he writes, "but to produce exceptionally reliable, competent boys who were ready to sacrifice themselves and who would one day become tough young men, soldiers, or even leaders" (48). As part of this toughening process, the boys were ordered to "chop the heads off chickens, twist the heads off pigeons with [their] bare hands, or

clobber little rabbits behind the ears with a stick and then cut their throats,” all accomplished “without blinking an eye” because none of them wanted to be “called a ‘sissy’” (49).

Sandwiched between more mundane experiences like gathering “medicinal herbs, to providing evacuee placements in hostels for children,” these lessons were all performed in line with the government’s ambition to raise a racist, nationalist, utopian society of the future through the proper molding of German youth (Stargardt 13). Viewed through a historical lens, the cruel lessons of this national educational policy prompt comparisons with the type of behavior elicited from and exhibited by guards in concentration camps.

The meaning of this childhood shaping of Germany’s own youngsters was not lost on Jewish children, especially when the two groups came into conflict with each other on the street or in school prior to the official start of the war as if they represented younger combatant versions of the roles that would be played out by adults. Already tattooed with her concentration camp prisoner number at the age of eleven, Kluger recalls conversing years later with a German colleague about the “sharp little daggers” given to boys in the Hitler Youth programs and angrily describes the effect on her childhood self when the “Nazi boys were singing the song about Jewish blood spurting from their knives” (17). When her adult colleague demurs that they were really just butter knives that could cut nothing but bread, she records in her memoir that he suddenly mentions the engraving on the blade: “Blood and Honor.” For Kluger this phrase is proof enough: from her point of view the only name that fits such a blade is “dagger,” regardless of “whether the knife is pointed or round” (17).

Anti-Semitism was encouraged in children in all countries under Germany’s control. In similar fashion, therefore, Louis Begley has his young Polish-Jewish narrator describe an

altercation with a group of Catholic boys who are playing tag ball, throwing stones at trees, and wanting the area where Maciek and his friends are playing:

When they wanted a space we were in, they would yell that all Jews and other garbage must disappear. We began to throw stones at one another. I would use my slingshot once or twice and then run away. The older boys stayed and fought. I was discovering that I liked to hurt others but was afraid of being hurt myself.

One day the Catholic boys came in much greater numbers and said they would kill us. It would be a permanent Jew curfew. They had big rocks, the size of fists, and sticks with nails in them. From then on, we went to the lumberyard only during their school hours. We would urinate on the piles of stones they used. It served them right to get Jewish piss on their hands. (42).

In Maciek's response readers see a growing desire for revenge. These examples of visceral mistrust and fear of non-Jewish peers learned before and during the war become echoed in some adult behaviors displayed by hidden child survivors long after the war, such as Jerzy Kosinski's outspoken desire as an adult to avoid children because of events he suffered at the hands of peers in Poland (Sloan 105).

In terms of character formation and trauma suffered during the six years leading up to the actual war, therefore, what we understand from Jewish children's reactions is that the intensifying anti-Semitic rhetoric and action after Hitler became chancellor, which held the threat of physical harm done to them by children as well as adults, brought a kind of war before the war. All children within reach of the Reich's policies suffered, but the negative actions with

which the Nazis tried to hammer their values into their own children rose exponentially when targeted at youngsters the ruling party considered undesirable.

2.2 Life in Hiding

Because of the number of lives lost and the circumstances under which the deaths occurred, intense critical attention was deservedly placed for decades after the war on concentration camps and their victims. It is not an overstatement to say that over time the subject of the Holocaust came to have *l'univers concentrationnaire* situated at its epicenter. However, the extermination process was more diverse than this single type of locale suggests, and individuals' traumatic memories, including children's, began to amass long before the infamous "*Arbeit macht frei*" sign on the entryway to the camps might come into view. Even before the factory atmosphere of the death camps progressed to full power, the Nazi's paramilitary group, the *Einsatzgruppen* task force under the direction of the SS, engaged in a mobile rampage that murdered more than one million civilians, predominantly Jews, the most notorious incident being the two-day Babi Yar massacre in Russia in which nearly 34,000 men, women and children were machine-gunned and hastily buried. Moreover, agreeing with this more diffuse sense of involved geographical boundaries, historian Omer Bartov writes:

“what we call the Holocaust and associate largely with mass murder facilities and gas chambers was played out more intimately in the form of communal massacres in vast parts of Eastern Europe, where the majority of Jews lived and were murdered... Approximately half of those murdered in the Holocaust perished in ghettos and mass executions at or near their places of residence, in open-air, often public events. (491)

Surviving children exposed to these acts of cruelty as isolated events or over a period of time carried a high stress level afterward. In fact, while “mental health and medical professionals as well as laymen tend to think of concentration camp survivors as the only ‘true’ Holocaust survivors,” write Rachel Lev-Wiesel and Marianne Amir in their psychological study of after-math life measures in four groups of child survivors, a variety of them now “support the view that there were many other experience settings during the Holocaust that produce[d] the same long-term effects as concentration camps” (454).

Millions of European Jews were crowded into ghettos as a strategic step so that their number could be further diminished through inhospitable living conditions before the remnant was deported to the camps. Many, though not all, Jewish children lived at least temporarily in such ghettos before finding a hiding place. As Heberer states, they often “played a unique role” in that environment:

As adept and nimble smugglers, they helped to sustain their fellow ghetto inhabitants with black market goods and contraband from the ‘Aryan side.’ As forced laborers, those youngsters fit enough to work helped their families survive in a perilous climate of starvation and deportation. Children were manifestly recipients of the ghettos’ extensive self-help and social welfare organizations. Yet, for children the ghetto also represented a particularly dangerous environment. Youngsters figured as the likeliest victims of starvation, illness and destitution. (109)

In the midst of terrible squalor they were routinely subject to ego-shattering scenes. From testimony given at the trial of Adolf Eichmann and other places we learn that the Nazis carried out special “children’s actions” in the ghettos to reduce the number of mouths to feed (Peretz). Such attacks did not lead to a “merciful death,” writes Maria Hochberg-Mariańska, who edited

the first collection of the early postwar testimonies of Jewish children in Poland. Rather, “[a] lethal bullet was a rare luxury; gas was not wasted on children”; instead, they “had to die in the most monstrous ways – burned alive, buried alive, smashed by rifle butts, beaten against a wall, drowned in sewers” (xxiv). Those who survived such attacks became witnesses to other atrocities. Nechama Tec and her mother, for example, were caught outside during a night *aktion* in the Lublin ghetto. Both managed to find shelter in separate hiding places, but hours later when they crept back onto the street Tec describes passing baby carriages whose tiny occupants had been strafed by gunshot. Shocked, she began to run past the dead lying on the street: “I felt all the dead were trying to keep me there with some terrifying, inexplicable power,” she recalls (xxxii), a sentiment reminiscent of those expressed by concentration camp survivors. Subsequently, her family shifted location multiple times and eventually found accommodations in Warsaw as a base from which to live on false identity papers, effectively disappearing from the Jewish world as the last members of Sarah Kofman’s, Louis Begley’s, and Jerzy Kosinski’s families would do.

With her classic Aryan looks and perfect command of Polish, Tec had the most freedom of movement in her family. She was only 8 years old when the war officially began, but in the face of terror even very young children proved able to muster astonishing restraint on behalf of secrecy. Emanuel Ringelblum, historian of the Warsaw Ghetto, records that “Jewish children went through the hard school of round-ups and ‘selections’” so they “learned to control themselves, even outdoing adults in this respect” (350). Their ability to sit motionless for hours made him confident that they would be able to hide on the Aryan side without giving themselves away.

Learned survival behaviors did, in some respects, make the child survivors look and act like adults, an observation made by Anna Freud and Sophie Dann when they worked with a small group of very young Holocaust survivors who had been rescued from the Theresienstadt concentration camp by the Russians and sent to England with other rescued children. The appearance of a premature adulthood is not to suggest, however, that somehow fear and harsh environment helped affected youngsters skip all the developmental milestones of childhood. Parents, in fact, may have been able on occasion to shelter their children from reality during the war because youth itself prevented them from always understanding the seriousness of the situations in which they and their families found themselves. Using a fairy tale setting to help restrain her toddler daughter's curiosity about occasional noises upstairs, for example, Sophia Richman's mother warned her that there was a wolf in the attic. This subterfuge stopped the child from opening the door and finding her own father who was involved in a kind of double hiding because the Christian woman who had agreed to shelter Mrs. Richman and her daughter did not know about his presence in the borrowed rooms and might have denounced them had his existence been discovered.

It would have been developmentally appropriate for a youngster who had been hiding in squalid conditions to consider a ride in a cattle car at first as an adventure. In this sense, therefore, it was not remarkable that a young Jewish boy taken by partisans to the forest to visit his doctor father at first considered the adventure "fun" (Marks 47), coming as it did on the heels of thirteen months spent in a darkened cellar cabinet so small his parents could not stand erect. While in the forest he witnessed the first murdered bodies of his life and found a severed leg in the woods. Since his father was running a makeshift hospital for the partisans, the boy decided to carry the leg to him, expecting that it could be useful in the treatment of some wounded man. He

could not understand why his father started crying, only long after realizing “that perhaps this was not the way he’d hoped that his nine-year-old would have been spending a winter’s morning” (49). For a long time, in other words, the child’s own youthful mind shielded him from the atrocity he had witnessed.

Tec’s arrangements in Amsterdam and her relative freedom to move about outside fall into the category of “visible” hiding as defined by Deborah Dwork in her study of the lives of Jewish youth in Nazi Europe (81). Similarly, the life in hiding described in *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat* by Sarah Kofman mimics Tec’s situation. As a nine-year old, the blond Kofman found some out-of-doors freedom in Paris with her foster mother, while her more Jewish-looking biological mother had to stay hidden inside. Being too young to appreciate the innate danger of outdoor treks, young Kofman found such excursions fraught with pleasure.

Tec’s and Kofman’s visible, urban hiding scenarios, as well as Begley’s or the Kosinski family’s hideout in southeastern rural Poland, may be categorized as existing in the “third stage of annihilation” as distinguished by Andrzej Żbikowski in his study on how individual Jews and families in Poland were hunted down after the stages of mass deportation and ghettoization had rolled out. The first and second phases contained mass extermination in camps and deportation to ghettos. The third phase consisted of individual—not mass—murder that took place “among Poles” and before their eyes, frequently with their participation, when Jewish refugees attempted to hide from persecutors or blended into the anonymous crowds of the larger cities (on the so-called Aryan side) or hid in hardly accessible rural areas poorly controlled by the German police (512).

We gain an appreciation for the never-ending stress associated with hiding even in sparsely populated rural districts far from better-patrolled urban areas by an account of such a

near discovery happening to the father of Jerzy Kosinski while the family was hiding in the open in Dabrowa Rzeczycka, a hamlet about twenty miles east of Sandomierz. After a trip to Poland to interview families in Dabrowa Rzeczycka where the Kosinski family lived the longest during the war, biographer James Park Sloan's research notes indicate that on one occasion in 1943 they rushed to the home of Josef Stepak, the town administrator, for help to hide from German soldiers who had come to town to search. While the rest of the village's inhabitants fled to the forest, Stepak offered his hayloft, but Kosinski senior started to sneeze, so "he was moved to the garden" (Sloan 44). Sloan reports that Stepak met with the Germans, offered them "soup and vodka," but "[when they] **stepped outside to urinate, the elder Kosinski, hiding behind a bush, had to control a powerful impulse to leap up and run. Trembling, he waited as they urinated only a few feet away**" (44, emphasis added).

To my knowledge no scholar has yet mentioned that when the younger Kosinski sought real-life details to include in *The Painted Bird*, he selected this event in his father's life and inserted its choreographic structure into the young protagonist's description of the attack of the Kalmuk soldiers, mercenaries working for the Reich, on a nearby village:

I crouched, almost paralyzed with fright, in the raspberry bushes. Drunken Kalmuks were wandering around, and my chances of remaining there unnoticed were dwindling. I could not think any more; I was frozen with terror. I closed my eyes. When I opened them again I saw **one** of the Kalmuks **staggering in my direction.** I flattened myself on the ground even more, and nearly stopped breathing. The soldier picked some raspberries and ate them. He took another step into the bush and trod on my outstretched hand. The heel and the nails of his boot dug into my skin. The pain was

excruciating but I did not move. **The soldier** leaned on his rifle and **urinated calmly** (162, emphasis added).

In writing this scene Kosinski acts less as a memoirist than as a novelist utilizing the freedom to insert details where they will best flesh out his story, this one capturing with a sense of verisimilitude the dangerous, picaresque life of Jews on the run in rural Poland during the Holocaust. Although the biographer does not record what type of bush the elder Kosinski crouched behind, the younger Kosinski's specificity of "raspberry" either adds an actual, known detail or highlights his alertness for what novelists call the telling detail. In either case, the material highlights the intense fear of discovery that accompanied a life in hiding.

The opposite of this visible type of hiding is the "invisible" version described in Anne Frank's diary in which she and her family literally disappeared behind the woodwork into a space she named the Secret Annex in Amsterdam, which became home to her, her family and several other Jews for the next twenty-five months until a collaborator betrayed them just before war's end. The Franks' need to attempt an invisible hiding situation foregrounds some of the anguished decisions that families had to make in the effort to secure safety for themselves and their children. Scarcity of food within the ghettos, frequent loss of parental protectors to starvation, disease, deportations or *aktions*, and the general mayhem of war made finding a hiding place for Jewish children a priority among any remaining parents, relatives, or caretakers, but the type of hiding situation often depended on factors entirely outside the family's control. Some rescuers demanded large sums of money that families could not gather. Also, during the deliberation on whether hiding was even possible, a determination had to be made depending on whether the child and his or her family could, if need be, pass muster as Gentiles. Because of strongly Jewish features or a Yiddish accent, some children could not live openly with their

parents or Christian protectors. For an opportunity at survival these youngsters would have to remain physically concealed, often in harsh conditions. In rural areas that might mean living under floor boards in barns or in cramped root cellars; in urban areas the opportunities to hide invisibly might involve remaining concealed in attics, closets, or even in hidden rooms as the Frank family did in Amsterdam. Reading, writing or drawing, if supplies could be afforded and were available, offered a small reprieve from the boredom and endless tension and may account for the widespread activity of diary writing by children during this time.

Some types of hiding situations appear to have been more sustainable than others. According to Heberer, social workers in the city of Łódź traced the outcome of 1,346 children under the age of 14 after the war whose identities were known to different Jewish agencies, and whose type of survival could therefore be tallied (xxvi). Of that number fifty-nine percent, by far the largest group, managed to survive the war by hiding on the Aryan side. Some arrangements, like those in Jerzy Kosinski's and Louis Begley's families, seem to have been plotted out: the family had time and ability to purchase false identity and baptismal papers that would help them procure clothing and food ration cards. Others happened spontaneously as in Sarah Kofman's family when her widowed mother learned that a round-up visit from the Gestapo was imminent, and she fled across town with her daughter to beg a non-Jewish acquaintance for shelter. Unlike the bureaucratic routine of the death camps, hiding appears to have been a more haphazard, individual affair, although in both places chance played a significant role.

Aside from dangerous and unhealthy physical settings, the stringencies of hiding warped normal life experiences. The ability to learn how to tell convincing falsehoods, for instance, was an extraordinarily important skill for Jewish children to learn if trying to hide anywhere within reach of the Nazis, as evidenced by the title of Begley's novel, *Wartime Lies*. "Lying," writes

Hochberg-Meriańska, who collected the testimonies for *The Children Accuse*, “which in the first few years of life was punished and in every way reviled, now becomes obligatory. For failing to lie you are not sent to the corner, as you were before for failing to tell the truth” (xvii). Her unspoken reason is that in a world fashioned by virulent anti-Semitism failure to learn how to lie carries a death sentence. In notes he collected for *Oneg Shabbat*, the underground archive in the Warsaw ghetto, Ringelblum recounts asking a four-year-old a treacherous question – “what he was called *before*” (emphasis added) – and remarks with satisfaction that the “tot” would only provide his Aryan name and declare that he had never possessed any other (351).

Encouraging extreme dissimulation was also necessary when trying to protect Jewish boys who, because of their circumcisions, had a more perilous time in open hiding than did girls. Emanuel Elbinger’s parents trimmed their son’s eyebrows, threw a big shawl over him, and had him pretend to be a peasant woman along with his mother, in effect literally trying to cloak him from suspicious eyes (Śliwowska 32). Richard Rosen’s parents also asked their son to masquerade as a girl and answer to the new name of Marysia Ulecki; to do so he had to receive lessons on how to act, walk, and talk like a girl, and to learn how to speak slightly altered word endings in Polish to signify his new gender (Marks 46). Nevertheless, the complicated training turned out to be useless. When the farmer who was hiding them ejected them from the cellar, the family was immediately captured by Ukrainian soldiers who took them to a German soldier remembered as wearing “incredibly tall, shiny boots” (Marks 45). Rosen writes:

My parents told him we were Christians. Skeptical, the officer commanded my father and me to drop our trousers. At that time, in that part of the world, only Jews were circumcised. As soon as we took our pants down, the truth was out. My parents and I were immediately taken away to the Lublin ghetto. There things

really changed for the worse. Food was very, very scarce, and children, who were not even classified as people, got nothing to eat. My parents had to share their meager rations with me. My most vivid recollection of that ghetto was the regular sight of dead people being taken away in the morning. (Marks 45)

Significantly, even in fiction about the Holocaust by male child survivors at some point mention the physical vulnerability to discovery that Jewish males faced during the war because of their circumcisions is made. Even in masquerade, a Jewish boy could not escape the reality of his own body.

Because most of the time children were sent into hiding situations without their families, they also remained at-risk youth vulnerable to the possibility of mistreatment. Carla Lessing, a clinical social worker who is a Holocaust survivor and was hidden as a child for thirty months in the Netherlands, notes in an article on aged survivors that a “study in the Netherlands estimated that more than 80% of hidden children interviewed were treated well, while 15% were occasionally mistreated and some 5% were treated badly.” Paul Valent, a psychiatrist specializing in survivor populations who was himself a hidden child, concedes that many rescuers became loving substitute caretakers. However, he also notes that the stress under which the caretakers lived for breaking the law in order to harbor Jewish children can be seen to have surfaced when “even constant parent substitutes often disciplined the children by threatening to turn them over to the authorities”; he concludes that “hiding with a series of unsympathetic caretakers could be more distressing than a concentration camp” for the child in question (111). Moreover, Valent states that “fully one-sixth of a sample of hidden children had been sexually molested” (111). Lev-Wiesel and Amir concur with Lessing’s claim that the subject of sexual abuse done to hidden children remains a neglected topic: “The combination of two painful issues

and emotional burdens, childhood sexual abuse and Holocaust atrocities,” they write, “has created an invisible barrier in studying the intertwined topics” (70). This situation is not limited to hidden children, but is true even in the case of adult women in hiding or in camps who were raped. Zoë Waxman reasons that the silence surrounding this subject results both from a “cultural taboo and also because such experiences are not considered to be a part of the narrative of the Holocaust” (124). I will return to this topic in Chapter 3 with discussions on sexual topics mentioned by Sarah Kofman and Jerzy Kosinski, both of whom eventually committed suicide.

No matter how secure or benign they turned out to be, hiding situations brought with them one other intrinsic threat to families of origin: the possibility of a child’s attachment to other grownups during the war that occasionally resulted in failure to re-attach if parents were found still alive after the war. All therapists who work with this population mention the feelings of deep abandonment perceived by children whose parents for whatever reason determined that the best course of action was to separate and send their offspring into the underground network for rescued children or who simply left them with another adult they hoped could be trusted whether the motivation to take charge of the child was prompted by greed, by altruism or by a combination of both. More often than not, the rupture to family life was severe. In Sarah Kofman’s case it occurred even though she was in hiding with her mother. For children who settled in with their new foster families, the return of biological parents after the war, the return of a quasi-normal life, was not always welcome.

Eventually Jewish children living under the shadow of the Nazi regime learned that for a Jew during the war danger lurked everywhere; some learned it could even come from within one’s own family as grown-ups succumbed to the constant terror of death. Friction between parents and their young adolescent children often might be categorized as developmentally

appropriate, such as the tension between Anne Frank and her mother in the close quarters of the Secret Annex or that of Ruth Kluger and hers in the concentration camp. However, David Boder, an American sociologist who toured DP camps in France, Switzerland, Italy, and Germany in 1946 and made the earliest extant copies of audio recordings on wire spools of his interviews with Jewish children and adults, illuminates a darker cleavage between the generations. With interviews that put a “premium on spontaneity and raw directness” (Niewyk 1), he details from a child’s point of view complete breakdowns of parent/child relationships. Although an iconic film image of the Holocaust involves women and children being forcibly separated at round-up points or in concentration camps, for instance, we discover in a Boder interview with thirteen-year-old Raisel Meltzer how the extraordinary pressure from the Reich coupled with the strong desire to live began to break down family loyalty, pitting parent against child in the kind of “choiceless choice” Lawrence Langer describes in connection with concentration camp inmates, i.e., no matter what choice was made, the outcome would be bad. Young Raisel thus remarks in answer to Boder’s question of why her father left her and her mother and her three-year-old brother while they were hiding in the woods:

My father said, ‘Shh, Rachel,’ -- my mother’s name is Rachel – ‘If you want to come, you and Raisel, you must take the little brother and put him under a tree, or else you must throw him into ... whichever ... whichever you want, as long as you do not take him along.’ My mother said ‘No. I will not leave the brother behind. Whatever will happen to me will happen to the children.’ And father said, ‘Yes. Stay if you want to. I am going.’ And my father was eating a piece of bread, and he leaned over. He started...he threw away the bread he was eating. He could not eat it anymore and started to cry, just like a

little child. Ah, he went away. And he went away. He did not want to remain with us.
(Niewyk 163).

Interviews with a child like this one transmit a sense of personal trauma more powerfully than adult-mediated recollections of children's responses often do. The ellipses, the erasure of the little brother's name, the small silences as well as the repetitions, function as emotional gaps that direct listeners to areas of unspeakable horror experienced by the daughter as she transmits to her listener the reality that her father reached the point of giving his own "choiceless choice" to her mother. While historians sometimes view children's testimony as inherently suspect because of their youth, Raisel's type of narrative is confirmed elsewhere by adults. An oral narrative by Celia K. in the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies tells how she saw a woman accompanied by a five-year-old girl and an infant boy trying to run to safety in order to hide in the woods with other Jews who had escaped from a nearby ghetto. As the boy cried, the crowd told the mother she had to "get away or kill him. She became wild," remarks Celia K., but eventually "put the child in the swamp" and "[w]ith her foot on his neck, she drowned him" (qtd. in Green and Kumar 85).

Such actions, which represent a complete reversal of normal human behavior and the insidious quality of Nazi terror that turned some victims into participants in the killing of targeted people, are not confined to the Holocaust. Two U.S. researchers who conducted interviews with survivors of the 1915 massacre of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, which has been called the first twentieth century Holocaust, report being told that during brutal deportation marches "Armenian mothers were forced to shrug off their smaller, straggling children, leaving them behind while they continued with an infant in their arms or attended to their older and stronger sons and daughters. Sometimes mothers left their infants on rocks in streams [thinking

this was] a better death than starvation” (Miller and Miller 55). These earlier testimonies thus give supporting witness as they acknowledge the level of utter desperation Jewish parents reached during the Holocaust after their physical and emotional reserves were exhausted, and why surviving child witnesses, like their adult counterparts in the camps, might afterward suffer severe or loss of trust in the idea of a beneficent world.

2.3 The Emergence of the Hidden Child Survivor

It is a relatively recent affair for scholars to move in a broad fashion from a focus on perpetrators and adult survivors of the Holocaust to analysis of children’s perception of life while under the dominance of the Third Reich. This reticence to engage children’s first-hand accounts stems from a similar restraint about incorporating adults’ testimonies in historical analyses: such texts have been considered intrinsically biased or spoiled by factual error. In time, however, they may turn out to be critical in helping us better understand the process and history of the Holocaust. Some historians argue, as Omer Bartov does, that such first-hand accounts should be analyzed as “historical documents” because, especially in the case of Eastern Europe whose history disappeared behind the Iron Curtain, they “provide different insights into these events from those available in official documentation and because they ‘save’ from oblivion events that cannot be found at all in other documents” (486).

I agree, but note that in the case of documentary statements sourced from children, scrutiny is required to understand to what degree, if any, an adult’s hand or voice shaped the child’s response. Early attempts to collect children’s testimonies do show such adult assistance, one example being the source records compiled in Palestine in 1943 through interviews with a group of about 1,000 young Jews who had been evacuated from the Soviet Union through

Palestine, the so-called “Tehran children.” Organized by the Polish *Centrum Informacyjna Wschód* (Eastern Center for Information), these interviews were done with child survivors, mostly orphans, who had originally fled Poland with their families to the Soviet Union after the 1939 blitzkrieg. Fifty-four years later, in 1997, an English version, Henryk Grynberg’s *The Children of Zion*, brought to U. S. notice for the first time fragments he had sutured together from these interviews. Working with excerpts from seventy-three testimonies, Grynberg created a choral narration in which each paragraph represents an individual child’s recitation, but together the accumulation of paragraphs represents the voice of a community of youngsters undergoing the trauma of war and dislocation because they were Jews. From these testimonies we learn that before the war someone’s father was “a cattle trader” (3), another was a “famous rabbi” (4), still another a “bookkeeper” (5). All manner of intellectual crafts and trades are represented. We also learn about the onslaught of war. Transmitted through Grynberg’s pen, the account of the blitzkrieg on Poland begins with a matter-of-fact tone. Describing the outset of the war a few miles from the village in which Jerzy Kosinski and his family would flee the following year, one youngster remarks simply that “The Poles took up positions in nearby Stalowa Wola and fired on the Germans from Mount Frycz. In order to see them better, they burned our town down” (15). As history indeed shows, the Polish air force could not withstand the Germans. Within the week the picture changed from German aircraft overhead to Germans on the ground as troops entered towns while local Jewish families were still involved in celebrating the religious calendar New Year. One youngster gives the following account:

The Germans entered Przeworsk during Rosh Hashana, and the first thing they did was to set fire to the big synagogue...the German commandant shouted, “Where is the rabbi?” The rabbi was in hiding. The Germans threatened to kill several Jews

if he did not appear. When the rabbi came, the Germans went crazy. They tore out his beard and beat him unconscious. Then they flogged everyone and ordered them to crawl on all fours. They called this ‘calisthenics for the Jews.’ Most of all they beat the old men who were not up to the exercises. When the Germans had beaten everyone bloody, they went up and down the rows, holding out their helmets and ordering everyone to throw in their money, watches, and fountain pens. (30)

What seems absent from this harrowing tale is the emotional reaction of the young witness. Although depicting significant interpersonal violence observed by a single child, the language of this paragraph nevertheless has a grammatical correctness and reportorial tone that reminds readers this child’s recollection is being mediated through an adult interviewer’s writing voice, first what Grynberg describes as the “wooden, bureaucratic style” of the original adult interviewers (x), then Grynberg’s own pen. Accordingly, the text likely downplays the actual emotional reaction of the child when the event was in progress.

Genuine attempts in the early postwar period were made to help children give spontaneous witness in line with their ages and various maturation levels. In 1945 the Historical Commission of the Central Committee of Polish Jews published guidelines on how to conduct interviews with surviving children. A selection was printed in Polish the following year as *Dzieci Oskarżają* (*The Children Accuse*). Done in Jewish children’s orphanages, dormitories and other shelters in Poland, these interviews are not literary documents. Rather, they are simple statements by speakers under sixteen close to the time under discussion who responded to oral questions about pre-war memories, parents, remembered experiences during the war, and how survival was accomplished. Highlighting some of the developmental hurdles children had to pass in order to have any chance at survival, the book consists of fifty-five children’s testimonies and

fifteen adult testimonies. The latter testimonies focus on children's experiences in various ghettos in Nazi-occupied Poland, whereas the children's testimonies are divided into six thematic sections: the ghettos, the camps, on the Aryan side, in hiding, the resistance and prison. These narratives have come into greater prominence since their re-publication in English in 1996.

As mentioned previously, another source of early postwar children's testimonies, though forming the smaller portion of the work, may be studied from audio recordings made by American sociologist David Boder in 1946 while he was touring DP camps in France, Switzerland, Italy and Germany. Boder published a small sampling of the interview in *I Did Not Interview the Dead* in 1949. Although the book went quickly out of print, his recordings were deposited in various scholarly libraries in the United States and have become a rich online resource, presenting survivors' voices and Boder's interview questions along with his written English translation.

In other cases, one must analyze how much the child's hand itself re-shaped the text, turning it into a literary work as opposed to leaving it as a series of continuous writing occasions completed while real-time events unfolded. The best-known example is by Anne Frank. Although the Netherlands State Institute for War Documentation holds about 200 similar documents (Frank – *Revised Critical Edition* 67), it is impossible to discuss Holocaust writings by hidden children without mentioning her diary, undoubtedly the most widely distributed of its kind with worldwide sales in the multiple millions long before the first international gathering of hidden child survivors was held in New York in 1991 (van der Stroom 74). The gradual discovery that it had been edited in meaningful ways by her father -- including a diminishment of her comments about Judaism in favor of a more universal appeal and certain pages expurgated to hide her blossoming adolescent sexuality and the accompanying tension with her mother

(Porat) – brought the diary so much negative attention that the Dutch government had a critical edition prepared in the 1990s to juxtapose her original entries in the plaid-covered diary her father had given her for her thirteenth birthday before the family disappeared into the Annex (the a-text), with her unfinished revision (the b-text), and the published 1952 version edited by her father (the c-text). As Nigel Caplan notes in his examination of her revisions, “by reading the *Critical Edition* both synchronically (across the three versions) and diachronically (through the three versions independently), we can ‘hear deep in’ to Anne’s writing, and engage with this text as a significant piece of the literature of atrocity” (78).

Because work on the diary stopped the moment the Frank family members were seized by the Nazis, we never hear in her voice what repercussion the deportation to Bergen-Belsen had on her well-publicized, redemptive notion about the basic goodness of people. Part of the enduring quality of her diary may lie in the fact that although her “invisible” hiding situation shielded her from eye-witness reportage of the tragedies seen by children in ghettos and other hiding situations, readers approaching her text know from the outset that she was “safe” for only twenty-five months and was then deported to a concentration camp where she and her sister succumbed to typhus. Because her life thread was therefore stitched irrevocably into the epicenter of the Holocaust, she remains in public memory an emblem of innocence swallowed by evil. The effect of her diary seems to hover over other portrayals of the Holocaust, for instance when Steven Spielberg makes a similar statement about innocence and evil by choosing a young girl in a red coat to be the only spot of color on which viewers might focus until the end of the black-and-white film, *Schindler’s List*.

Aside from the renowned Frank example, most others diaries have not received considerable critical attention. According to Sue Vice, who has written one of the few extended

analyses of Holocaust-related writing produced by children, “the general critical neglect of the non-fiction diary is partly due to the fact that it is a mixed genre: it is seen as a historical document but also as a cultural narrative” (120). Little critical attention was also paid to other types of testimony by hidden children. The cultural narrative that most closely follows the hidden children and their texts claims that a postwar silence of forty years reigned from this group before therapists, many of them having been children in hiding during the war, began to consider themselves as Holocaust victims. Certainly circumstances marginalized such children, discouraging them from claiming such an identity. “Denial of the impact of early childhood trauma” was an excuse “used by the German government to reject the validity of compensation claims by child survivors” (Wangh qtd. in Tauber 1997). For a long time psychiatrists and psychologists also passed over this group in favor of investigating the children of adult survivors of the concentration camps, the so-called “second generation,” in part because it was thought at the time that a young age during persecution would shield children from long lasting psychological sequelae, i.e., they would simply forget. A hierarchy of competitive suffering that stressed the severity of concentration camp incarceration versus what seemed like relatively “easy” situations of hiding also pressured against such identification. These influences distanced actual hidden child survivors from considering themselves part of the victim class. Only 25 years after the end of the war when Hans Keilson performed interviews to obtain the first comparative, longitudinal study of deported and hidden children in the Netherlands was it realized that psychological damage was done with age at the time of trauma being the best indicator of future symptoms, i.e., younger children showed more neurosis, while older ones exhibited more depressive symptoms (Feldman 193).

The sense of marginalization began to fade in the 1980s when Robert Krell, Paul Valent and other therapists who had themselves survived the war as hidden children began to publish articles on the topic. In 1985 Krell edited a special issue of the *Journal of American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* devoted to child survivors. The culminating event to this lengthy coming out was the First International Gathering of Children Hidden During World War II held in May 1991 in New York City. Abraham H. Foxman, who had survived the war as a Polish child in hiding and who was serving then as National Director of the Anti-Defamation League, helped to arrange the conference, which opened a floodgate to many memoirs of childhoods spent in hiding from the Nazis. Scholarly attention to this sub-segment of child survivors began to build from this point onward.

Attention paid only to this sudden abundance of manuscripts relating to childhoods in hiding would mask the fact that major texts were published on the subject during the “silent” period, notably Kosinski’s *The Painted Bird* in 1965 and Perec’s *W or the Memory of Childhood* a decade later. They share in common with the authors of the 1990s the fact that their writing seems to have been motivated by what I would call “moments of witnessing” in the public sphere. Just as the international gathering and accompanying news coverage in 1991 helped adults who had grown up as hidden children decide to publish their stories, different newsworthy events seem to have encouraged several earlier authors to pen their own documents that will be discussed in Chapter 3.

Anne Frank’s diary and Jerzy Kosinski’s *The Painted Bird* share the singularity of having been the first major books to limn the two different types of hiding – invisible and visible – that Dwork outlined when describing the lives of hidden child survivors. Both were subject to intense outside criticism, including charges by Holocaust deniers and academicians who

questioned their authenticity. They also represent the ends of the continuum with respect to genre. Where Frank wrote testimony about her own invisible hiding experience in Amsterdam, Kosinski penned a more difficult-to-classify fiction about a child's visible hiding ordeal: the boy discloses neither his name nor his ethnicity, but wanders a countryside similar to war-time Poland pretending to be Christian and encounters alternately kind and brutal peasants during his quest to remain alive. Identified clearly as fiction on the cover but vocally presented in private to friends and readers as autobiography, the novel launched a major literary career that collapsed eight novels later in the early 1980s when reporters from *The Village Voice* charged the author of *The Painted Bird* with plagiarism, utilization of unacknowledged editors, and misrepresentation as to its historical value as straight autobiography. As his biographer notes, Kosinski "would deny that the book was literally autobiography, while refusing to say categorically that it was not" (Sloan 209). This half-in, half-out posture greatly complicated the reception of his novels.

While the *Critical Edition* pulled Anne Frank's diary securely into the canon of Holocaust literature, the opposite happened to Kosinski's fiction: more than any other Holocaust writer he is compared with Benjamin Wilkomirski, whose memoir of a child survivor's life, *Fragments*, was discovered to be a fraud. Based on textual fingerprints of real traumatic events suffered during the war that can be found, much as Caplan did with Frank's work, by reading "across" and "through" his novels along with the text of a single short story he published at the end of his career, one not yet analyzed by scholars, I will argue later, however, that Kosinski's writing should be tugged back toward the canon as well.

Part of the appeal of Anne Frank's diary seems to lie in the fact that the horrific real violence of the Holocaust remains largely off-stage. The genocidal assault she is going to endure

escalates only after the diary is dropped on the floor the day the Gestapo arrives to claim her and her family. Readers therefore “see” her in her hiding place, yet ironically lose sight of her when she becomes invisible after being deported to Bergen-Belsen. The picture one carries of her afterward is that of the sweet, youthful adolescent face on a book jacket. Readers’ desire to know, yet not know, seems to find a more complicated relationship with *The Painted Bird*. Heavy criticism was applied to the novel and its author on the grounds that it exaggerated violence beyond the real, but this reproach seems to speak more to reader discomfort than to the reality of the Holocaust. Frequently mentioned vignettes considered overstated for sadomasochistic purposes include one in his second novel, *Steps*, in which a picture of the Virgin Mary shows her breasts lopped off and bleeding, and one in *The Painted Bird* in which a young man’s eyes are gouged out. Yet Samuel M. Strong, who traveled to Poland eight years before W.E.B. DuBois reached Warsaw to research the question of whether assimilation might have helped Jews avoid persecution, quotes at length an account published in the 1941 *Washington Times-Herald* that shows these types of scenes to have a basis in reality:

. . . This correspondent, like most newspapermen, always has been unwilling to place credence in atrocity stories, but after what I saw and was told at Bucharest by an eyewitness whose word cannot be doubted, I am forced to admit atrocities can and do occur and that those which occurred at Bucharest far exceeded in bestiality anything that might ever be imagined. . . Trusted friends have told me, and officials have confirmed, numerous cases of Jewish women whose breasts were cut off, not to mention equally sadistic mutilations like gouged-out eyes, brandings and bone-breakings. (480)

Corroborating this story of atrocity, Nora Levin states in *The Holocaust: The Destruction of European Jewry 1933-1945* that “According to eyewitnesses, ‘At the Umschlagplatz [the collection point where Jews were forced to assemble before being deported] terrible scenes were recorded. A child's eyes were gouged out by a German who desired to make two rings of them”” (126).

In 1965 at the time of its publication, it appears that readers intuited, but did not consciously understand, the outside forces that helped shape *The Painted Bird*. Although I agree with Kosinski’s biographer that the book was “not only an enhanced personal account but a *researched* historical novel” (191, original emphasis), the scenes that the author chose from research proved destined to alarm and upset his readership in a way that Anne Frank’s account did not. His desire for revenge, noted in the title of Paul Lilly’s *Words in Search of Victims: the Achievement of Jerzy Kosinski*, in contrast to her belief in the basic goodness of people, also had repercussions on their respective audiences. The telling of trauma is inherently problematic, but I will argue in a later chapter that Kosinski’s behavior in printing “fiction” on the book, but vocally asserting it was “autobiographical” finds some rationale in his last two works of fiction, *The Hermit of 69th Street* and “Chantal.”

The other authors under examination do not push reader boundaries as far as Kosinski did. Psychological strictures peculiar to the situation of hiding, as well as issues of identity confusion and trauma common in this group and its effect on textual production, will be discussed in upcoming chapters. Where they will all significantly differ from Frank’s work is that these authors survived the war, turning their attention back to childhood only after a long period of time. Unlike the diarist, therefore, whose writing takes place at the moment of trauma, children who survived the Holocaust in hiding and wrote narratives of memory as adults produce

texts that Vice describes as having a “temporally charged relation between narrator and character” (15). This situation speaks not only to the challenge an adult writer faces in representing naivety when writing childhood experiences, but also to the use of irony and, especially in this group, how to cope with absence of memory, an issue of identity as well as trauma that will be discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter 3 – The Last Eyewitnesses

We came across a Jewish man who had been shot...My mother saw me looking, and she pushed me away... “You can’t see those things.

It’s not for little children.” I said to her, “Little children?

I spent a year and a half as a partisan. What’s another dead person?”

Richard Rozen *The Hidden Children*

3.1 Childhood Interrupted

Decades after the war psychological attention finally came to Jewish child survivors. The *Journal of Clinical Child Psychology* published an article in 1974 on the traumatization of children during the Holocaust (Klein). In 1976, New York psychologist Eva Fogelman welcomed child survivors into her group therapy sessions for children of survivors, thereby planting the seeds for the first international gathering of child survivors that would take place fifteen years later. In 1979, Claudine Vegh, a child survivor and psychiatrist-in-training, published accounts by French child survivors. Finally, by the 1980s, forty years after the end of World War II, child survivors began to come to widespread notice as a separate group from adult victims when therapists like the psychiatrist and hidden child survivor Robert Krell realized their own status. Following their lead, this study defines the group as children younger than sixteen at war’s end, i.e., children born as early as 1930 who grew up under the Nazi regime. It focuses on texts written by three adult writers who try to recollect and to reconstruct life during the war when they were between six and twelve, the period of development that Freud called “latency” and Erikson called “middle childhood.” Most of the authors were, in a sense, “ahead of their

time,” publishing autobiographically inflected narratives before the group at large gained prominence.

Child survivors differ developmentally from adult survivors in a way expressed succinctly by Ruth Kluger (born 1931 in Vienna). Deported at age eleven with her mother, she escaped immediate death by lying about her age to win a place in a work group for adult women instead of joining the group of children headed for the crematoria. She contrasts her own reaction to the arrival and first weeks of life at Auschwitz with the experience of adults:

Primo Levi has a scene in his classic Holocaust memoir, *Is This a Man?* where a German wiped his hands on him as if he were not a man, but a dirty rag. But Levi could take it, because he came to Auschwitz with the self-esteem of a grown European, a rationalist, at home in Italy, secure in his identity. For a child it was different, for in the few years that I had lived as a conscious person, my rights had been removed piece by piece, so that Auschwitz had a kind of logic to it. (109)

A commentary on identity formation, her passage suggests how the critical variable of age affected the minds Jewish adults and child survivors. From a developmental point of view, a fifteen-year span in childhood varies markedly from the same duration in adulthood, i.e., it contains relatively brief maturational stages that matter when analyzing the group’s experiences. Children born after the blitzkrieg on Poland may have retained few personal memories of the war. Child survivor Susan Rubin Suleiman, for instance, now a Harvard professor and widely published scholar on Holocaust Studies, admits she has limited subjective recollections because she was only five when the hostilities ended (“War Memories” 563).

Autobiographical memories of those whose young lives bear the wounds of Nazi policies are scarred by interruptions. For older children they are structured around three periods: “before, during the Holocaust, and after” (Kraft 58). By contrast, younger children have only two reference points: during and after. Their memories begin at a point when life was already turned inside out. As Aharon Appelfeld writes:

While the adults fled from themselves and from their memories, repressing them and building up a new life in place of their previous one, the children had no previous life or, if they had, it was now effaced. The Holocaust was the black milk, as the poet said, that they sucked morning, noon, and night.” (*Beyond Despair* 37)

Robert Kraft records testimony from a child survivor who remembers biting into a banana with its skin intact after the war because she had lost her pre-war memory of this fruit (or never had one) and was unaware it needed to be peeled. Her mother, suddenly crying, was the one who grasped how much her daughter had missed of a normal childhood (58). Those who were in or who entered adolescence during the war like Anne Frank, who went into hiding at thirteen and was fifteen when the Germans discovered the family’s whereabouts, had more developmental time to come into internal dialogue with the war in general and the war against the Jews in particular. Older children therefore possessed a stronger sense of pre-war life and memories of themselves and the important caretakers in their lives. This is not to say that age made their lives easier. The authors of a study on post-traumatic stress symptoms of treated and non-treated adults who were child survivors note that “[b]y adolescence, children become capable of perceiving their own vulnerability and can evaluate the threat of traumatic events”; their study concludes that older participants “may have more fully grasped the significance of their

experiences and, as a result, have been more traumatized than the younger ones” (Cohen and Dekel *et al.* 611).

As mentioned, the focus of this dissertation is on the group whose ages fall in-between the youngest and the adolescents. In the Freudian perspective latency comes couched, respectively, after the oral, anal, and phallic phases, but before the genital stage in children’s psychosexual development. Freud’s view presumes that each stage focuses on a particular body area through which libidinal, or sexual energy, is discharged. As its name implies, latency is considered more a connecting timeframe than an active stage. If a favorable Oedipal resolution has occurred, the child in latency will turn away from investing a significant amount of energy in the desired parent in favor of engaging in peer relationships. The relatively quiet latency period of Freud’s system lasts till puberty. In the meantime, the child is thought to mostly occupy himself or herself in relationships with friends of the same sex. He or she joins clubs and develops various role models or heroes. Sexual and aggressive drives find expression in these socially acceptable forms through repression and sublimation. As Percey portrays in his list of childhood locales, the world experience of the child extends outward from the nuclear family as he or she strives to find a social place by accumulating skills and curbing primitive behavior through the emotions of shame and guilt.

In similar fashion Erikson’s developmental stages, which were widened to eight in order to map out adult life as well as childhood, also include a middle childhood period between ages six and twelve. His system weights social processes more heavily than Freud’s does. For both, latency or middle childhood is a period when children are supposed to focus energy on school and to develop abilities that will later allow them to find a welcome place in the world. If successfully negotiated, this period will help a child achieve a sense of competence. Much more

so than Freud, Erikson emphasizes that this developmental bridge is best aided by a supportive community, a variable that was largely unavailable on a national scale to European Jews during the Holocaust. Instead, the opposite happened: “[t]he Holocaust child survivor’s ability to develop a sustained identity was not only disrupted, this identity was transfigured into an insufferable identity -- a Jewish subhuman” (Fogelman 37).

Even though children in latency or middle childhood are supposed to be shifting away from strong allegiance to parents in favor of peers, children in hiding still needed a degree of parental attachment and care, a reassurance cut short by the stress of deportations and state-enacted murder. Potential peer attachments were frustrated as opportunities in schools and other social venues were blocked. Education was sometimes provided in a clandestine way as a form of resistance among Jews themselves, in individual families and in underground classes available in places like the Warsaw ghetto (Heberer 287). Within the confines of the ghetto, where violence took place daily, such classes had a salutary effect. While they lasted, writes Heberer, they offered “a sense of fellowship and camaraderie, which had evaporated elsewhere among a desperate community”; for some they became “a central and transforming experience” (288).

Interaction with peers was affected both by population transfers and the exigencies of life. If sufficient peers were available, child’s play continued, but it was often warped by the terrifying environment in which Jewish children found themselves. Aharon Peretz, a doctor in the Warsaw ghetto who offered a witness statement during the Eichmann trial, testified that: “The children in the ghetto used to play and laugh, and in their games the tragedy of the Jewish people was reflected. They used to play at graves, they would dig a pit, place a child in it, and call him Hitler. They used to play as if they were at the gate of the ghetto, some would be Germans and other Jews. They used to play at funerals, and all such games.” (qtd. in Heberer

299) Such play “was unconventional and shocked adult observers” (299), but George Eisen, who studied play habits of Jewish children during the Holocaust, considers it to have been “buffered learning” (79). These play periods, in other words, incorporated imaginative tasks that helped children make sense of the world in which they lived. Nevertheless, psychologists studying high-crime neighborhoods in modern urban environments have observed that extreme violence in middle childhood “can interfere with the age-expectable attainments of school-age children,” making it harder for them to enlarge their world and “take pleasure in increased autonomy and self-reliance” (Marans and Adelman 218).

In addition, for some latency-age children “identifying with the aggressor” may have become “a chronic hedge against feeling vulnerable” (Marans and Adelman 210). We can recognize a slide toward this identification style in child survivor narratives, especially those written by males. In normal times such youngsters might focus on typical heroes and role models, but in this time their energy might be directed at the Nazis. For example, Kaplan’s study on Jewish children’s school experiences prior to their ejection from the German school system finds a seven-year old Jewish boy who, when asked what he would wish for, responds “to be a Nazi” (44). The attractiveness of the German soldiers’ “incredibly tall, shiny boots” that makes an impression on a Jewish boy even in the midst of his being arrested (Marks 45) is repeated in statements by the young male protagonists in Kosinski’s *The Painted Bird* and Begley’s *Wartime Lies*. What is being represented, in my opinion, is not identification with Nazi principles, but a longing for positive group affiliation, the desire to be regarded as important that society did not make available to Jewish children.

According to Nathan Durst, a hidden child survivor and clinical psychologist at AMCHA, the National Israeli Center for Psychosocial Support for Holocaust Survivors and the

Second Generation, “the impact of traumatic experiences on various ages will evoke different reactions, which also have consequences for the therapeutic approach” (500). In his review of such methodologies, he notes that most hidden children “lived for many years in the shadow of their fragmented self, in a kind of double reality. Life was split,” he asserts, “between the past and the present, between outward successful adaptation and the scarred inner core” (503), a theme that will be developed later in this chapter in the discussion of “compound personality” as a residual of stresses involved in hiding (Tauber “Traumatized Child”). Living as the target of severe persecution for so long forced children to retrench psychologically, to flinch back from a society that would in civil times have helped them grow. Repercussions were evident decades after the war. A large study done in Israel, for instance, found that adults who had survived the war in hiding were less likely to join survivor organizations, “as if they still had to hide themselves” (Robinson et al. 30). In another large study that measured outcomes for Holocaust survivors based on Erikson’s psychosocial stages, the most ambivalent scores were reported for trust vs. mistrust and for identity confusion (Greene *et al.* 500), two traits relevant to the authors being discussed here.

According to therapists who work with this population, adults who were hidden as children proved reluctant to ask for help even if they were suffering from intrusive thoughts, depression or other illnesses. Clients who had been very young children during the war experienced a “void,” writes Durst, because they were unable to marshal memories of their past, as in the case of Suleiman and Perec; those who were older suffered more from traumatic memories (504). In categorizing by age the aftermath of the war for child survivors who approached AMCHA for services, Durst notes that in the 5- to 8-year-old group (Perec, nine at the end of the war, most closely fits here), more memories would be available than in the very

youngest group born during the war; however, he adds that energy would also be used to repress them in a form of childhood amnesia, which would be experienced as a “breach in one’s life history” (509). Perec defends his inability to produce childhood memories for a simple reason: “another story, the Great One, History with its big H, had already answered in my stead: the war, the camps” (6).

A double meaning is at play here: Perec’s original phrase – “*l’Histoire avec sa grande hache*” – translates literally to “History with its big axe.” The last word puns because the pronunciation of “*hache*” in French also sounds like the pronunciation of the letter “h.” His translator, David Bellos, likely chose the sound play when deciding on the translation to echo the phrase’s other capitalizations. The use of the capital “H” also suggests Hitler, though, who causes a life-long emotional “ache.” But “axe” should not get lost in translation. Its use allows the author to indicate how the war severed him from his past, the very notion of which bespeaks trauma. Even without the benefit of understanding French, readers can perceive that Perec is saying history writ large – with a capital “H” – dominates his sense of childhood. Small children have no way to counteract such dreadful happenings, so survivors from the latency group can prove vulnerable to the “reawakening of feelings of helplessness, feelings of insecurity and inferiority, with difficulties with socializing and confusion about identity” (Durst 519). Judith Kestenberg’s extensive research work, which allowed her to compare child survivors with children of survivors, similarly encourages her to conclude that the first group more than the second suffers from a “depressive core, a feeling of emptiness and loss of continuity in life” (48).

The interdisciplinary field of trauma studies that has grown so large in the past two decades holds that memories do not come as individual visualizations like photographs, or in a stream like motion pictures. Rather, “childhood memories actually come in flashes and use a

great variety of sensory modalities, not necessarily visual and not necessarily continuous” (Kestenberg and Kestenberg 20). Appelfeld’s description of his own memories bears out the theory:

From the years of the war I remember very little, as if they were not six consecutive years. True, sometimes from within the dense fog arises a dark body, a blackened hand, a shoe of which only patches remain. These images, at times as forceful as a stroke of fire, fade just as quickly, as if refusing to reveal themselves. . . but the palms of the hands, the soles of the feet, the back and the knees remember more than memory. If I knew how to draw from them, I would be flooded with visions. (*Story of a Life: A Memoir* 6)

Aside from the lack of narrative sequence he finds in his memories, what Appelfeld also shares in this comment is metacognition of the difference between semantic and somatic memory.

“When people are traumatized,” writes psychiatrist Bessel van der Kolk, “they are said to experience ‘speechless terror’: the emotional impact of the event may interfere with the capacity to capture the experience in words or symbols” (258). The memories refuse to reveal themselves: Appelfeld cannot name all of them, so he cannot write all of them. Instead he is aware that his body holds on to the memories – “the palms of the hands, the soles of the feet, the back and the knees” – in accordance with Piaget’s thought that “failure of semantic memory leads to the organization of memory on a somatosensory or iconic level (such as somatic sensations, behavioral enactments, nightmares, and flashbacks)” (qtd. in van der Kolk 258).

Psychologist Eva Fogelman has found these reactions to be clinically true. “When child survivors talk about specific incidents,” she writes, “feelings emerge in different parts of their bodies” (35).

We see this type of kinesthetic memory used as a transmission tool in Perec’s *W or the Memory of Childhood* in the way he uses endnotes in the autobiographical portions of his interwoven non-fiction/fiction sections in his book. Memories that are presented in the main body

autobiographical text often get erased in numbered notes at the end of each chapter, but the endnotes are not evenly distributed throughout the book. Instead, two or three arrive in most of the memoir chapters. But the chapter that has the most review of old photographs and family lore pertaining to his parents contains more than twenty endnotes. A reader who shifts back and forth from text to footnotes while reading this chapter will, in effect, re-enact Perec's sense of loss as he shuffles old papers and worn photographs on his desk.

Such flashes are also presented in Kosinski's final and most autobiographical novel, *The Hermit of 69th Street*, when the text is periodically interrupted by episodes that the narrator calls "memory slides." For him and for the reader they have an intrusive effect, causing a temporal shift congruent with Durst's idea that the past and the present live simultaneously, but in a fragmented way, within child survivors. An entire chapter of *Hermit*, which will be analyzed in Chapter 4, revolves around an upsurge of the protagonist's traumatic memory during a public address on television. Perhaps because the tale is launched in a humorous way, scholars have not noticed the PTSD quality of the vignette and therefore miss its autobiographical weight with respect to the author's life. Instead, Kosinski's biographer refers to the chapter as a "hilarious account of his stage fright" (Sloan 382), thereby missing the encroaching traumatic memory about child rape that overtakes the current time narrative. The mismatch between reader and writer may occur because of the oblique, encrypted way in which Kosinski makes his point in this chapter, a writer/reader failure that also underscores any therapist's challenge in achieving empathic listening in the face of a client's stories of atrocity.

Theories on how to deal with traumatic memory spread out on a continuum. On one end sits the idea that helping clients recall anything from childhood is crucial because it encourages a resolution of mourning, i.e., it is supposed to resolve the split between the adult self and the child self that therapists like Durst envision. This approach, remarks clinical psychologist Robert

Prince, carries “an implicit assumption that symptoms can arise from blocked memories perpetuating maladaptive defenses” and that unblocking them is of paramount importance (280-281). Prince cites for support Dori Laub, the co-founder of the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale University, who comments that “One has to know one’s buried truth in order to be able to love one’s life” (qtd. in Prince 281). From this camp Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi also argues that autobiography “becomes therapeutic as the act of welding the facts of memory with the imagined futures that were foreclosed by violent disruption” (368).

However, on the other end of the continuum lies the notion that forgetting is crucial to being able to continue with life. Too much recall, according to Lawrence Langer, does not restore a sense of agency or power for the victim, but instead “it achieves the reverse, reanimating the governing impotence of the worst moments in a distinctly non-therapeutic way” (83-84). Claudine Vegh weighs in on this side by writing in *I Never Said Good-bye* how she was sent to a vacation camp with other Jewish children after the war. All had suffered significant family loss. The rule she remembers from the camp was “oblivion at all costs or, at least, never to talk about it” (27). In a similar way, even though his situation is largely one of absent memory, Perec writes in *W* that “since I could not forget the facts, I made up my mind to view everything with indifference; every sort of resonance within me was stifled” (102), a remark that leans in the direction of active suppression.

His and Vegh’s reluctance to remember, which can have a constraining effect on the ability to bear witness, resonates in a comparable passage by Appelfeld and seems to be an identifying attribute for many child survivors:

Anyone who underwent the Holocaust will be as wary of memory as of fire. For many years the members of my generation were concerned with the concealment and

repression, or, to use a harsher word, the suppression of memory. It was impossible to live after the Holocaust except by silencing memory. Memory became your enemy. You worked constantly to blunt it, to divert it, and to numb it as one numbs pain. This battle lasted for years. People learned how to live without memory the way one learns to live without a limb of one's body. (*Beyond Despair* ix)

In like fashion, although readers have praised his work for its verisimilitude about life on the run in Poland, Begley's narrator in *Wartime Lies* ends his account with a negation of the text's autobiographic veracity by concluding that "Our man has no childhood that he can bear to remember; he has had to invent one" (197), a declaration that effectively distances the protagonist's experiences from the author's.

Kofman too opens *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat* with ambivalence about testifying, an understandable hesitancy in light of the fact that this memoir was only the last in several attempts to engage her childhood in print. Her father, a Parisian rabbi, was deported suddenly to Drancy and later to Auschwitz along with thousands of other French Jews in 1942; the family eventually learned that he had been brutally assaulted and buried alive during a work detail as punishment for wanting to pray on the Sabbath. The opening paragraph begins by describing her father's fountain pen that she stole years ago from her mother's purse. By now it is broken and patched up with Scotch tape, but she keeps it on the desk in front of her because it makes her "write, write." Her comment that "[i]t 'failed' me before I could bring myself to give it up" suggests a metonymic relationship between the tool and her father, as well as a form of repressed mourning for his loss. Paragraph two's single sentence -- "Maybe all my books have been the detours required to make me write about 'that'" (original emphasis) -- reads as an admittance of long-standing resistance to taking up the subject of his death. Friedlander also mentions in his memoir

the “strange paralysis” that gripped him for a long time when he tried to write about past events (qtd. in Vegh 167). To speak or not to speak. To remember or to forget. These spaces of contradiction, of *aporia*, must be negotiated by each of the writers as they produce their Holocaust childhood narratives.

Scholars often question why it took so long for child survivors (especially those who were in hiding) to publish their autobiographies. As mentioned previously, a multitude of circumstances accounted for this long silence: lack of empathetic listeners, for instance, and marginalization because of a hierarchy of suffering that situated concentration camp survivors in the center of attention. Appelfeld and Saul Friedlander, both of whom immigrated to Israel shortly after the war, would also have had their personal histories overshadowed by the master narrative of the emerging Jewish state. “War refugees,” Lincoln Shlensky states, “did not fit the heroic image of the pioneering New Jew, and the narratives of loss they carried with them were often ignored or suppressed because these stories appeared to be incompatible with the forward thrust of Zionism’s utopian vision” (416). But one can also contend that the writers simply needed a long period before they were capable of dealing with such incendiary psychological material. This possibility moves the group closer to the experience of older Holocaust survivors. Indeed, the common occurrence of child survivors writing in middle age about their past closely follows the results Jeremy Popkin found when analyzing memoirs by twenty-nine historians whose personal lives were deeply affected by the Holocaust (“Holocaust Memories”). Except for Friedlander and Nechama Tec, both of whom focused their professional work entirely on Holocaust-related topics, most memoirs were published late in life, usually after the historians retired.

Many literary scholars would agree with Gabrielle Schwab that “life writings often emerge from a traumatic core, occupying a space between two parallel universes: daily life and trauma” (95). “In real life,” she adds, “it is dangerous for these universes to touch,” but “in writing, they must converge” (95). Without this weaving together, the “stories remain cut off, their words stranded in the silence they try to cover, orbiting trauma like satellites. Writing from within the core of trauma is a constant struggle between the colonizing power of words and the revolt of what is being rejected, silenced” (95). Schwab’s comments would seem to describe the collective effort of all hidden child survivor writers in this study.

3.2 Entre Deux

In 2000 Jacob Lomranz, a psychologist at Tel Aviv University, performed a literature search funded by Israel’s Yad Vashem Center for Holocaust Studies in order to document research done on the event by members of his profession. Counting English-language articles (chapters in books were excluded) that were computerized under PsycINFO and PsycLIT and published between 1974, when such information began to be computerized, and 1993, he discovered that only 182 studies had been completed. Considering the importance of that genocidal event with respect to trauma and memory studies, Lomranz calls this a “meager crop.” Particular criticism is pointed at the fact that in the articles “traumas are not specified,” a problem since “the specific characteristics of any trauma determine posttraumatic effects.” He criticizes the fact that more than three quarters of the studies refer “merely to ‘survivors’ without specifying whether they were inmates of death camps, work camps, partisans, refugees in Russia, [or] fugitives hiding under false identities.” Such lack of specificity in effect flattens the group and makes it impossible to see the effects of trauma on an individual basis. In light of his comments, I am striving to differentiate not only between hidden child survivors as a subgroup

from child survivors in general, but also to discriminate between individuals within the hidden child group itself in order to distinguish issues that may arise in their narratives.

An initial way of accomplishing that goal is to parse the word “hidden.” All situations of hiding obviously presuppose some structure to hide behind. In the case of Anne Frank, the structure was three-dimensional, i.e., a physical wall behind a bookcase that swung open to uncover a hidden door. Within that secret environment, Anne was able until the time of deportation to retain her name, to continue her identity as a Jew, and to maintain relations with her immediate family, all of which factors inform her diary. By contrast, for the others in this study who were in “visible” settings as children, the hiding structure was more psychological than physical: a façade of false identity learned quickly to mask a real identity. To whatever degree Jewish culture was incorporated into the sense of self before the war for these children, it had to be disavowed while in hiding in order to protect the self and any rescuers. Unlike Anne Frank’s case, even their names changed: Sarah (Kofman) became Suzanne, Józef became Jerzy; Pavel Friédlander, known at home as Pavliček, became Paul-Henri, who became Paul-Henri Marie after his baptism, Shaul after immigration to Israel, and eventually Saul (Derwin 18).

Because the core identity was not fully formed at their young ages, the events that happened to children hiding in plain sight affected the growth of the self in a different way from children who lived in invisible settings. Of the name changes he underwent, for instance, Friédlander writes “[I]t is impossible to know which name I am, and that in the final analysis seems to me sufficient expression of a real and profound confusion” (94). As Derwin points out in her analysis of *When Memory Comes*, the confusion that arises from the problematic chain of name changes results in “the discontinuity of self through an image of sequential difference” (18). Because the relatively unexplored psychological ramifications of the type of hiding within

this subgroup of hidden children had important impact on identity development, I would argue that broad presumptions, particularly those observers bring to the notion of hierarchies of suffering, may be inaccurate and lead to misreading of autobiographical texts.

Within the field of the humanities several attempts have been made to solve the problem of too broad definitions that Lomranz addresses. Scholars are making more effort to coalesce, define and name this group of youngsters, while allowing room for individual interpretation. In his comparative study of Kofman, Perec, and historian Pierre Vidal-Naquet, for instance, Steven Jaron links them by using Freud's term "*entre-deux*" and concentrating less on the writing styles than on what he considers to be an "evocation of a condition at once historical, existential and psychical," namely, "the state of being between childhood or adolescence and adulthood; between Judaism and Christianity, as conversions during or after the war, were not infrequent; between memory and history; between fiction and historiography; or between French citizenship within the Republic, annulled in any case under the Vichy regime, and Jewishness" (209). He does not discuss the variable of visible/not visible, but by working with this list of oppositions Jaron is able to frame the children involved as representatives of a "liminal generation" (209). This attribute, he writes, situates them at the edge of a type of memory out of reach for children who are born directly after the war.

Unlike Perec, whose efforts in text and in life were expended at recovering lost memories, for instance, Henri Raczymow (born 1948), defines his own writing as *mémoire trouée*, a "memory shot through with holes." In his case, recovery of the past is impossible: "In my work, such a void is created by the empty memory I spoke of, which propels my writing forward. My books do not attempt to fill in empty memory. They are not simply part of the struggle against forgetfulness. Rather, I try to present memory as empty. I try to restore a non-

memory, which by definition cannot be filled in or recovered” (104). Like the trench on a battlefield, in other words, Raczymow’s *mémoire trouée* demarcates the line between his generation and those who, as Jaron understands, narrate their childhoods while “bear[ing] the scars of a lived experience” (208). From this perspective 1945 is a historical turning point, a “temporal paradigm,” as expressed by Ingeborg Bachmann (qtd. in Weigel 265). Beginning with the type of writing Raczymow produces, writers shift into the realm of postmemory, which Marianne Hirsch and James Young define as a way of representing one’s generational distance from history. This type of “vicarious past,” Young writes, can only be accessed through imagination (1-2).

Such a state of being in-between is extended further in Susan Rubin Suleiman’s idea of the “1.5 generation,” a term she admits is a “provocation” that requires explanation (277). As Sigrid Weigel points out, “the counting of generations begins with the second one” (265). No name is typically given to the first; it exists only in relation to subsequent generations. But with regard to the Holocaust it is understood that the adult survivors are “the voice of a generation that lays claim to a hegemonic and true image of history” (265). The question is who comes after. For several decades trauma theorists paid attention only to the children of such survivors in their psychological studies, denoting them as the “second generation,” but critics like Jaron and Suleiman are fixed on naming a generation in-between, i.e., the children who like their elders actually lived through the Holocaust. In support of her decision to treat such children as a separate generation Suleiman contends that:

What all of the attempts to define a historical generation have in common is the concept of shared or collective experience, which in turn influences (or even, as Mannheim suggests, “forms”) collective behavior and attitudes. In light of such

theorizing, we may well conclude that the Holocaust—or, more exactly, surviving the Holocaust—was a shared experience that created a generation, indeed, more than one. The definition of generation as a set of “age-related differences” allows us to distinguish among those who were adults during those years, those who were children or adolescents, and those who were not yet born. (280)

As part of the “age-related differences” that she thinks binds them into a group, one of Suleiman’s focal points is on the “premature bewilderment and helplessness” that affected children born from 1930 until the end of the war because they had not achieved the stable sense of self that is normally linked to adulthood (277). Additionally, she reminds us that this sense was also accompanied by “premature aging,” a result of having to act as if they were adults long before reaching maturity (277). A young child with Aryan appearance might become the family’s runner for food, for instance, or might become the *de facto* guardian for younger children if parents were deported or killed. Surprisingly young children were capable of this kind of responsibility. Suleiman also asks “to what extent such developmental differences also influence the memories and the narratives of survivors who look back after many years and provide oral or written accounts of their childhood” (282). Along with my rumination on absence, her question helped to spark this dissertation.

As Jaron and Suleiman make clear, scholars have a variety of entry points into these texts, especially binaries: Jewish versus Christian identity, vicarious versus remembered past, childhood perspectives versus those of adolescence or adulthood, memory versus history, fiction versus historiography, the national self versus the Jewish self. To this list we should also add differences between those who write in their original language (Perec and Kofman) and those who do not – another existential situation of “in-between.” Friedlander’s language of origin is

Czech, but he wrote his memoir in French; Begley's is Polish, but he writes in English; Kosinski's were Polish and Russian, but he wrote in English although he had command of four other languages (Jovanovich 253). Although Appelfeld writes in Hebrew, his early languages were German, Yiddish and Ukrainian, but he also learned French and Italian during the war, as well as English and Hebrew after immigration to Israel (Ramras-Rauch 5-8). A number of scholars parodied statements by Kosinski that he was more comfortable writing in English than Polish, but Aneta Pavlenko contends that after re-establishing themselves in a new locale and new language, many writers "continue to write in a 'stepmother tongue' rather than revert back to the primary language" because it prompts a desired "emotional estrangement and liberation" (181). She states, in fact, that as early as 1916 psychoanalysts like Ferenczi "had noted that their bilingual patients were often reluctant to utter taboo words in the native language, but did not experience the same anxiety" when using the second language's similar vocabulary (169).

Comparison of the hidden child survivor texts can also be made through the prism of psychological openness, i.e., authors who, for the most part, have consciously tried to exit their emotional hiding places as adults versus those who consciously remain to large degree within the culture of hiding. Perec and Kosinski belong to this second group. Coincidentally, the former wrote an early novel called *J'avance masque*, "a French version of the motto of the philosopher Descartes, *Larvatus Prodeo*, ("I go forward in disguise")" that "could have served as Perec's own motto" (Bellos 23), while the latter took the same expression for his life maxim (Sloan 127). The phrase suggests a constructed self that prefers hiding to autobiographical exposure, one that deliberately disguises or silences private thoughts and emotions. In both cases this impulse leads to textual games, although this aspect is generally recognized only with Perec's oeuvre because of his association with Oulipo, a group of French-speaking writers and

mathematicians whose members sought to create works using constrained writing techniques like lipograms, palindromes, and structures based on mathematical puzzles.

3.3 Writing in the Gap

Writing autobiography and memoir is a way of taking command of the past, an attempt to narrate all or a portion of one's life in order to experience the self as the subject of one's own history. Such effort for children who survived the Holocaust in hiding is bold in two ways: first, it entails coming out of emotional hiding in order to speak, although whether it is possible to do so completely is subject to debate. Appelfeld denies the likelihood: "If you read the many collections of testimony written about the Holocaust," he argues, "you will immediately see that they are actually repressions, meant to put events in proper chronological order. They are neither introspection nor anything resembling introspection, but rather the careful weaving together of many external facts in order to veil the inner truth" (*Story of a Life* 100). Whether leaning toward repression or discovery, writing an autobiography also involves wrestling with the idea, as Percec did, that one's individual history is as important to record as "history with a big H" (6).

Two desires may underlie this challenging task: first, to undertake it as an ethical act of witnessing, but second, because the effort promises what Jeremy Popkin calls the "transformative nature of the autobiographical act" (55). Under the best of circumstances, writing can be a thread that sutures together the disparate sides of self. Percec might quibble with this view, failing to find the redemptive note. His argument would be: "I know that what I say is blank, is neutral, is the sign once and for all of an annihilation once and for all" (59). Yet despite this expression of ultimate loss concerning the death of his parents, he also finds in writing an affirmation of attachment: "I write because we lived together, because I was one among them, a shadow amidst their shadows, a body near their body; I write because they left in me their

indelible mark and the trace of it is writing: their memory is dead to writing; writing is the memory of their death and the affirmation of my life" (59). Because Friedlander's parents were killed in Auschwitz and had no burial place, he probably writes for similar reasons, but likely also does so to deal with the state of having been "in-between" cultures and languages that he describes in his memoir as a "dispersed sense of self" (69). According to her translator, Sarah Kofman too began *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat* with "a sense of unexpected renewal" that she might be able at last to untie the "knot" formed in her child's heart during her time spent in hiding with her mother in a local woman's home during the war (Smock xi). Clearly these authors experienced the attempt to write autobiography or memoir as meaning making.

Because of the stress endured while in hiding and the long silence that followed, the act of representing the self vis-à-vis one's own history is nevertheless complicated. These writers seem to sense some value in representing themselves as split subjects, mostly by virtue of the structural components of their texts, an attribute noticed by Sue Vice in her study of child survivor writings. Perec's memoir arrives as a bi-focal text, alternating autobiographical chapters with a fictional adventure concerning the island of W that readers gradually come to realize is an emblem for the sadism inherent in Nazi ideology. Friedlander's and Appelfeld's autobiographies interlace chapters of remembered or idealized home life in Europe in a non-contiguous pattern with the post-immigration setting in Palestine/Israel. Kofman frames her memoir by connections to her father that encase the antagonistic relationship between the two mother figures of her life. Begley splits his voice between an older narrator who periodically interjects literary references from Ancient Rome into the unfolding drama and a third-person narrator closer in time to young Maciek's life on the run. In *The Hermit of 69th Street*,

significantly more autobiographical than his first novel, Kosinski also divides his narration between “memory slides” and his protagonist’s current life in New York.

Split or fragmentary narratives provide an obvious gap for writers to address and for readers to notice. As one of Perec’s friends from Oulipo states, “In the beginning was the gap. Once it’s been noticed, we all set about filling the gap as best we can” (Bénabou 157). Readers can also arrive at an alternate interpretation by considering another point of view on the psychological split facing child survivors. André Stein, who went into hiding at the age of 8 to escape the Nazi massacre of Jews in Budapest and later compiled stories of children who survived the Holocaust in a similar way, remarks that “[t]he children had no alternative but to keep their stories hidden. They lost their old identity and were quick to forge a new one around the vault that contained their shattered hidden selves (271).” His language is very close to how Friedlander expresses his grown-up sense of self: “perhaps I am the one who now preserves, in the very depths of myself, certain disparate, incompatible fragments of existence cut off from all reality, with no continuity whatsoever, like those shards of steel that survivors of great battles...carry about inside their bodies” (110). Both Stein and Friedlander thus establish a sense that they hold a traumatized, broken self that suffers even decades later. The autobiographer or memoirist of such a traumatic childhood faces rhetorical choices on how to embody this situation: by simply representing the gaps, for instance, or by trying to bridge the chasm between the current self and the remembered self.

The latter choice might structure itself around the theme of chronology, a basic underpinning of narrative, i.e., that the remembered self came first and the current self came later. The title of Sarah Kofman’s memoir, *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat* may be interpreted as an analogue for this idea, the comma suggestive of a finger turning a calendar page as Kofman

narrates the successive homes (similar to Friédlander's list of successive names) in which she lived during the war, i.e., first the home on Rue Ordener with her parents, *then* the home with the "Dame" of Rue Labat. Perhaps, however, narrative order of the physical residences is not be the point. Trauma is a situation where, as Hamlet says, "time is out of joint," one with a "peculiar, temporal structure" that Cathy Caruth calls "belatedness" (7). For this reason attempts to force narration of the trauma by chronology may end up fulfilling Appelfeld's warning that doing so can only be achieved by repression.

However, if Kofman's memoir is read in relation to Stein's depiction of an inner "vault," we may interpret the comma between Rue Ordener and Rue Labat less as a marker of chronology than as an indication of a doubled self. That reading, Stein's metaphor and Friédlander's self-depiction all conform to a conclusion drawn by Israeli therapist Yvonne Tauber as a result of her extensive clinical work at the National Israeli Center for Psychosocial Support for Holocaust Survivors and the Second Generation. She and her colleagues found that child survivors' "traumatization has often remained dormant throughout most of their lives except when reactivated by one of a multitude of triggers" (160). Such psychological prompts vary from sounds or smells in the present that evoke experiences from the past or even what an observer might consider a benign circumstance like a birthday celebration for a son or daughter that corresponds to the child survivor's age at the time of deportation or need to go into hiding. In Caruth's definition of belatedness and most definitions of PTSD, the past pursues the present. By contrast, Tauber's conceptualization of the latent feelings that erratically surface point us in a slightly different direction. She has coined the term "compound personality" to describe this phenomenon, which is defined to mean "the *coexistence* of the traumatized child self and the chronologically appropriate adult self within the child survivor's personality" (161, emphasis

added). Her framing in effect doubles the child survivor's responsive selves in the present, a different approach from those who would describe the victim's memory as one of dissociative or traumatic splitting.

Tauber's theory of compound personality asserts the presence of a "simultaneous existence of the pre-traumatized child or infant" who is "'frozen' at the age of traumatization with its perceptions and understandings, and of the adult" (161). Her notion echoes Kosinski's comment in his self-published pamphlet, "Notes of the Author on *The Painted Bird*," that accompanied the book's German edition, in which he tried to explain his challenges in writing his first novel:

"*The Painted Bird* was the result of the slow unfreezing of a mind long gripped by fear, of isolated facts that have become interwoven into a tapestry. The light of memory is less brilliant, but the illumination spreads to a broader area, and is softer, more sympathetic. Foregrounds lose in definition, and backgrounds emerge from the shadows ... Events to the child are immediate; discoveries are one-dimensional...

But to the adult the vision of these memories is multi-dimensional" (*Passing By* 208). Using the vocabulary of photography, a profession he considered entering prior to writing novels, Kosinski discusses "foregrounds" and "backgrounds" as if he is looking at his life through a camera and adjusting the depth-of-field settings on the lens. His metaphor suggests that a child has insufficient social understanding to use perspective; only an adult possesses the ability to look closely at a situation, yet is able to pull back to view it in broader context. In his opinion both sides are at play in his writing; the shifting focus is what connects them. This dynamic is similar to Ezrahi's analysis of how the child self in Friedlander's memoir is "juxtaposed with the voice of the mature historian writing in 1978" so that "the reader is invited

to experience *When Memory Comes* as a *pas de deux* between the selves who inhabit the present in Israel and the past in occupied Europe” (366, original emphasis).

Tauber’s notion of compound identity seems to argue for double subject selves, as these examples show, but selves that Kofman’s title shows are tied together in such a fundamental way that they are like twins who are not easily separated. An attentive reader of texts by these hidden child survivor authors should therefore be on the alert for “double-voiced” utterances, to borrow a phrase from Bakhtin, not only in novels, but also in autobiographies and non-fiction writings in which the compound personality of the survivor/hidden self expresses itself. The initial lines of *When Memory Comes* contain such an example: the text begins by telling readers how the author was born in Prague “at the worst possible moment, four months before Hitler came to power.” Ezrahi notes that here the author speaks with the force of historical knowledge (366). But the backshadowed, professional tone is followed “by a lapse into the conventional discourse of memoir” in which Friedlander speaks of his father and mother and asserts the importance of such personal connections, an unusual strategy for a historian (366). As a result, writes Ezrahi, “[e]ven as he claims his own vocation as historian, guardian of what he will call the ‘historian’s’ gaze, he allows the still, small voice of the child to speak as representative of history’s ever-inassimilable, intractable, raw material” (367). From my perspective these joined utterances from the adult and the child mean that the memoir begins with a double-voiced statement.

In other cases the double voice is more subtle and relies on a nuanced, often belated awareness by the reader of its existence rather than calling attention to itself as Friedlander’s example does. Such a speech act is Perec’s choice of the surname “Bartlebooth” for a character in *Life: A User’s Manual*. As Bénébou points out, this name derives from “Melville’s Bartleby and Laraud’s Barnabooth,” which he considers to be “complete opposites which almost cancel

each other out” because the former is a “negative” and the latter a “positive” (159). Together, the negative and the positive of the spliced figure add to zero. As this mathematical relationship is foregrounded in the reader’s mind, we realize that Perec has again inscribed a void in his novel, the gap that carries the weight of sadness infused in his writing.

In a life structured around hiding in plain sight, Jewish children and adults had to create a double voice to exist, one internalized, the other to communicate with their rescuers and with people with potentially threatening plans. Creating this façade necessitated the construction of a false Christian identity, something adults could accomplish and subsequently release with more equanimity than children because their memories and identities were formed prior to the Holocaust. For children in the latency age group, the “game” of hiding had deeper repercussions: it actively interfered with the process of identity formation. The false Christian layer infused a sense of otherness into their budding selves, one of the themes of the next chapter.

Chapter 4 -- Narrating Hiddenness

*“At 5 o’clock in the morning a trip to the convent...
I was afraid when I heard a footstep. I was afraid of people
looking at me, wondering perhaps if the next person will
denounce me and that will be the end.”*

Edith Knoll *The Hidden Children*

4.1 Approaching Trauma

Writing memoir decades after a traumatic event is a daunting task. In the case of childhoods overshadowed by the Holocaust, the gravitas of the event itself poses a significant challenge to the writer. Asked by a reporter why he wrote a novel about a Jewish boy in hiding in wartime Poland instead of writing a memoir, for instance, Louis Begley answers: “Who am I to call up these ghosts, to stick my hand into this stuff of nightmares, to bring it back?” (Fein). He means, one presumes, both mind and body memories. In his case, they include a variety of sense recollections that he could avoid if writing fiction, but not necessarily if penning a memoir: “Dead bodies. Smell of burning and decay. Thunder of bombs and artillery shells, and odious commands shouted in German, Ukrainian and Polish. Taste of potatoes baked in the ashes of a fire I made in a field where I was herding cows” (Charney para. 2).

Keeping traumatic experiences at arms’ length is one coping mechanism for survivors. German cultural critic Jost Hermand agrees that although “memories cannot be forced,” they may be kept at bay in the writing process (1). He warns readers, for example, that in recounting his time as a boy in the Hitler youth corps, he will “shy away from describing those [details] that involve sexual sadism” (xxx). Georges Perec, too, speaks of self-imposed reticence in the writing process. “I possess other pieces of information about my parents,” he admits while hiding

from readers what those pieces might be. The reason is that “I know they will not help me to say what I would like to say about them” (41). The need to reveal, in other words, may meet a similar, strong need to conceal.

This double bind, a call to remember coupled with a need to forget, or at least a compulsion to hide, arises from the traumatic nature of lives under the power of the Third Reich. The word trauma derives from the Greek for wound, from which noun Roger Luckhurst extrapolates the meaning of a “piercing or breach of a border that puts inside and outside into a strange communication”; trauma, he contends, “violently opens passageways between systems that were once discrete, making unforeseen connections that distress or confound” (3). This situation can be as true for the survivors of childhoods in hiding as it is for survivors of the death camps. Although youth is generally a time of at least partial psychological shelter because of an incomplete awareness of the world, the shocking quality of certain events from the period of the Holocaust can lance through that protective cover.

How trauma is transmitted to readers depends on the temperament and writing style of the individual survivor. Some choose memoir for reflection, others select fiction, or, as in the example of Perec’s *W or the Memory of Childhood*, a combination of both. Although readers of Holocaust-themed, autobiographical texts often presume a fact-based, testimonial heart at the center of such documents and may react negatively if discovered specifics do not mirror the survivor’s tale – as in the case of Jerzy Kosinski’s novel, *The Painted Bird* – most literary critics would also agree that “an autobiography, whether self-consciously fictionalized, stylized, or not, is irreducible to an historical document” (Rizzuto 6). That being said, instead of parsing out implied differences between autobiographical and fictional impulses on the part of hidden child

survivors, this chapter will bridge these rhetorical choices in search of traumatic tropes common to either side.

Neuroscientist Antonio Damasio, whose research centers on the subject of consciousness, contends that our sense of self arises from our need to map relations between self and others, a thorny juncture for hidden child survivors of latency age because they were all in the developmental stage of needing to seek their place in the world at precisely the moment that Nazi-dominated Europe avowed they were not entitled to such a place by virtue of their Jewishness. Ruth Kluger, for instance, remembers:

I happened to be the youngest child in our extended family, and hence the only one who couldn't grow into an expanding life, who couldn't swim, skate, or bike, and for whom the Austrian landscape was merely a series of sweet-sounding names...It was as if a whole generation lay between me and my cousins, and even today a gap yawns between me and those Viennese emigrants who have memories of moving freely and unselfconsciously about the city. Anyone who was just a few years older experienced a different Vienna than I, who at age seven wasn't permitted to sit on a park bench and instead could take comfort, if I so chose, in the thought that I belonged to the Chosen People. (25)

Kluger's trenchant phrase "if I so chose" brings to the surface the dilemma facing school-age children during the Holocaust. At a time when they should have been psychologically moving away from their families, they had no wider group with which to identify. Christian society did not welcome them; the humiliation and violence experienced by their own ethnic group made even their extended families and fellow Jews an unappealing group to join. For hidden children,

as psychoanalysts Marion Feldman, Yoram Mouchenik and Marie Rose Moro argue, these negative emotions would become both the source and the effect of these young victims' trauma because "the intention of the aggressor [was] internalized and remain[ed] active" throughout their lives (837). Therefore, "one of the psychic organizers among Jewish children who were hidden is a burying process, [in which] one or other [parts of the psyche] can be brought to the fore, depending on the setting, the circumstance, the environment, or the relationship with others" (840). This framework closely aligns with Yvonne Tauber's idea of a compound personality co-existing in hidden children. Later in this chapter, we will analyze such cases in the writings of Percec, Kofman, and Kosinski.

For children who went into hiding, survival depended on chance and the unmaking or masking of an identity-in-progress. This conflict poses great challenge to any person, but particularly to a writer who wishes to capture some truth about the self in an autobiographical gesture. The reason is that autobiography signals toward narrative, yet the life narrative of latency-age children who went into open hiding during the Holocaust was turned inside out, inverted, by necessary deception erased. Like the undertext of a palimpsest, the consciousness on which the sense of self was written before the war had to be expunged and a new identity had to be consciously encoded on top of it, something that did not happen to young Jews in closed hiding like Anne Frank. If Paul John Eakin is correct that "when it comes to our identities, narrative is not merely *about* self, but is rather in some profound way a constituent part *of* self," then we recognize how profound their loss was (2 - italics his).

As a genre, memoir seeks to reclaim the past, to merge fragmented memories and thereby bring into sharper focus the subject who writes it. Autobiographical fiction pursues a similar goal except that it utilizes fabricated scenes, description, and dialogue to illuminate a truth about the

historical self. Unlike ordinary events, however, traumatic memories can constitute a cognitively inaccessible past. Subjects who strive to share an account of their traumatic childhood have to consider various literary devices to construct that report, all of which must work around the fact that such a past may be significantly outside their conscious control.¹ *Children Writing the Holocaust* lists various rhetorical techniques to categorize narratives that arise from this situation, such as split-time texts in which the time when the document was written alternates with the remembered time of childhood (Aharon Appelfeld's *The Story of a Life: A Memoir* and Saul Friedlander's *When Memory Comes*, for example, both zigzag back and forth between their childhoods and their later lives in Israel) or ways in which authors strive to represent lost childhood memories (Vice 3). Of particular interest to our discussion is Vice's analysis of how a child survivor might narrate hiddenness. Using Louis Begley's novel, *Wartime Lies*, a split narrative in which an unnamed adult self and a younger self called Maciek both examine a boyhood on the run from the Gestapo, Vice argues that " 'Hiddenness' in *Wartime Lies* refers not only to the status of its child protagonist, but also affects the presence of the child's voice (it is hidden in a novel narrated by an adult); its generic status (fact is hidden within fiction); and its attitude to its readers (information is hidden from them)" (65). While I would agree with Vice's analysis of this individual novel, noting that it would also apply to other accounts written by hidden child survivors, I would argue that the life experience of hiddenness and its subjective

¹ See also Cathy Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*, which contends that "trauma seems to be much more than a pathology, or the simple illness of a wounded psyche; it is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available. This truth, in its delayed appearance and its belated address, cannot be linked only to what is known, but also to what remains unknown in our very actions and our language" (4).

handling by individual survivors permeates such texts in an even more profound way: it creates a type of textual thumbprint based on the developmental stage of the writers at the time of the event, one that links these narratives, whether memoir or fiction, and distinguishes them from other Holocaust survivor stories.

To illustrate this thesis, this chapter principally examines and analyzes narratives by three writers whose work represents a continuum of genres: Sarah Kofman and Georges Perec, both born in Paris to families who had sought escape from Polish pogroms in the 1920s by emigrating to that city, and Jerzy Kosinski, who was born in Lodz and hid with his parents during the war on the southeastern edge of the German-controlled, General Government portion of partitioned Poland. Kofman's late-life autobiographical writings fall in the category of testimonial narratives; Perec's *W or the Memory of Childhood* is a split narrative that interweaves autobiography with a fictional tale of super athletes whose world at first seems to be built on Olympic ideals. Threads of autobiography, historical research and fabrication are woven together to construct the canvas of Kosinski's novels. Despite the different genres, the narratives are linked by similar traumatic tropes that correspond with the early school-age status of their authors at the time of the war and the effect on them of having been hidden children. Rather than concentrating solely on traumatic memory, already the subject of many scholarly writings, three issues dominate this analysis: the authors' ambivalent ethnic identities, their disturbed modes of filial attachment, and their similar sensing of a split self as a consequence of living in open hiding.

4.2 The Awakening

As mentioned in previous chapters, Jewish children who survived the Holocaust did so in much smaller numbers than grownups. In ghettos the Nazis targeted them with special actions to reduce the youthful population; even if accompanied by parents they were typically escorted to the gas chambers immediately upon arrival in the death camps because their young age and small size made them unsuitable as workers. Any who survived the war likely did so in hiding in a wide variety of clandestine settings, i.e., hidden in convents, hidden with Christian families willing to risk the death penalty to shelter them either for financial gain or moral conviction, hidden in forests with partisans, some with one parent, some with both, many on their own. After the war such children were passed over as subjects of psychological study in favor of the so-called second generation, children whose parents had been in concentration camps. Early training in absolute silence about their Jewish childhoods likely contributed to the long sidelining of their stories. So strong was the learned silence that children hidden in convents often never realized that other Jewish children were in hiding with them; even young children can perceive danger, so whispered conversations or confessions rarely occurred during the war that would allow them to understand they were not alone in their predicament.

Because of a sliding scale of judgement in which their suffering was overshadowed by the trauma experienced by camp survivors, formerly hidden children as a group did not come forward in great numbers until more than forty years after the war. Anne Frank's *The Diary of a Young Girl*, published in 1952, fared well then and still does, but Americans quickly tired of stories about war atrocities, and the narratives that were published in the 1950s met little attention. As Dori Laub asserts, "[t]he absence of an empathic listener, or more radically, the absence of an *addressable other*, an other who can hear the anguish of one's memories and thus affirm and recognize their realness, annihilates the story" (Felman and Laub 68). After long

silence the First International Gathering of Children Hidden during World War II was held in New York City in May 1991. Sponsored by the Hidden Child Foundation/Anti-Defamation League (see Addendum), the two-day event featured a variety of speakers, many of whom had been hidden children themselves (e.g., Robert Krell, Paul Valent, Haim Dasberg, Nechama Tec, Abraham Foxman). Other notable speakers included those with first-hand knowledge of the Holocaust (Elie Wiesel) or intimate knowledge gleaned from their Holocaust-survivor therapy patients (Judith Kestenberg, Eva Fogelman). As if the subject of the conference bestowed permission to speak on its attendees, a flood of memoirs about childhoods in hiding followed the conference, a list that continues to grow and now includes books and films on the subject.

What then motivated a handful of hidden child survivors to publish fiction and memoir related to their childhoods during the decades from the end of war to the New York and other world conferences? On our list for this chapter Jerzy Kosinski was first to publish (*The Painted Bird*, 1965, novel), followed by Georges Perec (*W ou le souvenir d'enfance*, autobiography/novel published in French in 1975; translated into English as *W or the Memory of Childhood* in 1988); last came Sarah Kofman who made several attempts at autobiography or writings about the Holocaust (essays published in *SubStance* in 1986, *Paroles suffoquées* published in French in 1987 and translated into English as *Smothered Words* in 1998, and *Rue Ordener, rue Labat* published in French in 1994 and translated into English in 1996). One may speculate that their professions are what made it possible for them to come out of hiding, so to speak, before the Hidden Child conference in New York and other gatherings held abroad encouraged such disclosure. Kosinski and Perec worked as novelists. Kofman also published extensively, principally in the field of philosophy. In a manner of speaking these writers' word-based livelihoods gave them an advantage over other hidden children in publishing accounts of their

childhoods. But it also seems as if they too needed an event that invited them to step out of the silence that was impressed on them by a seemingly uncaring world and their own early training in hiding and silence.

Conjecture about the timing of initial work on Kosinski's first novel may begin with a pivotal change of attitude about the Holocaust in 1961. As Philippe Codde argues in *The Jewish American Novel*, two events made 1961 "a crucial year in Holocaust studies: the Eichmann trial and the publication of Raul Hilberg's *The Destruction of the European Jews*, both of which marked the beginning of a new interest and a more overt discussion of the Holocaust" (35). At that point Kosinski was living in America and working under the pseudonym Joseph Novak on *No Third Path*, his second, soon-to-be-published, non-fiction book about the Soviet Union. Not every child survivor has an interest in investigating the history of the Holocaust. Louis Begley, for instance, claims he only read books by Primo Levi, Kosinski's *The Painted Bird* and André Schwartz-Bart's *The Last of the Just* before writing his own *Wartime Lies* (Paris Review), but others differ. Historian Saul Friedländer, for instance, lies on the other side of the continuum: his entire working life has been devoted to the subject. Clearly Kosinski had an interest too: he named *The Nuremberg Trials Documents* as one of the ten most influential books of his life.²

² Answering a Sept. 29, 1976 query from *The Christian Century*, an ecumenical weekly, Kosinski provided a list of ten books in response to their question – "What books have shaped your life?": 1) Miguel De Cervantes' *Don Quixote*; 2) Shakespeare's *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*; 3) Joseph Conrad's *Nostromo*; 4) Mikhail Lermontov's *A Hero of Our Time*; 5) *The Nuremberg Trials Documents*; 6) *The Documents of the Great Stalinist Purge Trials*; 7) Robert Musil's *The Man Without Qualities*; 8) Stendhal's *The Red and the Black*; 9) Jacques Monod's *Chance and Necessity*; and 10) *The Oxford English Dictionary*. See UNCAT MS 481 Folder "Passing By – Working Papers" in the Katherina von Fraunhofer-Kosinski Collection of Jerzy Kosinski. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

The Eichmann trial in particular seems to have probably acted as a goad for Kosinski to relate his childhood experience. According to his biographer, Kosinski described the project for *The Painted Bird* to his mother in 1963 and received from her *Polish Children Accuse*, a “collection of testimony by children who had wandered and suffered during the occupation” (Sloan 191). The biographer implies, and I would agree, that such testimonies would help dredge up personal memories and also help the author fictionalize scenes for his first novel. But Sloan admits that “the essential imaginative leap [to write *The Painted Bird*] had taken place before Kosinski read this book” (191). “By his own account,” records Sloan, a long-time friend of the author, Kosinski asserted he began taking notes for the novel in 1961. One may therefore reasonably date the initial idea for the novel to the period when headlines proclaiming Adolf Eichmann’s capture splashed across newspapers around the world; details of his trial and subsequent execution in Israel followed for months and would not have been missed by anyone with as keen an eye for news about the Holocaust as Kosinski had demonstrated that he possessed. In fact, for many people this extensive media coverage caused renewed interest in wartime events and seemed to invite survivors to begin publishing accounts of their experiences during the war. A voracious reader like Kosinski also probably read Hannah Arendt’s *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, a 1963 book that took as its subject the “banality of evil” and the way ordinary people could harbor barbaric tendencies. One may argue that the peasants Kosinski imagined for *The Painted Bird* exemplify such individuals; even book reviewers pointed to the felt connection to Arendt’s term (Rolin par. 1).³

³ According to *Oral Pleasure*, a book of his writings and interviews published posthumously, Kosinski gave a speech in 1988 in which he said he received *Polish Children Accuse* “from someone” in 1961 (151). Either version of the story situates his interest in writing a novel with the publicity for the Eichmann trial as a backdrop.

In similar fashion political events related to the Holocaust seem to have prompted Sarah Kofman's decision to write autobiography. For a long time she "insisted that her own life-narrative, her own biography, can and should be found in her bibliography" of numerous books and articles on subjects as diverse as philosophy, psychoanalysis, literature, feminism and Jewish life, rather than in an actual autobiography (DeArmitt 1). Like Perec, Kofman lost a parent in the Vichy government's roundups that arrested many foreign-born French Jews and eventually transferred them to Auschwitz. Tens of thousands of French Jews, in fact, were destroyed through the collaboration of the Vichy government with the Third Reich. "The obligation to acknowledge this disaster," writes translator Ann Smock in her introduction to *Rue Ordener, rue Labat*, "[...] became] a painfully complicated national preoccupation in France" (viii) in the period after 1971 when French Nazi hunters Serge and Beate Klarsfeld located Klaus Barbie in Bolivia, the so-called "Butcher of Lyon." In 1979, on the heels of publishing a list of almost 80,000 names of French-Jewish deportees, the Klarsfelds founded an organization for Jewish children whose parents had been deported during the war. That Kofman followed these developments is certain: a page showing her father's name on the list appears inside *Smothered Words*, her first major attempt to write about the murder of her father in Auschwitz.

Though it contains some autobiographical material, *Smothered Words* is largely a treatise on the ethical paradox of writing about the Holocaust. Two forces seem to have pushed Kofman further to an actual autobiography about her own childhood in hiding. One was a series of conversations she had with feminist theorist and literary critic Frances Bartkowski in 1984. The two agreed during those conversations that Kofman would produce small autobiographic pieces for the journal *SubStance*. Such items were published in 1986 (Kofman, Bartkowski

Autobiographical Writings 6).⁴ The second force encouraging the writing of an autobiography was the continued upswing in focus on Nazi criminals in France, particularly the case of Paul Touvier. Located and jailed in 1989, he was given a provisional release in 1991, but clamor grew that he should be brought to trial. Media coverage was given in France to the Association of Sons and Daughters of Deportees who demonstrated in front of the Versailles appeals court to demand that he be brought to trial. This action came early in 1993, the same period Smock reports that Kofman began writing *Rue Ordener, rue Labat*.

Our final author, Georges Perec, notes in his autobiography that he accompanied one of his aunts back to his old Parisian neighborhood in 1946, but for fifteen years after that visit had no “occasion or any wish to go back” (*WMC* 48). He tells us, however, that in the summer of 1961 he suddenly decided to return (*WMC* 48). The timing of this re-visit coincides again with the Eichmann trial, which may have further raised a desire to consider writing about his past. But Perec also offers an official explanation for what led him to write *W or the Memory of Childhood*. According to his autobiography, in 1967 he had set off for Venice to attend a UNESCO conference on “Writing and Mass Media.” It is there, claims his biographer, that Perec “constructed [...his] public myth of himself” (Bellos Kindle location 7537): “When I was thirteen I made up a story which I told and drew in pictures. Later I forgot it. Seven years ago, one evening, in Venice, I suddenly remembered that this story was called *W...*” (*WMC* 6). Bellos assumes that the trip to Venice offered various significant prompts to Perec’s mind, e.g., likely trips to restaurants in the Giudecca, a section of Venice whose name translates into “Jews’ Quarter” (such a restaurant visit later appears in *WMC*), as well as the historical role Venice

⁴ Bartkowski writes in the introduction to Kofman’s pieces that the philosopher had “also written, but declined to publish, her autobiography” (6). Whether this reference is to an early draft of *Rue Ordener, rue Labat* is not clear.

played in Europe by the creation of the word *ghetto*. One may add to the biographer's speculation that by coincidence, Perec, like Louis Begley, may have been prompted to memory and curiosity by news of Kosinski's first novel. Translated into French as *L'Oiseau Bariolé*, it won France's top award for foreign authors in 1966, *le prix du Meilleur Livre étranger*. Very soon afterward Perec suddenly decided to interview his surviving relatives in depth about his family history and to travel to Poland for the first time to research his father's Jewish family tree. Had he read the novel, the sight of gondoliers in Venice standing in their vessels and moving down the lagoons might also have raised the visual memory of the boy in *The Painted Bird* standing on his skates in wintertime and gliding on ice-covered marshes, pulled along by a self-fashioned parachute of straps and canvas that he used as a sail. Such description is only a ninety-degree visual turn from the parachute and straps that were already so embedded in Perec's memory from a magazine cover illustration of a man with a parachute he believed his mother had bought him at the train station the last time he ever saw her.

Like Kofman's painful memory of the last vision of her father as the Gestapo took him away, these scenes in Perec's and Kosinski's books harken to the sudden vulnerability of children whose protection by and link to their parents was broken by the war. In the next sections, I will analyze how these three authors' writings exemplify the psychological posture of latency-age children in hiding during the Holocaust.

4.3 Georges Perec

Like many Polish Jews, Perec's mother and father fled pogroms in their homeland in the 1920s in favor of what seemed like a safer alternative in the working class, Parisian neighborhood of Belleville. Born in 1936, Perec was four when the war entered his life. His father, who had joined the French military in his adopted country, died in 1940 after receiving

inadequate care for a belly wound in a makeshift, prisoner-of-war field hospital the day after the French capitulated to the Germans. The shadow of the Third Reich arrived a second time in 1942 when Perec was six. At the Gare de Lyon train station in Paris the day his mother sent him into hiding in a Red Cross convoy, he remembers her handing him a children's comic book whose cover illustration depicted Charlie Chaplin connected to a parachute by his suspenders (*W or the Memory of Childhood* 26). While her son was learning to live life disguised as a young Catholic, she was rounded up by the Gestapo, brought to Drancy, deported most likely to Auschwitz and never heard from again. The Holocaust, though largely mentioned only by indirection as is true often in the novels of child survivor Aharon Appelfeld, is nevertheless embedded in Perec's writings. I agree with Steven Jaron that "the aporia ... of not knowing how to express what one has experienced while at the same time needing to express that experience" is a central issue in Perec's autobiography (215). As in the case of other child survivors, loss -- of specific people, of memories, of self-identity -- marks the void in his life that cannot be filled yet paradoxically must be approached.

In *W or the Memory of Childhood* the loss of his mother seems more traumatic than the death of his father, who entered the army while his son was still quite young. Perec's earliest and best memory of his father involves being given a key or a gold coin -- an invitation to discovery or a reward (*WMC* 14). He idolized the idea of him as a soldier during the war, secretly pocketing the bus money his aunt gave him daily and walking to school instead so he could save up to buy a few toy soldiers each week. While playing, he "thought up various glorious deaths" for his father (*WMC* 28-29). By contrast, the memory of the separation from his mother seems to haunt him for years. It is likely she who appears in the guise of an ill-fated mother and drowning victim in the fictionalized half of *W or the Memory of Childhood*.

While his father's death seems a natural consequence of his having been a soldier, his mother's murder seems in Perec's mind an event that could have been forestalled and therefore is one that engenders anger:

One day she took me to the station...I was going to Villard-de-Lans, with the Red Cross. I've been told that later on she tried to cross the Loire. The runner she called on, who was to smuggle her across, and whose address had been passed on by her sister-in-law who was already in the free zone, turned out to be away. She didn't make a fuss and returned to Paris. She was advised to move house, to hide. She didn't bother. She thought her war widow's status would keep her out of trouble. She was picked up in a raid...She saw the country of her birth again before she died. She died without understanding. (33 – boldface his)⁵

In this account of the last days of his mother's life one reads a son's criticism that she could not think critically, she could not save herself and, therefore, saved him physically, but not emotionally. He comes back to the point of his mother's perceived lack of awareness a second time in his autobiography, mentioning in a chapter endnote that "[t]here were actually a number of French edicts which were supposed to protect particular categories of people: war widows, old people, etc." (40), but Perec lists these categories only to demolish the idea of their truthfulness.

⁵ Six and one half pages in Chapter 8 of *W or the Memory of Childhood* are shown in boldface type (27-33). In the lines that precede this section Perec states that they represent writing he did in the 1950s when he first decided he would be a writer. The two passages contain descriptions of photos that remain of his mother and father as well as other brief memories. He claims to have "copied them out without making any changes" (26) and appears to use the font change to distinguish them from current writing, but also to emphasize their importance.

“I find it really hard to understand,” he complains in a state of vexation, “how my mother and so many others managed to believe in them even for a moment” (40). This sense of childhood frustration at the helplessness of parents during the Nazi terror is common among child survivors. Anger can help to deflect mourning, keeping alive the idea of what might have been rather than concentrating on what was.

Several other texts Perec wrote bolster the idea of trauma resulting from the separation and eventual loss of his parents. For instance, he was invited to join an experimental writers’ group known as OuLiPo, founded in 1960 by François Le Lionnais and Raymond Queneau, whose members sought to harness creativity through the utilization of constrained writing techniques. More so than for his autobiography, Perec was originally known for such creations, especially the lipogram. *La Disparition*, which he published in 1969, his 300-page lipogrammatic novel, entirely avoids the use of the letter “e,” the most common vowel in French. It is noteworthy that “e” normally appears four times in the author’s first and last names; removing it thus partially erases his identity. Repressing “e” also removes the French words for father and mother from the user’s vocabulary, i.e., père and mère. Removal from the page, of course, does not remove meaning from the text. On the contrary, as Patricia Merivale notes, all those missing “e” words “hide like ghosts, invisible but not absent, on every page” (75). In 1972 Perec published *Les revenentes*, a univocalic novel that uses only the vowel “e.”

This literary technique of pushing a letter away and pulling it back brings to mind Freud’s analysis of his grandson Ernst’s game that he named “fort-da” in which Freud observed the toddler repeatedly throwing a reel attached to a piece of thread so that he could no longer see it and then pulling it back into view (Jaron 214). Freud interpreted this obsessive behavior as a way of the child mastering the trauma of his absent mother. For Perec, there seems to be no

emotional mastery despite the brilliant literary technique; he dedicates his autobiography to “e,” the missing letter from *La Disparition* (whose title means disappeared but also death in French). This dedication is especially important when one considers that it likely represents his mother and father. “E” is pronounced “eux” in French, a word that means “them.” Warren Motte, a Perec specialist, therefore suggests that all of Perec’s writing is a continuous form of mourning for his lost parents, one that presents itself as “lamentations” (56).

Perec shares these emotions with other child survivors who lost one or both parents during the Holocaust. In fact, an ambivalence marked by repression and search seems to arise in child survivors in any attempt to reconcile themselves with the past. Their childhood self was too young to understand the context of the traumatic Nazi assault; their adult self’s significant loss of memory challenges their ability to stitch together a coherent chronicle of the past. Writing offers one potential way to suture past to present, so Perec believes he “has no alternative but to conjure up what for too many years [he] called the irrevocable: the things that were, the things that stopped, the things that were closed off – things that surely were and today are no longer, but things that also were so that [he] may still be” (*WMC* 12). In this he echoes orphaned historian Saul Friedlander’s idea that “Writing . . . does at least preserve a presence” (*WMC* 135). For Perec, writing comes after a long push/pull, it was/it wasn’t. This emotional turmoil is transmitted directly to his readers. He promises them in the title of his autobiography, for instance, that they will read “the memory of childhood,” yet in the opening paragraph of the autobiographical section vanquishes their hopes by starting off with the declaration, “I have no childhood memories” (6). This back-and-forth emotional struggle continues past the opening paragraph, setting up the narrative rhythm of the entire autobiography.

W or the Memory of Childhood is a difficult-to-classify book. Its thirty-seven chapters switch back and forth between autobiography (set in roman font) and an account of a fictional island called W near Tierra del Fuego that Perec imagined as a thirteen year old (set in italic font). The autobiographical chapters, often punctuated by endnotes that qualify or even withdraw (in effect erase) statements offered first as memory in the text – another push-pull – follow a rough chronological framework that is nevertheless at times recursive when memories re-appear and are clarified by new knowledge gained as the author grew up. Counterpoised to these historical fragments is a fictionalized story about W, an island dedicated to extreme sports.

The book itself is divided into two streams of narrative. The two story arcs – fictional and autobiographical – cross over each other midway, thus forming a chiasmic structure. Whereas commentators usually focus on the titular W, I would say that in this X hides the book’s deeper meaning. Perec himself calls X the “starting point for a geometrical fantasy, whose basic figure is the double V, and whose complex convolutions trace out the major symbols of the story of [his] childhood” (*WMC* 77). From the double V, he points out, comes the X, which can morph into a swastika, and even further into the insignia of the SS, the major paramilitary organization under Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party. But he notes the crossed lines can also become the Star of David (*WMC* 77). The two story arcs thus relate to each other through a reversal of structures in order to address a larger issue. In this case the larger issue is the Holocaust, though it is mentioned only by indirection in the book, a point of view advanced by Steven Jaron when he writes that Perec is a writer “ingenious for his indirection” so “what cannot be said openly must be suggested or implied” (215).

A second, quieter issue comes at the interstice between Part I and Part II where readers find a single page belonging to neither part that carries this sign:

(...)

(61). Motte argues that a chapter concerning the final portion of his mother's life belonged at this point, but Perec was never able to find out the details of her death. In Motte's view, therefore, the ellipsis inside a parenthesis signifies this void of information, an impossible-to-bridge deficit of details. The page therefore "escape[s] from language" and, "suspended as it is, clearly points toward something that remains well beyond language – and perhaps beyond thought, too" (Motte 62). One may also say, however, that the three dots of the ellipsis represent Perec and his parents in what he calls "the final refraction of a voice that is absent from writing, the scandal of their silence and mine" (*WMC* 42). Yet, I think this small sign may also work in a double way as the X does, i.e., it can simultaneously symbolize opposing points of view. By that I mean that Perec notes that the X is "the only letter that has turned into a word," but at the same time it is the "sign of a word deleted" by the "string of x's crossing out the word you didn't mean to write" (*WMC* 77). The sign on this interstitial page may therefore work both as an absence and as a hidden "site of remembrance and mourning for his mother" (Motte 59), in effect a visual tombstone for the grave she did not have in life (*WMC* 41). Perhaps the ellipsis also signifies his parents and himself. Then, as if writing three names on a slab of marble, he has manufactured on the page a collective tombstone for the three people in his family.

As we see, fiction helps to fill in the lacunae of memory for members of the 1.5 generation. Part I of the fictional thread in *W* seems to express the gradual emotional awakening of Perec. It starts with the death of a mother of a young son, imagines a sporting culture that the words "Véledrome d'Hiver" (winter cycling arena) might have suggested to him when he first heard the name of the place to which he mother was taken by the Gestapo yet did not comprehend its role in the deportations of French Jews, and ends with language arising from the

camps (*Raus! Raus!*) (WMC 155) just at the point where the autobiographical portion refers to his reading of David Rousset's *L'univers concentrationnaire* (WMC 163).

Other details seem inspired by life too. The story of *W* concerns a young French soldier who is helped to desert and re-settle in Germany by an organization that aids conscientious objectors. With the assistance of a woman named Caecilia Winckler,⁶ who is planning to take her 8-year old deaf and dumb son Gaspard on a cruise, they provide him with false papers and a new identity (much as the young Perec was sent on a train journey and similarly provided with false papers when he went into hiding). After a few years the older Gaspard is found by a representative from the organization and asked to go in search of the young boy whose identity he acquired. Apparently, while on a cruise, the boy, his mother and everyone on board fell victim to a cyclone that sank their boat off the coast of Tierra del Feugo. Because the young boy's body was not found, it is presumed he may still be alive, so his older namesake is asked to go in search of him.

Part II directly follows the ellipsis inside a parenthesis, but in this section both the young and the older Gaspard disappear completely from the text, replaced by an authoritative, fictional narrator's voice. The presence and disappearance of these two complementary characters suggests the "compound personality" that Israeli therapist Yvonne Tauber hypothesized for the child survivors she treated "in which the adult self and that of the traumatized child co-exist" (229). Just as the elder Gaspard is sent in search of the shipwrecked young Gaspard, Perec's autobiography is essentially one survivor's search for his younger, traumatized self. By giving the fictional young Gaspard the attributes of deafness and dumbness, Perec seems to imply a

⁶ Perec's mother's French name was Cécile.

self-criticism and disappointment in his real young self, i.e., he seems to want his boyhood self to have paid more attention to his surroundings when young so he could transmit more memories to his older self. At the least he is describing what Nathan Durst, a clinical psychologist who directed AMCHA, the National Israeli Center for Psychosocial Support of Holocaust Survivors and the Second Generation, called a life “split between the past and the present, between outward successful adaptation, and the scarred inner core” (503). He, like other child survivors who lost their families, comes out of the war as the “only living testimony to [his] whole family history” (Tauber 230), but it is a shattered self that emerges from hiding, a self that cannot speak. Because few physical objects remain of life before the war, the “Compound Self also serves as a memory bank” (Tauber 230). According to this theory, memories, rather than objects, must be the “anchor points” that tie the sides of the split self together (Ornstein, qtd. in Tauber 230).

Perec remains in pain because of the loss of such memories. After the disappearance of his mother and his entry into active hiding, his traumatized self cannot make sense of his life:

What marks this period especially is the absence of landmarks: these memories are scraps of life snatched from the void. No mooring. Nothing to anchor them or hold them down. Almost no way of ratifying them. No sequence in time, except as I have reconstructed it arbitrarily over the years: time went by. There were seasons. There was skiing and haymaking. No beginning, no end. There was no past, and for very many years there was no future either; things simply went on. (*W or the Memory of Childhood* 69)

What Perec describes mirrors in word choice and in spirit exactly what Tauber and other therapists recognized about the psychological suffering of their child survivor clients.

Perec seems to want his readers to begin to notice a connection between W and the camps and his trauma about his mother's disappearance into Auschwitz from the start of Part II. While its new narrator's voice relates the history of the island called W, the text immediately heightens the implied connection by informing readers that the island's original colonizers were "exclusively Aryans, Dutchmen, Germans, Scandinavians, scions of that proud class called WASPs in the United States" (*W or the Memory of Childhood* 67). This detail of the Nazi-Aryan background, plus prominent placement on the page of the words

FORTIUS ALTIUS CITIUS⁷

a "motto emblazoned on the monumental arches at the gates of each village" (67) also echoes the "*Arbeit macht frei*" (Work makes you free) wrought iron slogan posted over the actual entrances to a number of concentration camps during World War II, an entryway through which Perec's mother would have passed.

Life on the island W, the narrator quickly teaches us, is dedicated to extreme sports; its inhabitants seem at the outset pointed toward an Olympian ideal. By the end of the W section of the book, however, Nazi period icons are inserted into the text in a more prominent way: "There are two worlds, the world of the Masters and the world of slaves" and a slave would rather "believe in his Star" while wearing his "striped gear" as he approaches a subterranean room filled with "piles of gold teeth, rings and spectacles, thousands and thousands of clothes in heaps, and stocks of poor-quality soap" (*W or the Memory of Childhood* 162). Readers surely realize at this point, as critic Alan Astro pointed out, that *W* is an allegory for the concentration camp in

⁷ In reverse, these words are the motto from the 1924 Olympic games played in Paris. The original motto was "Swifter, Higher, Stronger." Perec reverses them to "Stronger, Higher, Swifter."

which Perec's mother perished. The disappearance of the old and the young Gaspard just before this tale begins thus makes complete sense: they vanish at the textual gateway just as Cécile Perec disappeared as she passed under the iron archway of Auschwitz.

The X that forms the underlying narrative structure of the book plays one more pertinent role with respect to Perec's place in the 1.5 generation. X is the only letter in the alphabet formed by two opposing pen strokes: the first from left to right, the pen lifted, and then the second from right to left. These calligraphic directions echo in reverse the sequence of ethnic identities that Perec had to assume in order to hide during the Holocaust. He went from being a young Jew in Belleville (where Hebrew and Yiddish are written and read from right to left) to being a baptized Catholic in hiding (where Latin is written and read from left to right) almost overnight.

France and Poland, where Perec, Kofman, and Kosinski, respectively, had to hide during the Holocaust, were and still remain principally Catholic countries. As part of their protective façade, the children had to learn to hide their Jewish selves underneath a pretend Catholic self that sometimes advanced to an actual switch in ethnic identity. This switch is by chance very oddly and damagingly placed for hidden children of latency age. James Fowler points out in *Stages of Faith* that children at around age 6 are supposed to be leaving behind the "rich, mythical world of early childhood" and beginning to "live in the more prosaic, linear and predictable era of the school years" (63). The necessity to hide interfered with this normal development: in order to survive, Jewish children who went into hiding were forced to do the opposite of what is developmentally appropriate, i.e., under penalty of death they had to develop a mythical self.

At the start of the school year in 1942-43, Perec was enrolled in a Catholic boarding school for boys called Collège Turenne. His biographer considers this move to be the point in which Perec, now close to six years old, the conventional age of understanding at which children are sent to primary school and judged able to begin operating outside the family setting, was finally told by his family “you must forget”:

How else do you tell a child that it is dangerous for him to reveal, (even incidentally, by things he does not say but merely lets slip, by the movement of an eye, or an eyebrow), that he understands Yiddish, that he knows what the Hebrew letters are, that his father’s name was Izie, that he lives in Belleville, that his family comes from Poland, that his grandmother sells pickled cucumbers, salt herring, and halva, that his grandfather is never around on Saturdays, that most of his friends are Jewish – in a word, that he too is a Jew? Presumably you tell him that he must set aside all his memories of the past, that he is starting a new life, that his name is Breton, that he is French, and that he must never even think of what he has left behind (Bellos Kindle location 1660).

When Perec comes to write his autobiography, therefore, it is not surprising that his text indicates identity confusion. One of his earliest ethnic memories, for instance, involves him sitting in the back room of his grandmother’s shop as a three year old. He describes the room as having “Yiddish newspapers scattered” all around (*W or the Memory of Childhood* 13). Since child survivors often describe the time before the Holocaust in idealized form, we are not startled to read: “The family circle surrounds me wholly, but the sensation of encirclement does not cause me any fear or feeling of being smothered; on the contrary, it is warm, protective, loving: all the family – the entirety, the totality of the family – is there, gathered like an impregnable battlement around the child who has just been born” (*W or the Memory of Childhood* 13). What

happens in memory within this protective circle is that the toddler Perec points to a character in one of the Yiddish newspapers and correctly calls it by name, all to the expressed joy and excitement of his relatives.

Only a page later, however, one of Perec's chapter endnotes destroys this memory by pointing out that the letter seen was probably not the Hebrew "mem" first remembered. It more likely was a "gimmel," he muses, which would be the Hebrew letter to start off the name Georges. His last thought, however, is that he probably did not perform this act at all. Rather, he remembers he has been told that when he was three he used to visit his aunts and they would sit on a bench by the Seine and he would make out "letters not in Yiddish but in French newspapers" (*W or the Memory of Childhood* 14). A memory that would indelibly identify him as a young Jew is thereby erased and he ends up painting himself as a secular French child.

Such statements and erasures persist in the book, indicating a "fragmentation prone self" (Tauber 229) consistent with a child survivor suffering from compound personality. They help to account for Perec's reticence as an adult to openly discuss his Jewish background. He does allude to Jews and Jewishness in his work, but as his close friend, Marcel Bénabou, acknowledges, "Perec knew next to nothing about Judaism either as a religion or a culture. He did not understand Yiddish or Hebrew, and outside the events of the war, he does not show any particular interest in any period of what might be called 'Jewish history'" (151). A reader who wants to take some comfort in the idea that a Jewish child nearly destroyed in the war grew up to be a self-identified Jew must depend on Bénabou's final thought that Perec had wanted to write a family saga called *Histoire d'Esther* (also called *L'Arbre, The Tree*), but he did not live long enough to do so. However, his friend also points out that finally writing his autobiography in some way shored up his feeling of ethnic identity: "I think that I began to feel Jewish," Perec

admits in an interview in *L'Arc*, “when I began to tell the story of my childhood” (qtd. in Bénebou 158).

4.4 Sarah Kofman

Born in Paris in 1934, French philosopher Sarah Kofman was one of six siblings between the ages of two and twelve living with émigré parents. In brief texts begun prior to her work on *Rue Ordener, rue Labat*, her full autobiography, readers are introduced to the wartime terror that began when she was eight years old and her father was caught in a round-up by the Vichy police. A Polish-born, Orthodox rabbi who, like Georges Perec’s family, had fled pogroms and relocated his family to Paris, Berek Kofman was arrested in 1942 along with thousands of other Jewish children and adults. Eventually deported to Auschwitz, he was beaten and believed to be buried alive a year later because he wanted to stop work on the Sabbath in order to pray. Kofman, her five siblings, and her mother were abruptly left to fend for themselves.

Rue Ordener, rue Labat is a slender volume -- one critic characterizes it as “skeletal” (Taylor 151) -- that tries to explain how it happened that her five siblings were found hiding places in the country, while she and her mother ended up hidden in the Parisian apartment of a Christian neighbor for the duration of the war. Barely eighty pages long, it opens with an anguished, half-page description of a broken fountain pen that once belonged to her father. The stylus now sits on her desk, urging her “to write, write” (3). Utilizing such a material touchstone to connect to a lost parent as a way of starting one’s story is commonplace in autobiographical statements written by Jewish children who went into hiding during the war. As discussed in an earlier chapter, such memorial objects gain great importance to children abruptly separated from parents, many never to be reunited. Mona Körte’s argument that these possessions become “*memento mori*” and thereby “replace the gravestone...because many [of the children] never

learn when or where their parents died” fits Kofman’s relationship to her lost father’s writing instrument (109).

Even so, her comment about the broken pen -- “it ‘failed’ me before I could bring myself to give it up” -- suggests how difficult and long-lasting her mourning process was. She ends the half-page introductory chapter wondering if “all the books [she has written] have been detours required to bring [her] to write about ‘that’” (3). Kofman cannot, or chooses not, to produce a more precise noun. The reader is left to wonder about the boundaries of this indeterminate word – what exactly does “ça” cover in her childhood: the disappearance of her beloved father and the circumstances of his death, her childhood in hiding at the Parisian home of Mémé, the rift with her biological mother, one or all?

Twenty-seven brief vignettes follow the command “to write, write.” Kofman seems to tell her difficult decade in chronological order from the moment her father was taken by the Vichy police till she entered the Sorbonne as a young university student. Of course, memories, especially traumatic ones, do not present themselves in chronological order, so readers may reasonably suppose that she wrote segments as they arose and then shaped them to make narrative sense. Like other child survivors, Kofman establishes her time before the war as a nearly idyllic one, firmly claiming her ethnic identity as a Jew by describing her father’s role as head parent and rabbi. His room, she tells us, was “the biggest and nicest of the apartment” where she “watched his every gesture, fascinated” when he “carried out all kind of religious ceremonies,” i.e., “marriages, divorces, circumcisions” (5). Having had an Orthodox up-

bringing, Kofman is able to tell in much greater detail than Perec or Kosinski – both raised in secular households -- about the rituals, holidays, and kosher eating habits of the family.⁸

Even in the mini-essays Kofman published in 1986, well in advance of *Rue Ordener, rue Labat*, food and eating habits are highlighted as they pertain to ethnic and cultural identity; they play a central role in her self-portrait. Feeling caught in a vise first in her parents' home when faced with the permissible and the forbidden within kosher eating rules, she positions her rabbi father as the lawgiver who decides what violates kosher rules: "You must not eat everything" (Autobiographical Writings 8). By contrast, her mother is named as "high priestess" of the kitchen, one whose commands extend beyond kosher dietary laws: "You must eat...and she stuffed and stuffed and stuffed us" (8). Multiple mentions of Sarah's history of vomiting follow. In these descriptions we see the characterization of the father as a figure who enacts boundaries, while the mother crosses boundaries, a fertile ground for rebellion, resistance and family rupture. This is not to blame Madame Kofman for the psychological loss of her daughter during the period of hiding. For one thing, the complaint about a Jewish mother-figure during the Holocaust urging food consumption when none is wanted is, of course, not peculiar to Kofman. The young Ruth Kluger, for instance, grumbles to her mother about an aunt who would punish her when she found out Ruth was pouring her breakfast cocoa down the kitchen sink. "She would make me

⁸ Though somewhat surprisingly, she makes definite errors in her recitation of such rituals despite the good grounding in religious studies. Michael Stanislawski's *Autobiographical Jews: Essays in Jewish Self-Fashioning* notes that she spells holiday names incorrectly and tells the Passover story with seven plagues instead of ten. This sort of "broken" memory is similar to Perec's inability to recall the shape of Hebrew letters he was taught as a child, and speaks to the general forgetfulness people experience concerning childhood lessons as well as the effect of trauma on memory.

stay in the kitchen until I had eaten or drunk a second helping, more than my unwilling stomach could absorb,” confesses Kluger, “but only after it had done so was its owner permitted to leave the house for school” (*Still Alive* 21).

For another, the dynamic about control that unfolds as the story progresses in *Rue Ordener, rue Labat* encompasses more than food. As if she were a geographical territory to be conquered, she portrays the two mother figures as women who compete to plant their cultural flags in her 8-year-old girl’s body. In the beginning, we are told, Madame Kofman risks her life to venture outside to find any kosher food for herself and her daughter, thereby trying to maintain her connection to her Jewish past. When that becomes too risky, she retreats to the bedroom she has been assigned in Mémé’s apartment. Mémé is complicit in this sidelining of Madame Kofman: she invites Sarah to dine with her, but never invites her mother. Thereafter, Mémé commandeers the kitchen and becomes the new lawgiver, consulting the medical dictionary on her dining table to make decisions much as Rabbi Kofman would have consulted his holy books. She puts herself in charge of the girl’s secular education. Over time she succeeds in changing Kofman’s eating habits, her religion, her hair style, her clothing, her physical expressions of affection, and even her speech. Conversations are used to drive a wedge between the girl and her past; Mémé introduces various names of Jewish philosophers at the same time that she shares a variety of anti-Semitic views: “She taught me that I had a Jewish nose,” writes Kofman with little trace of discomfort, “and made me feel the little bump that was the sign of it. She also said, ‘Jewish food is bad for the health; the Jews crucified our savior, Jesus Christ; they are all stingy and love only money’ ... Then she’d cite Spinoza, Bergson, Einstein, Marx” (47). What Sarah comes to believe about her Jewish mother during this interplay is what many children in hiding during the Holocaust concluded about their parents, i.e., that those formerly in

charge were now powerless, unable to control their worlds, unable to offer the safety that seemed to come with the Christian caregivers.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, a psychological imperative of latency is movement away from parents toward the wider world, but Jewish children trying to survive in the Gentile world during the Holocaust could often only achieve this goal by “a burying process” in which the former Jewish self was extinguished in favor of the new, Christian façade (Feldman et al. 840). The choice for the young Sarah Kofman, as Frederica K. Clementi argues, gradually became one between a “Jewish victim mother, whom the child eventually rejected, and a Christian mother figure, her wartime savior, who ‘colonized’ the Jewish girl’s identity, won her over, and separated her from her biological mother, her family, and her past” (120). In order to have a future, contends Clementi, Kofman must reject the unsafe, Jewish past as epitomized in her mother and instead give her allegiance to Mémé.

However, this development is not easily done; in one of the rare passages where she analyzes her reactions as well as narrates them, Kofman recognizes the split in herself that comes as a consequence:

My mother suffered in silence; no news from my father; no means of visiting my brothers and sisters; no power to prevent Mémé from transforming me, detaching me from herself and from Judaism. I had, it seemed, *buried* the entire past: I started loving rare steak cooked in butter and parsley. I didn’t think at all anymore about my father, and I couldn’t pronounce a single word in Yiddish despite the fact that I could still understand the language of my childhood perfectly. Now I even dreaded the end of the war! (57 – italics added)

Once again, as in Perec's case, we see a child survivor recognizing the birth of a compound personality, the former Jewish self hidden and encapsulated in the Christian self that over-takes it. The cost for this psychological transfer is high. Guilt and shame weigh on the young girl.

Other aspects of trauma are narrated in more subtle, perhaps even subconscious, ways. One example concerns verb choices. As already established, the psychological wound of trauma puts "inside and outside into a strange communication," one that "violently opens passageways that were once discrete, making unforeseen connections that distress or confound" (Luckhurst 3). This dangerous potential raises the risk in telling about one's traumatic past. The sign that such a passageway has opened up in *Rue Ordener, rue Labat* can be found by analyzing Kofman's switches from past to present tense in her verb choices, a movement that suggests slippage from telling about a trauma in the past to re-experiencing it in present time. Historian Dominick LaCapra expresses such an idea in *Writing History, Writing Trauma*: "In acting out, tenses implode," he argues, "and it is as if one were back there in the past reliving the traumatic scene" (21). Such verb implosions happen a dozen times in Kofman's autobiography.

Examining one can also suggest how the author tries to keep her emotional balance by resisting the pull of the traumatic past. For the most part, the text is narrated from a child's point of view. Kofman's child self slips into present tense the first time when describing the day the police came to seize her father: "Four in the afternoon. Someone knocks. My mother opens the door. A cop with an embarrassed smile asks 'Rabbi Berek Kofman?'" (6). As the scene continues, Madame Kofman embarrasses her daughter by telling several plausible lies to forestall her husband's departure. Because the event is depicted in present tense, the effect is to place readers (and herself) at the crisis moment as if in real time. Her mother's lies don't work and "they leave" (6). Kofman's final description of that day is, "We find ourselves in the street, all

six of us, pressed close together, sobbing very hard and wailing” (6). The pain of this moment, relived as if in real time, is so great that Kofman’s adult self seems to need to step in to stop the trauma from becoming overwhelming.

Kofman forestalls such an event by switching back to past tense and interrupting the chronicle of her father’s deportation to mention that as a grown-up she has visualized the reaction of herself and her siblings as a kind of Greek chorus:

When I first encountered in a Greek tragedy the lament, ‘ô poipoï, poipoï, poipoï,’ I couldn’t keep myself from thinking of that scene from my childhood where six children, their father gone, could only sob breathlessly, knowing they would never see him again, ‘oh papa, papa, papa.’ (7)

By the rendering of this description readers may come to understand a way Kofman represses emotion connected to this devastating event. Kofman does not tell us that she remembers the horrible scene on the street with her siblings and therefore can offer a metaphor for its emotional horror by comparing it to a Greek chorus. Rather, she shares that seeing the Greek chorus in a play makes her recall the traumatic childhood experience. What she seems to experience is a “form of somatosensory flashback” (Schwanberg 46), that is to say, her memory relies on a particular visual cue, but the traumatic moment is seen in a dissociated way as if she is witnessing the scene from a distance.

Moreover, not all of her senses seem to encode the trauma, a typical repercussion of shock. One may support that claim by Kofman’s repression of Yiddish in the memory, the language of her childhood self. In other words, she writes the outcry in French and Greek rather than the more likely exclamation of the Yiddish “oy tate, tate, tate” that she and her siblings

would have cried out in real life. Though she will continue to take great pains to establish her childhood sense of Jewishness early in her memoir by recounting various holidays and Jewish ritual events witnessed in her household, she avoids fully re-living this particular childhood scene (or is unable to tell it) by changing languages and writing in French and phonetically-rendered Greek rather than resurrecting her childhood tongue. Psychologists have noted that emotions are heightened in home languages while less intense in secondarily acquired languages.⁹

Kofman killed herself a few months after publishing *Rue Ordener, rue Labat*. Most scholars take the position that the writing of the autobiography cannot be construed as a direct cause of the suicide. I am less convinced, and would argue that the re-telling of the story likely resurrected overwhelming feelings of ambivalence, anger, and guilt that the young Sarah demonstrated toward her biological mother throughout the hiding period. To be sure, the two did not seem well suited for each other even prior to the war, but Kofman may have realized that her trauma – the origin of *ça* --sprang not just from the war itself, the loss of her father, and the competition between the two mother figures, but also from her own role in the triangularized relationship with the two women that was goaded and motivated by an unfinished Oedipal battle. This last item has relevance if we accept Tina Chanter's argument that "Mémé played the role (unwittingly or not) of the father she had lost, producing the distance necessary for Kofman to separate from her birth mother" (117).

⁹ See Jennifer Suzanne Schwanberg's article, "Does Language of Retrieval Affect the Remembering Trauma?" Her research found that traumatic memories were more intense when reported in clients' first languages than in secondarily acquired languages.

I do accept this argument because it helps to explain an action that Kofman took four decades after the war that has not yet been integrated into scholarship on her writing. In 1987 she published *Smothered Words*, in which she analyzed writings of Maurice Blanchot and Robert Antelme with respect to their thoughts on the Holocaust. The book was dedicated to the two men, as well as to her father, “who died in Auschwitz.” In *Smothered Words* Kofman takes the opportunity to copy statistics and other documentation from Serge Klarsfeld’s Memorial list of deportees from France, including her father’s name and details (she reproduces the actual page containing the details of his deportation in her book). For her, Klarsfeld’s project “with its endless column of names, its lack of pathos, its sobriety, the ‘neutrality’ of its information” is a “sublime memorial” (10). Her public inclusion of her father’s name and documentation from Klarsfeld’s list pins her father to history, but also functions for her as a textual memorial just as Perec’s ellipsis within a parenthesis did for him. However, what she hides from readers in her autobiography is that she prepared for a second, similar memorial listing during the year she published *Smothered Words*, this time for her beloved Mémé, whose Christian name was Claire Chemitre. At the end of *Rue Ordener, rue Labat* Kofman mentions that Mémé “died recently” (84). Kofman wasn’t able to attend the funeral, but notes that “I know that at her grave the priest recalled how she had saved a little Jewish girl during the war” (83). This sentiment is incomplete in that she “forgets” to mention that Mémé also saved her biological mother’s life. The omission is not an oversight; rather, it is a re-enactment of what had happened in 1987 in official paperwork. That year saw Kofman quietly begin a process to get Mémé on a memorial list by nominating her for inclusion on the Righteous Among the Nations wall at Yad Vashem, Israel’s museum of the Holocaust in Jerusalem.

The nomination was approved in 1989, several years before she finished *Rue Ordener, rue Labat*. The relatively brief rescue story, translated and adapted from French by museum staff, is noted on the organization's website as follows:

Claire Chemitre, born in 1904, was living in Paris during the occupation. On February 9, 1943, the German command in France asked the police commander in Paris secretly and unexpectedly to arrest all Jews who were to be deported because of alien citizenship. On the night of February 10-11, the gendarmes arrested 1,549 Jews, whom they interned in Drancy. Chemitre saw the beginning of the roundup, rushed to the adjacent building, and alerted the Kofman family, a Jewish woman and her eight-year-old daughter Sarah. She insisted that they hide in her apartment until the arrests stopped. Claire Chemitre had not been a particularly close friend of Mme Kofman. Thus, her act was even more meritorious, as she ran, practically under the policemen's noses, to rescue people who did not even know they were in danger. At the risk of her own life, Chemitre sheltered the Kofmans in her home, without the slightest remuneration, until Paris was liberated in August 1944. Fearful of discovery, Chemitre kept Sarah out of school and took on the responsibility of teaching her at home.

On October 4, 1989, Yad Vashem recognized Claire Chemitre as Righteous Among the Nations.¹⁰

¹⁰ Permission was granted for inclusion of this material by Yad Vashem via email on 7 Sept. 2015. See Addendum for a copy of Sarah Kofman's original application (in French) graciously provided by the same office at the museum. Both are from the collection of the Righteous Among the Nations department, Yad Vashem, file M.31.2/4388.

Although the above story makes it clear that mother and daughter both went to live with Chemitre, the space on the form designating who was saved by the Frenchwoman lists only Sarah Kofman's name. Once again her biological mother's name was omitted, just as it was never mentioned in the autobiography.

This information was brought to light by Catherine Dhavernas and James Carson, both professors at Queens University, Ontario, Canada. Citing that "in the practice of history one tends to distrust what people remember," they embarked on a research project "to verify Kofman's autobiography by using various archival and newspaper sources to establish the veracity of her recollections in both her autobiography and in the nomination she wrote on behalf of Chemitre's citation" (1). According to the two scholars, "substantial differences between the nomination and the autobiography" were discovered (1). One they examine in an academic paper presented at a conference on narrative in November 2014 in Paris concerns the assertion in the citation that Mémé herself came to warn the mother and daughter even though she did not know the family well. By contrast, in the autobiography written seven years later, Kofman claims an unknown man came to their apartment with the warning about the Gestapo and that her mother knew Chemitre well from the neighborhood, frequently hiding herself and her daughter at her apartment overnight when "there were rumors of a roundup" (30). In this latter version Chemitre is portrayed as a woman who knows the Kofman family from a former address and is judged by Madame Kofman to be a woman to trust because she is one "who loves children...She wouldn't let us go without a roof over our heads" (31).

How do we resolve these conflicting accounts? One way is to remember that memory, especially traumatic memory, is not fixed. Even Elie Wiesel has found it necessary to correct factual items in *Night*. Another is to follow Dhavernas' and Carson's line of reasoning after they

realize that a “gap” exists that “separated the salvation narrative” meant to nominate Chemitre as ‘Righteous’” and “the more ambiguous account around which her autobiography orbits” (3). Perhaps because they were able to verify other major facts presented in the story, the scholars’ final decision is to draw meaning from the emotion displayed in the autobiography rather than to question every detail. This conclusion echoes E. Ann Kaplan’s statement in her essay on “Memory as Testimony in World War II” that “In a memoir... ‘truth’ in regard to events is not, per se, at issue. The main thing about a memoir is the emotions that are remembered and the ways in which the writer expresses them” (43). Yet a third way is to reconsider Tauber’s idea of “Compound Personality” and Feldman, Mouchenik, and Moro’s notion that “one of the psychic organizers among Jewish children who were hidden is a burying process, [in which] one or other [parts of the psyche] can be brought to the fore, depending on the setting, the circumstance, the environment, or the relationship with others” (840).

If we accept these last twin hypotheses, as I choose to do, we may propose that different subject positions came forward at different times for Kofman when she was writing these documents. In 1987, concern about getting Mémé nominated to the list may have elicited a report from the child self, who remembered the woman as a savior rushing to her rescue and therefore reports such a memory. In 1993-1994, however, when Kofman was writing her autobiography and reflecting back on her childhood, she may have been more doubtful about the meaning of being saved as she acknowledged that the trauma of the war years had followed her throughout her life.

A fourth possibility exists, one less likely to find immediate acceptance among scholars who judge Kofman’s ethos to be of the highest order. It is possible that Kofman acted out from the subjective position of her child self in 1987 and in so doing deliberately shaped her memory

to include Mémé as a righteous Gentile who “risked her own life” as “she ran, practically under the policemen’s noses, to rescue people who did not even know they were in danger.” Kofman argued in the nomination that this act made Mémé “even more meritorious.” Such a point was critical to impress upon the nominating committee at Yad Vashem because the application process made it clear that basic conditions for granting the title included “risk to the rescuer’s life, liberty or position” and that “the initial motivation” would have been “the intention to help persecuted Jews: i.e., not for payment or any reward such as religious conversion of the saved person” or “adoption of a child” (FAQ). Kofman’s nomination seems tailor made for these criteria.

Her success in getting Claire Chemitre’s name added to the wall of honor bested her biological mother in two important ways and may have re-ignited feelings of guilt and shame experienced right after the war when a local French court awarded custody of her to Mémé. But Madame Kofman, accompanied by two men, kidnapped her daughter: “They tore me violently from Mémé and carried me in their arms all the way down to the street. My mother hit me and shouted at me in Yiddish, “I am your mother! I am your mother! I don’t care what the court decided, you belong to me!” she wrote. “I struggled, cried, sobbed. Deep down, I was relieved (61). It is plausible, therefore, that in grief in 1987 from revisiting the details of the murder of her father in Auschwitz while writing *Smothered Words*, she may have found herself wanting in a special way to reclaim that other mother – the one that Tina Chanter contends stepped into Sarah’s father’s shoes as his young daughter struggled with his sudden disappearance. Such a movement carries the remnant of an Oedipal attraction even though Kofman was 53 when she nominated Mémé.

She also would have known that getting acceptance for her mother-in-hiding on the wall of honor at Yad Vashem would alter the categorical relationship between herself and Mémé in a significant way because the State of Israel confers honorary citizenship on persons who are added to the list of Righteous Among the Nations. Succeeding in her effort thus would allow Kofman to best her mother's "high priestess role" by slipping into her father's role of lawgiver. By that observation I mean that she had seen him use the paternal rule of *pikuach nefesh* (a special rule of oral tradition that allows Jews to break normal rules in order to save a life) to outweigh Madame Kofman's objection on a train ride during the war when the Red Cross presented their under-nourished children with ham and butter sandwiches:

During the exodus, in the train that took us to Brittany, the Red Cross distributed cocoa and ham and butter sandwiches. "Don't eat that," said my mother. "Let the children eat," my father intervened, "It's wartime." The ham and butter, once decreed impure, I found delicious, now purified by circumstances and paternal authority. (Autobiographical Writings 9)

Metaphorically speaking, the nomination process allowed Kofman to achieve the same type of paternal ruling under the auspices of the State of Israel, i.e., though her mother objected to Mémé's role in her daughter's life (in essence declaring her "not kosher"), the honorary citizenship formally brings the Frenchwoman into the Jewish State (in essence declaring her "kosher"). Besting the same sex parent is not a recipe for a good emotional outcome, however. I conclude, therefore, that this secret act performed in 1987 and not shared with friends or her reading public in the autobiography becomes part of the traumatic *ça* that haunts her till the day she takes her life. No one wins in this story; everyone is a victim to the way the Holocaust dismantles normal life.

4.5 Jerzy Kosinski

Born in 1933 to Jewish parents in Łódź, Poland, Józef Lewinkopf was transformed into a boy called Jerzy Kosinski before the Nazi blitzkrieg overtook his country in 1939. His family's funds and foresight allowed the newly named Kosinski family, along with a blond Jewish toddler they adopted, to collect the necessary fraudulent paperwork to escape the city and eventually hide themselves in an out-of-the-way hamlet infrequently visited by the Gestapo in the southeastern portion of partitioned Poland. The success of their life in hiding was helped by sympathetic local villagers and Church officials. Kosinski, his adopted brother, and his parents survived the war; almost 60 members of his extended family did not.

Some readers would consider Kosinski's inclusion in this dissertation at best a controversial one. At first glance, Perce, Kofman and Kosinski do seem polar opposites. In the case of Kofman, for instance, her adult life centered on writing about philosophy and teaching the subject at the Sorbonne. Held in high esteem among scholars, her writings continue to act as source material for academic books and articles. Kosinski, on the other hand, lived his adult life as a globe-trotting novelist, enjoying significantly wider public recognition than Kofman did during her lifetime because of his award-winning novels and screenplays, his term as president of American PEN, multiple appearances on popular late-night television shows, and his well-received acting debut in the movie *Reds*. By the time of his death in 1991, roughly 70 million copies of his books were already in print (Cronin, Hall ix). Eight of his nine novels (the exception is his last, *The Hermit of 69th Street*) and two books of essays are still available from Grove Atlantic. His life has also long fired the imaginations of other writers: Cynthia Ozick's novella, "A Mercenary" (1974); Emily Praeger's short story, "The Alumnae Bulletin" (1982); James Park Sloan's biography, *Jerzy Kosinski* (1996); Davey Holmes' stage play, *More Lies*

About Jerzy (2001); Thane Rosenbaum's novel, *The Golems of Gotham* (2002); Agate Nesaule's novel, *In Love with Jerzy Kosinski* (2009); and Jerome Charyn's novel, *Jerzy Kosinski* (2011).

Nevertheless, many scholars hold a less sanguine opinion of the author and his work. The demand for analysis of his fiction has definitely declined. For instance, Brygida Gasztold, a Polish professor, published a monograph in English in 2008, *To the Limits of Experience: Jerzy Kosinski's Literary Quest for Self-Identity*. However, according to the WorldCat database, Harvard University was the only academic library in the United States to order a copy. If he is mentioned in scholarly work at all now, his name is generally treated in a negative way and often linked to the genuinely fraudulent memoirist, Benjamin Wilkomirski.

To be sure, the author was a difficult-to-understand man. He would express one truth in print, but according to his biographer, recount a different version in person. *The Painted Bird*, which told the story of an unnamed young boy, Jew or Gypsy, lost alone among a society of ignorant and savage peasants, was labeled from the outset as fiction. Sloan and others contend, however, that Kosinski often told people that the novel was his own autobiography and that the real story was worse. In 1965, when *The Painted Bird* was published, Elie Wiesel's encomium in the *New York Times* book review section was predicated on the fact that Kosinski had told him during an interview that he was a non-Jew. Long after the review had helped to rocket Kosinski to the center of the literary world, Wiesel still did not know the answer to the question.

According to one of his memoirs, *And the Sea is Never Full*, he sent friends to settle the issue with plans to forcibly disrobe Kosinski so they could determine if he was circumcised or not. Wiesel reports that only at that point did the author admit he was Jewish (347-49). Sloan, whose biography has influenced a number of academic analyses about Kosinski's fiction, concluded that Kosinski surrounded himself with a thicket of lies and falsehoods simply to screen the

“hollowness at the core of his being” (317). That prescient description would have come closer to understanding the psychosocial development of a hidden child survivor if the outcome of being forced by circumstance to bury his original Jewish self under penalty of death had been properly understood. Seen through the lens of Sloan’s judgment, Kosinski’s denial of his Jewishness seems unforgiveable. However, with even a small amount of research into Tauber’s theory of compound personality, which was built on actual therapy sessions with a number of child survivors, the moral issue of lying becomes less clear cut.¹¹

The claims (several completely unproven) against Kosinski’s ethos that were hurled at him in Geoffrey Stokes’ and Elliot Freemont-Smith’s 1982 *Village Voice* article, “Jerzy Kosinski’s Tainted Words,” are so often told in the intervening years that they risk becoming the truth in the absence of better information. Such evidence could come from the author’s literary archives, which are therefore utilized in this dissertation. It is unfortunate, however, that Kosinski’s fiction has not been analyzed in the context of a broader range of other child survivors’ writings. Sue Vice’s *Children Writing the Holocaust* consigns mention of *The Painted Bird* to a single footnote, in part perhaps because she analyzes his work in greater length in *Holocaust Fiction*, though against a variety of adult authors who were not child survivors. Ellen Pifer’s *Demon or Doll: Images of the Child in Contemporary Writing and Culture* includes an analysis of the boy in *The Painted Bird*, but once again Kosinski’s depiction of childhood is compared with those written by non-survivors and against texts from time periods outside the years of the Holocaust. Naomi B. Sokoloff’s *Imagining the Child in Modern Jewish Fiction*

¹¹ See also therapist Flora Hogman’s “The Experience of Catholicism for Jewish Children during World War II,” (*Psychoanalytic Review* 75.4, 1988: 511-532), which discusses mixed outcomes for such clients who struggled to develop a Jewish identity after the war.

does juxtapose an analysis of *The Painted Bird* next to fiction by child survivor Aharon Appelfeld, but Sokoloff raises issue with the “Jewishness” of Kosinski’s novel because it deflects “attention from the distinctiveness of anti-Semitism” in favor of an insistence “on the general inhumanities of human beings” (111). Like other critics, she also echoes the type of belief behind competitive suffering that silenced the youngest survivors for so many decades, seeming to assume that Kosinski’s depictions of the Boy’s life are an acknowledgement that he himself was at the periphery of the conflagration: “as bad as things are, the Boy’s suffering suggests that much more appalling, unutterably horrible things have taken place elsewhere, within the concentration camps and the death trains he watches from a distance” (126).¹² Yet therapists who work with individual hidden child survivors question whether such ranking is accurate or helpful in understanding life told from their perspective.

It is my contention that Kosinski’s fiction ought to be compared with writings from other child survivors regardless of genre. Returning to the examples of Percec and Kofman, we find many similarities among them arising from the experience of having lived in open hiding. Kofman and Kosinski, for instance, each suffered a lifetime of serious digestive issues rooted in the anxiety of hiding during the war; his became the basis for a notorious scene in *The Painted Bird* that positioned the boy one moment serving as an altar boy at Mass and the next being flung into an outdoor privy by outraged parishioners, a scene that was revisited and re-imagined in his last novel, *The Hermit of 69th Street*; hers became a trope in autobiographic writings that dealt with food as a battleground between her Jewish background and the Christian mask she was

¹² Although Sokoloff will later publish comparative analysis (see her “Childhood Lost”) on how children are presented as mute in Holocaust literature, including *The Painted Bird*, she will do so from the perspective of how adult writers make this presentation rather than how child survivors do, comparing Kosinski’s novel to one by Auschwitz survivor Elie Wiesel.

required to wear to support her assumed role as a non-Jew during the war. Józef /Jerzy and Sarah/Suzanne both experienced ethnic identity issues from the need to pretend to be non-Jews that were developmentally appropriate to the ages they were during the war.

Each writer beginning life as a precocious child seems to have realized that the situation of hiding, fraught as it was with the fear of detection by the police, the Gestapo, or just ordinary people, also made life somewhat malleable instead of fixed as it had been before, a discovery that led to learning to tell lies and to friction with the same-sex parent. Though not surprising considering their respective careers, each sought answers to the questions about their childhoods in written documents. Kofman looked to Robert Antelme and Maurice Blanchot to help herself think through the philosophical ramifications of the Holocaust's double bind between speech and silence; Kosinski, like Saul Friedlander, did historical research to educate himself about the Holocaust. In addition, because of actions initiated by adults, both children's latency years, the period of typically reduced sexuality that Freud believed occurred between approximately age seven and adolescence, were cut short. In Kofman's case, mention of this adult intrusion on the child was truncated in the autobiographic text, apparently so as not to accuse Mémé directly of unseemly behavior, though it seems clear some kind of sexual event occurred while they shared the same bed; in Kosinski's case, he admits in his fifties during an interview to having been raped more than once as a child (Gelb).

As adults, after long and prolific writing careers, both chose to end their lives, she at 60 via a dose of sleeping pills (Negroni 267); he at 57 settled in the bathtub of his Manhattan apartment with an overdose of barbiturates and a plastic bag taped over his head (Sloan 3-4). Right before their deaths, each hid actions taken that were related to their wartime childhoods: she secretly nominated Mémé for the wall of honor at Yad Vashem; he quietly published a short

story that referenced the war in a small circulation journal on Long Island and kept silent about it even days before his death when telling a reporter he planned to write a book of short stories.¹³ Finally, as writers, both produced what Luckhurst would identify as traumatic texts, writings that involve the “piercing or breach of a border,” narratives that exhibit a porosity of time in which the distress of the past periodically floods the present. It is evident in her autobiography by changes of verb tense that shift suddenly from past to present. It is evident in his fiction by use of palimpsests for certain remembered traumatic experiences in which the shattered self of childhood functions like an undertext, its salient details later re-arranged in a new order for a new story.

In my view, Kosinski, as much as Kofman or Perec, tints the texts he wrote throughout his life with the effects of his childhood in hiding. Though many readers believe only *The Painted Bird* deals with the Holocaust – and some would argue it doesn’t even do that – I would contend that all his fiction obliquely references his childhood, but does so by hiding autobiographical material inside a fictional cover, a structural match to the buried childhood self/Christian façade he had to adopt during the Holocaust in order to survive.

In the next chapter I will introduce such a text, the short story titled “Chantal,” that was written in his fifties, but has been completely missed by scholars except for its listing in Gloria Cronin and Blaine Hall’s annotated bibliography on the author (10). For the moment I will simply argue that throughout his adult life Kosinski seems to show a recognition of a compound personality-type split in his own character. One late-life example comes in an unpublished essay

¹³ See Pearl Sheffy Gefen’s “Jerzy Kosinski: The Last Interview,” published three days before his death. Originally printed in *Lifestyles Magazine* (Winter 1991): 18-24; reprinted in Ted Teicholz’ *Conversations with Jerzy Kosinski*, p. 227-237.

likely written in 1986 when he was 52: “Twenty Years Later: *Habent Sua Fata Libelli*.” The essay, whose title derives from Terentianus Maurus’ Latin phrase “*Pro captu lectoris habent sua fata libelli* (“According to the capabilities of the reader, books have their destiny”) provides an account of his noticing a used copy of the 1966 paperback edition of *The Painted Bird* while browsing in a rare book store in New Haven. The cover art portrays a detail from the lower right panel of Hieronymous Bosch’s triptych, *The Last Judgment*, in which a boy in a basket is being carried off by a beaked monster. Confronted by the two illustrated figures, Kosinski relates how he tried to engage the boy in conversation, but the child turned his head aside, too frightened to answer. By contrast, the monster carrying off the boy in a basket, whom Kosinski likens to his fiction-writing self, proved garrulous and made the author confess that all the scenes in the novel were fiction. (This identification carries a tone of humor. Kosinski frequently drew caricatures of himself that portrayed his own large nose, just as the beaked monster exhibited.)

This is not to say that autobiography does not ground *The Painted Bird*, but only that throughout his career the author seems to have knowingly positioned himself as a man on the fence between fiction and fact, an indeterminate situation that caused problems with his readers. If we compare his work to that of another child survivor, however, we notice how closely the emotion behind his New Haven essay matches the same in Perec’s fictional portion of his childhood autobiography. It is the fictional voice in the *W* section of Perec’s book – the “monster” – that carries off young Gaspard Winkler. Perec’s deaf and dumb boy and Kosinski’s mute, fearful boy are united in their brokenness, in their inability to speak. They appear to represent the same buried, fragmented self that was theorized in Tauber’s notion of child survivors’ compound personality.

Nor did Kosinski's split-self ideation wait till the end of his career to develop; it seems evident from the beginning. Barbara Tapa (now Lupack) wrote in her 1975 doctoral dissertation on Kosinski's Polish and American literary contexts that as part of his high school education in Russian schools he was assigned to read poetry by the Russian symbolist Alexandr Blok. Indeed, he quoted twice from Blok in his second book, *No Third Path*, a non-fiction commentary on Russian society written under the pseudonym Joseph Novak (58, 151). More tellingly, he seems to have used a phrase from the poet for the working title of *The Painted Bird*. Sloan's research for the biography made him determine that the most "plausible first title for that novel was *Beneath This Sacred Armor*," a title Sloan judges to possess a "sort of high-culture writerly pretension one expects to see in serious literary enterprises" (197). I would argue, on the other hand, that the way this phrase exists in Blok's poetry makes its use for Kosinski's first novel less the preening of a budding novelist than the suggestion of a consequent meaning for the author's double-self view. Blok's lines are: "I fear my *two-faced* soul/ And cautiously conceal/ My wild and *diabolical* image/ Beneath this sacred armor" (qtd. in Chukovsky 66 – italics his).¹⁴ Even as a novelist-in-the-making, in other words, Kosinski seems to demonstrate metacognition of a self-in-hiding, a self where war memories that cannot be spoken or experienced directly are given expression, as Perec's were, by a fictional voice.

Kosinski dubbed his writing technique as "autofiction," which, as his protagonist says in *The Hermit of 69th Street*, "means inner drama as much as it means history" (379). This

¹⁴ The Blok poem in which these lines appear is "Liubliu vysokie sobory" (1902), *Sobranie sochinenii v vos'mi tomakh*. (Moskva-Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1960), 1: 187. [Blok, Aleksandr. "I love high cathedrals." *Collected Works in 8 volumes*. (Moscow-Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1960), 1: 187. Citation prepared and translated by Timothy Westphalen.

technique has not been well understood by scholars studying his work. They tend to look for material obviously taken from life, like the Manson murders of Sharon Tate and her friends that are referenced in his novel *Blind Date*. But, as Kosinski related in an interview:

The premise for autofiction was established with notes I wrote as an appendix for my first novel in 1965. In the notes, I said that the writer incorporated the *fragments of objective reality* into a new literary dimension, but took from outside of himself “only what he is capable of creating in his imagination anyhow. Perversely, I can also take from outside things that in my fiction can exist as a fact in my life, since clearly I exist only as a fiction writer...As I wrote back in 1965, *The Painted Bird* is a vision of myself as a child, *not a reexamination or a revisitation*. (Kosinski *Oral Pleasure* 167 – italics added)

Two important phrases arise in this statement. The first concerns “fragments of objective reality,” which I decipher as referring to those fractured memories so common in the recollections of hidden children, a point of view that seems realistic. By contrast, a reader may consider that it is the exactitude of Kofman’s memoir that seems remarkable for its detailed remembrances forty years after they occurred. Perec, Kosinski and Louis Begley’s *Wartime Lies* openly need fiction to fill in the missing pieces.

A second important phrase clearly distinguishes that Kosinski’s approach to narrating the unnamed boy’s story is not meant as a “reexamination or a revisitation.” Here he is separating his novel from the kind of text that Kofman wrote. It is, I believe, a strategy built not only on an insufficiency of memories, but also one to help him distance himself from traumatic experiences,

much as Kofman used French to remember words cried out in childhood that were most likely originally spoken in Yiddish.¹⁵

If Kosinski was this clear about the origin of *The Painted Bird*, why did so many readers lose faith in him? We may find an answer by comparing his approach with that of other child survivors. Kofman's memoir falls under Philippe Lejeune's notion that autobiography involves a "pact" between writer, reader, and publisher. According to him this contract "supposes that there is an identity of name between the author, the narrator of the story, and the character who is being talked about" ("Autobiographical Pact" 12). Sometimes readers will extend the idea of the autobiographical pact to fiction if the triumvirate of identity markers lines up well enough, as they appear to have done in the case of Louis Begley's *Wartime Lies*, a novel highly praised for its mimetic achievement on the question of what happened to Jewish children in open hiding during the war, as well as for the professional esteem Begley enjoyed as an international lawyer at the New York firm Debevoise & Plimpton. Book reviewers continually pressed him to admit how much autobiography was folded into his novel. Although he agreed to certain similarities – like his young protagonist he was born in Warsaw, for instance; like Maciek he lived on the run with an older female relative (in real life, his mother; in fiction, Maciek was with a maternal aunt) – he routinely claimed that the book was fictive in nature because of events and characters that he needed to add to the true details of his own life. "There are some doors one cannot open just by turning the doorknob," explains Begley; "their opening must be conjured" ("Who the Novelist Really Is"). This steady defense of what we call fiction that is nevertheless infused with autobiographic details maintained his good relation with readers. Perec also enjoyed a

¹⁵ Kosinski's determination to use English rather than Polish to write all his novels likely points to a similar desire to distance himself from traumatic memories.

similar responsiveness with his audience because he clearly demarcated the line between fact and fiction in his autobiography by use of fonts, i.e., roman for real memories, italics for fiction.

These were signposts that made readers feel they could depend on him.

Steadiness of this sort is exactly what is missing in the case of child survivor Jerzy Kosinski. One of the first statements he made to me during our dinner was that if I left the table for a moment, he could hide anywhere in the restaurant and I would not be able to find him. I laughed, of course, thinking this a game, unaware that many Holocaust survivors feel a compulsion long after the war to find hiding places wherever they are. A few minutes later, though, the thought passed through my mind that I was with a trickster, a feeling shared by novelist Cynthia Ozick who said about Kosinski: “In life he was a magician, a kind of Loki or Mercury, a genius of masks and dazzlements; on the page less so.”¹⁶ I take her comment as a kind of disappointment in Kosinski as a novelist whom she had highly praised early in her career when she too thought he was writing an autobiographical novel, not the allegorical one it largely turned out to be.

It is true that conflicting behaviors in print and in person provided a fault line to Kosinski’s public persona that eventually gave way. My point in including him and weighing his work against that of other hidden child survivors is to argue that Kosinski was more traumatized during the war than his readership realizes. It was very important to him not to step into the victim role; he preferred to keep his readers on the victim end of the spectrum.¹⁷ Tauber’s theory

¹⁶ This description came to me in a letter dated May 4, 2011 in response to one I sent Ozick in which I asked her to give her final opinion of Jerzy.

¹⁷ I am not the first person to make this evaluation. See Paul Lilly’s *Words in Search of Victims: The Achievement of Jerzy Kosinski*: “Kosinski’s characters are survivors, not saving remnants, and his books are not meditations but tests of wills, flare-ups of energy between oppressor and victim, writer and reader” (154).

of compound personality has been very helpful to analyze certain characteristics of his work, as has the realization of how he utilized palimpsests to hide actual trauma that would move him into the victim role. In the next chapter I will use these two items to suggest a new way of engaging his work.

Chapter 5 – Hiding in Extremis

I am the boy who can enjoy invisibility.

James Joyce *Ulysses*

5.1 A Writer's Life

Five years ago an article in *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, the well-regarded journal of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, compared Jerzy Kosinski to the genuinely fraudulent memoirist Benjamin Wilkomirski, the pen name of Bruno Dössekker, a Swiss national who fabricated an identity as a Holocaust survivor in order to write *Fragments: Memories of a Wartime Childhood*, a book that purported to narrate the experiences of a very young child in hiding and subsequently in a concentration camp during the war. Under the critical eye of historians and journalists, Wilkomirski's identity and story collapsed.¹⁸ Kosinski was directly compared to him in the Holocaust museum's journal article and judged also by its author to be a "cipher for cautionary tales and critical scorn" (Neale 431). This opinion seems to draw on the fact that *The Painted Bird* did not in truth narrate Kosinski's actual life on the run during the war. Nor did the novel adhere to a standard of verisimilitude as Louis Begley's *Wartime Lies* did. Indeed, many rumors have arisen that claim Kosinski did not even write his own books.

In order to include someone in this dissertation whose ethos has been so badly damaged, it seemed necessary to visit Kosinski's literary archives to determine if a sense of him as a real

¹⁸ See Stefan Maechler's *The Wilkomirski Affair: A Study in Biographical Truth*. New York: Schocken, 2001. Print.

working writer could be established. After spending about fifty hours in his archives in 2009 and 2010, I came to a finding contrary to rumors about him using ghost writers. Indeed, within the broad range of material I investigated, his collection showed him to be a literary man at work at the type of tasks that normally engage fiction writers. For instance, he kept notebooks small enough to carry in his suit pocket and remove unobtrusively when he wanted to jot down ideas, some written partially in code so that no one but he could decipher them. When he was working on multiple drafts of texts, he sometimes used reams of paper in different colors to keep track of changes – blue, orange, yellow. In a pre-computer era, he also economized on typing time for himself and Kiki, his long-time assistant and eventual wife, by avoiding the need for an entire retyping each time a new draft was in progress. Often there were hand-written edits in English, clearly penned in his European-style script. But he would also use his manual typewriter to type new lines on sheets of paper that would subsequently be cut into quarter-inch strips and glued on the spot to be edited.

In the archives, to see his edits on certain manuscripts a reader can hold individual pages up to light and peer through the layers, much like an archeologist digging through a tel. In the manner of Flaubert's *le mot juste* he labored on individual words, using one, crossing it out in the next draft, using a third expression in the next, then reversing to the original choice. For example, on the thirteenth and final draft of "The Art of the Self" in 1968 when he was 35 years old, he was still penning in changes, i.e., "establishes" was crossed out and "fulfils" written above, "divide" became "fissure," "contest" became "struggle."¹⁹ In typescripts done the

¹⁹. "The Art of the Self," typescript, corrected – 1968; undated." GEN MSS 742. December 1998 Acquisition. Box 21. Katherina von Fraunhofer-Kosinski collection of Jerzy Kosinski, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Collection, Yale University. All following archival references pertain to the Beinecke Library.

decade before he died he would slash what he disliked with a red pen, crossing out individual words and lines and, if necessary, X-ing out the entire page.²⁰

Not wasting food was a life and death matter in the Holocaust, and Kosinski apparently didn't like to waste writing either. Some scholars have speculated that extra scenes in *The Painted Bird* were salvaged for use in his second novel, *Steps*. Such evidence can be found with the manuscript for *The Hermit of 69th Street*: a few papers left behind show he was re-working scenes cut out of the final draft into stand-alone short stories. On the other hand, he was willing to spend his own money to get his texts the way he wanted. Sloan mentions that publishers complained about Kosinski's habit of changing manuscripts even when they were in the galley stage, a time-consuming and expensive endeavor. An internal memo from his publishing house concerning his working habits on *Hermit* indicates that he delivered a first typed draft of over 1,000 pages. His editor helped him slash the count, and they agreed on a finished version. According to a publishing representative, Kosinski continued to demand revisions several times, each time arguing with them that they should not mind because he himself would pay for the extra work.²¹

He chose not to write in his first language (Polish), nor in his second (Russian). As mentioned in the analysis of Sarah Kofman's work in the previous chapter, writing in a different language than the language of childhood can help people contain an emotional upsurge of traumatic material. In *Emotions and Multilingualism*, Aneta Pavlenko contends that such people can use the new language as "a mechanism of defense" (29). Indeed, a sense of being freer in English

²⁰ "The Boat People." Unpublished short story in progress. Uncat MS 838 Box 1 f. 3 of 3.

²¹ "Correspondence – 1987-1988." GEN MSS 742. Box 10. Nov. 1997 Acquisition. Beinecke Library.

to express himself followed him throughout his adult life. He seems to have worked hard to master the language. His archives hold numerous, old, single-spaced pages in which he laboriously typed lists of English words and their Polish counterparts. Not necessarily simple words, they were the kind he would want in his novels, i.e., "bent over," "crunching noises," "turgid," "ferret out."²² He typed translations from French to English. From Poland in 1958 he received help from his father who had contacted a bookseller in London asking them to send his son a copy of *Living English Structure*. Nothing in the files that I accessed during my visits suggests that Kosinski was lazy or nonchalant about learning the tools of his trade, although sometimes he seemed frustrated about the finer points of writing in an adopted tongue. He kept, for instance, an old copy of a scholarly article: "How important, in the last analysis, are comma faults and dangling modifiers, spelling and capitalization?" asks the writer, a tenured professor who was teaching freshman composition. "Neither Chaucer nor Shakespeare (or their scribes) could spell worth a damn, and nobody really cares."²³ Doubts about grammar or spelling, notwithstanding, Kosinski maintained a strong writing schedule. When he was embroiled in the writing of *Hermit* in the 1980s, he worked such long hours that Kiki complained to her family: "JK has been working on THE HERMIT non stop ever since (7 days a week!) and the book should be finished in a month or so (with its 1600 manuscript pages the equivalent of some 800 printed ones! ! It's by far the longest work JK has even done, hence the time involved so far. Ugh!"²⁴

²² "English Lessons-typescript." GEN MSS 742. October 2001 Acquisition, 1980-2001. Box 34, folder 1 of 4, undated. Beinecke Library.

²³ The article is hand-marked on top: "Prose for the Day."

²⁴ "Friends-Old – 1983-1994." Folder 1 of 7. GEN MSS 742. April 2001 Acquisition. Beinecke Library.

5.2 Panic Attacks as a Marker of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Having established a view of him as the working author of his own texts, I will argue in the balance of this dissertation that Kosinski did indeed write autobiographical material in his novels, but it was not recognized as such by his readers because the author behaved in his fiction-writing life much as he had been taught to do as a child on the run from the Third Reich. That is to say, I contend that he developed a “poetics of hiding.” In other words, my analysis maintains that there are in fact genuinely autobiographical tropes that persist in his texts, but they are constructed in a way not obvious to his readers. Rather, they appear to be deliberately hidden in such manner that two narrative threads co-exist, much like Tauber’s notion of “compound personality” that theorizes a shattered child self co-existing with a chronologically appropriate adult self in Jewish adults who survived the Holocaust in hiding as children. One significant example concerns the issue of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a topic so far unexplored in critical analysis of Kosinski’s work.

To begin such an analysis, let us first establish an autobiographical fact of PTSD as one observed about Kosinski, but not openly revealed by him. Though the subject of panic attacks is not connected to any of the protagonists in his first eight novels, it seems in real life that Kosinski had a history of such extreme reactions. His biographer reports, for instance, that as a young adult Kosinski “frequently had nightmares and woke up screaming, the nightmares persisting, according to friends with whom he spent ski outings, all the way into the 1950s” (Sloan 57). Nightmares and sleep disturbances are characteristics of PTSD (Bisson 789). In his late twenties he was ill enough with anxiety and related stomach troubles to need concurrent

prescriptions for Vistaril, Bonadoxin, Pro-Banthine with Dartal, and Dexedrine (Sloan 186).²⁵ Kosinski's biographer argues that difficulty in graduate school caused his problems and that the stimulant was "so he could function with little sleep" (Sloan 186). However, this statement begs two questions. First, these medicines were being taken during the period when Kosinski was making notes for *The Painted Bird*. Shouldn't we consider that the attempt to re-visit his Holocaust childhood without even a therapist's help might have been very upsetting? Both Perec and Kofman, after all, went into analysis to deal with their pasts. Second, many writers who have Kosinski as their subject remark about and accept his peculiar sleep/wake schedule of four hours around dawn and four hours in the evening. This interrupted sleep pattern is assumed to be voluntary so that Kosinski could prowl the night scene in search of material for his books. Considering the type of medicines he was taking and the sporadic panic attacks, however, shouldn't we at least wonder if the interrupted sleep style was related to PTSD, a syndrome that interferes with normal sleep habits?

Another observed incidence of extreme fear occurred in 1975 when Kosinski was in his early forties. That was the year that Kosinski and Kiki stopped overnight in Cedar Falls, Iowa before heading to Hollywood where he was invited to appear on the *Johnny Carson* show. The plan was to meet with Jerome Klinkowitz and Daniel J. Cahill, two professors at the University of Northern Iowa who had been following Kosinski's career. On one of the evenings, Klinkowitz invited Kosinski and Kiki to his home for a party being held in their honor. In spite of the crowd

²⁵ Vistaril is used as a sedative to treat anxiety and tension. Bonadoxin is an antihistamine that helps to prevent nausea, vomiting, and vertigo. Pro-Banthine with Dartal is a combination drug meant to reduce psychic distress and to calm gastrointestinal spasms. Dexedrine is a stimulant used to treat hyperactivity and inability to concentrate. Difficulty concentrating is another marker of PTSD (Bisson 789).

and noise, Klinkowitz notes in *Keeping Literary Company* that “Jerzy proved the life of the party” while all the time “maintaining cautious control” (77).

Later in the evening Klinkowitz invited Kosinski to join him outside to view the gardens around the house. Kiki stayed inside to talk to another guest. Kosinski walked out the door first; his host followed behind. Klinkowitz writes:

I assumed Jerzy would be at his best out here, and that we might share a moment of silence after which he'd utter some profound and poetic truth. Instead, I found myself in the presence of a Jerzy Kosinski I'd never seen, for as we left the front steps and made our way through the side yard he became uneasy, moving in fits and starts and turns as he struggled to overcome the sudden disorientation. His eyes reflected the night's darkness, which no longer seemed pleasantly serene. Instead I found myself with a man transfixed by fear, a fear I began to share myself. Turning to the front door's light, Jerzy hurried back inside, wasting not a single word as he fled this insecure world ... What on earth was this, I wondered: Jerzy Kosinski afraid of the dark? (77-78).

When he wrote his reminiscence Klinkowitz eventually drew the conclusion that the author's Holocaust experience fine-tuned his ability to sense danger, to detect something menacing that was lurking nearby, while his host could not. Although he did not do so intentionally, the conclusion Klinkowitz voiced seems to build on the mythology that surrounded Kosinski, the same opinion that others expressed about him when he first arrived in America, i.e., that “he was a young man with an unusual affinity for borderline experiences” (Sloan 106).

But clearly, something about the setting in Klinkowitz' yard did alarm Kosinski.

Klinkowitz and I corresponded about this memory several times. In an April 10, 2010 letter he describes the “*narrow side yard*” they navigated after leaving the house, the “*almost complete silence,*” and finally the “*deep, dark, extensive woods*” far at the back of his yard (italics added). He continues:

Consisting of shallow *ravines* and a silted-up limestone quarry alongside a small stream, [the 4-acre stand of woods is] quite wild a place, especially for its urban location. On its far side is the southern reach of our city's Main Street, again a scene of light and business filtering through the very *dark and quiet woods*. When writers would visit, I'd often take them back there during the daytime for pastoral-style sylvan photo ops. Of course the dark made that impossible now, but I wanted Jerzy to see the great landscape setting we had. He, however, saw and sensed differently – probably because of the panic/fear we both describe (italics added).

The italicized, descriptive words are particularly meaningful because they reverberate from Kosinski's childhood, words that come coupled to sense memories that could easily have brought back recollections of Marianna Pasiowa, the woman Kosinski fictionalized as Marta in *The Painted Bird*. Though not realized at the time at Klinkowitz' house, there is a pronounced similarity about the place where the Kosinski family hid the longest during the war, the fictional setting of Marta's house in the novel, and the actual layout of Klinkowitz' yard. Sloan, who visited that area where Kosinski and his parents hid for most of the war, writes:

Looking out the back window of his first landlords, the Lipinskis, one might have noticed the tip of a thatched roof peeking above the top of a *ravine*. Continuing the line of march

down a *narrow path* through a thickly grown *ravine*, one would have come to a small cottage set in the middle of a meadow, in splendid isolation, with a clear view to the Vistula²⁶. . . . There is a special feeling to the meadow that surrounded Pasiowa's cottage and to the surrounding *woods*, a feeling that can best be described as a kind of *dark* enchantment. It is the Everyplace and Noplace of the forests from the Brothers Grimm, almost perfectly matched to a child's inner landscape of menacing forces, inarticulate fears, and the faint hope of magical deliverance – a place where the secret passions and fears of the human heart may assume the shapes of unimaginable beasts. In the vision he later rendered, Jerzy Kosinski captured the meadow and wood with the preternatural clarity of a dream recalled (25 – italics added).

What is evident here is that multiple details from a stop-gap hiding place during the war that became the jumping off point for *The Painted Bird* matched by extraordinary coincidence landmarks in a suburban backyard in Iowa. The “narrow path through a thickly grown ravine” in Poland had its American counterpart in the narrow side yard bordered with bushes that the two men navigated as they exited the front door and walked toward the backyard. The view of the Vistula River in Poland had its complement in the small stream, and the “dark” enchantment Sloan describes in Poland matched the “dark” and quiet nighttime woods at Klinkowitz' house. Since sensory cues often trigger PTSD episodes, it is reasonable to conclude that Kosinski experienced one at the professor's house and that is what made him flee back inside.

By his description of the meadow he visited in Poland, Sloan implies that the place where the Kosinski family hid during the Holocaust was ripe for a child's imaginative play; in doing so

²⁶ The Vistula is the longest and largest river in Poland.

he suggests that the child Kosinski built up the horror in his imagination that later became the adult Kosinski's outline for *The Painted Bird*. To reach this conclusion he is likely drawing on Kosinski's own admission that "*The Painted Bird* can be considered as fairy tales *experienced* by the child rather than *told* to him" (Notes of the Author – italics his). But his choice of words – “a dream recalled” – unlinks the facticity of the tale told from the teller. In effect, he seems to say that there is no autobiographical truth in what Kosinski wrote, i.e. he dreamed it up as a child. I prefer to take a cue from another child survivor, Aharon Appelfeld, who makes frequent mention of the way child survivors remember horror through their senses even when they cannot remember with words. From that perspective, what seems to have happened in Klinkowitz' backyard is that a “piercing of a border” took place, the PTSD type of event that “violently opens passageways between systems that were once discrete, making unforeseen connections that distress or confound” (Luckhurst 3).²⁷

²⁷ A decade after the incident at Klinkowitz' house I also observed a panic attack suffered by Kosinski in public. In 1985, when he and I met for dinner, he was in his early fifties. I was interested in hearing about books he enjoyed reading and in learning more about his writing methods. Two hours into our conversation, as we were vividly discussing the way pain was embedded in his female characters but not in the males, I pressed him about the meaning of this anomaly. At this point, as recorded in my notes jotted down the week following our dinner:

His body suddenly tensed; his torso snapped back against the banquette and started to lift off the seat, his legs banged against the table. “I can't, I can't!” came squeezed out in a small, pained voice. Instinctively I clamped my hand on his wrist to stop his upward trajectory. He slumped back down on the bench, breathing rapidly. He stared at me with such a wild, intense expression that I had to hide my face by pretending to concentrate on the bits of food still left in my plate. One of his legs jerked; his shoe hit the floor with an angry bang. For a long time we sat without speaking till he recovered his breath. Gradually we resumed our discussion by changing to a neutral topic and pretending nothing had happened. Only it had. At the beginning of the evening he had the look of a predator: sharp, intelligent, calculating eyes, the eyes of a hunter. Now, for an instant at the table, he had the eyes of the hunted.

That visceral response taught me everything one could ask about his childhood. The story later told about Kosinski's parents being able to purchase hot cocoa for his first communion party-in-

Even in his late fifties, Kosinski was still experiencing panic attacks. Sloan reports he had one while skiing in Europe. That time he fainted and had to be dragged to a gondola by Kiki (438). A few months later he collapsed again in the rest room at a gas station after hearing water flushing²⁸ (438). Sloan reports that in the late 1980s the writer was still suffering from “acute episodes” of “arrhythmia” that were real, but “had many aspects of panic attacks” (439). This pattern offers a possible explanation for why Kosinski spent the night “maintaining cautious control” at Jerome Klinkowitz’ house. According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV) published by the American Psychiatric Association, hypervigilance is one of the characteristic symptoms of PTSD (Bisson 789). People vulnerable to panic attacks are likely to want to arrange situations as much as possible so that they remain emotionally safe. He could not have predicted what feelings the stroll outside the professor’s house would spark.

As my next section will argue, Kosinski began to offer scenes about panic in his last fictions. The ninth novel, *The Hermit of 69th Street*, and his single, “lost” short story, “Chantal,” both published in the spring of 1988, make terror a significant part of his protagonists’ personalities. That this turn of events was never noticed by his critics occurs, in my opinion,

hiding in rural Poland and the assumption that this detail suggested his life in hiding was tolerable fell on deaf ears (Sloan 35). What I had seen and felt – as if I had grabbed a live electric wire and lived – suggested something very bad had happened, something I would never ask him directly about again. Twenty years later though, after discerning his use of hypertext in his last fictions, which will be discussed in the following section, I realized his extreme reaction at the table was likely in response to my inadvertent discovery of one of his textual hiding methods in which he occasionally migrated his own autobiographical facts into female characters.

²⁸ Kosinski claimed that some boys threw him into a lake as a child and he almost drowned, an event that sparked a life-long fear of water. Kosy dies by drowning at the end of *Hermit* because two “faceless men” drag him to the end of a dock and fling him off the pier. When Kosinski committed suicide, he did so in a bathtub filled with water as if putting himself back in time to the place of a childhood trauma.

because of the deliberate way Kosinski employed his poetics of hiding and because of the rupture in the writer/reader dyad that began with the *Village Voice* scandal.

5.3 A Poetics of Hiding

Disgraced after that newspaper attack, Kosinski became in effect the Icarus of Holocaust literature. His literary reputation had taken flight with his first two novels, garnering awards and high praise, respectively, in France and the United States. Over the ensuing years he rose higher by virtue of additional honors and a crossover into popular imagination through his appearances on late night TV talk shows with famous hosts like David Letterman and Dick Cavett, plus a role in a feature movie, *Reds*, and another on the 1982 Academy Awards show. The *New York Times* Sunday magazine featured his photo on its cover. He played polo, an exotic sport for someone who had spent his Polish childhood hiding from the Nazis. After trauma “one must try to get the most out of life” was a central belief for him. “Accept tragedy as a necessary part of experience,” he said, “no better or worse than my or your experience” (qtd. in Feder 6). This notion grew from his understanding of the writings of Polish-born, Jewish-American philosopher, Abraham Joshua Heschel, but it was out of sync with the thoughts of many others who survived or contemplated the extraordinary disaster called the Holocaust.

Like Icarus, he did not follow his father’s advice. Daedalus, who had fashioned wings made of feathers and wax, warned his son not to fly too high so the sun would not melt the wax and cause him to fall. Deaf to his father’s counsel, Icarus perished. Sloan describes Kosinski’s father as a man who also wanted a more down-to-earth son; his was too “flamboyant,” too prone to social excess (68). More than once, Kosinski presents his father’s advice as recalled through his own fictional alter-ego in *The Hermit of 69th Street*: “Live your life unnoticed” (71, 151,

358). But just as the hiding experience ruined the relationship between Sarah Kofman and her mother, so it did between Kosinski and his father. In both cases, the parents under fearsome stress judged their children out of control, and they were unable to command full obedience even with physical beatings. After the war Kosinski sought fame through his literary career. As a novelist of Polish descent he flew high in American literary circles for almost two decades until his downward spiral began with the *Village Voice* attack in 1982. Although he had and still does have supporters, one cannot help but feel a sense of schadenfreude emanating from certain quarters about his ruined career. To many it was, and still is, justification for the fact that he did not fit the customary idea of a sober-faced, sober-thinking Holocaust survivor.

I am one of those who think it worthwhile to study how Kosinski embedded his Holocaust experience into his novels in order to compare it with the way other hidden child survivor writers dealt with their early trauma, and am willing, therefore, to favor that goal and to pay less attention to literary rule-breaking. In trying to understand the aftermath of a childhood spent fleeing from the Nazi's, there is value in his protagonist Kosky's notion that " 'A novel is to be read for its characters, not for the character of the man or woman who wrote it, no matter what the author's character'" (*Hermit* 406). Kosinski exhibited certain characteristics common to other hidden survivors who were in middle childhood during the Holocaust, including a compound personality as defined by Yvonne Tauber that involved a buried, traumatized child self co-existing with a current time adult self. In literary matters, these textual features pertain to the way trauma is embedded in his work; how he used the technique of palimpsest to revisit childhood suffering in fiction, yet to present it in a new story arc that seems to the reader completely unrelated to the Holocaust; and how dissociation allows him access to emotional and traumatic material by hiding it in female characters. In this way he could continue to hide in the

text: his autofiction thus came into print encrypted under a fictive carapace in keeping with his life motto – *Larvatus prodeo* – “I go forth disguised” (Sloan 137).

These childhood memories hidden beneath adult experiences appear as a double-layered narrative thread. By this term I mean an autobiographical strand deliberately embedded in a fictional style so that the reality of his life remained visible to him, but is hidden from his readers by virtue of the altered context. Novelists, of course, often utilize real-life events to further their fictional narratives. What is different about Kosinski’s method is that he utilizes fragments of real-life events but ends up using them to tell two story arcs, one public, one hidden. As he wrote in the last major work of his life:

A strong experience in the present awakens in the creative writer a memory of an earlier experience (usually belonging to his childhood) from which there now proceeds a wish which finds its fulfilment in the creative work. The work itself exhibits elements of the recent provoking occasion as well as of the old memory (Freud). (*Hermit* 84 – attributed to Freud, boldface Kosinski’s)

Hermit’s Chapter 9 hints at such a maneuver. The thinly disguised story arc in that chapter concerns a relationship Kosinski had with the Polish poet Halina Poświatowska, who visited America in the late 1950s for heart surgery. In his analysis of the chapter Sloan calls it a “wistful love story” from the past (140).

On one level it seems so, but there is another layer that Kosinski suggests early on in the chapter: “**Again and again, the Gospels resemble a palimpsest: new things have, as it were, been written over the old tidings**” (94 – original emphasis). Coming soon after the idea of a “strong experience” in the present invoking an old memory, mention of palimpsest by the author

is not only a hint that layered narratives are at work, but also that he is knowledgeably engaged in the realm of hypertext creation. As defined by Gérard Genette in *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*: “Hypertextuality, in its own way, pertains to *tinkering* (398 – italics his). He considers this the art of “making new things out of old” and thinks it generates “more complex and more savory objects than those that are ‘made on purpose’” (398). As an example, he invites readers to recall the bicycle’s saddle and handlebars that in the hands of Picasso becomes a bull’s head, an art object that makes viewers’ imaginations rocket back and forth from the inanimate to the animate. He connects this “duplicity of the object, in the sphere of textual relations” to the palimpsest, which on a single parchment has one text almost entirely effaced and another inscribed on top (398-99). This is the technique Kosinski uses in *Hermit*.

Certain embedded details in Chapter 9 pertain to Poświatowska’s visit, but others don’t. His line about palimpsests suggests a second, newer, hidden, autobiographical story being told if his reader can get past all the typographic distractions and also find out what details Kosinski is hiding from his current life. (Apparently autofiction encryption works in both chronological directions; the deciding factor is what the author wants or needs to hide.) In this manner the metaphor of the garrulous monster/storyteller versus the silent boy comes to the fore. So, while most readers, even scholars, have come to interpret Kosinski’s fictional disguises as meaning fiction with autobiographical *overt*tones. I take the meaning in a different direction and think it describes fiction with autobiographical *under*tones. By metaphor, the glove changes, but the hand inside remains his.²⁹

²⁹ This sounds like literary hair splitting or Talmudic *pilpul*, perhaps, but it lessens the probability of incorrectly assigning autobiographical meaning to details that are in fact fabricated. When Kosky visits the Academy Award show (as did his creator) in Chapter 12 to present two awards in front of “600 million people” (*Hermit* 150), one should not deduce from this line (as his

The benefit of such an approach is that it offers a new way to engage Kosinski's work, something that has virtually stopped because scholarly discussion has ossified around a single question – did he or didn't he? -- with respect to plagiarism and falsification of facts. It would help matters if Kosinski's fiction could be given a new definition, i.e., it is not thinly disguised autobiography as readers are inclined to regard Louis Begley's *Wartime Lies*. Rather it is philosophical commentary on the banality of evil and on the suffering of the Other. Not a factual testimony about his childhood in the war, it is rather an emotional testimony presented through fiction of how he feels he was wounded during the Holocaust.

In the end, I hope to convince my readers that the above-named characteristics function like textual thumbprints for this individual hidden child survivor, aspects an editor or ghostwriter could not have placed in his fiction. His is the single mind behind his work, one that creates a poetics of hiding.

5.4 Palimpsest: Text and Undertext

A second hypertext example comes in Chapter 12 of *Hermit*, which relates a real-life story. In 1982 Kosinski was invited to present two Oscars on the Academy Awards show in Hollywood. Kosky, his fictional namesake in the book, makes a similar journey. In terms of textual production this chapter is more complex than the one about the poet Poświatowska. It

biographer did) that the number mentioned is real (Sloan 383). That is assuming autobiographical *overtone*, one that a quick email to the Academy's production office disproves. Rather, for grief carried by the buried self, one should look for autobiographic *undertone*. Kosinski lost 60 members of his extended family to the Nazis, and 6 million Jews are assumed to have died in this way. It seems more advantageous to assume Kosinski is making an exponential reference to those numbers, especially when the latter part of the chapter suddenly collapses into war memories from 1944. As I will argue in a later section of this chapter, what therefore appears a "hilarious account of his stage fright" (Sloan 382), turns out also to be a horrifying account of childhood trauma.

begins with a humorous top line story about Kosky's trip that highlights a sudden, severe anxiety attack stemming from fear he will not pronounce his assigned words properly and that he will miss his stage call. But there are also two simultaneous, hidden autobiographical undertexts connected to *The Painted Bird*. The first, told by the adult voice in the compound personality, humorously confesses about a fictional aspect of the book that was once thought to be autobiographical. The second, which occurs later in the chapter, belongs to the traumatized child self. Since he cannot speak, he remains silent while a narrator's voice intercedes on his behalf, much as the authoritative narrator did at the opening of Part II in Perec's *W* portion of his autobiography after the disappearance of the young and adult Winklers.

The author fractures the details and the narrative sequence of the original tale, but what cements the association between the books is Kosky described as "our altar boy" (167), as well as a parenthetical remark made by a fictional editor called Jay Kay who periodically interrupts the *Hermit* text. As the adult Kosky eyes the journalists, TV reporters and press photographers, Jay Kay asks "Aren't they all merely a replica of my old country's village elders gathered in the sacristy of that old village church?"(160). Two stories separated by decades are thus intertwined in a type of literary double helix if readers decode the secondary narrative thread. Though it begins with humor, by the end of this chapter in *Hermit* any trace of comedy will be gone. The text and undertexts together will have merged to tell a genuinely autobiographic, traumatic story, a fact not understood by scholars. To accomplish this literary maneuver, Kosinski will utilize vocabulary clusters and scenes from the earlier novel, making them rise up in the textual fabric like suddenly appearing bloodstains.

The first three pages of this 17-page chapter tell us that the protagonist, Norbert Kosky, is headed for Hollywood to present two Oscars at the Academy Awards show. The scene is light-

hearted, often funny. When he realizes the size of the television audience, for instance, Kosky has an early bout of stage fright. At rehearsals in front of an audience of 6,000, his hands and voice tremble and he is unable to pronounce “word” as it is written on his cue card. “Ward,” “wart,” “wort,” “worth,” “wourd” (156-57) – various permutations exit his mouth to the gleeful laughter of the audience. On the night of the performance, his anxiety reaches such a peak that “stage fright turns into stomach cramps. He is about to explode. Quick! He summons the page [and is bought to] the haven of a toilet. Thank heavens! Kosky locks himself in one of the stalls and, exploding in safety, suddenly sees his page peeping at him through a crack in the door frame” (159). For a moment afterward everything is calm till it becomes apparent that Kosky and his page are waiting in the wrong wing of the stage. His anxiety once again becomes so severe he ends up vomiting as discreetly as possible into his own handkerchief. Then he begins to run, hoping to get into the correct position before his name is called. As he runs, he hears a frantic voice paging him over a walkie-talkie.

This is the top line story for the first half of Chapter 12, a current-time farce, the one the monster who is carrying off the silent boy in a basket from the cover of the paperback edition of *The Painted Bird* would tell. But the boy has his own story. Hints have been dropped earlier in the chapter about the serious turn this story is going to take, much as Perec’s new narrator in Part II of his autobiography mentioned the “Aryan” ancestry of the inhabitants of W and the motto emblazoned overhead that resembles the *Arbeit Macht Frei* sign over the entryway to Auschwitz. (The page accompanying Kosky is also described as Aryan – 158. His job is to watch and keep track of Kosky, much as Jewish citizens were under the scrutiny of Nazi forces during the Holocaust). In similar fashion, by the fourth page of *Hermit’s* Chapter 12 ominous word choices begin to reveal stories from the earlier novel much as pentimenti suggest earlier versions of an

oil painting. (In the case of palimpsest, we may say the impressions from the undertext begin to show.) We are told, for example, that when Kosky flies to Hollywood he checks into the “Torquemada Inn” where, “on an empty bladder he floats for hours in the bladder-shaped” swimming pool (153). Torquemada, the first Grand Inquisitor in the Spanish Inquisition, equaled Hitler in his zeal to discover and destroy Jews-in-hiding. Mention of him begins to darken the chapter’s tone. For cognoscenti of Kosinski’s work, the introduction of a pool of water and an “empty bladder” also brings to mind a scene in Chapter 2 of *The Painted Bird*, where the boy protagonist watches the townspeople gut a giant catfish and inflate its empty bladder, only to find himself thrown on top of it by the villagers and cast into the river that leads out of town (22-23). In *Hermit* this story is treated humorously, likely an admission that the original scene in *The Painted Bird* was, in historical terms, fiction.

The undertext comes into more prominence as word choices and parallel scenes stitch together the two novels around a famous scene where *The Painted Bird*’s 10-year-old protagonist is suddenly drafted into the role of altar boy. Even before he performs his assigned task in the liturgical service, the text says the boy “shook with nervousness” and was “trembling” (121).³⁰ Then “the Mass proceeded in all its splendor” (122). Similarly in *Hermit*, Kosky calls the microphone area where he must stand the “pulpit” (155) and the Oscar ceremony the “Grand Mass” (159). Exactly as in the case of the boy in *The Painted Bird*, readers are told that Kosky is

³⁰ The type of extreme fright Kosinski experienced performing publicly as a young Jew masquerading as a Catholic altar boy should not be underestimated. It is echoed in other child survivors’ texts. Historian Saul Friedlander, for instance, writes in his autobiography that while serving at the altar he had the feeling of splitting into three people – “the one who was afraid, the one watching him, and the one serving the mass, like a machine” -- and therefore feared he was “going crazy” (*When Memory Comes* 133). Such a degree of dissociation indicates that what may appear to be a relatively benign setting to readers now was not experienced as such during the Holocaust by the hidden child.

“terrified and shaken,” his hand “trembling” as he too falls victim to stage fright (155). When the boy stands between the priest and another altar boy, he panics when he discovers he is supposed to pick up a heavy missal. “**Pan** Kosky **panics**” too moments before he goes onstage (emphasis added). Since “Pan” means “sir” in Polish, the syllables surrounding Kosky’s name also place him between two men.

If we recall Genette’s phrase that hypertextuality involves “tinkering” (398), we can easily find evidence of this activity in Chapter 12 of *Hermit*. What is different between it and *The Painted Bird* is the timing of the nausea, vomiting and stomach upset that befall each protagonist. Also, the boy in *The Painted Bird* drops the missal it was his responsibility to carry. By contrast, when warned about holding on tight to the Oscar statue and asked if he would drop a bible, Kosky swears “I won’t drop it. Not this time...I learned my lesson during the war” (166). After the missal falls in *The Painted Bird* angry parishioners chase the boy and fling him into a manure “pit” where he nearly drowns. Kosky’s “Aryan” page also leads him to a “pit stop” (160), but his visit is to the “pit” of a “lady makeup artist” (160) before being called onstage. When the boy eventually crawls “out of the mire” (124), he is “immediately gripped with cramps and vomiting” (124) that continue even after he runs into the nearby forest. By contrast, Kosky’s stomach troubles and retching occur before he goes onstage. Compared visually, the keyword clusters position as follows:

Keyword Repositioning in the Narrative Structures of <i>The Painted Bird</i> and <i>The Hermit of 69th Street</i>						
The boy becomes an altar boy			"shook with nervousness" "trembling"	"the Mass proceeded in all its splendor."	the boy drops the missal	angry crowd throws boy in a manure "pit" escaping to the woods, the boy "vomits"
Kosky's nerves before Oscars	Runs to toilet "to explode" "vomits"	his "Aryan page" leads Kosky to the "pit" of a lady makeup artist	"terrified and shaken" "trembling"	"the Grand Mass is about to begin."	"I won't drop it. Not this time. I learned my lesson during the war."	
<p><i>"No one has described fully the horror of this illness called anxiety."</i></p> <p>Attrib. to Anais Nin in <i>The Hermit of 69th Street</i>, Chapter 12.</p>						

Genette writes that “tinkering is always a game” and that integrating an earlier text into a later one is a “way of playing with it, of having fun with it and making fun of it” (399). This element makes a suitable description of what Kosinski attempts in the first three-quarters of Chapter 12. Making “fun” of his first novel, of course, seems to erase its horror and give ammunition to those who accuse him of profiteering on the Holocaust. This should not be the case, though, for two reasons. First, as we see above, both scenes involve performance before an audience, anxiety that catapults into stage fright, fecal matter, and vomiting, all conditions Kosinski suffered from throughout his life. The double telling in the undertext and in the hypertext suggests that these conditions and these events are grounded in reality. It is probable that the altar boy story described in *The Painted Bird* in which the boy was hurled into a manure pit was, in reality, a bout of extreme anxiety or an outright panic attack. Loss of body/bowel control at such a time is an event that will fill most adults and older children with deep shame. Since such an event would have happened during the Holocaust, shame would have been compounded by terror. These twin

tellings suggest that Kosinski believed his life-long episodes of anxiety and panic attacks originated from his Holocaust experience.

A worse event happens in the last quarter of the chapter. Kosky, running backstage to get into position, suddenly disappears from the text for a page and a half. As if the past is chasing him, he is overtaken by a strong war statement that completely alters the tone of the chapter. It reads as if seeing all the walkie-talkies carried by stage hands has instigated an episode of extreme anxiety and Kosky's (and, during the real show, Kosinski's) mind is suddenly overtaken by the past, so the current day text also collapses back in time:

This is summer 1944. The simple one-way radio—the early-day walkie-talkie found by the village fishermen on the dead body of a German soldier – snaps the latest news...July

3: “The Red Army takes Minsk.” July 13: “THE RED ARMY APPROACHES PINSK.”

The Germans retreat. Look at them all rushing home, this time ahead of their panzers who now protect their rears from the advancing Red Snappers (the Red partisans), and the suddenly invincible Red Army. The end of the war? Not quite, kid! You're on the home run, but not home free yet! THE VLASOVITES ARE COMING. The Vlasovites are the deserters from the Red Army. They are big, strong, meaty. They ride horses bareback and barefooted. They eat meat raw, and they eat it *po Tatarsku (à la Tartare)*, with their bare hands. Their pleasures are as raw as their meat or meatus.³¹ Raping men, women and children is their prime-time pleasure.

This horrifying narration is followed by an excerpt from *Polish Children Accuse*, fully cited at the bottom of the page, the book Kosinski had been sent during his note-taking days for *The*

³¹ Meatus is an opening or passage, especially one leading to the surface of the body

Painted Bird in the early 1960s. It narrates a 19-year-old's eye-witness account of soldiers pillaging a town, raping and murdering mothers and their children.

Just as suddenly as it was interrupted by this terrifying information the chapter returns to the Oscar ceremonies. Kosky, still running, passes a plastic forest scenery set backstage, sees many men (all called the Polish "Pan"), and finally makes his presentations. There is no sense of excitement at the close, just a quote from *The Great Gatsby*: "So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past" (167), which suggests a PTSD episode in which traumatic memories have intruded on current time life.

What are we to make of the author of *The Painted Bird* "tinkering" with his original novel? What are we to make of humor followed by horror? Some might say that the humor involved was his way of confessing to being a Holocaust profiteer, one who made money on the calamity, but was hardly touched by it – an imposter, in other words. Others might say that Kosinski was following an emotional arc that Klinkowitz noticed in his work before the two took that fateful walk in the backyard, that is to say, that he was using humor to "condition" the reader, "inviting predictable assumptions and then dismantling them so that by the time something truly frightful hits...one is virtually defenseless against it, all the customary defenses having been systematically deconstructed" (*Keeping Literary Company* 63-64).

Klinkowitz is an astute reader and may be sensing something dark and hateful in the way Kosinski seems to manipulate his audience. Based on what I witnessed at the dinner table and my understanding of how his texts are created, however, I suspect the humor/horror arc is a communication from the silent boy in the basket, a manifestation of deep anger and depression because he believes there is no way for him to express his childhood trauma except by saying it happened to someone else. Kosinski would take a stab at that task with the publication of

“Chantal” the same season *Hermit* was published, but he would effectively hide it, just as Sarah Kofman hid her Yad Vashem nomination from her readers. Both writers act and react as if the Holocaust made them lose faith in the idea of an empathetic listener.

5.5 “Chantal” or Shan’t Tell?

Fiction by Georges Perec and Jerzy Kosinski exemplifies the idea of a literature built on concealment. Each survived a Holocaust childhood in hiding. Perec’s embodiment of this past shows in his lipograms. As an adult Kosinski often physically re-enacted his childhood in hiding by dressing in disguises, once posing as a waiter to serve an unsuspecting Norman Mailer. He hid at home and asked guests to look for him. Even in his fifties he apparently had to remind himself that, if necessary, he could disappear from sight. In his writing he used hypertexts to keep one narrative layer public and the other private.

Three years before he killed himself the author also performed a literary act that he hid from most readers, just as Sarah Kofman concealed her nomination for Claire Chemitre to the Righteous Among the Nations’ wall of honor at Yad Vashem. In 1988 Kosinski, a novelist known for his abilities in self-promotion, quietly, unobtrusively, published his first and only short story in a small-circulation journal on Long Island that was edited by Martin Tucker, an English professor at C. W. Post College who had worked with the author on a newsletter for American P.E.N. in the 1970s when Kosinski was the president of that organization.³²

Six pages long, “Chantal” arrived the same season as the author’s ninth novel, *The Hermit of 69th Street: The Working Papers of Norbert Kosky*, a 527-page behemoth festooned on nearly every page with boldface type, italics, footnotes and quotes from other authors that made

³² This information was obtained via personal interview with Tucker at his office at C. W. Post College on 18 Nov. 2009.

it seem as if the author had intended to take to logical extreme Roland Barthes' notion in "The Death of the Author" that a "text is a tissue of quotations drawn from innumerable centers of culture" (146). This technique was apparently a rejoinder to critics who had charged him with the literary sins of plagiarism, derivativeness, purposeful deception and fraud. It was also a kind of slight-of-hand trick in text, a ploy of misdirection: demanding reader attention in so many stylistic ways on every page tired them quickly and made it less likely that they would notice when he was actually providing autobiographical material.

Judging by the dates on archived manuscripts, Kosinski took several weeks off from *Hermit* each January in 1986, 1987 and 1988 to write what would become the six-page, published version of "Chantal." While *Hermit* arrived in the spring of 1988 to the fanfare of advertisements and reviews in large newspapers like the *New York Times*,³³ "Chantal" appeared the same season in a small-circulation literary magazine on Long Island and went unnoticed. Other than a line in Cronin and Blaine's 1991 annotated bibliography on Kosinski, "Chantal" has not, to my knowledge, received any critical attention. It is not mentioned in Sloan's 1996 biography.

The short story deserves consideration alongside the author's novels, however, for three reasons. First, it is the only fiction Kosinski wrote named for a woman; second, multiple drafts are available in his archives so scholars can scrutinize his working habits; and third, it was the last fiction to occupy his mind before his suicide in May 1991. In late April of that year, in fact, he was in touch with a comparative literature professor at the University of Montreal, Wladimir Krysinski, a childhood friend from Poland who was an editor on a tri-lingual magazine in Canada called

³³ See full page ad for *Hermit* in the *New York Times* Book Review, 10 July 1988, p. 17.

ViceVersa. Kosinski wanted “Chantal” translated into French and published in the magazine. The professor preferred it to remain in English. During this negotiation, Kosinski killed himself. The story was published posthumously in English (Krysinski 8-9). In 1993 it was printed a third time at the request of Kosinski’s widow, this time translated into Polish and appended to a Polish edition of the novel *Being There*.³⁴ In a bit of bad literary behavior, both Kosinski and his wife kept silent about the first printing of “Chantal.” Each subsequent time Kosinski and Kiki presented it to editors as a new story with no provenance of earlier publications listed.

Hermit and “Chantal” read as if they are conjoined twins, deeply attached to each other by stylistic and content similarities: Samuel Kramer, for instance, the name of the male protagonist in the short story, also appears once in the novel; both texts integrate footnotes and quoted material from other authors. Both deal with PTSD. Both reference an attack by Kalmuk mercenaries,³⁵ formerly from the Soviet Union, who had fled persecution by Stalin, joined forces with the Third Reich, and who were guilty of wartime atrocities against Polish civilians. Such an attack is eye-witnessed by the boy in *The Painted Bird*, though the account has been widely criticized as autobiographically untrue. In my view, *Hermit*’s Chapter 12 and “Chantal” present themselves as a grand-scale embodiment of Kosinski’s poetics of hiding that is based on Tauber’s theory of compound personality. Their polyphonic voices represent a co-existing buried child self in the short story and a real-time adult self in the novel’s chapter. The traumatic emotional material from childhood embedded cryptically in Chapter 12 of *Hermit* paradoxically seems enlarged in the almost private short story.

³⁴ See *Wystarczy być – Chantal*. Trans. Julita Wroniak. Warszawa : Da Capo, 1993. Print.

³⁵ Use of the term “po Tatarsku (*à la Tartare*)” in *Hermit*’s Chapter 12 war scene brings to mind even to an English-speaking reader the Tatars, who share an ancestral home in Mongolia with the Kalmuk tribe.

Briefly told, “Chantal” concerns the experience of a writer named Samuel Kramer. When he arrives at a hotel in the fictional country of Mantrak, the concierge hands him a letter from “a young lady who said she *does* know him” (15 – italics his).³⁶ Kramer decides to meet her and the next day, “burning exhaust (and desire),” he races in his car to the motel that she had suggested (15). They meet in the bar, where he is “instantly recognized by Chantal” (15). After shaking hands, they leave the building to walk in a nearby forest where shafts of sunlight falling between the trees like theatrical klieg lights turn the clearing into a stage, “a stage Chantal clearly commands.” The burning question on Kramer’s mind as they head out is “*would she let him direct her?*” (15 – italics his).

In his *Art of the Self* essay written two decades earlier, Kosinski notes that “in classical French drama, scenes are marked by the exit or entrance of a character” (*Passing By* 224). So too in the short story scenes unfold in terms of forest clearings that Kramer and Chantal enter or exit. At first they “walk along a barely trodden path of virginal forest clearly not yet scorched by fire” (15). At a roadside temple dedicated to lovers, Chantal borrows a lighter from Kramer to light a candle and an incense stick. Once “they sit down, sharing two sides of a tree stump” (15), she borrows Kramer’s story-telling role³⁷ and begins a tale about a storyteller who in his wanderings encounters a painter, sculptor, and tailor who had once been partners. Because they have run out of creative ideas, they are no longer friends. Engaging them in conversation, the storyteller ends up suggesting they re-inspire themselves by building a “tantrika,” a wooden statue of a woman they can paint and dress (15). After they cooperatively utilize their particular skills, explains Chantal, the tantrika becomes their “ideal woman” (15). The problem begins when they start to

³⁶ All page references for “Chantal” belong to the version published in *ViceVersa*.

³⁷ The mirroring of physical movement and Chantal taking up the role of storyteller is important. It suggests a shared identity between the male character and the female character.

argue over who made her ideal. The quarrel becomes so fierce that the male storyteller advises them to get rid of the statue before she destroys them. Since he told the story about her, the storyteller suggests they should give her to him. When they do, he smashes the statue with his fist. Asked why, he replies, “Because she is mine...Because her story remains even when her remains are gone” (15). So ends Chantal’s story within a story.

Since it is getting late, Kramer and Chantal decide to head back to the motel, but suddenly step into a new forest clearing and encounter about two dozen Mantraki mercenaries. Immediately Chantal starts to attack them verbally. As tension builds, Kramer watches silently, so afraid “he swallows his own fear” (16). To distract himself, he focuses on a hovering dragonfly. Meanwhile, the captain of the commandoes makes a suggestive remark to Chantal. She responds by removing her hair clip, letting down her “jet-black hair,” and removing her clothes (16). All the men laugh, making Kramer so fearful of what is to follow that he “break[s] out of the real narrative net [to stage] a play of fantasy” (16). In this fantasy he imagines the gang rape of Chantal.

What brings this fantasy to a quick close is the sudden dropping of a lexical tombstone into the text, an obituary from *The Times Square Record* that announces the death of Kramer and Chantal, not by the commandos, but because they “accidentally stepped upon a hidden mine in a forest clearing during military maneuvers” in Mantrak (16).³⁸ The reader gasps at this shocking pre-closure development, but presses on because lines of text remain. Doing so raises the possibility that the attack has happened just in Kramer’s imagination. We are told that, in fact, when Chantal first offered herself to the captain, he spurned her and ordered his men back to

³⁸ In the 1986 and 1987 versions, the obituary ends the story.

their helicopters. After they leave, Kramer demands to know from an unhurt Chantal, “what all that display was for”: “You could have had yourself raped – and both of us killed, you know!” (17), the two possibilities already narrated. Unhurt, she replies calmly that she did it “to inspire” him, “to become, even if only for the time of one story, [his] ideal woman” (17).

What to make of this strange story? It seems to exemplify the paradoxical, two-faced character of its author, the silent boy and the story-telling monster. On the one hand, Kosinski wanted to hide “Chantal” – to make it a “shan’t tell” -- and did so by publishing it in a small-circulation literary journal and not even mentioning it during an interview three days before his suicide when he discussed plans to write a collection of short stories (Gefen). On the other hand, he seems to have wanted to publicize it and tried to get it a second life in *ViceVersa*. For a long time silence won. Other than brief mention in an annotated bibliography, “Chantal” has not received any critical attention. Not listed in Sloan’s 1996 biography, it is not even given its own folder in the literary archives at Yale, nor is it footnoted in *Oral Pleasure: Kosinski as Storyteller*, a collection of writings and interviews published in 2012 (Lupack). These absences are ironic because the nested tale that Chantal tells outlines in parable Kosinski’s personal explanation of his layered composing process, in particular the creation of female figures, one of the most controversial aspects of his work. Comparing the various drafts also informs us of how Kosinski situated himself as a writer: in the 1986 draft he considers himself an American literary figure and thus pulls material from that source, i.e., he connects the text to Tennessee Williams, whom he knew in New York. By the third draft in 1988, however, Kosinski peels off the American layer and reaches back instead to his European roots, showing Kramer’s attachment to Joseph Conrad’s *Lord Jim* and also to Charles Baudelaire’s *Les Fleurs du Mal*.

Many entry points suggest themselves for literary analysis. “Chantal” is rich in biographical allusions to Kosinski’s life, so we can see how real life migrates into his autofiction. A major one is the stage business in which Chantal and Kramer light a candle and an incense stick together at the roadside temple and then end up facing a group of sexually aroused men in front of whom Chantal takes out her hair clip, lets her long black hair tumble down, and removes her clothes, offering herself to the Mantraki commando. The progression of this scene has a precise corollary in Kosinski’s life. During the time he was drafting “Chantal,” he and a lover were making the rounds of various sex clubs in Manhattan. Sloan reports that:

They came to have names for the regulars – among them the Prince and Princess, a man with a wonderfully muscular body and a beautiful woman with long black hair. The Prince and Princess always arrived with candles, lit the candles, and made love as an enthusiastic audience gathered to watch. Occasionally a hand emerged from the crowd to touch one of them. (413)

As to what the author was doing during such times, Sloan remarks: “Kosinski, mainly, watched” (413), just as Kramer watches Chantal from the side of the clearing. This is an example in which Kosinski draws details from his own life and imagination to flesh out the characters; no other editorial hand or mind seems present. He simply takes autobiographical and imaginative details and uses them as narrative building blocks. As Ami Shinitzky writes, “Kosinski was an assembler, a collage maker” (719). Indeed, he made art from found objects: the story’s title could easily have been suggested to him as he walked in his own neighborhood. In the period when he was writing *Hermit*, a French bistro called the Chantal Café was open for business two blocks from his Manhattan apartment.

To support my thesis about what I term Kosinski's poetics of hiding, however, the coding that links the short story text to *The Painted Bird* and *Hermit*, along with the evolutionary development of "Chantal," by which I mean the editing changes Kosinski made from draft to draft, is even more important than biographical connections. First, linkage between the short story and *The Painted Bird* is forged by wordplay: Mantraki troops in "Chantal" versus Kalmuki soldiers in real life. The fictional Mantraki soldiers are depicted as Buddhists (16), as was true of the actual Kalmuki troops. Kosinski depicts the Mantraki commandos as mercenaries rather than an indigenous fighting force, an identical situation for the Kalmuki soldiers from Russia who had bound themselves to the Wehrmacht. Furthermore, when Chantal sarcastically calls the Mantraki leader a "dead doll" (16), the author seems to be hiding reference to Dr. Doll, the code name for the historically real *Sonderführer* Rudolf Vrba, the German officer in charge of the Kalmuki troops (Piekalkiewicz 218).

The most significant connection between the short story and the book chapter revolves around the subject of rape. Koski's backstage sprint, his "run for life" when *Hermit's* text plunges into July 1944 (162), and his disappearance from the next page and a half of the novel when it turns to the subject of rape suggests a hidden trauma suffered by Kosinski, one he cannot share directly with his readers. Indeed, we find corollaries in the earlier, 1986 draft of "Chantal." When Chantal is about to be gang raped in that draft, Kramer takes the opportunity to flee: "Watching Chantal, Kramer's guards no longer watch him. This is his chance. Suddenly, he takes off for the forest and he does it like a rhino on a stampede." The author then writes that Kramer

runs for life. He sprints. He slows down. He zigzags. He runs straight. But, no matter how he runs, he runs for the forest. To him, an old forest hand, the forest means natural

shelter--and shelter means life. No wonder. As a child Kramer spent some four years of World War II hiding in the forests of war-torn *Polesie* (with *Pol* standing for Polish--and *lesie* for *las*, the forest- as in the Polish phrase *chodzenie po lesie*-- walking through the forest...)

This section of the story's first draft from 1986 is notable for several reasons. First, the depictions of *Hermit's* Kosky and "Chantal's" Kramer as boys both involve a "run for life." Kosky as an adult would run through a "plastic forest" backstage in *Hermit* (164), just as Kramer and his boyhood self would head for the forest in "Chantal." All three – Kosky, Kramer, and the unnamed boy in *The Painted Bird* – run in a zigzag manner: Kosky left and right as he dashes backstage to get to the podium on time, Kramer as he "zigzags" away from Chantal's rape scene (17), and the boy as he too "zigzags" away from a Kalmuk soldier who is approaching him after the mercenaries have already raped children, women and men in the village (161-2). The body-in-movement similarities among the texts are so intense that one cannot help but wonder if the same autobiographical fact is hidden beneath all three. (Remarkably, it seems to fit Klinkowitz's description – "moving in fits and starts and turns as he struggled to overcome the sudden disorientation" – of the fearful way Kosinski behaved in his backyard.)

Since we know from Sloan's biography that Kosinski as a child did not actually witness the Kalmuk raid as it is depicted in *The Painted Bird*, we may speculate that the boy's "zigzag" run happened elsewhere. Sloan notes that in July of 1944, the same month named in *Hermit* for the savage rapes to civilian men, women and children by the Vlasovites, "the retreating Kalmuks stopped over in the region, raping and pillaging in Rzeczycka Okragla and burning most of Rzeczycka Długa," two towns a few minutes' gallop away from the town where the Kosinski family was hiding (48). Sloan remarks that in July 1944 all of the townspeople from Dabrowa

Rzeczycka, including the Kosinski family, fled to the forest “and remained there for several days” (48). The detail in “Chantal” that describes Kramer as a boy who “spent some four years of World War II hiding in the forests of war-torn *Polesie*” may therefore be counted as a simple extrapolation of a remembered, four-day hiding spell in July 1944 (“Chantal” 17 – italics his).³⁹ Sloan assumes the family stayed together in the forest, but no one, of course, would be an eyewitness to what actually happened. Logic doesn’t support everyone staying together. Family members were often separated at such times, the better to escape detection. A child who had been cooped up for as long as Kosinski might even initially find such an event exciting, and even for a time think of the forest as a shelter. But adults knew the opposite could be true: during the war, forests not only held the danger of wild animals, but also could be littered with body parts from clashes between soldiers and partisans, corpses, and could, in the case of July 1944, be vulnerable to the advancing counter-insurgency troops like the Kalmuks. Many first-hand accounts of Jewish families fleeing to forests to hide during the Holocaust also note that family members became separated, sometimes never finding each other again. It is quite within the realm of possibility that the young Kosinski was separated from his family during this brief period and that when he claimed to be alone during the war that he is referencing these four days, a factor no scholar in this area currently envisions. Importantly, the next time the townspeople fled to the forest, the Kosinski family refused to go.

Literary critic Sara Horowitz writes that in certain Holocaust novels – she names *The Painted Bird* and child-survivor Louis Begley’s *Wartime Lies* -- “the sexual violation of women

³⁹ This is a similar move to his use of numbers in *Hermit*, i.e., 6,000 audience members at the Oscar rehearsals, but 600 million the night of the telecast. The multiplier effect seems a communication about the surge in his anxiety level. In “Chantal,” a likely terror-filled, 4-day hiding episode may have felt like a 4-year ordeal.

is presented in the background or on the periphery, intended to darken and underscore the danger of the male protagonist and at the same time keep him at a safe remove.” A reader may reasonably wonder, however, if the point of the fictional strategy is always just for textual shading. Aharon Appelfeld was unable to write his own Holocaust childhood autobiography until he switched genders and began to write about a young girl (*Beyond Despair* xi-xii). Traumatic material, especially from childhood, may be easier to express if great distance is put between the self and the narrated victim. Telling trauma in third person can also derive from a sense of dissociation in which the self regards itself *as if* from across the room, a well-known phenomenon. This might explain the peculiar description Kosinski writes for Kramer: while in a state of terror as he contemplates what might happen to Chantal, Kramer concentrates on a dragonfly hovering overhead to remove his mind from what he fears is about to take place. This is, Kosinski writes parenthetically, “Kramer's way of distancing himself from imminent reality — by disconnecting his imminent narrative autofocus,” a description that very much possesses the aura of dissociation (16).

We see this dynamic unfold in in the three-year development of “Chantal.” By the published draft Kramer stands safely to the side of the clearing in which in his imagination only Chantal is raped. But the scene did not start out this way. In the 1986 draft, Kramer was at physical risk too:

Now that Chantal and Kramer are in their midst, the commandos close ranks--and they close them around Chantal and Kramer until our duo is literally encircled by them, until there is simply NO EXIT-- and until Kramer begins to perceive the transitive verb "encircled" as a non-transitive entrapment which--feasibly, but only feasibly--(he

reassures himself) could lead to an impasse ("call it a dual rape" in the words of Sam K).
("Chantal" 1986 Draft, 7)

This scene becomes even more emotionally charged if we notice two significant autobiographical connections. First, Sloan records that as a youngster Kosinski was attacked by local boys while ice skating. They "knocked [him] to the ice and began pulling down his pants" (Sloan 34). When fictionalized in *The Painted Bird*, this scene includes descriptions of attack and the threat of rape that are similar to those in the 1986 draft of "Chantal." "They encircled me with suspicion," notes the boy protagonist in the novel; Kramer expresses the same fear about being "encircled" (7). Further, as the boy escapes into the forest, his "skates [were] caught on roots and bushes" and he "stumbled once" (142-144). In like manner, as she tries to step over a fallen tree Chantal gets "one of her heels caught by a branch" and, "stumbling...[she] fall[s] to the ground" (16). The latter example is especially important because it suggests the migration of a male character's history into a female character, a gender switch.

The scenes in the novels and the short story carry the most emotional weight when readers recall that Kosinski admitted "with a terrible poignance" during a 1982 interview that he was raped "several times" as a child (Gelb). The reporter did not pursue the question, nor, to my knowledge, has anyone else. Sloan does report, however, that Kosinski advised writer Emily Praeger: "You must never personify actions to yourself" (341). Taken together, the admission and the advice suggest a possibility for what caused editing changes between the first draft of the story and its published version, i.e., it is possible they were motivated by Kosinski's own desire not to personify the rape of Chantal to himself.

It is easy to imagine a reason for such action. Rape and women's place as its victim in war is a narrative with a long history in Western society. So well is it pressed into readers'

consciousness that in writing about the advance of the Red Army Alexander Solzhenitsyn can capture its horror in a dozen words: “A platoon, a company perhaps? A girl’s been turned into a woman” (*Prussian Nights* 39). The situation is the reverse for men and boys, however.

Although they too become victims, especially in war which valorizes rape even against civilians as an expression of dominance, no narrative exists for them. With respect to the Holocaust, sexual crimes against Jewish women were cordoned off from discussion of other crimes against humanity: the first serious study on the subject did not appear for sixty-five years after the war (Hedgepeth, Saidal). Nevertheless, in general, a woman who is attacked finds herself inside a victim narrative taken for granted by society. A male in the same situation only has a narrative allied with the opposite gender.

Traumatic stories are called “unspeakable” because the victim cannot intimately express what happened. When significant shame has been experienced because of the humiliating nature of violent attack against the self, the “exposed, entrapped, and humiliated self turns outward with hostile attempts to save face” (Budden 1036). In Kosinski’s case readers should wonder why rape is so often recounted in his fiction, though not for the male characters. The boy in *The Painted Bird* observes rapes, but he does not become a victim. Yet Kosky disappears from *Hermit’s* text when the subject of child rape surfaces. Finally, while the short story originally names both Kramer and Chantal as possible victims of a “dual rape,” we find that editing later changes the line so that only she is vulnerable. These narratives, matched against Kosinski’s statement to Gelb, suggest that something physically and sexually violent happened to him before the war ended, something too traumatic to narrate in a coherent, first-person way.

His biographer concluded that Kosinski’s penchant for fast cars, sex clubs with an emphasis on sadomasochistic relations, and risky situations in general were a way of distracting

himself from the nest of lies he had told throughout his life. Given the hidden textual links connecting *The Painted Bird*, *The Hermit of 69th Street*, and “Chantal,” I would suggest an alternate explanation for Kosinski’s behavior. Michael Dorais writes in an analysis of the lifescritps chosen by men who were sexually abused as boys:

it is not surprising to find certain elements of abuse in the sexuality of some victims...By incorporating such aspects of their abuse into their own fantasies or sexual relations, these ex-victims, boys or men, may transform the earlier trauma into pleasure. What was painful can be transformed into a source of euphoria and the tensions provoked by risk can become a source of sexual arousal...Some respondents allude to situations where they have taken pleasure in having sexual relations in front of witnesses...The question also arises as to whether exhibitionism (that is, imposing one’s sexuality on someone else as the aggressor did in the past) is not, at least in certain cases, another way to commit an aggression, albeit solely on a psychological level. (148)

Some readers, of course, may object that Kosinski’s mention in the 1982 Gelb interview of being raped multiple times when he was a boy was one of his many lies. That response, however, begs the question of why he went through the trouble of encoding significant scenes – scenes he was confident readers could not decode -- from *The Painted Bird* into *Hermit*, novels written twenty-three years apart. It also leaves unanswered why he wrote and virtually hid a single short story, “Chantal,” in which an adult male alter ego was vulnerable to rape, then edited out that possibility to leave only the female character at risk. A response is also needed for the question posed by the penultimate line of *Hermit*, published alongside “Chantal,” in which Kosky is described as “the unsinkable Lotus Man *disguised* as the American Unsinkable Molly Brown,” (527 – emphasis added), a final vision that strongly suggests the possibility of parity and

interchangeability between certain female and male characters in his fiction. Later in 1988, in fact, Kosinski addressed the issue even more bluntly: when asked in September by a columnist if his personal life was the template for the male lead in a play he was writing called *Bruno and I*, he replied, “No, I am the woman” (Adams 26). Perceived autobiographical inconsistencies, in other words, may have been the reason for Kosinski’s literary downfall, but one is left to wonder if the failure by critics to find textual evidence of trauma suffered during his childhood may be attributed to the fact that his poetics of hiding was so effective they were searching in characters of the wrong gender.

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Addendum

THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL GATHERING OF CHILDREN HIDDEN DURING WORLD WAR II THE MARRIOTT MARQUIS HOTEL

SUNDAY, MAY 26, 1991

Benjamin Meed,
president, American Gathering/Federation of Jewish
Holocaust Survivors

Keynote Speaker:
Abraham H. Foxman, national director
Anti-Defamation League

Panel: "To Hide No More?"

Moderator: Dr. Haim Dasberg, psychiatrist

Panelists:

Sylvain Brachfeld, Israeli journalist
Daisy Miller, co-founder,
Child Survivors Group, Los Angeles
Mordecai Paldiel, director, Department
for the Righteous Among the Nations,
Yad Vashem

LUNCHEON

Chairman: Alvin Rockoff, chairman
Intergroup Relations Committee
Anti-Defamation League

Keynote Speaker:
Yaffa Eliach, Broeklundian professor,
Judaic Studies Department, Brooklyn College

WORKSHOPS

PLENARY SESSION

Panel: "The Psychological Impact of Being Hidden
As A Child"

Moderator: Sarah Moskowitz, professor,
California State University, Northridge

Panelists:

Judith Kestenberg, project director
Child Development Research
Robert Krell, professor of psychiatry,
Health Science Center Hospital,
University of British Columbia
Paul Valent, psychiatrist,
Melbourne, Australia

RECEPTION AND DINNER

in honor of
Dr. Jacques Fisher
and in memory of his parents
David and Mina Fisher
who perished during the Holocaust

Greetings: Dr. Jacques Fisher, president
World Association for Orphans
and Abandoned Children
World Interfaith Association

Remarks: Serge Klarsfeld, president
des Fils et Filles de Deportés Juifs, France

Entertainment by Kapelye Klezmer Band

MONDAY, MAY 27, 1991

PLENARY SESSION

Panel: "What Motivated the Rescuers?"

Moderator: Nechama Tec, professor of sociology,
University of Connecticut at Stamford

Panelists:

Eva Fogelman, psychotherapist,
Jewish Foundation for Christian Rescuers/ADL
Emanuel Tanay, MD, clinical professor
of psychiatry, Wayne State University
Marion Pritchard, psychoanalyst, Righteous Gentile

Remarks by Jewish rescuers:
Yvonne Jospa
Paul Halter

LUNCHEON

TRIBUTE TO RESCUERS

co-sponsored by the
JEWISH FOUNDATION FOR CHRISTIAN
RESCUERS/ADL

Remarks: E. Robert Goodkind, chairman
Jewish Foundation for Christian Rescuers,
Anti-Defamation League

Three Stories of Rescue

Gustave Collet
Belgium

Wanda Kwiatkowska-Biernacka
Poland

Gisela Sohnlein
Holland

Tribute: Presented by Fanya Heller and
Roman Kent, trustees
Jewish Foundation for Christian Rescuers/ADL

WORKSHOPS

SUMMARY AND APPRECIATION

RECEPTION AND FAREWELL DINNER

Chairman: Melvin Salberg, national chairman,
Anti-Defamation League

Guest Speaker: Elic Wiesel, Nobel Peace Laureate

Addendum 1: Permission given to include this document by the Anti-Defamation League's Hidden Child
Foundation. June 11, 2015.